

THE LANG PARK TEETH MYSTERY: FEATURE 33, UQASU'S LANG PARK SALVAGE

THE SHALLOW GRAVE...



Feature 33, Lang Park

Feature 33 was a coffin measuring just 92cm x 30cm, found in the south-east corner of the Anglican section of the cemetery. The preservation of post-cranial skeletal elements was poor, most of the bones having dissolved into the grey clay that filled the coffin. There were a few cranial fragments, however the mystery began when the teeth were counted. There were 36 - far too many even for an adult human... What were they doing there?

EXHIBIT A



A selection of the mystery teeth...

As can be seen in the diagram (above right), the younger stage of development (around 3 years) fitted with the stature estimates, but the older stage is around 12 years, by which age a normal person is too big to fit in a 92cm coffin. We turned therefore to DNA analysis in our quest for answers... By amplifying a section of mitochondrial DNA unique to each individual, we hoped to identify the number of people present and their degree of relatedness to each other. Despite poor preservation, we were able to extract DNA from several of the teeth (right). Analysis is ongoing.

THE VERDICT??

Morphological analysis suggests that two people were buried in Feature 33, one a child of 3-5 years, and the other a 12 year-old. The coffin size suggests that only the younger child could have been buried in F33. DNA analysis is promising, but there is more work to be done. So what has happened? Has an older child been exhumed, and their decomposed remains reburied with their younger sibling? Is this the grave of an abnormally small 12-year old? But why then would they be buried with milk teeth not their own? Or have the teeth of an older person been buried with a small child?

Perhaps some mysteries are not meant to be solved...

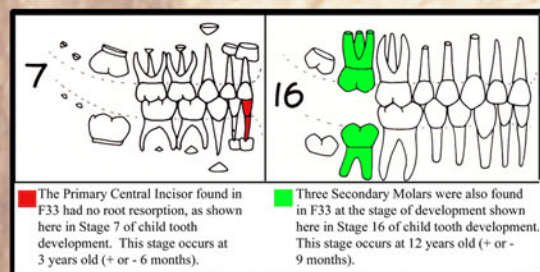
From August 2001 to May 2002, UQASU (University of Queensland Archaeological Services Unit) conducted an archaeological salvage of the human remains buried beneath the current Suncorp Metway Stadium redevelopment. Originally North Brisbane Cemetery, the site was Brisbane's major burial ground between 1843 and 1875.

Over 400 individuals were recovered from the site, among them many thought to be children, judging from the small size of their coffins. On September 19th and 20th, 2001, another small coffin, seemingly just like the others, was added to the tally...

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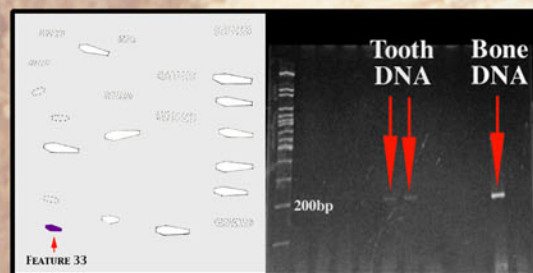
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MORE THAN ONE SUSPECT?



Conflicting stages of tooth development

UNRAVELLING THE CLUES...



Traces left at the scene...