

A note on biological remains from Aberglasney Mansion and Gardens (site code: AB99)

by

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Introduction

An archaeological excavation was carried out by Cambrian Archaeological Projects Ltd. at Aberglasney Mansion and Gardens, in summer/autumn 1999. Three of the sediment samples and a single wood sample ('GBA' and 'SPOT' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) recovered from the eastern side of the garden were submitted to the EAU for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential.

Methods

The sediment samples were inspected in the laboratory and descriptions of their lithologies were recorded using a standard *pro forma*. Subsamples of 1 kg were taken from each of the three samples and processed, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), to recover plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The wood sample was examined using a low power microscope to determine the species of tree from which it derived.

Results

The results are presented in context number order with information provided by the excavator given in square brackets.

Context 1188 [This sample appears to be the remains of a buried soil horizon which seals the linear features (H)]

Sample 7 (1 kg paraffin flotation)

Just moist, light to mid brown, brittle to crumbly (working soft), slightly clay silt with a few fragments of coal and pot.

The very large residue of about 250 cm³ consisted of angular to subangular gravel (to 45 mm maximum dimension) and sand, with a little coal (to 15 mm) and traces of charcoal (to 2 mm) and brick/tile (to 5 mm). There were also few modern root fragments, and a single ?modern stinging nettle (*Urtica dioica* L.) achene and a modern grass spikelet were recorded from the tiny flot (less than 5 ml). No invertebrate remains were seen in the flot.

Context 1193 [Sample taken from the more southerly of two linear gullies (sealed by Context 1188) which are located in the centre of the garden]
Sample 11 (1 kg paraffin flotation)

Just moist, light to mid brown, brittle to crumbly (working soft), slightly clay silt with a few very small stones (?shale, 2 to 6 mm) and a trace of modern rootlets.

The tiny flot (less than 5 ml) was mostly plant detritus and fragments of charcoal (to 5 mm) with a few sand grains, some modern roots and a ?modern stinging nettle achene. A few fragments of very rotted beetle cuticle were noted (possibly representing fragments of a weevil and a staphylinid). A single earthworm egg capsule was also seen.

The large residue of about 175 cm³ was of sand and angular to subangular gravel (to 30 mm) with a little coal to (10 mm), and charcoal (to 5 mm).

Context 1203 [Sample taken from a circular cut at the base of one of the linear features and may represent the remains of a tree/shrub planted in the bed]
Sample 8 (wood identification)

The sample was of wood from a conifer, probably spruce (*Picea* sp.), of which the most likely is *Picea abies* (L.) Karst. introduced to the United Kingdom before 1500 AD (Mitchell 1974) though this species was also present during parts of the Devensian glaciation. The lack of biseriate bordered pits in tracheids and the gradual change from early to late season growth suggests spruce rather than larch (*Larix*), this latter being introduced later (c. 1620 AD).

Context 1205 [Sample taken from the more northerly of two linear gullies (sealed by Context 1188) which are located in the centre of the garden]
Sample 12 (1 kg washover)

Just moist, light to mid grey brown, crumbly (working soft and slightly sticky), silty clay with lumps of concreted ?baked clay (to 60 mm)

The very small washover (approximately 5 ml) was mostly fragments of charcoal (to 4 mm) and sand grains with a few scraps of plant detritus. No invertebrate remains were seen in the washover.

The large residue of about 200 cm³ consisted of sand and angular to subangular gravel (to 50 mm) with a trace of coal (to 20 mm), brick/tile (to 10 mm) and charcoal (to 5 mm). There were also traces of modern roots.

Discussion and statement of potential

The samples yielded no unequivocally old plant or invertebrate remains and do not justify further work either work on them or, by extrapolation, on other samples from these excavations, assuming they are representative of the nature of the deposits.

On the basis of the samples examined in this assessment any biological remains present in the deposits will be too poorly preserved to allow the determination of the plant taxa from the original garden.

Recommendations

No further work is recommended on the present material.

Retention and Disposal

Any remaining sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be processed to recover material other than biological remains.

Archive

All 'environmental' 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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References

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