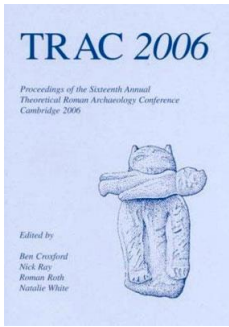

Paper Information:

Title: Subculture and Small Group Identity in Iron Age and Roman Baldock
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Pages: 150–171

DOI: http://doi.org/10.16995/TRAC2006_150_171
Publication Date: 29 March 2007

Volume Information:

Croxford, B., Ray, N., Roth, R., and White, N. (eds.) (2007) *TRAC 2006: Proceedings of the Sixteenth Annual Theoretical Roman Archaeology Conference, Cambridge 2006.* Oxford: Oxbow Books.

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Subculture and Small Group Identity in Iron Age and Roman Baldock

Keith J. Fitzpatrick-Matthews

The archaeology of small group identity

In contemporary society, it is a commonplace that identities are expressed through the subtle variations in the material culture we all use, variations that we may conveniently call 'style'. Indeed, it is generally believed that individuals choose particular styles in an effort to become the sort of person associated with those styles in popular culture. However, the very concept of style is one that has received scant attention within archaeological discourse, perhaps because its definition is thought to be self-evident. Sackett was perhaps the first to attempt a generalised model of the concept, although his conclusions, such as '*pottery decorations constitute a kind of* ethnic iconography' (1977: 377, author's emphasis), are hopelessly simplistic and echo early twentieth century archaeologists who naïvely assumed that archaeological cultures of recurring material culture 'styles' represented individual 'peoples' (Childe 1964: 25). The challenge for archaeology has become one of recognising how identity might be reflected within material culture, and of equal importance, what levels of identity are reflected. This, in turn, involves an examination of how forms of cultural identity are represented materially, and how this contributes to the construction of communities. Combining insights from analyses of consumerist society regarding style and aspiration to group membership with sociological analyses of youth subcultures and their appropriation of styles, it is clear that communities are not monolithic entities defined by a single approach to style. In archaeology, we can deal with such issues through the analysis of small groups or 'subcultures' that share similar stylistic features not found in other contemporary groups.

If there is no simple correlation between identity and specific styles of material culture, the discourse of material culture that derives from its consumption can nevertheless be understood in terms of the relationships between those items. There is one archaeological situation where it is possible to be reasonably sure of retrieving that part of the system of discursive objects to survive in the ground, at least: the excavation of human burials. Where they have not been disturbed by later activity, they will contain all those durable objects that the living thought appropriate to accompany the deceased individual. The discourses are potentially as complex as those of everyday life, and it should therefore be possible to recover information about how the living viewed themselves in relation to the dead. This, in turn, might help us to understand something of their self-identification, be it ethnic, religious, sexual, or otherwise.

The unusually large assemblage of Late Pre-Roman Iron Age and Romano-British burials from Baldock, Hertfordshire (Fig. 1) provide an ideal data set through which constructions of small group identities can be explored. Burial rites in the Late Iron Age are generally characterised as being relatively homogeneous across southeast England and northwest France (e.g. Stead and Rigby 1989: 86), with cremation becoming the dominant rite from the later first century B.C. (Darvill 1987: 171). However, significant variations do occur, including excarnation and uniquely inhumation cemeteries (Matthews and Burleigh forthcoming;

Matthews 1999: 144). Thus, there is already a tension between the older rites of excarnation and inhumation (the latter appearing to originate in the Middle Iron Age, with the former perhaps in decline by the Late Iron Age) and the supposedly 'continental' innovation of cremation. Moreover, the number of burials remains small in most places, with many smaller farmsteads showing no evidence whatsoever for the disposal of the dead following regular patterns of deposition.

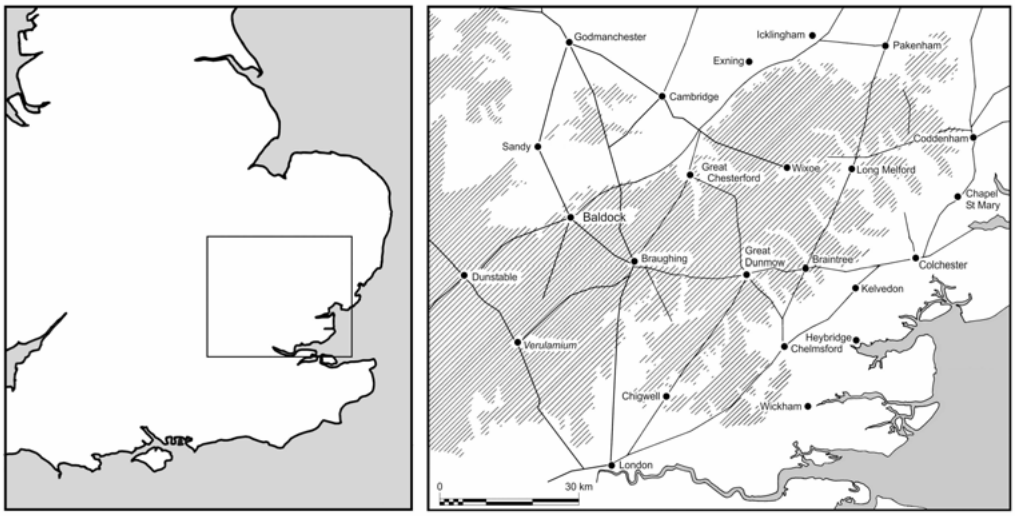

Figure 1: Baldock location.

The Aylesford-Swarling cremation burial has long been considered as the typical burial of the south-eastern corner of Britain during the century before the Claudian invasion (Collis 1977: 4; Taylor 2001: 68). In this tradition, the calcined bone was deposited in pits with a variety of pottery vessels and other objects. Occasionally, the burial was in the centre of a square enclosure, which is thought by some to have been a quarry for a low central mound (Burleigh 1982: 12; Stead and Rigby 1989: 86). The more elaborate graves contained items such as planked tripod buckets with bronze fittings, probably used for mixing wine during feasts, and imported bronze vessels and amphorae. The richest of these are referred to as 'Welwyn-type' burials, after the first well-publicised discovery in 1906 (Smith 1912: 1). The choice of which rite to employ must have been based on a number of complex factors, not simply religious belief or social convention. Cremation, for instance, is much more expensive than inhumation because an open pyre of Iron Age type needs to be fed with fuel and stoked for up to eight hours to reduce a body to calcined bone. On the other hand, it requires less outlay in terms of ground space to dispose of the cremated remains. Moreover, there may have been a resistance to exotic or novel, initially minority rites by some sectors of the population, while others eagerly took up the new practice. In terms of social network analysis, these are the distinctions between laggards and early adopters (Valente 1995: 95).

Romano-British burial practice continued the Late Iron Age traditions, with cremations deposited in cinerary urns being the most common form of disposal of the dead until the early third century A.D. (Philpott 1991: 8). Post-conquest innovations in the rite include the use of

glass or lead containers for the cremated remains, the inclusion of coins, glass phials, lamps, bronze-decorated caskets, and particularly the use of Samian pottery as a grave gift (Philpott 1991: 217). Philpott has seen these as the possible evidence for immigrants to the new province as they are found most commonly in the newly-established Roman centres, both military and urban sites.

Early Roman inhumations are usually thought of as uncommon and as a predominantly regionally biased survival of local Iron Age traditions (Taylor 2001: 94), it is now clear that they were more widespread than once thought. Although characterised as a largely rural phenomenon (Philpott 1991: 222), first century A.D. inhumations are found in such non-rural places as Chester, where they are explained as the importation of exotic traditions by soldiers. There are greater variations in this rite than with cremations, as the body can be positioned in many different ways, and with a varied collection of gravegoods.

Baldock

By 1900, the former existence of an ancient settlement at Baldock had long been forgotten, as it was long believed to have been a medieval 'new town' planted by the Knights Templar in the 1140s. However, when Romano-British burials were discovered in 1925, following the first deep ploughing of Walls Field on the eastern edge of the town, it became clear that a Roman settlement had once existed (Fig. 2). Over the next seven years, Westell, curator of Letchworth Museum, and his assistant Applebaum excavated a number of sites that soon made it clear that an extensive town had existed on the site in the Roman period, with its origins going back into the Late Iron Age (Westell and Applebaum 1933: 238). Subsequent large-scale campaigns by Stead from 1968 to 1972 (Stead and Rigby 1986) and Burleigh from 1978 to 1994 revealed progressively more about the character and history of the settlement. Owing to the location of modern development towards the eastern edge of the ancient town (whose core lay to the east of medieval Baldock), much of the fieldwork during the 1980s was focused on a collection of burial grounds that formed a ring around the town. Although much of the earlier fieldwork has been published (Westell 1931; Applebaum 1932; Stead and Rigby 1986), the large campaigns of the 1980s remain largely unpublished, although an assessment is due for imminent publication (Matthews and Burleigh forthcoming).

It has been clear for some time that the Late Iron Age settlement at Baldock belongs to the class of monument conventionally referred to as an *oppidum*, a relatively densely occupied area, with its position defined by complexes of dykes and other linear features (Burleigh 1995: 122). Since the late 1960s, it has been evident that its development began early in the first century B.C., with the deposition of the earliest known Welwyn-type burial occurring there in the early first century B.C., perhaps even before c. 100 B.C. (Stead and Rigby 1986: 60). By the middle of the century, distinct settlement and burial zones had been established, separated by a line of substantial posts inserted into the backfilled pits of an earlier pit alignment.

During the later first century B.C., Baldock was eclipsed by newer and faster growing *oppida* at Braughing and, *Verlamion* especially. Nevertheless, the settlement growth accelerated after 20 B.C., and continued to expand throughout the first century A.D. onwards. In the fifty years or so after 20 B.C., the tracks through the settlement were formalised, with side ditches and metalled surfaces appearing, while a rough street grid developed, based around groups of subrectangular enclosures that were likely to be domestic. The Roman conquest seems not to have affected the development of the town and by A.D. 100, it had expanded to

cover some 48 hectares, with cemeteries established around its periphery. From the third century onwards, the settled area contracted, although it is unclear if this was a result of population shrinkage or of denser occupation in the core. Certainly, the most substantial buildings so far discovered in the town date from the fourth century. Unusually, there is a good sub-Roman sequence, with a range of ceramic fabrics continuing into the middle of the sixth century. At least one of the town's cemeteries continued to be used until this time, and a timber hall built close to it is a sixth century type (Selkirk and Selkirk 1983: 74).

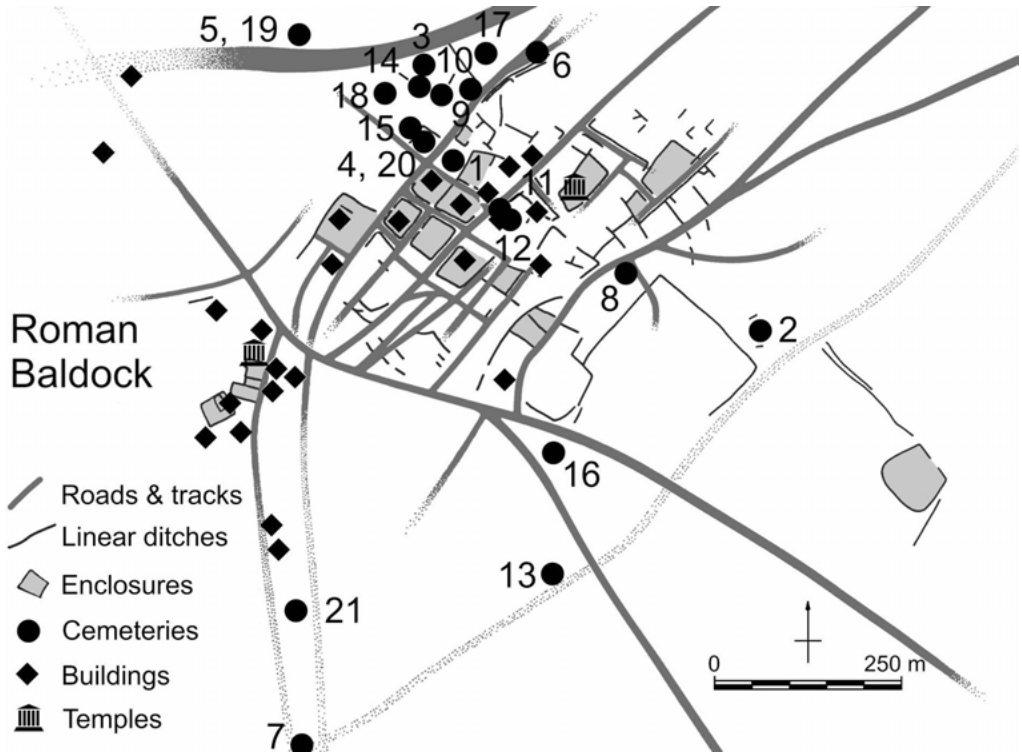

Figure 2: Romano-British Baldock.
Key to cemeteries: 1 California Large Enclosure, 2 Wallington Road, 3 Icknield Way Roadside, 4 California Small Enclosure, 5 Icknield Way East Enclosure; 6 Stane Street, 7 South Road, 8 Mercia Road, 9 Yeomanry Drive North, 10 Sale Drive East, 11 Downlands Enclosure A, 12 Downlands Enclosure B, 13 Clothall Road, 14 Sale Drive Doline, 15 Yeomanry Drive South, 16 Walls Field, 17 Royston Road, 18 Sale Drive West, 19 Icknield Way East, 20 California, 21 The Tene.

The town occupies a shallow bowl in the hills that run west-south-west to east-north-east through North Hertfordshire, close to the source of the River Ivel, which flows northwards to join the Bedfordshire Ouse. It is also at a road junction, with pre-Roman tracks from Braughing, *Verlamion* and Sandy converging with the line of the Icknield Way south-east from the Ivel springs. It seems to have functioned as a sub-regional market centre, with small-scale

craft production, although osteological evidence suggests that a substantial proportion of the townspeople were agricultural labourers. Even so, there is was a degree of personal wealth that places at least some of the inhabitants in the upper strata of Romano-British society.

Cemeteries and burial rites

There are 21 formal cemeteries are currently known surrounding the town (Table 1), with five pre-Roman square enclosures, an early inhumation cemetery, mixed-rite early Roman cemeteries, and late to sub-Roman inhumation cemeteries. Those to the north-east, south-east, and south of the town are the best known; others may have existed to the west, but this is the area occupied by the new town established by the Knights Templar in the 1140s, which has not been extensively explored archaeologically. The formal burial grounds range in date from around 50 B.C. to c. A.D. 550, with the bucket burial discovered in 1967 an early outlier. Cemeteries seem to have developed as the *oppidum* became established, although there are traces of Middle Iron Age burials in areas used for burials much later. Since the first burials were discovered in 1925, a little over 1800 burials have been recorded from the town's cemeteries, and almost 100 from more informal contexts. As well as these human cemeteries, there are a range of burial-like deposits, sometimes occurring in clusters, as with the so-called 'lamp pit' (Stead and Rigby 1986: 78–80), and a group of contemporary nearby pits resembling urned cremation burials but without any human bone.

The range of cemeteries and burial rites covers virtually the whole range of types attested in Roman Britain, with a few notable exceptions (such as the geographically restricted stone cists and, curiously, plaster burials). The earliest cemeteries were single-rite, with cremations in square enclosures and cremations or inhumations in less clearly defined burial grounds. Some of the enclosures may originally have contained square barrows, attracting secondary burials in the tops of the mounds, as was certainly the case with the California Large Enclosure. At Mercia Road, a number of cremations were associated with a circular building at the north-eastern end of an open-ended linear enclosure, some 190 m long. It is likely that this structure was a shrine or mortuary house as the enclosure was the only formal route through a line of posts inserted into an existing pit alignment, separating the settlement zone from the burial zone. There is evidence that some of these burial pits remained open for some time after the deposition of their contents. Use of the enclosure ended in the middle of the first century A.D., with the careful burial of an adult male dog in one of the largely silted ditches appearing to mark its formal closure. Around A.D. 70, these early, single-rite sites had largely been abandoned, with only the former inhumation cemetery at Wallington Road and the cremation cemetery at Sale Drive East continuing in use, although the former became a uniquely cremation cemetery. In their place, a number of enclosed mixed-rite cemeteries developed, generally at road junctions and encircling the town. These cemeteries continued in use until the late third or early fourth century. From the late second century onwards, a number of uniquely inhumation cemeteries were also established, and at least three of the old mixed-rite cemeteries (Royston Road, Walls Field and Icknield Way East) remained in use as inhumation cemeteries. All of these inhumation cemeteries were used into the fifth century (probably into at least the middle of the century), and one (California) was still receiving new burials in the middle of the sixth century. The sequence is shown graphically in Figure 3.

Table 1: Cemeteries in Baldock.

Cemetery	Type	Date	Number of graves	Publication
California Large Enclosure	Square cremation enclosure	*c* 50 - 25 B.C.	7+	Burleigh 1982
Wallington Road	Inhumation then cremation cemetery	*c* 50 B.C. - A.D. 310	174	
Icknield Way Roadside	Inhumation cemetery	*c* 50 B.C. - A.D. 250	13	
California Small Enclosure	Square cremation enclosure	*c* 40 - 1 B.C.	3+	
Icknield Way East Enclosure	Square cremation enclosure?	*c* 25 B.C. - A.D. 75	17+	
Stane Street	Inhumation cemetery	*c* 20 B.C. - A.D. 105	82	Stead & Rigby 1986: 77, burials 24 & 25
South Road	Cremation cemetery	*c* 10 B.C. - A.D. 125	7+	
Mercia Road	Cremations	A.D. *c* 1 - 50	4+	
Yeomanry Drive North	Cremation cemetery	A.D. *c* 1 - 105	59	Stead & Rigby 1986: 77, burials 22 & 23
Sale Drive East	Cremation then mixed-rite cemetery	A.D. *c* 1 - 250	65	
Downlands enclosure A	Square enclosure	A.D. *c* 1 - 25	1+	Stead & Rigby 1986: 61
Downlands enclosure B	Square enclosure	A.D. *c* 25 - 50	1	Stead & Rigby 1986: 61
Clothall Road	Cremation cemetery	A.D. *c* 50 - 105	8+	Stead & Rigby 1986: 61–75
Sale Drive Doline	Mixed rite cemetery	A.D. *c* 50 - 150	16	
Yeomanry Drive South	Mixed-rite cemetery	A.D. *c* 70 - 300	15	
Walls Field	Mixed rite then inhumation cemetery	A.D. *c* 70 - 310	351+	Westell 1931
Royston Road	Mixed-rite then inhumation cemetery	A.D. *c* 70 - 450	720	Stead & Rigby 1986: 75-77
Sale Drive West	Mixed-rite cemetery	A.D. *c* 75 - 300	59	
Icknield Way East	Mixed rite then inhumation cemetery	A.D. *c* 175 - 450	34+	Burleigh *et al*. 2006
California	Inhumation cemetery	A.D. *c* 175 - 550	98	
The Tene	Inhumation cemetery	A.D. *c* 275 - 450	80+	Burleigh 1980; Stead & Rigby 1986: 78

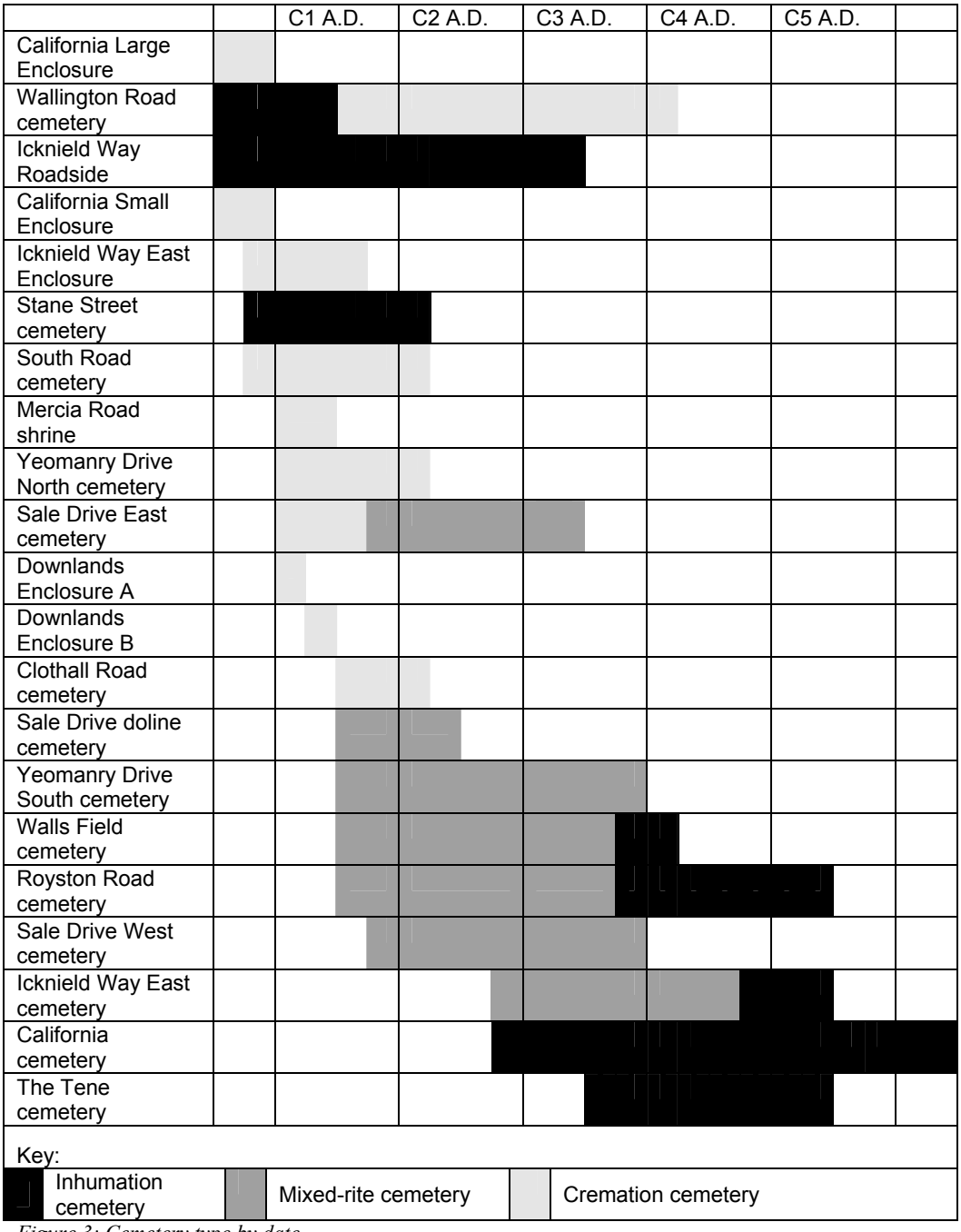

Figure 3: Cemetery type by date.

Cremations can be divided into two basic types: urned and unurned. In most cemeteries, the majority were apparently urned, and consisted of one or more vessels placed in a pit, one of which contained the ashes of the deceased. Most did not have any other objects with them, although some contained items of personal adornment. Occasionally, the vessels were placed in either a wood-lined pit or in a box. In two cemeteries, Royston Road and Yeomanry Drive North, unurned cremations outnumbered urned cremations, in the former case by a factor of about 2:1 (Burleigh 1993: 43 gives a figure of 3:2, conflating Royston Road with the then only partly excavated Yeomanry Drive North, where the ratio was about 8:1), while none of the cremations from Sale Drive East, Sale Drive West, Sale Drive Doline or Yeomanry Drive South was contained in an urn. Some cremations at Royston Road appear to have been performed *in situ*, so-called *bustum* types according to McKinley (2000: 39), and several were very incomplete, with connective tissue surviving the cremation process. Two pyre bases are known, at Wallington Road and Royston Road, whilst a pyre débris pit associated with the Iron Age bucket burial in the California Large Enclosure was located close to it. At the Royston Road cemetery, there were several examples of incomplete cremation, one of which was barely burnt (Burleigh 1993: 46). The latest cremations identified were from Icknield Way East Cemetery, and were dated to the later fourth century.

Inhumations occur at all periods from the mid-first century B.C. through to the sub-Roman period: there was never a time when they were not being deposited. However, the fewest inhumations were made between the mid first century A.D. and the late second century, when cremation was the dominant rite. There is no trace of a coffin in the majority of inhumations, although the presence of bodies with limbs laid close together, especially arms close to or on the chest, suggests the use of shrouds. Where coffins are attested, some were nailed and others were not, presumably being dowelled and jointed. Some inhumations seem to have been treated almost casually, with the limbs left flailing about wildly in the grave. A significant number of inhumations were prone or lying on one side, and from the late second century onwards, some inhumations were decapitated (McKinley 1993). Although there is not always osteological evidence to show how this was performed, the archaeological context makes it clear that the head had been removed prior to burial (Fig. 4). In one instance, the late second to early third century burial of an older adult female at Royston Road, the decapitated head had been placed on the lid of the coffin, and the grave had been left open for some time, beneath a timber superstructure. At least one of the inhumation cemeteries, The Tene, seems to have been well ordered, with few intercutting burials, and all extended supine skeletons were aligned uniformly with their heads to the west (against the usual pattern of head to the north-east or east seen in other cemeteries). It is tempting to suggest that this burial ground, which was in use from the late third to fifth centuries A.D., was the cemetery used by the town's Christian population if we employ the criteria suggested by Thomas (1981: 228ff). The California cemetery, on the other hand, belongs to Rahtz's (1977: 55) Type A: sub-Roman secular, with numerous intercutting graves.

A phenomenon that seems not to have been extensively commented on at other sites is the re-use of graves for secondary and even tertiary burials. Whilst there was a degree of intercutting in some of the early inhumation cemeteries, such as at Stane Street, in the late Roman cemetery at California, there are examples of burials in coffins where the almost complete but disarticulated skeleton of a presumably earlier occupant have been arranged around its outside (Burleigh 1993: 48). These are not cases of intercutting, as the more recent grave is generally in exactly the same location as the earlier. In some instances, it may be suspected that family relationships were involved in the decision to exhume then re-inter a

precious occupant, but in many cases, there is no obvious explanation. There are also several graves at this cemetery from which no bone was recovered, despite there being good preservation across the site, and it is tempting to suggest that they represent graves from which former occupants were subsequently removed without inserting a new interment, rather than graves that were never used (they are certainly not 'unfinished' in terms of construction).

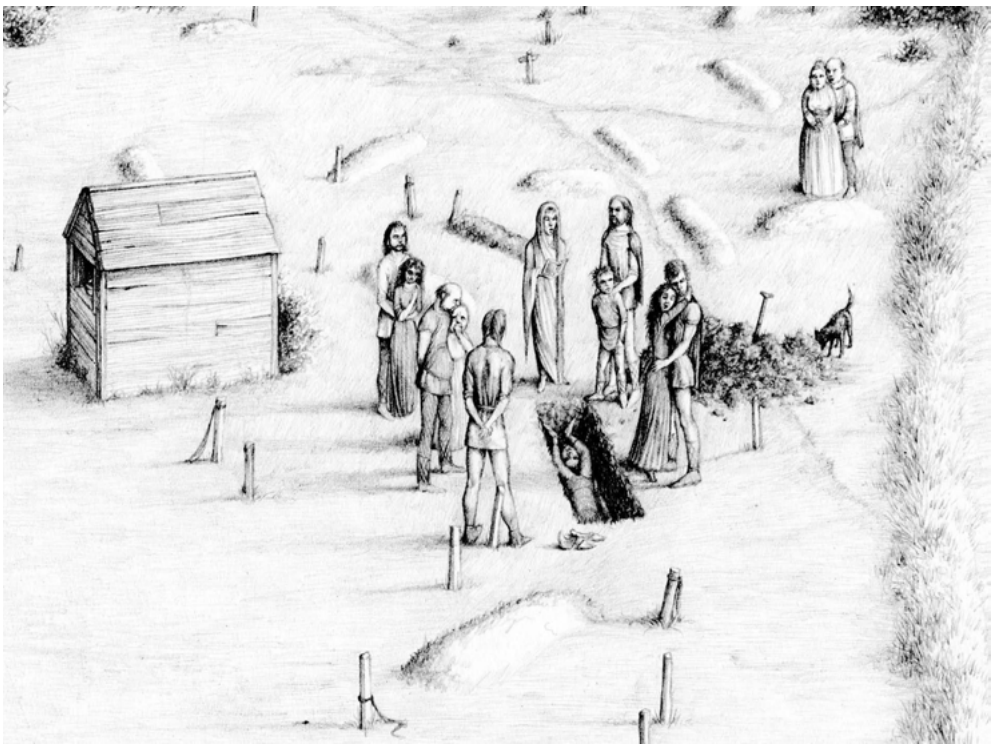

Figure 4: Reconstruction of the funeral of a decapitated young woman in the Royston Road cemetery, c. A.D. 200 (Stephen Player).

There is little obvious planning in any of the cemeteries, and each has its own character. It is evident that there was no standard model for the layout of an Iron Age or Romano-British cemetery and that each followed a logic (or lack of logic) that it is generally impossible to reconstruct. To make the situation more complex, many of the cemeteries were in use for several centuries or more, and it is possible that they were redesigned to suit changing tastes or beliefs. However, the difficulties in dating individual burials with any precision makes the compilation of phase plans extremely difficult in many instances, so that changes in layout are difficult, if not impossible, to recognise. In only a few cases is it possible to be certain that there were changes in layout, most notably at Wallington Road, where clear linear zones seem to mark the presence of paths at the surface for which no other evidence exists, and the continuing use of a restricted area for burials even after the defining ditch had long since silted up completely. At Royston Road, an area without burials to the north-east of the pyre base may

similarly be a zone where surface features no longer visible precluded the use of this area for the deposition of burials.

Generally, the most obvious feature of the cemetery layout was the boundary ditch, where it existed. The Late Iron Age square enclosures on the low ridge, north-east of the settlement, clearly define the limits of the burial grounds they contain. Some, if not all of them, appear to have served as the quarry ditches for mounds that initially covered a central burial and that attracted secondary burials in their surfaces rather than boundary ditches as such. These seem to have been the principal burial grounds of the second half of the first century B.C., although some unenclosed and less formal cemeteries originated towards the end of the cemetery. During the early Roman period, cemeteries seem to have become much more formalised, with the construction of boundary ditches in the decades around A.D. 70. However, there was often little effort to maintain these ditches. While the south-western ditch at Royston Road continued to be recut until at least the middle of the fifth century, at Wallington Road, it had silted up by the middle of the second century and was never cleaned out, even though burials continued to be deposited until the early fourth century. The situation with Late Roman cemeteries is less clear. Investigations at Icknield Way East and The Tene have been piecemeal and have not recorded any features that might define the edges of the cemeteries. At California, the cemetery occupies a corner plot at a crossroads that had been part of a domestic ditched enclosure. However, the ditch had silted up at the end of the second century A.D. when the first burials were deposited.

Variations of sex and gender

It is usual to find that identifiably male burials outnumber identifiably female burials in most Romano-British cemeteries (Davison 2000: 232; Wells 2001: 332), for a variety of reasons, including modern identification bias. However, at Baldock, identifiably female burials outnumber male until the mid-fourth century by around 10%; after this, males are dominant (Fig. 5). The reasons for this are not at all obvious, but it is sufficiently different from the usual pattern to cause comment. At present, it is not clear if it is a product of an identification bias, or if it reflects a genuinely ancient phenomenon. If it is real, the question must be asked: where are the rest of the males?

In terms of positioning, more females than males were buried with heads to the south-west, and more were laid in a crouched position; however, it must be pointed out that in most cemeteries, graves tend to be aligned parallel with one of the boundaries (usually a road). All the early examples of decapitation were performed on females, although the numbers are very low, and perhaps not statistically meaningful.

Cremations show even less variation. No first century A.D. male cremations were urned, but the numbers of sexed cremations for this period are small (so far, only twenty cremations earlier than A.D. 100 have been sexed) and the observation is probably meaningless. However, in the Wallington Road cemetery (and at no other), colour-coated beakers were found only to accompany female cremations; at Royston Road, more than twice as many females than males were interred in cinerary urns.

There is equally little evidence for variability by sex in the provision of other grave gifts, which occur in only a small number of burials. Whilst brooches, beads and coins are found only with female burials, finger-rings and pins more commonly with females, and ironwork

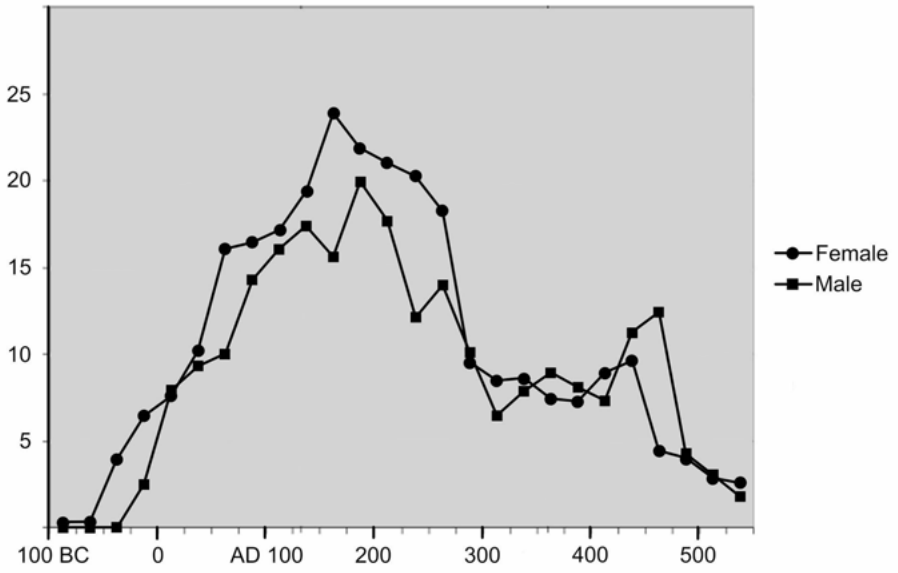

Figure 5: Burials per year, divided by sex.

(other than nails and hobnails) and bird bone more frequently with males, the numbers remain small. Some of the more curious grave goods, such as the lead curse tablet from burial WF309 at Walls Field (Westell 1931: 290), are from unsexed burials.

With regard to location, in the first century A.D. cemetery at Stane Street, there is a tendency for female burials to be deposited towards the edges of the cemetery (although there are also peripheral male burials), while in the earlier square enclosures, all of the sexed satellite burials are female (though none of the central burials have produced enough bone to permit sexing, and so this may not be significant). None of the later cemeteries shows any evidence for differential location according to the sex of the deceased.

As a result of this pattern (or perhaps the lack of pattern), there seems to be little evidence that the visible elements of the burial, such as the position of the body in the ground, the numbers and types of vessels in cremations, the range of grave gifts etc., were structured according to gender. This confirms Philpott's (1991: 233) observation that 'there is little difference between the treatment of men and women in Romano-British burial practice'. However, there are elements of the burial ritual that are not visible in the archaeological record, such as the use of coloured organic objects, the nature of the rituals preceding deposition and so on. Moreover, there is no sign of a change in pattern as a result of the Roman conquest.

Variations of age

It is a commonplace that infants are under-represented in Romano-British cemeteries, severely skewing age distributions, and making estimations of life expectation extremely difficult. Whether the reasons for this are ritual (very young infants being buried elsewhere or bone not surviving cremation), or a result of post-depositional factors is not clear. Certainly, foetal and

neonatal bone is well represented in some of the inhumation cemeteries at Baldock, notably Stane Street, where 20% of the burials were immature (including an instance of a female with three eight-month term foetuses, one of which in the birth canal), and Royston Road (McKinley forthcoming). Where graves of the very young have been recorded, there is little evidence for their differential treatment. The cremation assemblage of a child at Wallington Road was the only group from that cemetery to contain glass vessels, but the significance of this is not clear.

There is equally little evidence for the differential treatment of the elderly. In a fifth century grave in the California cemetery, an elderly and toothless male was buried with a small spouted feeding bottle of a type usually thought to be a baby's feeder; in this case, it was perhaps used to feed an elderly person who was no longer able to chew food. At Stane Street, only older mature or older adults and neonates were placed on their sides (and within this, more females than males were on their left sides and more males than females on their right).

Regional patterns

The burial evidence from Baldock is similar to that from elsewhere in the region. Large cemeteries of similar date have been excavated at *Verulamium* (Stead and Rigby 1989; Niblett and Thompson 2005: 138f), Skeleton Green at Braughing (Partridge 1981), Welwyn, Dunstable and so on. They provide parallels for the range of rites seen in the town's cemeteries, but it is noteworthy that only in Baldock is virtually the full range of Romano-British burial rites seen. The region has one of the best recorded collections of cemeteries from Roman Britain (Philpott 1991: 3), and Baldock stands out, even at a national level for the number and variety of its cemeteries. Of over 7000 Romano-British burials known in Hertfordshire (Niblett 1995: 107), and some 1800 (around a quarter of the total) are from Baldock.

An unusually high proportion of unaccompanied cremations have been excavated at Baldock in comparison to other sites, either locally or more widely within the province of *Britannia*. At Royston Road, around 40% of the cremations deposited between c. A.D. 75 and 280 were not in pottery vessels. In some cases, they were in wood-lined pits, while in others, the globular form of the bone deposit suggests the use of organic containers, such as leather or textile bags, or of wooden or basket-like containers.

Defining social groups

The enormous and diverse sample of burials from Baldock permits an attempt to be made at defining separate social groups within the town. Such groups may be supposed *a priori* to have existed. There were clearly wealthy individuals with well appointed houses in the centre of the town, and there were others who seem to have lived in one or two roomed buildings with none of the conveniences associated with Roman civilisation. There are three potential means of defining these groups: through the material styles employed in their burials, through the burial rite itself, and through the human remains. The first two deal directly with the choices made by individuals and social groups in expressing small community identity, while the third deals with the effects of lifestyle, which is dictated in part by the social group to which the deceased belonged.

The analysis of social groups through material style is a standard practice in archaeology, from the mid-twentieth century practice of defining 'archaeological cultures' to the current interest in recognising marginalised groups and gender relations. The dearth of items of personal adornment in burials has always posed a problem for this type of analysis; especially within later Romano-British burials (see Rosten, this volume). For instance, fewer than 8% of the inhumations in the first century Stane Street cemetery contained grave gifts and only three of these graves contained items of adornment. On the other hand, the analysis of pottery styles in cremation assemblages can be interesting. As already noted, colour-coated beakers were found always to accompany female or immature (and therefore unsexed) burials in the Wallington Road cemetery; this pattern was not repeated elsewhere, and must therefore be an element in the social uses of material culture by the social group using that cemetery. The complete lack of cinerary urns in cremations at a number of cemeteries (Sale Drive East, Sale Drive West, Sale Drive Doline and Yeomanry Drive South) might usually be explained in terms of poverty, but it is worth pointing out that even the wealthiest Late Iron Age cremations were unurned, and so these may be social groups that failed to take up the innovation of using cinerary urns for social reasons. Of 17 graves containing ceramic grave-gifts in the Late to sub-Roman cemetery at California, representing only 17% of the burials, eight were miniature vessels. At least two of these had been used before deposition, suggesting that they were not specialised grave gifts.

The analysis of burial rites has generally been restricted to commenting on the inhumation/cremation dichotomy, with the gradual rise to exclusivity of the former sometimes being linked to the growth of Christianity and other religions that promised bodily resurrection. Some work has been done on such features as the orientation of graves and the position of the body, but this has been intended to illuminate social practices at a much broader scale than that which is considered here. The data from Baldock permit the recognition of different practices between cemeteries. Thus, all of the inhumations at The Tene were extended and supine with their arms lying by their sides (or occasionally crossed over the abdomen), but other cemeteries showed a much greater internal variability, with Stane Street being perhaps the most extreme example, where only 48% of the burials were supine. There are also unusual inhumations, including a late second or early third century burial at Sale Drive West, where an adult lay extended on its right side, with a complete horse laid above.

Differences are also visible in overall patterns of mortality, as represented in the human remains. At Wallington Road, for instance, the majority of adult remains were of younger adults, while at Stane Street, there were more mature and older adults. This suggests differences within the age profile of the living population. This may reflect different patterns of mortality caused by differentiations in lifestyle, or it may be a social phenomenon, with Wallington Road especially favoured for the burial of the young. If the former explanation is to be accepted, this could be evidence for occupational specialisation.

Subculture, identity and style

If the data from Baldock do not permit an analysis of difference in terms of sex/gender, age cohort, or any of the other structuring principles generally invoked to explain variability, what do they represent? The differences between burials can be fundamental (cremation/ inhumation), or they can be subtle (the use of a grey ware cinerary urn, or the use of an orange ware cinerary urn of identical form). At all scales of difference, a human choice has been

made, and the challenge faced by the archaeologist is to determine what sorts of choices were available to those responsible for the burial ritual and, with greater difficulty, what determined those choices. This is where subculture theory provides a useful conceptual framework: it is within subcultures that social change is most dynamic (Matthews 1995: 587) and can subvert the mediation of power by the dominant groups in society. Irigaray's (1985: 171) analysis of patriarchal societies, which must perforce include Roman Britain, points to the normative desire for conformity and standardisation, something that is conspicuously difficult to find in the archaeological record. By treating archaeological data as a means of understanding non-normative practices (the very reverse of the Culture Historical and Processual approaches), we may gain an insight into a lower level of self-identification than is usually thought possible.

One of the few expressions of interest in subculture by an archaeologist is found in Clarke's (1978: 250) *Analytical Archaeology*, where he defined a subculture as 'an infra-cultural segment or activity alignment characterized by a specific type complex'. This is subtly different from the sociological definition, in which the role of the individual actor is stressed (Irwin 1997: 68), but it forms a useful starting point. Clarke's (1978: 251) attempt to classify subcultures into five basic types (ethnic, regional, occupational, social and sex) is less useful, however. Much more useful is his recognition that they can be either non-exclusive or exclusive. Thus, it is possible for an individual to belong to numerous subcultures, but some will be mutually exclusive (for instance, it is inconceivable that a Belfast Presbyterian could simultaneously be a member of Sinn Féin). One of Clarke's more useful insights is in his definition of occupational subcultures, where he distinguishes between 'specialist subcultures', in which the participants regularly follow similar subcultural patterns as a part of their social performance, and 'activity subcultures', in which the participants use short-lived patterns of behaviour that vary enormously from cycle to cycle (Clarke 1978: 253). This latter example is especially useful in considering the nature of Romano-British burial practice, insofar as it involves short-lived and occasional behaviours on the part of the participants and, as Clarke recognised, is dependent on social networks for the transmission of social variety and conformity. Combined with his analysis of social subcultures, which he recognised was incomplete and unsatisfactory (Clarke 1978: 255), he pointed to the idiosyncratic and non-functional variability of material culture as expressions of prestige value. These provide powerful conceptual tools for the analysis of burials. The danger of analyses of prestige value is that wealth, power, social rank, and peer esteem must carefully be distinguished, which Clarke failed to do. Prestige value is not synonymous with financial, hegemonic, or élite value. To use a contemporary analogy, the prestige value of the correct design and label of nylon sportswear in street ('chav') subculture is socially very significant, but completely irrelevant as an expression of wealth, power or rank.

Understanding non-functional variability necessarily involves an analysis of style, a concept that has proved to be enormously difficult to define. If we accept, following Hodder (1991: 121), that material culture is meaningfully constituted, we must establish how it is able to communicate those meanings, as if it fails to do so, it is no longer meaningful. Schiffer and Miller's (1999) *The Material Life of Human Beings* suggests that it is the meaningful and communicative nature of human material culture that separates our species from all others, including near relatives. The principal analytical tool in assessing the meaning of material culture has been to establish suites of attributes showing variation through time and space, which have generally been given the label 'style' (Hebdige 1979: 2; Hodder 1991: 20). Early archaeological uses of the term were vague and undefined, as Sackett (1977: 369) pointed out. He attempted to formulate a general model and defined style as '(a) concern[ing] a highly

specific and characteristic manner of doing something, and (b) that this manner is always peculiar to a specific time and place', and saw it as the 'passive voice' of artefact design, as opposed to function, and concluded that styles define ethic groups (Sackett 1977: 377).

Sackett's views now appear naïve and old-fashioned, and his emphasis on function, specifically 'proper function' (defined by Orton 2000: 46), as the primary determinant of form is clearly wrong. Under the influence of structuralism and post-structuralism, archaeologists have come to recognise that style is part of the communicative aspect of material culture. Wiessner (1984: 229), for instance, has argued that style fulfils a cognitive function in comparing and labelling, demonstrating that it has a role in negotiating both personal and social identities relative to others. In other words, she denied what Sackett had explicitly stated about the passivity of material culture. For Wiessner, it is not only an active component in social relations, but is also an important means of communicating information (1983: 271). Pollock has also argued that subsets of society (i.e. subcultures) need distinguishing symbols for social identification (1983: 385), while Braun (1989: 387) has attempted to link ceramic decoration with changing social formations. The choices behind the use of differing styles in burial assemblages ought thus to be communicating information about the deceased. Burial B55 from the Wallington Road cemetery (Fig. 6) is the only burial in that cemetery to contain glass vessels, and so we must ask why this infant was buried with both a bottle and a cup? Neither item was of great financial value. Both vessels were common, plain domestic forms, but they acquire a prestige value by being the sole representatives of a material type in this cemetery. At the same time, the cinerary urn was a common form in the cemetery, dubbed a 'Braughing jar', as it was a typical product of the Much Hadham factories near Braughing.

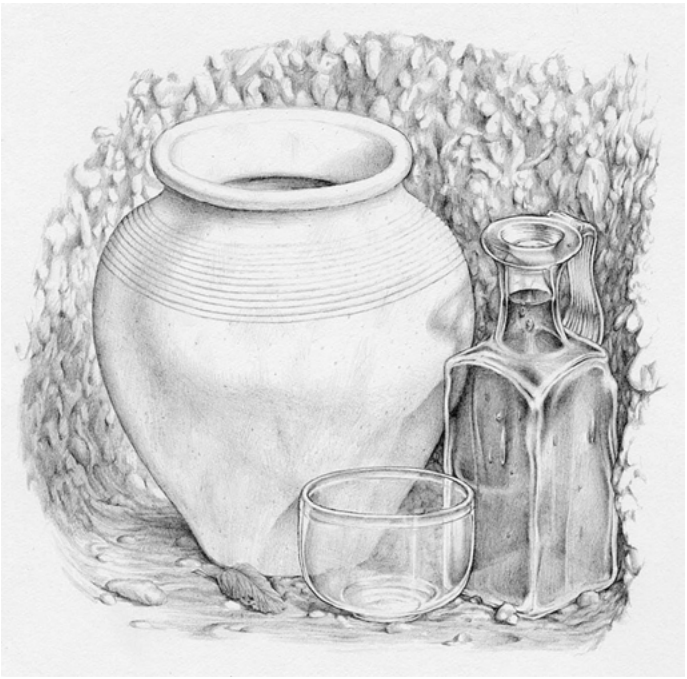

Figure 6: Burial B55, Wallington Road cemetery (Stephen Player).

Others have treated material culture as analogous to texts and suggested that it can be read (Hodder 1989: 266), if only in the sense that post-structuralist Critical Theory will allow. In other words, texts can only speak to the present, and not tell us about the past. Moreland (2001: 111f.) has criticised this view as 'presentist', wrongly assuming that traces of the past convey textual meanings that can only be understood in the present, and that contemporary interpretations press present concerns back into the past. Discussion about the past, according to Moreland, has become a debate about style, rather than content, and has trivialised knowledge about the past to a linguistic game (Moreland 2001: 117). However, it ought to be possible to read the discourse of material culture as a text situated in the past, rather than as a text about the past (Moreland 2001: 118). The discourses evident in the Baldock burial corpus thus provide us with an insight into social relations and negotiations of small group identity for the period in which these burials took place. Thus, if style is communicating something, then that communication was intended for those who used and witnessed the use of past material culture. This is Orton's 'system function', and she draws the analogy between spoons and washboards as domestic items to illustrate their 'proper function', and their use as musical instruments to illustrate their 'system function'. A more pertinent example here, would be the use of cooking pots as cinerary urns in Romano-British grave groups. This practice is a common in a society that did not produce specific ceramics for funerary use. Those who decided what a grave group would contain were well aware that they were using kitchenwares, and their understanding of the nuanced meanings of different vessel styles was much deeper than we can ever hope to establish. Nevertheless, there is perhaps a deliberate 'pun': the cremated remains have been 'cooked' in a way analogous to the food prepared in these vessels. Perhaps the urns were used in the preparation of a funeral meal and the deceased could take part by being interred in the cooking pot. This tension between 'proper' and 'system' functions is an aspect of the multivocality of material culture, exactly as in contemporary society (Campbell 1995: 109) that has often been assumed to be a recent phenomenon (Baudrillard 1996: 200). Consumption is not a phenomenon of industrial societies, but is an important element in establishing, reinforcing, and communicating personal identity and group membership. In contrast to the widely held belief that specific symbols identify close-knit populations, collective identity is more usually constructed from polysemous symbols: the group is defined by its margins and, more importantly, what lies beyond them (Cohen 1985: 50). Identity as a form of group membership is neither expressed nor constructed through a single badge, but through the interplay of numerous badges.

In this way, the process of Romanisation, shorn of its twentieth century ideological overtones, and perhaps more appropriately regarded as creolisation (Webster 2001: 217), can be regarded as the appropriation of Roman forms by indigenous populations in the expanding empire. The choice of style was an important element in negotiating new identities and can be seen within innovations in burial practice. Treating this as a form of consumption, it is now clear that the processes of transformation had already begun among at least the élites of south-eastern Britain before the conquest (if 'conquest' is the right term) (Creighton 2006: 160). The role of ideology in the shifting pattern of consumption in very Late Iron Age Britain created a material hegemony not by imposition, but by emulation, and probably even competitive consumption (Creighton 2000; 2006). At even the most mundane level, the choice of pottery style, and the consumption of material culture is all part of the *habitus* of the individual, and as Roth (2003: 44) highlights, it can be viewed as a '*collage*, created though an act of *bricolage*, and comprising a complex repertoire of social references'.

More problematic is how those who adopted Roman material styles viewed themselves in relation to those styles. By the fifth century, Patrick was in no doubt that he was a 'Roman', even if we cannot be sure precisely what he meant by it and despite his *Romanitas* being materially impoverished in comparison with that of three centuries earlier, although it was clearly based around the Church (Matthews 2001). In any discussion of *Romanitas* as an identity (or, indeed, of Romanisation as a material phenomenon) there is an inherent danger of regarding that identity as a common one, mutually agreed between those who possessed it. At what level ought we to regard a 'Roman identity' in Britain: as ethnic, community, subcultural or personal? These are areas that have hardly been touched by debates about Romanisation.

Sociologists recognise that personal identity is not monolithic and that each individual has access to a range of identities accord to circumstance. These different identities are expressed through performance, which brings us back to Schiffer and Miller's (1999) theorisation of material culture as communicative tool, while their contingent nature has links with subcultural practice. The Romano-British funeral was a performance that marked the transition from a living social actor to whatever was thought to be the role of the deceased after burial and it was an opportunity to impart an identity on their remains. Such identities were constructed by the living around their aspirations for the future of the dead. Our challenge is to understand the subtle variations in identity expressed through the material remains chosen to accompany the dead into the next phase of existence.

Conclusion

Although gender has been found to be a structuring principle in Late Roman burial rites (Keegan 2002: 105f), it does not appear to have been a major element in the rites performed in Late Iron Age and Romano-British Baldock. Whilst choices were certainly being made by the living about the type of rite, presence of material culture, position of body, and accompanying objects, the reasons for these choices are currently opaque. The suggestion made here is that these choices involved the social networks in which the deceased had participated whilst alive, through which they derived elements of their personal identities. These networks formed the bases for what we today regard as subcultures.

It is clear from the sheer complexity of the data that to regard one element as the major determining factor in the choices made about the nature of individual burials is too simplistic. Instead, it is proposed here that the Late Iron Age and Romano-British funeral was a social affair, bringing together actors within the social network of the deceased who would perform according to the nature of their former relationship. In some instances, this involved the deposition of objects within the grave, but much of the time, it must be suspected that their actions left no traces. The residues of their activities are what constitute grave assemblages, and these help to construct an identity for the deceased in whatever kind of afterlife the individual participant in the rites envisaged for them.

One example of a bizarre 'conjoined burial' will suffice to show how difficult and confusing it can be to understand the rites and rituals of a Romano-British funeral c. A.D. 100. An adult female buried with a small adult female dog were interred contemporaneously, although a mature adult male was buried slightly later, with his left hand raised to touch the woman's right hand (Fig. 7). We can portray this as a desire by those arranging the man's burial to reflect the affection he once had for a pre-deceased wife, but we are forced to confront the fact that to fit him into his grave with arm stretched above his head, it was necessary to

break his legs at the knees, forcing the lower legs upright along the foot end of the grave, with his feet raised in the air. Love and violence may make good (if clichéd) scripts for Hollywood, but they challenge our preconceptions of care for the dead.

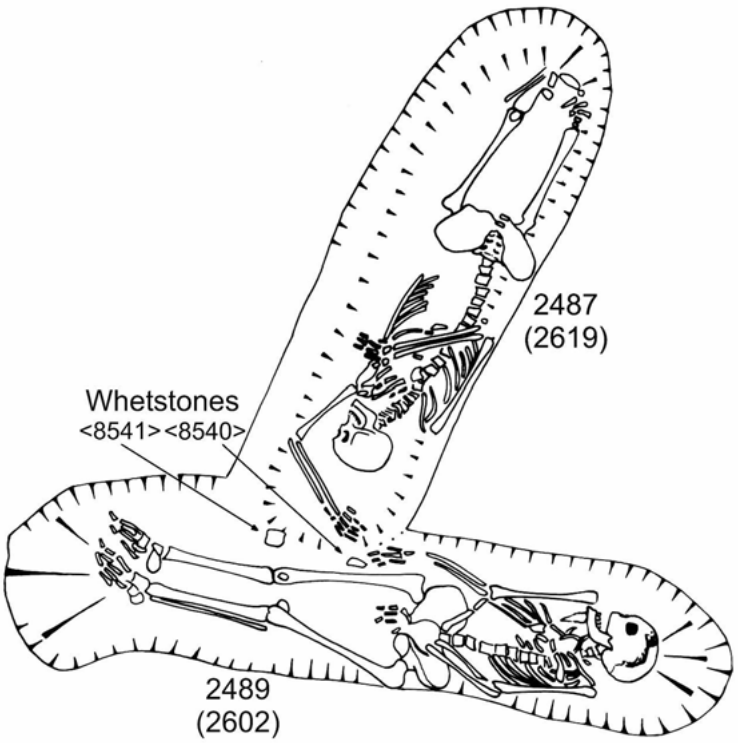

Figure 7: Burials 2487 and 2489, Upper Walls Common, Baldock.

A note on nomenclature

There have been a number of schemes used for naming the different sites in Baldock both in print and in the archive. In an attempt to rationalise the system, Gil Burleigh and Jonathan Drake devised a format in the early 1980s that gave each investigation a code number, beginning BAL (for Baldock). Initially, the numbers were used to refer to the areas investigated since 1980, so that the first area of Upper Walls Common to be excavated became BAL-1, the second BAL-2 and so on. The system was extended to include earlier fieldwork by Ian Stead, Percival Westell, Erik Applebaum and John Moss-Eccardt. However, a number of specialists had begun to write their reports using terms that had been supplied before the numbering system was established. Thus the terms 'Wallington Road', 'Barratt Site' and 'BAL-11' all refer to the same cemetery. The use of the numbering system then led to

Table 2: site codes and site names for cemeteries excavated 1926–2006.

Cemetery name in Matthews and Burleigh (forthcoming)	Burleigh/Drake code and site name	Stead and Rigby 1986; Burnham and Wacher 1990	Other names
California	BAL-1 Upper Walls Common, NW corner by California	V	Site 33 (Applebaum 1932)
Mercia Road	BAL-2 Upper Walls Common, SW edge		
Wallington Road	BAL-11 Upper Walls Common, SE end BAL-80 14 Westell Close	S	Upper Walls Common; Barratt Site
Royston Road; Stane Street; Yeomanry Drive North; Yeomanry Drive South; Icknield Way Roadside; Sale Drive East; Sale Drive West; Sale Drive Doline	BAL-15 Royston Road	E, X	TB, TH, TK (Stead Archive)
Downlands Enclosure A; Downlands Enclosure B	BAL-23 Upper Walls Common	A	TC, TG, TJ, TM, TO, TR, TT, TU, TV, TX, TY, TZ (Stead archive); Site 27/28 (Applebaum 1932)
Walls Field	BAL-25 Walls Field, SE end	P	Site 2/11/12 (Applebaum 1932)
South Road	BAL-28 South Road BAL-47 The Convent Cemetery	R	London Road Convent; Site 8/15 (Applebaum 1932); Kayser Bondor; Tesco; Convent of Providence
The Tene Chieftain's Burial	BAL-30 The Tene	F, J	Chieftain's Burial; TE, TN (Stead Archive)
The Tene	BAL-31 The Tene	J	Clinic site
	BAL-32 The Tene	K	TB (A), TQ (Stead Archive)
	BAL-40 The Tene	J	TP (Stead Archive); Site 18 (Applebaum 1932)
	BAL-48 65 High Street	J	
Brewery Field	BAL-33 Brewery Field	L	Site 26 (Applebaum 1932)
Clothall Road	BAL-36 Clothall Road widening, east	D	TF, TS (Stead Archive); Walls Field (Stead and Rigby 1986: 61–75)
Icknield Way East; Icknield Way East Enclosure	BAL-45 Icknield Way East	N, W	Site 14 (Applebaum 1932)

confusion when a single number was assigned to large areas; in the excavation area BAL-1, at least three separate burial grounds can be recognised, while in area BAL-15, at least seven separate cemeteries were encountered.

After the numbering scheme was devised, Stead published the final report of his excavations from 1968 to 1972, in which a lettering scheme was employed (Stead and Rigby 1986: 30–2). This scheme corresponds neither to the Burleigh/Drake system of the early 1980s, nor to the scheme used by Stead during his campaigns. This was then adapted for *The 'Small Towns' of Roman Britain* (Burnham and Wacher 1990: 284), and has thereby gained wider currency. Other publications have compounded the confusion further by adapting different schemes to suit their purposes and the matter is not helped when specialists refer to 'the' Romano-British cemetery (e.g. McKinley 1993).

In the assessment of the burials (Matthews and Burleigh forthcoming), an attempt has been made to establish a terminology for the different burial grounds identified in Iron Age and Romano-British Baldock that it is hoped will avoid the confusions caused by earlier publications. No scheme can be perfect, but this may help to resolve some of the issues arising from the incompatible terminologies used by different writers.

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