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**An evaluation of vertebrate remains from excavations at Methley Quarry,
West Yorkshire (site code: METH96)**

by

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Summary

A single box of animal bone from excavations at Methley Quarry, West Yorkshire was submitted for evaluation.

Most of the bones represented a single cattle skeleton which had been buried in a pit tentatively dated to the post-medieval period. However, most of the other features uncovered on site were late Iron age to Romano-British in date.

It is recommended that the material be retained at the EAU where further comparative biometrical work may throw further light on the date of the animal.

Keywords: METHLEY QUARRY; WEST YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; POST-MEDIEVAL; IRON AGE; ROMANO-BRITISH; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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An evaluation of vertebrate remains from excavations at Methley Quarry, West Yorkshire (site code: METH96)

Introduction

Excavations were undertaken by Malton Archaeological Consultancy at a site at Methley Quarry, near Castleford, West Yorkshire. The site consisted of late Iron age to early Romano-British enclosures, two possible Romano-British structures and a series of pits. However, most of the bone recovered represented a single animal, and as very little bone survived because of the acidic nature of the sediment, the excavators suggested a possible post-medieval date for the burial.

Methods

All the animal bone was examined, but records were only made on the animal skeleton.

Results

Bone

The near complete skeleton excavated at Methley Quarry is that of an adult cow (since all epiphyses are fused and all cheek teeth are erupted and well in wear). Missing elements include some carpals, 3rd phalanges, and some ribs (all can be explained through use of hand-recovery techniques).

Preservation overall is quite good (most of the long bones being complete or near complete), although the remains possess a somewhat decalcified quality, often characteristic of bones recovered from shallow well-drained deposits.

Two points of interest include the small size of this fully adult animal (certainly not reminiscent of post-medieval stock) and the apparent congenital absence of the second premolar from the mandibular tooth row. This condition has been noted by numerous workers and, although not

exclusively confined to Roman cattle, occurs in particularly high incidences in cattle mandibles from Roman assemblages.

In conclusion, the small size of the animal and its mature age at death, in conjunction with the congenital absence of the second premolar, strongly suggests that it is of Roman date. The absence of any other direct dating evidence, however, renders this conclusion a mere educated guess, although the size and conformation of the skeleton is very similar to other Roman examples, recently recorded from Lincoln (Dobney *et al* 1996a), Filey (Dobney *et al* 1996b) and Brough (Carrott *et al* 1994). The presence of nearby Roman archaeology (uncovered during the evaluation exercise) perhaps supports an early date for the skeleton.

The reason for the animal's death and subsequent burial are not to be found in the evidence from the skeleton. It may perhaps have been an animal which died of unknown causes or disease and was therefore considered unfit for human consumption (no evidence of pathology or butchery was noted from the skeleton).

It is interesting to note that from the Iron Age and Romano-British period in this country, burials of whole or part carcasses, representing a range of domestic livestock (including, dogs, horses, chickens, goats, sheep and cows), are thought to be of some ritual significance. It is thus possible that the cattle skeleton from Methley represents one such 'special deposit'.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the material be retained at the EAU where further comparative biometrical work may throw further light on the date of the animal.

Retention and disposal

All material should be retained for the present.

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.

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