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**The animal bone from excavations at  
Welwyn Hall, Welwyn, Hertfordshire**

by

Deborah Jaques

**Summary**

*A single box of hand-collected animal bone was recovered from excavations undertaken at Welwyn Hall, Welwyn, Hertfordshire. Most was of Roman date. Few conclusions can be drawn from such a small assemblage.*

*Worthy of note, however, were two galliform bones, which probably represent a food offering, from the fill of a grave cut, an example of a Roman funerary practice known from Britain and mainland Europe.*

**Keywords:** WELWYN HALL, WELWYN; HERTFORDSHIRE; ROMAN; POST-MEDIEVAL; FUNERARY PRACTICE; ANIMAL BONE

Authors' address:

Palaeoecology Research Services  
Environmental Archaeology Unit  
University of York  
Heslington  
York YO1 5DD

Telephone: (01904) 433843-51  
Fax: (01904) 433850

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Hertfordshire Archaeological Trust  
The Seed Warehouse  
Maidenhead Yard  
The Wash  
Hertford SG14 1PX

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## **The animal bone from excavations at Welwyn Hall, Welwyn, Hertfordshire**

### **Introduction**

Excavations at Welwyn Hall, Welwyn, Hertfordshire were concentrated on three particular areas with a view to investigating features uncovered during two earlier evaluations. These included Roman, Saxo-Norman and post-medieval features (Area A), the area of the ?mausoleum (Area B), and a ditch originally believed to have been associated with a Roman road (Area C).

### **Animal bone**

These excavations produced a single box of animal bone (35 x 21 x 14 cm), amounting to only 95 fragments (52 fragments from Area A, 11 from Area B and 32 from Area C). Of a total of 14 contexts containing animal bone, only two (1007 and 1133) yielded more than 20 fragments. Eleven of the bone-bearing contexts were described by the excavator as fills of ditches and pits, whilst the remaining three (1070, 1077 and 1111) were grave cut fills from Area B. The date range represented by these deposits was broad (2nd century to post-medieval). However, those which could be more tightly dated were of 2nd, 3rd and 4th century date.

All the material was scanned, but most contexts had yielded bones which were either too few in number (i.e. five fragments or less), or too badly preserved, to warrant recording by more than brief notes.

Preservation of the whole bone group varied, although most of the material was poorly preserved, appearing 'battered' and fragmented. Material from three contexts (1044, 1070 and 1108) was scored as 'good' but constituted a mere seven fragments in total.

Most fragments represented the major domestic mammals i.e. cattle, caprine (sheep/goat), pig and horse. Interestingly, two juvenile chicken/pheasant bones (femur and ulna), both almost complete and probably from the same individual, were recovered from Context 1070, the fill of a late 3rd century grave cut. It is not uncommon to find the remains of domestic fowl in graves dating from the Roman period and they are usually interpreted as food offerings for the dead (Lauwerier 1983; 1993, Philpott 1991). This practice appears to have been widespread, with numerous examples known from Britain and mainland Europe e.g. Saltersford, near Grantham (Dobney and Jaques 1994) and Nijmegen (Lauwerier 1988).

In conclusion, the overall preservation of the vertebrate remains was poor and suggestive of reworked or redeposited material. As a consequence, this small assemblage is of very little zooarchaeological significance.

### **Acknowledgements**

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### **References**

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## Archive

Preservation represents the general condition of the bone surfaces (range = good, fair, poor, very poor and variable)

Angularity represents the appearance of the broken surfaces. (range = spikey, battered, rounded and variable)

(m) = measurable

### **Context 1007 (ditch fill)** (not dated)

Preservation: very poor  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: variable - many fragments rather battered

10-20% fresh breakage

*Horse* - 12 teeth including 3 upper premolars, 1 upper premolar fragment, 2 upper canines and 6 upper incisors

*Unidentified* - 29 fragments, including cow/horse-sized shaft fragments

Total number of fragments - 41

Weight of identifiable fragments: 314g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 139g

### **Context 1019 (ditch fill)** (2nd century)

Preservation: poor  
Colour: not recorded  
Angularity: not recorded

*Unidentified* - 1 fragment - burnt shaft fragment

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 1g

### **Context 1021 (ditch fill)** (not dated)

Preservation: very poor  
Colour: not recorded  
Angularity: battered

*Unidentified* - 1 fragment - pig-sized shaft fragment

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 31g

### **Context 1029 (ditch fill)** (?post-medieval)

Preservation: fair  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: spikey

0-10% fresh breakage

*Caprine* - 1 femur  
*Unidentified* - 4 sheep-sized shaft fragments

Total number of fragments - 5

Weight of identifiable fragments: 29g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 18g

### **Context 1044 (pit fill)** (medieval and post-medieval)

Preservation: good  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: spikey

0-10% fresh breakage

*Cattle* - 1 humerus proximal fragment (m)  
*Caprine* - 1 radius (m) and 1 femur  
*Unidentified* - 2 sheep-sized shaft and rib fragments

Total number of fragments - 4

Weight of identifiable fragments: 357g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 5g

**Context 1070 (fill of grave cut)**  
(late 3rd century)

Preservation: good  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: spikey

*Chicken/pheasant* - 1 femur and 1 ulna, both representing juvenile individuals

Total number of fragments - 2

Weight of identifiable fragments: 0.6g

**Context 1077 (fill of grave cut)**  
(late 3rd century)

Preservation: very poor  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: battered

10-20% fresh breakage

*Caprine* - 1 metacarpal  
*Pig* - 1 mandible - P4-M2  
*Unidentified* - 4 sheep-sized shaft fragments

Total number of fragments - 6

Weight of identifiable fragments: 26g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 6g

**Context 1108 (ditch fill)**  
(2nd century +)

Preservation: good  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: spikey

*Cattle* - 1 metacarpal (m)

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of identifiable fragments: 61g

**Context 1111 (fill of grave cut)**  
(AD 140-70, residual)

Preservation: fair  
Colour: not recorded

Angularity: not recorded

*Unidentified* - 1 fragment

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 1g

**Context 1115 (secondary fill of ditch)**  
(4th century)

Preservation: poor  
Colour: variable  
Angularity: variable

*Horse* - 1 lower molar, M1? - very poor condition  
*Unidentified* - 5 fragments

Total number of fragments - 6

Weight of identifiable fragments: 21g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 28g

**Context 1125 (pit fill)**  
(?4th century)

Preservation: poor  
Colour: fawn/brown  
Angularity: not recorded

*Unidentified* - 1 cow-sized shaft fragment

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 12g

**Context 1127 (fill of linear feature)**  
(not dated)

Preservation: poor  
Colour: variable  
Angularity: rounded

fresh breakage

*Cattle* - 1 humerus, possibly burnt or scorched  
*Caprine* - 1 first phalanx  
*Unidentified* - 1 fragment

Total number of fragments - 3

Weight of identifiable fragments: 41g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 1g

**Context 1133 (tertiary fill of pit)**  
(?4th century)

Preservation: very poor  
Colour: brown  
Angularity: variable

20-50% fresh breakage  
>0-10% dog gnawing

*Cattle* - 1 radius, split longitudinally. Proximal articulation scorched?

*Caprine* - 2 metatarsals (1 m), 2 tibia (1 m)

*Pig* - 1 canine - female?, 1 scapula (m)

*Unidentified* - 18 fragments, including cow-sized and sheep-sized shaft and rib fragments

Total number of fragments - 22

Weight of identifiable fragments: 149g  
Weight of unidentifiable fragments: 67g

**Context 1175 (pit fill)**  
(not dated)

Preservation: fair  
Colour: fawn  
Angularity: spikey

*Horse* - 1 lower P2

Total number of fragments - 1

Weight of identifiable fragments: 32g