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**Evaluation of biological remains from
excavations at 69-73 Morton Lane, Beverley,
East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: MLB03)**

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**Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at 69-73 Morton Lane,
Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: MLB03)**

by

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Summary

Three sediment samples recovered from an evaluation at 69-73 Morton Lane, Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire, were submitted for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential. Provisional dating of the encountered deposits was as medieval to modern.

Three very different kinds of plant assemblage were recorded, all with some potential for palaeoecological interpretation. A common thread being the exploitation of wetland resources for peat and for standing vegetation. The few invertebrate remains present were poorly preserved, mostly unidentifiable and of no interpretative value. The vertebrate assemblages were too small to be of any great interpretative value, but do indicate the potential for well preserved bone to be recovered from deposits in this area.

The material examined warrants no further investigation at this stage, though any samples to hand not so far evaluated might, with profit, be studied. Certainly any further excavation at this site should include a programme of sampling and analysis.

KEYWORDS: 69-73 MORTON LANE; BEVERLEY; EAST RIDING OF YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; MEDIEVAL; POST-MEDIEVAL; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED GRAIN; PEAT; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; VERTEBRATE REMAINS; ?DYEING

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Evaluation of biological remains from excavations at 69-73 Morton Lane, Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire (site code: MLB03)

Introduction

An archaeological evaluation excavation was carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd (Northern Office) at 69-73 Morton Lane, Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire (NGR TA 034 397), between the 1st and the 3rd of September 2003.

A single trench, located in the rear garden of 73 Morton Lane, was excavated. This trench revealed evidence of medieval and early post-medieval activity, represented by at least one metre of stratified archaeological deposits.

There were a variety of medieval features including a substantial ditch, what appeared to be discrete pits, and numerous occupation deposits (including what may have been part of a clay surface). A substantial developed soil recorded throughout the trench may represent a hiatus of activity towards the end of the medieval period. Two wall footings at the northern end of the trench were filled with chalk rubble and probably represent part of an early post-medieval building. To the south, were two large postholes or pits (also of early post-medieval date) and, in the southernmost part of the trench, a substantial feature (probably a ditch) which contained waterlogged organic material. A massive rubble-filled post-medieval pit was recorded at the northern end of the trench. The uppermost part of the stratigraphic sequence was of later post-medieval and modern garden soils.

Three sediment samples ('GBA'/'BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were recovered from the deposits and submitted to PRS for an evaluation of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and their lithologies recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples from each were processed, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for the recovery of biological remains.

The flot and washovers resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residues were examined for larger plant macrofossils and other biological and artefactual remains.

Results

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 number.

Context 30 [fill, ?16th century]

Sample 1/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with paraffin flotation; approximately 12 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, dark grey-brown, brittle to crumbly (working soft), humic, slightly clay silt. Small stones (2 to 6 mm), charcoal and other fine ?charred material, and a trace of modern rootlets were present.

There was a minute flot with a few propagules from waterside and aquatic plants (including *Alisma*, *Characeae* and *Potamogeton*) but only scraps of invertebrate cuticle.

The small residue of about 250 cm³ contained a distinct and large component (in all fractions to 5 mm, but especially in the less than 1 mm fraction) of unburnt amorphous fen peat as well as a little charred peat and some charcoal. Other components were sand, grit and gravel (including chalk to 30 mm), a little brick/tile (to 20 mm), and unidentified bird bone.

Context 36 [occupation deposit, medieval]

Sample 3/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 14 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Just moist, mid brown to mid grey-brown, crumbly (working soft and somewhat plastic), slightly sandy, clay silt (to silty clay), with some lumps (to 15 mm) of slightly indurated, orange clay. Stones (2 to 20 mm), mortar/plaster and some rather rotted charcoal were present.

The small washover of about 30 cm³ consisted largely of fine charred plant material with clasts of pale brown 'ash'. Most of the charred plant remains were wood charcoal, saw-sedge (*Cladium mariscus* (L.) Pohl) leaf and occasionally culm fragments and grass/cereal culm. Other identifiable remains were limited to single specimens of *Vicia* (vetch) seed (less than 2 mm) and bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans* L.). It is possible that this charred plant material derived from the burning of thatch, though an origin in fuel cannot be discounted. This adds to the growing number of records for charred saw-sedge remains from medieval deposits in Beverley, though the concentration of material in this context is rather lower than in samples from some other sites.

There was a small residue (dry weight 530 g) of sand and small stones (to 15 mm), with a little charcoal (to 10 mm, approximately 2 g), some small fragments of shell (less than 1 g) including ?mussel (?*Mytilus edulis* L.), eggshell and one unidentified land snail, a single fragment of pot, and a little bone (20 g, see below).

Eighty-seven fragments of bone were recovered from this sample, of which half were identified as fish. Preservation of the bones was very good, although the colour of the fragments was somewhat variable. Most of the fish remains were spines and rib fragments which could not be identified to species. However, the remains of herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) and gadid (probably cod – *Gadus morhua* L.) were identified. Based on modern comparative specimens, the ?cod vertebra represented a fish with a total length of approximately 350 mm. Some of the larger skeletal elements were too broken to be identified but were probably also Gadidae remains. The only mammal fragment identified was a cattle second phalanx.

Context 56 [fill, medieval]

Sample 2/T (3 kg sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 15 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, light to mid grey-brown, stiff (working soft and sticky), slightly sandy clay silt, with stones (2 to 60 mm) and a little charcoal present.

This subsample yielded a small washover of about 30 cm³ of fine woody and herbaceous plant material, including small, very decayed wood fragments (to 10 mm) and charcoal. There were scraps of invertebrate cuticle. All the identifiable remains were rather strongly decayed, often fragmentary. They included taxa likely to have arrived in peat—bog bean (*Menyanthes trifoliata* L.), saw-sedge (*Cladium*) and perhaps the rush (*Juncus*) seeds—as well as some weld (*Reseda luteola* L.) seeds which might be connected with dyeing (evidence for which has been noted in several places in Beverley, including from another nearby excavation in Morton Lane, Hall *et al.* 2002).

The small residue (dry weight 470 g) was mostly sand and stones (to 25 mm), with a little charcoal (to 15 mm, approximately 3 g), a single poorly preserved charred ?wheat (cf. *Triticum*) grain, a little unidentified shell (much less than 1 g), and a little bone (9 g).

The vertebrate material recovered from this sample was well preserved, though with some fresh breakage apparent. Most bones were dark brown in colour, and a few were burnt. Overall, the assemblage amounted to 52 fragments, which included fragments of a goose (*Anser* sp.) carpometatarsus and a number of fish bones. A thornback ray (*Raja clavata* L.) dermal denticle was present, together with several fragments of vertebra which may be eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)).

Discussion and statement of potential

Three very different kinds of plant assemblage have been recorded here, all with some potential for palaeoecological interpretation. A common thread is the exploitation of wetland resources for peat and for standing vegetation, though this is hardly surprising given Beverley's location on the edge of an area of low-lying land.

The few invertebrate remains present were poorly preserved, mostly unidentifiable and of no interpretative value.

The vertebrate assemblages recovered from the samples considered here were too small to be of any great interpretative value. However, they do indicate the potential for well preserved bone to be recovered from deposits in this area and this should be considered in the event of any future excavation.

Recommendations

The material examined warrants no further investigation at this stage, though any samples to hand not so far evaluated might, with profit, be studied. Certainly any further excavation at this site should include a programme of sampling and analysis.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining sediment, together with the remains extracted from the processed subsamples, should be retained for the present.

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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