

**An evaluation of the bioarchaeological value
of some Roman and medieval deposits and bone from
excavations in Albion Street, Driffield
North Humberside (site code DAD92)**

by

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Summary

Four samples from Roman and medieval pits and ditches and a small assemblage of hand-collected human and non-human bone were examined. The deposits proved to contain only a very few biological remains of rather little use to interpretation of environment or human activity at the site and the assemblage of bones was too small to be informative. It is not thought that further investigation of animal and plant remains from this site would be profitable if the archaeological deposits are all of a similar nature to those seen.

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**An evaluation of the bioarchaeological value
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Four samples of excavated deposits and a small amount of bone retrieved by hand-collection were submitted for examination. Each of the sediment samples was described in the laboratory using a standard *pro forma* and a subsample of each disaggregated following methods of Kenward *et al.* (1980). In view of the likely paucity of waterlogged animal and plant remains, a 'washover' was performed, rather than paraffin flotation, and the washovers examined for plant and invertebrate fossils. The residues were oven-dried and checked for other components. The samples are discussed in context order:

Context 4 (excavator's notes) or **5** (sample tub), **Sample 53** [medieval pit fill]: mid grey, wet, smoothly gritty chalk gravel in a small amount of clay matrix.

A 3 kg subsample was investigated. The washover from it was of small size, with a moderate amount of charcoal to 3 mm, a few ?modern root fragments, the disarticulated remains of a single beetle, *Aphodius contaminatus*, and a ?modern fly adult. It is likely that the beetle is of recent date since so much of the individual was present and preservation was rather good. It is, in any case, of no interpretative value.

The residue consisted largely of rounded and angular chalk gravel to 35 mm, with a trace of angular flint to 15 mm, a fragment of burnt bone to 10 mm, a lump of ?glassy slag to 15 mm, and a sandstone pebble to 10 mm.

Context 9, Sample 61 [C4th pit fill]: chalk gravel (to 20 mm) in a small amount of mid yellow-grey-brown, moist, plastic clay matrix, with a little flint.

The small washover from the 3 kg subsample examined contained quite large numbers of snails, a little charcoal to 3 mm, a single very poorly preserved charred wheat (*Triticum*, probably *T. aestivo-compactum*) grain and an abundance of ?egg capsules (probably not from earthworms). The snail assemblage was rather diverse: the taxa recorded suggest grassland habitats (*Carychium minimum*, *Cochlicopa lubrica*, *Vallonia ?pulchella*, *V. excentrica*, *Punctum pygmaeum*, *Vitrina pellucida*, *Oxychilus cellarius*, *Helicella itala*, and *Trichia hispida*). There were also some modern shells of *Cecilioides acicula*.

The residue consisted largely of rounded and angular chalk gravel to 25 mm, with a little angular flint to 35 mm, a rounded sandstone pebble to 10 mm, a fragment of pot to 20 mm and a single snail shell.

Context 44, Sample 54 [C4th pit fill]: very dark grey, moist, crumbly to brittle (working plastic), slightly sandy silty clay with abundant chalk gravel and some flint; the fine clay peds suggested perhaps that this material had been bioturbated at some time.

The washover from the 2 kg subsample examined consisted largely of charcoal to 5 mm, with a few snails, a single elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) seed, a

?earthworm egg capsule and a fragment of cancellous bone to 5 mm. The snails consisted largely of modern *Cecilioides acicula* with a few *Vallonia* sp. and a single *Trichia hispida* was recorded. These latter two taxa are both typical of dry grassland.

The residue was of rounded and angular chalk gravel to 25 mm, with a little flint to 25 mm, a trace of charcoal to 10 mm and a little sand.

Context 50, Sample 57 [C4th ditch fill]: mid brown, moist, plastic clay with abundant chalk gravel to 30 mm.

The 2 kg subsample examined gave a small washover with a trace of charcoal to 2 mm, a few snails (all modern *Cecilioides acicula*) and rather frequent ?egg capsules.

The residue consisted of chalk gravel (mostly rounded, but with a few angular clasts) to 40 mm, a little flint to 30 mm, a few rounded sandstone pebbles to 25 mm, a fragment of shelly limestone to 45 mm, a fragment of pot, a trace of charcoal to 5 mm, one immature field vole (*Microtus agrestis*) humerus, and a small mammal (Muridae, mouse family) lower incisor.

Evaluation of the bones

A very small animal and human bone assemblage was recovered from the site. The material was relatively well preserved, exhibiting little evidence of physical erosion and only two fragments showed evidence of carnivore gnawing.

The 15 contexts which produced animal bone were grouped as follows:

- 5 contexts dated to Romano-British period (3rd/4th century)
- 1 context dated as early medieval (?12th century)
- 3 medieval contexts (12th-15th century)
- 2 post-medieval contexts
- 3 undated contexts
- 1 Romano-British/medieval dump

(i) Non-human bone: Romano-British contexts produced three identifiable fragments (an incisor and tibia from pig, and an isolated sheep 3rd molar). The unidentified fraction contained 34 fragments, mostly cow-sized (11) and sheep sized (11) shaft fragments. In addition, context 50 (a 4th century ditch), produced the almost complete remains of a juvenile domestic dog.

The single 12th century context produced only 2 identifiable and 12 unidentifiable fragments. The identified bones were a cattle tibia and a sheep distal humerus.

Bones from medieval (12th-15th century) contexts were only marginally more numerous consisting of only six identifiable and eighteen unidentifiable fragments. Cattle bones included a mandible fragment, an isolated maxillary dp4, a proximal metacarpal and a complete proximal phalanx. A single pig radius fragment and a goose-size shaft fragment represented the only other species present.

Post-medieval deposits also produced very small amounts of bone (a total of 35 fragments), 10 of which were identified to species. Cattle were again represented by a mandible fragment, a fragment of acetabulum and a fragmented distal humerus. Sheep/goat was present as a isolated M2 and a distal humerus fragment. Two chicken bones (a femur and radius) and a single medium-sized canid metatarsal were the only additional species present from this phase.

(ii) **Human bone:** Several infant bones were recovered from a fourth century pit (context 49), and included a complete ulna, radius, tibia, a fragment of frontal bone and orbit from the left side as well as a number of rib fragments.

Implications

Apart from a few snails, most of them modern intrusions, plant and invertebrate remains were rare and offered little interpretative information. The scant nature and relatively poor preservation of the bone material renders any future osteological work of very low priority in terms of zooarchaeology or physical anthropology. However a larger, well-preserved and systematically recovered assemblage would be of much greater importance.

Reference

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.

Please note: Information concerning the archaeological context and dating of the deposits and biota considered in this report have been provided by the Humberside Archaeological Unit; the Environmental Archaeology Unit takes no responsibility for changes in archaeological interpretation or re-phasing which may have occurred since this report was compiled.