

Oxford Archaeology Research Seminar VII: Life & Death in the Industrial Era

Summaries

Helen Webb: 'Excavations at the 18th-19th Century Radcliffe Infirmary Burial Ground, Oxford'

Excavations at the site of this burial ground revealed the largest assemblage of individual burials yet recovered from an 18th/19th century hospital site in Britain. Dating between 1770 and 1852, the burials comprise patients who had not been claimed for burial in their home parish. Believed to consist of members of the labouring and middle classes, most of whom had originated from the locality and surrounding counties, the burials provide an important perspective on early modern hospital care, surgery and burial at a time when hospitals underwent a radical transformation, becoming the medically focussed institutions we know today.

Stephen Rowland: 'More than bones: Excavations at the Trinity Burial Ground, Hull'

About one third of this one-hectare burial ground was archaeologically excavated in advance of roadworks. Belonging to the parish church of Holy Trinity (now Hull Minster), the site was in use between 1785 and 1861, providing much-needed burial space beyond Hull's medieval town-centre graveyards. Hundreds of monuments were recorded across the site, whilst the remains of at least 8,700 individuals were recovered, alongside artefacts and coffin fittings. Primarily, these represent a broad demographic, but also a cross-section of Hull's community, evidenced by spatial and temporal variations in organisation, burial practice and intensity, coffin panoply and memorialisation. Viewed holistically, these data provide an unparalleled opportunity to study the multi-faceted lives, identities, and beliefs of Hullensians when their town was fast becoming England's third largest port.

Louise Loe: 'Life and Death During the Industrial Era: Osteoarchaeological Insights from the Radcliffe Infirmary Burial Ground, Oxford and Trinity Burial Ground, Hull'

The impact of industrialisation on lives and deaths is widely documented, but *how* it affected lives and deaths, especially those of ordinary individuals, is not. This talk will discuss how the Radcliffe and Trinity osteoarchaeological records make a significant contribution to answering this question.

Both assemblages contain examples of work-related accidents, medical interventions, and high rates of infection, all of which provide a more nuanced perspective on the general picture of hazardous working lives, medical practice and poor living conditions, which characterise the period. Further, analysis of isotopes and DNA to explore relatedness, migration, and pathogens has allowed a more detailed appreciation of population composition, of funerary practice, and of activities, conditions, and diseases which are less visible in the archaeological record. Finally, some documented individuals and skeletons can be linked, presenting opportunities to integrate archaeology, osteology, and molecular science to animate surviving biographical accounts of these people.