Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York **98/28**, *3 pp.*

Evaluation of biological remains from 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York (site code YORYM 1998.162)

by

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Summary

Five samples of sediment from deposits excavated at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The sediment samples warrant no further analysis, and additional excavation is unlikely to recover biological remains in sufficient quantity or of suitable quality to require investigation.

Keywords: BISHOPTHORPE ROAD; YORK; EVALUATION; PLANT MACROFOSSILS

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19 August 1998

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Introduction

Excavations were undertaken at 292 Bishopthorpe Road, York, during August 1998 by York Archaeological Trust. Five sediment samples ('GBA' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) taken from deposits in three of the four trenches have been examined to evaluate their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

All the sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithology was recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 1 kg or 3 kg were taken from four of the samples for the extraction of macrofossil remains, whilst the remaining sample was bulk-sieved (to 500 μm), following procedures of Kenward *et al*. (1980; 1986).

The resultant washovers and residues were examined for plant and invertebrate remains.

Results

The results of the investigations are presented in sample number order. Archaeological information and/or archaeological questions to be addressed (provided by the excavator) are given in square brackets.

Context 1005 [?Roman - dump/?build-up deposit - What is the nature and derivation of this sediment?]
Sample 1/T (3 kg)

Just moist, light to mid brown, crumbly to unconsolidated, slightly silty sand, with very small to medium-sized (2-60 mm) stones and ?mortar fragments.

The very small washover of perhaps 1-2 cm^3 of modern root fragments and root bark, with charcoal, 'char' (vesicular or amorphous charred organic matter) and mortar fragments up to 2 mm in maximum dimension, and coal to 5 mm. The very small residue was of sand and gravel.

This deposit is essentially natural sediment (not necessarily *in situ*), with a small admixture of occupation debris.

Context 2002 [Medieval - back fill in ?pit 2009]
Sample 2/T (1 kg)

Just moist, light to mid grey-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated (working soft), moderately stony, slightly clay, sandy silt, with very small to large (2->60 mm) cobbles.

The washover of 1-2 cm^3 of modern woody and herbaceous root fragments with a little charcoal and brick/tile to 5 mm; a single very eroded and unidentifiable charred cereal grain was also noted. The tiny residue was of sand and gravel with a single large rather rounded clast of brick/tile to 70 mm.

Context 4003 [?Post-medieval or ?modern - unknown deposit/?flood silts - could this be a flood deposit?]
Sample 3/T (1 kg)

Just moist, mid to dark grey-brown, crumbly (working soft and sticky when wet), clay silt, with fragments of brick/tile (to 60 mm), roots, twigs and ?bark.

The washover consisted of about 40 cm^3 of modern woody and herbaceous root fragments, root bark and pale and very modern-looking elder (*Sambucus nigra*) and stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica*) seeds. There were also traces of 'char' less than 2 mm. The tiny residue was of undisaggregated silt with a few more root fragments.

There is no evidence from this sample to either confirm or contradict the interpretation of this sediment as a flood deposit.

Context 1006 [Natural/?dump - Is this natural?]
Sample 4/BS (8 kg)

Just moist, light orange-brown, unconsolidated sand, with light to mid grey clay mixed throughout and in discrete lumps.

The residue was very small: no more than a few hundred grammes of sand with a little 'grit'.

As there are no remains to suggest otherwise, it seems highly likely that this deposit is natural.

Context 2005 [?Roman - back fill in ?drain/?ditch 2006]
Sample 5/T (1 kg)

Just moist, mid grey-brown to mid to dark grey, crumbly (working soft), slightly clay, sandy silt, with small and medium-sized (6-60 mm) stones.

The washover of 1-2 cm^3 comprised fine charcoal, 'char' and coal to 2 mm. The tiny residue was of sand and gravel with traces of brick/tile to 10 mm.

Recommendations

Ancient plant remains were scarce in these deposits and the invertebrates absent. Consequently, additional work on the samples is not considered worthwhile. Further excavation is unlikely to recover biological remains in sufficient quantity or of suitable quality to justify investigation.

Retention and disposal

All remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be sieved for artefact recovery.

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.

Acknowledgements

The authors are grateful to York Archaeological Trust for providing the material and archaeological information, and to English Heritage for allowing AH to work on this material.

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