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# Mythe to Mitcheldean Mains Reinforcement, Gloucestershire

Human Bone

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## 84960 MYTHE TO MITCHELDEAN, GLOUCESTERSHIRE: HUMAN BONE

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May 2014

### Introduction

Human bone from four contexts was subject to analysis, comprising redeposited material from two gullies of a Late Iron Age roundhouse, and two nearby ditches of Late Iron Age–Romano-British date. A sample of bone was submitted for radiocarbon dating – results indicate a Late Iron Age date (Table 1).

### Methods

Bone condition was recorded following McKinley 2004 (fig. 6.1-7). Age and sex were assessed using standard methodologies (Bass 1987; Beek 1983; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994; Scheuer and Black 2000). Non-metric traits were recorded in accordance with Berry and Berry (1967).

### Results

A summary of the results is presented in Table 1; full details are in the archive. The small size of the assemblage limits the value of comparative discussion.

Areas of disturbance are recorded in the vicinity of the find spots while the bone in ditch 954 probably derives from the underlying gully. The bone is in relatively good condition (grade 2-3, eroded/root etched) with most breaks occurring in dry bone in antiquity. However, the bone from 811 appears to have been fractured whilst still somewhat fresh, suggesting the disturbance was reasonably soon after death. Based on the contextual and osteological evidence, the assemblage is considered to represent a minimum of one adult over c. 55 years, probably male.

Slight calculus deposits at the gumline (calcified tartar/plaque; Brothwell 1972, fig. 58b) were seen on all seven teeth (minimum one dentition). One minor carious lesion was noted in a second mandibular incisor, originating on the distal aspect of the tooth neck (True Prevalence Rate (TPR) 14.3%). The left mandibular first molar had been lost *ante mortem* (TPR 12.5%). Attrition is very heavy with the crowns worn down almost to the roots in most cases.

Abundant, healed capillary vessel impressions on the endocranial surface of the fragment of bone from context 853 indicates the individual's survival of some form of infection or irritation (i.e. haemorrhage) within the skull (Lewis 2004). Excessive porosity on the external cranial surface might be indicative of scalp irritation, as seen with persistent scratching due to head lice infestation (McKinley 2009, 15).

Historical and archaeological evidence indicate that Iron Age mortuary rites often featured the ritualised treatment and manipulation of the human body, particularly the skull (Aldhouse-Green 2001, 97-109; McKinley 2009, 4). Some such activity may be represented within the current assemblage; however, it is not clear if the material derived from a disturbed burial, or from some other mortuary rite recognised as a 'normal' part of the suite of Iron Age burial rites (Cunliffe 1992; McKinley 2009, 4). It is also likely that some of the material found its way into the deposits through inadvertent disturbance and redeposition

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Table 1: Summary of human bone analysis results

context	cut	date	quantification	age/sex	pathology
810	811 (gully)	*LIA	c. 10% s.	adult >18 yr. ?male	enthesophytes – occipito-mastoid crest
853	852 (ditch)	LIA	c. 2% s.	adult >55 yr. ?male	<i>ante mortem</i> tooth loss; calculus; dental caries
928	926 (gully)	LIA	1 tooth crown	adult >25 yr.	calculus
964	954 (ditch)	LIA	1 frag. s.	subadult/adult >13 yr.	endocranial vessel impressions (parietal); hyperporosity - exocranial

KEY: \*radiocarbon dated; s. - skull



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FS 606559

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