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**An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at  
Clifton Moorgate, York (CLM94)**

by

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**Summary**

*Seven samples of sediment from the fills of ditch and other cut features exposed during trial excavations at Clifton Moorgate near York were submitted for bioarchaeological evaluation. They were almost barren of plant and invertebrate remains other than small amounts of charcoal.*

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## An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Clifton Moorgate, York (CLM94)

### Introduction and methods

Seven samples from two trenches excavated by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. at Clifton Moorgate, near York, were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

All samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 1 kg were taken for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Plant macrofossils were examined from both the wet residues and the washovers resulting from processing. The washovers were also checked for invertebrate remains.

Subsamples of all the samples were also examined for the eggs of parasitic nematodes and other microfossils using the 'squash' technique of Dainton (1992). All produced negative results and are not discussed further here.

### Results

The results are presented in trench then context number order. Any archaeological information provided by the excavator is presented in brackets.

#### Trench 1

Context 108, sample 4 (Fill of irregular cut, sealed by ditch fill 112): Dry, light grey, indurated to brittle (working loose), clay sand with some iron salt flecks. The sediment showed variations in colour, lighter and darker, and composition, more and less sandy, on millimetre and centimetre scales. Charcoal and ?mortar/ash were present in the sample.

About 30 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments, a trace of root bark and 1-2 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 5 mm made up the washover; the small residue was of sand with about 30 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 15 mm. The presence of charcoal indicates that this is not a natural fill deposit.

Context 112, sample 3 (Uppermost fill of ditch 116, overlays context 108. Possibly rampart slumping into and over ditch?): Dry, light yellowish grey, indurated to brittle (working loose), clay sand with paler and darker yellow/orange mottling on a centimetre scale.

In the washover there was about 30 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments, a trace of charcoal <2 mm, and a modern grass fruit; the very small residue was of sand.

Context 113, sample 5 (Fill of ditch 116): Dry, light grey, stiff to brittle (working crumbly), clay sand with slight heterogeneity of composition—variations in proportions of clay and sand. Charcoal and ?ash were present in the sample.

There was about 25 cm<sup>3</sup> in the washover, along with <1 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 10 mm; the very small residue was of sand.

Context 114, sample 6 (Fill of ditch 116): Dry to moist, very heterogeneous mixture of approximately equal amounts of mid to dark grey-brown, ?humic clay sand and light yellowish grey clay sand with an overall plastic and brittle texture.

In the washover were about 5 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments, a little root bark and 1-2 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 10 mm; the small residue was of sand with a trace of charcoal.

Context 115, sample 7 (Primary fill of ditch 116): Dry, light grey, stiff to brittle (working crumbly), clay sand with centimetre scale variations in colour, lighter and darker, and composition, more sandy and more clay in parts. Charcoal was present in the sample.

The washover contained about 5 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments, <1 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 5 mm and a little root bark; the residue was very small and consisted of sand.

## Trench 2

Context 204, sample 2 (Fill occupying most of an East-West slot which is cut into natural. Lies directly below an old topsoil, context 203, above a sandier basal fill, context 210): Dry, light grey, stiff to brittle (working crumbly), clay sand with slight heterogeneity of composition, variations in proportions of clay and sand, and colour, orange flecking. Charcoal and ash were present in the sample.

The washover comprised about 20 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments and 1-2 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 10 mm; the residue was small and comprised sand and about 20 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 20 mm.

Context 212, sample 1 (Apparent East-West ditch which cuts into natural clay and silty sand): Dry, mid to dark grey, brittle (working crumbly; slightly sticky and lighter in colour when wet), slightly humic clay sand with more clay patches, patches of charcoal, near white sand and yellow sand. Rootlets (perhaps ancient) and traces of burrowing were present in the sample.

The washover consisted of about 2 cm<sup>3</sup> of (modern) root/rootlet fragments and a little root bark and 10-15 cm<sup>3</sup> of charcoal to 15 mm; the charcoal was characterised by a distinctive coppery coloration and had almost the appearance of having been partly mineralised, though treatment with dilute hydrochloric acid did not confirm this. There was also a small fragment of metallic slag, a modern buttercup (*Ranunculus* Section *Ranunculus*) achene and the very small residue was of sand.

## Discussion

Ancient plant remains in these samples were confined to small amounts of (usually) small-sized charcoal fragments. There were no invertebrate remains and no bone or shell was observed in the residues of processed samples.

## Statement of potential: implications for further work

These deposits offer no potential for bioarchaeological analysis other than through examination of the charcoal (which may yield a small amount of information about wood used for fuel, although the fragments were generally very small and identification would be difficult.

## Recommendations

### *Further work*

No further work on the present material is recommended. If deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging or higher concentrations of charred plant material are exposed during development, however, every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

### *Retention and disposal*

None of the material examined here need be retained.

## Archive

All extracted fossils from the test subsamples, and the residues and flots are

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

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### **References**

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