

The Sedgeford Historical and Archaeological Research Project



Introduction to the Archaeology of Human Remains

This introductory pack is designed to give all those taking the six-day course which takes place from **Sunday to Friday**, an insight into what you will be learning, and a list of things to help you get started. The course sessions will be split between boneyard field teaching spaces and the village church.

Course Content

The course is based on skeletal remains excavated in Boneyard, the Sedgeford Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Students will become familiar with the technical vocabulary involved and develop skills in recognition of specific bones and teeth and standard recording systems for human remains. The course is structured into topics. Each day will comprise a series of informal lectures which will take place on the Boneyard site followed by practical sessions which will take place in the nearby parish church of St Mary (transport will be available between the sites if required). You will be given the opportunity to apply the methods and information you have learned through the meticulous recording of a skeleton using a system adapted by SHARP from the Standards for Data Collection from Human Skeletal Remains (Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994).

The main content covered will be:

- Introduction to skeletal anatomy and technical terminology
- Growth and development of bones
- Using skeletal variation to assign sex and age at death
- Identifying pathology and (where possible) cause of death.
- Sampling and analysis for radiocarbon dating and isotope analysis
- Interpretation of data collected
- Ethical considerations

As excavations on the Boneyard cemetery have halted there will be no opportunity to participate in the excavation of burials. The focus will now shift to post excavation recording and compilation of data. There may be an opportunity to stay on and assist the Human Remains team with these important elements of the archaeology.

Aims of the course

1. To explore aspects of human anatomy, dentition and paleopathology.
2. To instruct students in the methods which can be employed to retrieve information from human remains and make an accurate record using a standard system.
3. To develop in students an awareness of the value of this information with respect not only to the life, size, sex, age and cause of death of the deceased but to the interpretation of the site in question and the wider environment.
4. To consider the ethical, legal and religious issues, which influence the manner in which archaeologists treat human remains.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course students should be able to:

1. Use correct technical terms when referring to human remains and their archaeological analysis.
2. Use a range of basic diagnostic techniques to determine size, age, sex and health status (including pathology) from the evidence of human remains.
3. Demonstrate a critical awareness of the value of the information contained in human skeletal remains for the interpretation of the site and the wider environment and vice versa.
4. Select and synthesise data to produce a report.
5. Discuss the ethical, legal and religious issues which arise from the discovery, conservation and treatment of human remains.

Participation and what to bring

- This course assumes no previous knowledge of either anatomy or physiology, however you may find it both interesting and helpful to delve into the archaeological world of human remains. Below are listed a few general texts which provide very good introductions to applications of osteoarchaeology.
- For each section of the course you will be given a number of information sheets and copies of the S.H.A.R.P. recording system sheets. Please bring with you an **A4 sized ring binder** or other folder, which will act as your portfolio, and **writing/drawing material - i.e. Pencil, pen, rubber, ruler.**
- Reference books will be supplied but there are limited numbers. If you wish to purchase your own the main recommended text is:
White, T.D. & Folkens, P.A. 2005. *The Human Bone Manual*. London: Elsevier Academic Press.

General readings:

- Bass, W. M. 2005. *Human Osteology: A Laboratory and Field Manual*. 5th Edition. Columbia: Missouri Archaeological Society.
- Brothwell, D R, 1981. *Digging up bones* (3rd Edition). Oxford: Oxford University Press/British Museum (Natural History). **A good general introduction, slightly outdated.**
- Mays, S, 1998. *The Archaeology of Human Bones*. London: Routledge. **More detailed and far more up to date than the Brothwell book, with some good case studies.**
- Roberts, C and Manchester, K, 2010. *The Archaeology of Disease* (3rd Edition). Stroud: The History Press Ltd. **The definitive introduction to death, disease, and trauma.**

Historic England has produced guidance documents which can be downloaded for free from their website. Their website also provides links to guidance produced by the Advisory Panel on the Archaeology of Burials in England (APABE):

- The Role of the Human Osteologist in an Archaeological Fieldwork Project
- Science and the Dead: A Guideline for the Destructive Sampling of Archaeological Human Remains for Scientific Analysis
- Large Burial Grounds: Guidance on Sampling in Archaeological Fieldwork Projects
- Guidance for Best Practice for the treatment of Human Remains Excavated from Christian Burial Grounds in England

Also for download from the CfA website (it is recommended that both are read in conjunction):

- Updated Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains 2017
- Guidelines to the Standards for Recording Human Remains 2004