

*Reports from the Environmental Archaeology Unit, York 97/52, 7 pp.*

**Evaluation of the biological remains from County House,  
Monkgate, York (site code: 1997.103)**

by

John Carrott, Paul, Hughes, Cluny Johnstone, Frances Large and Darren Worthy.

**Summary**

*A single sediment sample and one box of animal bones were presented for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.*

*The sample yielded some fish remains and a few fragments of charcoal. The vertebrate assemblage was of limited interpretive value because of its small size and the broad dating of the contexts.*

**Keywords:** COUNTY HOUSE; MONKGATE; YORK; SEDIMENT SAMPLE; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; ROMAN; MEDIEVAL; LATE MEDIEVAL; EVALUATION

Authors' address:

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

Telephone: (01904) 434485/433843/434487/434486  
Answerphone: 433846  
Fax: 433850

Prepared for:

York Archaeological Trust  
Cromwell House  
13 Ogleforth  
York  
YO1 2JG

27 November 1997

## Evaluation of the biological remains from County House, Monkgate, York (site code: 1997.103)

### Introduction

An evaluation excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at County House, Monkgate in York, during October 1997. A single sediment sample and one box (approx. 20 litres) of animal bone were presented to the EAU for evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential. The deposits were dated to three broad categories; Roman, medieval and late medieval.

### Methods

#### *Sediment sample*

The sediment sample was inspected in the laboratory and a description of its lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma*. On the basis of this inspection and information supplied by the excavator the sample was felt to have little potential for the retrieval of plant and insect remains and consequently was treated as a 'BS' sample rather than a 'GBA' sample (*sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992). The entire sample (14kg) was sieved to 500 $\mu$ m (with a 500 $\mu$ m mesh for the washover) and the resulting washover and residue were sorted primarily for bone, charcoal and artefacts.

#### *Vertebrate remains*

The vertebrate remains (from both the hand-collected and the sieved assemblages) 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 by the sheep-goat working-party (Dobney *et al.* forthcoming).

### Results

#### *Sediment sample*

#### **Context 1020, sample 1/BS**

[Roman dump deposit from a large, shallow pit]

Moist mid-dark grey, unconsolidated to crumbly (working soft), clay silt with mortar flecks and mammal bone both present.

The washover contained sand grains, small fragments of brick/tile, charcoal, wood and two grass seeds (*Poa* sp.). Additionally two fish vertebrae and two small mammal fragments were present.

Stones, brick/tile, charcoal, and large mammal bone were common in the residue, with pottery, mortar, metal, shellfish, amphibian and fish bones present. Table 1 gives the number of fragments and weights of the vertebrate remains recovered.

#### *Hand-collected vertebrate remains*

Bone from a total of 14 contexts was presented for evaluation. Material from 13 of these contexts was examined, representing three date groups; Roman (5

contexts), medieval (5), and late medieval (3). Context 1000 was described by the excavator as a machine removed deposit, and hence the bone was excluded from the evaluation.

Preservation of the vertebrate remains was generally 'fair', colour was variable, although mostly light brown, and 'angularity' (appearance of broken surfaces) was also variable with both spiky and battered fragments in most contexts. Evidence of dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breakage was recorded as present on 0-10% of fragments. The fragment size was generally small (<10 cm). These factors suggest that the origins of the fragments may differ and that the deposits may be, to some degree, mixed.

Table 2 gives the number of fragments and weights of the hand-collected vertebrate assemblage by period. The biometrical archive of the 14 measurable bones is given in Table 3. Although the assemblage is small the main domestic mammal species (cattle, caprovid, pig and horse) are represented, along with dog (*Canis* f. domestic). The bird species represented were goose (*Anser* sp.), duck (*Anas* sp.) and chicken (*Gallus* f. domestic). In addition herring (*Clupea harengus* L.), eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)), cod family (Gadid) and amphibian were present in the sieved assemblage.

## Discussion and Statement of potential

### *Sediment sample*

The sediment sample was of some bioarchaeological interest. The small

amounts of charcoal and bone recovered indicate that there is potential for the preservation of bioarchaeological remains on this site even if not in great quantity.

### *Vertebrate remains*

The small size and broad dating of this assemblage render it of little interpretative value. The overall preservation combined with the recovery of fish and bird remains suggest that should further excavation be undertaken, with a more extensive sieving programme, an assemblage of less limited interpretative value would be recovered. However, any additional vertebrate assemblage would only prove useful if a tighter dating framework could be achieved.

## Recommendations

No further work is necessary on the present vertebrate assemblage but provision should be made for the recovery and analysis of a larger vertebrate assemblage should further excavation be undertaken. Preservation of bioarchaeological remains indicates that if further excavation is undertaken a sampling strategy should be employed to enable the recovery of fish remains. Sampling for bioarchaeological remains other than bones should only be undertaken if anoxic, waterlogged deposits or larger concentrations of charred material are encountered.

## Retention and Disposal

The vertebrate remains should be retained for the present in case further excavation reveals a larger assemblage. The non-bone

components of the residue from the sediment sample may be disposed of.

## **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**

We are grateful to York Archaeological Trust for providing the material and the archaeological information.

## **References**

Dobney, K., Hall, A. R., Kenward, H. K. and Milles, A. (1992 for 1991). A working classification of sample types for environmental archaeology. *Circaea, the Journal of the Association for Environmental Archaeology* 9, 24-6.

Dobney, K. M., Jaques, S. D. and Johnstone, C. J. (forthcoming). Protocol for recording vertebrate remains from archaeological sites.

von den Driesch, A. (1976). A guide to the measurement of animal bones from archaeological sites. *Peabody Museum Bulletin* 1. Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University.

Table 1. Vertebrate remains from bulk-sieved sample from County House, Monkgate, York.

Small mammal = fragments assumed to from animals smaller than a rabbit; Medium mammal 1 = fragments assumed to be from caprovid, pig or small cervid; Large mammal = fragments assumed to be from cattle, horse or large cervid.

Taxa		No. Fragments	Weight (g)
Caprovid	Sheep/goat	2	7.3
<i>Clupea harengus</i> L.	Herring	6	0.5
<i>Anguilla anguilla</i> (L.)	Eel	2	
Gadid	Cod family	1	
Fish		9	
Amphibian		1	
Small mammal		3	49.6
Medium mammal 1		12	
Large mammal		9	
Unidentified		132	
<b>Total</b>		<b>177</b>	<b>57.4</b>

Table 2. Vertebrate remains by period from County House, Monkgate, York.

Medium mammal 1 = fragments assumed to be from caprovid, pig or small cervid; Medium mammal 2 = fragments assumed to be from dog/ cat/ rabbit sized animals; Large mammal = fragments assumed to be from cattle, horse or large cervid.

Taxa		Roman	Medieval	Late medieval	Total	Weight (g)
<i>Canis f. domestic</i>	Dog	1	-	-	1	7
<i>Equus f. domestic</i>	Horse	1	-	1	2	56
<i>Sus f. domestic</i>	Pig	7	-	-	7	62
<i>Bos f. domestic</i>	Cattle	16	3	3	22	521
Caprovid	Sheep/goat	7	1	-	8	100
<i>Ovis f. domestic</i>	Sheep	4	-	-	4	
<i>Anser sp.</i>	Goose	2	1	-	3	4
<i>Anas sp.</i>	Duck	1	-	-	1	1
<i>Gallus f. domestic</i>	Chicken	2	1	-	3	4
Fish (Unidentified)		1	-	-	1	<1
Medium mammal 1		123	6	4	133	1165
Medium mammal 2		1	-	-	1	
Large mammal		79	7	2	88	
Unidentified		-	18	-	18	
<b>Total</b>		<b>245</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>1920</b>

Table 3. Biometrical archive for County House, Monkgate, York.

Taxa	Context	Date	Element	Measurements			
Horse	1013	Late med	Phalanx 1	GL=73.95	SD=30.09	Bp=51.55	Dp=32.06
				Bd=43.12	BFd=40.16		
Dog	1020	Roman	Tibia	SD=7.64	Bd=16.91	Dd=12.99	
Cow	1011	Roman	Metacarpal	Bp=47.51	Dp=29.21		
Cow	1011	Roman	Astragalus	GLI=56.86	DI=30.49	Bd=35.60	
Cow	1019	Roman	Metatarsal	Bp=38.59	Dp=38.76		
Cow	1023	Roman	Calcaneum	C=23.80	DS=34.48		
Cow	1017	Roman	Tibia	SD=27.69	Dd=68.37		
Sheep	1019	Roman	Calcaneum	C=12.89	C+D=23.19	DS=19.54	
Sheep/goat	1017	Roman	Metacarpal	SD=14.15	Bp=22.88	Dp=16.28	
Sheep/goat	1017	Roman	Metacarpal	Bp=22.61	Dp=15.27		
Sheep/goat	2040	Medieval	Metacarpal	Bp=25.54	Dp=17.33		
Sheep/goat	1011	Roman	Tibia	SD=11.55	Bd=26.16	Dd=18.94	
Sheep	1017	Roman	Tibia	Bd=25.58	Dd=17.51		
Chicken	2041	Medieval	Femur	SC=7.46	Dp=16.22		