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**An evaluation of vertebrate remains and sediment from excavations
at St Mary's Abbey Precinct Wall, York (site code: 96.168)**

by

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Summary

A single sample of sediment and one box of animal bone from excavations at St Mary's Abbey Precinct Wall, York, were submitted for evaluation.

Lack of information precludes any detailed analysis of the sediment sample. The bones formed too small an assemblage for useful interpretation, but it is possible that further excavation, with adequate recovery, might yield interpretatively valuable groups.

No further analysis of the material already recovered is recommended. It is suggested that, in the event of further excavation at this site, it is important that an appropriate sampling and recovery strategy be employed.

Keywords: ST MARY'S ABBEY PRECINCT WALL; YORK; EVALUATION; EARLY MODERN; POST-MEDIEVAL; MEDIEVAL; SEDIMENT SAMPLE; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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An evaluation of vertebrate remains and sediment from excavations at St Mary's Abbey Precinct Wall, York (site code: 96.168)

Introduction

Excavations were undertaken by York Archaeological Trust at a site adjacent to St Mary's Abbey Precinct Wall, York. A single sample and a small assemblage of hand-collected animal bone, amounting to one box (31 x 31 x 22 cm), were recovered from deposits dating from the medieval, post-medieval and early modern periods. This report evaluates the bioarchaeological potential of the material.

Methods

The sediment sample was submitted to the EAU to answer a particular question posed by the excavator, i.e. to establish whether the sediment was of local origin. It was inspected in the laboratory and notes were made on its characteristics.

All the animal bone was examined and records made of preservation, quantities and identifications where appropriate.

Results

Sediment sample

On the basis of hand texturing, the sediment can probably be classified as a sandy loam (Hodgson 1976). It is apparent, again from hand texturing, that the sediment is not very well sorted, and thus is probably not wind blown sand, although this cannot be proved. Its characteristics are possibly consistent with fluvial sandy material (and it resembles many modern flood silts seen along the Ouse in York), although there is insufficient evidence to confirm this. There was certainly nothing to suggest that it had been imported over any distance. If the deposit formed above plausible river flooding levels, it may have been carried from the river edges.

Bone

A very small assemblage of animal bones was recovered from the limited excavations. This consisted of material from only five contexts containing a total of only thirteen identifiable fragments (Table 1).

Preservation of the material was good, with the broken surfaces, for the most part, appearing 'spikey' and the colour being recorded as brown or fawn. Few of the bones showed evidence of dog gnawing or fresh breakage. Butchery was evident on a small number of cattle fragments.

Most of the identifiable fragments represented the remains of the major domesticates, i.e. cattle, caprine and pig. In addition, a single cat femur was present.

Statement of potential

In order to establish whether the deposit represented by the sample is of local origin and/or whether it was part of a local soil profile within the area of excavation, it would be necessary, firstly, to have made observations in the field to see the relationships and type of boundaries of this context with adjacent ones and, secondly, to compare the sample with other significant materials in the vicinity.

Unfortunately, the investigations above (i.e. comparison with local material and establishment of profile relationships) cannot be carried out as the excavations have already been completed.

The vertebrate assemblage is of little interpretative value as it stands because of its very small size and the limited number of bones which can be used to obtain age-at-death and biometrical information.

Recommendations

No further analysis of the material already recovered is recommended.

In the event of further excavation, sedimentological information might be obtained providing an appropriate field work and sampling strategy is employed. A vertebrate assemblage of medieval, early Post-medieval and early modern date will also be recovered. A large assemblage of such dates would potentially be of academic importance, particularly if it is well recovered, well preserved and tightly dated.

Retention and disposal

The sample and the animal bone recovered during this exercise do not merit retention.

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.

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References

Hodgson, J. M. (1976). Soil survey field handbook. Describing and sampling soil profiles. *Soil Survey Technical Monograph 5*. Rothamsted Experimental Station. Harpenden: Lawes Agricultural Trust.

Table 1. Archive of the animal bone from St Mary's Abbey Precinct Wall.

Date	Context number	Preservation/ colour	Notes
Early Post-medieval	1011	Fair Brown	<i>Cattle</i> - 1 metatarsal (measurable); chopped <i>Pig</i> - 1 tibia
Late medieval	1012	Fair Brown	<i>Cat</i> - 1 femur <i>Unidentified</i> - 1 cow-sized rib fragment
Medieval	1016	Fair Brown	<i>Caprine</i> - 1 metatarsal <i>Unidentified</i> - 5 fragments
19/20th century	2001	Good Brown	<i>Cattle</i> - 1 calcaneum (measurable), 1 calcaneum (chopped), cow mandible (juvenile), 1 pelvis fragment <i>Caprine</i> - 1 metacarpal (measurable), 2 mandibles (both P3-M3), 1 radius <i>Pig</i> - 1 tibia
19/20th century	2002	Fair Fawn	<i>Unidentified</i> - 1 sheep-sized shaft fragment