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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at land off Wigginton Road, York (site code: YORYM 2000.572)

by

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Summary

Five sediment samples and a single separately bagged spot find from deposits revealed by excavations at land off Wigginton Road, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

The few ancient biological remains recovered from the sediment samples were of no interpretative value.

No further work is recommended on the current material.

KEYWORDS: WIGGINTON ROAD; YORK; EVALUATION; ROMAN; ?19TH/20TH CENTURY; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at land off Wigginton Road, York (NGR: SE 5975.5575), during July 2000.

Five sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) from separate contexts were recovered from the deposits. A single separately bagged spot find from one of the deposits was also submitted. Preliminary evidence suggested that the deposits were of Roman and 19th/20th century date.

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

Methods

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

The washovers and residues were examined for plant remains. The washovers were also scanned for invertebrate remains, and the residues for other biological and artefactual remains. A brief examination was made of the spot sample from Context 4001 (Sample 4).

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

Results

The results are presented in context number order. Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is presented in square brackets.

Context 1008 [?19th/20th century backfill of feature possibly containing a hedge]

Sample 1/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns, with washover)

Just moist, light grey-brown (locally more grey and more brown), stiff (working plastic, more plastic when wet), slightly sandy clay with a little charcoal and modern rootlets present.

There was a very small residue of about 75 cm³ of charcoal, modern roots and gravel, charcoal, coal and (mainly indurated, perhaps partly burnt) ?peat or mor humus to 20 mm (the latter is the peaty material accumulating on heathland) with burnt soil (some largish lumps to 30 mm). There were traces of charred hazel (*Corylus avellana* L.) nutshell. The tiny flot was of modern roots, a fresh-looking elder seed and other modern or probably modern plant remains.

Context 3011 [?19th/20th century backfill of feature possibly containing a hedge]

Sample 2 (Description only)

Just moist, light brown (buff) to mid to dark grey (mottled/jumbled on 10 mm-scale), brittle to crumbly, slightly clay sandy silt (more sandy in places) with modern rootlets present.

No further investigation of this sample was undertaken.

Context 3016 [Roman backfill – basal fill of ditch 3018]

Sample 3/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Just moist, light grey-brown to dark grey, stiff (working soft), clay silt. Charcoal flecks, ?charred grain, and modern rootlets were present in the sample.

The very small residue-cum-washover of about 10 cm³ consisted of quartz sand with some charcoal and charred and uncharred fragments of peat/mor humus (all to 5 mm). There were moderate numbers of *Cenococcum sclerotia* (resting bodies of this soil-dwelling fungus may be no more than an indicator of the accumulation or inwash of soil, though they might also be introduced with mor humus), structures which may have been earthworm egg capsules, and some modern roots and grass fruits (some of the latter had begun to germinate). There were also moderate numbers of tiny fragments of beetle sclerites, all apparently from weevils. Although these could not be identified more closely, they were probably species found on soil surfaces. Such assemblages of extremely decayed remains of robust weevils are rather characteristic of ancient soils and features infilled by soil inwash.

Context 4001 [19th/20th century backfill of feature possibly containing a tree]

Sample 4/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Just moist, varicoloured (light grey to mid grey-brown to dark grey-brown), crumbly (working just plastic), silty clay sand with some modern roots/rootlets.

There was a very small residue of a few cm³ of modern roots, with sand with a little charcoal (including burnt bark fragments to 10 mm). The traces of uncharred plant remains were modern, as were some earthworm egg capsules. The very small flot consisted of modern roots.

Sample 4/SPOT

A spot find bagged separately on site from Sample 4: a pair of charred acorn cotyledons (the seed leaves from within the fruit of an oak, *Quercus* sp.).

Context 7001 [Roman backfill – only fill in ditch 7002]

Sample 5/T (Description only)

Just moist, light to mid grey to light to mid grey-brown (orangeish in places - from rotted modern rootlets), stiff (working soft and slightly plastic), slightly silty clay with some modern rootlets present. This appears to be a 'natural' deposit.

No further investigation of this sample was undertaken.

Discussion and statement of potential

No further study of the biological remains from these samples is necessary.

Recommendations

No further work is recommended on the current material.

Ditches such as 3018 at the site might locally produce good preservation and the deposits should be excavated and sampled if they are threatened by the proposed development.

Retention and disposal

The current material may be discarded.

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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References

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Table 1. List of sediment samples from excavations at land off Wigginton Road, York, with notes on their treatment.

| Context | Sample | Notes |
|---------|--------|---|
| 1008 | 1 | 2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover |
| 3011 | 2 | Description only |
| 3016 | 3 | 3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover |
| 4001 | 4 | 2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover, and spot find |
| 7001 | 5 | Description only |