

A REVIEW OF CANTERBURY'S ROMANO-BRITISH CEMETERIES

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This article presents the findings of the recent Canterbury Roman Cemeteries project, conducted by the author in collaboration with Canterbury City Council and funded by the Roman Research Trust. Using published sources and CCC's Urban Archaeological Database (UAD), the aim of the project has been to assess our current level of understanding of the extra-mural Romano-British cemeteries of the city, reviewing the quantity and quality of funerary data and considering the ongoing impact of development in these areas. The evidence to date mostly relates to burial, but recent research (reviewed in Weekes 2008) also focuses attention on other aspects of the funerary process, in particular the rite of cremation and so called 'secondary rites' of revisiting burial sites; the potential for research into these funerary elements at Canterbury is also briefly considered here.

Cemetery areas and cemetery plots

In the main the cemeteries of Roman Canterbury continue to be known only as rather vague general areas based on the spatial extent of accumulated evidence, a state of affairs not uncommon for important urban centres in *Britannia* (compare, for example, Roman Canterbury maps in Blagg 1982 and Pratt 2004, as well as Crummy's map of the Colchester cemeteries: Crummy 1993, fig. 8.2). The approach taken during the recent survey has been rather to pinpoint particular 'sites' in order to begin to fine-tune this generalised picture (see **Fig. 1**). It should be noted from the outset, however, that a 'site' can represent anything from partial evidence of a single burial to a fully exposed archaeological area containing a hundred burials or more. Often the older data is simply too vague to be sure even of the rough location of burials, and while there is much new localised evidence, we are still far from understanding the internal morphology of any of the cemeteries in the same detail as the eastern cemetery of *Londinium*, for example (see Barber and Bowsher 2000), where over twenty separate cemetery plots have been identified, arranged either side of a road east out

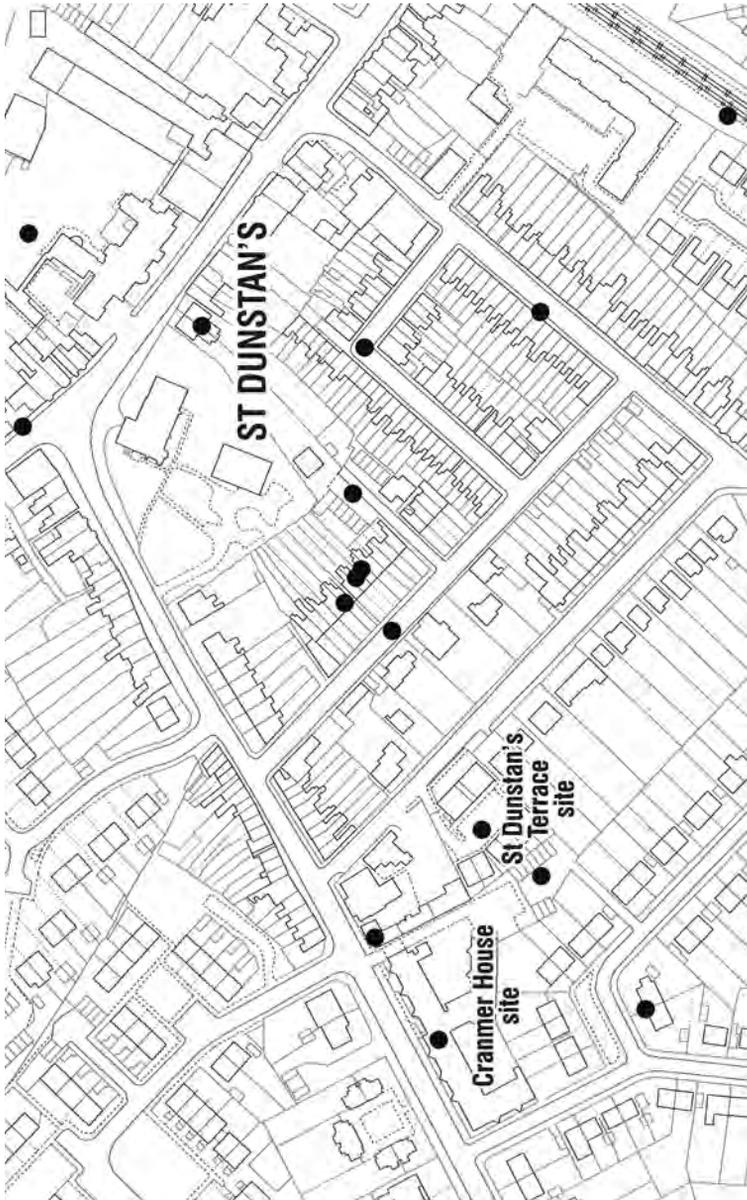


Fig. 1 The north of the St Dunstan's cemetery area in Canterbury showing location of cemetery sites (some reconstructed and very approximate).

of the Roman provincial capital (see also Mackinder 2000). And even in this test case much work remains to be done, as the cemetery plots are only known in part, inferred from the regularity of roadside and perpendicular ditches forming the enclosures for funerary features.

A ray of hope for Canterbury in this regard was supplied by the 2000-2001 St Dunstan's Terrace excavation in the North-Western cemetery area (Diack forthcoming). This open-area excavation, when added to evidence produced by the adjacent 1980s Cranmer House site (Bennett 1987a), clearly showed separate cemetery plots divided by substantial south-west/north-east aligned ditches (**Fig. 2**).

It was most interesting that the area to the south-east of the St Dunstan's Terrace ditch was devoid of burials: a good example of just how generalised the currently mapped 'North-west' cemetery remains. A more detailed mapping of the cemetery areas is needed (beyond the scope of this project), which would also factor in all of the 'negative' evidence of areas apparently devoid of burials and other cemetery features, as well as synthesising all new evidence on the layout of the suburbs as a whole and the interrelationship between particular cemetery plots and extra-mural roads, trackways, boundary ditches and industrial areas.

All of the cemetery areas around the city are, therefore, likely to be much more complicated in terms of layout and development than current maps indicate, and further clues as to this complexity are emerging on monthly basis. It is especially notable that many of the newer discoveries appear to cluster near earlier finds, potentially reflecting more focussed cemetery plots or groups of plots within the general zones. The new summary of Canterbury's Romano-British cemeteries presented here takes account of such correlations, but it must also be remembered that the data is still far too limited or poorly understood for this to be regarded as anything more than an interim statement. In all likelihood at least some of the groupings suggested below will be rendered defunct by some new discovery, and even a more detailed examination of primary archives would probably change the current view; nonetheless the following can be offered as working hypotheses.

Summary of Canterbury's Romano-British cemeteries

(as at mid 2010, described clockwise beginning at the north)

North. A good example of new discoveries augmenting old can be seen in a group of albeit dispersed burials to the north of the city (**Table 1**). The most recent discovery here produced a re-used section of inscribed grave stone (Helm and Rady forthcoming).

North-East. On the other hand, no new evidence has been forthcoming, and almost nothing is known, of putative cemeteries along the North-East

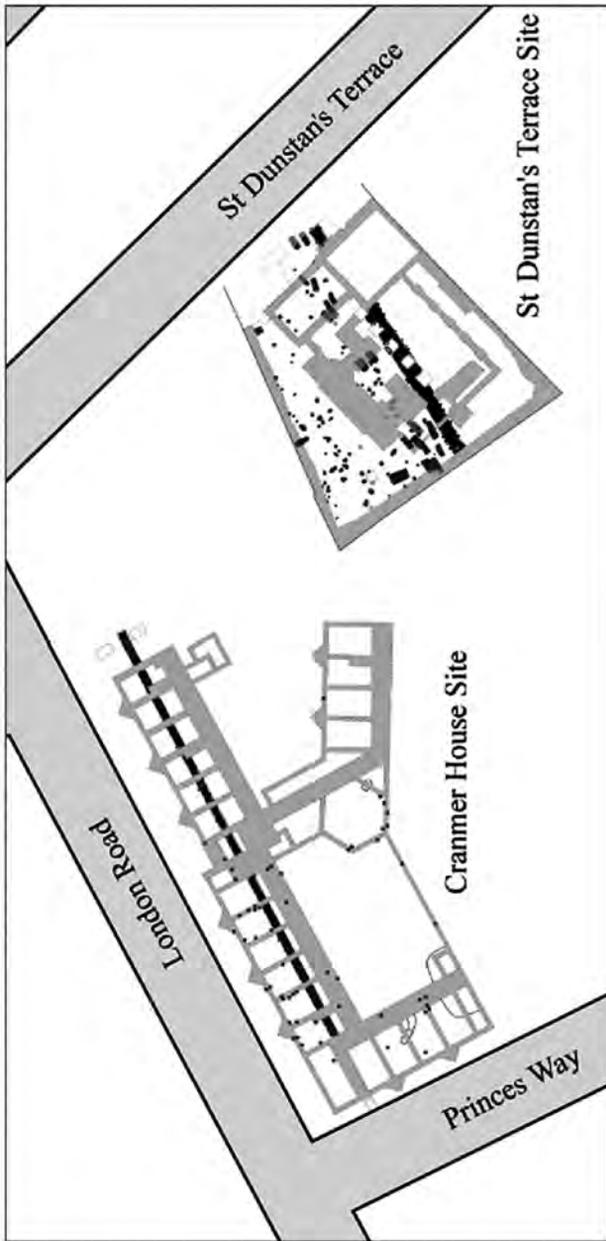


Fig. 2 Cemetery plots in the north-western cemetery area (after Bennett 1987a, fig. 21; and Diack 2003, fig. 1).

TABLE 1
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S NORTHERN CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
1	North	<1901	N E of St Stephen's Roundabout	I	3	Pilbrow 1871
2	North	<2001	Charolet Close, Market Way	I	1	Rady 1999
3	North	>2000	Market Way	I	1	Helm 2005; Helm and Rady forthcoming

(I = inhumation burials)

Roman road heading for Reculver (**Table 2**). The best guess at present is that at least one urban cemetery plot may lie nearer the North Gate ('North-East A'), while burials with perhaps more affinities with those of rural élites (including well stocked amphora burials) have also been reported further out at Vauxhall, truncated by Victorian Brickearth quarrying.

TABLE 2
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S NORTH-EAST CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
4	North-East A	<1901	NW of Northgate and SW of St John's Hosp.	C	1	Andrews 1985
5	North-East B	<1901	Artillery Barracks/Vauxhall Brickfields	C	U	VCH 1932

(C= cremation burials)

East. Following various works in the second half of the twentieth century, an 'Eastern' cemetery area (**Table 3**), can be added to the previously

designated ‘North-eastern’, ‘South-eastern’, ‘Southern’ and ‘North-western’ ‘quarters’ outlined in the Victoria County History (VCH, iii, *Kent* 1932, 75-7). A focus of mixed cremation and inhumation burial lay immediately outside Roman Quenin Gate (‘East A’), and both inhumations and cremation burials are known a little further to the east, perhaps representing another cemetery plot in the area of St Augustine’s Abbey (‘East B’). More foci exist in the Barton Court area (‘East C’) and further out at St Martin’s Hill (‘East D’); the latter was perhaps a rural burial plot that happens now to lie within the latter day city.

TABLE 3
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY’S EASTERN CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
6	East A	<1901	S W of Lady Wootton’s Green	I	<11	Andrews 1985
7	East A	<1941	Abbey Gate, St August. Abbey	U	1	Andrews 1985
8	East A	<1961	Lady Wootton’s Green	M	5	Frere <i>et al.</i> 1987
9	East A	<2001	Diocesan House, 26 Broad Street	M	<11	Hutcheson 1993
10	East A	<2001	Diocesan House (North)	M	5	Clark 1992
11	East B	<1981	S side of Abbey Church, St August. Abbey	I	1	Sherlock and Woods 1988
12	East B	<2001	Dovecot Gardens (St Augustine’s College)	C	2	Pollard 1982
13	East C	<1961	Kent Institute of Art and Design, East of 15-17 Albert Road	C	3	Andrews 1985
14	East C	<1981	Barton Court	C	1	Urban Archaeological Database (UAD)
15	East C	<2001	Longport Session House	C	6	UAD
16	East D	<1941	Windmill Road, St Martin’s Hill	C	<11	Whiting and Mead 1928
17	East D	<1961	Avon Close	C	2	UAD/Jenkins

(C = cremation burials, I = inhumation burials, M = mixed)

South-East. Sporadic concentrations of burials, perhaps again representing individual plots, can be proposed in the vicinity of Roman Roads exiting the city to the South-East (**Table 4**). Various burials and types of burials

TABLE 4
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S SOUTH-EAST CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
18	South-East A	<1901	Watling Street	C	U	VCH
19	South-East A	<1901	Salthill (St George's Roundabout)	I	1	Urry 1949
20	South-East A	<1901	Watling St Traffic Island	I	U	Andrews 1985
21	South-East A	<1901	Opp. 17 Lower Bridge Street	I	4	Andrews 1985
22	South-East A	<1901	Roman Tumulus, between St George's Lane and City wall	U	1	UAD/Ordnance Survey
23	South-East A	<1901	West of St George's Gate	C	1	Brent 1861
24	South-East A	>2000	Whitefriars CW29	U	U	UAD
25	South-East A	>2000	Whitefriars CW19/21	C	U	UAD
26	South-East B	<1961	Vernon House, Garden	C	U	Andrews 1985
27	South-East B	<2001	No 8, Vernon Place	M	4	Houliston <i>et al</i> 1995
28	South-East C	<1801	E of St Sepulchre's Nunnery in orchards	C	U	Hasted 1799
29	South-East C	<1901	Cossington Rd, St Sepulchre	M	U	Brent 1861
30	South-East C	<1901	Old Dover Road, Canterbury	C	3	Andrews 1985
31	South-East D	<1901	Ethelbert Rd, Old Dover Road	I	1	Cozens 1906
32	South-East D	<1901	St Lawrence, Canterbury	C	1	UAD
33	South-East D	<1921	'Rookelands' (136 Old Dover Road?)	C	1	Cozens 1906

(C = cremation burials, I = inhumation burials, M = mixed, U = unknown)

cluster near or within the line of the Roman Wall ('South-East A'), those inside reflecting an earlier designation of the town perimeter. Those outside include some of the significant yet again little understood Roman barrow mounds at Canterbury. The fact that others of this type are known or conjectured immediately to the south of the city (see below) probably gives an indication that the true focus at least for the barrows was more generally to the south and south-east of the *civitas* capital.

Further concentrations suggest either cremation or mixed-rite plots in the vicinity of Vernon Place ('South-East B'), in the area of the medieval St Sepulchre's nunnery ('South-East C') and further along Roman Old Dover Road ('South-East D').

South. A southern and predominantly inhumation plot (or plots, 'South A') was located just outside the later wall and focussed in the area of Pin Hill and the Canterbury East Station (**Table 5**). This probably later Roman cemetery certainly contained many burials, but because they were mainly seen during earlier 'investigations' even the sheer numbers of these so far disturbed cannot be stated, let alone any understanding of relative burial practice.

More dispersed inhumations characterise the practice in the Rhodaus Town area just to the east of these ('South B'), an arrangement better understood because of recent open-area excavation at Augustine House (Helm 2009). This work revealed an interesting arrangement of late Roman inhumations apparently aligned on a boundary ditch, as well as a possible temple/mausoleum within an enclosure fronting onto Roman Watling Street. The latter building was apparently the focus for periodic placed deposits of hobnailed shoes and coins.

Lone cremation burials are also reported further to the south, in the Martyr's Field area and Hollow Lane allotments (tentatively labelled 'South C' and 'South D' respectively, as further evidence may consolidate them as additional foci).

South-West. Apart from an anomalous and frankly suspicious early double inhumation (Bennett *et al.* 1982), the closest burials to the south-west of the city (**Table 6**) clearly indicate an early focus for cremation burials ('South-West' A), again spanning the line of the later wall and, in this case, Worth Gate. Once more, the majority of these finds were also early in the investigation of Canterbury's Roman period cemeteries, and a great deal more information is required to add even to comparatively recent finds (which can also be limited by the 'key-hole' nature of developer-funded archaeology in the city).

A focus for inhumation is suggested by finds a little to the south ('South-West B'), although these may represent outliers of the inhumation cemetery at 'South A' (see above), and the pattern of sporadic cremation

TABLE 5
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S SOUTHERN CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
34	South A	<1801	Canterbury East Station	C	1	VCH
35	South A	<1901	Near St Edmund's Church	I	1	Brent 1879
36	South A	<1901	Pin Hill human remains	I	11-50	VCH
37	South A	<1961	15, Station Rd East 1949	I	1	Andrews 1985
38	South A	<1961	12, Station Road East	I	3	Jenkins 1951
39	South A	<2001	Human remains, Station Road East	I	U	Bennett 1991
40	South A	<2001	Station Rd East (houses on north side) barrow mound?	U	1	Herdman 1992
41	South A	<2001	15, Station Rd East	I	1	Diack 2002
42	South B	<2001	Canterbury Motor Company, Rhodaus Town	I	2	Jarman 1999
43	South B	<2001	No 5, Rhodaus Town	I	1	Pratt 1999
44	South B	>2000	Augustine House, Rhodaus Town eval.	I	1	Helm 2008
45	South B	>2000	Augustine House, Rhodaus Town exc.	I	4	Helm and Boden 2009; Helm 2009
46	South C	<1921	Martyr's Field Area	C	1	Andrews 1985
47	South D	<2001	Hollow Lane Allotments	C	1	Andrews 1985

(C = cremation burials, I = inhumation burials, M = mixed, U = unknown)

burials reported at intervals as one moves away from the city is repeated here along Wincheap and out to Thanington, suggesting roadside plots in the direction of the Stour Valley ('South-West C-E').

TABLE 6
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S SOUTH-WEST CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
48	South-West A	<1901	Wincheap Green and Roadway	C	U	Brent 1879
49	South-West A	<1901	Roman mortuary urns, under former Ash's Malthouse, Castle St	C	U	Andrews 1985
50	South-West A	<1901	The <i>Round House</i> Wincheap	C	U	Brent 1861
51	South-West A	<1901	Canterbury Castle	I	1	Andrews 1985
52	South-West A	<1901	Gasworks, Castle Street	C	U	UAD/Jenkins
53	South-West A	<1981	Rosemary Lane Car Park	C	2	Bennett <i>et al.</i> 1982
54	South-West A	<1981	Ditto	I	2	Bennett <i>et al.</i> 1982
55	South-West A	>2000	Simmons Road, Wincheap	U	1	Shand 2005
56	South-West B	<1901	Wall Field, Wincheap (Green Field Bungalow)	I	U	Andrews 1985
57	South-West B	<1961	N of No. 10, Gordon Rd	I	1	UAD/Jenkins
58	South-West C	<1981	Wincheap	C	1	UAD
59	South-West D	<1981	Nos 116-90, Wincheap (Invicta SS)	C	2	Bennett <i>et al.</i> 1980
60	South-West E	<1981	Formerly 3, Thanington Road	C	1	UAD

(C = cremation burials, I = inhumation burials, U = unknown)

North-West. Thanks to rescue and developer-funded work in recent years, the north-west cemetery area (**Table 7**) is currently slightly better understood than other areas around the city, and it is possible to outline more detail here, with particular foci predominantly given over to cremation or inhumation burials being suggested as well as mixed rite cemetery plots. Sites nearest the north-west side of the city ('North-West A'), although somewhat scattered, suggest the latter. To the south of these, our understanding of an inhumation plot or plots at the end of Station Road West and Kirby's Lane ('North-west B1') has very recently

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TABLE 7
SITES IN ROMAN CANTERBURY'S NORTH-WEST CEMETERY AREA

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
61	North-West A	<1921	Pound Lane	C	2	UAD/Jenkins
62	North-West A	<1981	Nos 16-21, North Lane	I	7	Bennett 1978
63	North-West A	<2001	30, North Lane	M	2	Leggatt 1991
64	North-West A	<2001	4-7 and 20-21 Carriage Mews, Kirby's Lane (EK Omn. Wks)	I	5	Rady 2009
65	North-West B1	<1901	SW end of Kirby's Lane	I	3	Pilbrow 1871
66	North-West B1	<1961	SW end of Station Road West	I	3	Jenkins 1951
67	North-West B1	<2001	Kirby's Lane	I	U	Tatton-Brown 1983
68	North-West B1	>2000	Hallett's Garage, 21-24 St Dunstan's St	I	11-50	Gollop 2009; Adrian Gollop pers. comm.
69	North-West B2	<1901	Southern Railway	U	U	VCH/Ordnance Survey
70	North-West B2	<2001	Linden Grove	I	2	Bennett 1989
71	North-West B2	>2000	71 St Dunstans St (House of Agnes)	I	1	Robertson 2009
72	North-West C1	<1901	Orchard Street	C	U	VCH/Ordnance Survey
73	North-West C1	<1901	Junction Cross/ Church Street	C	1	Andrews 1985
74	North-West C1	<2001	8, New Street	I	1	Bennett 1987b
75	North-West C1	<2001	St Dunstan's mains sewer	C	4	Taylor 1985
76	North-West C1	<2001	5, New Street	C	3	Taylor 1985
77	North-West C1	<2001	7, New Street	I	3	Bennett 1987
78	North-West C1	>2000	Ryde Street	C	1	Diack 2008
79	North-West C2	<1901	Whitstable Road	C	U	Ordnance Survey
80	North-West C2	<1901	Rear Garden of Roper House	C	U	VCH/Ordnance Survey
81	North-West C2	<2001	No. 38, St Dunstan's St	C	U	Andrews 1985

TABLE 7 (cont.)

Site no.	Cemetery area/ potential group	Discovery date range	Site name	Type	No.	Main reference
82	North-West D1	<1941	Telephone Repeater Stn St Dunstan's Terrace	C	<11	Whiting 1927
83	North-West D1	<1961	Westgate Court Farm	C	1	UAD/Jenkins
84	North-West D1	<2001	No 66, London Road	U	1	UAD/Jenkins
85	North-West D1	>2000	Telephone Rptr Stn St Dunstan's Terrace	M	>100	Diack <i>forthcoming</i> (eval. 00 and excav. 01/02)
86	North-West D2-3	<1961	22 -24 Crown Gardens	C	4	UAD/Jenkins
87	North-West D2-3	<2001	Cranmer House, London Rd.	M	>50	Bennett 1987a
88	North-West E	<1921	Rheims Way 1906	C	1	Andrews 1985
89	North-West E	<1921	Rheims Way 1913	C	1	Pilbrow 1871
90	North-West E	<1961	Queen's Avenue	C	3	UAD/Jenkins
91	North-West E	<1961	Rheims Way Jenkins burial 1	C	1	UAD/Jenkins
92	North-West E	<1961	Rheims Way Jenkins burial 2	C	1	UAD/Jenkins
93	North-West E	<1961	Rheims Way Jenkins burial 3	C	1	UAD/Jenkins
94	North-West E	<1961	Rheims Way Jenkins burial 4	C	1	UAD/Jenkins
95	North-West E	<1961	Whitehall Road Area	I	1	Frere <i>et al.</i> 1987

(C = cremation burials, I = inhumation burials, M = mixed, U = unknown)

been augmented by evaluations (Gollop 2009; Robertson 2009) and open area excavation (Adrian Gollop, pers. comm.) at the former Hallett's Garage. Over thirty inhumations, some intercutting, were revealed within the first part of the site to be uncovered, and with more areas of the site yet to be excavated this number is likely to increase (although these areas are almost certainly more heavily disturbed); it is to be hoped that some evidence of the layout of the cemetery will also be revealed. On the other side of St Dunstan's Street and to the south-west, inhumation burials at Linden Grove and vague reports from the construction of the railway suggest a further, perhaps directly related plot or plots ('North-West B2'),

although the recent find of a lone inhumation burial at 71 St Dunstan's Street again suggests dispersed inhumation in this area, much like the pattern already seen at 'South B'.

Continuing north-west, evidence of mixed rite cemeteries actually increases in the St Dunstan's cemetery area, raising questions about the implications of more sporadic finds in other areas. There is a clear focus of burials around Orchard Street, Church Street, Cross Street, Ryde Street and New Street ('North-West C1'), and further reports of cremation burials at St Dunstan's Street and further north indicate another possible focus there ('North-West C2').

Along the line of London Road to the south is the best known of all cemetery areas at Canterbury. Open area excavation at St Dunstan's Terrace, rescue excavations at Cranmer House, and earlier observations at Crown Gardens seem indicate at least three cemetery plots ('North-West D1-3'), separated by two known boundary ditches (see Figs 1 and 2). Finally, observations along Rheims Way, to the south of these plots, have indicated another burial focus there ('North-West E').

Overall cemetery data: quantity and quality

Most importantly, the majority of the ninety-five 'sites' included in this survey were older chance discoveries and interventions, and were certainly identified prior to any modern standards of excavation being imposed; in fact, 79% of these 'sites' were come across/investigated prior to the introduction of developer funding in the early 1990s.

TABLE 8: APPROXIMATE DISCOVERY DATE RANGES OF CANTERBURY'S ROMANO-BRITISH CEMETERY 'SITES' (JUNE 2010)

<i>Discovery date ranges</i>	<i>Number of 'sites'</i>
Before 1801	2
1802-1901	28
1902-1921	5
1922-1941	3
1943-1961	16
1962-1981	8
1982-2001	23
Since 2000	10

It is impossible with so many early and incomplete records to conjecture on the sheer numbers of burials that these figures represent, let alone any other cemetery features that would probably not even have been noted at

the time. A process of collation and detailed study of primary sources in museum and personal archives (beyond the scope of this project) could no doubt fill in a lot of the gaps in the dataset, but much that would seem significant in the twenty-first century would not have been looked for in the nineteenth and even the twentieth centuries.

It is clear that the great majority of the data so far available for the cemeteries of Roman Canterbury (and indeed elsewhere) has been collected either in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by those mainly interested in artefacts, or more latterly by those mainly interested in burials as such. A large proportion of the sites (see **Fig. 3**) produced evidence only of cremation burials, with notably fewer containing solely inhumation burials and fewer still representing mixed rite cemeteries.

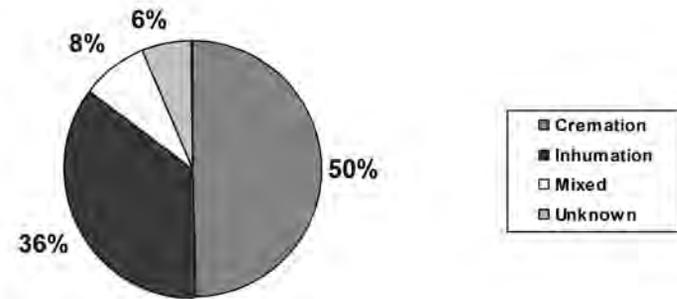


Fig. 3 Types of Funerary Rite represented by the ‘Sites’ in the Survey.

The latter statistic is undoubtedly a function of the limited site areas of many of the excavations and of their being chance finds, especially during the nineteenth and early twentieth century when extensive works took place. This, and the fact that in many cases anyone who could identify burials often did not see them *in situ* but received objects ‘second hand’, is also reflected by the number of sites where the evidence is not complete enough even to tell whether cremation burials or inhumations were represented (or indeed whether they were burials at all). In 41% of the sites only one burial (inhumation or cremation burial) was recorded, and 68% of the sites produced 5 or fewer features, with sites producing between 11 and 50 burials or more being very much the exception (**Table 9**).

A general lack of concerted and research driven investigation of Canterbury’s Roman cemeteries has had an impact on the overall quality of the data (**Table 10**).¹

TABLE 9. NUMBERS OF BURIALS REPRESENTED BY 'SITES'

Number of burials represented	Number of sites	Percentage
1	38	41
2-5	26	27
6-10	6	6
11-50	3	3
51-100	1	1
>100	1	1
Unknown	20	22

TABLE 10. THE QUALITY OF THE CANTERBURY DATA FOR RECONSTRUCTION OF BURIAL RITUAL (JUNE 2010)

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Record quality</i>	<i>Percentage of 'sites'</i>
A	Detailed recording of entire burials of known extent, including bone analysis, object typology, dating and condition, spatial arrangement of objects in burial, environmental analyses	20%
B	As above, but lacking bone and environmental analyses	9%
C	Secure analysis of entire object assemblage but little or no detail of spatial arrangement in original context and no bone and environmental analyses	13%
D	Apparently little or no chance of reconstructing entire burial groups, occasionally whether burials were cremation burials or inhumations, or even burials	58%

Research frameworks

This initial assessment demonstrates that we need more and better data in order to investigate Romano-British burials at Canterbury, and also that these new data should to be collected in line with current research questions on Roman funerary practice in general (see Pearce and Weekes forthcoming). The following areas are the priorities:

Cemetery layout and morphology: the layouts of the cemeteries and cemetery plots of Roman Canterbury provide the context for comparison, and

need to be better defined in order to begin comparing and contrasting burial practice over time and between contemporary burial plots.

Comparison of burial practice: there is much still to investigate in terms of regional and local traditions and particular traits relating to Romano-British burial contents (see Weekes 2008). How do the Canterbury data compare with broader trends? Further interesting questions can also be raised, such as the need to understand upper contexts of these features in relation to revisiting of burials and even continued manipulation of their contents (Weekes 2005).

Not just burials, but funerals: evidence of important aspects of the funerary process *other than burial* is still sadly lacking in Roman Canterbury. Only meagrely reported examples can be found in the published material, none of which have been subjected to the detailed osteological and environmental analyses we would now expect. Such evidence would include remnants of possible cremation pyre sites, structures or related features, for example, and any cremation related deposits that are found both in burials and in a variety of other contexts such as pits and cemetery plot ditches (McKinley 2000; Weekes 2008; McKinley forthcoming).

Cemetery surfaces: we have hardly even begun to explore the possibility of extant cemetery surfaces in this country (although considerable progress in this area has been made in Italy: see Ortalli, forthcoming). These remnants of the ground surface into which burials were cut might contain remnants of offerings of food, drink and other objects left at the grave side, and even evidence of mausolea. A possible cemetery surface reported at Cranmer House, St Dunstan's (Bennett 1987a), only seen in section because the area was simply trenched for foundations rather than being open area excavated, could be of national significance. Recent small-scale research excavation to look for this putative horizon in the garden at Cranmer House (carried out by the author and Rupert Weekes in 2009: supported by the Canterbury Archaeological Society and Canterbury Archaeological Trust) unfortunately produced negative results, but the search continues.

Data synthesis

The data for all of these aspects of Romano-British funerals collected through the developer-funded process will remain piecemeal, concealed in grey literature reports, and ineffective if it is not synthesized with existing knowledge. We need to link these disparate findings to research funding in order to realise and develop our understanding of cemetery areas and plots, and recognise them as existing 'monuments'. This can be best achieved with a Geographical Information System (GIS), within which spatial data (cemetery areas and plots, contours and elevations,

deposit modeling, potential for cemetery surface survival etc) can be interrogated in conjunction with tabular attribute data (burial and other deposit contents, etc.). In this way it might begin to be possible to build up a three-dimensional spatial models of cemetery development and survival, and to investigate comparative funerary traditions in more detail than ever before. The Urban Archaeological Database at Canterbury has already provided the starting point for such a study, but quality and quantity of data could be added via a concerted re-appraisal of the primary archives in line with current research questions.

Conclusion

The extra-mural Roman cemeteries of Canterbury and other Romano-British centres relate to the development of an important aspect of provincial culture and society. The archaeological evidence that remains of them, while often considerably disturbed since the cemeteries were abandoned, is potentially just as complicated as urban stratigraphy, and should be archaeologically investigated in the same way. Above all, it is vital that we begin to conceptualize Romano-British cemetery areas as significant 'monuments' in themselves, requiring continued protection and careful, research led investigation.

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ENDNOTE

¹ All of which equally applies to more rural funerary contexts; a brief survey of Surrey data, carried out for the South East Research Framework in 2007 (Weekes 2007) produced strikingly similar results to those shown in tables 9 and 10 of this paper.

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