

Environmental evidence from 13-17 Coney Street  
(YAT/Yorkshire Museum sitecode: 1991.3)

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by

J. B. Carrott, A. R. Hall and H. K. Kenward

**Summary**

Four samples have been examined for plant macrofossils and invertebrate animal remains. With the exception of some charcoal and a very few identifiable of plant macrofossils of no interpretative significance, the deposits were found to be barren of organic material.

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## Introduction

This report discusses the results of analyses of invertebrate animal and plant remains from deposits excavated from the 13-17 Coney Street site (YAT/Yorkshire Museum sitecode: 1991.3).

## Methods

Subsamples of raw sediment were examined in the laboratory for plant and invertebrate animal remains. Descriptions of the lithology were made following a standardised format.

A 'rapid assessment' was carried out on all the samples. 'Test' subsamples (Kenward *et al.* 1986) of 1 kg were taken and processed by paraffin flotation (Kenward *et al.* 1980) to extract insect remains. Plant remains were recorded from the flots from paraffin flotation and the residues were inspected for further plant material.

## The samples and results of the analyses

The analyses carried out on each sample, and the remains recovered, are described below, together with a laboratory description of the sediment. A brief archaeological description and/or interpretation of the context is given in brackets where available. The samples are presented in context order.

### Context 2010 [Sample taken for the detection of any organic remains at the lowest level of excavation]

Sample 4: Mid grey-brown, moist, crumbly (becoming plastic when handled), slightly sandy, silty, clay. Large pieces of limestone (greater than 10 mm), charcoal, mortar, brick/tile and an iron object (remains of corrosion products) were present in the sample.

A 1 kg 'test' subsample (1) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains but none were present in the tiny flot which contained only a few tiny fragments of charcoal less than 1 mm in size.

The residue was examined wet and was mostly mortar, gravel and sand, with a little charcoal, brick/tile, oolitic and Magnesian limestone (up to 50 mm maximum dimension) and a trace of fish bone.

### Context 4028

Sample 3: Mid to dark grey-brown, moist, crumbly, sandy, clay, silt. The sample contained abundant fragments of mortar, while pieces of brick/tile were common and charcoal, large bone fragments (greater than 20 mm) and glass were present.

A 1 kg 'test' subsample (1) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains but none were found. The tiny flot gave a little evidence for food remains in the form of seeds of blackberry (*Rubus fruticosus* agg.), raspberry (*R. idaeus*), elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) and fig (*Ficus carica*). There was also a little coal and charcoal.

The residue was examined wet and was mostly mortar, sand and brick/tile up to 30 mm in maximum dimension, with two fragments of colourless glass and one of brown glass to 30 mm, a little mammal and fish bone, coal, cinder, Magnesian limestone and fine-grained sandstone.

**Context 5018** [Sample taken to ascertain whether this was an occupation derived deposit]

Sample 1: Mid to dark grey-brown, dry to moist, crumbly, slightly sandy, silt with patches of red-brown coloured material which was slightly more concreted and other patches which were rich in charcoal. The sample appeared to be ash.

A 1 kg 'test' subsample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains but none were present. The tiny flot yielded a little coal and charcoal to 5 mm maximum dimension and three seeds of dyer's rocket or weld, *Reseda luteola*. Of these, one was preserved by waterlogging, the other two were charred. This plant is quite commonly recorded from urban archaeological deposits and was probably a frequent weed in disturbed places, especially on calcareous substrates. The evidence here is hardly sufficient to suggest its possible use in dyeing at this site.

The residue was examined wet and consisted of about equal volumes of sand and charcoal (up to about 20 mm maximum dimension), together with a few small fragments of bone.

**Context 5039** [The sample may be slightly contaminated by material from the layer below it]

Sample 2: Moist, layered, very heterogeneous, charcoal-rich clay or silt with a secondary component of cream to red-brown material in layers 1 mm to 1 cm thick. White flecks were quite common in the sample which had the appearance of an 'ash spread'.

A 1 kg 'test' subsample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains which were, however, lacking. The tiny flot contained a little charcoal up to 1 mm, and a single waterlogged seed of a ?field poppy, *Papaver cf. rhoeas*.

The rather small residue was examined wet and was mostly sand and gravel with about 20% by volume of charcoal (to 10 mm maximum dimension), a little brick/tile, oolitic limestone and oyster shell fragments.

### Implications

These deposits yielded too few biological remains to provide useful comments on their formation, other than to remark that sample 3 may have contained some faecal material or domestic food waste, though the evidence is very slight. It seems more likely that very little organic matter was deposited as these sediments formed rather than that organic matter was once present and had later decayed. It would be unwise to assume, however, that further excavation would not reveal any deposits with 'waterlogged' preservation of organic matter in deep features.

### References

- Kenward H. K., Hall A. R. and Jones A. K. G. (1980). A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal macrofossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits. *Science and Archaeology* 22, 3-15.
- Kenward H. K., Engleman C., Robertson A. and Large F. (1986). Rapid scanning of urban archaeological deposits for insect remains, *Circaea* 3, 163-72.