

From the *Transactions* of the
Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

On Certain Crania disinterred at St. Werburgh's, Church, Bristol

by J. Beddoe
1878-79, Vol. 3, 79-82

© The Society and the Author(s)

ON CERTAIN CRANIA
DISINTERRED AT ST. WERBURGH'S, BRISTOL.

By JOHN BEDDOE, M.D., F.R.S.

Read at Bristol, 30th July, 1878.

IT IS noteworthy that comparatively few measurements of mediæval and recent English skulls have been published, though of ancient Saxon, Keltic, or pre-Keltic ones we possess very many, carefully detailed. The modern English Skulls found in the collections of craniologists have belonged, for the most part, to malefactors or to paupers; and it is more than doubtful whether they at all nearly represent, in size and development at least, the average or typical national form.

The opportunity afforded by the demolition of St. Werburgh's Church and the clearing of its grave-yard was, therefore, a valuable one. This was pointed out to me by Dr. David Davies, and through his kind introduction, and by the permission and assistance of Mr. Wm. Gregory, I was enabled to see and measure upwards of 50 Skulls from St. Werburgh's. Of these, 36 were taken from below the vaults which underlay the floor of the Church. The old Church of St. Werburgh dated from Edward the Second's reign,¹ but was, to a great extent, re-built in 1761. These 36 Skulls must all, therefore, have been prior to 1761, and many of them appeared to be, and I have no doubt were, of much greater antiquity, if not truly mediæval.

I measured also all the Crania that were obtained in a perfect state from the open church-yard. They were 17 in number, not including one which had evidently belonged to a negro, and a few Skulls of children. These were all comparatively recent.

¹ This refers to the lately demolished church, but there can be no doubt that a church had existed on the same site from pre-Norman times.—
ED.

The measurements taken were but few, as I had not leisure nor opportunity for elaborate observations. They were—the greatest length from the globella backwards, the greatest breadth wherever found, whether temporal or parietal, and the height from the anterior margin of the foramen magnum.

There was a notable difference between the two series, the older heads being, for the most part, quite unlike the more recent and unlike the Bristolian heads of to-day, so far as I can judge. Dr. Davies suggested to me that they indicated some remains of an early type, neither Keltic nor Teutonic, but possibly Ligurian; and I thought the suggestion plausible. The Skulls in question were short, broad, rounded, rather flat, with rather small frontal region, but otherwise well filled. Of the 36, 13 were decidedly brachycephalic, and 3 more yielded the neutral index of 80, whereas out of the 17 church-yard Skulls not one was brachycephalic, and only 2 neutral. I set down 28 as masculine, and only 8 as feminine; herein probably committing some errors, as I know no reason why male Skulls should have preponderated to so great an extent. It is possible, therefore, that I have put down the average dimensions of the males a little too low, through the admission of a few females among them. With this proviso I give the following averages:—

OLD SKULLS.

	Length.	Breadth.	Height.	Long.Index.	Alt. Index.
28 MALES	7.346	5.887	5.36	80.1	72.9
8 FEMALES	6.956	5.56	5.10	79.9	73.2
36 (Both Sexes)	7.26	5.815	5.30	80	73

Of the more recent, or church-yard Skulls, 10 appeared to be masculine and 7 feminine. They exhibited some of the types which are common in this neighbourhood at the present day, but of the small round type which had attracted the attention of Dr. Davies and myself among the 36, there was not one distinct example among the 17.

RECENT SKULLS.

	Length.	Breadth.	Height.	Long.Index.	Alt. Index.
10 MALES	7.58	5.94	5.40	78.1	71.2
7 FEMALES	7.18	5.33	5.15	74.2	71.7
17 (Both Sexes)	7.43	5.69	5.30	76.58	71.3.

There were two or three large and well-developed Skulls among the 10 males, and the averages yielded, allowing for the thickness of the integuments of living heads, and estimating it according to Broca's rules, were somewhat larger than those I got from 80 of our contemporary Bristolians, mostly belonging to the working classes. The proportion of breadth to length was also somewhat greater in the Skulls, but this excess was reduced to only $\frac{1}{2}$ per cent. when the females were included; and 17 is but a small number for averaging.

I am not aware of any reason for supposing that the sleepers at St. Werburgh's differed much in race or rank from the occupants of other Bristol grave-yards. Possibly the fact of their having been buried in or under the Church may indicate some slight superiority of rank or class in the 36, and we know that the upper classes have usually the largest heads. On the other hand, M. Broca—it is impossible to talk long about anthropology without referring to our great master, Broca—examining several series of Skulls from Parisian cemeteries, of various dates, found a tendency towards increase of size in the more modern heads, shewn chiefly in a larger development of the frontal lobe. He did not observe any great change in the proportion of breadth to length. But in the case of St. Werburgh's we find an increase in length with a decrease, absolute or comparative, in breadth. Such a change is, *primâ facie*, owing to an admixture of blood, and judging by the eye, I should say it had been due to the immigration of West-country people who altered and confused the old Bristolian type. The great breadth of that old type is difficult to account for. I have some conjectures on the subject, but do not feel justified in airing them at present. I will only say that, if Teutonic, it does not much resemble the Anglo-Saxon type of Davis and Thurnam; and that if descended from the British brachycephal, it must have been much modified and emasculated by the influence of urban civilization

LIST OF SKULLS FROM BELOW VAULTS OF
ST. WERBURGH'S.

LENGTH, maximum, from prominence of glabella

BREADTH, maximum, wherever found.

HEIGHT, maximum, from anterior border of foramen magnum.

L.	B.	H.		L.	B.	H.	
1-7	6.2	?		20-7.55	5.8	5.5	Ellip. Sax. type, <i>not very old?</i>
2-7.6	6	?		21-7.6	6.1	5.15	
3-7.1	5.7	?	Fem.	22-6.8	5.9	5.2	Ligur?
4-7.6	5.95	?		23-7.2	5.75	5	
5-7.7	5.9	?		24-7.25	5.7	5.5	Flat-sided Phœ- nozyg.
6-6.8	5.8	?		25-6.8	5.8	5	Like 22
7-7	5.6	?	Fem.	26-7.15	5.6	5.3	Fem.
8-7.75	5.9	?		27-7.9	6.1	5.25	
9-7.3	5.75	?		28-6.7	5.5	4.9	Fem.
10-7	5.1	5.1		29-7.15	5.8	5.85	
11-7.2	5.7	5.5		30-6.8	5.6	5	Fem.
12-7.3	5.7	5.7		31-7.4	6	5.6	Saxon Platyc.
13-6.7	5.3	5.1	Fem.	32-6.3	5.7	5.2	M? Teeth worn flat.
14-7.6	6	5.6		33-7.4	5.8	5.5	Kelt. Narrow fr.
15-6.7	5.6	5	Fem.	34-7.5	5.6	5.3	Fem.
16-7.5	5.8	5.35		35-7.2	5.8	5.2	M.?
17-7.5	6	5.2		36-7.5	6	5.7	Fine full Teut-
18-7.9	6	5.2					
19-7.9	6	5.4	Gaelic type?				

ABERRANT SKULL from below vaults, not included in averages—

Length, 8.2. Breadth, 5.3. Height, 5.3. Flat-sided, with prominent brows and occiput, and seems to belong to some other race—possibly Spanish.

Church-yard Skulls from St. Werburgh's; comparatively or positively recent.

L.	B.	H.		L.	B.	H.	
1-7.7	5.9	5.3		10-7.8	6	5.7	
2-7.3	5.15	5.1	Fem.	11-7.5	5.8	5.35	
3-6.8	5.15	4.8	Fem.	12-7.2	6	5.3	
4-7.5	5.8	5.5		13-7.9	6.2	5.7	
5-7	5.5	5	Fem.	14-7.4	6.1	5.7	
6-7.3	5.5	4.9	F?	15-7.9	6.1	5.2	
7-7	5.15	5.15	F?	16-7.6	5.7	5.4	
8-7.3	5.8	5.6	F?	17-7.6	5.2	5.2	
9-7.5	5.7	5.25	F?				