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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Crossgates Farm, Seamer, N. Yorkshire (site code: CG96)

by

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Summary

Five samples of sediment from an enclosure boundary ditch tentatively dated to the Romano-British period, revealed by excavations at Crossgates Farm, Seamer, N. Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological remains. Two samples were selected for analysis. Rather small amounts of plant material were recovered: some charcoal, charred stem/root fragments and a few charred cereals; a few small bones (amphibian, shrew, fish) were also noted. The present material probably warrants no further analysis, though future excavations should include bulk-sampling and analysis of layers likely to give similar or larger concentrations of biological remains.

Keywords: CROSSGATES FARM; SEAMER; NORTH YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; ?ROMANO-BRITISH; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED CEREALS; CHARCOAL; BONE

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Introduction

Excavations were carried out by Malton Archaeological Projects Ltd at Crossgates Farm, Seamer, a few kilometres south of Scarborough, North Yorkshire, during 1996. Five General Biological Analysis samples ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al*. 1992) were submitted for an evaluation of their biological remains. The samples were from a ditch interpreted as forming a boundary to a rectangular enclosure of possible Romano-British date.

Methods

All of the samples were initially inspected in the laboratory. Two samples were selected for processing and were described using a *pro forma*. A 3 kg subsample was taken from each of the selected samples for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al*. (1980; 1986) and using a 'washover' to concentrate the less dense organic fraction. The remaining unprocessed sediment was retained as voucher samples. The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for their content of plant and invertebrate macrofossils, and animal bone. Notes were made on the quantity of fossils and principal taxa.

Results and discussion

Context information provided by the excavator is in square brackets.

Context 1092, Sample 4/T
[Silting of open ditch]

Just moist, mid to dark grey/brown (with a hint of purple), crumbly (working plastic and soft), slightly sandy, silty clay. Mortar/plaster, rootlets, and stones in the size range 2-20 mm were present. There was also a trace of charcoal.

The very small washover contained mainly ?modern root fragments, the rest being predominantly charcoal to 10 mm in maximum dimension. Amongst the charred plant remains were root/twig fragments thought to be heather/ling (Calluna vulgaris (L.) Hull), a small grass fruit, small numbers of poorly preserved cereal grains (only tentatively identified as wheat, Triticum, barley, Hordeum, and oats, Avena). There were also a few charred ?tuber and rhizome remains which may suggest that burnt turf was present. The concentration of plant remains overall was low, but a much larger sample might produce an interpretatively more useful assemblage. A single ?fish bone was also recovered.

The residue, which was small (approx. 0.3 litres) for the size of subsample processed, was composed mainly of sand and gravel. A few animal bones were recovered and comprised a single bone each of a common shrew, an amphibian, and an unidentified small mammal. Two fish bones, four unidentifiable bone fragments, a little charcoal, some nutshell fragments, and one (possibly contaminant) Hydrobia ulvae (Pennant) were also present.

Context 1093, Sample 5/T
[Primary silting of open ditch]

Just moist, mid brown (with a purple tinge), crumbly, then soft and sticky to plastic when wet, moderately stony, slightly sandy, silty clay. Stones in the size range 2-60 mm were common and a few

stones larger than 60 mm were present. Charcoal, rootlets, and fragments of mammal bone were also noted.

There was a very small washover, mainly charcoal, with other charred plant fragments much as in Sample 4, but much sparser. A modern mite and a few worm capsules were also recovered.

The residue was of more modest proportions, about 0.67 litres in volume, and consisted mostly of sand and gravel, the latter abundant and up to 50 mm in maximum dimension. Three unidentifiable fragments of burnt bone and one fish bone were present.

Recommendations

Further work on the bioarchaeological material from these particular contexts is not considered worthwhile, although some further useful information might conceivably be obtained from Context 1092 by processing a much larger subsample. In particular, there appears to be no potential for ecological or land-use reconstruction. It should be noted, however, that material from the other contexts revealed during these excavations, and not examined here, may not necessarily produce similar results.

If further excavations take place at this site then every effort should be made to investigate any revealed deposits, including an intensive regime of sampling, and commensurate funding for post-excavation analysis should be made available.

Retention and disposal

The sediment remaining from the selected samples need not be retained but a decision concerning retention of material from unexamined contexts will need to be made by MAP in consultation with the curator.

Archive

All extracted fossils, the washovers, and 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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