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**Evaluation of biological remains from  
excavations at Throckley Middle School,  
Throckley, Tyne and Wear  
(site code: TMS04)**

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by

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**Summary**

*A single sediment sample recovered from deposits encountered during excavations at Throckley Middle School, Throckley, Tyne and Wear, was submitted for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential. The sample was taken from a deposit of ?early Roman date directly underlying and sealed by the foundation of Hadrian's Wall.*

*Ancient biological remains recovered from the sample were restricted to a small amount of unidentified fine wood charcoal and other charred plant material most likely to represent debris from the burning of peat or turves. In the context of a layer immediately underlying the foundations of Hadrian's Wall, debris from clearing of the ground prior to construction of the wall seems likely.*

*No further study of the biological remains from this sample is justified, but the possibility that other deposits with good preservation of charred plant remains may be present at this site should be borne in mind during any further development. Sufficient suitable material for radiocarbon dating to be attempted was recovered from the processed subsample but, should dating be attempted, it would be desirable to recover additional remains via the processing of additional sediment.*

**KEYWORDS:** THROCKLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL; THROCKLEY; TYNE AND WEAR; HADRIAN'S WALL; EVALUATION; EARLY ROMAN; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; BURNT PEAT/TURVES

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## Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Throckley Middle School, Throckley, Tyne and Wear (site code: TMS04)

### Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (Northern Office) at Throckley Middle School, Throckley, Tyne and Wear (centred on NGR NZ 1543 6686), during April 2004.

Two trenches were excavated and encountered the truncated remains of Hadrian's Wall. A layer overlying the natural sub-stratum and sealed by the Wall foundations was recorded in both of the trenches. A single bulk sediment sample ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) from this deposit (where recorded as Context 21) was submitted to Palaeoecology Research Services Limited (PRS), County Durham, for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

### Methods

The sediment sample was inspected and its lithology recorded, using a standard *pro forma*, prior to processing. A subsample was processed broadly using the techniques of Kenward *et al.* (1980).

The washover resulting from processing was examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residue was examined for larger plant macrofossils and other biological and artefactual remains.

### Results

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 number. No

invertebrate remains were recovered from the sample.

**Context 21** [deposit of ?early Roman date directly underlying and sealed by the foundation of Hadrian's Wall]

Sample 1/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 15 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, mid brown to mid grey-brown (mottled on a 5 mm-scale), crumbly (working soft), clay silt. Stones (2 to 60 mm) and flecks of ?charcoal or other fine charred material were present.

There was a tiny washover (~5 ml) of charred plant material, the bulk of which comprised small (<5 mm) fragments of root/rhizome material and one structure which may have been a tuber of lesser celandine, *Ranunculus ficaria* L. A few of the fragments could be heather (*Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull root/rhizome. Otherwise, there was a single plantain seed, perhaps hoary plantain, *Plantago media* L. and a very little small (<5 mm) wood charcoal. Overall, these remains are consistent with detritus from the burning of turves or perhaps peat.

The rather small residue (dry weight 0.73 kg) was of stones (to 45 mm) and sand.

### Discussion and statement of potential

Ancient biological remains recovered from the sample were restricted to a small amount of unidentified fine wood charcoal and other charred plant material most likely to represent debris from the burning of peat or turves (Hall 2003). In the context of a layer immediately underlying the foundations of Hadrian's Wall, debris from clearing of the ground prior to construction of the wall seems likely, the plant material perhaps even representing charring of surface or just subsurface vegetation *in situ*.

Some of the identifiable charred plant remains recovered would provide suitable material for radiocarbon dating (via AMS) to be attempted; though a 'flat spot' in the radiocarbon

calibration curve around the provisional date for this deposit may prevent a useful result.

## Recommendations

No further study of the biological remains from this sample is justified, but the possibility that other deposits with good preservation of charred plant remains may be present at this site should be considered in the event of further interventions.

If material for radiocarbon dating is required then processing of a larger subsample for the recovery of additional charred plant remains would be desirable.

## Retention and disposal

Although no further study of the biological remains is recommended, all of the material should be retained for the present – against the requirement for material to be submitted for radiocarbon dating.

## Archive

All material is currently stored by Palaeoecology Research Services Limited (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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