

## Skeleton found near Cambridge evidence of first Christian burial in England

March 16 2012, by Bob Yirka

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Anglo-Saxon bed burial with gold cross. Image (c) Cambridge University

(PhysOrg.com) -- A British archeological team has unearthed the 1,400-year old remains of a sixteen year old girl buried with a gold and garnet cross on her chest. And because they also found with her, an iron chatelaine (belt hook) and purse, still attached to her leather belt with polished rocks and a knife, they believe she lived during a time when Britain was in the process of moving from paganism to Christianity.

The [burial site](#) is approximately three miles south of [Cambridge](#) in the village of Trumpington Meadows and the research team believes the remains are from a period between 650 and 680AD. They were found due to digging for a new housing development.

Adding to the story is the fact that three other skeletons were found nearby. Two were of females, also apparently in their teens and another whose gender has not been identified, but appears to have been someone who was slightly older than the rest of the group. Though it's not been proved as yet, it appears likely the whole group succumbed around the same time to disease, probably the plague.

It's the small (3.5cm) cross the young girl was wearing when laid to rest that most excites historians though. Because of its quality, it's likely the girl came from a rich or noble family. The introduction of [Christianity](#) from that period is believed to have started with the wealthy, which would add further credence to the idea that the young girl came from a family of means.

The young girl was also laid to rest, literally, in her bed, in the grave, another holdover from pagan times. Though the wood had long rotted away, the iron frame was still very much in evidence.

Another reason researchers and historians are so excited about the find is because of its rarity. Prior to finding this new burial site, only one other example of a person being buried with both a cross and bed have been found. The cross itself, the experts say, is an excellent example of the high quality of Anglo-Saxon metalwork, and adds more evidence to contradict those who call that time in European history, the dark ages. Thus far, the cross is only the fifth of its kind ever found in the UK.

Also, because the loops on the back of the cross are smooth and shiny, it appears the young girl, whoever she was, wore the cross most, if not all

of the time. At her burial, it appears the cross was actually sewn into her garment.

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