Epilogue

Social identity is a term which has been employed by archaeologists in a variety of different ways over the last forty or more years. It refers not only to individual perceptions but also to the external categorisation of individuals and groups. As a result, social identities are a nexus of pluralistic interpersonal and intergroup relationships, which change over time (Williams and Sayer, 2009: 2). In the mortuary context these identities were mediated via funerary events, and so no two events could be the same. Different actors contributed to a funeral that was meaningful to them, and which reflected their experience and their outlook. The specific contribution from individuals depended on their social influence, which was in turn mediated by their identity and was reliant on the chronological context because social attitudes and relationships are determined by an individual's situation and circumstances. The resultant expression of mortuary identities was inherently complex and multi-faceted; but most of all the expression of identity was inherently relational.

It is vital to remember that 'the dead did not bury themselves' (Parker Pearson, 1993: 203; 1999: 3), because the decisions and attitudes which contributed to the aesthetics of display and the expression of the deceased's identity were selected by a unique mortuary party within a historically contingent event. The mortuary events were knitted together by a group of people who had been fragmented following the death of one of their members (Metcalf and Huntington, 1991). The decisions that this community made dictated the mode of burial – cremation or inhumation – and the location of the grave within a cemetery (assuming it was in one), as well as the orientation of the grave and its relationship with earlier graves and the use of markers, feature or structures, the inclusion of objects, the dress a person wore, how they were positioned and whether they were alone. The mortuary party also dictated the length of the mortuary event, the stories told, and how the person was remembered. These decisions were directed by the participants and

influenced by their approaches and attitudes, and so each event was the result of the contemporary societal context created by such factors as local and regional politics, religion, family and wealth. Material and social things like dress, weapons, wealth, children and the past were reflections of that contemporary attitude. This complexity is hard to see in the archaeological record, because individual approaches to life course, gender or status cannot capture that relational *Zeitgeist*. It is vital therefore that this study proposes a holistic approach, creating a relational mortuary archaeology in which the spatial location of a grave was as important as the chronological date, the objects and the gender display within. Indeed, subtle questions like attitudes to gender in the past cannot be understood unless the social context is first explored.

In the introductory sections of this volume we discussed the materiality of shoes. This discussion revealed different attitudes towards shoes or dress mediated by class, status, gender, life course and individual or group expression. Indeed, social science understands that our contemporary attitude towards gender, for example, is mediated by generation, personal experience, education, class and regional or national situation (Kopytoff, 1986). It is puzzling therefore that archaeology continues to explore social questions in binary or chronological fashion. In the case studies presented in the book, the early Anglo-Saxons did not have one attitude towards status or gender, age or identity. Moreover, social attitudes and therefore the resultant funerary expression were dictated by different attitudes towards children, women, men, wealth, ancestors or the past. Importantly, different attitudes towards these things could be seen in different funerals, among different groups from the same cultural and chronological contexts. In short, to understand the social dimensions of mortuary expression we need to explore difference in terms of 'social class', attitude and aesthetics, and not via two-dimensional entities like social status based on wealth. Today, attitudes dictated by background or family might influence someone's attitudes, determining things like the age when you have children and how to approach books, marriage, student loans, family history or social obligations. For example, the middle classes might move for work, whereas those with a more regional background might remain near home to be close to an extended family network (Carsten 2004). If your parents moved for university, for a job or a career, you might be more willing to do so yourself. I am not suggesting that the past contained differences comparable to contemporary social classes, but that the past contained equally complex social institutions. I am proposing that background, attitude and approaches to key social institutions varied according to a person's situation, and approaches to these institutions would have been expressed differently by different funerary parties.

Early Anglo-Saxon archaeology has the advantage of a small number of texts dating to the seventh century. In many ways, these muddy the waters more than they aid interpretation. Nonetheless the holistic method proposed in this volume combines an exploration of space, the immediate or more ancient past, gravegoods, chronology, grave features, mortuary aesthetics, skeletal archaeology, gender and life course to look at *leitmotifs* in cemetery construction and narrative creation. It explores mortuary technologies specific to the period and looks at the local adaptation and use within over one hundred sites. This approach is equally relevant to the mortuary context of the prehistoric Levant, post-medieval USA or the Roman East. In short, the aesthetics of burial, the use of mortuary technologies and their local adaptation, and the exploration of mortuary party attitudes can reveal a complex pluralistic and multi-dimensional past no matter the context to which it is applied.

This book has built on a series of published papers to propose an original approach to horizontal stratigraphy that builds on the wider contemporary archaeological context to explore local history and family narratives; its focus is on the holistic social context at the heart of the ancient community (Sayer and Dickinson, 2013; Schiffels *et al.*, 2016; Sayer and Wienhold, 2012; Sayer, 2009; 2010; 2014). This approach matters because understanding that community tells us about status and dynamism, since community is both the agent of change and at the same time the conservative and traditional. Creating a place in archaeological dialogue for community, family and kinship is vital if we are going to fully utilise the data available from emerging technologies such as the exploration of ancient DNA. As technology becomes more sophisticated so must archaeological approaches to the social situations and social dynamics of past peoples.