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Evaluation of biological remains from further excavations at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: ERYMS1999/20)

by

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Summary

Washovers and residues from ten pre-processed bulk sediment samples, recovered from deposits of Neolithic to Romano-British date, revealed by further excavations at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their content of bioarchaeological remains.

Ancient biological remains recovered were restricted to small quantities of charcoal and charred hazel nutshell.

If not intrusive, the nutshell (and probably also the charcoal) would provide material suitable for dating by accelerator mass spectrometry if required. The example of material which may have originated in burnt turves (charred heather – Context 228) is of interest as a further example of a phenomenon which is increasingly commonly encountered on prehistoric sites in eastern Yorkshire and elsewhere.

The very small amounts of plant material from relatively large volumes of sediment (and lack of other ancient biological remains) indicate that further analysis of the deposits in hand and of others encountered in future in this area is probably not worthwhile. Any remaining sediment from these samples may be discarded unless it to be processed for the recovery of non-biological remains.

KEYWORDS: SEWERBY COTTAGE FARM; BRIDLINGTON; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; NEOLITHIC TO ROMANO-BRITISH; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

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Introduction

A further archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by On-Site Archaeology, at Sewerby Cottage Farm, Bridlington, East Riding of Yorkshire (NGR TA 186 694), during August and September 2002.

A geophysical survey of the site had indicated a complex of rectilinear enclosures in the south-western corner surrounded by a series of further ditches to the east and north. This pattern suggested a later prehistoric or Romano-British ladder settlement and surrounding field system. The fifteen excavated trial trenches (plus two from the earlier evaluation) were located to investigate these features.

Washovers and residues from ten pre-processed bulk sediment samples, mostly from fills of postholes and other cut features of Neolithic, Iron Age and Iron Age/Romano-British date, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Ten bulk sediment samples ('BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al*. 1992) were processed to 1 mm (with a 300 micron sieve for the lighter washover fraction) by the excavator.

The washovers and residues resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residues were examined for larger plant macrofossils, bone, and other biological and artefactual remains.

Results

Charred plant remains extracted from residues and washovers from the same samples were assessed for their content of plant and invertebrate remains and the archaeological potential of the remains. The results are summarised in Table 1.

As far as charred and therefore presumably ancient remains are concerned, only charcoal and some charred hazel (*Corylus avellana* L.) nutshell were recorded (the former present in all samples, the nutshell in all the Neolithic samples examined) and the quantities were usually very small; a single Iron Age sample (from Context 228 – pit fill) yielded some other remains which may indicate the presence of ash from burnt turves. Most samples contained some uncharred modern roots and there were rare uncharred weed seeds, also presumably modern. The only invertebrate remains were some uncharred modern earthworm egg capsules in one sample and shells of the burrowing land snail *Cecilioides acicula* (almost certainly intrusive to the deposit) in another.

The residues from processing were of stones (to 60 mm) and gravel ranging from 0.45 kg to 2 kg in dry weight. They contained no biological remains other than the traces of charred plant noted above. Fragments of flint (some of which may have been worked) were present in some of the residues.

Discussion and statement of potential

If not intrusive, the nutshell (and probably also the charcoal) would provide material suitable for dating by accelerator mass spectrometry if required.

The example of material which may have originated in burnt turves is of interest as a further example of a phenomenon which is increasingly commonly encountered on prehistoric sites in eastern Yorkshire and elsewhere (cf. Hall, 2002).

Recommendations

The very small amounts of plant material from relatively large volumes of sediment (and lack of other ancient biological remains) indicate that further analysis of the deposits in hand and of others encountered in future in this area is probably not worthwhile.

Retention and disposal

Any remaining sediment from these samples may be discarded unless it is to be processed for the recovery of non-biological remains.

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.

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References

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Table 1. Plant remains from Cottage Farm, Sewerby (further excavations). ***Key****: Neo = Neolithic; IA = Iron Age; LIA = late Iron Age; RB = Romano-British. For charcoal, the approximate volume (in cm^3), abundance (ab) and maximum dimension (sz, in mm) are given; '+' indicates 'trace' amounts (a few fragments, <1% of original volume), ++ represents a volume between 1% and 10%; maximum size (in mm).*

Context	**Context type**	**Date**	**Sample**	**Volume (litres)**	**charcoal**			**other remains**
					vol	ab	sz	
216	fill of ring ditch 215	LIA	1	10	<5	+	5	
228	fill of pit 229	IA	2	10	20	+	10	charred ?heather (cf. *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull root/basal twig fragments and indet. (probably monocot) root/rhizome fragments (both to 5 mm); modern earthworm egg capsules and one uncharred modern weed seed
230	fill of fire pit 211	IA	5	10	<5	+	2	
235	fill of ring-ditch re-cut 266	IA/RB	6	20	<5	+	5	
902	fill of posthole 901	Neo	8	10	20	+	15	a little charred hazel nutshell; charcoal includes ?hazel
904	fill of posthole 904	Neo	16	0.5	90	++	15	a little charred hazel nutshell
906	upper fill of posthole 905	Neo	9	5	65	++	20	a little charred hazel nutshell; a few modern uncharred weed seeds and some modern *Cecilioides acicula* (Müller) shells
907	fill of postpipe 908 in posthole 905	Neo	10	10	10	+	10	a little charred hazel nutshell
909	packing of posthole 905	Neo	11	2	<5	+	10	a little charred hazel nutshell
914	fill of posthole 913	Neo	15	10	80	+	15	a little charred hazel nutshell