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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Bootham School, York (site code: 1996.196)

by

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Summary

Two samples of sediment from the earliest (but undated) deposits revealed by excavations at Bootham School, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Small numbers of poorly preserved plant remains of little interpretative value were recovered from the sediment samples.

No further work is recommended on the material currently available.

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Introduction

Excavations were carried out by York Archaeological Trust at Bootham School, York on March 6-8th 1996. Two General Biological Analysis samples ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al*. 1992) were submitted for an evaluation of their biological remains. The deposits considered here were the earliest revealed but of unknown date.

Methods

Both of the GBA samples were inspected in the laboratory; 3 kg subsamples were taken from each of the GBAs for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for their content of plant and invertebrate macrofossils. Notes were made on the quantity of fossils, their quality of preservation, principal taxa, and main ecological groups.

Results and Discussion

The results are presented in sample number order. Context information provided by the excavator is given in square brackets.

Context 3, **Sample 1/T**
[?Naturally accumulated buried soil]

Moist, light to mid brownish grey, plastic, sandy clay silt with mm-scale burrows.

The very small washover was mostly charcoal (to 5 mm), coal and cinder (to 2 mm) with some plant detritus, very decayed seed coat of greater celandine (*Chelidonium majus* L.), modern moss shoots and many earthworm egg capsules. In isolation, the celandine seeds are of little interpretative value, though they commonly occur in urban deposits associated with standing stone structures, often with few or no other plant remains, as here.

The smallish residue consisted largely of sand, with some gravel (to 35 mm).

Context 3, Sample 2/T
[?Naturally accumulated buried soil]

Moist, light to mid brownish grey, plastic, sandy clay silt with small and medium-sized (6 to 60 mm) pieces of rotted sandstone present.

The very small washover was, again, mostly charcoal (to 10 mm), cinder and a little coal (to 2 mm) with traces of elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* L.) seeds and many earthworm egg capsules; one larger lump of burnt material (to 20 mm) was amorphous in

nature and may have been peat, bark, or perhaps a soft kind of coal.

The residue was similar to that from the subsample of sample 1, though traces of coal, charcoal and cinder (to 5 mm) were present and there were a few fragments of iron-concreted sand (to about 5 mm).

Recommendations

This material offers little prospect for bioarchaeological interpretation of the mode of formation of the deposits; the few plant remains and the abundant earthworm egg capsules, if contemporaneous with the deposits, are not inconsistent with the excavator's interpretation of the layer as a buried soil, however. Further light might have been shed on the question of the interpretation of the layer had it been examined in the field by a pedologist.

Although the present material is unlikely to yield further information, if deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging or higher concentrations of charred plant material are exposed during development, every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Retention and disposal

The samples need not be retained.

Archive

All extracted fossils 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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