

# Mysterious sailor unearthed by Cranfield archaeologists

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The 'Made in Gosport, 1794 halfpenny. More photos are available on request.

(PhysOrg.com) -- Mystery surrounds a sailor who was unearthed as part of Cranfield University's dig at Royal Hospital Haslar this summer.

Dr Andrew Shortland and his team from Cranfield's Centre for Archaeological and Forensic Analysis have been working at the Gosport site for three years.

Two metal discs that were probably placed over his eyes before burial were found near the skeleton; one was a medal that featured a kneeling slave engraved with the phrase 'Am I not a man and a brother?' and the

other was a halfpenny with the picture of a ship and the words 'Made in Gosport, 1794'. Unlike the rest of the burials that were set out all aligned one way, this particular sailor was placed at the far end of the grave yard and out of alignment.

The area to the south-west of the building was used to bury sailors and marines that died in the hospital from 1753. It is thought the grounds could have up to 15,000 burials.

Dr Shortland said: "We believe the kneeling slave coin was bought by people to show their support for the abolition of slavery so we think we have found a very earlier abolitionist sailor.

"Some people believe coins were put on the eyelids to keep them closed but the most interesting reason involves a belief that seems to stem from Greek mythology. The Greeks used the coins to pay to get over the River Styx on their journey to the underworld."

The team started excavating the site owned by the MOD in 2007. Dr Shortland said: "The site is extremely interesting and we wanted to find out more about the many young men who died in active duty for the Royal Navy and were buried here.

"We have found several amputated limbs buried with different sailors, but this is the most mysterious find we have come across so far."

Provided by Cranfield University

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