

*Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York, 2000/37, 5 pp.*

**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at 90 The Mount, York  
(site code YORYM 2000.507)**

by

Deborah Jaques, John Carrott, Allan Hall and Steve Rowland

**Summary**

*This report evaluates the bioarchaeological potential of a single sediment sample and one box of hand-collected bone recovered from excavations at 90 The Mount, York. Deposits were of ?Roman to post-medieval/modern in date, and included dumps, demolition, ploughsoil and ditch fills.*

*The few ancient biological remains recovered were limited to small fragments of charcoal and other charred plant remains (including charred cereals) of no interpretative value. No invertebrate remains were noted. The small vertebrate assemblage included the remains of cattle, caprovids and pigs, with low frequencies of horse and goose. Both trenches produced a mixture of butchery and domestic refuse, the assemblage being too small for clear patterns of disposal to be identified.*

*No further work is warranted on the current material and excavations in this area are unlikely to result in the recovery of plant or invertebrate macrofossils. The vertebrate remains, however, were well preserved and a larger assemblage might be expected should further excavation be undertaken.*

**Keywords:** 90 THE MOUNT; YORK; MEDIEVAL; POST-MEDIEVAL; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; PLANT MACROFOSSILS

Authors' address:

Environmental Archaeology Unit  
Department of Biology  
University of York  
PO Box 373  
York YO10 5YW

Prepared for:

York Archaeological Trust  
Cromwell House  
13 Ogleforth  
York YO1 7FG

21 June 2000

## Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at 90 The Mount, York (site code YORYM 2000.507)

### Introduction

Excavations at 90 The Mount were undertaken by York Archaeological Trust in May 2000. The two trenches revealed deposits of ?Roman to post-medieval/modern date. A single sediment sample ('GBA' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) and hand-collected vertebrate remains, amounting to one box (approximately 20 litres), were recovered from the deposits and submitted to the EAU for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

### Methods

#### *Sediment sample*

The material was initially inspected in the laboratory and described using a standard *pro forma*. A subsample was processed for extraction of plant and invertebrate macrofossils following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

#### *Vertebrate remains*

All of the bone was recorded; subjective records were made of the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Additionally, for the larger assemblages, notes were made concerning fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks. Fragments were identified to species or species group, using the reference collection at the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York. Fragments not identifiable to species were described as the 'unidentified' fraction.

### Results

#### **Context 2004** [ditch fill - medieval]

Sample 1 (3 kg sieved to 300  $\mu$ m, with washover to 300  $\mu$ m)

Moist, mid grey-brown, unconsolidated to crumbly (working just soft), slightly clay, slightly sandy silt. Very small and small (2-20mm) stones and mammal bone were present.

The 3 kg subsample yielded a very small washover of a few cm<sup>3</sup> of sand and charcoal (to 10 mm), with a single charred oat (*Avena* sp.) grain, and one apparently partly-charred corncockle (*Agrostemma githago* L.) seed fragment. The small residue of about 200 cm<sup>3</sup> comprised sand and gravel (to 40 mm) with a small (15 mm) bone fragment. No invertebrate remains were observed.

A single oyster shell was recovered (by hand) from this deposit.

#### *Vertebrate remains*

A total of 182 fragments was recovered by hand from the two trenches, whilst a borehole deposit (Context 303) produced a further 10 fragments (Table 1).

The deposits ranged in date from ?Roman to post-medieval/modern. Most of the material was recovered from deposits dated to the medieval period: Contexts 1001 and 1002, in Trench 1, and ditch fills 2002, 2004 and 2006 in Trench 2.

The whole assemblage was well preserved,

only material from Contexts 1002 and 2004 being recorded as battered in appearance. Fragments from the latter were also particularly variable in colour. Bones from Contexts 1001, 1002 and 2004 also showed a greater degree of fragmentation, some of which had occurred in antiquity and some more recently, during excavation. Context 1001 contained a number of scorched and burnt fragments, their fragile and brittle nature accounting for their more fragmentary condition.

Evidence for butchery was observed, and was quite extensive on bones from Contexts 1000 and 1002. Unfortunately, material from Context 1000 was too broadly dated for any useful information to be retrieved regarding butchery practices. Chop marks were noted on the shaft of a horse metapodial from Context 2006. This may represent carcass dismemberment or may be the removal of the lower limb elements during skinning. Context 303 (borehole deposit) produced the remains of a sheep skull which had been chopped longitudinally, presumably for removal of the brain.

Remains of the usual domesticates (cattle, caprovids and pigs) were identified, along with several fragments of horse and goose. Two canid bones (a mandible and a tibia) were recorded from Contexts 1002 and 2004. These were probably dog, but were not inconsistent in size (and morphology) with fox bones from the EAU reference collection. Additionally, a single tibiotarsus shaft fragment was tentatively identified as duck, the diagnostic features being mostly absent.

In total, six measurable fragments and four mandibles with teeth *in situ* were noted.

Both trenches produced a mixture of rubbish, including both butchery and domestic waste,

but, no distinct patterns of refuse disposal were discernable.

### **Statement of potential**

Preservation of biological remains in Context 2004 was minimal and no further work on this material can be justified.

The size of the vertebrate assemblage is small and the number of fragments providing biometrical and age-at-death information is insufficient for further, detailed analysis to be undertaken.

### **Recommendations**

Prospects for further work on similar deposits in the vicinity of this excavation for plant and invertebrate macrofossils seem poor, though the sampling and investigation of contexts where there may be concentrations of charred plant remains should be borne in mind in any future interventions at this site.

Vertebrate remains from these excavations were well preserved and, on the whole, did not appear to include redeposited material. It is extremely likely that any larger scale excavations in this area will produce a moderate sized assemblage of bone.

### **Retention and disposal**

Any remaining sediment from the sample may be discarded. The vertebrate remains should be retained for the present.

### **Archive**

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

## Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to Dave Evans (YAT) for providing the material and the archaeological information, and to English Heritage for allowing AH to work on this material.

## References

Dobney, K., Hall, A. R., Kenward, H. K. and Milles, A. (1992). A working classification of sample types for environmental archaeology. *Circaea, the Journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology* **9** (for 1991), 24-6.

Kenward, H. K., Engleman, C., Robertson, A., and Large, F. (1986). Rapid scanning of urban archaeological deposits for insect remains. *Circaea* **3** (for 1985), 163-72.

Kenward, H. K., Hall, A. R. and Jones, A. K. G. (1980). A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal macrofossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits. *Science and Archaeology* **22**, 3-15.

Table 1. Total number of bone fragments recovered from deposits at 90 The Mount, York.

Species		1000	1001	1002	2000	2002	2004	2006	2008	303	Total
Canid	dog family	-	-	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
<i>Equus</i> f. domestic	horse	-	-	-	1	-	1	2	-	-	4
<i>Sus</i> f. domestic	pig	2	1	4	-	-	1	-	-	-	8
<i>Bos</i> f. domestic	cow	7	4	9	3	2	-	-	-	-	25
Caprovid	sheep/goat	6	6	2	1	-	-	2	-	10	27
<i>Anser</i> sp.	goose	3	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	4
cf. <i>Anas</i> sp.	?duck	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Unidentified		36	22	31	2	3	17	9	1	-	121
<b>Total</b>		<b>54</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>192</b>