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**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Union Terrace, York  
(site code: 2001.4434)**

by

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**Summary**

*This report evaluates the bioarchaeological potential of a single sediment sample and a small assemblage of hand-collected vertebrate remains from excavations at Union Terrace, York. At the time of writing, pottery spot dates were unavailable, but the deposits which produced the sample and the bones were believed to be post-medieval in date.*

*Only a few ancient plant and invertebrate remains were present and these had no interpretative potential. The small, and mainly well preserved, vertebrate assemblage included the remains of cattle, caprovids and pigs, but there were insufficient fragments to be of any interpretative value.*

*Further analysis of the biological remains recovered from the current excavations is not warranted. Additional excavations are only likely to produce useful remains if deeper deposits are investigated.*

**KEYWORDS:** UNION TERRACE; YORK; EVALUATION; POST-MEDIEVAL; 18<sup>TH</sup>/EARLY 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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## Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Union Terrace, York (site code: 2001.4434)

### Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at a site in Union Terrace, York (NGR TA \*\*), in May 2001.

One sediment sample ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) and a third of a box of bone (approximately 7 litres) were recovered from the deposits. Preliminary evidence suggested a post-medieval/early modern date for the deposits.

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

### Methods

The sediment sample was inspected in the laboratory and its lithology was 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 washover and residue were examined for plant remains. The washover was also examined for invertebrate remains, and the residue for other biological and artefactual remains.

For the hand-collected vertebrate remains, subjective records were made of the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Additionally, for the larger assemblages, notes were made concerning fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks. Where possible, fragments were identified to species or species group, using the reference collection at the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York.

Fragments not identifiable to species were described as the 'unidentified' fraction.

### Results

#### *Sediment sample*

Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is given in square brackets.

**Context 10005** [slightly organic layer, with a highly 'organic' odour - Phase 2 – post-medieval]  
Sample 10/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover)

Moist, dark grey-brown, brittle to crumbly (working somewhat plastic when wet), slightly clay silt, with rotted limestone and traces of brick/tile present.

There was a large residue of about 550 cm<sup>3</sup> of quartz sand and brick/tile (to 15 mm in maximum dimension), with some coal, cinder (both to 15 mm), gravel (to 35 mm) and traces of bone (to 5 mm); there were some concreted lumps of sediment (to 20 mm) but these are not thought to represent faecal material. The minute washover contained a few moderately well preserved uncharred seeds of no particular interpretative value (only buttercup, *Ranunculus* Section *Ranunculus*) was present as more than one individual—there were moderate numbers) and traces of insect remains with no interpretative potential.

#### *Hand-collected vertebrate remains*

A very small assemblage of animal bones was recovered from these excavations. Material from five contexts (9015, 10003, 10005, 10009 and 10016) was recorded, most representing deposits from Trench 10.

Preservation of the vertebrate bones was mostly good and few fragments were battered in appearance. Fresh breakage was noted, particularly on fragments from Context 10009.

The entire assemblage amounted to 44 fragments, with only 10 of these bones being identified to species or family group. The identified bones included the remains of cattle, caprovids and pigs. The unidentified fraction was composed of large and medium-sized mammal rib and shaft fragments, whilst large mammal cranium fragments and vertebrae were

also noted. Few fragments of use for providing biometrical and age-at-death data were recovered.

## Discussion and statement of potential

On the basis of examination of this single sediment sample, there appears to be no value in further analysis of the material from this site, though—from what is known of the archaeology and environmental archaeology) in this area, *vide* Jones (1987), Tomlinson (1989) and Richards *et al.* (1989)—excavations of deeper-lying material may well yield deposits with a higher potential for bioarchaeological study.

The size of the vertebrate assemblage is small and the number of fragments providing biometrical and age-at-death information is insufficient for further analysis to be undertaken.

## Recommendations

Any subsequent excavation should be accompanied by sampling and bioarchaeological assessment of any well-stratified and well-dated deposits thought likely to contain plant and invertebrate remains.

Vertebrate remains from these excavations were mostly well preserved and, on the whole, did not appear to include redeposited material. It is likely that any larger-scale excavations in this area will produce a moderate-sized assemblage of bone.

## 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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