Seeking ‘Norman Burials’, evidence for continuity and change in funerary practice following the Norman Conquest

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Abstract

An absence of characteristic post-Conquest funerary rites in England has led to the conclusion that the arrival of the Normans had little effect on burial customs (Daniell 2002). Indeed, documentary resources recount sweeping changes to many walks of life following the Norman Conquest, but tend to neglect to mention any significant changes to burial practices. Moreover, scholarship concerning the archaeology of the Church tends to focus on the fabric, statuses and roles of church buildings, omitting any detailed discussion of potential distinctions in the form or place of burial between pre- and post-Conquest periods. This paper re-examines the evidence for change and development within the funerary sphere during the 11th and 12th centuries in England, with a view to highlighting the ways in which Norman influence might have impacted on burial rites. Documentary, archaeological and osteological evidence are employed to revisit key themes – the decline and disappearance of execution cemeteries; the impact of castle construction on extant Anglo-Saxon cemeteries; and the relocation of cemeteries to new sites following the Norman invasion – and to introduce new themes deriving from in-depth analysis of osteological data such as the differential treatment of infants, and patterns of health and disease. This chapter reveals that there were a number of developments following the Norman Conquest relating to both cemetery location and funerary rites. These appear to have been associated with post-conquest reforms made in political, religious and economic life, and can be thus argued to represent characteristically Anglo-Norman funerary practices.

In 2002 Christopher Daniell drew attention to the apparent invisibility of characteristic post-Conquest funerary rites in England, noting that while documentary sources recount sweeping changes to many aspects of society after 1066, they neglect to mention any significant changes to burial practices. Archaeological insights are equally limited, as scholarship by archaeologists on ecclesiastical matters in the wake of the Conquest tends to focus on church buildings, their status and roles, omitting any detailed discussion of potential changes in the form or place of burial used in post-Conquest periods (for reviews of the relationship between Norman castles and extant churches see, amongst others, Creighton 2002, 110- 32; Drury 1982; Morris 1989, 250–274; Blair 2005, 365–366, 388).Despite this lack of detailed consideration,it has been widely concluded that the arrival of the Normans had little effect on English burial customs. This chapter will re-examine the burial record, exploring evidence for change and development within the funerary sphere during the 11th and 12th centuries in England, with a view to highlighting the ways in which Norman influence may have impacted on burial rites. It revisits Daniell’s main themes – the decline and disappearance of execution cemeteries; the impact of castle construction on extant Anglo-Saxon cemeteries; and the relocation of cemeteries to new sites following the Norman invasion – and introduces new themes deriving from in-depth analysis of osteological data such as the differential treatment of infants, and patterns of health and disease. This chapter reveals that there were a number of developments following the Norman Conquest, relating to both cemetery location and funerary rites. These appear to have been part of a long process of continuous change in the funerary sphere tempered with broad-ranging post-Conquest reforms made in political and social life, and as such can be regarded as characteristically ‘Anglo-Norman’ funerary practices.

EXECUTION CEMETERIES AND THE TREATMENT OF DEVIANTS

In his review of Norman burial, Daniell (2002, 234) pays particular attention to execution cemeteries and deviant burial, providing a compelling argument that this is the one arena where the otherwise negligible influence of the Normans may be apparent. During the mid-11th century, it appears that there was a cessation of Anglo-Saxon deviant burial customs, particularly the practice of using specific execution cemeteries located on hundredal boundaries, and after the Conquest executed criminals were buried in normative cemetery types, including especially those of castles and hospitals (Reynolds 2009, 233–247). While there has been much subsequent work on execution cemeteries, Daniell’s hypothesis remains valid. A comprehensive review has been undertaken of Anglo-Saxon execution cemeteries (Reynolds 2009) and a significant reassessment of the persistence of deviant burial beyond the 11th century is currently in progress (by Alyxandra Mattison at the University of Sheffield), which allow some light to be shed on the evidence now available for the issues Daniell raised. Characteristically deviant forms of burial such as prone positioning, decapitation and interment with the hands tied all appear to decline significantly in frequency after the Conquest (Mattison pers. comm.). Occasional examples of deviant burial in churchyards occur, including the group of individuals from St Margaret in Combusto, Norwich (Norfolk) (Ayers 1990; Reynolds 2009, 246) who are buried prone, with hands behind the back as if tied, and in grave cuts on a north to south orientation. Reynold’s survey also exposes the limited dating evidence that is available for execution cemeteries, necessitating the reiteration of Daniell’s (2002, 247) caveat that inaccurate dating may be obscuring the timescale across which 11th-century changes to deviant burial practices occurred. Nevertheless, there remains little conclusive evidence for post-Conquest continuation of deviant cemeteries and limited evidence for the use of characteristically deviant burial customs. Where radiocarbon dating is occasionally employed, it is, indeed, clear that the floruit of execution cemeteries is firmly within the period from the 7th to10th centuries (eg see Reynolds 2009, Table 23), and mainly towards the latter end of that range. Post-Conquest deviant burials are limited to rare examples, such as a single interment from Staines (Middlesex) dated to AD 1030 to 1220 at 95% confidence (Reynolds 2009, 123) and to a few cases where post-11th century pottery occurs in the graves of executed individuals such as at Sutton Hoo (Suffolk) (Reynolds 2009, 133).

The growing separation of Church and state that characterises Anglo-Norman politics appears to have resulted in the Church losing, or consciously opting out of, its role during the Anglo-Saxon period of reinforcing judicial punishments through exclusion of those who had transgressed. Execution cemeteries were explicitly linked to the Anglo-Saxon hundredal geography, and, thus, they may no longer have found a role in the wake of newly evolving land divisions (Reynolds 2009, 233). Changing ecclesiastical attitudes to punishment may also have been a factor in the decline in execution cemeteries and deviant burial practices, and, indeed, the compelling coincidence with the origins of doctrine concerning purgatory has been noted before (Daniell 1997, 177–182; 2002, 252). Belief in a liminal locality, where divine punishment was meted out (combined with the growth in the public consciousness of the reality and severity of such punishment via doom imagery and the like) may well have removed any necessity for the physical signaling of deviance in burial, or even dissuaded any such display lest it appear that man was trying to do the work of God.

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EXTANT CEMETERIES AND POST-CONQUEST CASTLES

The construction of Norman castles in the second half of the 11th century had a significant impact on several Anglo-Saxon churches and cemeteries, as their sites were appropriated by the builders of these castles (Blair 2005, 365–366, 388; Creighton 2002, 116–122; Daniell 2002; Hadley 2001, 40–41; 2007, 200; Morris 1989, 262). This process was highlighted by Daniell (2002, 249–251) as a facet of Norman destruction of aspects of the Anglo-Saxon landscape, with the implicit assumption that castle construction would have damaged burials and that interment at the sites concerned would have abruptly ceased. On closer inspection, however, the relationship between new castles and extant cemeteries appears more complex than has been previously supposed, presenting examples of both change and continuity (fig. 0.1).

It is certainly the case that the construction of a castle could have had an immediate and destructive impact on churchyards. The erection of Norman castles and their defences at Eaton Socon (Cambridgeshire) (Addyman 1965, 40–41; Lethbridge and Tebbutt 1952) and Norwich (Ayers 1985) appears to coincide directly with the abandonment of late Anglo-Saxon cemeteries at both sites, which involved the demolition of associated churches and the sealing of their graveyards. Ayer’s (1985) excavations within the north-east bailey of the castle built in Norwich *c*1067–70, revealed a series of post-Conquest ditches cut across and around an earlier Anglo-Saxon cemetery. Ayers (1985, 66) explicitly describes this as evidence of the ‘imposition’ of the bailey on the extant church and cemetery complex. At sites where castles were constructed directly over cemeteries, there is also plentiful evidence for the widespread disturbance of burials. At Pontefract (West Yorkshire) there is a complex stratigraphic sequence in which a densely used, multiphase cemetery underlies the earliest Norman earthwork defences and a later Elizabethan chapel. These earthworks were found to contain vast quantities of disarticulated human bone from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery (from which two in situ individuals produced radiocarbon dates of AD 671–998 (sk. 352) and AD 782–1022 (sk 354) at 95% confidence) (Roberts 2002, 74). These remains had been unearthed during Norman ground works and simply left as part of the upcast (Roberts 2002, 89). Human remains from an earlier cemetery were also identified in the north bailey rampart at Colchester (Essex), which itself was raised using earth removed from the contemporary bailey ditch (Cotton 1962, 60; Drury 1982, 386). Thus, a pre-Conquest cemetery appears to have been cut and largely destroyed during the initial castle construction, at some time between 1066 and 1100. Concern for the fate of extant churchyards is revealed in some contemporary documentary sources. During the siege of Hereford Castle by Geoffrey Talbot and Miles of Gloucester in the mid-12th century the former set up his men in and around the cathedral building earthen defences, resulting in damage that was recounted in the *Gesta Stephani* ‘the earth of their kinsfolk’s graveyard was being heaped up to form a rampart and they could see, a cruel sight, the bodies of parents and relations, some half-rotten, some quite lately buried, pitilessly dragged from the depths’ (*Gesta Stephani* I, 53, Potter 1976,108–109). It is presumed that the church was finally abandoned at this point, but, interestingly, there is a record of a wooden reliquary containing St Guthlac’s body remaining there until it was accidentally burned during the reign of Edward I (Colvin 1963, 676; Shoesmith 1980, 5). This suggests that the church may have survived in some form until the 14th century. Roger, Bishop of Salisbury was severely criticised by local powerful laymen for building part of his castle on the churchyard at Malmesbury (Wiltshire), but it seems that this reproach was as much for his conspicuous use of money and domineering display of power than for the desecration of the dead (*Historia Novella*, King and Potter 1998, 44–45). *The History of the Kings Works* (II, 888) recounts the construction of Worcester castle in 1069 by Urse d’Abitot. In 1216, following the death of King John and his interment at Worcester, ‘the monks took the opportunity to put the king’s executors in mind of the encroachment on their burial ground perpetrated nearly a century and a half earlier’, taking back land in the bailey as recompense. It is, however, not clear in this account whether the encroachment onto the cemetery resulted in the disturbance of any graves, and it may be that the monks were seeking back their land as opposed to raising a complaint against violation of burials.

Where post-Conquest construction works threatened to disturb or seal previous interments, there is some evidence to suggest that certain graves could be opened and the bodies exhumed. There is an example of a possible post-Conquest reburial of a disturbed pre-Conquest interment at Norwich. The burial in question, that of a child aged two to three years, was the only surviving grave in its area. Detailed forensic analysis, considering degree of joint disarticulation compared to known sequences of decomposition, concluded that the individual was unlikely to have initially decomposed in this grave and that a scenario where the body was buried elsewhere for approximately 12 to 18 months then reinterred would be a viable explanation, provided that there was some shrouding or clothing to hold certain joints together (Black 2009, 193–194). In addition, examples of empty graves apparently cleared of their occupants appear at a number of cemeteries over which castles were built. For example, at Black Gate in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (Tyne and Wear), there were several features excavated in areas to the north of the cemetery that may have been cleared graves, certainly the fill of one (feature 2795) included bone fragments but no interment (Nolan *et al* 2010, 221). There were also two charnel pits in area C, at least one of which may have housed remains disturbed during the construction of the keep (Nolan *et al* 2010, 247). Nine empty graves were also identified at Barnstaple (Devon) within a pre-Conquest cemetery that was disturbed by the construction of the Norman castle. An oval pit containing fragments of three broken crania, long bones arranged in what the excavators describe as a ‘diamond pattern’, and covered by the remains of wooden boards, was also interpreted as a reburial, potentially of burials disturbed by the cutting of the moat (Burial 38, Miles 1962, 66–8). At Pontefract, six of the fourteen excavated pre-Conquest burials were empty graves (pits 615 and 290). The remains in some of these graves had apparently been exhumed from an area truncated during the second half of the 12th century by construction of an apse at the eastern end of the chapel located within the castle (Roberts 2002, 73). Where the remains were taken to is not known, but in this case it appears that the intention was to avoid disturbing any interments during the post-Conquest building works – within the interments around the apse area only the small bones of part of a child’s skeleton and a perinate were encountered during excavation (Roberts 2002, 73) (fig. 0.2). It is notable at Pontefract that the raising of the bailey defences half a century earlier had, in contrast, not resulted in such care being taken to avoid disturbing burials. This sequence of events at Pontefract contradicts the suggestion made by Creighton (2002, 123) that activities during the Anarchy were less respectful of cemeteries than the earlier primary phases of castle construction. This was apparently not the case at Pontefract, nor, indeed, anywhere else considered here. Creighton’s hypothesis is largely based on the same 12th-century documentary evidence presented above, and indeed, it seems that the Anarchy period generated more written accounts of the building of castles over cemeteries. However, in consequence, the disproportionate number of comments regarding the destruction of cemeteries by castle building from the 12th century may be an artefact of the availability of written evidence. Moreover, as noted here, it is not entirely clear whether these 12th-century sources are directly attacking the desecration of burials, or taking the opportunity to raise other, political grievances that may have held more relevance to the writers in the 12th century than they had done a century earlier.

Extensive recent excavations at Norwich (Shepherd Popescu 2009a; 2009b) provide one of the most comprehensive pictures of interaction between extant cemeteries and castles, and emphasise the significant changes that were brought about by the events of the Conquest. However, not all pre-Conquest burial sites in the city were abandoned and destroyed. In particular, St John at the Castle Gate remained in use from the late 10th until the 14th century, albeit being reduced in size by the encroachment of the 12th-century castle precinct (Shepherd Popescu 2009a, 123). It is also possible that burial at Farmer’s Avenue persisted for a number of years after the initial phase of Norwich castle was constructed. Radiocarbon dating of this cemetery was extensive, but remains problematic, with one proposed model (that which takes into account the effect of variable dietary patterns on dating) placing a substantial number of the Farmer’s Avenue interments in the post-Conquest period (Bayliss *et al* 2009, 246). Nevertheless, interments had certainly ceased by the time of the construction of the south bailey rampart, which sealed the site between *c*1094 and 1121 (Shepherd Popescu 2009a, 101).

Several further examples exist of the continued use of cemeteries after castles were constructed over or around them. At Black Gate, Newcastle-upon-Tyne the castle built *c*1080 was defended by a rampart and an external ditch which effectively sealed a substantial area of the pre-Norman cemetery. Unfortunately, the interface between the 1080 ditch and the cemetery was not excavated so it is not clear to what extent these activities disturbed or destroyed graves. Yet, despite the fact that the majority of the cemetery was sealed, interments continued to be made, some cutting into the rampart and therefore definitively post-dating it. Post-Conquest graves comprised 33 interments located in all excavated areas to the north and west of the castle (Nolan *et al* 2010,195, Figure 15) (fig. 0.3). The exact date of cessation of burial at Black Gate is not clear, but it seems that burial was phased out gradually rather than ending abruptly. A stone keep was added to the castle in 1168 and whilst this clearly post-dates the majority of interments and cuts through several, it is likely that burial continued to some extent (fig. 0.4). The last generation of burials cut a cobbled surface which contained a penny of Henry II (1158–1180), and thus probably post-dated the construction of the stone keep (Nolan *et al* 2010, 201–202). In addition, eight interments contained 12th- or early 13th-century pottery in their fills, or cut other interments that did (Nolan *et al* 2010, 201). Moreover, the excavation of a 13th-century paten in the cemetery soil to the north of the keep in 1929 is tantalising, if circumstantial, evidence of a priestly burial of post-Conquest date (Nolan *et al* 2010, 203).

The post-Conquest interments at Black Gate comprise individuals of all ages and both sexes and include a variety of funerary practices, such as cists, head boxes (where only the skull is surrounded by a stone structure) and coffins. It has been noted that there is a larger proportion of post-Conquest cist burials than earlier ones at this site, but as stone cists are widely identified in cemeteries pre-dating the Conquest across northern England, this pattern at Black Gate cannot be interpreted as characteristically post-Conquest (Mahoney Swales 2012, 304). It is possible that the Black Gate cemetery served a Minster, and Diana Mahoney Swales (2012) has suggested that the cists may represent elite Christian burials associated with this high-status site. Nonetheless, the lack of significant differences between pre- and post-Conquest phases of burial at Black Gate would tend to suggest continuity during the 11th and 12th centuries as opposed to any change in the structure of the population who utilised the cemetery.

Similar developments to those traced at Black Gate have been identified elsewhere. At Trowbridge (Wiltshire), renovations to the castle during the 12th century saw the entire cemetery sealed by a clay layer (Graham and Davies 1993, 70–71, 73). Nevertheless, nine graves appear to post-date this event. As at Black Gate, funerary practice at Trowbridge during the latest phase of burial associated with the Anarchy period castle (*c*1139–1200) was not generally distinguishable from the preceding later Anglo-Saxon periods (Graham and Davies 1993, 74). Although the last phase of burial is notable for the widespread inclusion of charnel in graves, and especially the use of disturbed crania as ‘pillows’ around the skull of the main burial, both these practices are found in the pre-Conquest cemetery phases too (Graham and Davies 1993, 39–41). Burial at Trowbridge finally ended when the church was turned over to domestic use by the addition of a chimney and internal divisions made within the nave *c*1200 (Graham and Davies 199, 73). At Hereford, the incorporation of St Guthlac’s minster into a castle does not appear to have precipitated an end to burial within its long-established cemetery. Burials from the latest two phases of interment, characterised respectively by the presence of cists and the predominance of infants, produced radiocarbon dates from the mid-11th into the 12th century (Shoesmith 1980, 32, Figure 29).

In the aforementioned examples, it is clear that burial activity continued beyond the absorption of Anglo-Saxon churches and their cemeteries into Norman castle complexes. There is no compelling evidence to suggest that there was any hiatus in burial or that the post-Conquest interments represent anything other than a continuation of use by normal populations. This suggests that these churches retained at least some of their original status and function, and perhaps even their original congregations. Anglo-Norman chapel-sharing arrangements – where local people would use the castle chapel as a main place of worship – have been identified by Richard Morris (1989, 262). He argued that these arrangements were not, however, usually satisfactory in the long term. For example, following a period of sharing, new places of worship were built outside the castle in the post-Conquest centuries at both New Buckenham (Norfolk) and Launceston (Cornwall) (Morris 1989, 262–263). This scenario fits well with the chronology of abandonment of cemeteries within castles discussed above, although at neither site is it clear where the replacement cemetery was located. Could the continuation of burial at Black Gate and Trowbridge represent archaeological evidence of such chapel sharing arrangements? That burial does not persist for more than a century of so at either site would certainly fit with the supposedly unsatisfactory nature of these arrangements in the long-term.

It appears, then, that the siting of a post-Conquest castle on land already occupied by Anglo-Saxon churches and their cemeteries was common, yet the impact on the pre-Conquest structures and activities could be highly varied. Although it has been suggested that Norman castle construction destroyed earlier sites and necessitated their abandonment, this is not the only, nor even the most frequent, scenario. Even in circumstances where castle building resulted in significant alterations to burial areas, it seems that interments could continue to be made. In all examples cited in this paper, it appears that burial finally ceased by the 13th century. This was not always accompanied by abandonment of the church, but it may have been accompanied by a change in its status. A change from religious to secular function is seen at Trowbridge but, in other cases, churches also appear either to have lost their appeal or their right to provide burial, with little evidence for further change in function.

BROADER CHANGES IN FUNERARY PRACTICE

Alongside developments in religious and political structures, changes to land holding, land use and manorial rites that characterised the Conquest seem to have had a slow but notable impact on places of burial. During the immediate post-Conquest centuries relocation of churches is attested at many places and has been reviewed by many authors (eg Daniell 2002, 249; Morris 1989, 268). This chapter is, however, primarily concerned with burial, and thus it is the pattern of abandonment and shrinkage of pre-Conquest cemeteries between the 10th century and the immediate post Conquest, and the attendant change in land-use from religious to secular (Hadley 2007, 195), that shall be reviewed here. Although sufficiently detailed case studies that provide evidence of changes in landscape division, both broad and detailed variations in land use *and* a detailed chronology are few, those that do exist might serve to suggest one possible pattern of development during the post-Conquest centuries.

Perhaps the best evidence for one possible sequence of development that could impact on a burial ground spanning the Conquest emerges from excavations at Raunds Furnells (Northamptonshire). Here a pre-Conquest church and associated churchyard were established in the mid-10th century as part of a late Saxon manor complex (Audouy and Chapman 2009, 25). The church was demolished at some point during the later-11th to mid-12th century, and replaced by a much larger church structure. Yet this did not last for long, having been converted to domestic use by the 13th century (Boddington 1996, 11). The impact of these developments on burial is significant, most notably because there is extremely limited evidence that burial continued at all beyond the post-Conquest building works. In his detailed stratigraphic analysis, Boddington (1996, 11, 55) went as far as to note that ‘it remains uncertain if there were burials in this phase at all’. No interments cut the demolition deposits of the pre-Conquest church (Boddington 1996, 11), and only two interments may reasonably be thought to post-date its construction. The potentially post-construction interments comprise skeleton 5222, in a grave that shows similarities in alignment to the new church and differs notably from the alignment of earlier graves, and skeleton 5282, a mature male from a stone coffin that appears to be a secondary burial in this container as, amongst other evidence, the lid had been broken and replaced incorrectly (Boddington 1996, 43, 55). However, there is no stratigraphic evidence to prove the late date for skeleton 5222 and the only reason skeleton 5282 appears to post-date the new church is that it is assumed that the original occupant was cleared out as part of its construction. More broadly, it appears that limited burial continued in the vicinity of the post-Conquest church, but it is also apparent that even if a few interments were made after it was built, the cemetery experienced a significant change in use with its role for burial effectively ended.

It is also possible to see the impact of post-Conquest changes at Raunds on earlier burials. Changes to the graveyard included clearance of grave mounds, markers and crosses. Individuals from several pre-Conquest stone coffins were also exhumed and reburied in pits, whilst other disturbed graves had bones sealed under the new foundations or discarded (Boddington 1996, 27–28). Of those exhumed, three were reburied rather haphazardly into two very large pits along the north wall of the new church. These individuals – a mature male and female and a 17–25 year old female – are assumed to have been removed from coffins so the stone could be used for construction (fig. 0.5). A further ten burials were also disturbed, with no attempt made to rebury.

At Raunds, therefore, the period immediately following the Conquest saw significant changes to burial practices, and in the location in which it was conducted. Such evidence is also found in other locations, and churches and their associated cemeteries at Thorpe-by-Norwich (Norfolk), Barrow-upon-Humber (Lincolnshire), Ketton Quarry (Leicestershire) and Cherry Hinton (Cambridgeshire) all appear to have been relocated in the wake of the Conquest (Hadley 2007). Where the local populations relocated their cemetery is sometimes difficult to establish, but it seems likely that at Raunds, St Peter’s church, located not far south of contemporary manor of Furnells, is a likely candidate. St Peter’s origins are obscure, but a series of seemingly mutually contradictory endowments during the first decades of the 12th century suggest, at least, that its foundation predated these (Richmond 2009, 18). There is, unfortunately, no evidence to suggest the date at which St Peter’s acquired burial rites (Courtney 2009, 17). It remains possible that St Peter’s provided a direct replacement for Raunds in terms of burial (Boddington 1996, 68), but why did the relocation take place? The Conquest saw the manor at Furnells placed into the hands of the Bishop of Coutances. It has been suggested that by this point the pre-Conquest church was probably too small to support its congregation and that the cemetery was becoming rather full – perhaps the change of ownership in itself precipitated much needed improvements (Boddington 1996, 70)? However, this does not adequately explain the rather abrupt cessation of burial, just as a more substantial church was constructed. ‘In the 12th century parochial rites became more defined, and a general tidying up of the parochial landscape occurred’ (Richmond 2009, 18), and, accordingly, some churches would have been relegated in status with concomitant loss of burial rites in favour of newer/larger/better situated churches elsewhere. Could the new church at Raunds have lost its right to bury to St Peter’s? The reasons for these apparently widespread changes may, however, be complex, and resist attribution to any one particular factor. Cemetery relocation and contraction have been noted amongst pre-Conquest sites prior to the mid-11th century (Hadley 2007, 196–199), and thus cannot be seen as uniquely post-Conquest changes. Nevertheless, there is much to suggest that the broader events of the Conquest could have accelerated and perpetuated, if not stimulated, some of the changes noted here. A similar argument has recently been presented for developments in the construction of church buildings and stone monuments during this period (McClain 2011, 152); indeed, it is the indirect effects of Conquest on medieval society that appear to best contextualise the developments noted both here and elsewhere within the funerary sphere.

OSTEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO MID 10th-CENTURY BURIALS

Exploration of osteological evidence for links between funerary treatment of individuals and age, sex, health status and disease has the potential to provide a further means of investigating any apparent changes in funerary rites relating to the Conquest. Indeed, in some cases where Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were abandoned, there is evidence for the adoption of funerary practice distinguishing babies and infants who had died before the end of their first year from the remainder of the population. The selective treatment of children aged one year or under in English Christian cemeteries is infrequent but nonetheless relatively widespread from the 8th to 13th century and has been termed ‘eaves-drip’ burial (Boddington 1996, 55; Craig-Atkins 2014; Crawford 1999, 85–89; Hadley 2010, 109). This phenomenon takes the form of preferential interment in locations close to standing structures within cemeteries, most often the walls of a church or chapel. Archaeological evidence from certain cemeteries that span the Conquest suggests that eaves-drip burial may have been adopted during this period by communities that had not previously distinguished their youngest members in burial, thus these community cemeteries in the process of abandonment may have been utilised preferentially for the interment of the youngest dead. A cluster of largely children’s burials were encountered to the north of the walls of St Guthlac’s Minster, Hereford, which are thought to date to the late-11th to mid-12th centuries (Shoesmith 1980, 10, 17). These burials comprised thirteen children under two years, three children aged between five and ten years, and seven children under the age of seven years (groups 5c, 6 and 7) (Shoesmith 1980, 30, 46, 51). The youngest individuals (four neonates and two infants under nine months) had been afforded burial locations closest to the church building, within approximately one metre of its foundations (Shoesmith 1980, 20). It is argued by the excavator that these child burials were the latest interments made in this cemetery, post-dating other interments that begin around 800 (Shoesmith 1980, 10). The total removal of Norman occupation layers in the area of the cemetery by later landscaping works makes it impossible to be definitive about the exact relationship between the infant interments and castle construction (Shoesmith 1980, 51), yet we know that St Guthlac’s survived into the post-Conquest period, so there is no reason to assume the burials must be pre-Conquest. Indeed Shoesmith (1980, 51) seems relatively convinced they represent the selective and ‘late use of this piece of consecrated ground for the burial of small, unbaptized children’.

Further evidence for the differential treatment of infants around the time of the Conquest is found at Raunds, where a burial zone within 1.5m of the church walls is particularly notable for its concentration of densely packed small graves which housed the remains of fifteen neonates and five infants. In his interpretation of topographic analysis and stratigraphic phasing within the cemetery, Boddington (1996, 54) considered the burials in the eaves-drip zone to be amongst the latest at this site, having been inserted into an area of ground surrounding the church that had been intentionally left empty of graves during the earliest phases of burial. Therefore, it seems that neonates and infants were only spatially segregated towards the end of the burial sequence at Raunds, probably for the last few decades before the churchyard’s complete abandonment at the time of the construction of a new, larger church in the late-11th to mid-12th centuries (Boddington 1996, 7). A cluster of neonate and infant eaves-drip burials has also been identified in the final phase of burial at Tanners Row, Pontefract (Wilmott in prep.). This last phase of burial is argued by the excavators to immediately pre-date alterations made to Pontefract castle defences in the 12th and 13th centuries, but has not been subject to radiocarbon dating (Wilmott in prep.). As at Raunds, the final, probably post-Conquest, phase of interment at Pontefract is characterised by a distinct cluster of neonates and infants located along the westernmost wall of a stone church, the majority of these interments being within 1.5m of the wall. The cluster of juveniles includes eleven neonates and seven infants under two years. A final example of eaves-drip burials being adopted during the latest, post-Conquest phases of burial at a Saxo-Norman church is seen at Cherry Hinton (McDonald and Doel 2000). Here the church was constructed in two phases, between the 8th and 12th centuries. A substantial number of burials are contemporary with the second phase of this building, including a reported thirty-three neonates and infants buried ‘beneath the church eaves’, cutting structural features associated with the earliest church building (McDonald and Doel 2000, section 5.5.26).

The differential treatment of infants in these cases is notable for its occurrence in the latest phases of each cemetery, all of which span or post-date the Conquest. This was the period during which these churchyards fell out of use, while in the case of Hereford it seems that adult burial had already moved to a new site. It was noted above that many long-established pre-Conquest churches appear to have lost their rights to bury as part of widespread rationalisation of the parochial system in the immediate post-Conquest period. Could it be that eaves-drip interments were utilising burial grounds that had already lost their status as community burial sites? There are multiple reasons why the youngest dead might be differentiated in death through eaves-drip burial, but it is particularly notable here that the rite was taking place in abandoned (or soon to be abandoned) cemeteries. I have argued in a previous study that the decision to adopt eaves-drip burial might relate to the extent to which baptism was accepted and desired, developing concepts of sacred space, the degree to which use of burial grounds (and the practices permitted within them) were controlled and the strength of belief in the potential for funerary rites to affect post-mortem fate (Craig-Atkins 2014). I have also noted the requirement for a standing structure of some kind to act as a focal point for this funerary rite. The churches demonstrably remained standing at Raunds and Pontefract beyond the cessation of burial, so the key requirement for eaves-drip burial – the presences of a standing structure – was still satisfied, even if the burial grounds were no longer the main choice for the interment of most of the community. Eaves-drip burial was apparently not acceptable in cemeteries established from the 13th century, but perhaps it was still desired for a time, appearing in locations where burial had otherwise ceased.

The osteological evidence for change in health, diet and disease prevalence during the 11th and 12th centuries has received limited attention. General changes have certainly been noted, such as the nascence of leprosy as a social problem (Orme and Webster 1995; Rawcliffe 2006; Roffey 2012; and this volume), deteriorating health as a result of long-term urbanisation and population increase (Dyer 1989; Lewis 2002; Roberts and Cox 2003, 221–222) and the effects of conflict and warfare (Boylston 2000, 371; Stroud and Kemp 1993), but they have not been widely interrogated at the level required to draw any suitable conclusions pertaining directly to the Norman Conquest and its effects. Indeed, the numerous 19th-century accounts of craniometric shift between the supposedly long-headed Saxons and round-headed Normans remain some of the most substantial contributions to synthetic anthropological study of this specific period (Davis and Thurnam 1865; Dudley Buxton 1937; Morant 1926; Thurnam 1863–4; 1867–9). These studies, which tend to rely on the cephalic index (length vs breadth of the skull), are now thought to be severely affected by bias resulting from small sample sizes and the limited representativeness a two dimensional measurement of the skull provides of the complex variability in population-specific cranial form – the key objection to the proposed craniometric shift remains that there is more variation in modern human cranial measurements *within* most populations than there is *between* them (Relethford 1994) and thus viable discrimination of populations can only be derived from multivariate statistical analysis of very large samples. Moreover, the viability of craniometric studies is predicated on a model of Conquest involving large-scale population movement, which has long been argued to be erroneous (Tattersall 1968). Future work exploring evidence for changes in health during the 11th century will be enhanced by an exploration of evidence besides cranial morphology and its application to well-dated assemblages.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has revisited Daniell’s survey of evidence for characteristically Anglo-Norman funerary practices, highlighting areas where new evidence provides the opportunity for revision, and raising new ways in which the question of change and continuity in burial during the 11th and 12th centuries might be approached. It was never in doubt that characteristically Anglo-Norman funerary rites would be only subtly different from preceding Anglo-Saxon rites, as there were many similarities in funerary rites in England and northern France before the Conquest (Zadora-Rio 2003, 19) and the period witnessed no major changes in religious belief or practice to disrupt this status quo. Nonetheless, broader changes more generally considered characteristic of the 11th and 12th centuries have been identified through their effects on burial practice: the disappearance of a widespread execution/deviant rite as the Church became increasingly devolved from the state and ceased involving itself in secular justice; the appropriation of burial grounds for castles by virtue of their location in strategically and politically sought-after positions and the varying effect that this had on the use of the cemeteries; changes in the parochial system, manorial landholding and lordship precipitating and directing cemetery relocation; and, finally, developments in the ways that certain people were treated in death, most notably infants and lepers, that derived from broader changes in perception of the status of the living and the fate of the dead.

Alongside the new insights provided, this chapter has highlighted gaps in archaeological knowledge that could be addressed in several ways. Accurate dating is a particular issue when dealing with such a short time period as the Conquest and serves to highlight the value of reliable stratigraphy and effective, and high-precision, radiocarbon dating. The challenges of resolving these issues have necessitated the reliance on a few secure examples here where a wider range of evidence would undoubtedly have been preferred. Osteological evidence for changes in health, diet, activity and disease spanning the conquest have yet to be afforded sufficient attention in print, and therefore might be one effective means of shedding further light on the effects of the Conquest on the English population. Finally, the relationships between funerary rites of the immediate post-Conquest periods in England and France would also benefit from attention, such that any intrusive rites might be identified at their origin or coeval developments highlighted.

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