Kendrew Quadrangle Excavations January – August 2008

Phase 3 – Mass Burial
Patterns of Violence

St Brice's Day, AD 1002

Skull wounds

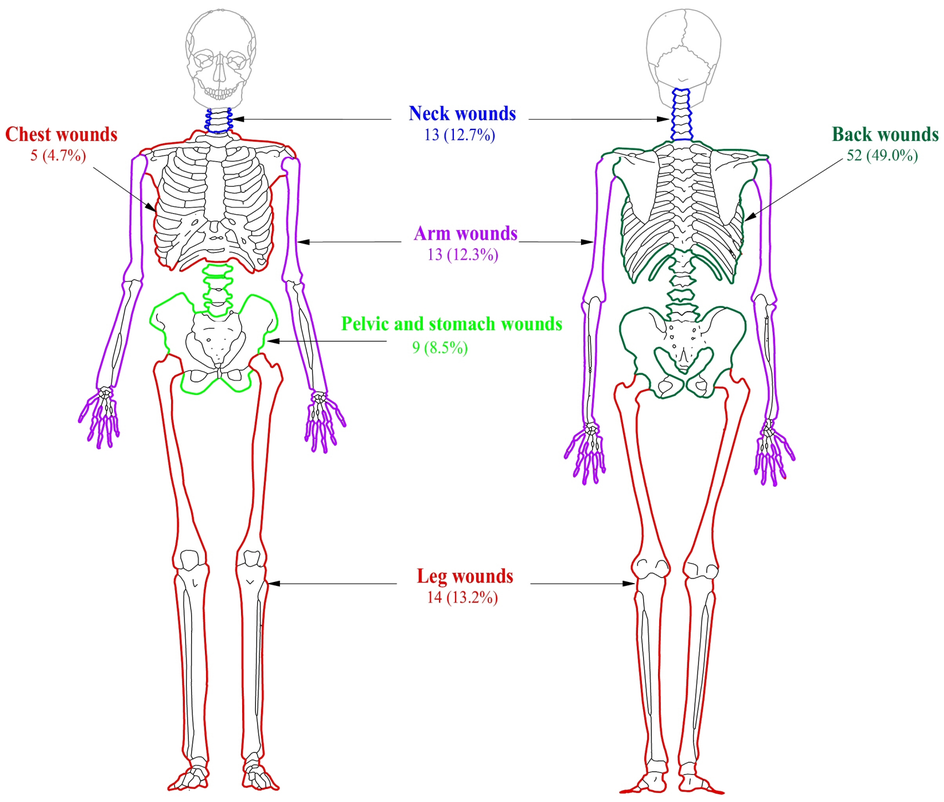
A total of 40 blade wounds were recorded on 18 skulls, with individual skulls exhibiting up to 9 blade wounds, and an average of 2.2 injuries per affected skull. These injuries most frequently affected the right and left sides of the head, and the back.

Thirteen of 23 (56.5%) individuals with both cranial and postcranial elements of the skeleton present had sharp force trauma to both regions.

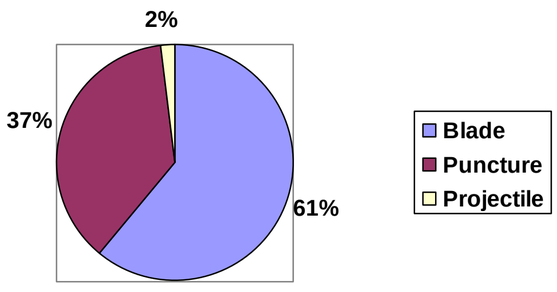
Postcranial wounds

Thirty-one individuals displayed a total of 106 perimortem injuries to their bodies (not including the head) on 93 separate bones. Most were blade wounds (61%), followed by puncture wounds (37%) and projectiles (2%).

The back was the most commonly affected part of the body, with 49% of all wounds. The neck and legs both displayed 13% of the injuries, followed by the arms (12%), stomach (8%) and the chest (5%).

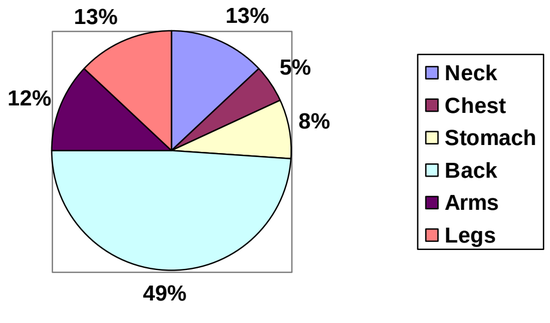


Left and right: The distribution of wounds across the areas of the body and head.



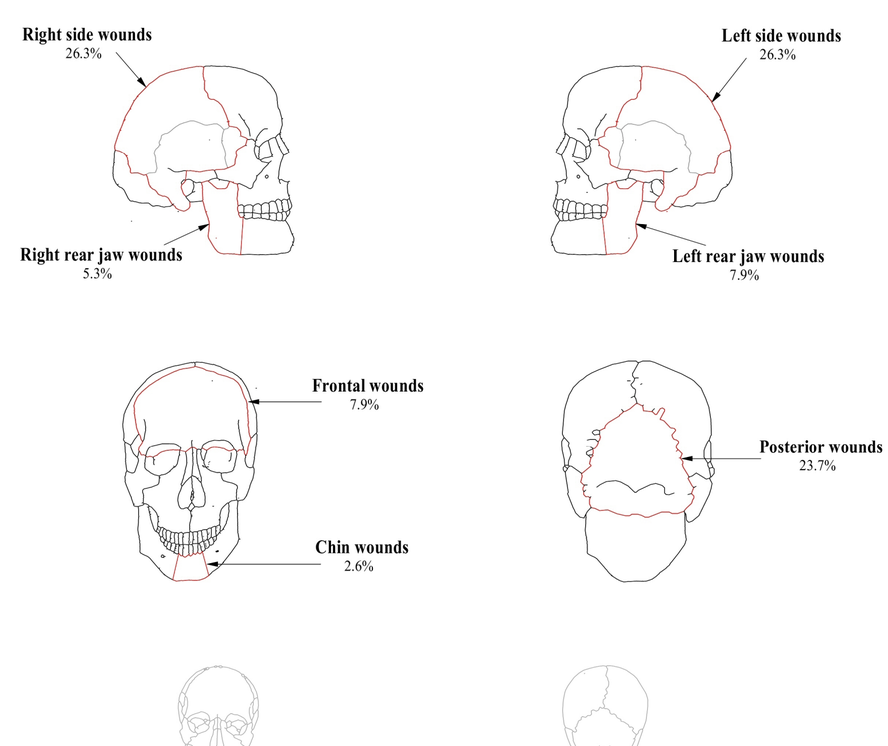
Above: Pie chart showing the proportions of wounds caused by blades, punctures and projectiles.

Below: Chart showing the percentage of wounds caused to each body area. Note almost 50% are recorded on the back.



Summary

The pattern of injury differs from what would be expected from face-to-face combat. A right handed swordsman would generally attack the head and body on the opponent's left side, striking mainly the arm and the cheek or top of the skull. A defender with a shield, armour and a helmet, would suffer few blows to the torso and would probably not take many head wounds until already defeated. The wound patterns observed here suggest the victims had fallen, were retreating, or were attacked from behind. They had very few arm wounds, but many to the back and the skull. In other words they were next to defenceless. It began to look like a massacre, not a battle. The burning seems difficult to interpret, but could have resulted from being trapped in a burning building when already wounded. It is possible one or two of the men had to be cut out from under burning timbers, resulting in the loss of their lower legs.



Right: Distribution of all recorded wounds superimposed onto one skeleton.