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**Assessment of biological remains from
Corve Street, Ludlow, Shropshire (site code: B1910A)**

by

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Summary

One pre-processed sediment sample and a small quantity of fish bone and scales, from deposits revealed by excavations at Corve Street, Ludlow, Shropshire, were submitted for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

The ancient biological remains recovered were of limited interpretative value though sufficient to show the potential for survival of organic remains within these deposits. The evidence of the plant and invertebrate remains gave no reason to suppose that the pit feature from which the sediment sample (Context 122, Sample 8) derived was used for tanning as had been tentatively suggested on the basis of other inclusions.

No further work is recommended on the current material.

KEYWORDS: CORVE STREET; LUDLOW; SHROPSHIRE; ASSESSMENT; MEDIEVAL (1350 - 1450 AD); 16TH CENTURY; PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS; FISH BONE; FISH SCALES

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Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by Gifford and Partners at Corve Street, Ludlow, Shropshire, in 1999. A single pre-processed sample (dated to 1350-1450 AD on recovered pottery) from a pit feature, and a small quantity of fish bones and scales (from four contexts of the same and later, 16th century, date) were submitted to the EAU for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

Nine litres of the sample from Context 122 (Sample 8) had been processed prior to submission to the EAU. The material comprised a paraffin flot (to 300 m), 600 m flot, 300 m flot, a small bottle of insect remains removed during processing, the wet residue (though this appeared to represent only the non-mineral fraction and to have been sorted for larger organic remains e.g. bone, wood, nutshell), and approximately half a litre of unprocessed sediment.

The fish bone and scales were identified to species group or species (where possible), using the reference collection at the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York.

Results

The results of the examinations are presented in context number order. Archaeological information and questions to be addressed (provided by the excavator) are given in square brackets and italic text, respectively, by context.

Context 3 [fill of construction trench, ?late 16th Century]

Hand-collected bone

Identification of fish bone.

One ?gadid (cod family) ?opercular (chopped).

Context 110 [late 16th Century fill of stone cellar]

Sample 6

Identification of fish bone.

The small quantity of fish bone was mostly not identified to species level. The results of the examination are listed below:

- 1 herring (*Clupea harengus* L.) vertebra
- 1 herring (*C. harengus*) post-temporal
- 7 eel (*Anguilla anguilla* (L.)) vertebrae (2 burnt, all quite large)
- 1 gadid branchial
- 4 gadid intemeural/interhaemal spines
- 4 gadid branchiostegal rays
- 10 gadid fin rays

33 unidentified spine/ray fragments
1 unidentified fish fragment

Context 121 [fill of pit 109, c. 1350-1450 AD]

Sample 7

Identification of fish bone.

One cod (*Gadus morhua* L.) vertebra from an individual of approximately 70 cm in length.

Context 122 [fill of pit 109, c. 1350-1450 AD]

Sample 8 (9 litres of sediment processed prior to submission to EAU)

Other remains from this feature (primarily the animal bone from Context 121 - not considered as part of this assessment) have been used tentatively to suggest that it contained either primary butchery waste or waste from tanning. Do the other biological remains, the insects in particular, provide any additional information as to the use of this feature?

The raw sediment was a grey-brown, stony, humic sandy silt.

All of the submitted components of the sample were examined. Few invertebrate remains were seen but these included fragments of fly (Diptera sp.) puparia, mites (Acarina sp.), earthworm (Oligochaeta sp.) egg capsules, earwig (Dermaptera sp.), unidentified insect larval fragments, and a bee (Apoidea sp.) wing fragment. Beetle remains extracted before submission to the EAU were restricted to the fraction labelled 'insect remains' and included fragments of two carabids (?*Nebria* sp. and *Agonum* sp.), *Carpelimus fuliginosus* (Gravenhorst), *Platystethus arenarius* (Fourcroy), *Gyrohypnus angustus* Stephens, *Loricera pilicornis* (Fabricius), an omaliine, and *Oxytelus sculptus* Gravenhorst. A rapid scan of the residue revealed some additional invertebrate remains (including whole and fragmentary beetle elytra) which had not been extracted by flotation.

The plant remains were mostly woody and herbaceous detritus with some seeds, moss and uncharred ?cereal rachis.

Five well-preserved fish scales were recovered from this deposit. They were identified as grayling (*Thymallus thymallus* (L.)).

Discussion and statement of potential

Two observations may be made regarding the material as supplied. Firstly, the 'flots' were much larger than would be expected as a result of paraffin flotation, resembling washovers (using the terminology of Kenward *et al.* 1980). Secondly, preservation in IMS rather than water is essential for storage of material of this kind.

The plant and invertebrate remains are of no great interpretative value. The plant taxa show hints of grassland and some probable woodland (from the mosses) with some traces of food waste (or ?cess)—overall, they form a typical medieval urban assemblage with no pronounced character but which may well have come together in 'litter' (e.g from a stable or byre). The invertebrate remains are too few in number to be interpretatively useful. The recovered plant and invertebrate remains are not typical of the suite of taxa that might be expected from a tanning pit, however (Hall and Kenward unpublished).

Information supplied by the excavator indicated that the samples from the pit feature (Contexts 121, 122) also included mammal bone, wood, nutshell, small fragments of leather, and charred grain. Together with

the remains discussed above, these various components are, perhaps, rather more indicative of general dumping of waste than of a more specialised use of this feature. There is, of course, no reason why the material backfilling a feature should be related to any 'primary function'.

The fish bone (and scale) assemblage was very well-preserved but too small to be of interpretative value.

Recommendations

In view of the fact that the principal archaeological question to be addressed by the investigation of the plant and invertebrate remains (whether there was any evidence that the pit feature was used for tanning) has been answered (in the negative), no further work is recommended on these categories of material. (Amalgamation of the existing residue and flots and repetition of the paraffin flotation may yield further invertebrate taxa but it is thought unlikely that this will produce a significantly larger, or more interpretatively useful, assemblage.)

The fish bone and scale remains should be reintegrated with the other vertebrate remains from the site. Any further study of the vertebrate remains should consider the assemblage as a whole, but the fish remains do not, in isolation, warrant further work.

The deposits considered here show potential for organic preservation (in particular the fish remains, though few in number, were very well-preserved). Should additional deposits showing preservation by anoxic waterlogging, or containing concentrations of charred plant material, bone or other biological remains, be exposed by further excavation, then every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Retention and disposal

All of the current material should be retained for the present. It is recommended that the flots are stored in alcohol (rather than water as is currently the case) to reduce the degradation of the recovered plant and invertebrate remains.

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.

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