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**Evaluation of biological remains from 39 Holgate Road,
York (site code: 1998.332)**

by

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Summary

Four samples of sediment and a single box of animal bone were recovered from deposits of early post-medieval and Roman date during excavations at 39 Holgate Road, York. This material was submitted for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

The deposits produced small amounts of plant remains, which were of no interpretative value. No invertebrates were recovered.

The variable preservation of the bones and the presence of human remains suggest the inclusion of reworked or redeposited material within some contexts. Additionally, the small size of the recovered vertebrate assemblage precludes any further detailed recording and interpretation.

KEYWORDS: HOLGATE ROAD; YORK; NORTH YORKSHIRE; EVALUATION; PLANT REMAINS; ANIMAL BONE; HUMAN BONE

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Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by York Archaeological Trust at 39 Holgate Road, York, North Yorkshire, in August 1998. Four sediment samples ('GBA' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) and a single box of bone were recovered from deposits of early post-medieval and Roman date from two trenches. This material was submitted to the EAU for evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and a description of their lithologies was recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of two of the samples were selected for extraction of macrofossil remains, following procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986).

Table 1 shows a list of samples and notes on their treatment.

The vertebrate remains were examined and a basic archive produced (see Appendix). A record was made of the preservation, quantities (numbers and weights) and identifications where appropriate. Ribs, vertebrae, cranium and fragments not identified to species were recorded as unidentified. Material from Context 2010 (described by the excavator as the result of machine clearance) was merely scanned.

Results

Sediment samples

The descriptions are presented in context number order. Archaeological information and/or archaeological questions to be addressed (provided by the excavator) are given in square brackets.

Context 1006 [Olive green mottling. Is this a dump of organic material?]

Sample 1 (2 kg washover)

Moist, mid to dark grey brown with orange flecks and distinctive olive mottling, crumbly (working plastic and slightly sticky when wet), clay silt with a little charcoal present.

The very small washover (of a few cubic centimetres) included moderately large numbers of well-preserved whole and fragmentary elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) seeds, together with a trace of stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.) achenes and a little charcoal and root bark. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

The small residue was mostly of undisaggregated silty clay sediment with a large fragment of tile (to 95 mm maximum dimension), and some gravel and sand.

The few recovered biological remains did not indicate that this was a dump of organic material.

Context 1007 [Are these pond/river silts? If so, any indication as to *in-situ* or dumped]

Sample 2 (2 kg washover)

Moist, dark grey, crumbly (working plastic and slightly sticky when wet), clay silt. Small and large stones (6 to 20 mm and 60+ mm) and fragments of brick/tile were present and veins of vivianite were common in the sample.

The small washover (of about 20 cm³) consisted mainly of woody root fragments with moderate numbers of elder seeds and a small range of seeds in varying states of completeness and preservation representing several annual and biennial weed taxa, including henbane (*Hyoscyamus niger* L.), hemlock (*Conium maculatum* L.), fat-hen (*Chenopodium album* L.) and stinging nettle. No invertebrate remains were recovered.

The very small residue was mostly sand with some brick/tile (to 15 mm), gravel, charcoal (to 10 mm) and a small mammal bone fragment. A single unidentified snail was also present.

The recovered biological remains gave no clear indication as to the method of formation of this deposit.

Context 2004 [Ditch fill]
Sample 3 (Description only)

Moist, light to mid orange-grey-brown, crumbly, sandy silt with inclusions of mid red brown clay. Small and medium-sized stones (6 to 60 mm) and modern roots were present in the sample.

No further investigation of this sample was undertaken.

Context 2006 [Ditch fill]
Sample 4 (Description only)

Moist, light to mid orange-grey-brown, crumbly, slightly silty sand with patches of darker grey-brown sandy silt. Small and medium-sized stones (6 to 60 mm) and modern roots were present in the sample.

No further investigation of this sample was undertaken.

Vertebrate remains

Preservation was, on the whole, recorded as fair, with fragments from Trench 1 being mainly dark brown in colour, whilst those from Trench 2 were fawn. A small number of fragments from contexts 1004, 2001, 2003 and 2006 were rather battered and some had rounded edges. Material from Context 2006 was also very fragmented, with 20 to 50 % of

fragments being less than 50 mm in maximum dimension.

Little dog gnawing was evident and fresh breakage was negligible. The assemblage from the Roman ditch deposit, Context 2004 showed a high proportion of butchered bones, including split and heavily chopped cattle shaft fragments.

In total, 155 fragments of bone were recovered (mainly from the Roman ditch fills in Trench 2), of which only 30 were identifiable to species. Cattle and caprovid remains were most common, with pig, horse, dog and cat also present. Two contexts (2006 and 2010) contained single fragments of human bone (a juvenile humerus and a 3rd lower molar).

There were only three measurable fragments and 2 mandibles with teeth *in situ*.

Discussion and statement of potential

These deposits demonstrate that a small amount of plant material is present, but that it is of little interpretative significance. No invertebrate remains were recovered. Deeper-lying deposits with waterlogged preservation may well offer an opportunity for more useful analyses of biological remains.

The variable preservation of the bones and the presence of human remains suggest the inclusion of reworked or redeposited material within some contexts. Additionally, the small size of the recovered vertebrate assemblage, the rather broad dating framework, and the extremely limited number of bones which can be used to obtain age-at-death and biometrical information, preclude any further detailed recording and interpretation of the extant assemblage.

Recommendations

No further work is required on the present sediment samples.

If deposits with organic preservation by anoxic waterlogging or concentrations of charred plant material, bone or other biological remains are exposed by further excavation every effort should be made to sample and investigate them.

Retention and disposal

The remaining sediment samples may be discarded. The vertebrate remains 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.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1. A list of the sediment samples from 39 Holgate Road, York, North Yorkshire.

Context	Sample	Described?	Processed?	Notes
1006	1	Y	Y	Description and 2 kg washover
1007	2	Y	Y	Description and 2 kg washover
2004	3	Y	N	Description only
2006	4	Y	N	Description only

Appendix

The vertebrate remains. *Key: Unid = unidentified fragments*

Trench 1

Context 1004 [early post-medieval (predominantly) - fill of cut/?pit]

Preservation: Most fragments were recorded as 'fair', with sharp edges. A couple of rounded fragments and a few that were a bit battered in appearance were also noted. Colour was mainly recorded as dark brown, although some fragments were lighter in colour and these tended to be the better preserved bones.

Caprovid: 1 humerus fragment (measurable); 1 metacarpal.

Cat: 1 mandible (with teeth).

Horse: 1 ulna; 1 metacarpal.

Unid: 19 fragments, most of which represent large mammal rib, vertebra and shaft fragments.

Weight identified: 281 g

Weight unidentified: 237 g

Context 1007 [early post-medieval - dump]

Preservation: Well-preserved bones which were mainly dark brown in colour.

Caprovid: 1 cranium, split longitudinally; 1 incisor.

Unid: 2 fragments.

Weight identified: 74 g

Weight unidentified: 31 g

Context 1029 [16thC - horticultural soil]

Preservation: Fair, with one fragment fawn and one dark brown.

Caprovid: 1 radius shaft fragment

Unid: 1 large mammal shaft fragment

Weight identified: 23 g

Weight unidentified: 82 g

Trench 2

Context 2001 [Roman, 1st-3rd centuries - fill of feature cut into natural]

Preservation: Fair to poor preservation, quite fragmented and rather battered in appearance. Fragments were fawn in colour.

Unid: 7 unidentified fragments.

Weight unidentified: 19 g

Context 2003

Preservation: Fair to poor, fragments fawn in colour, some with battered appearance. Fairly fragmented.

Caprovid: 1 scapula (juvenile).
Pig: 1 mandibular P3.
Unid: 9 unidentified fragments.

Weight identified: 2 g
Weight unidentified: 26 g

Context 2004 [Roman - fill of ditch]

Preservation: Good. Fragments fawn in colour with sharp 'spiky' broken edges.

Cattle: 1 horncore with associated cranium; 1 incisor; 1 metacarpal (juvenile); 1 first phalanx.
Caprovid: 2 mandibles (dp2-M1 x 2).
Pig: 1 maxilla, with teeth; 1 ulna.
Horse: 1 phalanx.
Dog: 1 maxilla, with teeth; 1 tibia (measurable).
Unid: 50 fragments - mainly large mammal shaft fragments split or chopped longitudinally.

Weight identified: 413 g
Weight unidentified: 689 g

Context 2006 [Roman - fill of ditch]

Preservation: Fair to poor preservation. Very fragmented, with rather battered and rounded fragments. Fawn in colour.

Cattle: 1 mandible fragment; 1 first phalanx.
Caprovid: 2 x M1/M2; 1 tooth fragment.
Pig: 1 maxilla; 1 scapula
Human: 1 humerus fragment from a baby.
Unid: 36 small fragments, including large mammal shaft and rib fragments.

Weight identified: 45 g
Weight unidentified: 103 g

Context 2008 [Roman - post-hole fill]

Unid: 1 large mammal cranium fragment.

Weight unidentified: 5 g

Context 2010 [machine clearance layer]

This context was scanned; there were 35 fragments in total, of which 14 were identified. Cattle, caprovid, pig and goose remains were all represented. Also 1 human 3rd molar was identified.