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**An evaluation of biological remains from
excavations of medieval and Roman deposits at
Bishop Burton, N. Humberside (site code BBB93)**

by

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Summary

Four samples of sediment of Roman and medieval date from a site near Bishop Burton were examined for their content of plant and animal remains. Analysis of subsamples of three of these yielded altogether no more than a few fragments of charred hazel nutshell and a very few charred cereal grains.

The tiny assemblage of hand-collected bone was of no zooarchaeological significance.

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Methods

Four samples of sediment from excavations on land off Bryan Mere, Bishop Burton, were submitted for an evaluation of their content of biological remains. All the samples were examined in the laboratory and a sediment description recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Three samples were selected for further analysis for which 1 or 2 kg subsamples were taken and processed following techniques described by Kenward *et al.* (1980). 'Washovers' from the residues were checked for insect remains and both washovers and residues examined for plant fossils.

Results

Sample 56, context 15 [buried medieval soil, widespread across site]: moist, light-mid grey-brown, slightly brittle to crumbly (working plastic), very slightly sandy silt clay with traces of flint (2-6 mm) and of charcoal. Traces of modern roots/rootlets and some 'worm burrows'.

The very small washover from a 2 kg subsample contained a few modern roots with a little charcoal to 10 mm. The latter included two very fragmentary small ?cereal grains, two small fragments of hazel (*Corylus avellana*) nutshell and a ?modern earthworm egg capsule. The small residue was of sand with a few small angular flints to 10 mm.

Sample 57, context 20 [ditch fill containing Roman pottery, below context 15]: moist, mid orange-grey-brown (with faint purplish cast), crumbly and stiff (working plastic), very slightly sandy silty clay with traces of flint and chalk 2-20 mm and black and brown specks of ?charcoal and ?humic material.

A tiny washover was produced by the 1 kg subsample processed; it consisted mostly of modern roots with a trace of charcoal < 2 mm. The small residue was of sand with a few angular flints and rounded ?sandstone to 20 mm.

Sample 58, context 47 [thin linear spread of burnt material below context 15]: moist, mid brown (mottled lighter brown or stronger brown, with black patches at mm and cm scales), crumbly (working plastic), very stony, very slightly sandy silty clay with moderate amounts of flint and chalk (2-60 mm) and abundant very fine charcoal.

The 1 kg subsample yielded a rather large washover (much of it mineral material), with moderate amounts of modern roots and some charcoal to 10 mm. The latter contained modest numbers of rounded, eroded, hazel nutshell fragments and a single oat (*Avena* sp.)

grain. The small residue was of sand with angular flints and some rounded sandstone to 40 mm. There was also an abraded bird bone fragment.

Sample 82, context 64 [lower fill of cut, probably a ditch, cutting a medieval soil, context 16]: light-mid orange-grey-brown, brittle (breaking into rather large peds), slightly stony silty clay with traces of chalk and flint 2-20 mm.

This sample was not selected for further analysis; the sediment was highly oxidised and there was no indication that charred material would be present.

Bone

An extremely small assemblage of bone was recovered by hand-collection. It included a mere 24 fragments (524.5 g). Of these, only seven could be identified to species, these being fragments of a single mandible and some teeth of horse (from context 79). These were from a small individual ('pony size') and the teeth were extremely worn, indicating advanced age. Most of the material was only moderately well preserved, but the bone from two contexts (20, 44) was of noticeably poorer quality, with evidence of abrasion. A single sheep-sized shaft fragment from context 51 showed evidence of extensive dog gnawing. Fresh breaks, almost certainly occurring during or post excavation, were evident throughout.

Implications

There can be no justification for further biological analysis of this material and it seems unlikely that future excavation would yield more bioarchaeological information unless concentrations of charred material or deep features with waterlogging were encountered. It is not recommended that any of the sediment or bone be retained for future analysis or as part of the archive.

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.