

Palaeoecology Research Services

Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at a site near Homelands Farm, Selby Road, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: SRH2002)

by

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Summary

Three sediment samples and half a box of hand-collected bone, recovered from excavations of deposits of medieval to early modern date at a site near Homelands Farm, Selby Road, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, East Riding of Yorkshire, were submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

There were small amounts of uncharred plant remains and insects in all of the samples though the remains were generally strongly decayed and did not offer much information of interpretative value.

The vertebrate assemblage recovered from these excavations was rather scant. The early modern posthole fills mainly produced chicken remains and several fragments identified as cat. The skull and mandibles of a very young piglet and a few fragments of horse were recovered from ditch fills of 15th-17th century date. Whilst preservation was mostly quite good insufficient fragments were recovered for useful interpretation.

No further work on the current sediment samples is thought to be worthwhile, but the possibility that further excavation will reveal deposits with better preservation, both by charring and waterlogging, should be borne in mind and an appropriate programme of sampling and assessment undertaken. It seems unlikely that additional excavations in the vicinity would produce vertebrate remains of any interpretative value.

KEYWORDS: HOMELANDS FARM; SELBY ROAD; HOLME-ON-SPALDING-MOOR; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; 15TH TO 19TH CENTURY; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by Humber Field Archaeology at a site near Homelands Farm, Selby Road, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, East Riding of Yorkshire (NGR SE 8038 3842), during October 2002.

Previous excavations in the vicinity revealed an extensive late medieval pottery kiln site with enclosure ditches. During October 2002, three trenches were excavated, uncovering archaeological features, of which some were associated with those found in the earlier 2000 excavations. Preliminary investigations suggested that the deposits ranged in date from 14th/15th century to the early modern period (19th century onwards).

Three sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992), and half a box of hand-collected bone (approximately 10 litres) were submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The submitted sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithologies were recorded, using a standard *pro forma*, prior to processing, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

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

For the hand-collected vertebrate remains that were recorded, data were entered directly into

a series of tables using a purpose-built input system and *Paradox* software. Subjective records were made of the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Other information, such as fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks, was noted, where applicable.

Fragments were identified to species or species group using the PRS modern comparative reference collection. The bones that could not be identified to species were described as the 'unidentified' fraction.

Results

Sediment samples

The quantity and quality of preservation of plant and invertebrate remains were recorded for the three submitted samples. The results are presented in Table 1 together with archaeological information provided by the excavator.

Hand-collected vertebrate remains

Excavations at this site produced very little bone. The recovered assemblage amounted to only 36 fragments, 19 of which represented the fragmented remains of the head and lower jaw of a piglet. Deposits of 19th century date produced well-preserved fragments, whilst those of 15th-17th century date were of rather poor preservation. Extensive fresh breakage was noted, particularly within the material from Context 114. Table 2 shows the number of fragments from each phase and includes brief identification notes.

The pig skull was recovered from Context 114, a ditch fill of 15th-17th century date. The individual represented was very young,

probably neonatal, with none of its teeth showing any sign of wear. Other deposits of a similar date produced a heavily worn horse incisor and three fragments of horse cranium, whilst the four later posthole fills contained chicken and cat remains.

Discussion and statement of potential

There were small amounts of uncharred plant remains and insects in all of the samples though the remains were generally strongly decayed and did not offer much information of interpretative value. The charred remains included some heather material which may have originated in charred peat or turves (and consistent with recent observations at many sites in the south-east of the Vale of York).

Although some deposits showed potential for the survival of bone very few fragments were recovered, and the earlier material from the ditch fills (15th-17th century) was of rather poor preservation. It is suggested that this area of the site was not being used for the disposal of refuse and shows little potential for the recovery of useful vertebrate assemblages.

Recommendations

No further work on the current sediment samples is thought to be worthwhile, but the possibility that further excavation will reveal deposits with better preservation, both by charring and waterlogging, should be borne in mind and an appropriate programme of sampling and assessment undertaken.

The current vertebrate assemblage does not warrant further investigation. It seems unlikely that additional excavations in the vicinity would produce vertebrate remains of any interpretative value.

Retention and disposal

Any remaining samples of deposits from this excavation, and fossils extracted from them, together with all of the hand-collected material, should be retained for the present.

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. Comments on plant and invertebrate remains from three samples from excavations at Selby Road, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, East Riding of Yorkshire.

| Context | Sample | Weight and processing | Context information, sediment description, dating and comments |
|---------|--------|--|---|
| 138 | 3/T | 2.80 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no sediment remains from the submitted sample | <p>Ditch fill, ?17th century.</p> <p>Moist, light to mid grey-brown to mid grey-brown, crumbly, slightly silty sand. No inclusions were observed.</p> <p>There was a small washover of about 10-15 cm³ of organic material: charcoal (to 5 mm in maximum dimension), coal (to 2 mm), with traces of uncharred ('waterlogged') seeds and fruits, all fragmentary and taxa typically found where preservation is poor. There were, however, fragments of charred ?heather (cf. <i>Calluna vulgaris</i> (L.) Hull) root/basal twig, and uncharred and perhaps also charred peat (none of these larger than 5 mm), perhaps originating in burning of peat or turves. Also noted were traces of waterlogged wood (very decayed fragments to 5 mm) and some insect fragments, most of which were of weevil sclerites, of the kind often observed where decay has removed almost all the fossils. The very small residue of about 35 cm³ was of sand and a little gravel to (5 mm).</p> |
| 254 | 5/T | 2.90 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no sediment remains from the submitted sample | <p>Ditch fill, 16th century.</p> <p>Moist, light brown to mid grey-brown, crumbly, slightly silty sand. No inclusions were observed.</p> <p>The small washover of about 10 cm³ consisted of charcoal (to 5 mm) but with quite large numbers of (mostly) rather poorly preserved 'seeds' of stinging nettle (<i>Urtica dioica</i> L.) and henbane (<i>Hyoscyamus niger</i> L.) and some other weeds. Again there were traces of charred ?heather root/twig, charred ?peat, and some very decayed uncharred beetle fragments. The very small residue of about 50 cm³ comprised sand with a little iron-cemented sand and gravel (to 10 mm).</p> |
| 262 | 4/T | 2.70 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no sediment remains from the submitted sample | <p>Ditch fill, 15th/early 16th century.</p> <p>Moist, mid grey-brown, crumbly, slightly silty sand. No inclusions were observed.</p> <p>There was a small washover of about 30 cm³: a little charcoal (some with concreted sand attached, to 5 mm) and small charred twig fragments (to 5 mm); a few very decayed beetle fragments and a single uncharred elder (<i>Sambucus nigra</i> L.) seed were also noted. The twig fragments could not be identified, but some at least were clearly 'grooved' and may well be from a small shrubby legume, such as broom (<i>Cytisus scoparius</i> (L.) Link) or dyer's greenweed (<i>Genista tinctoria</i> L.)—identification might be possible if more material could be recovered and perhaps if scanning electron microscopy is used to discern the epidermis cell pattern where it survives. The very small residue of about 50 cm³ was sand and a little gravel and some iron-concreted sand (to 10 mm).</p> |

Table 2. Hand-collected vertebrate remains by context from excavations at Selby Road, Holme-on-Spalding-Moor, East Riding of Yorkshire. Key: Total frags = total number of fragments recovered.

| Context | Context type | Date | Total frags | Notes |
|----------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| 114 | fill of ditch [289] | 15 th -17 th C | 19 | Fragments of single pig skull - piglet; no wear on teeth. 19 fragments with fresh breakage damage - skull, maxillae and mandibles. |
| 222 | fill of posthole [182] | 19 th C+ | 4 | Chicken femur, skull, beak, pelvis and synsacrum |
| 223 | fill of posthole [187] | 19 th C+ | 2 | Two chicken sternum fragments; one from juvenile individual |
| 224 | fill of posthole [186] | 19 th C+ | 1 | Chicken tibiotarsus |
| 225 | fill of posthole [174] | 19 th C+ | 4 | Cat femur and 3 rib fragments, probably cat. |
| 252 | fill of ditch [251] | 15 th -17 th C | 4 | Four fragments - rather poorly preserved. Includes horse incisor - heavily worn and 3 horse cranium fragments. |
| 256 | fill of ditch [257] | 15 th -17 th C | 2 | Two very poorly preserved fragments; both were unidentified. |