

Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York 97/24, 7pp.

**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at
47-55 Tanner Row, York (site code: 1997.3)**

by

John Carrott, Allan Hall, Cluny Johnstone and Frances Large

Summary

Sediment samples from ninth century to modern deposits at 47-55 Tanner Row, York, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

*With the exception of the *Trichuris* eggs and other microfossils noted in Sample 6 (Context 1014) and a small quantity of charcoal recovered from Sample 1 (Context 1007) the sediment samples were barren of identifiable plant and invertebrate macrofossils.*

Although small, the hand collected vertebrate assemblage was well preserved with a moderate number of measurable bones and an interesting range of species.

No further work need be undertaken on the present material but in planning further work it should be remembered that a significant vertebrate assemblage could be recovered, and provision should be made for post-excavation research and publication. If deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging are exposed by further excavation every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Keywords: 47-55 TANNER ROW; YORK; EVALUATION; CHARCOAL; MICROFOSSILS; *TRICHURIS* EGGS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

Authors' address:

Palaeoecology Research Services
Environmental Archaeology Unit
University of York
Heslington
York YO1 5DD

Prepared for:

York Archaeological Trust
Cromwell House
11 Ogleforth
York
YO1 2JG

Telephone: (01904) 434485/433843/434487
Answerphone: 433846
Fax: 433850

21 May 1997

Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at 47-55 Tanner Row, York (site code: 1997.3)

Introduction

Excavations were carried out by York Archaeological Trust at 47-55 Tanner Row, York (NGR SE 5987 5161) in March 1997. Two trenches were excavated: Trench 1 at 49-51 Tanner Row (27 metres from the street frontage, 3 x 3 x 1.65 m deep) and Trench 2 at 55 Tanner Row (3.5 metres from the street frontage, 3.3 x 2.3 x 1.6 m deep). Four General Biological Analysis samples and one spot sample ('GBAs' and 'SPOT' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) and one box of bone were submitted for an evaluation of their biological potential. The material probably dates from the 9th century to present.

Methods

The material was initially inspected in the laboratory and described using a *pro forma*. One GBA sample was bulk-sieved to 500 µm. The residue resulting from processing was examined for its content of plant macrofossils.

A single box (39 x 16 x 15 cm) of hand-collected animal bone was submitted for evaluation. All the hand-collected bone was examined; subjective records were made of preservation, angularity (i.e. the nature of the broken surfaces) and colour, whilst quantities and identifications were noted where appropriate. In addition semi-quantitative records were made of fragment size, butchery, burning, fresh breakage and dog gnawing. All fragments not identified to species or species group were recorded as 'unidentified'. These included skull, vertebra, rib and shaft

fragments and other elements where species identification was unclear.

The SPOT sample was examined for the eggs of parasitic nematodes and other microfossils using the 'squash' technique of Dainton (1992).

Results and discussion

Sediment samples

The results are presented by trench in context number order. Context information provided by the excavator, and archaeological questions to be addressed, are enclosed in brackets.

Trench 1

Context 1007

[Deposit sealing SW-NE aligned linear trench 1013]

Sample 1

12 kg bulk sieved to 500 µm

Dry, mid brown to mid grey brown, unconsolidated, slightly sandy ashy silt. Brick/tile, mortar, charcoal and very rotted shell were present in the sample.

The large residue was mostly sand and fragments of brick/tile with some mortar, coal, cinder and charcoal and a little pot, metal, shellfish and bone. The latter, a total of 34 fragments (9.6 g), consisted of: a large bird (probably goose) vertebra, a bird phalange and sternum fragment, a ray (Rajidae) dermal denticle, an eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)) vertebra, a herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) vertebra, eight unidentified fish fragments, three unidentified mammal fragments (burnt), one medium mammal rib fragment, two medium mammal shaft fragments and 14 unidentified fragments.

Context 1014

[Spot sample from ?very decayed wooden lining to

cut 1016. Fill 1015 (of cut 1016) produced a small amount of 12th century pottery]
Sample 6

Is this part of a wooden lining?

Just moist, light to mid brown, very decayed organic material, possibly with some very decayed bone.

The 'squash' was mostly organic detritus with a little inorganic material. Many phytoliths, a few fungal hyphae and two *Trichuris* eggs were noted. One of the parasitic nematode eggs was intact (retaining both polar plugs) though very pale.

The presence of the *Trichuris* eggs indicates a faecal component to the deposit. The organic material forming the matrix of the sample was too decayed to determine whether or not it had originally been part of a wooden lining to the cut.

Trench 2

Context 2002

[Layer sealing E-W aligned roughly linear feature 2004 containing a single sherd of York ware (9-11th century)]

Sample 2

Just moist, dark grey brown, crumbly (working soft and slightly sticky), slightly sandy clay silt with some fragments of ?mortar and brick/tile.

No further analysis was undertaken on this sample.

Context 2003

[Fill of linear feature 2004 containing a small amount of 4th century pottery and some Roman brick and Tegula]

Sample 3

Sediment description as for Sample 2 (above).

No further analysis was undertaken on this sample.

Context 2005

Sample 4

Sample description as for Sample 2 (above) but with large stones (60+ mm) present.

No further analysis was undertaken on this sample.

Hand-collected bone

Trench 1

Eleven contexts from this trench (seven dated to the late medieval period) produced a small amount of bone. Only three of these (1010, 1011, 1012) produced more than 20 fragments each. In total 61 identifiable (2454 g) and 102 unidentifiable (1341 g) fragments were recorded. The range of species identified is shown in Table 1, together with the total number of fragments, numbers of measurable bones, numbers of mandibles with teeth *in situ* and weights.

Preservation of the material was good, with the broken surfaces, for the most part, appearing 'spiky', with a few recorded as battered. Colour was variable, both within and between contexts, ranging from beige to brown. In addition, copper alloy staining (greenish-blue in colour) was present on 20 to 50 % of the bones in most contexts. Dog gnawing was noted on 0-10% of bones in a few contexts, fresh breakage was slightly more abundant (10-20%). Evidence of butchery was present on 10-20 % of fragments overall but in a few individual contexts was nearer 50%. No burnt fragments were noted.

The main domestic species (cattle, caprovid and pig) formed the greatest proportion of the assemblage, with domestic fowl and geese also represented. Additional, less common species present included hare (*Lepus* sp.), cat (*Felis* f. domestic), Fallow deer (*Dama dama* (L.)), and raven (*Corvus corax* L.). The 'unidentified' fraction consisted mainly of large mammal rib, vertebra and shaft fragments.

Trench 2

The four bone bearing contexts (one dated to the Roman period, one medieval and two more broadly dated) from the second trench yielded 23 identified (700 g) and 35 unidentifiable (434 g) fragments. The range of species identified is shown in Table 2, together with the total number of fragments, numbers of measurable bones and weights.

Preservation of the material was good, with the broken surfaces appearing 'spiky'. Colour was variable both within and between contexts, ranging from fawn to brown. Dog gnawing and fresh breakage was noted on 0-10% of the fragments. Butchery evidence was slightly more abundant

being present on 10-20% of the fragments. No burnt fragments were noted.

The three main domesticates were present, with cattle the most numerous followed by pig then caprovid. In addition, a single domestic fowl bone was present.

Statement of potential and recommendations

The GBA samples have no further potential for bioarchaeological investigation. Further investigation of the SPOT sample may allow and identification of the *Trichuris* eggs to species—although, in the absence of other environmental evidence, little additional information would be obtained.

Although small, the vertebrate assemblage was well preserved with a moderate number of measurable bones and an interesting range of species. This suggests that should further excavation be undertaken and a tighter dating framework be achieved, then a significant animal bone assemblage could be recovered. Within a wider context, both Roman and medieval animal bone assemblages from York are rather scarce in the published literature so additional information for these periods would be important. Useful comparisons could be made with assemblages from the General Accident site, Tanner Row (O'Connor 1988), Merchant Adventurers' Hall (Carrott *et al* 1996), and Coppergate (unpublished), York, and with material from Beverley (Scott 1991; 1992).

No further work need be undertaken on the present material but in planning further work it should be remembered that a significant vertebrate assemblage could be recovered, and provision should be made for post-excavation research and publication. If deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging are

exposed by further excavation every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Retention and disposal

The bone assemblage should be retained for the moment. Any remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless it is 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 enabling AH to work on this material.

References

- Carrott, J., Dobney, K., Hall, A., Issitt, M., Jaques, D., Kenward, H. and Large, F. (1996). An assessment of the biological remains from further excavations at Merchant Adventurers' Hall, York (site code: 1995.1). *Reports from The Environmental Archaeology Unit, York* **96/44**.
- Dainton, M. (1992). A quick, semi-quantitative method for recording nematode gut parasite eggs from archaeological deposits. *Circaea* **9**, 58-63.
- Dobney, K., Hall, A. R., Kenward, H. K. and Milles, A. (1992). A working classification of

sample types for environmental archaeology. *Circaea, the Journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology* **9** (for 1991), 24-6.

Kenward, H. K., Engleman, C., Robertson, A., and Large, F. (1986). Rapid scanning of urban archaeological deposits for insect remains. *Circaea* **3** (for 1985), 163-72.

Kenward, H. K., Hall, A. R. and Jones, A. K. G. (1980). A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal macrofossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits. *Science and Archaeology* **22**, 3-15.

O'Connor, T. P. (1988). Bones from the General Accident Site, Tanner Row. *The Archaeology of York* **15** (2), pp. 61-136 + plates III-VII. London: Council for British Archaeology.

Scott, S. (1991). *The animal bones* in Armstrong, P., Tomlinson, D. and Evans, D. H., Excavations at Lurk Lane, Beverley, 1979-82. *Sheffield Excavation Reports* **1**, pp. 216-33. Sheffield.

Scott, S. (1992). *The animal bones* in Evans, D. H. and Tomlinson, D., Excavations at 35 Eastgate, Beverley, 1983-6. *Sheffield Excavation Reports* **3**, pp. 236-51. Sheffield.

Table 1. Summary of hand collected bone from Trench 1, 47-55 Tanner Row, York.

Taxon		No. fragments	No. measurable	No. mandibles	Weight (g)
<i>Lepus</i> sp.	Hare	1	1	-	3
<i>Felis</i> f. domestic	Cat	2	-	-	15
<i>Sus</i> f. domestic	Pig	8	1	1	227
<i>Dama dama</i> (L.)	Fallow Deer	1	-	-	52
<i>Bos</i> f. domestic	Cattle	29	9	3	1993
Caprovid	Sheep/goat	10	5	-	124
cf. <i>Anser</i> f. domestic	?Domestic goose	2	2	-	17
<i>Anser</i> sp.	Goose	1	-	-	3
<i>Gallus</i> f. domestic	Chicken	4	4	-	16
<i>Corvus corax</i> L.	Raven	1	1	-	4
Subtotal		59	23	4	2454
Bird		2	-	-	6
Unidentified		100	-	-	1335
Subtotal		102	-	-	1341
Total		161	23	4	3795

Table 2. Summary of hand collected bone from Trench 2, 47-55 Tanner Row, York.

Taxon		No. fragments	No. measurable	Weight (g)
<i>Sus f. domestic</i>	Pig	4	-	29
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	Cattle	15	5	641
Caprovid	Sheep/goat	3	2	27
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i>	Chicken	1	1	3
Subtotal		23	8	700
Unidentified		35	-	434
Subtotal		35	-	434
Total		58	8	1134