

Session ID	27
Session Title	The treatment of the dead in current archaeological practice: exploring knowledge gain, value and the ethical treatment of remains from burial ground excavations for HS2 in a national and international context
Start Time	Tue Dec 17 14:00:00
Room	784

The treatment of the dead in current archaeological practice: exploring knowledge gain, value and the ethical treatment of remains from current major burial ground excavations for HS2 in London and Birmingham, alongside comparative investigations in the UK, Europe and internationally. The current archaeological excavations at two large urban cemeteries at St James Gardens, Euston, and Park Street Gardens, Birmingham, as part of the HS2 Historic Environment Research and Delivery Strategy, are providing significant insights into the treatment of the dead in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The identification of named individuals, including the recent discovery of Captain Matthew Flinders, has also raised the profile of historical human remains in the present and the potential political significance of such discoveries. The scale of the burial ground excavations at Park St and St James, with the latter containing tens of thousands of buried individuals, raises questions about contemporary attitudes to the mass excavation of human remains. Excavations of human remains at this scale place a focus upon ethical and social considerations regarding their treatment through the processes of excavation, study and reburial as well as the personal responses of those involved in the excavation process. Archaeological excavation may be considered an acceptable treatment of the remains of the dead, in return for scientific knowledge. It is, however, necessary to consider how archaeological excavation and scientific study of human remains contribute to our understanding of past societies, how research aims are determined and what the potential impact of that knowledge is to those in the present. The session will explore attitudes to the treatment of the dead in present and past societies, how burial ground excavations are perceived from a public and political perspective and question the processes of selection for study. Papers will discuss these themes with comparative burial ground studies in the UK, Europe and United States.

14:00	Session organisers	Introduction	
14:10	Mary Ruddy, WSP	Doing the right thing? A can of ethical worms.	Excavations at Park Street Gardens are drawing to a close after two years of work. This has been the largest urban excavation Birmingham has seen, supported by a programme of engagement to a broad range of audiences. Questions of an ethical nature are always first on the agenda: what happens to the remains after study? Have any relatives come forward? How do you decide which are archaeologically excavated and retained? Queries demonstrate that concerns focus less on the treatment – viewed as careful, sensitive and thorough - and more the wider ethics of burial ground excavation. When is it acceptable to dig up the dead? Who makes decisions on treatment and reburial, and why are some individuals, like named burials or scientifically important skeletons, treated differently from others? Where contemporary attitudes have not been so tame, are they politically motivated? A broader historical and anthropological perspective contrasts present day legal and moral practice with earlier social uses of the deceased. Comparing our modern relationship with cadavers, burial and posthumous disturbance with what we know of the past reveals interesting differences. In prehistory, tombs were revisited and bones perhaps used in ceremony, whereas in ancient Greece it was a crime to tamper with human remains. This paper aims to examine the way ethics vary depending on whether someone feels a familial, economic or spiritual responsibility for the remains in question, and concludes that an open and inclusive approach to excavation is beneficial in dispelling suspicion and concerns about the treatment of remains.

14:35	Caroline Raynor, Costain-Skanska	The social impact and effects on wellbeing of working with human remains at St James's Gardens, Euston	Recent work at St James's Gardens near Euston Station in London has seen archaeological excavation take place on an unprecedented scale, in preparation for HS2 Phase 1. In a post-medieval burial ground believed to contain up to 40,000 burials, excavation work was carried out by a multi-disciplinary team unprecedented in its size and range of expertise – including but by no means limited to a large team of archaeologists. The scale and nature of the work has given rise to the question; “how does archaeology affect us?”. This paper analyses data generated through team surveys and face to face interviews to highlight how staff, including but not limited to professional archaeologists, experienced the archaeological processes on this site. The surveys were designed specifically to capture and assess potential mental health and wellbeing challenges, related to working with human remains and the cultural material associated with their burial.
15:00	John Lawson, City of Edinburgh Council	Archaeology through the fence line: The excavation of medieval human remains in Leith	The Edinburgh Tram project continues to be one of Edinburgh's and Scotland's most controversial and high profile developments running through the centre of Edinburgh from its Airport and ultimately to its Port in Leith. As part of the advance works in 2008-9 the project unearthed the remains of two medieval-post-medieval graveyards, the largest of which was an unknown extension to Leith South Parish Church comprising c.400 burials underlying one of the port's main thoroughfares. Since then two further Council projects within primary schools have unearthed Human remains at Newhaven a 16th century murder and at St Mary's primary School part of the 1644/45 plague burial ground. This paper will look briefly at the results from these excavations and discuss the challenges presented by excavating within the public domain, and more importantly the opportunities they present in engaging with the public and promoting archaeology.
15:25	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>	<b>BREAK</b>
15:55	Kae Neustadt, Atkins	The challenges of scientific research on human remains – a comparison with the work of colleagues in the USA	The unprecedented number of human remains anticipated to be recovered from HS2 excavations can be seen as an unlimited opportunity to take advantage of the latest technologies to test these remains for any number of traits, in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of the people and cultures represented by the bones. This paper presents a critical look at how and why destructive analysis on human bone is conducted and examines some of the ethical questions surrounding the reasons behind such analyses against the potential of the information gained to advance our understanding of the past. Drawing on experiences with the treatment of archaeological human remains in the USA in addition to experience in the assessment of archaeological sites from HS2, this presentation looks at how and why human remains are key to understanding both the archaeological past and the archaeological present. It further examines questions of ownership and archival responsibilities, as well as raising questions regarding the treatment of the prehistoric dead versus the historic dead and how our approach to these remains reflects modern identity politics.
16:20	Louise Loe, Oxford Archaeology	Identifying the Missing: The excavation of First World War Mass Graves at Fromelles, Northern France	In 2009 Oxford Archaeology undertook the first project of its kind: the excavation of 250 soldiers who had fought and died in the battle of Fromelles, 1916. Unlike traditional excavations of post medieval burials, the aim of this project was to recover soldiers from unmarked mass graves, scientifically examine them and employ this evidence alongside DNA and historical sources in an attempt to identify the soldiers by name for their commemoration on headstones in a CWGC cemetery close to the recovery site. To date, 166 soldiers have been identified by name and efforts to identify further names continue. The Fromelles excavation took place over ten years ago now, but the project continues to have considerable impact on those in the present. This paper will describe the project, including the aims and the ethical and political considerations, and will illustrate the important perspective it provides on contemporary attitudes to the mass excavation of human remains from the past.

16:45	Katie Dalmon, University of Alba Iulia, Romania	Improving scientific research outcomes from human remains excavated in Romania	<p>This paper will discuss how the implementation of a systematic excavation framework would improve scientific research on human remains from Romania (particularly focusing on Dealul Furcilor) and how this would benefit approaches to human remains more widely.</p> <p>Dealul Furcilor is one of three suggested necropolises excavated since the 1950s at Apulum, underneath modern-day Alba Iulia, Romania. So far 976 surviving in-situ articulated human remains have been recovered. These have yet to undergo any significant osteological analysis and are retained between several institutions. Archaeologists making these discoveries have traditionally focused on stratigraphy, grave goods, and architectural structures, while rarely discussing the human remains themselves, leading to an incomplete understanding of the site. Romanian archaeology does not have a coherent research plan for Roman necropolises. Over 50 necropolis areas in Roman Dacia have been investigated, but of these, only a few have been subject to scientific research. Material needs to be disseminated quickly from increasing numbers of rescue excavations, making it more and more unlikely that any systemic research framework will be implemented.</p>
17:10	Andrea Bradley, HS2 Ltd.	Discussion	
<b>17:30</b>	<b>END</b>	<b>END</b>	<b>END</b>