Introduction – rethinking early medieval mortuary artefacts

The study of portable artefacts, particularly those discovered from graves, has traditionally been one of the mainstays of early medieval archaeology. As explored in the introduction, while a consideration of ‘commemoration’ might tempt us to focus this study upon burial mounds and gravestones, this book will begin by considering the role of portable artefacts and materials in the remembering and forgetting of the dead.

The choice of early medieval communities to clothe the dead and place artefacts on and around the cadaver is the very reason that these graves have become such a visible and diagnostic feature of the archaeological record and an invaluable resource for understanding the early medieval period. The high visibility of furnished graves is not without its problems for archaeologists, since graves with objects have tended to dominate archaeological studies at the expense of the many regions and periods within the early Middle Ages where grave goods were sparse or absent – because they do not survive, because they were placed with the dead but were recirculated among mourners or deposited elsewhere, or because they were never a part of mortuary ceremonies (see Lucy & Reynolds 2002). Yet for those communities practising furnished burial rites, placing selected artefacts and materials with the dead could serve as an important means of configuring and transforming social memories of the dead and the past, and, in turn, social identities.

In this chapter we shall explore how archaeologists have begun to address the portable artefacts found in graves and other contexts from a mnemonic perspective. Rather than regarding grave goods as functioning to display a static social role that was ‘held’ by the deceased, we can see portable artefacts as an important medium for the complex, sequential and selective process of remembering and forgetting the social person throughout the funeral and culminating in the burial. It will be shown that furnished burials created an ‘image’ of the dead through the selective deployment of artefacts that influenced the production and reproduction of social memory.

Moreover, it is argued that the contrast between furnished and unfurnished burial is not one between early medieval societies that commemorate through portable artefacts and those that do not. Instead, it is argued that the selectivity of grave goods placed in furnished graves suggests that those artefacts involved in the funeral but circulated and exchanged among the living also had a mnemonic significance. The decline of grave goods in seventh-century England is more than a change in the
context of commemoration towards permanent memorials (pace Effros 2003) but an extension of the mnemonic significance of artefacts through their biographies and away from the display of deposition.

**Early medieval furnished burials – previous studies**

Since the nineteenth century, studies of early medieval burial have, often myopically, focused upon the study of these artefacts in and of themselves with only occasional consideration of the mortuary contexts from which they derived. In the antiquarian and culture-historic traditions, artefacts were (and to some extent continue to be) used as an important means of dating graves, as well as of assessing the racial and cultural identities, along with the religious beliefs, of their occupants (e.g. Leeds 1913; 1936; 1945). More recently, as archaeologists adopted an explicitly social perspective in mortuary archaeology inspired by the New Archaeology (Binford 1971; Chapman & Randsborg 1980), but perhaps also by German approaches and methods (Samson 1987; Härke 2000b), the variability of grave goods was regarded as an index of social position and wealth (e.g. Alcock 1981; Arnold 1980; Dommasnes 1982; Jørgensen 1987; Shephard 1979; Solberg 1985; see also Härke 1992; 1997d). Subsequent studies appreciated the crude nature of focusing purely on ‘vertical’ social differentiation and have attempted to look at regional and local variations (Fisher 1988; 1995; Lucy 1998; 2002; Pader 1982; Richards 1987), as well as ‘horizontal’ social differentiation, including how gender, age and kinship might have influenced the provision of grave goods (Crawford 1993; 2000; Fisher 1988; 1995; Gowland 2001; Härke 1990; 1997d; 1998; Stoodley 1999a and b; 2000; Tyrell 2000). National surveys have revealed important patterns in the deployment of grave goods (Härke 1990; 1992; Stoodley 1999a; 1999b; 2000). Meanwhile, in some instances large-scale cemetery excavations have provided data adequate enough to recognise clear patterns in artefact-provision within individual cemeteries, the scale of analysis most relevant to the ritual practices of past communities (e.g. Ravn 1999; 2003). Moreover, further studies have explored the variability in the provision of specific artefact-types in more detail, as with studies of weapons and belt-fittings (Dickinson & Härke 1992; Härke 1989a; 1990; 1992; Marzinzik 2003). This research has been greatly facilitated by cross-referencing the provision of artefacts in graves with osteological evidence for age, sex, biological distance and pathologies. Such methodologies have usually been applied to inhumation burials, but increasingly it has also been applied to early medieval cremation burials as well (McKinley 1994; Richards 1987; Ravn 1999; 2003; Williams 2003).

While early social approaches attempted to infer social organisation directly from the burial evidence, within much of the subsequent research there is an acute awareness that caution is necessary in naively ‘reading’ the identity of the dead directly from their treatment in death (Härke 1990; 1997c; Samson 1987). There are seven main issues in this regard.

1. **Survival.** We must be cautious over the differential survival of artefact types, given that leather, textile and other perishable remains rarely survive, and bearing in
mind the question whether the number and type of the metal, ceramic and glass objects reflect the original grave assemblage in terms of quality and quantity (Lucy 1998). For example, the textiles that swathed the corpse may have been more significant than the metal dress fasteners that archaeologists assume were the important objects for symbolising identities (see Effros 2002b; 2003).

2. **Selection.** Early medieval graves do not represent individuals who expired and fell into the grave with the objects they happened to have with them when they died! Artefacts were selected from the possessions of the deceased and their kin, as well as gifts from ritual participants and those attending the funeral. Because archaeologists tend to have only the grave preserved for their investigation, many other stages that constitute the ‘transition’ of death or rites de passage of funerals being no longer visible (see Bartel 1982; Hertz 1960; Metcalf & Huntingdon 1991; van Gennep 1960), it is easy to forget the innumerable objects that might have come into contact with the corpse and had special roles in the funeral but that did not enter the grave. For instance, the employment and association of objects with the dead might have taken place during the washing, dressing, translation, transformation and interment of the cadaver, and there might also have been objects associated with the distribution of property among kin and mourners, and with the feasting and other practices that might have accompanied the funeral. These artefacts need not necessarily have ended up in the burial deposit, even though they might have had important and prominent functions in the mortuary process.

3. **Regional and chronological change.** Geographical and temporal changes in mortuary practices will affect the quantity and quality of artefacts placed in the grave, so that caution must be taken in comparing cemetery with cemetery and region with region, as well as with cemeteries of different date-spans (e.g. Arnold 1980). For instance, we should be acutely aware that the provision of artefacts in different regions might have had different significances within similar social structures, or that different social structures might have involved the comparable provision of artefacts in graves. Similarly, over time the frequency and nature of artefacts and their disposal might have changed (see Cannon 1989). Reading social structure directly from these changes may overlook changes in fashion, cycles of competitive consumption and even the deliberate suppression of mortuary expenditure (Morris 1992).

4. **Symbolism.** As discussed in the introduction, artefacts in graves may be present because of their meanings, and these may relate to the social identity of the deceased, but they might also relate to broader cosmological themes (see also Parker Pearson 1982; 1999c; Shanks & Tilley 1982). Since furnished burial is neither exclusively ‘pagan’ nor ‘Christian’ in early medieval contexts, this theme is applicable both to pre-Christian cosmologies (e.g. Andrén 1993; Price 2002, but see also Williams 2001b, Gräslund 1994) and Christian world-views (Effros 1996; 2002b and 2003; Thompson 2002; 2003a and b; 2004).

5. **Context.** The social and symbolic messages of artefacts may depend as much on context as the function, form and decoration of the object itself. For example,
subtle differences in the location of artefacts in relation to the body might have held important social and symbolic messages (Lucy 1998; Pader 1982), and these may have been ‘read’ by different audiences at different levels. Moreover, the significance of a given object might have changed depending upon the age, gender and status of the deceased as constructed by mourners, the combinations of other objects it occurs with, and its location in the grave in relation to the posture and orientation of the body (see Sofaer Derevenski 2000; Stoodley 2000). Consequently, using the simple quantification of grave goods to infer social identity may miss many of the statements made in early medieval graves.

6. Agency of mourners. A related issue concerns the agency of mourners in how they portray the dead. Archaeologists have repeatedly emphasised that the ‘dead do not bury themselves’, and the treatment of the dead body in the grave might say more (or as much) about the identities and socio-political claims of the living than it does about the ‘roles’ of the dead themselves (see Lucy 1998; Parker Pearson 1999c; Samson 1987). It is possible, and perhaps even likely, that the roles and identities of the living person are not reflected wholly or accurately in the manner of their mortuary portrayal. The social identity of the dead might be invented, enhanced, suppressed or even inverted from those held in life (Halsall 1998; 2003; Pader 1982; Parker Pearson 1982; 1999c). For instance, the artefacts interred with the dead are as likely to be ‘gifts’ from mourners as they are possessions of the deceased, and this should not be restricted to the distinction between costume and grave offerings (pace Crawford 2004; King 2004).

7. Ideology. Mortuary practices are the results of the intentional actions of mourners and are theatrical, ritual displays. They were therefore ideological statements (Carver 1986; 1995; 2000; 2001; 2002; Halsall 1998; 2003; Theuws & Alkemade 2000). From such a perspective we can imagine portable artefacts as having an overt role in legitimising and reproducing, but also transforming, identities and social structures, and as being fundamentally enmeshed in power relations that involve competition and conflict, domination and resistance. Mortuary practices can therefore embody myths of origin (Härke 1997a, b and c).

In combination, these issues caution archaeologists against reading social structure directly from early medieval mortuary variability without taking into account the many practical, methodological and theoretical problems that a social reading of burial data entails. An emphasis upon mortuary variability and the provision of grave goods may still have much to tell us, but it is not a direct reflection of social organisation, or even simply its stylised portrayal in an ideological context, that mortuary practices provide. One way forward might be to consider not only the symbolic and ideological context of grave goods provision, but also the mnemonic roles of portable artefacts.

Memory and early medieval grave goods
With these ongoing issues and debates in sharp focus, we must reappraise the way we think about early medieval grave goods. In particular, the possibility that artefacts
were not only intended to symbolise identities, but also to evoke social memories has received limited consideration by early medieval archaeologists (Hallam et al. 2001: 129–54). A number of studies have already begun to consider the mnemonics of early medieval artefacts, focusing upon their form, iconography and decorations to suggest their role in displaying and communicating status, and also origin myths. For example, Heinrich Härke (1997c) has discussed the Germanic origin myths that may have been asserted and reproduced through the deployment of weapons in graves. Meanwhile, the significance of Styles I and II animal art as symbols of Germanic political allegiance and mythical origins has been raised by numerous writers, both for the Scandinavian and Continental material, and for Anglo-Saxon finds (Dickinson 1991; 1993; 2002b; Hedeager 1992b; 1998; 1999; 2000; Høilund-Nielsen 1997b; 1998). If the form and decoration of objects communicated and constituted a range of memories and associations with idealised pasts, then their burial with the dead could have served to emphasise their symbolic meaning and connections with ancestors. The deployment of these objects would simultaneously enhance certain ways of remembering, but equally they would serve to suppress and ‘forget’ others, making their use a strategy of distinction and exclusivity as well as inclusiveness and group membership. In the context of the shifting political allegiances that typify the early medieval period, this interpretation is appealing because of its focus upon the ‘active’ role of style in creating new pasts for elites and their followers. Moreover, this approach finds close parity with historical research showing the use of myths (biblical and heroic) by early medieval elites to portray themselves as legitimate successors to the past (e.g. Pohl 1997).

These studies have made important contributions, yet there remains the need to address the manifold ways in which grave goods might have influenced other forms of social remembrance within the mortuary process itself, both through their presence and through their associations with other artefacts and the corpse. For example, while mythical memories may have been evoked by some artefacts, such as those with elaborate decoration, others may have evoked the past through their circulation and curation and consequently their association with a series of famed social actors, as discussed in relation to the gift-exchanges recorded in the Anglo-Saxon poem Beowulf (Bazelmans 2000). This is a theme explored by Heinrich Härke concerning the circulation of weapons in early and middle Anglo-Saxon society (Härke 2000a).

Other artefacts still would have been valued not only for their antiquity but also for the distance they had travelled from far-away places with exotic and prestigious associations, as well as for the manner of their conveyance – as such the exotic objects deriving originally from the Byzantine, Frankish and British spheres, or those objects inspired by Scandinavian exemplar found within the mound 1 ship-burial at Sutton Hoo (Carver 1998a; 2005; Williams 2001a). Some objects may have developed mnemonic significance because of the lack of a known and remembered history, as has been suggested for Roman objects from early medieval graves likely to have been discovered rather than curated (Eckardt & Williams 2003). Meanwhile, the potential role of heirlooms as exhibitors of memory is a well-known theme from early medieval written sources as well as from occasional archaeological finds, as in
the case of ‘named’ and inscribed swords (e.g. Ellis Davidson 1962; see also Lillios 1999). Even the incorporation of old materials (i.e. ‘spolia’) into a new object, such as the Alfred Jewel, could have been an important way of creating links to the past (e.g. Kornbluth 1989; Wilson 1964; Webster & Backhouse 1991). Conversely, the production of new objects with an exclusive mortuary function may have served to distance the deceased from the past and instead emphasise a new identity, as in the case of gold-foil crosses placed or sewn onto early Christian funerary attire (in parts of the Continent) or placed on the corpse (e.g. in the recently discovered early seventh-century chamber-grave from Prittlewell in Essex) (MOLAS 2004; see also Effros 2002b).

While artefacts could be memorable for their ‘special’ qualities derived from their biographies and mythologies, their significance for commemoration could come from more mundane and prosaic sources. There might also be objects with mnemonic roles cultivated from their use in daily life, as parts of the household or through their use in daily, regular or seasonal social and economic practices, such as spindle-whorls and knives (e.g. Härke 1989b; see Hoskins 1998), or their intimate use in connection with the body, as with combs or tweezers (Williams 2003; 2004a; see chapter 3). An apotropaic role might also be important, as for prized amulets used to protect the person and their identity from spiritual and physical harm (Eckardt & Williams 2003; Meaney 1981; White 1988). In these senses, commemoration derives from their functional qualities (both practical and symbolic) and their close involvement with the habitus of early medieval technologies of the body and daily activities.

The mnemonic role of objects need not be restricted to the evocation of different temporalities of the past (i.e. mythical, genealogical, biographical and so on), but apply also to conjuring aspired or prospective memories of the future. For instance, objects may evoke a social identity never achieved in life but attributed to the deceased in death (see Hope 1997; 2003; Thompson 2003a; 2004). Examples include the provision of some infants and children with weapons that they could not have wielded in their lifetime (see below; Härke 1992).

We also need to consider the wide range of attributes that made portable objects important as foci for remembrance. Traditional studies have focused on the form and decoration of early medieval artefacts, but these are only some of the features that may have informed their use in mortuary commemoration. For instance, the colour and brilliance might be aspects that were as important as form and decoration (Gage et al. 1999; Jones 2002; 2004; Hosler 1995; Saunders 1999; 2002). It may have also been important whether they appeared new and shiny or worn by time and use. In addition to these qualities, the treatment of artefacts might influence their meaning: whether they are produced, exchanged, consumed, fragmented or destroyed (or a combination of these) during the mortuary context (e.g. Jones 2003; Williams 2003). It is only by considering the diversity, complexity and biographies of the many objects often referred to collectively as ‘grave goods’ that archaeologists can begin to engage with their significance for early medieval societies.

These broad principles help us to consider the commemorative roles of artefacts in mortuary practices, but it is important to remember that what are often called ‘grave
goods’ may relate to many divergent types of artefact with different associations with the cadaver, including clothing, artefacts placed on or around the body, and elements of the structure of the grave itself (see Barrett 1994). In this light, artefacts can have many different mnemonic associations, and each object may relate to the deceased’s and mourners’ identities in contrasting ways. Yet, in combination, artefacts helped to compose a final and striking ‘tableau’ of the dead within the grave or upon the pyre (e.g. Carver 2000; Geake 2003; Halsall 2003). This image of the deceased was composed to create a memorable ‘scene’ that simultaneously emphasised certain aspects of the deceased while ‘forgetting’ others (see chapter 4).

If we allow for the possibility of artefacts having a role in creating social memories, then we can imagine that they were not simply adjuncts to commemorative practices performed primarily through the medium of the written or spoken word, or by the raising of permanent memorials over graves. Instead, artefacts deployed during the funeral and selectively placed with the dead may have been an important medium for commemoration, serving as a mnemonic interface between the corpse and the mourners. This involved the enhancing of some memories and the suppression of others: a process of both remembering and forgetting.

Early medieval grave goods – a mnemonic approach
If we take this mnemonic approach, how does it help us understand the changing uses of portable artefacts in early medieval mortuary practices? The use of portable objects in graves was not a unique development of the early medieval period, for many prehistoric and Roman-period communities across north-west Europe employed a diverse range of artefacts in graves. Yet the distinctive assemblages of material culture found in graves dating to the later fifth and sixth centuries AD in southern and eastern England have tended to be regarded as representing the introduction of a new mortuary tradition. Archaeologists have regarded these new furnished burial rites of early medieval Britain as ‘pagan’ and ‘Germanic’: part of a broader pattern of furnished cremation and inhumation rites that have their origin in Scandinavia and ‘free Germany’ beyond the edge of the Roman Empire (Hedeager 1992a; Hills 2003; Todd 1992). The spread of furnished burial in the fifth and sixth centuries is usually seen as reflecting Germanic migration, although different scholars have interpreted the process of invasion and settlement in contrasting ways. In addition, more recent studies have moved away from seeing migration in isolation towards the consideration of other possibilities, including elite take-over rather than mass migration, and an ideological change involving the imitation of Germanic groups and social practices (e.g. Higham 1992; Hills 2003). The issue is further complicated by the fact that, despite a decline in grave-good provision in late Roman cemeteries, and the accepted major changes in society that took place from the fourth to the sixth centuries, the furnishing of graves was an integral element of late Romano-British mortuary practices (Gowland in prep.; Philpott 1991). Considering furnished burial as a form of commemoration related to the evolving social and political context of competition and conflict in the period may be a fruitful way of integrating these different viewpoints. Seeing mortuary practices as a context for creating new relationships with
the dead, ancestors and the past makes these debates somewhat redundant. While not denying either the likelihood of a series of migration events over the fourth to sixth centuries or native continuity in many areas, we can say that furnished burial came into its own in this context of social and political transformation.

The first new furnished burial rite of the fifth century AD is urned cremation burial. Cremation involved the provision of objects on the funeral pyre, after which the ashes were collected and placed in a cinerary urn. The pots, often decorated, contained the cremated remains and a range both of pyre goods (artefacts placed on the pyre and present in the grave in a fragmented, distorted and often incomplete state, including glass beads, ivory bag rings, combs and spindle-whorls) and grave goods added largely unburned to the burial (such as further bone and antler combs, and iron and bronze toilet implements, including tweezers, shears, razors and earscoops) (Richards 1987; 1995; Williams 2004b). The artefacts placed in these graves seem to have had a particular association with the management of the body, and the presentation and cutting of hair and nails in particular (see chapter 3). The fragments that survive in the urn are therefore a selection of a far greater number of objects placed with the dead on the pyre. This is attested at the cremation cemetery of Spong Hill (Hills 1977; 1980; Hills & Penn 1981; Hills, Penn & Rickett 1987; 1994) not only by the discovery of fragments of dress accessories (brooches and beads), but also by fragments of glass vessels and burnt pot-sherds that must have been placed or smashed on the pyre prior to, or during, the cremation (Evison in Hills et al. 1994).

Accompanying these cremation rites, sometimes at the same cemeteries, but also in many newly established sites, are furnished inhumation graves – unburned corpses accompanied by a range of grave goods, including weaponry, vessels and items of costume, such as belt buckles, dress fasteners and necklaces. There were probably greater similarities in the mortuary processes of both rites than their remains suggest, for the furnishing of inhumation graves must in many ways have resembled the decking-out of the funeral pyres of those destined to be burned (McKinley 1994). These two forms of mortuary practice have different distributions, cremation predominating in east Yorkshire, the east Midlands and East Anglia, and inhumation found over all of southern and eastern England. Mixed-rite cemeteries, in which both rites are found to a similar degree, are a southern English phenomenon. Meanwhile, three areas – south-west Wessex, east Kent and Northumbria – have produced limited evidence of cremation as a common burial rite. In all other regions, cremation and inhumation are found alongside each other in varying proportions. This variation in the mixture of rites may not be entirely random or directly connected to the Continental origins of immigrant groups. It may be that the choice of rite was a deliberate and active choice to symbolise socio-political affiliations with particular ideas, practices and groups while simultaneously creating a visible distinction from others (Williams 2002a; see also Lucy 2002).

As interesting as these new furnished burials are, there are equally those areas of eastern and southern England where few furnished burials are found. Some of these areas are likely to have had a sparse population in the period, while others, such
as Hertfordshire, Essex and West Sussex, were populous in the Roman period, and here other explanations must be sought. One is that these remained British areas and continued variations of Roman burial rites into the fifth and sixth centuries, and perhaps in places even later (e.g. Dark 1994; 2000). A further, less explored, possibility is that furnished inhumation and cremation are only two of the more visible types of burial rite in the period and that others existed that leave little archaeological trace. In areas where these other rites were more commonplace, burial sites may be harder for archaeologists to find. Possible alternative rites include unfurnished inhumation and unaccompanied cremation, or the excarnation (ritual exposure and dismemberment) of the dead. Whatever the precise explanation, it is likely that we have visible to us only some of the complex variability in the provision of grave goods in early medieval burials of the fifth and sixth centuries AD.

Moving into the seventh century, we encounter the phenomenon of ‘final-phase’ burials. There remains considerable debate over when sixth-century burial rites disappear and when new cemeteries are established. Helen Geake (2002) has suggested an early seventh-century hiatus, in which there is a proliferation of largely invisible burial rites, with only the wealthy barrow-burials at sites like Sutton Hoo and Snape attesting to continued burial traditions. Others perceive a more seamless transfer of burial rite and burial location, although both may not have happened at precisely the same moment for the entire population and in each region (Boddington 1990). Through the seventh and into the early eighth centuries AD in southern and eastern England we see the decline of weapon-burial, more modest and Byzantine/Frankish-inspired high-status female mortuary costumes in selected graves, and an overall reduction in the frequency and quality of grave goods placed with the dead.

The decline of grave goods in the seventh and eighth centuries has also been attributed to a range of explanations. A simplistic view is that grave goods represent pagan beliefs and their subsequent decline reflects the replacement of localised pagan cults of the dead with a new Christian orthodox doctrine of death sustained and supported by the involvement of the clergy in mortuary practices (Taylor 2001). There is no question that mortuary practices were Christian in and around early Christian centres. These would be the graves of the inmates of the religious communities themselves, as well as the secular elite and their retainers who were most closely associated with them. However, numerous objections have been raised to the view of the decline in cremation, the decline in furnished burial and the increased popularity of west–east orientation as evidence of a new belief system imposed on the population. The lack of direct historical evidence for an active clerical influence on burial before the tenth and eleventh centuries is one argument (e.g. Bullough 1983; Effros 2002a; Gittos 2002; Hadley 2001), but it is also clear that field cemeteries continued long after the conversion to Christianity (Hadley 2001; 2002; Zadora-Rio 2003). More complex socio-political and economic explanations have been sought in changing patterns of inheritance and the circulation of moveable wealth, and in the possibility that taxation by an increasing church and secular administration of kingdoms encouraged the decline in grave goods (Boddington 1990; Geake 1992; 1997; 1999a
Objects of memory

and b; Hadley 2001; 2002; Shephard 1979). It is also possible that, while not controlling burial rites (see Geake 2003), Christianity brought with it from the Merovingian kingdoms, Ireland and western Britain a commemorative emphasis upon topography and monumentality at the expense of portable artefacts (Effros 1997). Whatever the case, it is the argument of this chapter that although their role changes, portable artefacts continued to be enmeshed in evolving technologies of remembrance.

Alongside these final-phase cemeteries, others of contemporary date had already adopted a findless and Christian burial tradition almost bereft of any deliberately placed artefacts (Geake 1992; 1997). This suggests that rather than a coherent and linear trend from furnished to unfurnished inhumation burial, together with the cessation of cremation rites and the preference for west–east orientation, we are looking at alternative strategies of commemoration in contemporary operation. For some communities, burial with grave goods was encouraged and developed in certain contexts, but for others artefacts were circulated and disposed of in other contexts.

Grave goods did not die out as completely as it might first appear. A range of artefacts has been recovered from cemeteries of the seventh to eleventh centuries, including knives, whetstones, buckles, coins, beads and combs (Hadley 2001: 95–7). Evidence of a range of grave structures, including chests, coffins, biers and charcoal layers, has been recovered. Meanwhile, shroud pins, brooches and knives are among the items that continue to be found with some graves (Daniell 1997). Moreover, the late seventh-century tomb of St Cuthbert uncovered in Durham Cathedral strongly illustrates that the placing of artefacts with the dead could serve as a votive practice compliant with Christian practice and belief, rather than contrary to it (Campbell 1982; Coatsworth 1989; see also Crawford 2004). There is also the possibility, as Hines (1997b), Härke (2000a) and Stocker & Everson (2003) have argued, that weapons were ritually deposited elsewhere, as in watery contexts (see chapter 6), a practice found in cult sites from Scandinavia (Jørgensen 2003) and possibly associated with funerary ritual both before and after conversion to Christianity.

Outside southern and eastern England, other artefact-poor burial traditions were practised, often seemingly developing from later Roman west–east-orientated Christian-style burial rites. These graves are again characterised by a lack of grave goods, and yet at these sites there are, sometimes, instances of artefacts from graves. At the sub-Roman cemetery of Cannington in Somerset, for example (see chapter 6), we have a range of modest artefacts found in a minority of graves, including knives, coins, beads and pins (Rahtz, Hirst & Wright 2000: 87). Also, there is interesting attention to grave structure, including the placing of quartz pebbles in some graves, as at Capel Maelog in Powys (Britnell 1990) and Capel Eithin on Anglesey (White & Smith 1999).

Meanwhile, the ninth century sees a brief interlude, when furnished burial rites return associated with the raiding and invasions of the Danes and Norsemen. Most famously in the Northern and Western Isles of Scotland, in Ireland and on Man, we see a new phase of furnished burial within existing Christian cemeteries. Yet similar graves have been found across England, evident in the unusual cremation
barrow-cemetery at Ingleby in Derbyshire (Richards et al. 1995; Richards 2004). Other furnished burials include those from churchyards or prominently located burial mounds found from the Isle of Man and Cumbria to the Western Isles, Orkney and the northern Scottish mainland (Bersu & Wilson 1966; Freke 2002; Graham-Campbell & Batey 1998; Richards 1991).

These general trends in the provision of furnished burials can be related to traditional narratives of migration, conversion and kingdom formation, but they may also be related to patterns of socio-political structures, tensions, crises and transformations. By considering furnished burials as a commemorative strategy to create a memorable image of the dead, we can pursue the significance of the rite further. Let us now move on to look at a selection of the grave goods found in furnished burials, and how they may have served in remembering and forgetting the dead.

**Brooching the subject**

Dress fasteners were an important part of costume and identity in the early medieval world, and brooches are a common element of furnished burial rites across northwest Europe and Scandinavia. While the traditional approach to brooches is to create typologies and chronologies and identify their Continental origins (Welch 1992; Hines 1997b; see Effros 2004 for a review of Continental approaches), more recent studies have complemented such insights with assessments of their function as a part of early medieval costume and their contextual associations in mortuary contexts, as well as the symbolic and iconographic meanings of brooch form and decoration (e.g. Dickinson 1991; 1993; 2002b; Owen-Crocker 2004). In early Anglo-Saxon graves, brooches are found predominantly with adult females and some child graves, although they could in rare instances occur as an element of male-gendered costume (Stoodley 1999a). There is considerable local and regional variation in the provision and use of brooches as an element of dress (e.g. Fisher 1988; 1995; Hines 2002; Lucy 1998; 2002) but as a general rule brooches tend to be used in fastening female costume, being often found in pairs at the shoulder or chest (Owen-Crocker 2004).

It is by no means certain that the dead were dressed in their own brooches, nor is it clear whether mortuary costume was a direct reflection of the costume worn by the living person. Yet it is clear that brooches show signs of use and wear and were therefore used as an element of the costume of the living (Hines 1997b; Stoodley 1999a). As such they were an extremely visible element of the mortuary display both during the preparation of the corpse for burial and within the grave itself (fig. 2.1). Between brooches we often find strings of beads, some only ten or twenty in number but in rare cases numbering well over 100 beads, that worked in combination to create a mortuary display.

*Berinsfield, Oxfordshire*

The brooches from the early Anglo-Saxon cemetery excavated at Wally Corner, Berinsfield (near Dorchester in Oxfordshire) provide us with a case study through which we can explore in more detail the relationship between brooches, beads and the mortuary construction of social memory and identity. The cemetery lies on
Figure 2.1 An artistic interpretation of the rituals involved in preparing and dressing an adult female cadaver for burial within the context of a settlement of the sixth century AD. The image serves to emphasise the likely public nature of the entire early medieval mortuary process from dying and death to disposal. It also illustrates the prominent role of dress accessories and other portable artefacts in the funeral (artwork by Aaron Watson).
the second gravel terrace and forms part of a concentration of early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and settlements clustering along the Thames and its tributaries, close to the location of the Romano-British small town of Dorchester where, by the early seventh century, the first West Saxon episcopal see was established (Boyle et al. 1995: 4, 137–43). The cemetery consisted of 114 inhumed skeletons and 4 cremation burials uncovered during a salvage excavation by the Oxford Archaeological Unit ahead of gravel extraction. The cemetery was in use from the mid-fifth to the later sixth century AD (Boyle et al. 1995: 124–7). The discoveries are thought to represent between half and two-thirds of the cemetery, and by the time of its abandonment it is possible that the cemetery had received up to c. 300 burials (Boyle et al. 1995: 112). Many graves were disturbed by the removal of the topsoil, and others may have been completely destroyed. This is particularly likely for cremation burials, for when they are found, they tend to be interred in very shallow positions (Boyle et al. 1995: 8). Despite the limitations of the evidence, the Berinsfield cemetery is one of the few early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries recorded and fully published from the Upper Thames valley (Blair 1994; Hawkes 1986; see also Boyle et al. 1998; Scull 1992).

The Berinsfield graves have featured prominently in recent studies of burial and identity in the period because of the relatively good skeletal, contextual and spatial information they provide (e.g. Stoodley 1999a: 133–4). Focusing on this cemetery does not allow the statistical surety of regional and national surveys, however. Moreover, a reappraisal of the bone evidence by Rebecca Gowland is likely to require the qualification of some of the relationships between osteological age, sex and the provision of artefacts with the dead (Gowland 2002; in prep). Nonetheless, this summary study provides a perspective on how the body, artefacts and cemetery space interacted in commemorating the dead.

No single brooch-type was used as a badge of identity or group affiliation at Berinsfield. As well as brooch-types common in ‘West Saxon’ areas with saucer and disc brooches predominating (see Dickinson 1979; 1991; 1993), there are also ‘South Saxon’ button brooches (Avent & Evison 1982), ‘Kentish’ square-headed brooches and ‘Anglian’ small-long brooches (Hines 1984; Leeds 1945). At Berinsfield, as with other cemeteries, we find the occasional reuse of Roman brooches (White 1988). This variability is common for early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries and need not reflect the ethnic affiliations or origins of individuals wearing these objects, but the complex exchange patterns and interactions between neighbouring localities and regions (see Hines 2002; Malim & Hines 1998). It is almost unknown for the female graves from a single cemetery to display the same brooch-type in such a way as to tempt one to consider them as symbols of mutual affiliation (see also Brugmann & Parfitt 1997; Hirst 1985). Yet, equally, the central importance of brooches in the mortuary display of female-gendered identity suggests that they were not bereft of significance in symbolising the identities of the deceased and mourners before the closing of the grave. How then did brooches serve the construction of social memory at Berinsfield?

Despite the variation, the brooches were located in the Berinsfield graves in such a way as to suggest that permutations around a common formula were employed
in dressing the dead (figs. 2.2 and 2.3). In 22 of the 24 Berinsfield brooch-burials, pairs of brooches were found. In all cases but one, pairs of brooches are found at the collar, suggesting their use in dressing the corpse in a peplos-style garment with two fastened straps, one over each shoulder (Owen-Crocker 2004; fig. 2.4). Of the paired brooches, most (19/22) were of the same type, while more rarely (3/22) they were of different types. The combination of a saucer and square-headed brooch in burial 107/1 in grave 107, in which the square-headed brooch was already broken when buried, might indicate a second-best or ad hoc use of the brooch (Hines in Boyle et al. 1995: 85). In the other cases, the pairings also involved rare brooches: a Roman and small-long brooch combination in grave 83, and a disc and equal-arm combination in grave 8. The two instances of three brooches both involve pairs of saucer brooches at the shoulders and a third, great square-headed brooch that may have had different functions, as a cloak-fastener in one instance (grave 107, fig. 2.2) and as a pouch-fastener in the other (grave 77). In some cases the pairs of brooches were accompanied by pins, as in grave 91 (Boyle et al. 1995: 50).

In further instances this formula seems to have been rejected. In the case of grave 83, the posture of the burial was tightly flexed, and the brooches do not appear to have been placed in the grave as clothing, since one was found near the left hand, the other by the pelvis. A variation occurs in grave 73, where the pair of saucer brooches was not located at the collar (Boyle et al. 1995: 47). One saucer brooch and pin were placed at the shoulders, and the second small saucer brooch was found on the left side of the chest.

Of the two instances of single brooches, one was a saucer brooch from a heavily disturbed grave (grave 22) that probably formed one of a pair (the other half now lost), while the other was a rare stützarmfibul found with an infant (grave 64). The latter find was an extremely old and worn brooch, perhaps not used by the deceased.
but placed on the body by mourners as a commemorative act. This review indicates that brooches were used following a set formula, but different types of brooch were employed in contrasting ways, and some individuals were denied the burial rite involving brooches afforded to others.

Brooches were clearly an integral material aspect of gendered identity for the early Anglo-Saxon community interred at Berinsfield, with just over half of the adult...
females buried with brooches (17/31). On occasion, there are cases of adult males with female dress assemblages, and one of the female-gendered graves from Berinsfield was tentatively sexed as male on osteological grounds (grave 104; see Stoodley 1999a: 33, 189; Gowland pers. comm.). This grave seems typical for adult females in terms of grave goods and posture but was distinguished by the provision of an uncommon (but not rare) brooch-type. However, the grave is also marked out by the placing of charred logs down both sides of the grave (Boyle et al. 1995: 52). This is a rite found in other early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries (e.g. Cook & Dacre 1985) and may reflect a means of purifying the grave (see chapter 4). In combination this suggests that the burial was marked out as different in the choice of burial rite to complement the unusual provision of artefacts for the biological identity of the deceased.

Brooches were less common with children, even if half are presumed to be female (only 6/34 children aged under 15 had brooches). This supports a more general pattern in the increasing provision of brooches not only as a symbol of gender, but also of age, in early Anglo-Saxon mortuary practices (Stoodley 1999a and b; 2000). No brooch-types seem to be restricted to any particular age-group, but there do appear to be broad differences in the age of individuals given each brooch-type. The wealthiest brooch-type in terms of size and craftsmanship is the square-headed brooch, restricted to burial with sub-adults, and young adults. Meanwhile, saucer brooches seem restricted to adults, while disc and applied saucer brooches were also found with sub-adults. The old Continental brooch was clearly an heirloom, and it is notable that it was interred singly with an infant, a pattern identified in other cemeteries of associating old objects with young deaths (Crawford 2000).

Were these brooches actually visible in the grave? It seems that they were visible at many stages of the funeral, but they may not have been so prominent as they appear in the excavation reports, where they are associated with the few other artefacts that have survived over one and a half millennia in the soil together with human bones. With the clothing present, and perhaps wrapped, they may have been more subtle aspects of the mortuary costume. These were objects that may have held their greatest significance at earlier stages of the funeral, during the washing and dressing of the corpse and its display prior to burial. They may have been visible on the corpse as it was laid ‘in state’, carried to the burial site and lowered into the grave (fig. 2.1). However, there are instances where textile preservation suggests that, in some cases, the Berinsfield brooches were overlaid by outer layers of clothing, either cloaks or

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**Table 2.4**

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Figure 2.4 The brooch types buried with graves from Berinsfield correlated against osteological age at death.
Fatal and Memory in Early Medieval Britain

blankets placed over the corpse. Moreover, in some cases a head-veil may have been laid over the head and shoulders. Certainly in two instances (graves 5 and 91) there is evidence of a head-dress or cloak placed over the corpse and secured by a ring and pin. Therefore the association of the brooches and the body was intended as an element of display, but one that was restricted to those who paid close attention in proximity to, and had roles to play in the dressing of, the corpse, its procession and interment.

Next, we must explore how the ‘image production’ of adult-gendered dress is played out through the spatial organisation of the cemetery (fig. 2.5). The Berinsfield cemetery consisted of a series of separate burial plots radiating from a common focus upon a Romano-British ditch running roughly north-south through the site (Boyle et al. 1995; see Stoodley 1999a: 133–4). There are three discrete plots and a more dispersed spread of graves westwards from the ditch. Each area has localised clusters, lines and rows of graves within the broader distribution. Although it is not possible in many cases to demonstrate a deliberate and intentional spatial association this is feasible, given their similar orientations. It must also be borne in mind that the graves are likely to have been marked with mounds and posts (Hogarth 1973). The location of earlier graves may have provided mnemonic prompts for subsequent burials. The brooch-burials are found in all burial plots, but they are particularly uncommon in the eastern plot, where most of the graves are either of children or adult males.

There are instances of brooch-burials interred adjacent to each other, notably graves 104 and 91 and graves 42 and 49. However, while the first pairing look almost identical in terms of grave-size and orientation, burial posture, and the provision of pairs of small-long brooches and beads, as well as the fact that both individuals were of a similar age at death (20–5 years), there are also subtle differences in the grave assemblages. Grave 104 does not have a copper-alloy pin, while grave 91 does. Also, grave 104 had over twice the number of beads, and from their location they do not appear to have been suspended from the neck but placed in the grave by mourners. Grave 104 also had three iron rings to the left of the waist and charred logs placed along the grave sides, together with a fragment of a stamp-decorated vessel, all elements not found in the burial rite for grave 91. Given the apparent care and attention to make similarities between the two burial rites, these differences are worth noting and may have been intentional. Against this evidence it should be remembered that grave 104 is an instance of an osteological male buried with a female-gendered grave assemblage (see above).

A similar interplay may be witnessed in the adjacent graves 42 and 49, both of adult females aged over 45 years at death. The former was interred with two saucer brooches, sixteen amber beads, an iron buckle loop and an iron knife. On a slightly different orientation, grave 49 had an identical posture but was interred with two disc brooches. Regardless of how we read the interplay between these two burials, their similarities are unusual at Berinsfield. In all other instances, adjacent graves appear to select different combinations and types of brooch and bead from their neighbours. Whether this was due to expedience or conscious choice to differentiate new interments from existing graves, it is evident that each burial was a distinctive
performance that evoked similarities with other funerary rituals but that also marked differences in terms of orientation, posture and grave assemblages.

Consequently, while brooch-burial may have intercut status groups as an expression of gendered identity and perhaps also household and group affiliation (see Stoodley 1999a), it is clear that each individual performance was attempting to distinguish new burials from existing, remembered, neighbouring graves. Whether
motivated by competition or not, it is possible that this was at least partly concerned with the subtle manipulation of a commonly expressed mortuary ‘image’ created in the grave as the culmination of the funeral.

*When image failed – adult female burials without brooches*

Having reviewed the uses of brooches as an integral element of display within the grave, we must ask why some adult females were buried without brooches. Of the fourteen adult females without brooches, seven cases can be explained by post-burial disturbance and truncation, and brooches may very well have been originally present. There are only seven cases where the lack of brooches appears to reflect the choices of the early Anglo-Saxon mourners (fig. 2.6).

In all seven unambiguous adult female burials at Berinsfield without brooches, the absence of brooches correlates with unusual aspects of burial practice. Graves 4 and 152 appear to be standard extended supine burials, but without any grave goods. However, the five other adult females are distinguished by their posture, orientation and spatial location (fig. 2.7). Grave 108 was a young female aged between 20 and 25 without grave goods found in an extended supine position on the edge of the cemetery. Grave 106 was a female of well over 45 years of age, buried on the edge of the eastern male burial group and a row of graves in the northern group. The body was, unusually, positioned on its left side, with legs flexed and left arm bent, with hand near shoulder, and no grave goods were found. Grave 109 was also a female of over 45 years of age and, although buried in an extended position, was inserted into an extremely narrow grave so that the arms were tightly folded over the body. It is also noteworthy that this grave was situated adjacent to brooched females, but on the very edge of the cemetery; again, no grave goods were found, and the burial had a different orientation from that of the nearby graves. Grave 25 was an adult of indeterminate age buried in a bent or curved position in the Romano-British ditch running through the cemetery, and the grave seems to be situated between the south-east and western burial areas. Grave 134, an extended supine female of over 45 years of age, was again distinguished by its peripheral position to the west of the

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*Figure 2.6 Table of brooch-less adult female burials from Berinsfield.*
northern group within a Bronze Age pond barrow. The grave was also distinguished by its unusual orientation: rather than the prevailing south–north of the adjacent northern group graves, or the west–east of the more southerly burials, burial 134 was orientated north–south. The burial was the only one of the group of seven to receive any grave goods, which consisted of six beads (two amber, four glass), a bronze pin and an iron knife.

Although each burial is different, many show clear distinctions from the normative burial rite of extended supine posture with grave goods and following an orientation shared with the rest of the burial plot. They also tend to be positioned on the peripheries of burial plots (fig. 2.7); this author does not accept that these burials are necessarily later than furnished graves because of their peripheral position (pace Boyle et al. 1995: 133). They have burial postures that would make the display of costume difficult (either crouched, flexed or constricted), and in all but one case they do not simply have fewer grave goods, they have none at all. Moreover, when we look at the age profile, we see a propensity towards older individuals, while those with brooches show a tendency towards the younger end of the age-range. The sample is too small to argue with certainty, but it appears that the burial rite distinguished those not afforded a role in image production. This may have been because of their social status and identity in life, but it could equally concern the interaction of the deceased’s identity with that of the mourners or the circumstances of death. The active role of mourners in deciding who was buried is illustrated by the case of grave 83 mentioned above (p. 49). There, the adult female was interred in a flexed position with brooches, but the brooches were not apparently worn on the body but placed over the cadaver, perhaps as part of clothing added by the mourners. In this instance we may be seeing a person destined for an image-less burial subject to a change of status and afforded a supine burial with artefacts by mourners at the grave side.

It is difficult to disentangle which factor was more important. Were these adult females denied the ideal posture because of the absence of appropriate brooches for mnemonic display? Or was the absence of brooches a reflection of their distinctive posture? Either way, it is clear, as other authors have noted (e.g. Haughton & Powlesland 1999; Hirst 1985), that there is a close connection between posture and burials denied pairs of brooches on their mortuary costume in sixth-century graves. Both elements may relate to the inability to grant certain adult females the same mnemonic display as was the aspired norm for many adult female graves – or, indeed, the actual wish to deny them it.

**Memories at the cutting edge**

Having discussed the provision of brooches in predominantly adult female graves of the later fifth and sixth centuries, let us now discuss a set of artefacts with male associations: weapons. In late fifth and sixth centuries, weapons, knives and belt buckles were the most consistent material markers of male identity in mortuary practices (Härke 1989a; 1990; Marzinzik 2003). The weapon burial rite continues
Figure 2.7 The distribution of adult burials without clearly gendered grave goods in the Berinsfield cemetery (redrawn by Séan Goddard after Boyle et al. 1995).

at some sites through the seventh century, increasingly employed as a sign of status (Härke 1992). Spears and shields are the most frequently uncovered weapons (Dickinson & Härke 1992; Swanton 1973). Less common are finds of spathae (double-sided swords; Ellis Davidson 1962), while other infrequent items include seaxes (short swords), franciscas (axes) and (very rarely) arrowheads (Härke 1990: 25–6; 1992). Helmets and mail corselets are the least common weapon-types, found in
only a few of the very richest graves (Härke 1990: 26). Weapons are among the most frequent and distinctive sets of grave goods placed in burials of the fifth to seventh centuries in southern and eastern England, a pattern that is reflected more widely throughout early medieval northern Europe and Scandinavia (figs 2.8 and 2.9).

Weapons have been subject to a wide range of archaeological studies. In addition to discussions and reports of weapons from particular graves and cemeteries, they have been discussed as evidence for the racial and religious affinities of those interred (e.g. Wylie 1857; Leeds 1913) and the occupation of the deceased as a ‘warrior’. Meanwhile, studies have addressed weapon typology and chronology (e.g. Dickinson & Härke 1992: 4–30), construction techniques (e.g. Dickinson & Härke 1992: 31–54; Ellis Davidson 1962) and their use in combat (e.g. Dickinson & Härke 1992: 55–61; see Härke 1990: 22–4 for a literature review of approaches). The broader social context of weapon-use has also been discussed. In addition to their use in combat, weapons could have a variety of roles in socio-political and ritual display (Dickinson & Härke 1992: 61–2). In the burial context, weapons could be a means of displaying the identities of the dead and hence allow us to read the social organisation of the burial community (e.g. Arnold 1980) or to identify changing uses of weapon deposition as an act of conspicuous consumption at the funeral (Arnold 1980; Theuws & Alkemade 2000). The most detailed and influential study of the symbolism of weapon-burial to date has been the work of Heinrich Härke. By looking at the variability in the provision of weapons in early Anglo-Saxon graves, Härke compiled a range of evidence to argue that although weapons are often found buried with male adults who could have used them during life, they were not principally symbols of ‘warrior’ status. Instead, Härke interpreted the presence of weapons (and the
Figure 2.9 The artefacts from grave 28 from Berinsfield, Oxfordshire (adapted by Séan Goddard after Boyle et al. 1995; reproduced with the kind permission of the Oxford Archaeological Unit).
Objects of memory

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choice of weapon combinations) as forming a multi-layered and polysemous symbolic act relating to the social identity of the deceased (Dickinson & Härke 1992; Härke 1989a and b; 1990; 1992). In turn, the frequency and character of weapon provision can be seen to vary within and between cemeteries, whereas changes over time were seen to reflect regional and chronological changes in social structure and Anglo-Saxon ethnogenesis (Härke 1989a; 1990: 26; 1992: 159–64; see also Stoodley 1999a; 2000). While there has been a reluctance by some to accept Härke’s arguments concerning the ethnic symbolism of weapon burial (e.g. Lucy 2000; Tyrell 2000), his study suggests that the burial of weapons constituted a Germanic ethnic origin myth, symbolising perceived and/or real cultural origins through the burial ritual (Härke 1997c). In this sense, weapons not only symbolised social identities, but also connected past and present through their use in the funeral.

These archaeological theories and studies have augmented historical and literary studies of the social and ritual roles of weaponry (Härke 2000a). Weapons were produced, circulated, displayed, fragmented and taken out of circulation in social and ritual practices that served not only to construct and reproduce power relations but also to formulate and communicate distinctive concepts of the ideal social person (Bazelmans 2000; Theuws & Alkemade 2000). In this light, the weapon burial rite did not simply construct real or imagined links to a Germanic past and mythic ancestors. It also employed weapons that may themselves have had long cultural biographies of use and reuse as complex composite artefacts that connected known individuals and groups to each other through cycles of exchange (Theuws & Alkemade 2000). In this light it is important to make the distinction with female burial costumes that, composed by mourners, were closely connected with the preparation of the body. By contrast, weapons were arranged around the body and could often be placed outside coffins (where present), and therefore they need to be regarded more as ‘gifts’ added during the composition of the grave.

What has not been thoroughly addressed to date, however, is how weapons, as such a prominent, if changing, part of funerary rituals in the fifth, sixth and seventh centuries in early medieval Europe, served in social remembrance. Certainly the weapons themselves may have been symbols of mythical origins, but memories were also promoted by the composition of the burial deposit. The display of weapons formed part of a tableau composed using the dead body and artefacts. This symbolic text was intended to be read by mourners and onlookers as part of a ritual performance and display (see Halsall 1998; 2003).

Weapon burials and identity

We can identify broad national patterns in the provision of weapons in graves, as well as regional and local patterns in how different social groups employed the rite (Härke 1992; Lucy 2002; Stoodley 1999a). Sam Lucy has even suggested that different cemeteries in the same regions and indeed different burial groups show contrasting uses of what at first appears to be a very similar rite (e.g. Lucy 1998; 2002). Without attempting to suggest that the site selected reveals all the patterns in
weapon provision, we shall again focus upon the cemetery of Berinsfield (Oxfordshire).

At Berinsfield, a slightly higher than average number of adult males for the region were interred with weapons, but the combinations were typical (fig. 2.10). With no swords recovered, most graves contained a spear (eight instances), a shield (seven instances) and a shield and spear (eight instances). There is also one grave with a shield, two spears and two knives. Given that knives might also have been fighting weapons in some instances, single weapons need not represent non-functioning weapon-sets. Spears were placed on either side of the body and shields tended to be placed over the chest or stomach (Härke in Boyle et al. 1995: 68–9). Osteological sex and weapon provision are closely correlated, with no cases at Berinsfield of skeletons sexed as female interred with weapons. It is also clear that age correlated with the combinations of weapons placed with the dead. First, those adult males without weapons tended to be mature or old individuals, with only one young male interred without weaponry. To put it another way, older individuals were less likely to receive weapons upon death, while all younger adults received weapons (Härke in Boyle et al. 1995: 69). Also, weapon burials tended to be wealthier in other artefacts than those of adult males without weapons. Single spears had the greatest range, being found with children and juveniles as well as adults from 20 to over 40 years of age, the smaller spearheads being found in child and juvenile graves (Härke in Boyle et al. 1995: 69). By contrast, a number of bodies were interred with shields alone, and these tended to be younger adults: no child or juvenile burials had shields. By contrast yet again, the combination of spear and shield was found in mature adults aged 30–40, whereas the only individual with two spearheads and a shield was over 40 years of age. Therefore, different weapon combinations were selected to communicate subtle differences in social identities. Although the interpretation of non-metric traits remains open to debate (see Mays 1998; Tyrell 2000), Härke did observe that individuals with weapons had different traits from those without, hinting at possible family relationships between those interred with weapons and more distant relationships with those not selected for weapon burial. Whether read as ethnic differences,
as Härke suggests, or as indicators of familial divisions, the evidence does suggest that groups with different social/biological relationships had a different treatment in death.

**Image production in weapon-burials**

So far we have discussed the combinations of weapons, following on from the work of Härke and using Berinsfield as an example. However, the way in which we create these patterns assumes a degree of objective overview that would not have been possible in the early medieval period. In other words, for those attending early medieval funerals, earlier funerals and the way weapons were placed may have been remembered, and broad expectations and patterns would have been recognised in what, how and where weapons should be interred. Yet, since many months may have separated each interment, and years may have separated the deaths of two individuals whose age, gender and status required comparable burial procedures, we should not expect hard-and-fast rules over interment, but merely trends. This is because we must recall that such variations may be reproduced through the vagaries of personal memory, oral tradition and the consensus reached over what occurred in earlier funerals. Consequently, burials that to the archaeologist appear very different may to the past population have been little more than the continuation of a rigid, orthodox tradition. Equally, those elements that are the same need not be those valued in the past.

When considering weapons, we must be aware that, for each successive burial, the community and those controlling the burial ritual (elders, shamans or cunning women: Dickinson 1993; Price 2002), as well as those looking on (relatives, allies, friends, subordinate groups, hired mourners etc.), may have had a clear set of expectations formed by social memory concerning how the dead should be disposed of. When composing the grave, attempts may have been made simultaneously to evoke recollections of past funerals and to ensure that artefacts were placed with the dead in an appropriate fashion. Other efforts may also have been made to distinguish the current funeral from earlier events as the dead or mourners assert their agency to alter, manipulate and transform the sets of rules and expected procedures from which they were building their burial rituals.

For any particular cemetery, the patterns we identify are therefore trends that accrue throughout the lifetime of the cemetery, a process that in some instances may stretch over a century. How were these patterns reproduced? As John Barrett astutely observed (Barrett 1994), each successive burial involved a set of choices about how to portray the dead, whether to follow earlier burials (as far as they were remembered) and evoke similarities with the past, or to emphasise differences, distinctions or deliberate juxtapositions of differing disposal images of the dead. Both choices involve acts of remembering and rely on the sets of images constructed through the use of portable artefacts. In most cases, a mixture of the two (both similarities to and differences from the past) will be sought, both to evoke elements of earlier funerals in the treatment of the dead, and to distinguish the burial: in other words, a compromise between dogged orthodoxy and innovation.
Memory reproduction
At Berinsfield, we can see how these ideas might begin to play out. The distribution of weapon-burials at Berinsfield is much more clustered than their female equivalents (fig. 2.11), with three or possibly four groups evident: an eastern sector, a south-east group and a western group that in turn might be split into an eastern core and a western scatter. When the different weapon combinations are plotted, it is evident that they are interspersed. We can focus on two sets of graves in the eastern half of the western group that seem to be related in terms of location and orientation: the three burials 28, 52 and 53, and the four burials 20, 24, 29 and 30. Taking the first group, it is evident that different locations were chosen for each, burial 28 with two spears on the right side of the head and a shield over the chest, burial 52 with a spear on the left side of the head and shield over the pelvis, and burial 53 with the spear on the right side with the shield over the pelvis.

The same distinctions can be seen in the clear row of burials 20, 24, 29 and 30. Moving from north to south, burial 20 was disturbed but the spearhead was on the left side of the head, burial 30 was disturbed and the original position of the spearhead is unknown. Burial 29 had a shield placed over the stomach area, as did burial 24, but in addition a spearhead was situated on the left side of the head.

Indeed, these subtle distinctions are repeated with almost every closely positioned pair of weapon burials in the cemetery. This ‘pattern’ can be recognised at other cemeteries, with even clearer patterns in the deposition of groups of weapon-burials, for example, at Mill Hill, Deal (Parfitt & Brugmann 1997). At this site, the late fifth- and sixth-century graves congregated around an early Bronze Age burial mound (fig. 2.12). Many graves were clustered against the mound, perhaps seeking a close connection to whatever ancestral or supernatural associations the monument evoked, and perhaps to connect the newly dead to imagined pasts and myths of origin (Williams 1997; 1998). Yet a group of weapon-burials was located, evenly spaced, on the eastern side of the monument, leading the excavators to speculate that small mounds had originally been placed over each grave (Parfitt & Brugmann 1997: 13). The weapon-burials are, because of their proximity and orientation, clearly related, and yet the position of the interred objects and the posture of the body varied considerably with each interment. Given the unknown number of years that may have passed between each burial, it is not possible to prove that there was a conscious desire to reference earlier burials while creating subtle differences or to commemorate earlier graves through the presence of weapons. However, it is suggested here that the intention was to do both: to evoke the past through re-enacting the earlier burial rite, and also to make a distinctive image that played off against, but did not replicate, the earlier interment. If this argument is accepted, then it challenges attempts to limit social mortuary archaeology to the reading-off of broad patterns. Instead, it asks us to look at how each individual burial was a ritual performance serving not only to create a memorable image of the deceased, but also to respond to and evoke earlier interments through burial rite and location. This image production and image reproduction combined to sustain the mortuary tradition and create links between the living, the recently dead, and possible concepts of ancestry and ancestors through the use of grave goods in the funeral.
Metaphors, biographies and gift-giving
As already discussed, the practice of furnishing the dead was, however, neither ubiquitous nor static in early medieval Britain. First, not every grave, and in some cemeteries only a minority of late fifth- and sixth-century Anglo-Saxon burials, was furnished. As we have seen, in other areas the rite is absent. Also, the rise and subsequent decline of the furnished burial rite illustrates that, over time, the deployment of dress accessories, artefacts and grave furnishings was increasingly avoided as a means of
promoting memory. Why was this the case? When social commemoration is discussed, it is often assumed that grave goods were only a fleeting experiment during a period of ethnic and political change, as well as social upheaval and competition. Exploring the changing provision of grave goods in the final-phase cemeteries of the seventh century suggests an alternative explanation.

Final-phase cemeteries have long been characterised and discussed (e.g. Boddington 1990; Geake 1997; Hyslop 1963; Leeds 1936). They are often situated in new locations from late fifth- and sixth-century burial sites and tend to consist of small burial grounds of west–east orientated burials with relatively sparse furnishings. Classic type-sites include Winnall II near Winchester in Hampshire (Meaney & Hawkes 1970) and Chamberlain’s Barn, Dunstable, in Bedfordshire (Hyslop 1963), although final-phase graves are sometimes found overlying early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries, as at Finglesham in Kent (Hawkes 1982), Lechlade in Gloucestershire (Boyle et al. 1998) and Edix Hill, Barrington, in Cambridgeshire (Malim & Hines 1998). While many graves contain few objects, some burials are still furnished with elaborate and sophisticated material culture assemblages, including items of personal adornment, bag and box collections, and vessels. Indeed, alongside these cemeteries, the late seventh century is also defined by a series of isolated barrow-burials, some of which, particularly female graves, were especially wealthy (Geake 1997; 2002;
Shephard 1979). In the introduction, we reviewed the evidence from the female burial placed on a bed and surrounded by rich furnishings within an earlier Bronze Age burial mound on Swallowcliffe Down (chapter 1). This burial encapsulates the fact that this furnished tradition appears to straddle the conversion, with many graves containing implicit and explicit allusions both to pre-Christian and Christian ritual practices (Speake 1989).

**Harford Farm**

A full review of seventh- and early eighth-century burial sites is beyond the scope of this discussion. This study will instead focus upon a recently published cemetery of the final-phase type from Harford Farm, near Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk (Penn 2000). The excavations were conducted ahead of road construction, revealing forty-seven burials in forty-six west–east orientated graves in two burial plots focusing upon two of a series of prehistoric burial mounds (fig. 2.13). The site was located on a locally prominent gravel spur between the valleys of the rivers Yare and Tas. The graves in area A were thirty-one in number, were west–east orientated and were arranged in rows on the southern side of a prehistoric mound. To the south (area C/D) was a second group of fifteen graves, also west–east in orientation and scattered on the west and east sides of a prehistoric monument. This practice of monument reuse was a common feature of seventh-century burial sites (see chapters 1, 5 and 6).

The two groups of graves at Harford Farm appear broadly contemporary, although those in area A frequently showed traces of wooden coffins, whereas the more scattered and less ordered arrangement of graves to the south indicated other types of furnishing interpreted as pillows and beds of textile, leather or some other organic material. Because of the sands and gravels into which the graves were cut, few human remains were preserved. The bodies were revealed only through stains in the soil indicating that all identified cases were of adults, positioned supine and extended in most instances (Penn 2000: 74). Despite the fragmentary evidence, the surviving grave goods paint a picture of the very end of the furnished burial tradition, with only some of the burials receiving elaborate assemblages of grave goods. Yet the proportion of graves with artefacts is very high at Harford Farm when compared with other final-phase cemeteries. Only thirteen out of forty-seven had no grave goods at all. Meanwhile, a further eighteen had knives or knives and buckles, leaving sixteen graves with a range of more elaborate grave goods. Of these, eleven were regarded as ‘modestly equipped’ with knives, buckles and sometimes chatelaines, including one instance of ‘weapon-burial’: grave 25 interred with a seax. Since many of the graves produced evidence of coffins and other organic linings to graves, it is possible to question the assumption that the decline in metallic objects was accompanied by a comparable decline in other grave furnishings. Therefore, when we discuss ‘findless’ burials and a decline in furnished burials, we may only be seeing the decline in the deployment of metal dress fittings and metal artefacts: the provision of grave structures, clothing and other textiles may have continued. Indeed, this is demonstrable
Figure 2.13 Plan of the excavations at Harford Farm, Caistor St Edmund, Norfolk showing two groups of seventh – early eighth-century burials focusing upon a Bronze Age barrow cemetery (redrawn by Séan Goddard after Penn 2000).
through the archaeological evidence for middle and later Anglo-Saxon burial rites in which a wide range of grave furnishings is employed (see chapter 3).

This leaves five graves – 11, 18, 22, 28 and 33 – that were clearly distinguished from the rest of the graves, since the number and quality of the artefacts retrieved during excavation were far in excess of those from the other burials (figs. 2.14–2.18). Interestingly, these burials are not set apart in terms of location, nor are their graves any larger than the others; in addition, more poorly furnished burials from the cemetery produced more evidence of organic grave furnishings revealed by soil-stains. Therefore it appears that these individuals were afforded a comparable burial rite to their lesser-furnished companions, but the choice was made to include a range of portable artefacts on and around the body.

All of the five rich burials from Harford Farm are female-gendered assemblages, although the osteological sex of these individuals could not be ascertained due to the poor bone-preservation. Moreover, the artefacts were not always located where one might expect if they were elements of the deceased’s mortuary costume. This suggests that many of these artefacts had other roles in the composition of the burial assemblage, rather than simply being elements of mortuary costume. It is argued that these grave assemblages can be understood only partly as ‘clothing’ used in the production and reproduction of an ‘image’, as occurred in sixth-century furnished burials. Certainly, this is still likely to be part of the story, but the location, character and form of the objects suggest that many were mnemonic objects placed with the dead because of their biographies and metaphorical associations rather than because they were associated exclusively or even primarily with the identity of the deceased. Moreover, each burial assemblage was unique, suggesting little in the way of a repeated mnemonic image reproduction at Harford Farm, as was the case at Berinsfield. Their deposition in a grave is argued to have been less about the personal identity of the deceased and more a powerful strategy of social commemoration for the mourners demonstrating perhaps family, household or community remembrance. A brief description of the graves provides the basis for developing this interpretation.

### Grave 11

With traces of a coffin-stain surviving over the burial, the body in this grave survived in a semi-flexed position orientated west–east and visible only as a soil-stain (fig. 2.14). The cadaver was interred with a costume consisting of elaborate precious metal accessories. They comprised a gold, silver and garnet composite disc brooch and three silver-wire rings, that from their position, seem to have been suspended from the neck of the corpse. Also suspended from the neck or placed on the chest were a further eight to ten silver-wire knot rings associated with a silver toilet set of three items – a perforated spoon and two picks (figs. 2.16 and 2.17).

Upon the disc brooch, a product of the early seventh century (c. 610–50), was a runic inscription running from the back-plate onto the pin-mounting. The Old English inscription is interpreted as ‘luda:giboetæsigilæ’, translated as ‘Luda repaired this brooch.’ Associated with this runic inscription are a series of zoomorphic
Figure 2.14 Plans of graves 11, 18 and 22 from the Harford Farm cemetery (redrawn by Séan Goddard after Penn 2000).
The seemingly mundane inscription is notable as one of the earliest known of this variety, most being eighth and ninth century (Hines in Penn 2000: 80; Penn 2000: 45–9; see below). The object is an early seventh-century brooch of Kentish manufacture and therefore may have been at least fifty years old when interred towards the end of the seventh century in this Norfolk grave.

Between the right arm and the chest were placed a knife and shears, while at the belt were three iron suspension rings and a key. Another key and a comb were placed beside the feet and copper-alloy fragments hint at further objects towards the foot end of the grave (Penn 2000: 14).
Figure 2.16 Artefacts from grave 11 from the Harford Farm cemetery (adapted by Séan Goddard after Penn 2000; reproduced with the kind permission of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology).
Figure 2.17 The disc brooch with animal-decoration and a runic inscription added at a later date on the back from grave 11 from the Harford Farm cemetery (adapted by Séan Goddard after Penn 2000; reproduced with the kind permission of Norfolk Landscape Archaeology).
Grave 18
This was another encoffined burial, with an iron barrel-lock and key fragment found at the far western end of the grave, suggesting a wooden box containing an iron awl had been placed adjacent to the head (Penn 2000: 65; see fig. 2.14). Also found in the grave were a gold and garnet pendant, shears, a copper-alloy bracelet used as a suspension ring, an iron purse-mount and a collection of suspended objects of unknown function (possibly an inkpot and pen-case). Of special note is a suspended bronze cylinder of a type often described as a ‘relic box’. It contained a silver pin-suite and linking chain (Penn 2000: 66–7).

None of these items was situated on the body as elements of costume. Instead they were located alongside the northern edge of the grave in the area of the left side of the waist and left thigh, all seemingly beside or upon the coffin. The final
item is one of only two pin-sets characteristic of final-phase Byzantine-style jewellery from the cemetery, and its position shows that it was not placed on the body as an element of costume but concealed with the relic box. It appears that two sceattas (silver coins) were added to the grave, possibly placed on the coffin to the right and above the head. These diagnostic items date the grave to the very early years of the eighth century (Penn 2000: 75).

Grave 22
This burial contained surviving stains suggesting an extended supine posture was encoffined with two groups of artefacts (see fig. 2.14). The first group consisted of the remains of a necklace or festoon at the neck, comprising silver-wire knot-rings, silver bullae and glass beads. The other concentration of objects was on the left side of the waist (i.e. as with grave 18, along the northern side of the grave either in or on top of the coffin). These artefacts are interpreted as a chatelaine (an ornamental chain, usually found by the waist of female burials), consisting of a copper-alloy ring linked to wire rings, as well as beads, a buckle, a knife, a tool (possibly a pair of tweezers) and two keys (Penn 2000: 27–9).

Grave 28
Also thought to have held a coffin, this grave contained a further division between objects located by the neck and two groups of objects by the waist (fig. 2.15). A festoon of fifteen silver-wire rings and a single silver bucket-shaped pendant were found at the neck. However, other items of jewellery were found in a cluster situated outside the coffin, on the northern side adjacent to the waist and left forearm of the skeleton. These included eleven bullae of a silver necklace, as well as an open-work gold pendant. Also placed outside the left forearm were two spindle-whorls, two silver decorated discs, five iron rivets that may indicate the presence of a comb, and a knife. Finally, placed upon the left hip was a chatelaine consisting of an iron ring, shears, a steel, a key and a series of other undiagnosed iron objects. Evidence of dress for burial is evident from a copper-alloy shoelace tag found by the left foot (Penn 2000: 25–7).

Grave 33
The fifth and last wealthy female-gendered burial from Harford Farm seems to have been interred without a coffin and the only one of the five to be found in the southern, most dispersed, burial group (see fig. 2.15). The body seems to have been positioned in a semi-flexed posture. By the neck was a Roman intaglio mounted in a frame of twisted and beaded gold wire showing signs of wear. On the right side of the body were found two gold discs with garnets that may have adorned the outside of an adjacent leather or textile bag. The contents of the bag consisted of a necklace made of silver-wire knot-rings with seventeen beads of either glass or amethyst. Also in the bag was a silver toilet set of three implements (one of which was a perforated spoon) like those suspended from the neck of grave 11, and the remains of a chatelaine
consisting of an iron ring and key. Finally, by the right leg was a pair of shears (fig. 2.18).

Assessment
Elements of these graves evoke the sixth-century mortuary practices from Berinsfield described earlier. Despite Berinsfield being ‘pagan’, to use traditional terminology, and Harford Farm being an ‘early Christian’ cemetery, it is difficult to avoid the close similarities that these mortuary practices exhibit. The dead are clothed and furnished in their graves, and while artefacts are restricted to fewer graves at Harford Farm, the structure of the burial rite seems comparable. It may be possible to argue that the composition of artefacts and the body was intended for display within the grave in a manner suggested for sixth-century graves. Graves 11, 22 and 28 had necklaces in place by the neck, suggesting they were worn as part of the mortuary costume. In addition, grave 11 had the disc brooch associated with its necklace. A silver toilet set was positioned just below, hinting that they may have also been suspended from the neck. Finally, grave 33 has a gold intaglio pendant suspended or placed by the neck. The location of chatelaines (bag groups) near the waist in graves 11, 22 and 28 is also consistent with their being part of the mortuary costume dress, or at the very least, with their having been placed there to give the impression of being so, as part of the mortuary display. These items show signs of curation, hinting that they were treasured not only for their form, decoration and ‘value’, but also because of their antiquity and provenance as received gifts or acquired treasures.

However, this is only part of the picture. There are indications that many of the items were placed upon and around the corpse, rather than used to dress the dead. The knife and shears in grave 11 were over the right arm, a position that does not correspond to the usual waist-side location of these items. The same applies to the key and comb by the feet of this burial. Moreover, while the items on the northern (left-hand) side of grave 18 could have been suspended from the waist, they are strung out, suggesting a deliberate placing within the coffin unattached to the corpse. They included a gold and garnet pendant that would have been a prominent element of the costume had it been placed on the corpse itself. It is notable that the ‘relic box’ contained and concealed the silver pin suite, rather than this item being on display and positioned on the corpse. In grave 28 most of the items, including a silver necklace, were clustered on the left side of the waist but do not seem to have been worn. Among this group was a gold open-work pendant, a striking object indeed if it had been placed suspended from the neck of the dead person. Instead, these items appear to have formed part of a bag or other organic container added to the grave by mourners and separated from the chatelaine that overlay the left pelvic bone. Finally, in grave 33, the bag collection was separate from the body, on its right side, and within it was the silver necklace and silver toilet set, as well as the remains of a chatelaine group. Once more, these were items that could easily have been displayed upon the body itself but were instead selected for interment adjacent to it.

The same observation applies to other prestigious objects placed in the Harford Farm graves. The one certain weapon-burial from the cemetery (grave 25) had a
seax enclosed in a leather sheath placed on the northern side of the grave, possibly over the left side of the corpse’s torso. As well as this position suggesting the blade was laid on the corpse, it was placed upside down, the blade facing the head of the corpse – the opposite of what one would have expected had it been an element of ‘dress’ (Penn 2000: 25). Furthermore, many of the basic elements of burial ‘costume’ at Harford Farm are not present in these five wealthy graves. Only two of the five have knives, and none of the five have belt buckles. It is therefore difficult to see these graves as augmenting a common repertoire; rather they were also making a distinctive statement by showing elements of being dressed for death (such as the shoe-lace tag from grave 28), but with many of the items placed around the cadaver.

**Harford Farm in context**

The marked lack of elaborate grave goods in the majority of graves means that the assemblages placed within these five wealthy female-gendered graves could be seen as evidence of the high status of the deceased and/or the mourners. Yet the selection of objects for interment may signify more than the straightforward classification of artefacts as ‘personal possessions and jewellery’ linked to ‘mundane’ associations suggests (Penn 2000: 98). Certainly, the Harford Farm graves form part of the phenomenon of wealthy female graves that are found across England in the later seventh and early eighth centuries (Geake 1997).

Similar patterns can be found elsewhere in adult female ‘final-phase’ burials. For instance, grave 93 from the Boss Hall cemetery at Ipswich in Suffolk produced a composite brooch with evidence of repair and of some antiquity when buried, while the gold pendants and silver toilet set from the grave are interpreted as being placed in a pouch at the neck and therefore potentially not a visible part of the burial costume (Webster in Webster & Backhouse 1991: 51–3). Meanwhile, grave 14 at Lechlade in Gloucestershire contained a female aged between 14 and 16 years. A silver pin-suite and a necklace of silver-wire rings, silver pendants on silver-wire rings, and a bead necklace together with a mounted beaver-tooth pendant were all found at the neck, forming a part of the mortuary costume. However, the other items, including iron shears, a cowrie shell, fragments of a glass vessel, glass beads and a relic box, were hidden from view within a wooden box left of the lower legs of the interment (Boyle et al. 1998: 58–9, 156).

A further instance can be recognised in the wealthy bed-burial placed into a pre-historic mound at Swallowcliffe Down discussed in chapter 1. Although found to have been previously disturbed when excavated, with the consequence that items of jewellery may have been removed by antiquarian barrow-diggers prior to excavation, none of the five deposits related to the body itself, but were placed around the cadaver as gifts from the living. The first point about this burial is that the items were not only concerned with display, but also with concealment. Personal items were concealed away within boxes before or during burial, making the process one of enclosure, rather than a tableau of burial display within the grave itself. Second, in addition to the themes recognised at Harford Farm, we can identify a particular emphasis upon vessels for food and liquid in this grave. Despite the undoubtedly wealthy character
of the grave, most of the wealth is dedicated not to overt display, but to specific practices and functions within the burial ritual and within life. Drinking rituals may have been part of aristocratic hall-centred social life in the later seventh-century, and drinking may have been a means of commemoration. But drinking could have served as a form of exchange and incorporation by which the living and the dead could be connected to memory transmission. In other words, drinking vessels at Swallowcliffe and other high-status early medieval burials are less about the personal identity of the deceased so much as the mnemonic interaction of the living and the dead expressed as a form of gift exchange and incorporation. The messages are metaphorical and sociological rather than propagandistic and mythological. These were items not necessarily connected to the identity of the individual, but to communal, social and ritual practices. The burial ritual at Swallowcliffe was therefore not only related to the gendered identity of the deceased, but also to wider themes of commemoration through the display and concealment of objects belonging to a range of groups, brought as possessions and gifts to celebrate the remembrance of the dead.

The wealth of these graves was clearly part of the burial ritual in which objects were placed in the grave to articulate the identity of the deceased and their status, gender and socio-political affiliations, as well as the identities of the living. However, while some objects were displayed upon the body, others were concealed around the edges of the grave, within bags and boxes, some seemingly placed separate from the body itself. In the case of the two coins from grave 18, it appears that objects were sometimes added after the coffin had been closed. This evidence combines to suggest that, rather than being elements of mortuary costume, these were items placed on the corpse by mourners separate from the body, and often concealed from view during the final display in the grave.

It is difficult to explain these rites as either ‘pagan’ or ‘Christian’. Instead, they make more sense as socio-political statements of display (Bazelmans 2000; Effros 2003; Halsall 1998; 2003; Janes 2000; Marzinzik 2000). Helen Geake (1997) has argued that rich female dress assemblages demonstrated aristocratic status and also ideological affinities with the Roman and Byzantine world, a form of ‘renaissance’ linked to the closely connected dual processes of Anglo-Saxon kingdom formation and religious conversion. Sonja Marzinzik’s study of late seventh-century belt buckles has recently stressed the ‘Frankish’ rather than ‘Roman’ or ‘Byzantine’ affinities of these burial rites, adapted and adopted for the English context (Marzinzik 2003). However, this does not explain the rite and its mortuary significance.

A number of writers have recently challenged the ubiquity of the term ‘grave goods’, suggesting that this phrase lumps together many different types of artefact located on the cadaver, around the cadaver and outside the coffin and/or grave structure (see also chapter 4). King (2004) has recently addressed the fact that ‘gifts’ (offerings not placed with the body but added to the grave) from early Anglo-Saxon graves may have had an important role in the reproduction of social relations. As items added to the grave by mourners, the rich artefacts from Harford Farm would fall into this category. However, King does not address the mnemonic roles of placing these artefacts with the dead.
Sally Crawford (2004) comes closer to the mark when she emphasises that these wealthy female burials may best be described as ‘votive’ offerings within a Christian context, rather than grave goods in a traditional, pagan sense. Yet this contrast is equally predicated upon the false distinction of ‘possessions’ and ‘gifts’, the former regarded as costume, the latter as objects added to the grave by mourners. These cannot be neatly separated chronologically or according to pagan or Christian belief. Despite these limitations, her principal argument resonates closely with those presented here. These were items not necessarily connected with costume per se, but items enclosed with the dead to mediate relationships between living individuals and communities and the memory of the dead person. But we must still ask why these objects, and why for these particular graves?

Discussion

The objects used in wealthy final-phase female burials served to mark status. They were also those objects closely connected to the body: items of costume such as pendants and necklaces, objects that may have symbolised involvement in or supervision of agricultural tasks, such as shears, or objects that were concerned with the presentation of the body, such as toilet sets. Rather than ‘mundane’ objects, these were items with biographies closely connected to the regimes of bodily management and display during life, as well as social practices within the household and farmstead. No single metaphor or theme runs through these items, but collectively they provide a constellation of aristocratic and female-gendered associations. In particular, the careful use of brilliant and precious objects of silver, gold and gems is notable, even when these objects were hidden from view within containers.

Other objects clearly had much longer biographies. The ‘keep-sakes’ of bag collections, which included functioning brooches (as in grave 18 at Harford Farm), may suggest the curation of objects important and valued in relation to dead persons. The choice not to wear such an item may have been governed by its mnemonic associations with a previous owner. In fact, these objects are better explained as gifts or heirlooms rather than objects appropriate for the display of the deceased’s personal identity. Possibly older still than these keep-sakes was the composite disc brooch from grave 11, perhaps over fifty years old when buried. It is also an object rarely found outside Kent, where these brooches were produced. It was repaired at some stage in its use, evidenced by the runic script and decoration added to the back. It may have only recently come into the possession of the Norfolk community among which it was buried, but it seems equally likely to have been a valued object for the household, associated with the history and identity of the social group, and not simply a personal trinket. The decision to place such an item with the dead must have been a statement not simply about the personal identity of the deceased but also about the wider kin group and household, and their social memories. This argument is sustained when we realise that such investments of wealth in graves may have accompanied only certain funerals, perhaps at times of crisis, stress or competition between groups, when such statements were necessary to affirm links to the past (see Stoodley 1999a). Consequently, those buried with artefacts may not
necessarily have been of any higher status than the unfurnished or poorly furnished graves around them: it may have been the timing of the mortuary rite that governed the choice of displaying or concealing these items with the corpse.

**Conclusion: rethinking grave goods**

In this chapter we have challenged the traditional conception of grave goods as symbolising a static identity held by the deceased upon death and have attempted to overcome the usual perception of grave goods as ‘reflecting’ social identity directly. Instead, we have suggested that grave goods had a range of mnemonic roles. Focusing upon brooches and weapons, we have seen how memories were created for the dead through the creation of an image in the grave (image production) and also the referencing of earlier interments to emphasise both similarities and differences (image reproduction). Moving into the seventh century, we recognised that image production became complemented by an increasing value placed on the biographies of specific objects. Rather than relationships with specific individuals, these objects could have been more, not less, significant in commemoration through their circulation in society and only occasional deposition with the cadavers of select individuals. The ‘final-phase’ burial is often regarded as the end of ‘pagan’ burial rites and the ‘superstitious’ beginnings of new Christian funerary mores. Yet this discussion suggests that, while this may in part be the case, what was changing was the relationship between death, memory and material culture.


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