

AH

An evaluation of biological remains
from excavations at Ankers Garage,
45-57 Gillygate, York
(YAT/Yorkshire Museum site code 1992.8)

[92/22]

K. M. Dobney, A. R. Hall and H. K. Kenward

Summary

Eight samples of deposits of medieval and Roman date and a small corpus of hand-collected bone were examined. The sediments were almost barren of biological remains other than charcoal and provide little useful interpretative information about the nature of the deposits. Further work on deposits of this kind at this site is not thought worthwhile.

Authors' address:

Environmental Archaeology Unit
University of York
Heslington
York YO1 5DD

(0904) 433843-51

15 May 1992

An evaluation of biological remains
from excavations at Ankers Garage,
45-57 Gillygate, York
(YAT/Yorkshire Museum site code 1992.8)

K. M. Dobney, A. R. Hall and H. K. Kenward

Methods

A series of eight samples for biological analysis and a small collection of animal bone from excavations of Roman and medieval deposits at 45-57 Gillygate, York, were submitted. The samples of sediment were all inspected and described in the laboratory and further analysis carried out on all of them. From each, 1 kg subsamples were taken and submitted to disaggregation and (where appropriate) 'washover', following methods described by Kenward *et al.* (1980). The washovers were examined for plant and invertebrate remains and the dried residues were also examined for their content of other components. All the hand-collected bone was inspected and recorded, apart from cases where only unidentifiable fragments were recovered from a context.

Results

The samples are considered in context number order, with relevant archaeological information or excavator's queries in brackets.

Context 1015, sample 1 [medieval build-up]: mid slightly brownish grey, moist, brittle to crumbly (working to plastic), sandy clay with traces of root channels/burrows, and traces of charcoal, shellfish and mortar and modest amounts of brick/tile.

There was a small washover of charcoal and cinder to 10 mm with a single half of a charred ?barley (cf. *Hordeum* sp.) grain, one charred sedge (*Carex*) nutlet, one whole elder (*Sambucus nigra*) seed (and a few fragments), some ?fungal sclerotia (resting bodies), a few small charred twig fragments and a little unidentifiable bone <5 mm. The residue was of sand and gravel (including magnesian limestone and sandstone) to 30 mm with a little mammal bone to 35 mm, brick/tile to 10 mm and a trace of coal and charcoal.

Context 1019, sample 2 [medieval build-up, immediately below 1015]: mid grey-brown, moist, plastic to crumbly to somewhat brittle sandy clay with traces of stones 20-60 mm and limestone >10 mm, charcoal, mortar and brick/tile.

The small washover consisted mainly of charcoal to 5 mm, with a little coal, one charred fragment of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell (to 10 mm), a few fragments of elder seed, one charred barley grain and a fish vertebra. There was also a small group of associated mineralised millipede segments (i.e. representing one individual) and a fragment of ground beetle elytron, oxidised yellow. The residue comprised sand and gravel to 35 mm, with a little charcoal to 15 mm, and brick/tile to 10 mm.

Context 1055, sample 3 [medieval backfill]: mid brown (with a slight orange cast), moist, brittle to crumbly (to slightly plastic when worked), slightly

clayey sand with traces of stones 60-200 mm and limestone >10 mm and distinct burrows or root traces.

Apart from a small amount of charcoal to 10 mm, the small washover contained only a singly very eroded charred bread/club wheat (*Triticum aestivo-compactum*) grain, a trace of elder seed fragments and a few small fragments of unidentifiable fish bone. The modest residue included tiny pellets of undisaggregated clay with sand and a little gravel (including oolitic limestone) to 25 mm, with traces of brick/tile <5 mm, and coal <10 mm.

Context 1053, sample 4 [levelling or floor layer; Roman]: mid brown, moist, slightly brittle (working to plastic) sandy clay with greyer and browner mottles and traces of charcoal, stone 2-6 mm and root traces/burrows.

Charcoal (up to 10 mm in maximum dimension) predominated in the small washover, with a trace of elder seed fragments and a few small charred twig fragments. With the sand and gravel (to 20 mm) in the residue there was a trace of brick/tile and charcoal, both <5 mm.

Context 1066, sample 5 [medieval backfill]: mid grey-brown (with blackish cast), moist, brittle to crumbly sandy clay with traces of charcoal (including a fragment of hazel roundwood to 50 mm maximum dimension) and fine charcoal throughout) and white and orange flecks.

The modest washover of charcoal to 10 mm also included a single charred bread/club wheat grain, three charred elder seeds, one fragment of charred hazel nutshell and a little coal. There was an almost entire mineralised millipede and a head of the burrowing ground beetle *Trechus micros*, oxidised yellow. The small residue contained undisaggregated clay with the sand and a little gravel (including magnesian limestone to 20 mm), a trace of mammal bone to 20 mm and brick/tile and charcoal both <5 mm.

Context 1076, sample 6 [Roman ditchfill/backfill within cut 1078, immediately beneath 1074]: mid grey, moist, crumbly (working plastic) sandy clay with traces of stones 30-60 mm and moderate amounts of mortar.

The very small washover comprised charcoal <5 mm. The modest residue was of sand with abundant mortar to 35 mm, with a trace of brick/tile <5 mm and charcoal <10 mm.

Context 1083, sample 7 [backfill in Roman ditch 1093]: light-mid buffish grey-brown, moist to wet, plastic, sticky, sandy clay with traces of stone 6-60 mm and orange mottles on cm-scale.

There was a very small washover of charcoal <5 mm, whilst the residue was of sand and gravel to 45 mm, with a little charcoal (including oak, *Quercus*) to 15 mm and a trace of burnt bone <5 mm.

Context 1091, sample 8 [backfill in Roman ditch 109, basal layer]: varicoloured—black to pale pink-orange on cm- and mm-scale of variation—moist to wet, plastic, sticky sandy clay with traces of stones 6-20 mm, bone >20 mm

and ?brick/tile and ?mollusc shell fragments.

There was a modest washover of charcoal <5 mm with a little rotted oyster shell to 5 mm. Sand and gravel (including sandstone to 60 mm) made up most of the modest residue, with mortar and a trace of brick/tile to 15 mm and charcoal to 5 mm, with two fragments of (?ancient) glass.

In addition to the 1 kg subsample, a 5.8 kg subsample was disaggregated and sieved to 1 mm to concentrate any larger macrofossil remains. Apart from a little unidentifiable mammal bone (some of it burnt), there was only a single distal tibiotarsus of a duck (?mallard), *Anas* sp. and a little mussel (*Mytilus* sp.) shell and some charcoal (including oak, to 20 mm). The rest comprised sand and gravel to 90 mm (including sandstone and magnesian limestone) with a trace of brick/tile to 20 mm.

Bone

One and a half standard boxes of animal bone were recovered. Of this material, eight contexts derived from what were classified broadly as medieval and seven from Roman levels. In terms of the quantity of bone, however, the largest proportion of the assemblage was from medieval deposits.

Preservation of all material was fair, some of the bone from medieval deposits being well preserved.

Domestic mammals, represented in both Roman and medieval deposits included cattle, sheep and pig. In addition, two horse fragments were recovered from medieval deposits (contexts 1015), whilst elements of chicken appeared in both groups (a tarsometatarsus showing evidence of fracture and subsequent callus formation). Two duck humeri and a goose radius were also recovered from medieval deposits only, along with a toad pelvis fragment.

Twenty-four measurable elements were recovered from medieval levels, nine from Roman contexts. Most elements of domestic animal were represented and butchery was evident on a number of fragments. The presence of skull, rib and vertebral fragments (most evident in the medieval deposits) suggests general domestic refuse. The Roman assemblage is too small for any conclusions to be drawn.

Implications

There seems to be little value in making further analyses on sediments of this kind from this area; preservation is poor and fossils too thinly distributed to be interpretatively useful. Without more refined dating, the bone is of little zooarchaeological value. Medieval deposits indicate good preservation of reasonable quantities of material which might repay further investigation if closely-dated deposits are available. The Roman material is too sparse to draw any useful conclusions though a larger and better-preserved Roman assemblage from this area would be of interest.

Reference

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