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**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Eastgate South,
Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: DES2001)**

by

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Summary

Two sediment samples from deposits of Romano-British date, revealed by excavations at Eastgate South, Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Though charred plant remains were very sparse in the samples, it would perhaps be worth examining more material, especially from Context 56 and other similar feature fills to check for cereals, chaff and other material. Certainly any further excavation should be accompanied by careful sampling of suitable deposits (especially pit and ditch fills, hearths and floors, if found).

Small assemblages of snails were recovered from the samples and these were of some use in the determination of the local environment. In the event of further excavation the possibility of recovering similar assemblages should be considered.

KEYWORDS: EASTGATE SOUTH; DRIFFIELD; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; EARLY AND LATE ROMANO-BRITISH; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; SNAILS

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by Humber Field Archaeology at Eastgate South, Driffield, East Riding of Yorkshire (NGR TA 0282 5740), between 4 and 19 April 2001.

Two sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were recovered from the deposits. Preliminary evidence (from pottery dating) gave early and late Roman-British dates for the deposits.

All of the material was submitted to the EAU for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithologies 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 washovers and residues were examined for plant remains. The washovers were also examined for invertebrate remains, and the residues were examined for other biological and artefactual remains.

Results

Sediment samples

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

Context 9 [fill of pit 98. Romano-British]

Sample 3/BS (10 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Moist, mid grey-brown, soft (working more or less plastic), very stony (abundant stones in the range 2 to 20 mm), silty clay with some ?charcoal present.

This subsample yielded a very large residue of about 3.5 litres of angular chalk gravel (to 70 mm in maximum dimension), with some other gravel, including a little flint, and some sand. There were also a few fragments of baked clay/daub (to 25 mm). The small washover consisted of a few cm³ of charcoal (to 5 mm) and snails, with traces of charred ?heather (*Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull) root-basal twig fragments, root/rhizome fragments and unidentified charred cereal grains. (The ?heather and root/rhizome material seems most likely to have originated in peat or turves burnt for fuel or burnt as a result of destruction of a roof or wall).

The small snail assemblage included some *Pupilla muscorum* (Linnaeus) and *Cochlicopa lubrica* (Müller) together with smaller numbers of *Trichia hispida* (Linnaeus), *Vallonia* sp., *Carychium* sp., ?*Aegopinella* sp., ?*Vitrea* sp., and *Ceciloides acicula* (Müller). The latter a modern burrowing species almost certainly intrusive to the deposit.

Context 56 [primary fill of ditch 58. Late Romano-British (4th-5th century)]

Sample 2/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Moist, mid to dark grey-brown, crumbly (working soft and slightly sticky), slightly stony, clay silt with some clasts of mid reddish-brown clay.

There was a large residue of about 600 cm³ of angular chalk gravel (to 30 mm), some other gravel, including flint, a trace of brick/tile (to 20 mm) and a little sand. The small washover comprised a few cm³ of charcoal (to 10 mm) and snails with a few charred wheat (*Triticum*) grains and one barley (*Hordeum*) grain, as well as and some ?spelt (*T. cf. spelta* L.) glume-bases (the latter few in number, but quite well preserved). There were also traces of charred ?*Calluna* root-twig fragments.

The small snail assemblage was very similar to that recovered from Context 9 (Sample3) though no *P. muscorum* were seen and there were a few freshwater planorbids.

Discussion and statement of potential

Archaeobotanical evidence from the Driffield area is very meagre and the late date of some of this Romano-British material is significant: it is a period when we should be considering what changes to agriculture took place as the influence of the Roman establishment declined (at least in terms of any kind of centralised system of organisation and trade). The presence of remains which may have arrived as fuel or in building materials is of importance in adding to a growing body of such evidence from late prehistoric and early historic sites in this area of England.

The small snail assemblages had two components, the first indicating a dry, calcareous, open landscape, and the second a damp, more heavily vegetated one. Such assemblages are fairly common from cut features at sites on chalk—the ‘dry’ component reflecting the general local environment and the ‘damp’ component the modified conditions within the cut. The presence of planorbid remains in the sample from Context 56 indicates that the ditch contained water at some point.

Recommendations

Though charred plant remains were very sparse, it is perhaps worth examining more material, especially from Context 56 and other similar feature fills to check for cereals, chaff and other material. Certainly any further excavation should be accompanied by careful sampling of suitable deposits (especially pit and ditch fills, hearths and floors, if found).

No further work is recommended on the current snail assemblages. The numbers of recovered remains were small but of some use in the interpretation of the local environment and, in the event of further excavation, the possibility of recovering similar assemblages should be considered. In particular, variation between assemblages recovered from sequences of samples taken through cut features may reflect changes in local land-use or in the use of the feature.

Retention and disposal

All of the current material 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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