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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Winteringham, Humberside (site code: WEF95)

by

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Summary

Five sediment samples and a single box of hand-collected bone were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis. All of the sediment samples gave traces of charred plant remains of no interpretative value. The animal bone assemblage was too small to allow definite interpretation, but one context yielded some evidence of industrial activity.

Should further excavation occur the possibility of recovering a well-dated animal bone assemblage of moderate size must be considered.

No further work on the material described here is recommended.

Keywords: Winteringham; charred plant remains; animal bone; horncore; industrial activity

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Introduction and methods

Five samples (GBAs *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) and a single box of hand-collected bones, mostly of Roman date, from excavations by Humberside Archaeology Unit at Winteringham, were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma*. All of the samples were sieved to 500 :m to recover biological remains and finds, the latter to be returned to the excavator.

Plant macrofossils and bone were examined from the residues.

The samples were not deemed suitable for examination for the eggs of parasitic nematodes.

Results

A list of context interpretations (from information supplied by the excavator) is presented in Table 1.

The sediment samples

All but one of the contexts were of Roman date (2nd to early 3rd century A.D.). Context 86 contained beaker shards of ?Bronze Age date.

All of the samples consisted of moist, mid brown, unconsolidated sand with very small to medium-sized stones (2 to 60 mm) present.

The residues from processing were mostly sand and stones (to 60 mm). All of the samples yielded a few charred plant remains - charcoal (to 5 mm) and/or fragments of unidentified charred seeds and grain - and a few bone fragments. Bone recovered from the samples is discussed together with hand-collected material in the next section.

Three fragments of pot (Context 6), a nail (Context 7) and a single fragment of brick/tile (Context 4) were removed from the residues to be returned to the excavator.

Bone

The results of the investigations are summarised in Table 2.

One box (50 x 28 x 20 cm) of hand-collected bone, representing nine contexts of mostly Roman date (2nd to early 3rd century A.D.) was presented.

Overall, preservation was fair to poor - many of the bones were recorded as 'battered'. The bones were mostly fawn in colour with black staining on many of the fragments. Butchery marks, evidence of dog-gnawing and fresh breakages were evident on 0-10% of the bones.

The assemblage was very small, comprising three hundred and ninety-three fragments (weighing 5233 g), of which eighty-six were identifiable to species. Thirteen measurable bones, six mandibles with teeth and twelve isolated teeth were recorded.

The remains of cattle, caprines, pig and horse were present, with cattle (41 fragments) and caprines (21 fragments) forming the largest components of the identified material. The cattle remains included sixteen horncores, of which thirteen were from Context 20. Chop marks were noted on the base of most of the horncores, indicating their deliberate removal from the skull.

There were only three bird bones in the assemblage, representing goose (Anser spp.), raven (*Corvus corax* L.) and chicken.

Ten fragments of bone were recovered from the sediment samples. Two mandibles and a humerus from Context 86 (Sample 6) were identified as common

shrew (*Sorex araneus* L.). The other fragments were not identifiable.

Discussion

Ancient plant remains from these samples were confined to charcoal fragments and fragments of charred seeds and grain, of no interpretative value. There were no invertebrate remains — not even any shell in the residues.

The presence of putative waste from horn-working may suggest industrial activity on or around the site but, the limited assemblage size precludes any detailed conclusions. This type of industrial waste is unusual from sites of the Roman period.

Statement of potential

The sediment samples offer no potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The hand-collected animal bone assemblage is of little interpretative value because of its small size, poor preservation and the limited number of bones providing age-at-death or biometrical information.

Recommendations

Should more extensive excavation be undertaken (in which case systematic sieving should be carried out), it is probable that a well-dated, moderate-sized assemblage of animal bone would be recovered.

Any sediment samples remaining from this evaluation should be sieved to 1 mm to recover small bones.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining material should be retained for the present.

Archive

All extracted fossils from the samples, and the residues, 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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Reference

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.

Table 1. Information on context types (provided by the excavator)

Context number	Sample number	Context interpretation
4	2	Fill of grave 3
5		ditto
6	4	Internal surface
7	5	External surface
10		Rear wall
12		Fill of ditch 11
20	1	Fill of ditch 19
26		Fill of trench 25
34		Fill of trench 33
84		Fill of gully 83
86	6	Fill of pit 85

Table 2: Hand collected bone from 2nd - early 3rd century deposits.

Species		**Total no. fragments**	**Total weight (g)**	**No. measurable**	**No. mandibles**	**No. isolated teeth**
Bos f. domestic	cattle	41	2,459	10	3	6
Caprine	sheep/goat	21	137	-	2	5
Sus f. domestic	pig	5	80	-	-	1
Equus f. domestic	horse	16	937	3	1	-
Anser spp.	goose	1	1	-	-	-
Corvus corax L.	raven	1	2	-	-	-
Gallus f. domestic	chicken	1	1	-	-	-
Total identified		86	3,617	13	6	12
Total unidentified		307	1,616	-	-	-
Total		393	5,233	13	6	12