

Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York 2001/05, 3 pp

**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at
Britannia car park, York (site code: YBC00)**

by

Deborah Jaques, Allan Hall and John Carrott

Summary

A single sediment sample from deposits revealed by excavations at Britannia car park, York, was submitted for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Small quantities of plant and vertebrate remains were recovered from the sample. These were of extremely limited interpretative value but did indicate the potential to recover biological remains from deposits in this area.

No further work on the current sample is warranted and any remaining sediment may be discarded (unless it is to be sieved for artefact recovery).

KEYWORDS: BRITANNIA CAR PARK, YORK; ST LEONARD'S LEPER HOSPITAL; EVALUATION; MEDIEVAL; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; PLANT REMAINS; SHELL; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

Authors' address:

Palaeoecology Research Services
Environmental Archaeology Unit
Department of Biology
P. O. Box 373
University of York
York YO10 5YW

Telephone: (01904) 433846/434475/434487
Fax: (01904) 433850

Prepared for:

Field Archaeology Specialists
Department of Archaeology
Kings Manor
York YO1 2EP

25 January 2001

Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Britannia car park, York (site code: YBC00)

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by Field Archaeology Specialists at Britannia car park, York revealing two medieval boundary ditches (F1 and F8, possibly associated with the St Leonard's Leper Hospital) and a later brick culvert (F4, possibly associated with the 18th century inn).

A single sediment sample ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) was recovered from the deposits. Dated artefacts recovered from the deposits (pot sherds and tile) were all of medieval date

The sample was submitted to the EAU for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment sample

The sediment sample was inspected in the laboratory and its lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma*. The sample was processed following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Results

Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is presented in square brackets. The sample number has been created for EAU internal record keeping purposes and is derived from the context number.

Sediment sample

Context 1006 [Primary fill of a large medieval boundary ditch (F1) dated to the 14th or 15th century] Sample 100601/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Moist, mid grey-brown (locally light to mid brown), stiff and slightly sticky (working soft and plastic), very slightly sandy silty clay. Rounded pebbles (6 to 60+ mm), blue vivianite (particularly along root traces), charcoal and very rotted ?oyster (*Ostrea edulis* L.) shell were present in the sample.

The sample yielded a very small washover of a few cm³ of charcoal (to 15 mm) with a little coal (to 15 mm), and traces of ?modern roots, modern moss, and seeds or seed fragments of a few charred and uncharred weeds of no particular significance. There were a few tiny charred twig fragments which may have been heather (*Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull), and a single charred sclerenchyma spindle of cotton grass (*Eriophorum vaginatum* L.), perhaps evidence for burnt peat or turf. Also present were some small clasts of the blue mineral vivianite, indicative of the former presence of organic matter. The moderate-sized residue was of sand and gravel (to 45 mm) with a trace of pottery, bone and a few flakes of rotted ?oyster shell (to 25 mm).

Twenty-one fragments of mostly well-preserved bone were recovered from this sample. Most were small (<20 mm) and unidentifiable, but four amphibian bones and several fish fragments were noted. The remainder of the assemblage represented medium-sized mammals and included a number of cranial fragments.

Discussion and statement of potential

The sample does not warrant further study though it clearly shows that deposits in this area may well yield small, but potentially

useful, quantities of biological remains (particularly of charred plant and bone).

In the event of further excavation, examination of more material from the area may offer evidence for fuel consumption and use of raw materials.

Recommendations

No further work is necessary on the present sample, though the possibility of recovering interpretatively useful assemblages of biological remains from similar deposits should be borne in mind when planning future interventions. Additionally, deeper deposits may well have some waterlogged preservation.

Retention and disposal

The remaining sediment from the current sample may be discarded unless it is to be sieved 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

The authors are grateful to Justin Garner-Lahire of Field Archaeology Specialists for providing the material and the archaeological information, and to English Heritage for allowing AH to contribute to this report.

References

Dobney, K., Hall, A. R., Kenward, H. K. and Milles, A. (1992). A working classification of sample types for environmental archaeology. *Circaea, the Journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology* **9** (for 1991), 24-6.

Kenward, H. K., Engleman, C., Robertson, A., and Large, F. (1986). Rapid scanning of urban archaeological deposits for insect remains. *Circaea* **3** (for 1985), 163-72.

Kenward, H. K., Hall, A. R. and Jones, A. K. G. (1980). A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal microfossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits. *Science and Archaeology* **22**, 3-15.