

Archaeological Material from Helmsley

Introduction

As a result of a conversation with work colleges Robert Morgan, a member of 3D Archaeological Society, was invited to look at the material being disturbed as a result of the construction of an extension to Thyme Cottage, 28, High Street, Helmsley, North Yorkshire. Planning permission with no archaeological constraint had already been granted.

Initially a small amount of archaeological material was taken to the workplace and then passed over to John Buglass to look at and try to identify (see below for descriptions). As a result of the initial examination of the material both J Buglass and R Morgan were invited to look at the site and collect any material disturbed by the construction.

The site was visited on the 5th February 2005 and systematic visual examination and metal detector survey was made of the excavated spoil which had been spread over the garden to the rear of the property. This inspection revealed a range of artefactual material including ceramics, clay pipes, glass, animal bone, iron and copper alloy objects.

The vast majority of the material was of post-medieval origin and predominately ceramics and animal bone. Basically typical of material dumped in a domestic midden prior to the introduction of refuse collection. What was of particular interest was a number of unabraded medieval pottery sherds though not as many as seen previously, suggesting the presence of medieval structures there or near by.

The metal work was typically modern with a few items of historic interest. The first of these was a lighter made from a spent rifle cartridge (typical of First World War 'Trench Art'). Secondly, was a cap badge of the Canadian 'Hastings and Prince Edward Regiment'. Who were known to have been billeted at nearby Duncombe Park country house. Finally a small copper alloy finger ring, probably originally gilt cover, was recovered. Inside was a simple 'hallmark' of S 15 and possibly a W.

Brief Description of the Initial Material from High Street, Helmsley.

Animal Bone

Introduction

A small assemblage of animal bone recovered from the excavation of house footings was examined and identified using standard reference guides (Serjeantson & Cohen, 1996 and Schmid, 1972). The assemblage was small and where identifiable, was entirely composed of domestic mammal species which exhibited evidence of butchery.

Identification

The faunal remains were examined and identified using standard reference guides (Serjeantson & Cohen, 1996 and Schmid, 1972). They were identified to species and

part of body wherever possible. Where full identification was not possible due to the fragmentary nature of the bone the remains.

Apart from bone identifications evidence for butchery (in the form of cut, chop or saw marks), gnawing and pathological changes was looked for and the presence of any of these conditions was recorded.

The biological age of the remains was noted only when the individual bone was obviously from an immature animal, as noted by unfused or partially fused epiphysial ends or partially erupted dentition.

Results

Cattle Bones (*Bos* sp.)

Pelvis fragment, sawn at ends. Also has extensive dog gnawing on one end particularly. Cut marks on surfaces.

Mandible (lower jaw) one tooth left in place.

Ribs, one sawn at both ends one chopped and dog gnawed.

Metacarpus x2, one dog gnawed and split. Osteochondritis dessicans on the articulating surface. The other the same but with chop marks as well.

Phalange x2.

Ulna fragment, chopped.

Plus lots of fragmentary bits from butchering.

Sheep (*Ovis* sp.)

Radius, dog gnawed.

Metacarpus, part gnawed.

Metatarsus from a juvenile animal.

Mandible frags x4, some teeth in place, little wear therefore young animal (?2 yrs or less maybe)

Pelvis, dog gnawed

Scapula fragment.

Pig (*Sus* sp.)

Mandible fragment, one tooth in place.

Molar tooth.

Canine, either juvenile or small female.

Pottery

Two small bags of pottery were examined, one contained fragments of a rim and a handle and some of the sherds joined. It is quite possible that they are all from the same vessel. The second bag contained the 'bung hole' from a storage jug for liquids, as before it is possible that all the fragments are the same vessel. There are a lot of fresh breaks on the sherds strongly suggesting that it was substantially intact when in the ground and has been broken during construction work. All of the ceramic material appears to be medieval and from my limited knowledge I would estimate 15th century onwards.

Discussion

Due to the small size of the assemblage it is difficult to draw any detailed conclusions but it can be confidently stated that the material is typical of domestic refuse, probably from a midden.

It is interesting to note that the pottery is present in large, un-abraded, fragments that is usually indicative that the material has not moved far (if at all) from where it was dumped. The animal bone shows extensive signs of butchery in the form of cut, chop and saw marks. Saw marks are often taken to indicate a later (most likely post-medieval) date of deposition but there is no reason why the animal bone should not be contemporary with the pottery. The extensive gnawing shows that the material was accessible to dogs on the ground surface prior to incorporation into the midden. The range of species present (cow, sheep and pig) is typical of domestic refuse with cattle being the commonest followed by sheep and only small amounts of pig.

References

McCarthy, MR and Brooks, CM (1988) *Medieval Pottery in Britain AD 900-1600*. Leicester University Press.

Schmid, E (1972) *Atlas of Animal Bone*. Elsevier.

Serjeantson, D and Cohen, A (1996) *Guide to Bird Bones*. British Museum Press. London.



Plate 1: Cap Badge.



Plate 2: Copper Alloy Ring.



Plate 3: Hallmark.