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**An evaluation of biological remains from excavations at
Main Street, Spaunton, North Yorkshire (site code: 1997.93)**

by

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Summary

Two samples of sediment and one box of hand-collected bone from deposits of medieval date excavated at Main Street, Spaunton, North Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their potential for bioarchaeological analysis.

The extremely limited range of plant and invertebrate macrofossils encountered in these two samples and the obvious presence of modern plant material prevents any further interpretation.

Keywords: MAIN STREET; SPAUNTON; NORTH YORKSHIRE; MEDIEVAL; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; BONE

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Introduction

Excavations at Main Street, Spaunton, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 7247 8993), undertaken in October 1997 by York Archaeological Trust, revealed deposits of medieval date. Two samples of sediment and one box of 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 3 kg were taken from 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. None 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

The vertebrate remains were examined and

a basic archive produced. A record was made of preservation, quantities (numbers and weights) and identifications where appropriate. Measurements were taken, (where appropriate) according to von den Driesch (1976), with additional measurements following those outlined in Dobney *et al.* (forthcoming).

Results

The sediment samples

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

Context 2004 [Dump of medieval (probably 12-14th century) construction/demolition material overlying a large medieval pit (Context 2007)]
Sample 1/T (3 kg washover)

Just moist, light to mid brown to light gingery brown, crumbly, silty sand. Very small to large stones (2 to 60+ mm), mortar and charcoal were present in the sample.

This sample produced a small washover principally composed of charcoal (to 5 mm), wood fragments and modern rootlets. Many of the pieces of wood were very well preserved, retaining a pale grey or yellow colour. Large dicotyledon leaf fragments and pieces of root bark were also noted. Nine weed taxa were identified from the assemblage of fruits and seeds. All of the constituents of the assemblage were typical of open or disturbed ground. The sample also contained occasional small sclerotia of soil fungi (*Cenococcum* spp.), which are common in aerated slightly acidic soils, and some earthworm egg capsules. Most seeds were found to be uncharred and at least half were pale in colour and very well preserved. The very good state of preservation and the survival of delicate plant structures suggests that

a significant proportion of the plant assemblage recovered from this sample was modern.

The residue was very small and mostly composed of angular oolitic limestone gravel (to 80 mm), quartz sand and occasional pieces of mortar.

Context 2006 [Uppermost fill of a large medieval pit/well (Context 2007)]

Sample 2/T (3 kg washover)

Just moist, light to mid brown, unconsolidated, silty sand. Very small to medium-sized stones (2 to 60 mm), flecks of mortar and fragments of roofing slate were present in the sample.

The washover for this sample was small and composed of herbaceous rootlets, woody rootlets, charcoal (to 2 mm) and quartz sand. The remainder of the washover was composed of occasional heather fragments (*Calluna vulgaris* L.), a very limited range of weed species, indicative of open and disturbed ground (3 taxa) and frequent small sclerotia of *Cenococcum* spp.. A single fragment of a beetle larva was also noted. All of the root material was very well preserved, with bark remaining on woody fragments, indicating that the material was probably modern.

The moderate-sized residue was dominated by rotted mortar (to 20 mm) with frequent pieces of flaggy sandstone (to 110 mm) and oolitic limestone (to 50 mm); a single fragment of the land snail *Helix aspersa* Müller was also noted.

Bone

A single small box (6.8 litres) of vertebrate remains was submitted for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential. Material from three contexts of medieval date were studied in detail (the rest being considered as modern by the excavator). Overall preservation was 'fair', colour was mostly 'fawn', and 'angularity' (appearance of broken surfaces) slightly 'battered'. Fresh breakage was evident on 20-50% of the fragments with dog gnawing and butchery evident on 10-20%. The few measurements which could be made are given in Table 1.

Context 1008

A single ?Red deer (c.f. *Cervus elaphus* L.) humerus (weight 24.9 g) was recovered from this context but was poorly preserved (eroded) and also slightly dog gnawed.

Context 1009

The following cattle bones (weighing 139.8 g) were identified from this context: 1 metatarsal, 2 metacarpal fragments, 2 tibia fragments (1 measurable). In addition, 3 unidentified fragments were recorded (weighing 24.5 g).

Context 1010

A total of 4 unidentifiable fragments were recorded (weighing 7.3 g).

Discussion and statement of potential

The extremely limited range of plant and invertebrate macrofossils encountered in these two samples and the obvious presence of modern plant material prevents any further interpretation.

The vertebrate assemblage is very small and thus of limited intrinsic value. This combined with only fair preservation suggests that further excavation would not recover a significant quantity of bone.

Recommendations

No further work is recommended on the sediment samples.

No further work on the vertebrate assemblage is warranted, although it should be borne in mind that, if further excavation is undertaken at the site, a further, probably small, quantity of vertebrate remains may be

recovered and provision should be made for analysis.

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

Retention and disposal

Any remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be sieved for artefact recovery.

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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Table 1. The biometrical archive for vertebrate remains from Main Street, Spaunton, N. Yorks.

Taxa		Element	Measurements (mm)	
c.f. <i>Cervus elaphus</i> L.	?red deer	Humerus	BT = 47.5	HTC = 25.7
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	cattle	Tibia	Bd = 53.4	Dd = 38.1