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**An evaluation of biological remains from excavations  
at Healing, S. Humberside (site code: HEA95)**

by

John Carrott, Allan Hall, Deborah Jaques and Frances Large

**Summary**

*Sediment samples, a small assemblage of hand-collected vertebrate remains and a small box of marine molluscs were submitted for evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.*

*The sediment samples contained only small numbers of plant and invertebrate remains of no interpretative value. The animal bones and marine molluscs recovered from this evaluation formed too small an assemblage for useful interpretation.*

**Keywords:** HEALING; GRIMSBY; MEDIEVAL; ANIMAL BONES; INVERTEBRATES; PLANT REMAINS

Authors' address:

Environmental Archaeology Unit  
University of York  
Heslington  
York YO1 5DD

Prepared for:

Humberside Archaeology Unit  
The Old School  
Northumberland Avenue  
Hull HU2 0LN

Telephone: (01904) 433843-51  
Fax: (01904) 433850

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## An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at Healing, S. Humberside (site code: HEA95)

### Introduction

Excavations were undertaken at Healing, near Grimsby, in an area once occupied by the medieval village. The site, most of which is confined within an enclosure, consists of numerous earthworks representing house platforms and associated structures. Three of the six trenches excavated were located outside the enclosure with a view to investigating the less distinct features visible there.

Samples of sediment, a small quantity of marine shell and some hand-collected animal bone were recovered; this report evaluates the bioarchaeological potential of the material.

Two phases are represented:

Phase 1 - 12th to late 13th centuries

Phase 2 - 14th to 16th centuries

### Methods

From the twenty-nine samples ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) submitted, six were selected for further examination on the basis of information supplied by the excavator. These samples 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). 'Washovers' were taken rather than 'flots', as the organic content of the samples was very low. Excess material from two of these samples was bulk-sieved to 500 :m (with a 500 :m mesh for the washover) and notes were made on the composition of the residues.

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

Sixteen groups of hand-collected shell, mostly from ditch fills (nine of sixteen), were examined and briefly commented upon.

A small assemblage of hand-collected animal bone, amounting to a single box (31 x 39 x 31 cm), was recovered from the site. With the exception of the unstratified material and the bones from deposits described as top soil, all the animal bone was briefly examined. The larger assemblages (i.e. over 15 fragments) were recorded in some detail, whilst notes were made on the remainder.

### Results

#### *The sediment samples*

The results of the investigations of the sediment samples are presented in phase and context number order. Context information provided by the excavator is presented in brackets.

#### *Phase 1* (12th - late 13th centuries)

##### **Context 13** [pit fill]

##### Sample 1

Just moist, mid grey/brown with orange mottling (to 1 mm), brittle and slightly indurated (working crumbly), slightly sandy, slightly silty clay. Very small stones (2 to 6 mm), mammal bone fragments and modern rootlets were present in the sample.

The small washover was mostly rootlets, sand and charcoal (to 5 mm), with traces of other plant detritus. Many earthworm egg capsules were noted, along with three incomplete molluscs (*Cecilioides acicula* (Müller), a burrowing species and probably intrusive) and three *Chara* sp. (stonewort) capsules.

The residue consisted mainly of sand and stone with a few charcoal pieces (to 5 mm) and some ?brick/tile. Single individuals of *Pupilla* cf.

*muscorum* (L.) and *C. acicula*, were also recorded, the latter almost certainly modern. Bone was represented by a small number of unidentifiable fragments.

### Context 32 [fill of trackway ditch]

#### Sample 21

Moist, mid brown, stiff to crumbly (working plastic), slightly sandy, slightly silty clay, with a few, localised patches of rotted sandstone/? burnt earth. Very small and small stones (2 to 20 mm), flint and chalk and some land-snails were present.

Besides sand and rootlets, the washover yielded several earthworm egg capsules. The invertebrates were represented by three beetle fragments; these were single examples of *Stenus* sp. and *Anotylus nitidulus* (Gravenhorst), both probably modern, and an unidentified larval head capsule.

The residue was composed mainly of sand and stones, with only a few tiny pieces of charcoal (to 5 mm) and a small number of molluscs. The latter included approximately twenty *Vallonia* sp., several of which were identified as *V. excentrica* Sterki.

### Context 89 [pit fill]

#### Sample 23

Moist, stiff (working plastic), light to mid brown (with small patches of ochre and orange) silty clay. Very small stones (2 to 6 mm) and charcoal were present, whilst small stones (6 to 20 mm) were common in the sample.

The washover contained mostly pale plant detritus, fine charcoal (to 5 mm) and some sand. A few molluscs fragments and earthworm egg capsules were also recorded.

The residue from the 1 kg subsample consisted almost entirely of stones and sand, with a few fragments of charcoal (to 5 mm). The excess residue, although broadly similar in composition, also contained some rootlets and a few unidentifiable bone fragments. A small number of molluscs were recorded from both residues and included eight *Cochlicopa lubrica* (Müller), two *Vallonia* cf. *excentrica*, one *V.* sp., one *Ena*

*obscura* (Müller) and one *Cecilioides acicula*.

### Context 97 [ditch fill]

#### Sample 26

Moist, stiff (working plastic) mid brown, slightly sandy, silty clay with patches of mid orange/brown and ginger-coloured mottles (to 1 mm). A wide range of sizes of stones (2 to 60 mm) and charcoal were present.

The washover recovered from this sample was of modest size, consisting mainly of sand, fine charcoal (to 5 mm) and plant debris (mostly rootlets). Some *Heterodera* (soil nematode) cysts and a small fragment of beetle cuticle were also present.

The residue was mostly stone and sand, with a single charcoal fragment, a few slivers of bone and three molluscs (two *V.* cf. *excentrica* and a *C. acicula*).

### Phase 2 (14th -16th centuries)

#### Context 3 [primary ditch fill]

##### Sample 2

Just moist, mid brown, slightly indurated to crumbly (working crumbly), sandy, silty clay. Again various sizes of stone (chalk) (2 to 60 mm) were present, as well as some animal bone fragments.

The washover was mainly sand and rootlet fragments, with a little other plant detritus, many earthworm egg capsules and traces of charcoal (to 2 mm). Also present were small numbers of modern, well preserved nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.) achenes and a few scraps of very poorly preserved elderberry (*Sambucus nigra* L.) seeds. Invertebrates were represented by five beetles, all identified as *Meligethes* sp. and all most likely to be modern.

The residue was composed mainly of sand and stones, with a few fragments of coal and a few of charcoal (to 5 mm), some shellfish and three *Cecilioides acicula*.

The bone component of the residue consisted of two amphibian bones, a microtine tooth and ulna and the distal half of a sparrow (*Passer* sp.)

tarsometatarsus. Part of a mole (*Talpa europaea* L.) tibia, the incisor of a medium-sized mustelid and a small number of unidentifiable fragments were also recorded.

#### Context 4 [secondary ditch fill]

##### Sample 4

Dry, brittle and indurated (working sticky when wet), mid brown, silty clay, with very small and small stones (2-60 mm) present. Fragments of brick/tile and mammal bones were present, whilst marine molluscs were common.

This sample yielded a small washover containing mostly sand, charcoal (to 5mm) and rootlets. Several *C. acicula*, many earthworm egg capsules and a single charred grain were also recorded.

Sand and stones formed the main components of the residue from the GBA subsample. Traces of charcoal (to 5 mm), a few fragments of shellfish and a small number of molluscs were also noted. The snails were identified as *C. acicula* (12), *Cochlicopa lubrica* (1) and ?*Cepaea* sp. (2).

The residue from sieving excess sediment contained (in addition to those components listed above), rootlets, brick/tile fragments, a sherd of pottery, numerous cockles (*Cerastoderma* sp.), some oyster (*Ostrea edulis* L.) and a few mussel (*Mytilus edulis* L.) fragments.

Bone (from both residues) was represented by a few small mammal fragments including a microtine humerus; there was also part of a cat tooth and phalange and the phalange of an unidentified passerine. Fish remains included two thornback ray (*Raja clavata* L.) dermal denticles, a ?flatfish (?Pleuronectidae) vertebra and two fragmented vertebrae.

#### Hand-collected shell

On the whole, the hand-collected shell was well preserved, although not particularly abundant. All shell-bearing contexts contained fragments of oyster (*Ostrea edulis* L.) in varying frequencies. Cockles (*Cerastoderma* sp.) were recorded in some numbers from Contexts 1 and 4, whilst two whelks (*Buccinum* spp.) (Contexts 8 and 46) and a single mussel (*Mytilus edulis* L.) shell (Context 1) were

also recorded.

#### Hand-collected bone

Preservation was variable, with some bone appearing battered and heavily eroded. Colour was mostly brown, with some variation apparent within the material from each context. Few of the bones showed evidence of dog gnawing, fresh breakage or butchery.

The assemblage was very small (44 identifiable and 81 unidentifiable fragments), with few measurable bones or mandibles with teeth.

Most of the identifiable fragments, not surprisingly, represented the remains of the major domesticates, i.e. cattle, caprine, pig, horse and chicken. Goose was represented by a single tibiotarsus of a size consistent with either the grey geese (*Anser* spp.) or a small domestic variety. In addition, twelve cat fragments (representing at least three individuals) and a hare radius were identified.

Of the three fish bones recovered, one was a cod (*Gadus morhua* L.) articular (Context 31), whilst two remained unidentified.

## Discussion and statement of potential

There were few plant and invertebrate macrofossils in these deposits, indicating a low input of organic matter and/or poor preservation. Many of the specimens recorded were modern or likely to have been intrusive and the deposits are, therefore, considered to have little potential for further investigation for these categories of remains.

The vertebrate assemblage is of little interpretative value as it stands because of its very small size and the limited number of bones which can be used to obtain age-at-death and biometrical information.

However, in the event of further excavation, the possibility of recovering an important rural vertebrate assemblage of early medieval date should be considered.

## Recommendations

It is recommended that no further work is undertaken on the existing plant, invertebrate and vertebrate remains.

## Retention and disposal

The material recovered during this excavation is not worthy of retention.

## 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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