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Keywords
Excavations, John's Island, Charleston County, South Carolina, Archeology

Disciplines
Anthropology

Publisher
The South Carolina Institute of Archeology and Anthropology--University of South Carolina

Comments
In USC online Library catalog at: http://www.sc.edu/library/

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JOHN'S ISLAND BURIAL
(38CH68)

by

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Research Manuscript Series, No. 24

Prepared by the
INSTITUTE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA
MAY 1972
JOHN'S ISLAND BURIAL  
(38CH68)

by Richard Polhemus

The excavation of an irrigation ditch on the Bryers Plantation at the south end of John's Island disturbed a grave containing the remains of four individuals and associated trade goods. Mrs. Laurie Townsend and her father, Robert Berry, the present owner, discovered the grave, on February 6, 1971, and recovered the disturbed skeletal material and many glass beads from the back dirt pile. Dr. Robert L. Stephenson was contacted by Mrs. Townsend about the find and visited the site on May 24. Only a small portion of the burial pit extended beyond the limits of the irrigation ditch and the relative position of the four individuals and the associated material could not be determined in the field.

An examination of the material, kindly loaned to the Institute for study by Mrs. Townsend, provided several suggestions concerning the mode of the burial and the date of the burial. The material was cleaned and catalogued by the Institute staff prior to examination by myself and Dr. Ted A. Rathbun of the Department of Anthropology and Sociology.

The skeletal material was examined by Dr. Rathbun to determine the number of individuals, age, sex, and any other pertinent information represented by fragments in the collection. The following summary has been derived from his notes on the material.

INDIVIDUAL 1  Completeness: Fragmentary  
Age: Adult  
Sex: Female  
Stature: 105-107 cm (± 4 cm)  
Condition: Charred areas on most bones. Distribution of charred areas indicated that individual was not articulated at the time charring took place.

INDIVIDUAL 2  Completeness: Fragmentary  
Age: 30-40 years  
Sex: Male  
Condition: No sign of charring.

INDIVIDUAL 3  Completeness: Very fragmentary  
Age: Adult  
Sex: Possibly male  
Condition: No sign of charring.

INDIVIDUAL 4  Completeness: Very fragmentary  
Age: Infant  
Sex: Indeterminate  
Condition: A few teeth and skull fragments. No sign of charring.

Although the skeletal material was broken up during excavation of the irrigation ditch several suggestions may be made upon the relative
disposition of the individuals in the grave. Mrs. Townsend described
the grave as being two and one-half to three feet deep with the skeleton
curled up on its left side with the head to the west. A large number of
glass beads were concentrated in the neck and chest area. The individual
described by Mrs. Townsend would appear to be Individual 2. Individual
1 was a secondary burial partially burned elsewhere as indicated by
charred areas on the bones. It is not possible to determine the dispo­
sition of Individuals 3 and 4 although the small number of bones repre­
sented suggest additional secondary burials.

Associated with the skeletal material are 1,127 glass trade beads
and 29 iron square wrought nails. The square wrought nails all bear
fragments of preserved wood from planks three-fourths inch thick indicat­
ing a box or other container was present, possibly containing the
secondary burials. The glass trade beads are all of types prevalent in
the second quarter of the eighteenth century. Both wire wound and tube
drawn forms are present in the collection. The bead forms present are
listed below. Kenneth Kidd's bead classification system was utilized in
classifying the beads.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FORM</th>
<th>COLOR</th>
<th>SIZE</th>
<th>NUMBER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wire wound faceted</td>
<td>Translucent pale blue</td>
<td>2-4 mm</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire wound spherical</td>
<td>Opaque black</td>
<td>&gt;10 mm</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire wound faceted</td>
<td>Clear oyster white</td>
<td>&gt;10 mm</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire wound spherical</td>
<td>Clear oyster white</td>
<td>&gt;10 mm</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wire wound faceted</td>
<td>Translucent light gold</td>
<td>&gt;10 mm</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn seed</td>
<td>Translucent bright blue</td>
<td>2-4 mm</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white</td>
<td>4-6 mm</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>366</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Translucent pale blue</td>
<td>&gt;10 mm</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Translucent bright blue</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Translucent bright mint green</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque red exterior with clear mint green core</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Translucent robin's egg blue</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque black with three spiral white stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Translucent bright blue</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque black with three red stripes centered on three white stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white with three mint green stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn spherical</td>
<td>Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three bright blue stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn oblong</td>
<td>Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three blue stripes</td>
<td>4-6 mm</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn oblong</td>
<td>Opaque white with three red stripes centered on three blue stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tube drawn oblong</td>
<td>Opaque white with three bright blue stripes</td>
<td>6-10 mm</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The John's Island Burial was composed of a primary inhumation of an adult Indian male in conjunction with three secondary burials and a quantity of glass beads. The types of glass beads present in the Indian burial suggest that the burial took place during the second quarter of the eighteenth century. The size and number of iron square wrought nails indicate a wooden box was present in the burial pit to contain one or more of the secondary burials. It is not possible to attribute the John's Island Burial to a particular group of Indians at the present time. Future work in the area may provide other more diagnostic features which will help determine which group made the burial.

The burial from John's Island provides one of the few samples of historic trade goods recorded for Charleston County and only through the interest and cooperation of concerned individuals could the remains be recovered and studied. It is through the help of concerned individuals in all parts of the state that finds such as that reported by Mrs. Townsend can be brought to the attention of the archeologist and properly recorded.