

## The Trumpington Bed Burial in its Wider Context Dr Sam Lucy

Ahead of development in Trumpington, trial trenching had revealed a widespread Roman and pre-historic landscape but thus far very little Anglo-Saxon.

Excavation of a small area by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit found an Iron Age enclosure and a double Beaker burial. The rest was Anglo-Saxon. Five Middle and Late Saxon sunken-featured buildings were identified (although one turned out later to be an Iron Age feature), one post and trench building and a complex of ditches. From the Early Saxon period came four burials, sunken-featured buildings, ditches, a hall and two wells.

An Early Saxon sunken-featured building contained Thetford Ware pottery from the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and some worked bone items, the implication being that the settlement was abandoned and the feature left open for several centuries. All other structures dated to the 7<sup>th</sup> century and contained contemporary material. Another sunken-featured building contained early Saxon pottery and animal bone. The Hall measured 9m x 20m and contained very few finds except a small amount of 7<sup>th</sup> century pot.

Of the four burials, all were aligned west-east; the first was an adult of 18-25, sex uncertain, with no grave goods; the second was an adult of 18-25, probably female, buried with a pair of shears; the third was a female of 15-20, found with a buckle at her pelvis; the fourth was a female of 14-18 who had possibly suffered illness or dietary deficiency in childhood, and was buried in a bed with a metal frame; the frame had fabric adhering to it, and this is being analysed in York.

The body was found with a gold and garnet cross in almost perfect condition (one of only five such finds) which had probably been sewn onto clothing via four attachments at the back. Also found were a pair of gold and garnet linked pins for fastening clothing, again in perfect condition. A chatelaine had been buried with the body which has preserved textile attached. Bone and tooth analysis on the body is planned.

Very few bed burials have been found, with small clusters around Cambridge and Salisbury, and a small number of other isolated instances. They all contain high-status females. Distinct late 7<sup>th</sup> century assemblages are found in the burials and are possibly Christian.

A bed burial from Bloodmoor Hill, Suffolk contained a typical assemblage of T-shaped key, shears, chatelaine, silver jewellery including crosses, caskets and boxes, beads, spindle whorls, strike-a-light and brooches which were already old when deposited. This burial probably dates from 640–670AD.

A bed burial from Westfield, Ely contained blue glass palm cups, combs, pendant crosses, jewellery box and beads; a copper alloy box, which was once thought to have contained a sewing kit, could have held items of Christian significance. Dietary analysis indicated a lot of fish was being consumed, and this could possibly point to Christian influence.

An English Heritage late 7<sup>th</sup> century chronology project shows peaks of female burials with grave goods separated by troughs when there are no grave goods. The Trumpington burial fits into one of these peaks. It contained one of 4 cloisonné pectoral crosses found in female burials. The bed could be associated with Christianity, as it could be seen that the body was resting, ready for resurrection. The conclusion is of a high-status, Christian cemetery and settlement, possibly a female monastic site. A further observation suggests that the nearby double Beaker burial may have been covered with a mound; it is known that Anglo-Saxon cemeteries were sometimes sited near barrows.

Further information can be found on [cam.ac.uk/research/news/mystery-of-anglo-saxon-teen-buried-in-bed-with-gold-cross](http://cam.ac.uk/research/news/mystery-of-anglo-saxon-teen-buried-in-bed-with-gold-cross)