

Suffolk Survey Summer 2007

Honouring the Ancient Dead

Introduction

In the late Summer of 2007 HAD became aware of large scale archaeological work at the RAF bases of Lakenheath and Mildenhall - ongoing since 1997 and unearthing over 400 Saxon and other early British remains. Many local modern day Pagans were reported to be alarmed at the scale of the project. As a means of testing the level of feeling, and as an insight to be shared with Suffolk County Council Archaeological Services, HAD decided to conduct a survey of local opinion on the topic.

The primary survey was conducted amongst local Pagans and other moot attendees.

In parallel with this, the same questionnaire was made available at the nearby West Stow Anglo Saxon Village for the general public to give their voice.

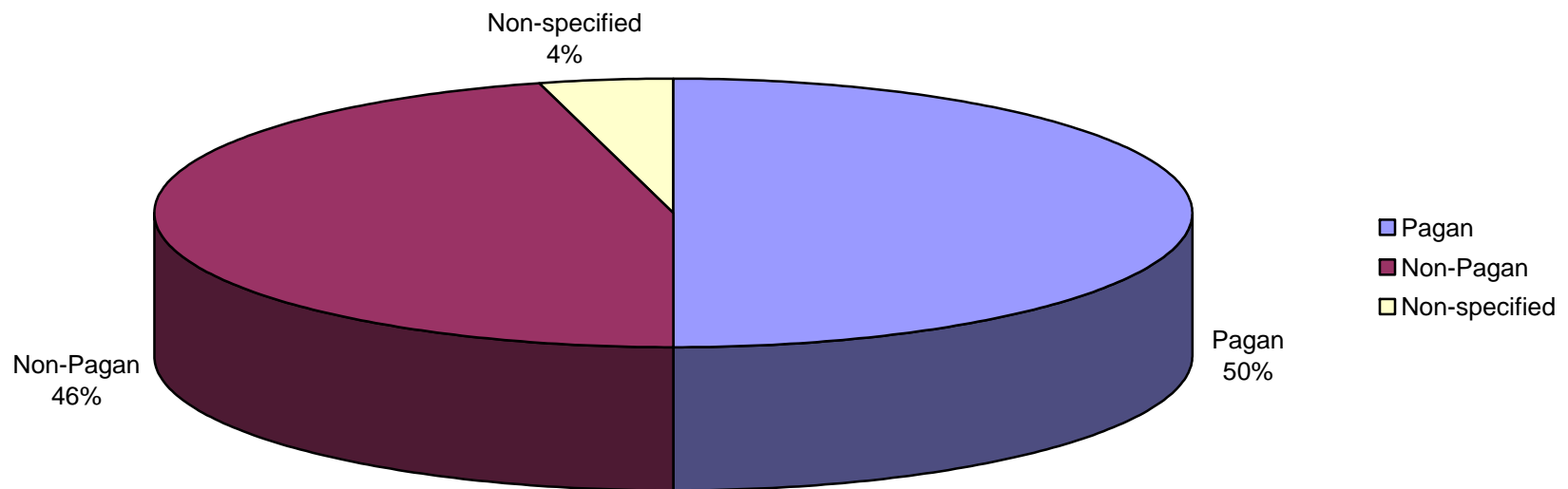
Although the wider sample group included some strongly pro-scientific analysis viewpoints, which are reproduced here in full along with counter positions, overall a striking alignment was seen between Pagan and non-Pagan alike.

Most people seem to have a deep seated personal belief in the need for respect for human remains – whatever their background.

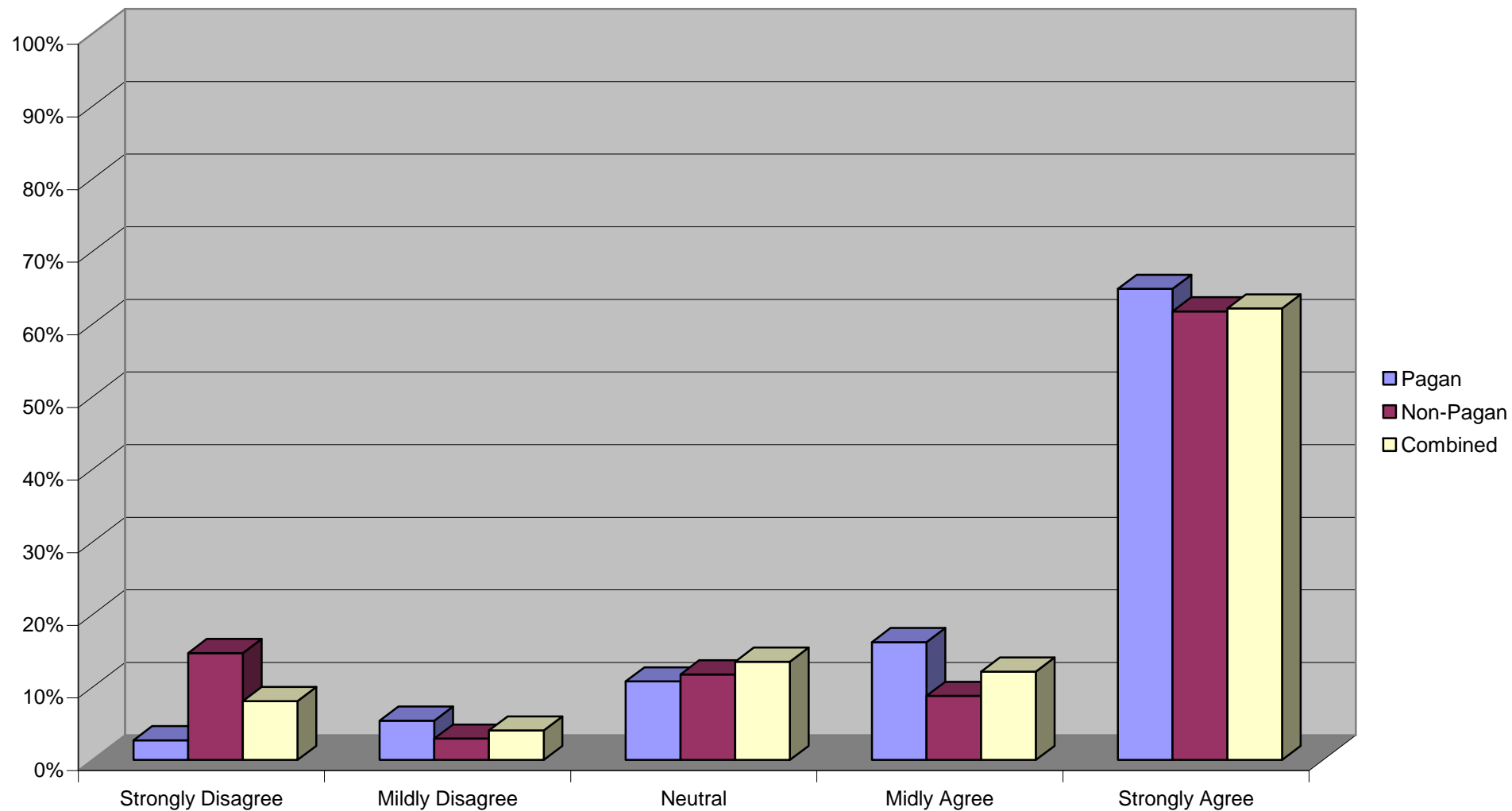
The following analysis represents the combined findings taken from a total of 74 respondents across both survey groups.

Religious Beliefs

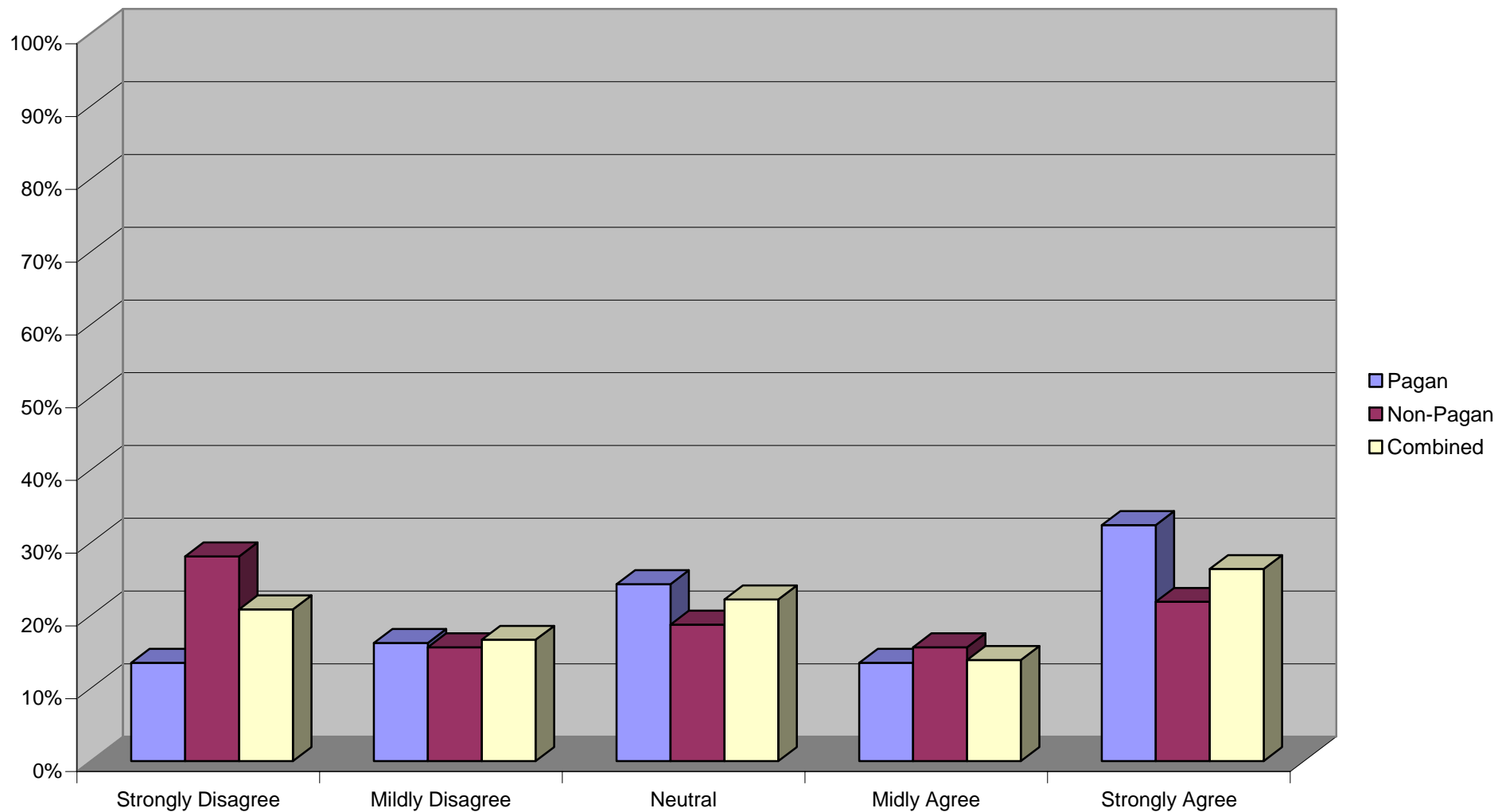
Do you class yourself as Pagan?



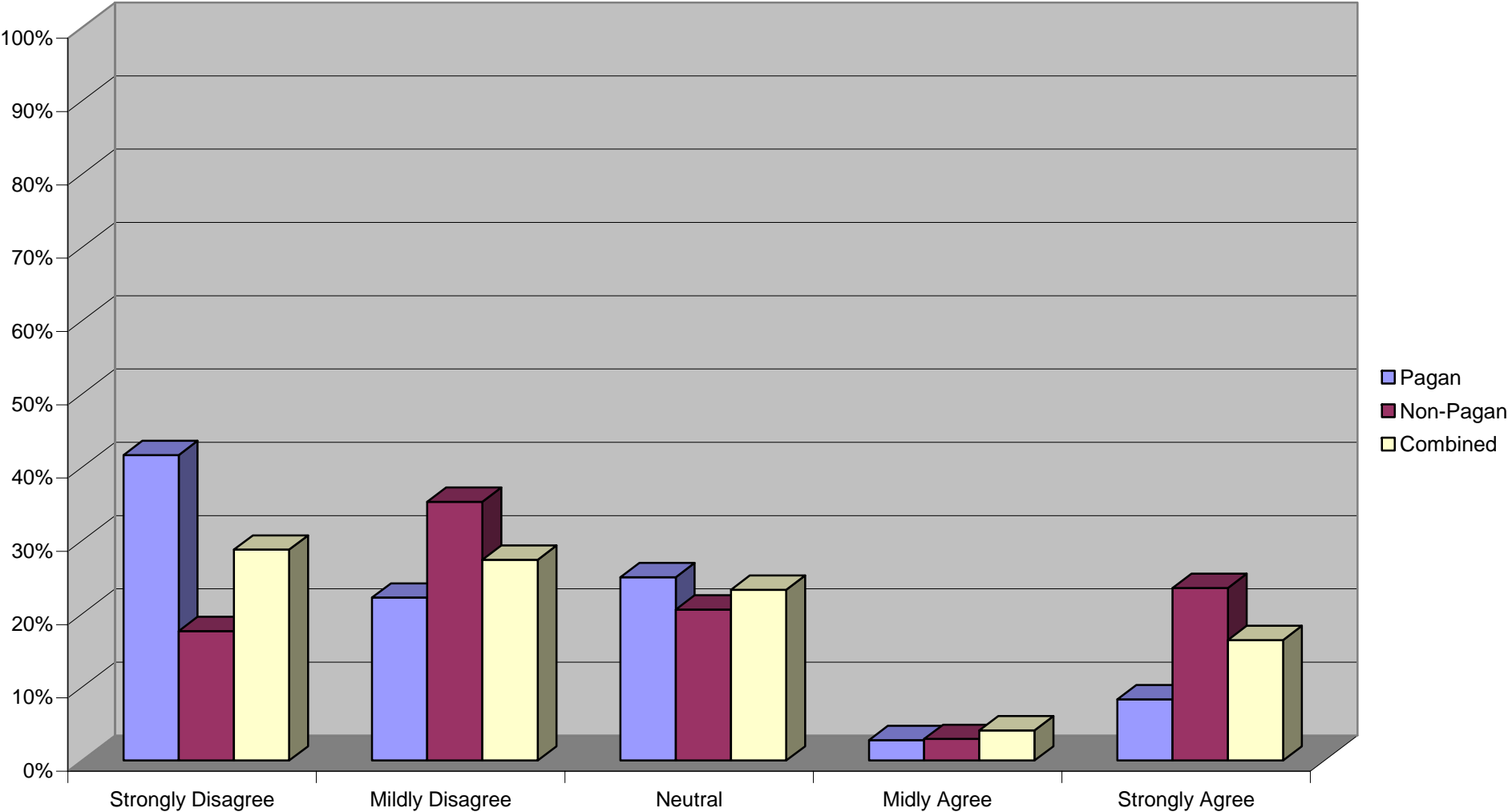
Pagan or preChristian burial sites should be treated as places of sanctity



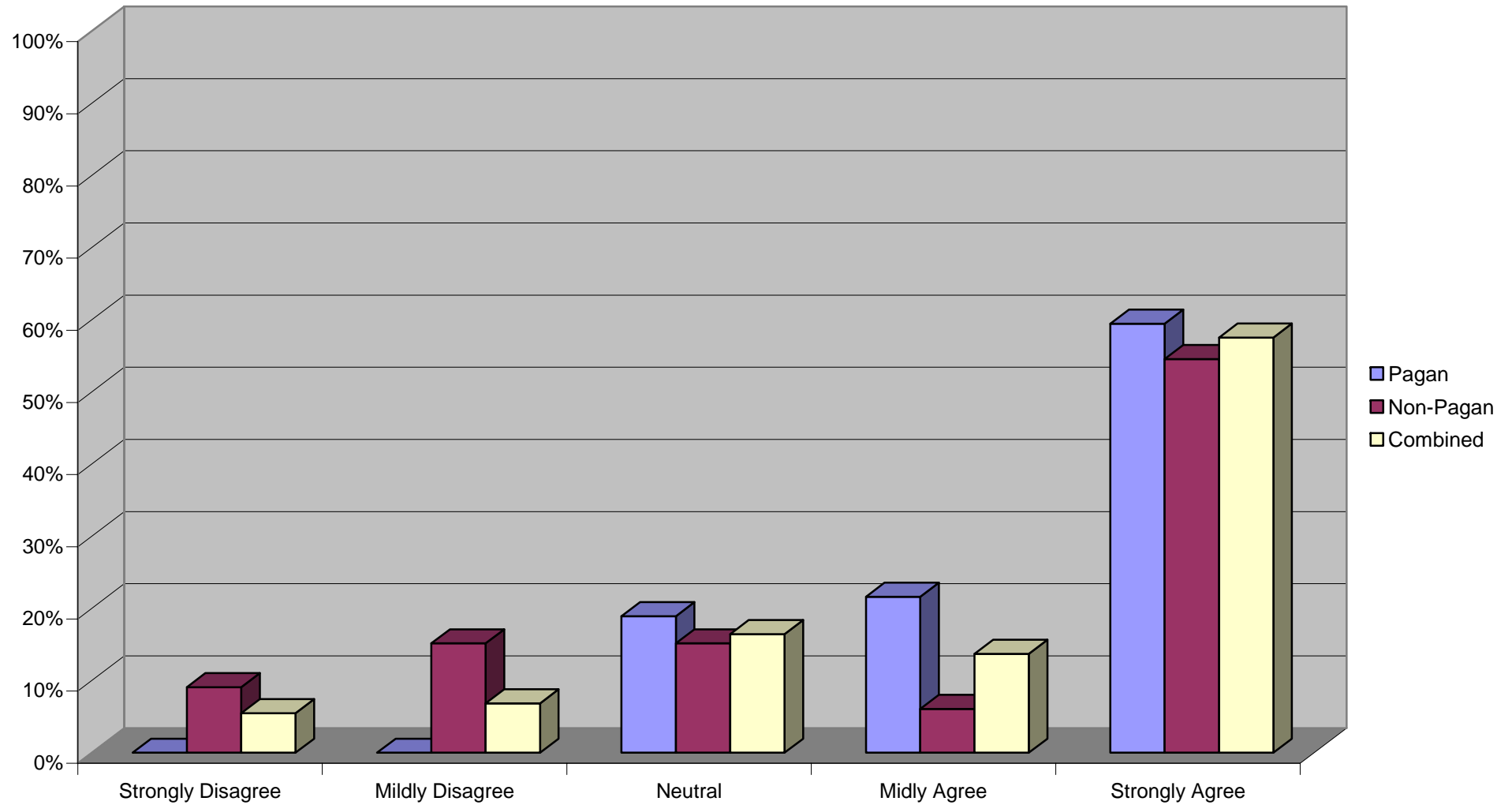
Distrubance of sites known to be pagan burial grounds should be stopped



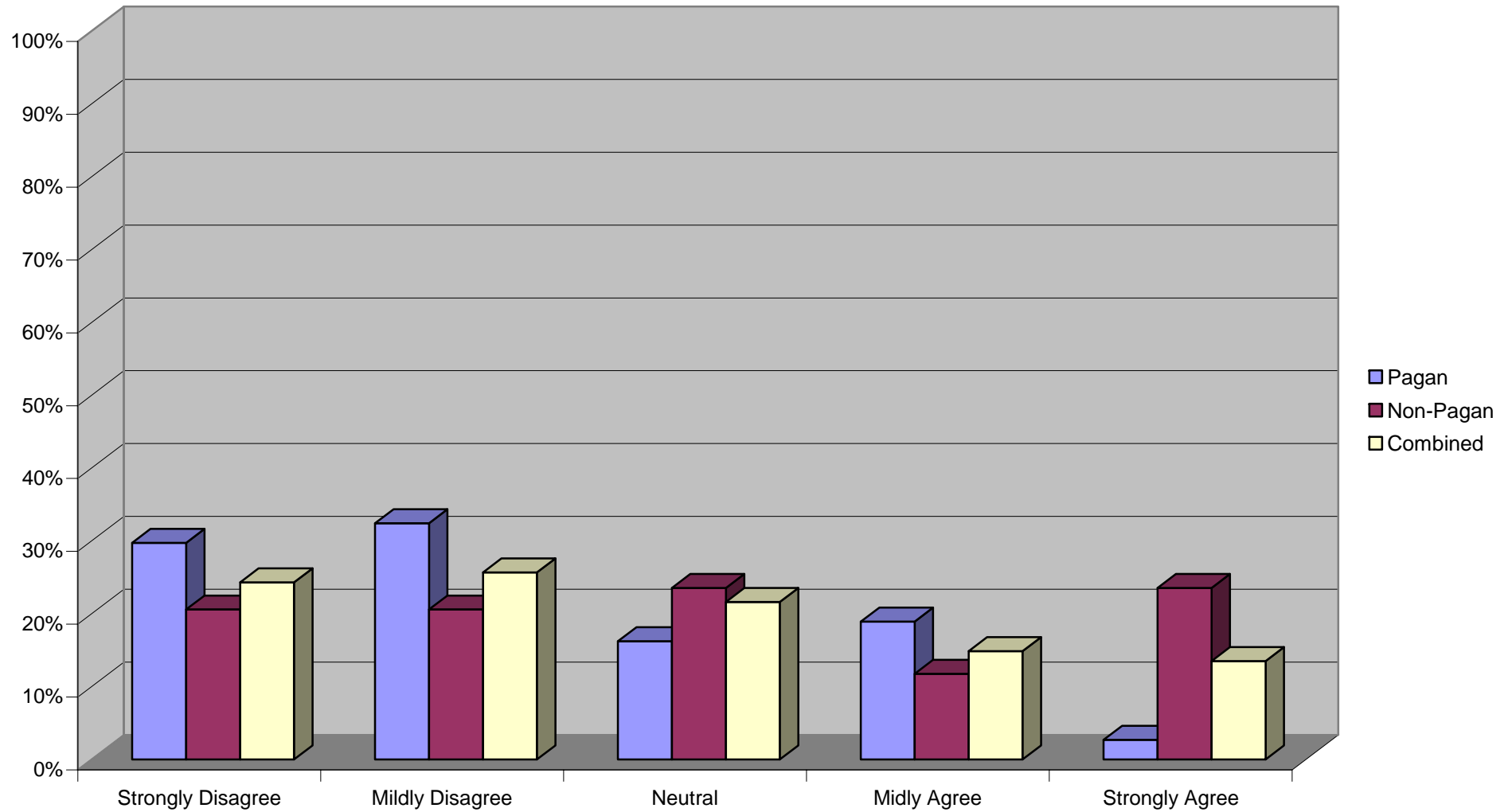
Remains should be retained indefinitely for archaeological research



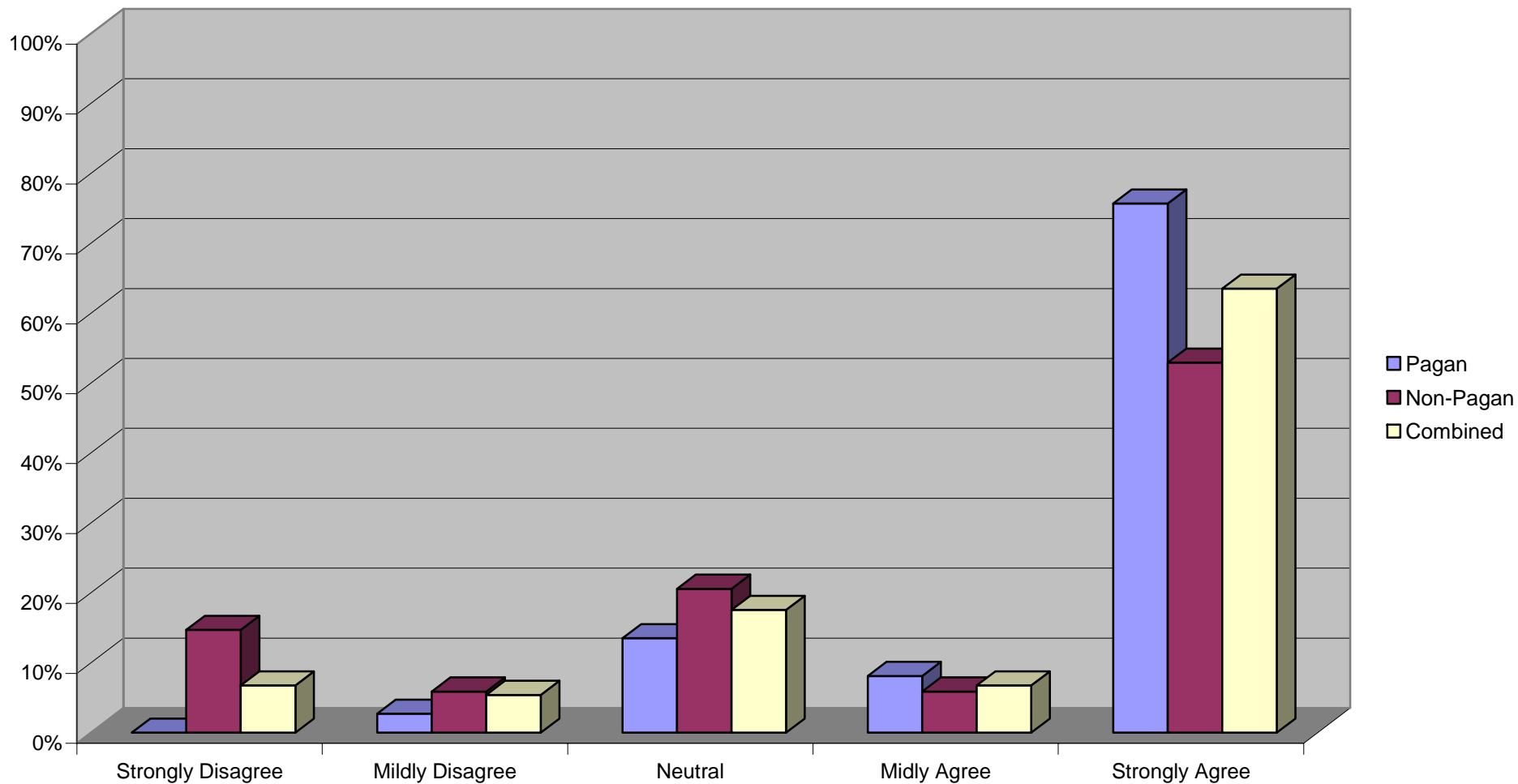
Human remains should always be reburied after archaeological analysis



Display of human remains in museums is acceptable



Archaeologists and museums should involve all interested groups in decisions about human remains



Quotes – non-Pagan West Stow

- “Superstition should never be empowered to impede scientific enquiry.”
- “Religion should never interrupt science. Belief in myths shouldn’t halt the search for truth. Obviously!”
- “This idea seems to be founded on a confused view of history – who or what is Pagan?”
- “Research is to be welcomed. Development of sites commercially (e.g. another Tesco's) MUST be refused.”
- “A person’s life and death should be treated with respect regardless of timescales.”
- “Medical research scholars may also be keen to work on these remains, and their findings might be of great value to historians. Let as many interests as possible be involved.”
- “All human remains, whatever their date, should be treated with the same respect as our own dead.”

Quotes – Pagan West Stow

- “Examining the case of Otzi, his remains are so unique he should be retained for archaeological examination, but a burial of many swiftly re-interred once examination’s completed retaining or replicating only the most unique or relevant.”
- “Archaeological research is important to understand our common humanity and shared history. I feel queasy when I see human remains in museums, and sad. These are our ancestors and should be treated with respect. Fostering disrespect also fosters racism and carelessness for human life. I would prefer to see reproductions in museums – good quality (as at Sutton Hoo).”

Other Pagan Quotes - 1

- “Remains should be investigated, but returned to their original state in as short a time as possible. They should be treated with respect!!!!”
- “As a heathen I think that Anglo-Saxon remains & grave goods should be put on a purpose built boat sent to sea on fire after a ceremony by local heathen hearths & a blot to the ancestors.”
- “I believe that studying the past helps us to learn more about ourselves. It is important study. We learn much from graves, skeletal remains, grave goods. But I say instead of storing for later study, study as uncovered and then re-inter. Take photos, measurements then give goods back to the dead.”
- “I believe that study of these sites will aid in our understanding about the indigenous tribes, beliefs and culture. I also believe that the sites should be treated with respect and that any/all human remains & any artefacts be re-interred in a sacred ground if they must be moved for whatever reason.”
- “I am torn between reburying remains as a mark of respect for our Ancestors and my burning desire to know the finest detail about how they lived which I feel is best uncovered via Archaeological methods.”

Other Pagan Quotes - 2

- “As a Spiritualist the body, skeleton, etc. is an overcoat to the soul/spirit which continues as life after death. However all burial grounds should be treated with respect and should reburial be needed then again great respect should be acceptable to all no matter their creed, or age of the deceased.”
- “People have the right to learn but not at the expense of something sacred.”
- “I am in agreement for remains to be analysed, but believe they should be re-interred afterwards with respect. I agree with particular remains being displayed for educational purposes, but not for bones to be ‘archived’ without any future plans for them. Consider how you would feel if it was your grandfather/mother and act accordingly.”
- “In two minds about disturbing sites. If we had not disturbed them we would never know about them but they are graves!!”
- “I believe that all remains discovered should be either reburied in situ or new site which incorporates strong similarities to the original burial. Museums should be able to take details and extensive photography to recreate any historical finds for historical recording but to hold a person’s bones seems to me unethical.”