

Palaeoecology Research Services

**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at  
Metcalf Lane, Osbaldwick, York  
(site code: YORYM2002.451)**

by

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**Summary**

*Nine sediment samples recovered from excavations of deposits of ?prehistoric to modern date at Metcalfe Lane, Osbalwick, York, were submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential. All of the hand-collected bone recovered was from 'modern' contexts and was not included for evaluation.*

*Three of the samples yielded no more than a little charcoal in rather small fragments. The plant material in the single sample yielding modest numbers of charred cereal grains was not generally well preserved. Examination of a larger subsample is unlikely to provide specimens from which closer identification will be possible.*

*It is probably not worth pursuing further analysis of this material unless a reasonably narrow date can be achieved, and, even then, the possibility that it is not primary material means it is of limited value.*

*The present material need not be retained.*

**KEYWORDS:** METCALFE LANE; OSBALDWICK; YORK; EVALUATION; ?PREHISTORIC TO MODERN; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED GRAIN

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## Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Metcalfe Lane, Osbaldwick, York (site code: YORYM 2002.451)

### Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at Metcalfe Lane, Osbaldwick, York (NGR SE 6285 5220), between 22 April and 24 May 2002.

Nine sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were recovered from the deposits for which provisional dating ranged from ?prehistoric to modern. All of the hand-collected bone recovered was from 'modern' contexts and was not included for evaluation.

All of the samples were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

### Methods

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and four were selected for examination. Descriptions of the lithologies of these samples were recorded using a standard *pro forma* prior to processing (following the methods of Kenward *et al.* 1980; 1986) for the recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils and the residues were examined for larger plant macrofossils and artefactual remains.

### Results

The results of the investigation are presented in context number order. Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is given in square brackets. A brief summary of the processing method and an estimate of the

remaining volume of unprocessed sediment follows (in round brackets) after the sample numbers.

No invertebrate remains were recovered from the samples.

**Context 1008** [fill of linear gully 1023. Predates ridge and furrow so perhaps 10<sup>th</sup> or 11<sup>th</sup> century in date (though there was no pottery to substantiate this)]  
Sample 4/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 2 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, light to mid grey to mid brown to dark grey-brown, stiff to crumbly (working plastic), slightly silty clay with some ?rotted charcoal, charred grain and modern rootlets present.

There was a small washover consisting of a few cm<sup>3</sup> of modern roots with a modest-sized concentration of charred cereals, perhaps a few tens of grains per kilogramme of sediment. They mainly comprised some rather puffed and shrunken barley (*Hordeum*) and much better-preserved oats (*Avena*), with perhaps no more than a single wheat (*Triticum*) grain. The finer fractions contained rather numerous broken fragments of cereal. Chaff was confined to a few scraps of oat awn and glume, and there were a few charred and uncharred weed seeds, the latter probably of recent origin. Also present were traces of charcoal (to 5 mm in maximum dimension) and coal (to 3 mm), the latter perhaps from the local drift. The small residue of about 75 cm<sup>3</sup> was mainly iron-rich concreted sediment (?pan) to 5 mm with some ?burnt soil clasts to 15 mm.

**Context 4008** [fill of natural tree-throw or hollow 4009. ?Post-glacial/prehistoric in date]  
Sample 2/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 6 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, varicoloured (buff to dark grey-brown in shades of brown, grey, and grey-brown), stiff to brittle (working plastic), clay with a few modern rootlets.

The washover comprised a few cm<sup>3</sup> of modern roots with a little coal and charcoal (both to 5 mm); the tiny residue of a few cm<sup>3</sup> was of sand and gravel (to 10 mm).

**Context 5004** [backfill of curvilinear gully/ditch 5019 of probable Roman date]

Sample 3/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 7 litres of unprocessed sediment remain) Just moist, light to mid grey-brown to light to mid orange-brown (?oxidation), stiff to brittle (working plastic), clay with a few modern rootlets.

The washover comprised a few cm<sup>3</sup> of modern roots with a little coal (to 5 mm); there was a small residue of barely 50 cm<sup>3</sup> of sand and gravel (to 10 mm), most of the sand grade consisting of concreted iron-rich material (?pan).

**Context 6002** [secondary backfill of linear gully 6004 of probable Roman date]

Sample 1/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 8 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, light brown to light grey (and light to mid orange-brown in places), stiff to brittle (working plastic), clay with a little ?rotted charcoal and a few modern rootlets.

The washover comprised a few cm<sup>3</sup> of modern roots with a little coal (to 5 mm) and charcoal (10 mm); there was a tiny residue of less than 5 cm<sup>3</sup> of concreted sediment (?pan), sand, and gravel (to 10 mm), with a trace of brick/tile fragments (<2 mm).

## Discussion and statement of potential

Three of the samples yielded no more than a little charcoal in rather small fragments. The plant material in the single sample yielding modest numbers of charred cereal grains was not generally well preserved and examination of a larger subsample is unlikely to provide specimens from which closer identification will be possible.

## Recommendations

It is probably not worth pursuing further analysis of this material unless a reasonably narrow date can be achieved, and, even then, the possibility that it is not primary material means it is of limited value.

## Retention and disposal

The present material need not be retained.

## Archive

All material is currently stored by Palaeoecology Research Services (Unit 8, Dabble Duck Industrial Estate, Shildon, County Durham), along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

## Acknowledgements

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