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**Assessment of biological remains from excavations at
Foxton's Garage, York (site code: 2000.452)**

by

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Summary

Samples of sediment and a single box of hand-collected bone recovered from excavations at Foxton's Garage, York, have been assessed for their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The samples proved to be almost barren of identifiable plant and invertebrate remains. The vertebrate assemblage recovered from Trench 9 was too small to be of interpretative value and that from Trench 7 appeared to be of reworked (or redeposited) material and showed no potential for further analysis.

No further work is recommended on the current material.

KEYWORDS: FOXTON'S GARAGE; YORK; ASSESSMENT; POST MEDIEVAL; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; ANIMAL BONE; HUMAN BONE

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Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by MAP Archaeological Consultancy Ltd. at Foxton's Garage, York (NGR SE 5975 5194), in March and April 2000. Seven sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) from seven contexts and one box (approximately 20 litres) of hand-collected bone were recovered from the deposits. Contexts 7028 and 7034 contained Roman pot but all of the deposits considered here must post date the period 13th-16th century because of the presence of medieval pottery in Phase 1 (Context 7034).

All of the samples were submitted to the EAU for assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The submitted sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory. The lithologies of four of the samples 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 four selected samples were also examined for microfossils (in particular diatoms) using the 'squash' technique of Dainton (1992) this method was originally developed for the assessment of intestinal parasitic nematode eggs but has also proved to be applicable for the detection of other microfossils.

Plant macrofossils were examined from the residues, flots, and washovers resulting from processing. The flots and washovers were also examined for invertebrate remains, and the residues were examined for other biological and artefactual remains.

Table 1 shows a list of the submitted samples and notes on their treatment.

Results

Sediment samples

The results are presented in context number order.

Context 7021

Sample 1/T (3 kg GBA)

Moist, mid grey-brown (locally more brown and more grey), stiff to crumbly (working soft), very slightly sandy clay silt. Very small stones (2 to 6 mm) were present.

The microfossil 'squash' was wholly inorganic.

There was a small residue of about 300 cm³ of which about half the volume was made up by a single cobble, the rest being sand and gravel. The tiny flot contained a few elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) seeds and seed fragments, some (?modern) rootlets, a few very decayed fragments of insect cuticle, traces of some broken cysts of the soil-dwelling nematode *Heterodera*, and traces of fine (<2 mm) charcoal.

Context 7028

Sample 3/BS (9.5 kg bulk-sieved to 300 microns and washover)

Moist, mid grey-brown, stiff and slightly sticky (working soft), clay silt with bird bone present.

The small residue of about 700 cm³ consisted of sand with some gravel and traces of brick/tile, bone (including a chicken (*Gallus f. domestic*) humerus but mostly unidentified fragments some of which were burnt), pottery and coal, and a probable iron object.

Sample 3/T (3 kg GBA)

Description as for the bulk subsample above.

The microfossil 'squash' was mostly inorganic with a trace of organic detritus, a few fungal hyphae, and a single live soil nematode.

The small residue of about 250 cm³ consisted of sand with a little gravel; the tiny flot contained traces of fine (<2 mm) charcoal and a few elder seeds and seed fragments, and traces of very decayed insect cuticle and tentatively identified earthworm egg capsules and broken *Heterodera* cysts.

Context 7031

Sample 4/T (3 kg GBA)

Moist, mid grey-brown, stiff to crumbly (working soft), slightly sandy clay silt with medium-sized stones (20 to 60 mm) present.

The microfossil 'squash' was mostly inorganic with a trace of organic detritus, a few fungal hyphae, and a single live soil nematode.

There was a small residue of barely 200 cm³ of sand and gravel with traces of bone, cinders, brick/tile and ?slag. The washover comprised a few cm³ of sand and fine (<5 mm) charcoal with some ?modern rootlets and an earthworm egg capsule, as well as traces of elder seeds and seed fragments.

Context 7034

Sample 6/T (3 kg GBA)

Moist, light to mid grey brown (locally light to mid grey), soft and slightly sticky (working soft and somewhat thixotropic), slightly sandy clay silt with small stones (6 to 20 mm) present.

The microfossil 'squash' was mostly inorganic with a trace of organic detritus and two live soil nematodes.

The small dry residue of about 200 cm³ consisted of sand and gravel with traces of pottery, brick/tile, bone (some burnt), clinker/slag and coal. The small washover was a few cm³ of sand with some charcoal (to 5 mm), including oak (*Quercus*); there were a few elder seed fragments.

Hand-collected bone

Material from both trenches was mostly reasonably well-preserved, but was rather battered in appearance and, in some cases, the bones had very rounded edges.

Trench 7

The bones from this trench were extremely fragmented. Thirteen deposits were represented. A single human phalange fragment was noted from Context 7017. The remaining deposits produced only animal bone, with cattle and large mammal (probably mainly cattle) fragments being the most abundant. Small numbers of caprovid, pig, horse and chicken remains were also identified. Few measurable bones were present because of the fragmentary nature of the remains, and mandibles or isolated teeth (of use for providing age-at-death or sexing information) were rather scarce.

Trench 9

Only a very small assemblage of material was recovered from this trench. Bones from Context 9003 were mostly identified as human. The fragments from the other four contexts that produced bone were few in number and were identified as cattle or large mammal.

Discussion and statement of potential

Although it was considered that there might be some potential for preservation of plant and animal remains in these deposits when the samples were first examined in the laboratory, they have proved to be almost barren of identifiable remains; certainly the plant and invertebrate material recorded are merely those widely recorded in deposits with minimal preservation and perhaps represent fossils introduced into the silts post-depositionally through the action of soil fauna or via soil incorporated into the silts as they formed.

The vertebrate assemblage recovered from Trench 9 was too small to be of interpretative value and that from Trench 7 appeared to be of reworked (or redeposited) material and showed no potential for further analysis.

The examined deposits appeared to have been water lain, however, the dearth of biological remains meant that no additional information was obtainable to confirm (or deny) this impression.

Recommendations

It is not recommended that any further study of the material in hand or of deposits similar to those examined here is undertaken at this site, though the likelihood that well-preserved plant and invertebrate remains will be present in deeper deposits at a location like this, close to the River Ouse, should be borne in mind when planning future interventions.

Similarly, although the current bone assemblage has no interpretative value, it does show the potential for the preservation of vertebrate remains from these deposits. More widespread or larger scale excavations would probably produce a moderate-sized vertebrate assemblage that would be of some interest if it were associated with a tight chronological framework.

Retention and disposal

The samples need not be retained unless there are requirements for study of non-biological components. The vertebrate assemblage should be retained for the present.

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.

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Table 1. List of sediment samples from excavations at Foxton's Garage, York, with notes on their treatment.

Context	Sample	Notes
7021	1	3 kg paraffin flotation
7025	2	Sample examined – no further action
7028	3	3 kg paraffin flotation and 9.5 kg bulk sieved to 300 microns
7031	4	3 kg processed to 300 microns with washover
7032	5	Sample examined – no further action
7034	6	3 kg processed to 300 microns with washover
7035	7	Sample examined – no further action