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**Evaluation of vertebrate remains from excavations at George Street, York
(site code: 1997.151)**

by

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Summary

Two boxes of animal bones from deposits revealed by excavations at George Street, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological remains.

A small but well-preserved assemblage of animal bones, representing Roman, medieval and post-medieval periods, was recovered. Although, in itself, it was of little interpretative value, it is possible that further excavation, with adequate recovery, might yield interpretatively useful groups.

Should further development be undertaken at this site, an appropriate sampling and recovery strategy should be employed and a comprehensive post-excavation programme be provided for.

Keywords: GEORGE STREET; YORK; NORTH YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; ROMAN; MEDIEVAL; POST-MEDIEVAL; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; BUTCHERY

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Introduction

Excavations were undertaken at George Street, York, during December 1997 by York Archaeological Trust. Deposits in three trenches produced a small assemblage of vertebrate remains, amounting to two boxes (each box approximately 20 litres). The pottery assemblage suggests that most of the material from Trench 1 is Roman in date, although a single sherd of 13th century date was identified from Context 1020. Whilst deposits from Trench 2 and 3 appear to be mainly medieval and post-medieval in date, four of the contexts in Trench 3 also produced fragments of Roman pottery.

This report evaluates the potential of the recovered vertebrate assemblage.

Methods

Material from twenty-seven of the thirty-one bone-bearing contexts was recorded. The remaining four contexts were of modern date, or described as unstratified by the excavator, and were therefore excluded.

Semi-subjective, non-quantitative data were recorded for each context regarding the state of preservation, colour, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'), whilst quantities and identifications were noted where appropriate. Additionally, semi-quantitative information was recorded for each context concerning

fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks.

Results

The range of identified species recovered from the excavations is shown in Tables 1-3.

Trench 1

Whilst overall the material from Trench 1 was reasonably well preserved, some of the fragments had a rather battered appearance; this was particularly noticeable on the bones from Context 1026. Three human bone fragments from a juvenile individual were identified within the assemblage from this context, suggesting the presence of reworked or redeposited material. Colour was recorded as brown or fawn, with little variation within contexts.

Evidence of fresh breakage and dog gnawing was negligible, affecting few bones (i.e. 0-10% from each context). The proportion of butchered fragments from Contexts 1011 and 1017 was high (over 50%) and included many split and heavily butchered cattle metapodials. This practice of systematically breaking up the shafts of cattle long bones, presumably for the extraction of marrow, has been noted from other Roman assemblages in the region and throughout the Roman Empire.

A total of 143 (2461 g) fragments were recovered from this trench, of which 52 (1446 g) were identifiable to species. The

assemblage consisted mainly of cattle remains (Table 1), the majority of which were metapodials. Caprovid, pig and chicken remains were also noted in very small quantities.

The nature and extent of the butchery is reflected in the small number (7) of measurable fragments.

Trench 2

Deposits from Trench 2 produced 67 (1905.4 g) identifiable and 95 (889 g) unidentifiable fragments. Preservation of this material was very good, although, as with Trench 1, some contexts (2010 and 2023) contained a few fragments that appeared battered or rounded. Most fragments were a gingery-brown in colour, with little dog gnawing, butchery or fresh breakage evident.

The assemblage from this trench was composed mainly of caprovid and cattle remains (Table 2), and included a large ram horncore chopped through its base. Pig and cat bones were also identified, along with those of chicken and ?woodcock (cf. *Scolopax rusticola* L.). Additionally, two fragments of fish were noted but it was not possible to identify them to species or species group.

Trench 2 produced only twenty measurable bones, three mandibles with teeth and three isolated teeth.

Trench 3

The smallest assemblage was recovered from Trench 3, amounting to only 60 fragments (1444.5 g) of which 22 (1042 g) were identifiable to species.

Most of the deposits produced small

quantities of moderately preserved bone, although as with material from other trenches, there were small numbers of battered or rounded fragments present. Most bones were fawn or brown in colour.

Butchery evidence was present and included a few split cattle metapodial shaft fragments.

Cattle remains made up the bulk of the assemblage, but caprovid and pig remains were also present. Fish were represented by a single ?cod (cf. *Gadus morhua* L.) premaxilla (Context 3006) and a dog tibia was noted from Context 3001. There were only 5 measurable fragments, 2 mandibles and 3 isolated teeth.

Statement of potential

The small size of the recovered bone assemblage, the rather broad dating framework, and the limited number of bones which can be used to obtain age-at-death and biometrical information, preclude any further detailed recording and interpretation of the extant assemblage. However, preservation of the material was mainly good from all three excavated areas, suggesting that further, more extensive, excavation would provide a useful assemblage of moderate size, particularly if a tighter chronological framework were achieved.

Important comparative Roman assemblages from York include those from Wellington Row (Carrott *et al.* 1995) and Tanner Row (O'Connor 1988). Medieval and post-medieval vertebrate assemblages also exist from York and a large well-dated assemblage from George Street could be compared with material from Post-conquest Coppergate (Bond and

O'Connor in press), the Bedern (Hamshaw-Thomas, in press), Walmgate and Skeldergate (O'Connor 1984). Whilst much material from this period has been excavated in and around York, little has been fully analysed and published, leaving a large gap in our understanding of the activities being undertaken in the city.

Recommendations

No additional work on the recovered material is recommended.

Any destruction of these deposits should be accompanied by an adequate sampling strategy, with appropriate provision for a post-excavation programme. Similarly, if further excavations take place at this site then every effort should be made to investigate any revealed deposits (especially contexts with good organic preservation), including an intensive regime of sampling.

Retention and disposal

The bones should be retained.

Archive

All vertebrate remains from George Street are 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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Table 1. Vertebrate remains by context from Trench 1, George Street, York.

Species		1010	1011	1014	1016	1017	1020	1026	Total
<i>Sus</i> f. domestic	pig	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	3
<i>Bos</i> f. domestic	cow	-	40	-	-	3	-	1	44
Caprovid	sheep/goat	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Gallus</i> f. domestic	chicken	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	1
<i>Homo sapiens</i>	human	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Unidentified		3	52	2	5	9	2	18	91
Total		3	95	2	5	12	3	23	143

Table 2. Vertebrate remains by context from Trench 2, George Street, York.

Species	2005	2007	2008	2010	2011	2019	2021	2023	2026	2027	2028	2030	Total
<i>Felis f. domestic</i> cat	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
<i>Sus f. domestic</i> pig	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	1	3	-	-	-	5
<i>Bos f. domestic</i> cow	1	-	-	2	-	-	3	5	5	6	-	3	25
Caprovid sheep/goat	-	-	2	7	-	-	-	8	6	3	-	2	28
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i> chicken	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	2
cf. <i>Scolopax rusticola</i> L. ?woodcock	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	1
Unidentified fish	-	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Unidentified bird	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
Unidentified	-	-	4	30	2	3	8	10	19	17	1	1	95
Total	1	2	6	41	3	4	11	25	34	28	1	6	162

Table 3. Vertebrate remains by context from Trench 3, George Street, York.

Species	3001	3003	3006	3007	3010	3012	3032	3035	Total
<i>Canis f. domestic</i> dog	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
<i>Sus f. domestic</i> pig	-	-	1	1	-	-	1	-	3
<i>Bos f. domestic</i> cow	4	-	3	4	1	1	1	-	14
Caprovid sheep/goat	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	1	3
cf. <i>Gadus morhua</i> L. ?cod	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	1
Unidentified	3	1	3	24	3	1	3	-	38
Total	9	1	8	29	4	3	5	1	60