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**An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at
Starting Gate, Tadcaster Road, York (site code: 1996.170)**

by

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Summary

Two samples of sediment and one box of hand-collected bone from deposits of Roman to modern date excavated at Starting Gate, Tadcaster Road, York were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The sediment samples were almost barren of ancient biological remains, though further examination of the charcoal recovered from the deposits may yield a little information if there are relevant archaeological questions to be addressed.

The small size of the excavated bone assemblage precludes any further detailed recording and interpretation.

Keywords: STARTING GATE; TADCASTER ROAD; YORK; PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; BONE

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Introduction

Excavations at Starting Gate, Tadcaster Road, York undertaken in 1996 by York Archaeological Trust revealed a series of deposits of Roman to modern date in three trenches. Samples of sediment and some hand-collected bone from these deposits have been examined to evaluate their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Sediment samples

Two samples of sediment ('GBAs' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were submitted. The samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithologies recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 2 kg were taken from each of the samples for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Plant macrofossils were examined from both the residues and the washovers resulting from processing, and the washovers were examined for invertebrate remains. Neither of the samples were deemed suitable for examination for the eggs of parasitic nematodes.

Artefacts were removed from the residues to be returned to the excavator.

Bone

One box (26 x 26 x 20 cm) of animal bones was recovered. With the exception of the

unstratified material and the bone recovered from deposits described as 'top soil', all of the bone was briefly examined and notes made on preservation, quantities, and identifications where possible. Contexts containing bone from Trenches 1 and 2 were dated as Roman. Vertebrate remains from Trench 3 were dated as Roman and medieval/post-medieval.

Results

The results of the investigations are presented in context number order by trench, with information provided by the excavator in brackets. Trench 1 revealed two phases of post-hole buildings (including a 'slaggy' furnace base). Trench 2 included the ?East roadside ditch, post holes and a gravel surface suggesting roadside settlement to the East. Trench 3 was largely composed of the cobble base and bedding of the ?Roman road from Chester.

The sediment samples

Trench 2

Context 2007[Roman. ?Natural]

Sample 1

Moist, light grey brown (locally lighter and darker), crumbly to soft, slightly silty sand. Very small to medium-sized stones (2 to 60 mm) were present in the sample.

The very small washover consisted of tiny rootlet fragments, perhaps modern, with a trace of charcoal (to 2 mm); there were also fragments of male and female cones of a modern conifer (perhaps *Chamaecyparis*) and a single earthworm egg capsule.

The moderately large residue was mostly sand with a few stones (to 25 mm) and traces of brick/tile (to 10 mm), charcoal (to 5 mm), pot and ?slag.

Trench 3

Context 3005 [Natural subsoil]
Sample 4

Just moist, light grey brown, crumbly to soft, very slightly silty sand. Traces of ?rotted lime and modern roots were present in the sample.

The tiny washover included a few fragments of woody modern root and charcoal (to 2 mm) with a few charred seeds, an earthworm egg capsule and a ?catopine beetle fragment.

The moderately large residue was mostly quartz sand with a little gravel and a few stones (to 35 mm) with some coal (to 5 mm), brick/tile (to 10 mm), charcoal (to 10 mm) and further root fragments.

Bone

The very small assemblage consisted of material from only five contexts yielding a total of fifteen fragments (six identifiable).

Preservation of the assemblage was generally good with the broken surfaces, for the most part, appearing 'spikey' and colour either brown or fawn. Fresh breakage was particularly evident on the bones recovered from Context 2006.

The identifiable fragments represented the remains of cattle and caprine (see below). In addition, a small fragment of ?red deer (cf. *Cervus elaphus* L.) antler was recovered from Context 2015.

Trench 1

Context 1006 [Roman—packing]

Unidentified - 1 fragment.

Weight of unidentified fragments - <0.5g

Trench 2

Context 2006 [Roman—natural]

Cattle - 1 pelvis (almost complete), 1 pelvis fragment, 1 mandible (M1 broken).

Caprine - 1 heavily chopped pelvis fragment.

Unidentified - 6 fragments including cow-sized rib, shaft and vertebra fragments.

Weight of identified fragments - 524g

Weight of unidentified fragments - 199g

Context 2015 [Roman—?natural]

?*Red deer* - ?worked, small fragment of antler.

Weight of identified fragments - 3g

Trench 3

Context 3002 [Roman—road surface (structural make up)]

Unidentified - 1 cow-sized rib fragment

Weight of unidentified fragments - 5g

Context 3003 [Medieval/post-medieval—?plough soil]

Caprine - 1 mandibular molar

Unidentified - 1 cow-sized shaft fragment

Weight of identified fragments - 5g

Weight of unidentified fragments - 3g

Discussion and statement of potential

Ancient plant remains were confined to charcoal fragments (almost certainly from wood used for fuel), further examination of which may yield a little information if there are relevant archaeological questions to be addressed.

The single ancient invertebrate remain is of no interpretative value.

The vertebrate assemblage, although well-preserved, is of little interpretative value because of its very small size. It is not possible to evaluate the interpretative value of unexcavated material on the basis of such a limited assemblage.

Recommendations

If deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging, higher concentrations of charred plant material, or larger quantities of bone are exposed by further excavation every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Retention and disposal

The hand-collected bone assemblage should be retained for the present.

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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