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An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at the Old Manor House, Baynard Castle, Cottingham (site code: COM95)

by

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Summary

Three sediment samples and two boxes of hand-collected animal bones from medieval and post-medieval deposits were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis. The sediments were almost devoid of ancient biological remains. The bones formed too small an assemblage for useful interpretation, but it is possible that further excavation with adequate recovery might yield interpretatively valuable groups.

No further work on the material described here is recommended.

Keywords: Old Manor House; Baynard Castle; Cottingham; plant remains; marine molluscs; animal bone

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Introduction and methods

Samples of sediment, a small quantity of marine shell and some hand-collected animal bone were recovered from the excavation of a single small trench adjacent to the manor at Baynard Castle, Cottingham. This report evaluates the bioarchaeological potential of this material.

GBA samples

All three samples ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 1 kg were taken from each of the samples for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

The flots and residues resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils and bone.

Two of the samples were also examined for the eggs of parasitic nematodes using the methods outlined by Dainton (1992).

Bone

The hand-collected animal bone assemblage consisted of two boxes (30 x 40 x 15cm) containing bones from seven contexts. In addition, a very small quantity of bone was retrieved from the three GBA samples. Most of the bone recovered came from Phase 2 and 3 deposits.

This small assemblage represents deposits from four phases:

Phase 1. Second half of the 12th century (contemporary with the original castle on the site).

Phase 2. 14th century (assumed to represent construction and occupation of a 'fortified' manor house).

Phase 3. ?mid 14th century (represents the disuse of the manor house, reported to be in ruins in the mid 14th century).

Phase 4. Post-medieval.

Results

The sediment samples

The results of the investigations are presented in context number order, with information provided by the excavator in square brackets.

Context 11 [Phase 1. Fill of large pit or hollow]

Sample 1 [upper half of fill]

Moist, mid brown (with some gingery patches), crumbly, sticky (working plastic), silty clay. Small (6-20 mm) and very small (2-6 mm) stones were common in the sample, whilst medium-sized (20-60 mm) stones and charcoal were recorded as present.

This sample yielded a tiny flot containing very small amounts of plant debris, fine charcoal (< 5mm) and sand grains. Several *Heterodera* (soil nematode) cysts were also present.

The residue was mostly sand and gravel with some small stones (6-20mm) and a few slivers of unidentified bone. Fish were represented by a single gadidae (cod family) vertebra.

The 'squash' yielded no parasite eggs; the material seen was mostly inorganic with some organic detritus, some phytoliths and a few fungal hyphae.

Context 11 [Phase 1. Fill of large pit or hollow]

Sample 2 [lower half of fill]

Moist, mid brown (again with some gingery patches), crumbly, sticky (working plastic), slightly sandy, clay. All sizes of stones (2-60+ mm) were noted as common in the sample, and charcoal was present.

The flot recovered from this sample was modest, consisting of a small quantity of sand, fine charcoal (< 5mm) and plant debris. A few *Heterodera* cysts and two *Chara* sp. capsules were also present.

As with the previous residue, sand and gravel predominated, although, additionally, there was also some charred grain, two pot sherds and a few unidentified fish fragments.

The 'squash' was mostly inorganic with some organic detritus and a small number of phytoliths.

Context 15 [Phase 2. Fill of stone lined drain]

Sample 3

Moist, mid brown, crumbly (working soft), sandy, clay, silt, with a minor component of small clay lumps. Very small (2-6 mm) and small (6 to 20 mm) stones were common in the sample, and large (60+ mm) stones were also present. Charcoal, large mammal bone, marine molluscs and some modern rootlets were also noted.

The flot contained a very small quantity of plant debris (mostly rootlets), fine charcoal (< 5mm) and a few sand grains. Three *Chara* sp. capsules and a single shell of *Cecilioides acicula* (Müller), a burrowing snail (probably intrusive), were also recorded.

The residue consisted mainly of sand and gravel with a few charcoal pieces (< 10mm) and some ?modern rootlets. Fragments of fish bone included herring

(*Clupea harengus* L.) and gadidae (cod family) vertebrae, whilst mammal remains were represented by a single pig phalanx (lateral).

Marine molluscs

Well preserved shells of oyster (*Ostrea edulis* L.), whelk (*Buccinum* sp.) and cockle (*Cerastoderma* sp.) were identified (Table 1). Some of the oyster and whelk shell from the Phase 2 drain fill (context 3) were very large, and should more material become available from this context it should be recorded. If further material becomes available from Contexts 5 and 23, this should be assessed, and perhaps recorded.

Bone

A total of only 99 identified (4,196g in weight) and 110 unidentifiable (1,850g) fragments was recovered. Of these, only four fragments were from deposits dated to Phases 1 and 4. The remaining assemblage consisted of 74 fragments (31 identified) from Phase 2 and 131 (68 identified) from Phase 3 deposits (Tables 2 and 3).

Preservation of the assemblage was generally good, colour being mostly fawn (except for the three fragments from Phase 1), and the broken surfaces were, on the whole, angular in appearance (very few showed signs of chemical or physical abrasion). Dog gnawing, although present, was recorded at very low frequencies (i.e. <10% of the entire assemblage), as was evidence of fresh breakage. Context 15, Phase 2 (the fill of a drain), contained bone fragments covered in what appeared to be faecal concretion.

Most of the identifiable fragments, not surprisingly, represented the remains of the major domesticates, i.e. cattle, caprine, pig, and chicken. Goose was represented by a single tibiotarsus and fragment of cranium, and was of a size consistent with the wild grey geese (*Anser* spp.) or a small domestic variety.

Bones of wild mammals included fallow deer (*Dama dama* (L.)), present in equal proportions in Phases 2 and 3, and red deer (*Cervus elaphus* L.), only identified from Phase 2. Fallow deer was most common, a total of 12 fragments identified from the hand-collected assemblage and a further two from Sample 3. The cervid remains from the hand-collected assemblage were exclusively hind-limb elements (femur, tibia and metatarsal), whilst those from Sample 3 were antler and cranial fragments, almost certainly from the same individual. The skull fragment (which included the pedicle, burr and portion of unshed antler) showed extensive chopping around the pedicle and associated cranium.

Two cervid metatarsals (red and fallow deer) showed evidence of a swelling of the anterior portion of the mid-shaft, parallel with and medial to the line of the median extensor tendon. This condition appears very similar to one previously described on sheep metatarsals from a number of archaeological sites including Selby (Carrot *et al.* 1993a), St. Andrewgate, York (Carrot *et al.* 1993b) and Lincoln (Dobney *et al.* 1995) and is of unknown aetiology.

Discussion

Ancient plant remains from these samples were confined to a few charcoal fragments, fragments of charred grain and some traces of plants of disturbed wet places (Context 11, Samples 1 and 2), of no interpretative significance.

There were no insects, and land snails were represented by a single species (*Cecilioides acicula* (Müller)) which was almost certainly a modern contaminant.

Although the cervid remains identified from the bone assemblage hint at high status occupation, the lack of wild birds, which might be expected from a high status site, may be the reflect the bias of hand-collection procedures.

Statement of potential

There is no need for further work on the sediment samples as they offer little potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The very small bone assemblage from Cottingham is of limited interpretative value as it stands. Very few measurable bones and mandibles with teeth are available, and the range of species represented is limited.

Recommendations

Should further excavation be undertaken there is the likelyhood of recovering a moderate-sized and well preserved bone assemblage of high academic value. Few systematically recovered high status assemblages of medieval date are available for study both regionally and nationally.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining material should be retained for the present, although the sediment samples might be reduced by bulk sieving.

Archive

All extracted fossils from the test subsamples, and the residues and flots 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. Hand-collected shell

Context		3	5	15	23	11
Phase		3	2	2	2	1
<i>Ostrea edulis</i> L.	(upper)	14	11	2	3	1
	(lower)	10	18	5	1	-
	measurable	19	16	7	3	-
	ageable	12	8	2	2	-
	weight (g)	300	270	450	-	-
	attachment of spats	y	y	-	-	-
	infestation- <i>Polydora ciliata</i> (Johnston)	y	y	y	-	-
	infestation- <i>Polydora hoplura</i>	-	-	y	-	-
	infestation- <i>Cliona celata</i> (Grant)	y	y	y	-	-
<i>Buccinum</i> sp.		2	-	3	-	-
<i>Cerastoderma</i> sp.		1	-	-	-	-
Total weight (g)		350	270	570	-	-
Record		nwr	?r	r	?r	nwr

Table 2. Hand-collected bone from phase 2

Taxon		Total no.	No. measurable	No. mandibles
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	cattle	17	1	1
Caprinae	sheep/goat	1	-	-
<i>Sus f. domestic</i>	pig	4	-	1
<i>Cervus elaphus</i> L.	red deer	2	-	-
<i>Dama dama</i> (L.)	fallow deer	5	1	-
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i>	chicken	1	1	-
<i>Anser</i> spp.	goose	1	-	-
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>31</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>2</i>
Unidentified		43	-	-
<i>Sub-total</i>		<i>43</i>	<i>-</i>	<i>-</i>
Total		74	3	2

Table 3. Hand-collected bone from phase 3

Taxon		Total no.	No. measurable	No. mandibles
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	cattle	27	3	1
Caprinae	sheep/goat	16	6	-
<i>Sus f. domestic</i>	pig	11	2	2
<i>Dama dama</i> (L.)	fallow deer	7	3	-
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i>	chicken	6	3	-
<i>Anser</i> spp.	goose	1	1	-
<i>Sub-total</i>		68	18	3
Unidentified		63	-	-
<i>Sub-total</i>		63	-	-
Total		131	18	3