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**Assessment of animal bone remains from excavations at
20/20A Lewin Street, Middlewich, Cheshire (site code: B2568A)**

by

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Summary

A small and fairly well preserved assemblage of animal bones, from deposits of medieval date, revealed by excavations at 20/20A Lewin Street, Middlewich, Cheshire, was assessed for its zooarchaeological potential.

The material ranged in date from medieval (the earliest being 13th century) to 19th century, with most of the bones originating from 14th-15th century pit fills. Bones from eighteen dated contexts were examined, totalling 260 fragments, 51 of which were identified to species; bone from a further four undated contexts were scanned. For ease of summarisation, bones were divided into medieval and post-medieval period groups. A rather limited fauna of dog, pig, horse, cow, caprovid and goose was represented.

No further work on the current material is recommended.

KEYWORDS: 20/20A LEWIN STREET; MIDDLEWICH; CHESHIRE; ASSESSMENT; 13TH TO 19TH CENTURY; MEDIEVAL; POST-MEDIEVAL; VERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Assessment of animal bone remains from excavations at 20/20A Lewin Street, Middlewich, Cheshire (site code: B2568A)

Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by Gifford and Partners Ltd. at 20/20A Lewin Street, Middlewich, Cheshire.

A single box (approximately 10 litres) of hand-collected bone was recovered from the deposits. Spot dating of recovered pottery gave a range from the 13th to the 19th centuries for the deposits.

The material was submitted to the EAU for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

For the hand-collected vertebrate remains data were entered directly into a series of tables using a purpose-built input system and *Paradox* software. Subjective records were made of the state of preservation, colour of the fragments, and the appearance of broken surfaces ('angularity'). Additionally, for the larger assemblages, notes were made concerning fragment size, dog gnawing, burning, butchery and fresh breaks.

Where possible, fragments were identified to species or species group, using the reference collection at the Environmental Archaeology Unit, University of York. Fragments not identifiable to species were grouped into categories: large mammal (assumed to be cattle, horse or large cervid), medium-sized mammal (assumed to be caprovid, pig or small cervid), and completely unidentifiable.

Results

Archaeological information regarding the deposits was provided by the excavator.

Medieval

Bones from fifteen contexts were examined, ten of which could be dated to the 14th-15th centuries. Preservation was generally better in pit fills, and described as 'good', while that from cultivation soils was only 'fair'. Angularity was more variable but tended towards 'rounded'. There was no clear relationship between angularity and feature type, which may support the suggestion that many of the pitfills were dumps of redeposited material. Fragmentation and fresh breakage was extremely high—there were few contexts where 50% or more of the fragments were 5 cm or more in maximum dimension. Dog gnawing and butchery marks were not present in significant amounts. There were occasional calcined bones, but these rarely accounted for more than 10% of the remains from any one context. Colour was most frequently fawn, occasionally brown, and with the exception of burnt fragments was fairly uniform within contexts.

Of the total of 256 bones ascribed to medieval contexts, only 50 were identifiable to species. The majority were cattle, followed by caprovid and pig, with single bones of horse and dog. Eight of these fragments were measurable, and there were only two mandibles, one of which belonged to the dog from Context 65.

Summary information for the bones from medieval contexts is presented in Table 1.

Postmedieval

Three contexts yielded four bones, one of which was identified as sheep, the rest as either large or medium-sized mammal. Preservation was described as 'good' and angularity as 'spiky'.

Undated

Bone from four undated contexts, including a bag of unstratified bone, Context 2 (machined subsoil), and Contexts 25 and 67 (no dates), were briefly scanned for interesting features. The unstratified material contained the unfused distal femur of a large caprovid, while Context 2 included an unfused proximal phalanx of a pig and a cow premolar. The small amount of remains from Context 25 included a cow upper premolar and a very damaged goose humerus. Context 67 yielded the metatarsal and

unfused proximal tibia of a cow and an upper canine of a male pig.

Discussion and statement of potential

On the basis of less than sixty identified fragments, it is not really possible to conclude much regarding the nature of settlement at Lewin Street. What little material there is implies the disposal of relatively unspecialised domestic kitchen waste. Elements such as metapodials and phalanges are slightly better represented among the cattle remains, but this may relate to the more durable nature of these denser elements—rib, longbone and vertebra fragments were common amongst the bones which could only be identified as large and medium-sized mammal. There were no wild species among the identified bones, but the sample was too small to do more than suggest that the occupants were not of particularly high status.

Recommendations

The current assemblage is too small and poorly preserved with insufficient proportions of measurable bones and ageable mandibles to render further study particularly informative. No further work is recommended unless additional material is recovered from this site.

Retention and disposal

All of the current material should be retained for the present.

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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Table 1. 20/20A Lewin Street, Middlewich, Cheshire: summary information for hand-collected vertebrate remains from medieval deposits.

Taxon	Measurable	Unfused	Mandibles	Total Fragments
<i>Canis</i> f. domestic dog			1	1
<i>Sus</i> f. domestic pig	3	1	1	7
<i>Equus</i> f. domestic horse				1
<i>Bos</i> f. domestic cow	3	3		30
Caprovid sheep/goat	2	1		11
<i>Subtotal</i>	8	5	2	50
Large mammal				133
Medium-sized mammal				31
Unidentified				42
<i>Subtotal</i>				206
Total	8	5	2	256