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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations on the west side of St Augustine's Gate, Hedon, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: SAH99)

by

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Summary

Four sediment samples from deposits revealed by excavations on land to the rear of Numbers 9 and 11 on the west side of St Augustine's Gate, Hedon, East Riding of Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

The ancient biological remains recovered were essentially limited to a very few poorly preserved charred bread/club wheat grains and some charred gorse leaves of little interpretative value. The small assemblage of vertebrate remains recovered from the samples was insufficient for any meaningful interpretation to be made.

No further work is recommended on the current material. Further bioarchaeological analysis of the deposits at this site is only likely to be warranted if sediments with a richer content of better-preserved remains are encountered.

KEYWORDS: ST AUGUSTINE'S GATE; HEDON; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; CHARRED GRAIN; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; MOLLUSCS

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Introduction

Archaeological excavations were carried out by Humber Field Archaeology on land to the rear of Numbers 9 and 11 on the west side of St Augustine's Gate, Hedon, in November 1999. Excavation was undertaken in two trenches located within separate burgage plots which revealed deposits mainly dating from the 12th Century through to the 19th Century. Episodes of ground raising, building, pit digging and dumping were recognised in both trenches.

Sediment samples from four contexts ('GBA' and 'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were recovered from the deposits and submitted to the EAU for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

All of the sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory. Descriptions of their lithologies were recorded using a standard *pro forma*. All four samples were processed following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Table 1 lists the samples delivered for assessment and gives notes on their treatment.

Results

The results are presented in context number order by trench. Archaeological information (provided by the excavator) is given in square brackets.

Trench 1

Context 1023 [fill of pit 1025 - pottery dated 12th-13th century]

Sample 1 (2 kg sieved to 300 μ m and washover to 300 μ m)

Waterlogged, mid to dark grey-brown, sticky, slightly sandy, clay silt, with small and medium-sized stones (6-60 mm) and a large fragment of brick/tile (to 200mm) present.

The small washover of about 30cm³ was of charcoal (to 15mm) and coal with some charred leaves or spines of gorse (*Ulex* sp.) and small charred twig fragments (which might also be of this plant). There was also a charred glume (chaff fragment), probably of oat (*Avena*). Uncharred plant remains included traces of a few weed and a waterside/aquatic taxon of no particular interpretative significance. No invertebrate remains were seen.

There was a very large residue of about 550cm³ of sand and gravel (to 30mm), with some mortar (to 40mm) and brick/tile and a trace of clinker/coke (both to 55mm); also present were shellfish fragments (to 5mm), coal (to 15mm), flint (to 35mm), and glass (to 30mm). Twenty-four bone fragments were recovered from this sample, most (20) of which were <2mm in dimension and not identified to species. Those fragments which could be identified included a caproid mandible and an amphibian shaft

fragment.

Context 1029 [Layer - ground raising deposit - pottery dated 12th-13th century]

Sample 3 (5.5 kg sieved to 300 μ m and washover to 300 μ m)

Moist, mid to dark grey-brown, sticky (working soft and sticky), very slightly sandy, clay silt. Charcoal, rotted shell, including cockle (*Cerastoderma* sp.), and ?mortar were present in the sample.

The small washover of about 50cm³ was of charcoal (to 10mm) and coal and cinders (to 15mm), with modern roots and rhizomes and a conifer shoot fragment. There were also traces of poorly preserved charred bread/club wheat (*Triticum aestivo-compactum*) grains, and of uncharred (?modern) elder (*Sambucus nigra*) seeds. A single earthworm egg capsule was noted.

The moderately large residue of approx 600cm³ was of sand, gravel (to 35mm, and including some angular chalk, to 65mm) and concreted sediment (in clasts to 10mm), with traces of brick/tile and pottery (both to 20mm) and some cockle shell fragments. Vertebrate remains amounted to 61 rather battered fragments. Remains of fish (probably Gadidae), ?chicken and amphibian were identified.

Trench 2

Context 2030 [ground raising deposit - pottery dated late 12th-early 13th century]

Sample 4 (2 kg sieved to 300 μ m and washover to 300 μ m)

Moist, light to mid grey-brown to mid grey-brown, soft and slightly sticky to crumbly (working plastic), slightly sandy, silty clay with small clasts of orange and light grey-brown ?clay. Small stones (6-20 mm), rotted charcoal fragments and modern springtails were present.

The small washover of about 20cm³ of charcoal and coal (to 5mm) with modern roots with a few poorly preserved bread/club wheat grains. A few fragments of poorly preserved invertebrate cuticle were noted. Molluscs were represented by a single, ?modern *Vertigo pygmaea* (Draparnaud) and fragments of *Cecilioides acicula* (Müller), a burrowing species which is almost certainly intrusive within the deposit.

There was a moderate-sized residue of about 200cm³ of sand and mortar (to 15 mm) with a trace of brick/tile (to 10mm), chalk (to 20mm), flint (15mm) and pottery (30mm). Fragments of cockle (*Cerastoderma* sp.) shell, ?bird eggshell and a small number (24) of bone fragments, including fish were also noted.

Context 2033 [ground raising deposit - pottery dated late 12th-14th century]

Sample 5 (2 kg sieved to 300 μ m and paraffin flotation)

Waterlogged, mid brown, sticky (working slightly soft and sticky), sandy clay silt. Very small stones (2-6 mm) and ? charcoal were present in the sample, whilst tufa was common.

The tiny washover of a few cm³ in volume was of modern roots with a few poorly preserved bread/club wheat grains. One earthworm egg capsule and a *Daphnia* ephippium were also noted.

The large residue of about 400cm³ mainly consisted of vesicular tufa (to 45mm; probably most of the 'sand' present was also tufa, rather than quartz sand). There was a little brick/tile and charcoal (both to 10mm), along with possible shellfish and eggshell. Small fragments of landsnails, among them *Cochlicopa* *lubrica*, were also recorded. Eleven fish bones, including herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) and Pleuronectidae vertebrae, were identified, the remaining vertebrate fragments (21) being unidentified.

Discussion and statement of potential

These deposits (as represented by the samples) were remarkably free of any evidence for occupation other than a little pottery, brick/tile and bone, and plant remains were essentially limited to a very few poorly preserved charred bread/club wheat grains of no particular interpretative value, although one context (1023) yielded some charred gorse leaves which may indicate remains from material used as fuel, or the burnt remains of a raw material originally used for one or more of a myriad of purposes. There is nothing to be gained from further analysis of these samples and further bioarchaeological analysis of the deposits at this site is only likely to be warranted if sediments with a richer content of better-preserved remains are encountered.

Recommendations

No further investigation of the biological remains from these deposits is warranted.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be sieved specifically for artefact recovery.

Archive

All material is currently stored in the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York, along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

Acknowledgements

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References

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Table 1. List of the sediment samples evaluated from St Augustine's Gate, Hedon, East Riding of Yorkshire (with notes on their treatment).

Context	Sample	Context description	Notes
1023	1	fill of pit 1025	2 kg sieved to 300 m and washover to 300 m
1029	3	ground raising deposit	5.5 kg sieved to 300 m and washover to 300 m
2030	4	ground raising deposit	2 kg sieved to 300 m and washover to 300 m
2033	5	ground raising deposit	2 kg sieved to 300 m and paraffin flotation