

H I S T O R Y  
M Y S T E R Y

**WHO WERE THE  
RICCALL SKELETONS?**

**T E A C H I N G**

**L E A R N I N G**

The **History Mystery** series from **icHistory** are excellent for the teaching of ...

- Critical thinking.
- Historical inquiry.
- Understand that our understanding of the past is always evolving.
- Personal bias ... are students prepared to let go of their original hypothesis?
- Corroboration.
- Source evaluation.
- Discussion and debate.
- Cross pollination of ideas and theories.
- Understanding the importance of shared / sharing knowledge.

# THE MYSTERY

In 1956, the remains of 46 people were discovered on the bank of the River Ouse.

The river was near to the village of Riccall, in Yorkshire.

Some of the skeletons were complete, some were part skeletons.



# HYPOTHESES

At this point - brainstorm the mystery of the skeletons.

Some things to consider ...

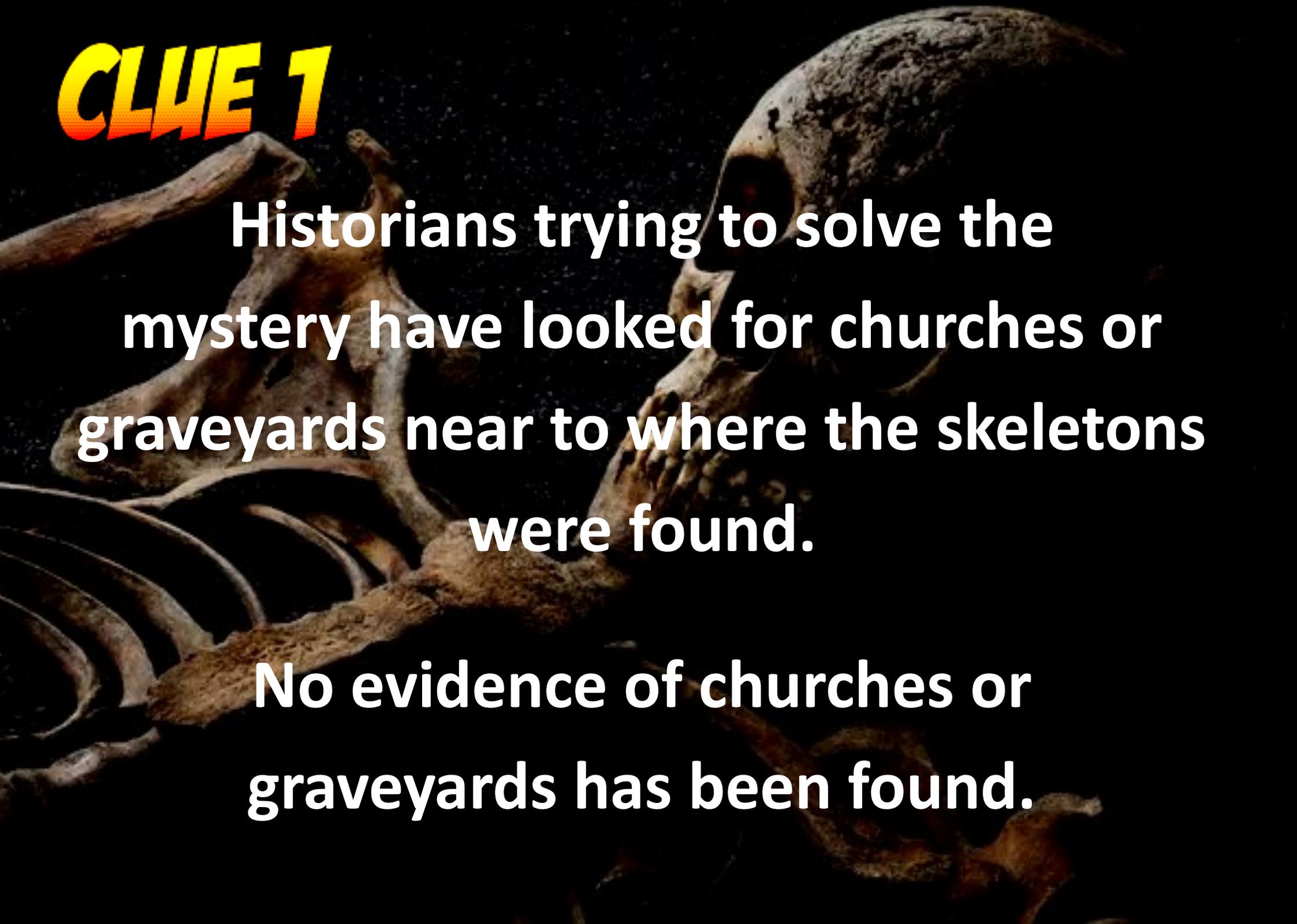
- Who could these people have been?
- How did they die?
- How did they all end up ( dead ) in the same place?

Your original thoughts about what happened are your **hypothesis**.

At this stage, your hypothesis is probably based largely on guesswork.

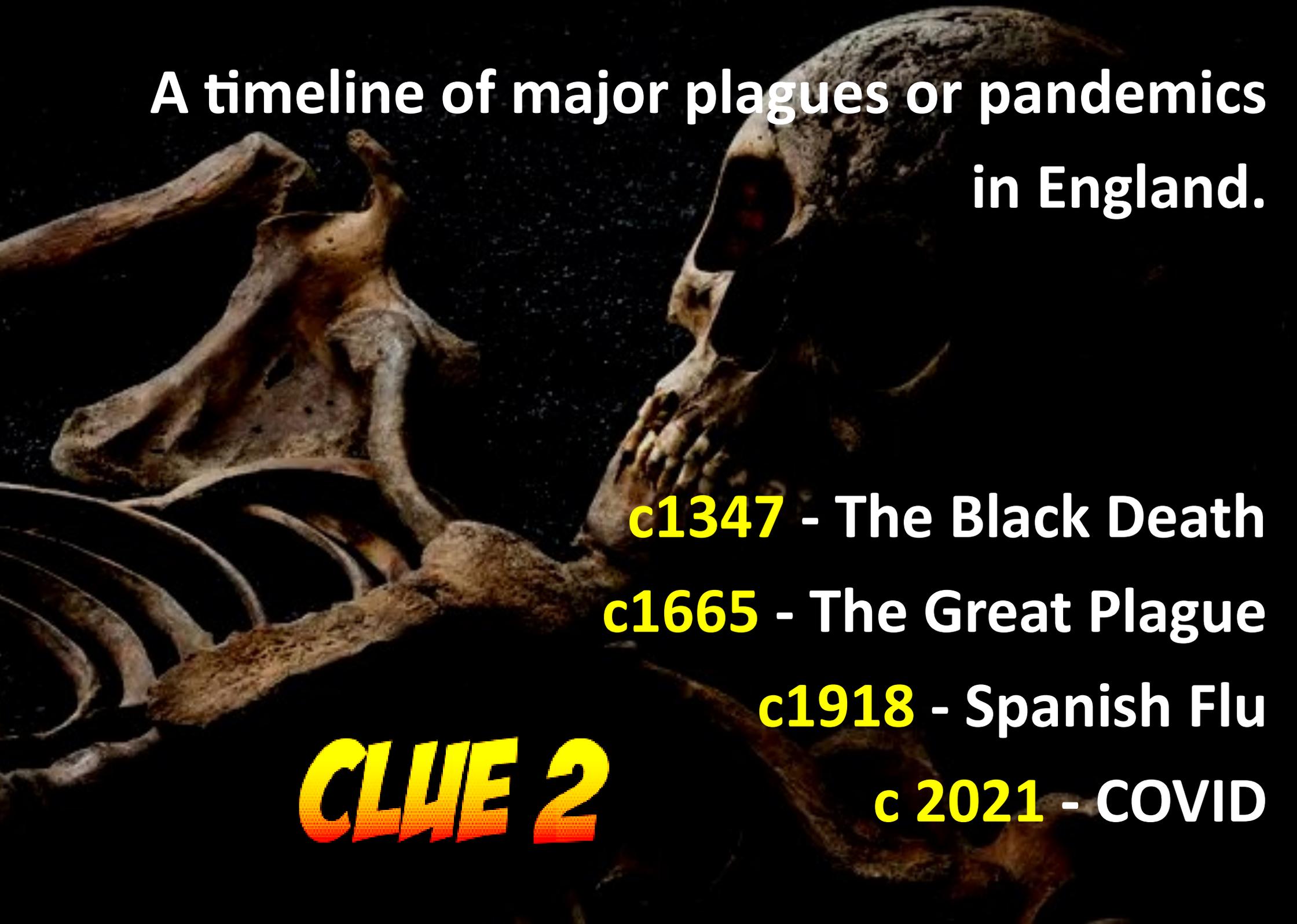
You will need to study further evidence and do more detective work to be able to **prove** or **disprove** your hypothesis.

# **CLUE 1**



**Historians trying to solve the mystery have looked for churches or graveyards near to where the skeletons were found.**

**No evidence of churches or graveyards has been found.**



**A timeline of major plagues or pandemics  
in England.**

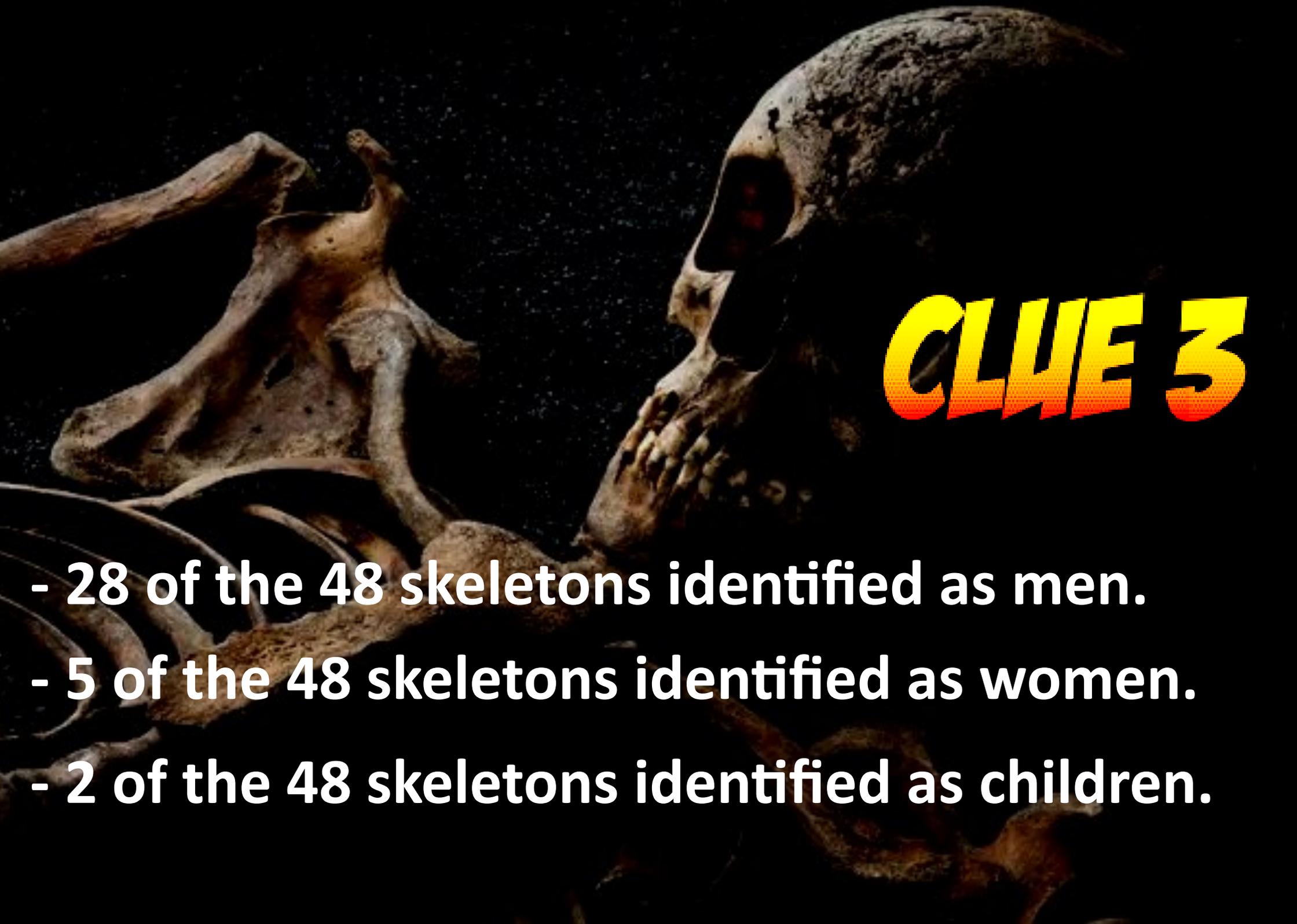
**c1347** - The Black Death

**c1665** - The Great Plague

**c1918** - Spanish Flu

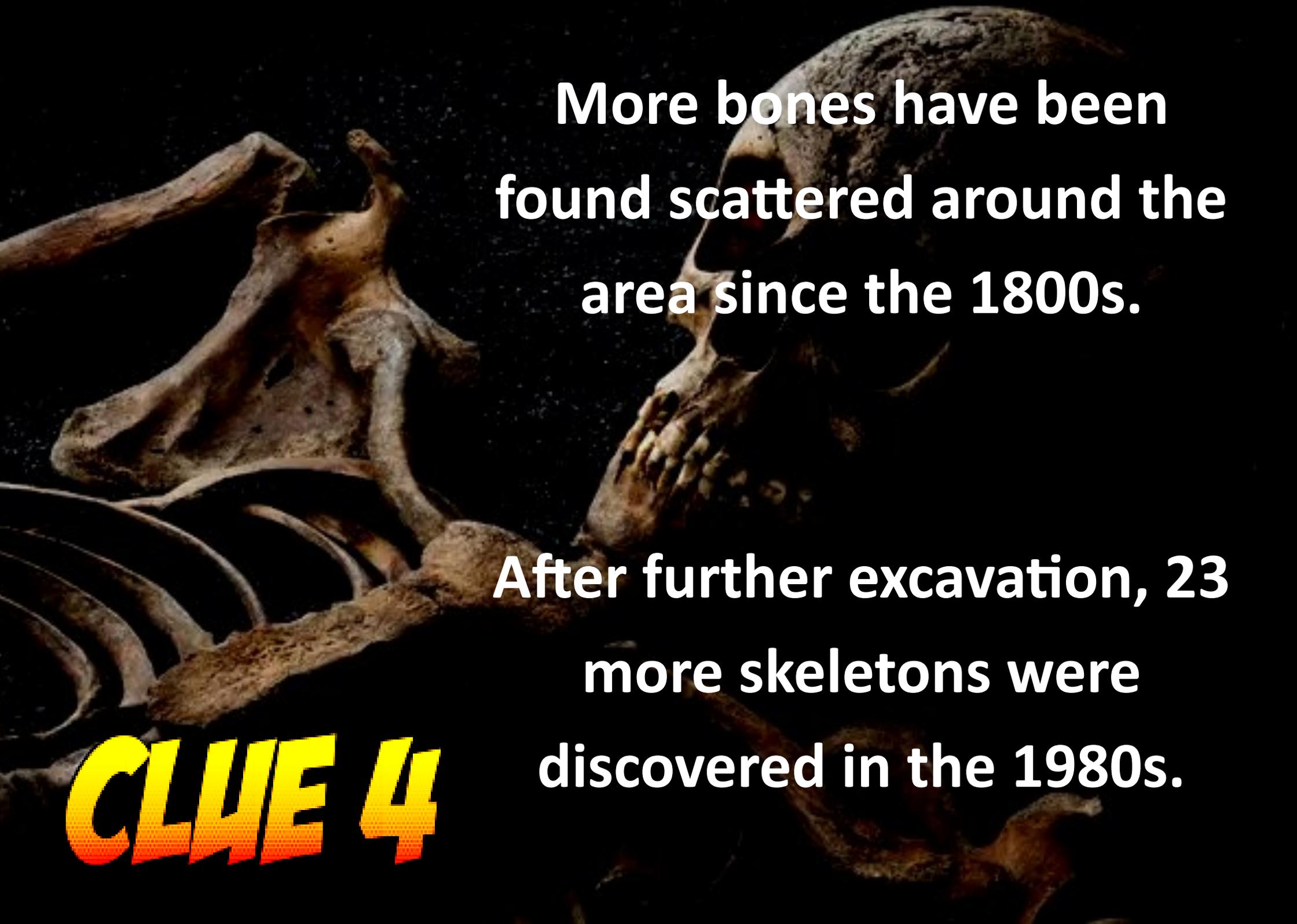
**c 2021** - COVID

**CLUE 2**



# CLUE 3

- 28 of the 48 skeletons identified as men.
- 5 of the 48 skeletons identified as women.
- 2 of the 48 skeletons identified as children.

A close-up photograph of a human skull and other skeletal remains, including a ribcage and a long bone, scattered on a dark, textured surface. The skull is the central focus, shown in profile, with its eye sockets and nasal cavity clearly visible. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the texture of the bone against the dark background.

More bones have been found scattered around the area since the 1800s.

After further excavation, 23 more skeletons were discovered in the 1980s.

**CLUE 4**

Many of the bones showed  
signs of trauma.



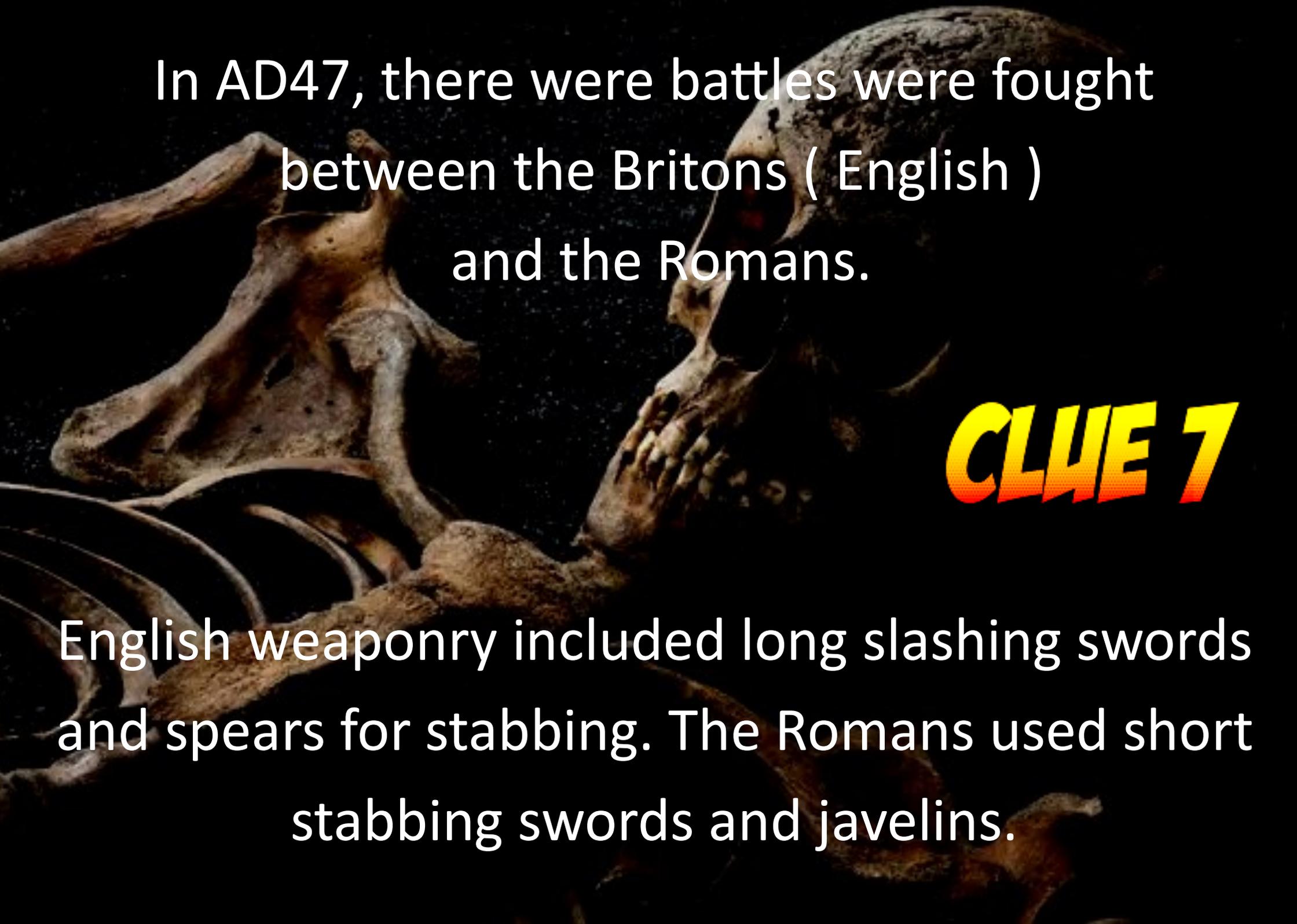
This included bones with deep cuts and  
many were broken or totally shattered.



# CLUE 6

In AD 71 the Romans decided to quell local skirmishes in the north of England and the Ninth Legion marched on the York area, choosing to settle in the marshy meadowlands near the river seeing it as a suitable site on which to build a fortress ... The River Ouse was crucial for transportation of men and supplies to the settlement from the North Sea.

[www.jorvik.co.uk/roman-york/](http://www.jorvik.co.uk/roman-york/)



In AD47, there were battles were fought  
between the Britons ( English )  
and the Romans.

**CLUE 7**

English weaponry included long slashing swords  
and spears for stabbing. The Romans used short  
stabbing swords and javelins.

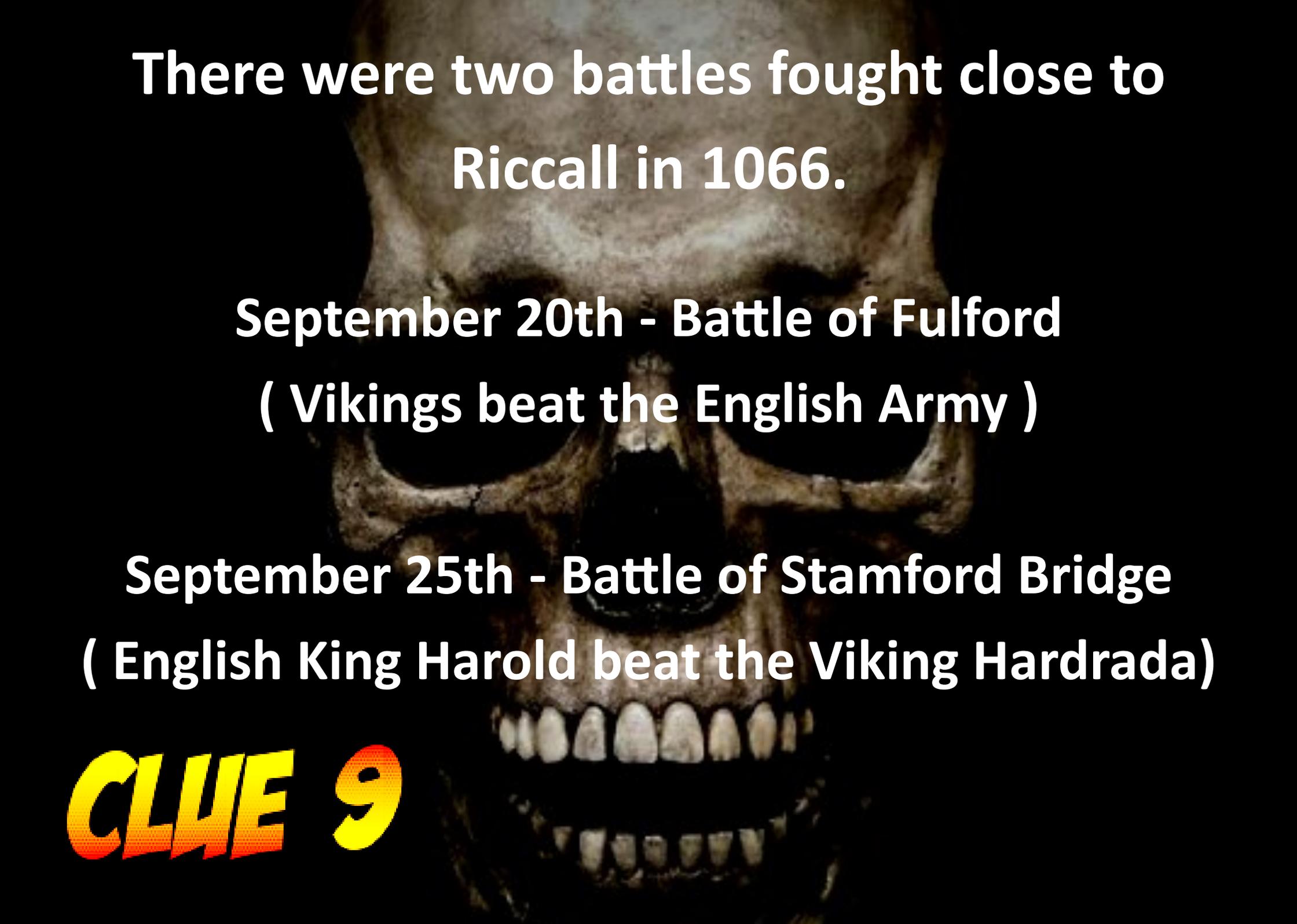
*'King Harald of Norway sailed up the River Ouse towards York with 300 ships. King Harold of England was in the south but went northwards by day and by night as quickly as he could ...*

*... Then King Harold and his army went over the bridge and killed King Hardrada and large numbers of Norwegians. The surviving Norwegians fled. The English pursued them and attacked them fiercely until they reached their ships. Some were drowned and some were burned and some killed in various ways so that few survived. The King (Harold) let the survivors go home in 24 ships. '*

**CLUE 8**

**Anglo Saxon Chronicle - 1066**

**Written by English monks after the Battle of Stamford Bridge.**



**There were two battles fought close to  
Riccall in 1066.**

**September 20th - Battle of Fulford  
( Vikings beat the English Army )**

**September 25th - Battle of Stamford Bridge  
( English King Harold beat the Viking Hardrada )**

**CLUE 9**

# **CLUE 10**

**In 1066, both the Anglo - Saxons ( English )  
and the Vikings fought battles using ...**

**Swords + Battle Axes.**

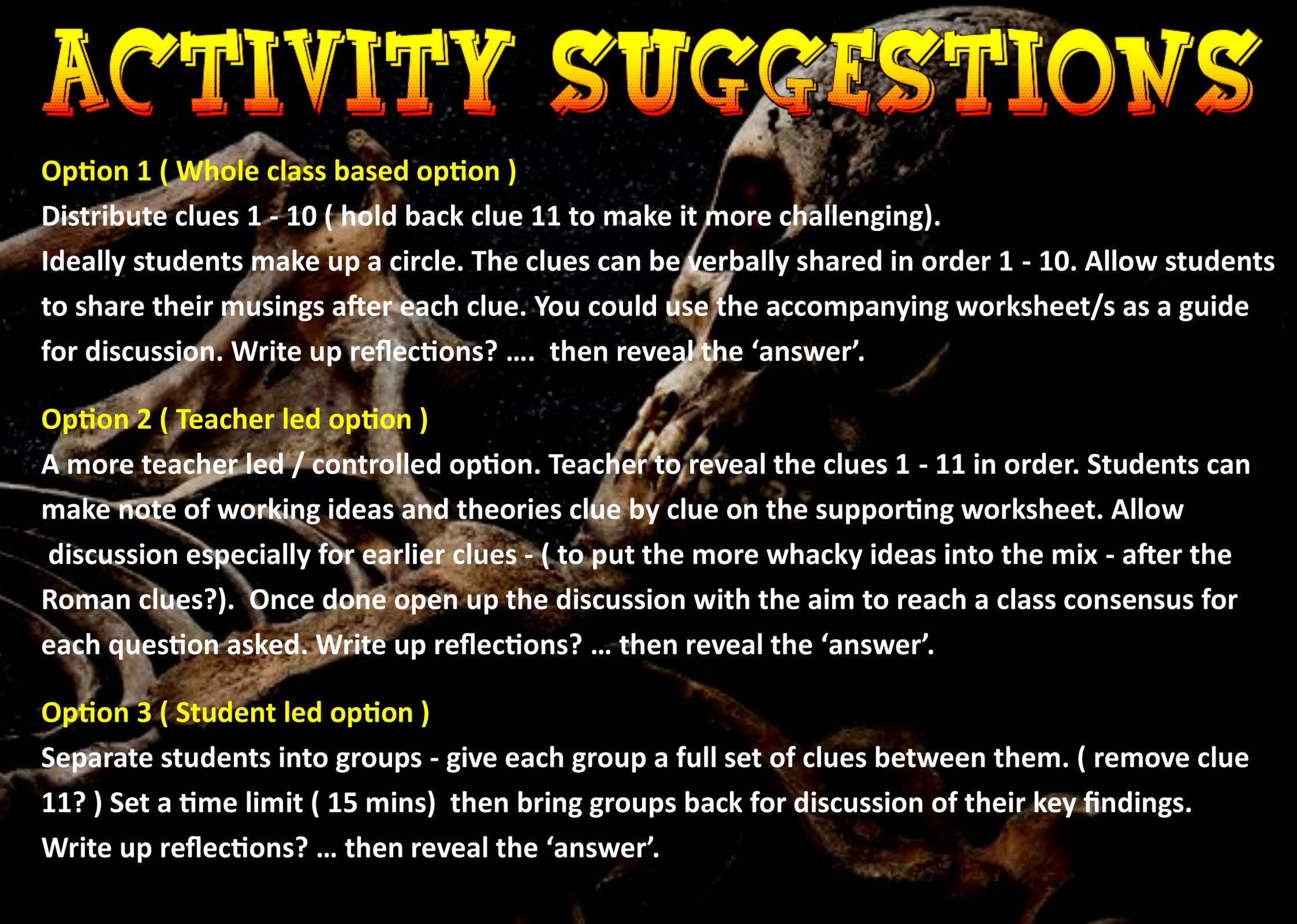
Scientists analysed  
the teeth of the  
skeletons.

Results showed  
that they were  
from lands circled  
in red on the map.

**CLUE 11**



# ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS



## Option 1 ( Whole class based option )

Distribute clues 1 - 10 ( hold back clue 11 to make it more challenging).

Ideally students make up a circle. The clues can be verbally shared in order 1 - 10. Allow students to share their musings after each clue. You could use the accompanying worksheet/s as a guide for discussion. Write up reflections? ... then reveal the 'answer'.

## Option 2 ( Teacher led option )

A more teacher led / controlled option. Teacher to reveal the clues 1 - 11 in order. Students can make note of working ideas and theories clue by clue on the supporting worksheet. Allow discussion especially for earlier clues - ( to put the more whacky ideas into the mix - after the Roman clues?). Once done open up the discussion with the aim to reach a class consensus for each question asked. Write up reflections? ... then reveal the 'answer'.

## Option 3 ( Student led option )

Separate students into groups - give each group a full set of clues between them. ( remove clue 11? ) Set a time limit ( 15 mins) then bring groups back for discussion of their key findings. Write up reflections? ... then reveal the 'answer'.

# The Riccall Skeletons - what happened ?

 **Mission** = to use clues / evidence to investigate the mystery of the skeletons.

**The mystery** - In 1956, the remains of 46 people were discovered on the bank of the River Ouse.

The river was near to the village of Riccall, in Yorkshire.

Some of the skeletons were complete, some were part skeletons.

Your starting hypothesis: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

<b>C</b>	<b>Key points of information</b>	<b>Importance / significance?</b>
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		
9		
10		
11		

Do you think you have solved the mystery ?

Yes / No

Has your original hypothesis changed?

Yes / No

Which 3 clues "evidence" were the most useful / helpful ?

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11

# Mystery Solved.



## Notes and acknowledgement.

Answer - most likely the remains Hardrada's invading army from 1066.  
The remains were of those killed as they fled back to their ships  
close to Riccall.

Women and children could indicate that Hardrada was coming to claim  
and settle.

The Roman 'clues' are included to throw students off the scent and guides  
them into cross checking other clues to reach a more valid conclusion.

The blunt force injuries / trauma injuries to bones more likely from axes  
and weaponry from 1066 - rather than weaponry from Roman era fighting.

**This activity is an adapted version found in Hodder - What is History?  
And Ian Dawson @ [thinkinghistory.co.uk](http://thinkinghistory.co.uk)**



# An icHistory Mystery

**This resource is a free member resource.**

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