
5 The Burials

The total number of graves recorded by the excavators was 117, but of these only 113 contained bones included in the report on the skeletal material (see [Section 8 – The Human Bones](#)). Three skeletons were too fragmentary to be lifted and one proved to be part of a later burial. Within this description, only the latter (SK36) and SK37, which could not be phased, are excluded from this general discussion.

The remaining 115 burials included 44 attributable to BP1 and BP2 (P2a), with 14 of these definitely belonging to BP1, being sealed by the earliest midden layer (C175). Thirty belonged to BP3 (P2b), sealed by the deep midden deposit (C84), and a further two could only be ascribed to BP1–3 and one to BP2–3. Of 37 burials within the church (BP4–5), 14 were definitely of BP5, being cut into deposits post-dating the enlargement of the east end of the church. One burial, the fragmentary number 70, could only be attributed to BP3–5.

Separate reports (below) provide analyses of both the timber and the methods of construction employed in the manufacture of wooden coffins, as well as of the skeletal material. [Illustration 30](#) (see [Section 8.2.2 – Age and sex](#); and [Section 8.4 – Pathology](#)) shows the distribution of skeletons by sex and pathology for Periods 2a, 2b and 3. This section exists to draw together a few pieces of general information about the burials. Full details and illustrations of each burial are in the site archive.

Evidence of wooden coffins was found in a maximum of only 23 of the 117 graves (c 20%), this

evidence ranging from extensive timber remains to the survival of varying numbers of iron nails (in the case of SK40 (BP3), only one nail, which may well have been redeposited). The use of coffins does not appear to have become common until the late 14th century, after the construction of the late medieval church, with 17 (44%) of the BP4–5 burials containing evidence of coffins, against only four or five (16%) of those of BP3, and just one (2%) of the earliest two burial phases. The apparent marked increase in coffin burials occurring within the church of the late 14th to mid-16th century may reveal more about the social and economic status of people buried in the Lady Aisle of the High Kirk than of a change in burial fashion. Most of the other graves contained varying numbers of copper-alloy pins and/or lace tags. These items suggested that bodies were normally buried in shrouds and/or in some form of bag or sack fastened with draw-strings. This pattern of the increasing use of coffins from the late medieval period onwards is also noted in the results from the 1988–97 excavations undertaken within the nave of Glasgow Cathedral ([Driscoll 2002](#)).

Grave-goods, ie items deliberately buried with bodies, were found in just two graves (SK43 and SK31), both from BP3 (P2b). In each case the remains of a pilgrim's wood and iron baton were recovered (see below). Coins were found in the back-filled material in four graves (SK8, SK18, SK19 and SK22), all BP4–5 (P3).