

Palaeoecology Research Services

**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at St
Oswald's School, Fulford, York
(site code: OSA02EV14)**

by

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Summary

Four sediment samples recovered from excavations of deposits of Roman to post-medieval date at St Oswald's School, Fulford, York, North Yorkshire, were submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

All of the samples yielded moderately large residues of sand with a little gravel and usually also some ?iron pan (in small fragments) and a small washover with some coal, and usually also some charcoal. Other charred material was confined to very small numbers of small fragments of ?heather, root/rhizome, and a single charred cereal grain. The charred ?heather and root/rhizome are considered to be possible indicators of the presence of charred peat or heathland turves.

No further work is thought to be needed for the samples in hand but it is possible that other deposits in the vicinity will yield further evidence in the form of charred remains. A programme of sampling of primary contexts and evaluation of samples should be undertaken if further well-dated archaeological layers not so far examined are to be destroyed by the development at this site.

The material in hand may be discarded if not required for any other purpose.

KEYWORDS: ST OSWALD'S SCHOOL, FULFORD; YORK; NORTH YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; ROMAN TO POST-MEDIEVAL; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

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Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by On-Site Archaeology, at St Oswald's School, Fulford, York, North Yorkshire (NGR SE 6110 4945), between the 5th and the 13th of December 2002.

St Oswald's School in Fulford lies some 2.5 km south of the historic core of the City of York, and some 100m east of Fulford, a former medieval village now subsumed within York. The SMR and recent work at the adjacent site of Germany Beck indicate an extensive late-prehistoric and Romano-British landscape. The Germany Beck site also produced an interesting assemblage of Roman pottery. A nearby archaeological evaluation of the proposed site for Fulford School Sports Hall indicated the presence of archaeological features cut into the natural sub-soil. These features were a ditch and a gully and appeared to be of prehistoric and Roman date.

Four sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) recovered from Trenches 4 and 5 (of 5 excavated) were submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The submitted sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithologies were recorded, using a standard *pro forma*, prior to processing, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The washovers resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residues were examined for

larger plant macrofossils, other biological remains and artefacts.

Results

The results are presented in context number order by Trench. Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is given in square brackets. A brief summary of the processing method and an estimate of the remaining volume of unprocessed sediment follows (in round brackets) after the sample numbers.

A few artefacts were recovered (mostly small ceramic fragments) and these were forwarded to the designated specialist. No invertebrate remains were recovered from the samples.

Trench 4

Context 4001 [ditch fill in 4012, Roman]

Sample 4/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 6 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid to dark grey-brown, crumbly (working more or less soft), silty clay sand. Some stones (6 to 20 mm), rotted ?charcoal and a modern contaminant seedling were present.

The moderate-sized residue (of about 100 cm³) was of sand and a little gravel (to 30 mm in maximum dimension), with a single tiny fragment of burnt bone. The small washover (of about 20 cm³) was of charcoal (to 5 mm), including ?heather (cf. *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull) root/basal twig and a single fragment of charred root/rhizome (both to 5 mm), coal, and some 'cinder-like' material (which might be from peat rather than coal). A single unidentifiable charred cereal grain was also noted.

Context 4007 [fill of slot 4015, Roman]

Sample 2/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 5 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid grey-brown, crumbly (working soft), clay sandy silt, with a little coal (to 30 mm) and some modern rootlets.

There was a moderate-sized residue (of about 100 cm³) of sand with a little gravel (to 30 mm), with some coal

and fragments of large mammal bone (including a tooth fragment), plus a small piece of pot (to 20 mm). The small washover of (about 20 cm³) was mainly coal (15 mm) and charcoal (10 mm), with some modern roots and traces of charred ?heather root/twig.

Context 4009 [ditch fill in 4018, medieval]

Sample 3/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 5 litres of unprocessed sediment remain]

Just moist, light to mid grey-brown, crumbly (working soft), silty clay sand, with some charcoal and modern rootlets.

The moderate-sized residue (of about 110 cm³) was of sand and a little gravel (to 30 mm). The very small washover (of just a few cm³) consisted only of modern roots, charcoal (to 10 mm) and a trace of ?heather root/twig.

Trench 5

Context 5005 [fill of broad linear feature 5006, medieval to mid 17th century]

Sample 1/T (2 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; no unprocessed sediment remains as a further 11 kg was processed as a bulk sample – see below]

Just moist, light to mid brown to mid grey-brown, stiff to crumbly (working soft and somewhat plastic), slightly sandy silty clay (to clay/silt), with a little charcoal and modern rootlets present.

There was a moderate-sized residue (of about 120 cm³) of sand and a little gravel (to 15 mm), and a small fragment of ?brick/tile (to 15 mm). The small washover (of about 20 cm³) was mainly coal (to 10 mm), with some modern roots, a little ?cinder and a trace of charcoal (to 5 mm).

Sample 1/BS (11 kg sieved to 1 mm for artefact recovery)

The very small residue (dry weight 445 g) was of sand and a little gravel (including stones up to 20 mm). There were also a few small fragments of ceramic material (to 15 mm).

Discussion and statement of potential

All the samples yielded moderately large residues of sand with a little gravel and usually also some ?iron pan (in small fragments) and a small washover with some coal, and usually also some charcoal. Other charred material was confined to very small numbers of small fragments of ?heather (cf. *Calluna vulgaris* (L.) Hull) root/basal twig material (in three samples) and, in one case, also of a fragment of root/rhizome and a single charred cereal grain. The charred ?heather and root/rhizome are considered to be possible indicators of the presence of charred peat or heathland turves and it is possible that some of the 'cinder-like' material in the samples from Context 4007 (and perhaps 5005) is from the same source. It is interesting that these remains are present in contexts dated to both the Roman and medieval periods: if there has been no reworking, it could be inferred that the same activity occurred at both periods.

Recommendations

No further work is thought to be needed for the samples in hand but it is possible that other deposits in the vicinity will yield further evidence in the form of charred remains. A programme of sampling of primary contexts and evaluation of samples (following that adopted here) should be undertaken if further well-dated archaeological layers not so far examined are to be destroyed by the development at this site.

Retention and disposal

The material in hand may be discarded if not required for any other purpose.

Archive

All material is currently stored by Palaeoecology Research Services (Unit 8, Dabble Duck Industrial Estate, Shildon, County Durham), along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

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