

**Notes on the biological remains from Sherburn, North Yorkshire
(Site code 99EV08)**

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Summary

The very few ancient biological remains recovered were limited to very small fragments of charcoal and other charred plant remains (including a few charred cereals), a few land snails and a small quantity of vertebrate remains. These remains are of no interpretative value beyond that discussed in the text.

Introduction

An evaluation at Sherburn, North Yorkshire produced a single sample and small bag of bone for analysis. These were recovered from medieval (12th-13th Century) deposits.

Results

Sediment sample

Context 1005 [12/13th century ditch fill]

Sample 100501/BS (14 kg sieved to 500 µm and washover also to 500 µm)

Just moist, mid reddish brown, unconsolidated (working soft and slightly sticky when wetted), very slightly clay, sandy silt (to silty sand). Very small to large stones (2 to 60+ mm) and fragments of pot were present in the sample.

The washover consisted of about 20 cm³, mostly of amorphous charred material, with traces of two possible wet grassland plant taxa and small charred root/rhizome fragments (less than 5 mm in maximum dimension); these were perhaps material originating in ash from burnt turves or peat. There was also a little charcoal (to 10 mm) and a further 20 cm³ or so of modern roots with some modern weeds and other seeds. The very few charred cereal grains present appeared mostly to be bread/club wheat (*Triticum aestivo-compactum*), though none was whole and all were badly eroded. Invertebrate remains included land snails: many (more than 20) *Cecilioides acicula* (Müller) (a burrowing species most likely intrusive to the deposit), five *Vallonia excentrica* Sterki, a single *Cochlicopa lubrica* (Müller), and unidentified fragments of three other taxa; a few earthworm egg capsules; and a head of a large ground-dwelling weevil (*Barynotus* sp.). The fair preservational condition of this last, together with the lack of other insect remains, suggests that it was intrusive to the deposit. One eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)), two herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) vertebrae, and an amphibian bone were also recovered from the washover of this sample.

The modest-sized residue (dry weight 2.6 kg) was mostly stones (mainly chalk to 90 mm with a little flint), sand and gravel with a little pot, cinder, modern roots, earthworm egg capsules and burrow casts, unidentified land snail fragments, and animal bone. The latter comprised a total of 78 fragments of bone (weighing 3.3 g). Species included mole (*Talpa europaea* L.), herring (*Clupea harengus* L.), eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)) and amphibian. The remainder comprised unidentified mammal and fish fragments.

Hand-collected vertebrate remains

Overall preservation was described as good. Colour was noted as ginger, whilst angularity (appearance of broken surfaces) was recorded as slightly battered. A single burnt fragment was present, and fresh breakage was evident on 20-50 % of the assemblage.

A total of 15 bone fragments (weighing 845 g) were recovered from three contexts. Most of the vertebrate fragments were identifiable to species and included cattle, horse, caprovid, pig, dog and hare (*Lepus* sp.).

Context 1002

1 cow lower 3rd molar
1 cow maxillary molar
1 cow metacarpal (unfused)
1 caprovid pelvis
1 caprovid radius (subadult)
1 sheep radius
1 hare tibia
1 dog ulna
2 large mammal shaft fragment (1 burnt)
Weight = 128.2 g

Context 1005

1 pig scapula
Weight = 5.7 g

Context 1008

1 horse humerus (measurable)
1 horse tibia (measurable)
1 cow mandible (with teeth)
1 large mammal cervical vertebra
Weight = 710.9 g

Discussion and statement of potential

Plant remains are very thinly dispersed in the sample examined and do not themselves warrant further study. Similarly, the invertebrate remains have no interpretative potential. The vertebrate assemblage is too small to allow further work to take place and is hence of no interpretative value.

Recommendations

If the sediment investigated bioarchaeologically is typical of the archaeological deposits at this site it is probable that further study will not be productive of interpretatively useful fossil plant assemblages, though every effort should be made to recognise, sample and analyse any primary contexts where charred plant material is known or suspected to be present in high concentrations.

As bone assemblages of 12th-13th century date have rarely been fully analysed and published, provision should be made for the recovery, analysis and publication of what might be expected to be a moderate-sized bone assemblage from any further excavation.

Retention and disposal

Any remaining sediment from this sample may be discarded unless it is to be sieved for the recovery of artefacts.

The vertebrate remains need not be retained.

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