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**Evaluation of the biological remains from Water Lane, Clifton, York  
(site code: 1997.95)**

by

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**Summary**

*Two sediment samples and a small box of animal bones were presented for analysis of their bioarchaeological potential. The sediment samples were considered of extremely low potential after initial inspection.*

*The vertebrate remains consisted of two neonatal individuals, one calf probably dated to the Roman period and one caprovid probably dated to the post-medieval period. If the pottery analysis confirms the tentative dates supplied by the excavator then it is possible the Roman calf may be interpreted as a 'special deposit'.*

**Keywords:** CLIFTON; YORK; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; NEONATAL INDIVIDUALS

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## **Evaluation of the biological remains from Water Lane, Clifton, York (site code: 1997.95)**

### **Introduction**

An evaluation excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at Water Lane in Clifton, York, during October 1997. Two sediment samples and one box (6.8 litres) of animal bones were presented to the EAU for analysis of their bioarchaeological potential. As pottery dates were not available prior to the submission deadline all dating information is tentative and as a consequence the interpretation is also subject to revision.

### **Methods**

#### *Sediment samples*

Both samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithologies recorded using a standard *pro forma*. On the basis of this inspection no further action was considered appropriate.

#### *Vertebrate remains*

The vertebrate remains were examined and a basic archive produced. A record was made of preservation, quantities (numbers and weights) and identifications where appropriate.

### **Results**

#### *Sediment sample descriptions*

#### **Context 7018, sample 1/T**

A mixture of light orangeish-brown sand and light grey clay with some silt and oxidised iron; texture stiff, working plastic.

#### **Context 7017, sample 2/T**

A moist, light-mid grey-brown silty sand, texture crumbly working slightly soft, containing modern rootlets.

#### *Vertebrate remains*

Preservation of the vertebrate remains was generally good, colour was brown and 'angularity' (appearance of broken surfaces) was spiky. More than 50% of the fragments were recorded as <5 cm in any dimension. Evidence of dog gnawing, burning and butchery was absent but fresh breaks were present on 20-50% of fragments.

#### **Context 4005**

Seventeen fragments of bone (weighing 4.8 g) were recovered from this context. The bones included left and right tibiae, right humerus, right radius, four metapodial fragments, a single sacral vertebra fragment and eight rib fragments. All the fragments probably came from the same individual - a neonatal caprovid. The context is tentatively dated to the post-medieval period.

### **Context 10003**

Thirty-two identifiable and numerous tiny unidentifiable fragments of bone (weighing 26.7 g) were recovered from this context. Identifiable fragments included left radius, left ulna, left humerus, seven metapodial fragments, six vertebral fragments, three lower and one upper tooth with nine tooth fragments, one third phalanx and two innominate fragments. These and the unidentifiable fragments probably all came from the same individual - a neonatal cow (*Bos f. domestic*). The context is tentatively dated to the Roman period.

### **Discussion and Statement of potential**

#### *Sediment samples*

After initial laboratory inspection, the bioarchaeological potential of the sediment samples was considered extremely low and, hence, no further action was taken.

#### *Vertebrate remains*

Such a small assemblage of vertebrate remains has no intrinsic value. However, the fact that all the bones recovered are from two neonatal individuals is interesting, particularly from contexts of such widely differing dates. Other Romano-British and earlier Iron Age sites have produced articulated and semi-articulated remains of juvenile and adult animals. These have been interpreted as so-called 'special deposits' of supposed ritual significance. Whether this is the case at Water Lane is open to question, as a consequence of the limited extent of

excavation. The post-medieval caprovid remains may simply represent a casualty of disease buried for convenience.

### **Recommendations**

It is recommended that if further excavation is to be carried out, sediment sampling should only be undertaken if more organic or anoxic waterlogged deposits are encountered. Bearing in mind the good bone preservation, provision should be made for further bone recovery and subsequent analytical work.

### **Retention and Disposal**

The sediment samples may be disposed of but the vertebrate remains should be kept in case further excavation reveals a larger assemblage.

### **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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