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Who were these people? A sideways view and a non-answer of political proportions

Alex Gibson

Introduction

Gordon Barclay raised this important question – who were these people – in 2005 when it was demonstrated, thanks to the National Museums of Scotland's dating of cremated human bone project, that the central Food Vessel cremations at North Mains were broadly contemporary with the construction of the henge (Barclay 2005, 92).). As has always been the case during my friendship with Gordon, the questions he poses, even during casual conversation, are always worth considering. They are also deeper than they often may appear. 'Who were these people' is a question not just relevant to North Mains but it can be taken further and extended to the whole range of Neolithic and Bronze Age burials not just in Scotland but in Britain and Ireland as a whole and indeed elsewhere in Neolithic Europe. This study is by no means exhaustive, rather it plays Devil's Advocate by examining a range of interpretations, many unprovable but by no means ignorable, and hopefully it may stimulate thoughts (or not) amongst colleagues and challenge some current thinking. These musings are offered to Gordon as a small way of thanking him for the work over the past few decades on which and by which I have been hugely reliant and influenced. We have mainly been in agreement: we may not be now. They are also offered in the hope that they may be entertaining, questioning, contentious but also in the full understanding that they may bore him to tears now that his research has changed to things more modern.

The old division with which Gordon and I grew up of multiple disarticulated 'burials' in the Neolithic and crouched inhumation, then cremation, 'burials' in the Bronze Age is now known to be totally inadequate (Gibson 2007, and see Cooney, this volume). Thanks to the widespread application of radiocarbon dates from carefully selected samples, crouched inhumations can be seen to span both periods, the rite of cremation is equally long-lived and disarticulated remains persist into the 2nd millennium. Cremations, crouched inhumations and disarticulated inhumations are still all classed as 'burials' and those that are accompanied by broadly contemporary artefacts are normally classed as 'rich'. Bronze Age burials in particular are often deemed to be those of a 'social elite'. These interpretations are influenced by our modern ideas of what constitutes a burial and by our materialistic environment that equates possessions with wealth: the variables are rarely considered. Unless a body has been left to medical science and/or involved in serious trauma, in our present society a 'burial', whether by inhumation or cremation is a respectful way of disposing of the complete mortal remains of (usually) a loved one. It is most frequently

arranged by the family and is a discrete and final act bestowed upon an individual: an act of closure removing the deceased from the realm of the living. Tributes are normally floral and/or charitable and the grave may be tended (but not disturbed) for a considerable time after the event. The word 'burial' therefore, when dealing with human remains, means something quite specific to us. There is, however, absolutely no evidence to suggest that these views were held by Neolithic and Bronze Age populations. Indeed it is becoming increasingly obvious that the treatment of human remains in the 4th to 2nd millennia BC was totally alien to our own ideas. Evidence for exposure might suggest that the dead stayed amongst the living for a considerable time. Other variables demonstrate that the methods of disposing of the dead were many. Rather than 'burial' we may be better resorting to a more wordy but less prejudicial term such as 'the structured deposition/discard of human remains'.

Inhumations: Single, Multiple and Partial

Firstly there is the question of the individual. Multiple remains are clearly known in the Neolithic and this needs no reiteration here. But multiple inhumations are also encountered in the Beaker period and later as most conclusively demonstrated by Petersen in 1972. Petersen recorded multiple inhumations in both Beaker and Food Vessel graves, particularly but not exclusively from the Yorkshire Wolds. These reached up to 11 individuals at Rudston 62 and 15+ at Aldro 54 (Peterson 1972, 31) where at both sites articulated burials and 'dismembered remains' were found (Mortimer 1905, 64). More recent finds continue to demonstrate the widespread occurrence of these phenomena. Seven individuals were found associated with a Beaker at South Dumpton Down in Kent (Perkins 2004). These were largely contracted but also included bone bundles (B7) and incomplete remains (B6) and radiocarbon dates suggest that the deposition, if sequential, was rapid.

The deposit of 7 individuals with a Beaker in a cist at Bee Low, Derbyshire, resembles more a chamber of a long barrow than it does a cist in terms of the burial deposit (Marsden 1970). A similar pattern of articulated, disarticulated and partial remains of 9 or 10 individuals was noted in the grave of the Boscombe Bowmen (Fitzpatrick 2011). At least 1 adult (represented only by a skull and fragment of femur) and 5 children were found in a cist at Linlithgow in West Lothian (Cook 2000) and a crouched inhumation associated with the incomplete disarticulated remains of 3 others were located with approximately 33% of a Beaker at Monkton in Kent (Bennett et al. 2008).

The disturbing of a body by a secondary addition is easy to understand but less easy to explain is the partial removal of remains assuming that they were actually there in the first

place. What was so important about the missing parts that necessitated their removal or indeed retention? Why not displace or remove the whole body? Who were these people who could share the same grave yet be treated so very differently ?

This difference in treatment is further illustrated by the finding of cremations and inhumations in the same grave. Peterson (1972) records 13 instances on the Yorkshire Wolds where the two modes of 'burial' are in physical contact suggesting that if not actually deposited at the same time, they were closely sequential. What were the factors that governed the choices between these two contemporary but very different rites? The graves that Petersen identifies are Food Vessel associated and this is interesting. Despite the discrepancy in dates, Food Vessels developed from middle Neolithic Impressed Ware. The similarities in form and decoration are too close to be coincidental (Gibson 2013). The middle Neolithic was also a time when cremations and inhumations were being deposited simultaneously as evidenced by the later burials at Duggleby Howe (Gibson & Bayliss 2010). Is this evidence for the reinvention of tradition? What is (are) the relationship(s) between the inhumed and the cremated? The status of each individual either in life or immediately prior to death must have been very different for them to have warranted such drastically different treatments.

Secondly there is the question of discrete. As well as the multiple examples mentioned above, there are partial examples too as already noted at South Dumpton Down and Linlithgow. The Amesbury Archer, though at first seeming largely complete, was found to lack a rib (Fitzpatrick 2011). At Manston in Kent, a particularly spineless individual lacked vertebrae (inf D perkins). Some 'incomplete' burials may be explained by taphonomic processes but this is certainly not the case in all (arguably most?) examples, especially where long and other robust bones are missing. A Beaker burial from Bredon Hill, Worcestershire lacked a finger – until it was discovered inside the skull. Other palaeoenvironmental data suggested that the corpse had been exposed (Thomas 1965) and must have been at least cadaverous when deposited. Who were these people whose corpses could be mutilated or their skeletal remains rendered incomplete? A particularly striking 'crouched inhumation' at Newborough in Northumberland was associated with a bronze dagger. The bone was poorly preserved and lifted in blocks. Laboratory excavation and analysis found that only the lower part of an individual was represented and that the 'head' was in fact the pelvis and that the arms and legs comprised a leg each (Newman & Miket 1973). Initially identified as a female, this burial has now been re-examined and is more likely to be male as befits the dagger association (Gamble & Fowler 2013). In this case it does not seem to have been the removal of bones that accounts for the situation, but rather the deliberate placing of partial skeletal remains to resemble a complete deposit. Who was THIS person? What on earth is going on here?

Other 'deviant' burials can be documented in antiquarian and more recent literature. At Grendon, in Northamptonshire, within a pit group, an adult was laid over an infant in Pit 9: both were face down. In pit 6, only a lower leg and foot was found, apparently articulated (Gibson & McCormick 1985). The possible 'head' burials at Dalgety, Fife are also notable in this context. Though the preservation was poor, it appeared that the teeth had been in their mandibles when deposited and the size of the pits precluded the presence of complete bodies (Watkins 1982, 81-3). From the dental evidence, Pit 2 contained the teeth of a child and 3 young adults. Pit 3 contained the teeth of a child and a young adult and Pit 6 contained the teeth of a child and the token cremation of another. This is reminiscent of a pit at Esh's Barrow in eastern Yorkshire that contained three skulls that had been "placed in contact with each other so as to present the trefoil figure" (Greenwell 1877, 206). Two skulls had been placed on their crowns and represented mature adults, one being described as 'an aged woman'. The third, that of an adolescent of about 15 years old, was placed on its base and was associated with 'some cervical vertebrae and others from amongst the upper bones of the body lying in connection with it and apparently in situ (ibid). Who were THESE people?

Cremations: Single, Multiple and Partial

Fragmentary burial is at its most obvious amongst cremations. Aside from the 'crematoria' underneath some long barrows, now widely believed to be burnt mortuary structures (Vyner 1984; 1986), the rite of cremation escalates in the later Neolithic. Once again, in Bronze Age contexts, more than one individual is frequently identified amongst the cremated bone with at least 4 individuals represented by a Collared Urn cremation at Weasenham Lyngs, Norfolk (Petersen & Healy 1986). This multiple deposit is unlikely to be explained as accidental incorporation resulting from the re-use of a pyre site. Though some pyre sites have been identified from areas of burning below round barrows, our idea of pyres is heavily influenced by ethnography and the descriptions of Virgil and Homer (where, incidentally, the sacrificed bodies of 12 Trojan prisoners were placed on the pyre of Patroklos – Iliad Bk23). At Carneddau in Powys, there was clear evidence for the burning not of a body but of body parts, possibly defleshed, in a pit. The pit was too small to have held a complete body, it had cremated bone and charcoal mixed through its fill, it had been slightly undercut as if the flames had been stoked with a pole, and the edges of the pit were heavily burnt (Gibson 1993, 8). Other cremation-bearing pits with heat-affected sides have been explained as resulting from the deposition of the cremated remains while they were still hot (inter alia Longworth 1984, 47). This, however, is clearly not the case as it would take considerable

and sustained heat to completely oxidise the pit sides and it is more likely that they also provide evidence for in situ cremation or at least pyro-ritual activity. From this it is evident that not all cremations need have been pyre cremations and once again there is evidence for selection of body parts (and probably individuals). It is well known that some cremation deposits are little more than token amounts of human bone. Complete cremations are rare even when allowing for the greater combustion of some bones (McKinley 1989, 2013). The infant ear bones from Collared Urn burials in north Wales clearly indicate selection even allowing for their comparative density and therefore their greater chance of surviving cremation (Lynch 1991). Who were THESE people?

Around 3000 BC at Balbirnie in Fife, deposits of cremated bone were being placed in holes in the ground at the same time as stones were being inserted into them (Ritchie 1974: Gibson 2010a). With the exception of cremation IV (adult, ?Female), the deposits are far less than one might expect for the cremated remains of an individual (McKinley 2013). They are token deposits and, where the sex can be determined, they appear to be female. Who were THESE women that small amounts of their remains could be placed in a pit prior to it receiving a stone? Surely they are special. Specialness, however, does not infer rank or social status. Surely the importance of these deposits results from their treatment and their context. Their importance in death and the act of deposition need not reflect their status in life. They may have been propitiatory, dedicatory, sacrifices in the broadest sense. They may even have been unknown – bones taken from a mass repository. The apparent uniformity of gender, however, may argue against this. Similar careful selection, and mixing, of human remains appears to be evident at the middle Neolithic cremation cemetery at Forteviot, Perth and Kinross where nine discrete cremation burials were found pre-dating the henge within which they were found. At least some of these deposits indicate the mixing of cremated bones of adults and children (Noble and Brophy 2011; forthcoming).

Grave goods

The social status of the deceased in the Neolithic and Bronze Age is, to say the least, ambiguous. Floral and food (animal bone) tributes can be documented although in only one instance, the early Bronze Age Forteviot dagger burial, Perth and Kinross, have flowers been recovered from such a grave, in this case copious quantities of Meadowsweet (Noble & Brophy 2011). Tipping's analysis of pollen remains from Bronze Age graves concluded that the dominance of single pollen types suggested that it was 'the product of anthropogenic deposition' (Tipping 1994, 137). The lime (*Tillia*) pollen at Ashgrove, coming from the

Beaker, may also have represented honey. Cattle and sheep bones were recovered from the grave of the Boscombe Bowmen (Fitzpatrick 2011) whilst pig bones were associated with the primary and secondary cremations at Sarn-y-bryn-caled in Powys. Usually interpreted as food remains, this may again be over-simplistic given that the pig bone from the secondary cremation at Sarn-y-bryn-caled produced a radiocarbon date much older than that obtained from the cremated human bone (Gibson 2010b).

However the majority of tributes that survive in the archaeological record comprise a suite of artefacts many of which had their origin in the Middle Neolithic (Gibson in prep). These artefacts have been considered as representative of the deceased in life (Case 1977, 81: Woodward 2000, 37). Thus arrowheads in a grave represent an archer, leather-working tools represent former artesans. Dagger and gold-associated skeletons represent high-status individuals – the social elite. Indeed the very fact that some of these people are being given formal burial may itself be a sign of their status. But this too may be over-simplistic and heavily biased by our own experience. Before the hypothesis is blandly accepted, it must be questioned.

For example, it is being shown that many of the artefacts that accompany Early Bronze Age skeletons were already old when deposited (Woodward 2002). Indeed, some were broken. Some cups from early Bronze Age cremations in Scotland have been identified as firing wasters (Gibson 2004) and are incomplete. On-going research on the English corpus is also identifying a comparatively large number of wasters. At Fan in south Wales, the firing spall had been retained with the cup and the Collared Urns from the same barrow were also firing wasters, the fabrics having sintered and bloated (Gibson in Schlee 2014) These may well have been fired on the pyre and may have made specifically for the funerary ritual. Many Urns and Food Vessels that accompany skeletal material are also far from complete. The 'Food Vessel' from Doune, Perthshire, is but a sherd (McLaren 2004). From North Mains itself, the Food Vessel with 'Burial' E comprised six sherds and the Beaker with 'Burial' F was 'substantially complete wanting only parts of the lower body' – in other words NOT complete (Cowie in Barclay 1983, 157). The desire to illustrate archaeological ceramics at their best and the restoration of many specimens in museum collections makes the actual extent of survival difficult to assess from published literature alone. Whilst in some cases plough damage can be invoked to account for the incomplete pots, in others, such as cists or contexts protected below cairns and barrows, it is clear that the pot could not have been complete at the time of deposition (unless, like body parts, some artefacts suffered later disturbance and partial removal). Chunks of rim missing from inverted Collared Urns (Gibson 1993, 17), use-wear traces on vessels attesting earlier episodes in their biographies

(MacGregor 1998) all illustrate that many pots associated with skeletal material were less than pristine.

Some of the items that comprise this old and damaged material have been described as 'curated' or as 'heirlooms' (Woodward 2002). The term should be avoided as it is loaded with a significance that may not have been intended by the depositors of the material. Interpreting these artefacts as heirlooms assumes that they belonged to the individual (or his/her kin-group) with whom they were associated. This may have been the case but it is by no means certain. In examples of modern 'sacrifice', such as the donation of objects to charities, old items are often donated, heirlooms seldom are. The artefacts that we find associated with Neolithic and Bronze Age skeletal remains must have been deposited by the living and therefore they may equally have belonged to those attending the rites rather than to the subject of them. Some were not just old, but broken, no longer fit for purpose: disposable.

These grave goods may therefore have been votive, symbolic, saying more about the living than the dead. Within recent memory, the makeshift shrines that followed the death of Diana, former Princess of Wales, comprised not just extensive floral tributes but also symbolic 'votive gifts' from mourners. Teddy bears, children's toys including dolls and Lego, football colours and other personal items were all deposited. Many (probably most but this cannot be evaluated) had been used. They may have held significance, even value, to the depositors but they were NOT heirlooms. This public outpouring of grief and the need to leave mementoes attests how Diana was regarded by the public rather than what she actually represented in life: there were none of the expensive trappings that one associates with aristocracy and royalty. That came later, in the funeral ceremony and ritual, and those rites have left little archaeological trace. If, in some future documentary, a panel is tasked with naming three things that represented Diana, it is highly unlikely that teddy bears, Barbie dolls, or Manchester United scarves would rate highly. Landmines (and the awareness she brought to their dangers and brutality) may more readily come to mind.

When considering who these people were, 'the Diana principle' must be kept in mind. Arrowheads do not necessarily imply an archer, an observation unequivocally made at Stonehenge (Evans 1984) where the arrowhead trauma in the individual is unlikely to have been self-inflicted! Artefacts that we deem to have high status do not necessarily reflect the individual's position in life. Even if wearing items (necklaces, wristguards), this does not prove that those items originally belonged to the individual. The ritual practice of depositing old items in pits is well attested in the Neolithic and Bronze Age (Harding 2006; Garrow 2007) and at the writer's own site of Upper Ninepence in Powys, the flint artefacts and ceramics had all come from the domestic sphere. The flints showed evidence of trampling

and it was suggested that it was midden material that was being votively buried (Gibson 1999). Rather than formal discrete burials, it may be possible to regard some 'graves' as elaborate pit deposits involving not just the deposition of artefacts but also the structured deposition of human remains, perhaps complete, perhaps multiple, perhaps incomplete, perhaps burnt. The skeletal remains therefore may not represent a 'burial' in the modern sense but rather a component of artefact deposition: the ultimate in structured deposition, a sacrifice in the broadest sense. Who were THESE people?

Burial context

The associated burial furniture is therefore ambiguous in the extreme and cannot be treated at face value. The 'richness' of an artefact need not be directly transferrable to the human remains with which it was associated. The human remains may have formed part of this 'rich' deposition. In order to address the question of who these people were, context rather than artefactual association may be a more profitable route. The burials within the henge at North Mains may be a case in point assuming that they are directly connected to the construction of the monument rather than just broadly contemporary. Parallels may be drawn with the central Beaker burial at Balfarg (Mercer 1981), perhaps the dagger burial at Forteviot (Brophy & Noble 2011; Noble & Brophy 2011), the Beaker associated monumental cist burials at Cairnpapple (Piggott 1948) and the infant with the cleft skull at Woodhenge (Cunnington 1929). Once again several scenarios present themselves.

The henge monuments may have been reconstructed around the burials out of respect to their former rank in life. This is difficult to prove as our chronologies are rarely so precise as to be specific about the sequence in absolute terms. However, if the burials are later than the construction of the earthwork, for example at Cairnpapple Hill (Piggott 1948), then the same conclusion could be drawn: the status of the individual warranted burial in such a prestigious position. As argued above, associations may not necessarily denote status, therefore the artefactual poverty of the graves need not counter this hypothesis. The cleaving of the skull of the Woodhenge child, however, does not overtly suggest a prestigious individual except in death and the context of his/her deposition. That said, this may also be ambiguous and the manner of execution may result from the child's status – the end of a dynasty for example or the captured child of a rival and hostile chief. This is admittedly subjective and unprovable but without written records to flesh the bones it is offered as an example of another possible scenario

The internal ditches of henges, it has been claimed, may have been designed to keep dark internal forces contained within their realms (Warner 2000). Warner was referring to later prehistoric Irish sites but his hypothesis has proved attractive to Neolithic studies in Britain (inter alia Barclay 2005; Bradley 2011; Brophy & Noble 2012). If this hypothesis is accepted, then perhaps those buried were perceived as having powers that needed containing. The large cist cover at Forteviot and Balfarg might support this conjecture. The lack of any monumental grave construction at North Mains and Woodhenge might not. The burials at Cairnpaple were contained by the massive stones of the dismantled stone circle seemingly associated with the building of one monument (the henge) and the dismantling of another (the stone circle) (Piggott, 1948; Bradley 2011). But it is often forgotten that as well as a flint cairn over the grave at Woodhenge, the internal area may also have been sealed by a mound as the monument was originally named 'The Dough Cover' from its low mounded interior (Cunnington 1929, 3). So too may Balfarg have had a mound accounting for the paucity of ploughmarks in the interior (Gibson 2010a) and a similar argument has been made for Forteviot henges 1 and 2 (Brophy & Noble 2012). The mound at Cairnpaple is clear. North Mains, however, furnishes no such reinterpretation.

A more prosaic explanation for the internal ditches of henges has been proposed elsewhere, namely that they provide a means of delineating and closing a site that has already had a ritual biography (Gibson 2010c). The dumping of the spoil on the outside does not compromise the internal space. The ditch is the important enclosing feature with banks (if any existed - there was none for example at Llandegai B - Lynch & Musson 2004) often having an unfinished appearance (Avebury, Arbor Low) though admittedly they may still have formed a screen. If this is the case, then it may be that these people, rather than representing an elite, were in fact propitiatory as has been suggested above and that their interment formed part of the closing ritual.

This may be supported by the fact that recent research is demonstrating that henges such as Gordon's own site at North Mains (Barclay 1983) were constructed on sites that already possessed ritual significance and, often, a previous monumental history (Gibson 2010a, Bradley 2011, papers in Gibson 2012, and Younger, this volume). In enclosing this ritual space and confining the otherworld forces, did these forces also have to be pacified? Was the deposition of human remains the means of this pacification? Admittedly this is conjecture and as archaeologists we should shun the speculative but it is not at all sensationalist as human sacrifice or ritual killings can be well-supported in later prehistory (Lindow Man), the classical literature, ethnographically and historically and it is commonly agreed from historical and ethnographic parallels that people in the Neolithic must have had deep superstitions, complex mythologies and powerful belief systems that doubtless required

proper ritual responses. Whilst there may be no direct evidence for this hypothesis, there is equally no evidence against it. It may be unprovable but it is logical and the suggestion should not be ignored. These 'en-henged' burials were the original subjects of Gordon Barclay's question.

Violence and outsiders

There is also a considerable amount of data for the violent deaths of individuals in Prehistory generally but increasingly so in the 4th to 2nd millennia (Schulting & Wysocki 2005.). As well as cranial trauma, arrowhead burials where the projectile point is actually within the skeleton are also known and the body from the Stonehenge ditch has already been mentioned above. Doubtless more examples will be found as detailed palaeosteology becomes more routinely applied and more advanced. Death by soft tissue damage must also have occurred yet will leave no skeletal traces identifiable to current methods. Recent work on the burial sequence at Duggleby Howe has also identified not just trauma, but other questions relating to those interred (Gibson & Bayliss 2010; Gibson & Ogden 2008). Burial K, for example, at the base of the 2.75m deep pit and within a wooden coffin showed no sign of trauma amongst the surviving bones but his mandible showed signs of weathering. He had been exposed, buried when skeletal, yet arranged in a contracted position according to Mortimer's (2005) description. Above him, burial I has signs of possible perimortem cranial trauma though it is obscured by Mortimer's reconstructive materials. The accompanying skull J, however, had major blunt force trauma to both parietals and the symmetry of the damage suggests that he/she (either female or a gracile male – Gibson & Ogden 2008) may have been executed by means of a blow from above whilst the head was resting on an anvil stone. Traces of a cut to the forehead and a healed nasal fracture further demonstrate that this individual had a less than cosseted life. Who were THESE people?

Isotope analysis has shown that, whoever they were, they were not local to the chalk (Montgomery et al. 2007). With isotope analysis it is often easy to say where people did NOT originate, but tracing their origins is somewhat more problematic. Given this, it is possible that Burial K came from as far away as north-western Scotland or Cornwall. The places of origin of the others may have been closer to Duggleby, but they were not from the chalk. On current evidence the inhumation burial sequence at Duggleby Howe lasted for just over half a millennium yet no chalk-dwellers seem to have featured in this sequence. Were they brought to the area for burial? Were they vanquished enemies or slaves? The brutally executed Skull J may be important here. If foreigners are being buried, where does this leave our notions of the importance of ancestry in the Neolithic? Perhaps ancestors or any

social elite that may have existed were buried differently, not for them being dumped in a hole in the ground.

A similar scenario has been demonstrated in a multiple pit burial of a woman and 3 children at Monkton Up Wimborne (Green 2000). DNA analysis shows that the group comprised a mother and her young daughter and a brother and sister unrelated to the other two. The youngest child suffered from malnutrition and the others were iron deficient. Isotope analysis suggests that, like Duggleby, these people were foreign to Cranborne Chase possibly coming from the lead-rich area of Mendip (Green 2000, 78-9). There is nothing in the stratigraphy of the grave to suggest sequential burial here and the question as to why four foreigners of different ages were buried simultaneously remains unanswered. Who were THESE people?

In the early third millennium, aside from 6 child inhumations the preferred rite changed to cremation at Duggleby. Instead of in the ground, these remains were deposited above it, in the primary mound itself constructed around the 29th C cal BC (Gibson & Bayliss, 2010). There was clearly a change in context as well as in rite. Who were THESE people? The cremated remains from Duggleby can no longer be located so any patterns of age and gender must, unfortunately, remain unknown.

Some 'burials' also appear to have been sealed rather more securely than necessary. The monumental cists at Cairnpapple Hill have already been mentioned as has the huge cist cover at Balfarg (Mercer 1981). At Forteviot the cist cover weighed several tonnes (Noble & Brophy 2011) and a large cist cover was also found at Cist 1 at Dalgety (Watkins 1982, fig 3). Could this be to keep in hostile spirits or, more prosaically, to keep out grave robbers? Certainly the conspicuous effort involved in the procuring, moving and placing of these large stones sets these cists above the norm. It is, however, generally assumed that the large cist covers and cairns or barrows sealed the graves of the dead, but what if their occupants were not dead at the time of deposition? Human sacrifice or ritual killing has been discussed above at Stonehenge, Woodhenge and Duggleby Howe. It was also suggested at Sarn-y-bryn-caled (Gibson 1994). It has been mentioned above that perimortem trauma is seen on some skeletons but equally fatal soft-tissue injury must remain undetected. At the circular ditched enclosure (Kreisgrabenanlage) at Ippesheim, Bavaria, a skeleton was found inverted into a pit in the centre of the enclosure. The sex of the skeleton could not be determined but careful excavation allowed a reconstruction to be made and it could be seen that the left hand had been held downwards towards the pit base in order to break the fall whilst the right hand covered the mouth to protect against the inevitable suffocation (Schier 2005). The late LBK enclosure at Ippesheim cannot be directly compared in either time or space to the

hengings of the British Neolithic but that is not the point of this example. Rather it illustrates that live burial was practiced in Neolithic Europe but that detecting it must rely on exceptional circumstances. Whether this explains the monumental cist covers or not, the peri-mortem trauma that does survive on some human remains, and the arrowhead injuries in others does suggest that some bodies were treated very differently in death and deposition and not all was cornfields and pan-pipes amongst our early farming communities.

The Bronze Age pit graves such as Aldro 54 (Mortimer 1905, 64-66) may be another way of ensuring containment of the bodies. This was over 3m (12ft) deep and the treatment of the bones within it diverse. The basal deposit was of an adult and child and 'some of the adult leg bones seemed to have been split lengthways in the manner in which animal bones are frequently found' (Mortimer 1905, 66). The second burial, associated with a Beaker, comprised a 'large heap' of human bone and the 'calvarium of an adult was the receptacle for a collection of tarsal and metatarsal bones, vertebrae, the joint end of a large leg bone and portions of a skull' (Mortimer 1905, 66). Mortimer observed that the skull had been deliberately packed. There were also child bones and 6 jaws representing 4 children under 10 and 2 adults. At Garton Slack, C41 at the base of a pit almost 2m (6ft) deep was the inhumation of a man, with pig bones and over his hips was an articulated human fore-arm and hand from another individual (Mortimer 1905, 259). In the middle fill of the pit was a burial with a handled Food Vessel and a cup. The pit grave (c.2m deep) at Garton Slack 75 was also Food Vessel associated and the primary burial of a mature male seems to have been in a slightly odd position with one hand under the chin and the other down by his knees. These pit graves recall Duggleby Howe almost 2 millennia earlier. Once again are we seeing the return to pre-Beaker ways? Do the depths of the pits ensure containment in an area devoid of large stones?

Mortimer's descriptions of many of the interments do not seem to conform to the accepted 'crouched inhumation' norm. Bodies may be in unusual positions as mentioned above and at Garton Slack 81, the body of a female who appeared to have had part of her foot amputated, was placed with her head forced back, one hand by her chest and the other by her thighs (Mortimer 1905, fig 602). She seems to have been dumped rather than placed, and this can be seen elsewhere in Mortimer's descriptions. Who were THESE people?

Conclusion

One of the fundamental problems with any approach to the archaeology of human remains in the Neolithic and Bronze Age are the words 'burial' and 'funerary'. They are loaded with modern interpretations and influenced by current practices and values. No matter how we try to detach ourselves, the idea of burying an individual and the funeral rites that are performed come from our current cultural backgrounds and mindframes. The use of the term 'deviant' for burials that do not conform to our norm illustrates this perfectly. Indeed, in the 4th to 2nd millennia BC, it may have been the complete discrete burial that was considered 'deviant'. Our 21st century minds must be opened and it must be recognised that the hugely diverse treatments of human remains in the Neolithic and Bronze Age probably requires equally diverse explanations and interpretations.

Gordon's original question was specifically asked of the people buried with Food Vessels at the time that the North Mains henge was constructed but, as Gordon doubtless knew at the time, the question is much deeper. 'Who were these people' is a fundamental question that all archaeologists must strive to answer but answers must, at least for the time being, remain elusive. We have no historical records. The data that we use to reconstruct Neolithic and Bronze Age society are not only ambiguous but also incomplete. Material remains represent but a small part of what must have been complex and deep-rooted belief systems and rituals. The deposition of bone must have played a part in those rituals but not necessarily or always an important part.

It is also clear that not all (possibly the minority) of the population were receiving burial after all the multiple burials at some long barrows seem to have happened over a very short time interval in relation to the duration of the early Neolithic (Whittle et al. 2011). What was happening to the majority of the population? From the treatment of some of the remains noted above, it appears unlikely that it was only the elite that were being buried. Rather it seems that people/bodies/bones were being selected for burial. Who were these people and who were the selectors? The answer to the specific question is at present, only known by those specific people who treated the remains of their contemporaries in such a rich variety of different ways and over a considerable space of time and place.

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