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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at West Cowick, East Yorkshire (site code: 1997.48)

by

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Summary

Two samples of sediment from the fills of a pit revealed by excavations at West Cowick, East Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological remains. Pottery from the fills dates to the late 15th/early 16th century. The only plant and invertebrate remains recovered from this material were small numbers of modern contaminants, indicating disturbance of the deposits. This material therefore warrants no further bioarchaeological analysis.

Keywords: WEST COWICK; EAST YORKSHIRE; BIOARCHAEOLOGICAL; EVALUATION; MEDIEVAL

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Introduction

Excavations carried out by Malton Archaeological Projects Ltd to the rear of the Ship Inn, West Cowick, East Yorkshire (SE 6505 2160) revealed a pit, associated with nearby kilns, containing sherds of pottery datable to the late 15th/early 16th century. Two General Biological Analysis samples ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al*. 1992) were submitted for an evaluation of their biological remains. One sample was taken from the uppermost fill of the pit and the other sample from the lower fill.

Methods

Both samples were initially inspected in the laboratory and described using a *pro forma*. The whole of Sample 1 (Context 1027), and a subsample of three kilograms from Sample 2 (Context 1028), were processed 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 from Sample 2 was retained as a voucher sample. The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for their content of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

Results and discussion

Context information provided by the excavator is in square brackets.

Context 1027, Sample 1/T
[Uppermost fill of pit 1030]

Just moist, mid brown, unconsolidated, slightly silty sand with stones present in the size range 2-60 mm. Rootlets were also noted.

The moderate-sized washover consisted largely of rootlets, with some very small fragments of pottery, cinder, coal, and charcoal. Also present were a few earthworm capsules and a few modern weed seeds of no interpretative value. The residue consisted of sand, with a few stones, some fragments of pot, and the occasional piece of charcoal (to 7 mm).

Context 1028, Sample 2/T
[Lower fill of pit 1030]

Moist, mid-dark brown, unconsolidated silty sand. Rootlets, pottery, 'glassy' slag, and stones within the size range 2-60 mm were present.

The washover was of moderate size and was composed mostly of rootlets and sand, with a few fragments of charcoal (to 5 mm), some tiny pieces of coal (to 3 mm), and some cinder. The only invertebrates present were modern contaminants and included a pupa and beetle larva. A few modern weed seeds were also noted. The residue contained mostly sand and pottery with just a few very small pieces of charcoal.

Unfortunately, neither of the samples yielded remains with any potential to shed light either on the source of fuel used for

the kilns (the tiny quantity of charcoal present can not be used as evidence of fuel), or on the nature of the local environment.

Recommendations

Further work on the bioarchaeological material from these particular contexts is not considered worthwhile, especially as the deposits appear to have undergone sufficient disturbance to allow contamination from modern plant and animal taxa. It should be noted, however, that any material from 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 showing an appreciable organic content, 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 MAPAC 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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