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Report on an Archaeological Evaluation

at

St George's Field Car Park
York
Phase 2

York Archaeological Trust
1990

ST. GEORGE'S FIELD CAR PARK

A concise report on the second phase of archaeological evaluation

1. INTRODUCTION

The first stage of evaluative excavation was undertaken in October 1990 (Fig. 1). This showed that archaeological deposits survived, relatively intact, beneath the modern car park; however, conclusive evidence of the position, and the extent of survival, of the medieval St. George's Chapel was not forthcoming. Consequently, in order to obtain this information, a third trench was excavated in the week commencing 26th November 1990.

Trench 3 was sited over the assumed position of the south-west exterior wall of the chapel (according to the 1852 Ordnance Survey map of York). It was intended to be up to 10m long x 3m wide, and at right-angles to the wall, but initially only the central part of the trench, measuring 5.5m in length, was examined.

Excavation of the trench was by machine, until evidence of a substantial masonry wall was observed at a depth of approximately 1.8m below the surface (Fig. 2). As this wall was in the predicted position, in the middle of the reduced trench, it proved unnecessary to extend the trench to its full length. Even so, relatively little of the reduced trench south of the wall could be excavated, as an electric cable trench - located about 3m south of the wall according to the plan of services for the site - was actually found to lie immediately to the south of the wall.

Archaeological recording involved the drawing of sections through the deposits removed by machine; and the planning of the wall and the deposits on either side of it. Hand excavation was confined to a 0.4m square against the south face of the wall, to assess the height and nature of the chapel wall.

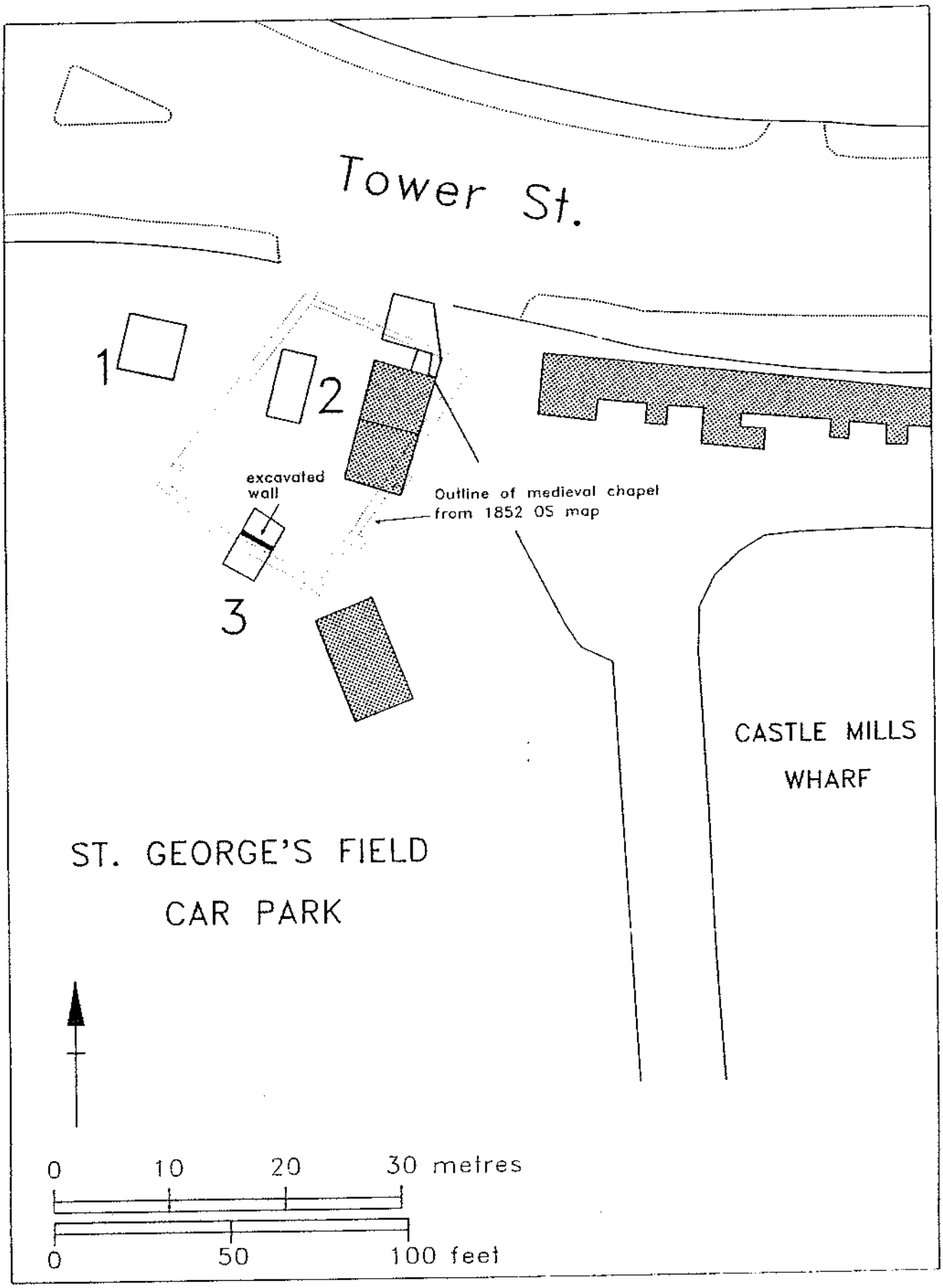

Fig.1 Location of the excavation

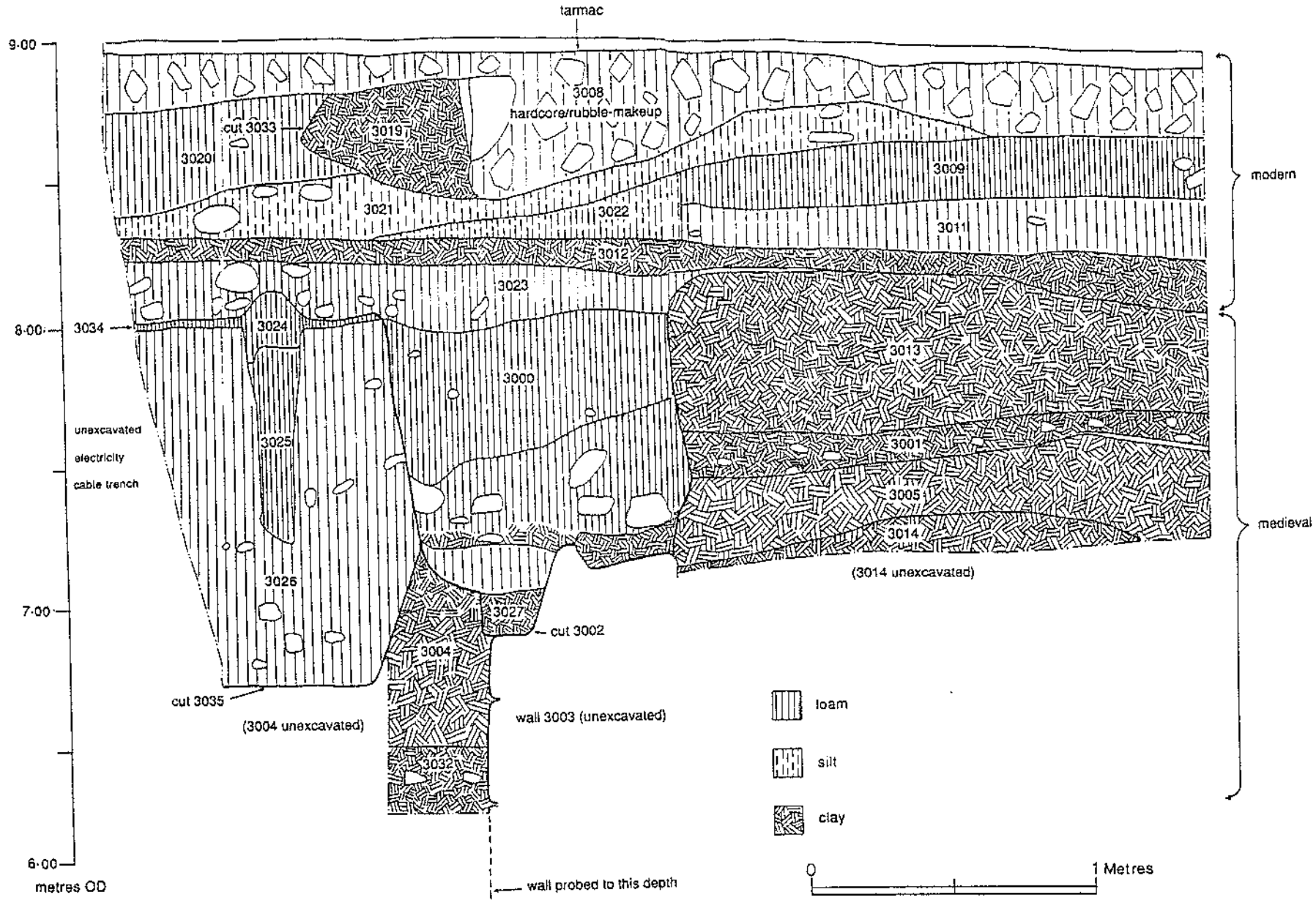

Fig.3 East-facing section of trench

2. THE EXCAVATION

2.1 The major masonry wall (3003) was the earliest archaeological context encountered (Fig. 3); this was only slightly north of the line of the south-west wall of the chapel shown on the 1852 Ordnance Survey map, and it is considered that it is the chapel wall. It was built with mortared courses of large, squared limestone blocks. The top-most course on the south (external) face consisted of blocks measuring 0.3m square x 0.2m thick, on average, although some were as much as 0.5m long. Below this, the excavation against the face of the wall showed that the limestone blocks in the next course down were about 0.35m thick, and probing suggested that a third course extended to a depth of at least 5.96m AOD. The north (internal) face comprised smaller limestone blocks, squared only on the visible face; the north face survived to a greater height (7.27m AOD maximum) than the south face (6.98m AOD maximum), apparently because later robbing of the wall had preferentially removed the larger, more regular, external facing-stones.

2.2 To the north of the wall (inside the chapel), the earliest deposit was a cobble and limestone surface, set in silty clay (3014), although there was fragmentary evidence of a mortar surface below this, at about 7.10m AOD (not in section). Above this were two thick clay dumps (3005 and 3013), which are thought to represent raisings of the floor level within the building, to a height of about 8.10m AOD. They were separated by a silt clay containing many small fragments of mortar and limestone (3001); in addition, at least two fragmentray mortar surfaces were observed within this layer, which seems to indicate a prolonged period of occupation (and perhaps demolition) within the chapel. A similar sequence of internal deposits was observed in Trench 2 of the first evaluative excavations.

2.3 To the south of the wall (outside the chapel), the earliest deposit excavated (in the small hand-dug trench) was a silt clay, of unknown purpose (3032). Above this was a clay dump (3004) 0.6m thick, which may indicate raising of the ground surface outside the building; These deposits were clearly laid down against the chapel wall. The clay layer was cut by a large pit (~~3004~~) of unknown function, which contained a sandy clay loam (3026) and a single fragment of human pelvis.

2.4 The internal and external deposits were cut by a trench, 1.00m wide and up to 1.30m deep, which followed the line of the wall (3002). This cut was filled with silt loam layers, containing a large amount of cobbles, limestone and mortar fragments, and clay patches (3000). This is interpreted as 19th-century robbing of the chapel wall.

2.5 Above this was a layer of silt clay (3012) and a sandy, gravelly surface (3011) at about 8.35m AOD; they are thought to be the remains of a gravel road, which seems to have been laid down over the site very soon after the demolition of the chapel in 1856.

2.6 Finally, there are deposits relating to the 20th-century car park. Levelling/dumps (3020 and 3021), are cut by a narrow trench (3033) lined by sandstone kerbs; this appears to be the west side of an earlier entrance road into the car park. A hardcore and rubble layer, beneath tarmac, forms the present car park surface at about 8.95m AOD.

3. THE FINDS

The site produced a range of material types, all of which have been viewed and assessed. Identifications of all material are based only on initial viewing, not on the result of research.

3.1 Bone and Antler
A single sawn antler tine was recovered.

3.2 Fired clay
Four fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered.

3.3 Iron
A circular disc of uncertain function was recovered.

3.4 Pottery
Pottery was only recovered from four contexts, plus a small amount of unstratified material. Three of these contexts contained late, 18th - 20th century, material. It is possible that some of this might be intrusive, so the dates given in the pottery list are in date groups with comments, as it is too small a group for any specific comment.

3.5 Animal Bone
A few fragments of animal bone were recovered representing sheep and cattle.

3.6 Human Bone
A single human bone was recovered from context 3004 — 3026 in text!

3.7 Building material
Fragments of post-medieval tile were recovered.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Medieval.

The south-west exterior wall of St. George's Chapel survives to at least about 7.30m AOD, and should any parts of it have escaped robbing, it could occur as high as about 8.10m AOD. It is at least 1.30m high, and as foundations apparently were not encountered, it is suspected that the bottom of the wall is below 5.50m AOD. At least 0.70m wide, this is clearly a massive and impressive wall, standing at least 2m high.

Internal and external deposits, including mortar and cobble floors, occur from approximately 8.15m AOD; as the ground level at the time of the construction of the chapel is thought to be about 6.00m AOD if not lower, the medieval deposits would exceed 2.10m in depth.

4.2 Post-medieval.

There was no evidence of the use of the chapel building as a workhouse and public house, following the 16th century Dissolution. This is probably because the Victorian clearance of the site resulted in a slope in the ground surface down to the south, from about 8.30m AOD in Trench 2 down to 8.10m AOD, thus progressively removing more of the uppermost (i.e. post-medieval) remains further south.

4.3 Modern.

Deposits resulting from the clearance of the site, followed by its use as a car park, overlie the remains of the chapel to a depth of about 0.90m.

5. IMPLICATIONS

These results confirm the findings of the first evaluation exercise; the chapel structure, in spite of partial robbing, survives to a great extent, and is very substantial. Moreover, internal and external deposits (and no doubt other structural remains) resulting from activity throughout the entire life of the chapel, are intact. In addition, the potential survival of Prehistoric, Roman, Anglian and Anglo-Scandinavian remains cannot be overlooked. Consequently, the results from this second phase of evaluative excavations only reinforce the implications laid down in the first evaluation report.

Pottery List

u/s	late 12th to 20th century; late 13th/14th and 19th/20th century
3000	Roman to 20th century; late 12th/13th century and late 18th/19th century; very mixed but mostly from the later date range.
3001	mid 13th to 14th century; three sherds from a single vessel
3004	first half 18th century; one sherd
3005	11th to 20th century; 11th to mid 13th century and 19th century; three sherds only.

York Archaeological Trust
Artefact Record Summary Sheet

Site name: St. George's Carpark (II)	Site code: 1990.17

BULK FINDS	BOXES	SMALL FINDS	NUMBERS
Pottery	in misc	Coins	
Tile	in misc	Iron	1
Stone		Copper-alloy	
Slag		Lead	
Crucibles		Silver	
Plaster/Daub		Gold	
Leather		Glass	
Wood		Bone/Antler	1
Bone, Human	in misc	Ivory	
Bone, Animal	in misc	Fired clay	4
Soil samples		Stone	
Other: Misc. includes pottery, tile, animal bone, human bone, shell	1	Jet	
		Textiles	
		Wood	
		Other	
Total	1	Total	7

sheet 1 of 1

Environmental evidence from St George's Fields car park (1990 excavation)

E. P. Allison, J. B. Carrott, A. R. Hall, H. K. Kenward and J. E. Richardson

Summary

Eight samples from the St George's Fields car park excavation have been examined and seven of these processed further. Sub-samples were taken from four of the samples and processed using the techniques for 'general biological analysis'. Three other samples were washed through 300 micron sieves and the residues examined.

All of the samples were either barren of plant and invertebrate remains, or contained assemblages too small to be of any diagnostic value.

Context 1135 was judged to be worthy of further study.

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Environmental evidence from St George's Fields car park (1990 excavation)

by

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Introduction

This report discusses the results of analyses of invertebrate animal and plant remains from deposits excavated from the St George's Fields car park site in York (code: 90.17) during October 1990.

Methods

Whole samples, or sub-samples, of raw sediment were examined in the laboratory for plant and invertebrate animal remains. One of the samples was judged to have only a small organic content at the time at which the samples were inspected; its sedimentary characteristics were recorded, and no further action was taken.

A 'general biological analysis' was carried out on four of the samples. 'Test' subsamples of 1 kg were taken and processed by paraffin flotation (Kenward *et al.* 1980) to extract insect remains.

Plant remains were recorded from both the flots from paraffin flotation and from the residues; the latter were air-dried prior to examination and weighing.

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. The samples are presented in context order.

Context 1079 [Deposit at level of wall construction cut]

Sample 1 Mid to dark grey-brown, moist, crumbly, sandy silty clay with inclusions of small and medium stones, small fragments of tile/brick and small pieces of coal.

A 1 kg 'test' sub-sample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains. The resulting flot was barren of insect remains, containing only numerous, very small, fragments of coal, a few undiagnostic pieces of plant tissue and one elder seed. The small (0.25 kg dry weight) residue was mostly sand and coal with angular limestone (10-40 mm), a moderate amount of brick/tile and a few fragments of part-burned coal.

Context 1097 [Drain silts]

Sample 2 Mid to dark grey-brown, moist, crumbly, sandy silty clay with inclusions of small stones, small fragments of bone and small pieces of tile/brick. Also present were small pieces of coal, fragments of clay pipe stem and orange sand (on a mm scale).

A 1 kg 'test' sub-sample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains. There were a few (<10) beetle fragments in the flot all of which were broken and pale, many (>20) small fragments of larvae, small fragments of coal and numerous undiagnostic pieces of plant tissue. The larval remains were extremely fragmentary and are therefore unlikely to represent a large number of individuals. The small (0.16 kg dry weight) residue consisted mainly of sand and fine pieces of brick/tile with some coal, bone, mortar, pot and pieces of clay pipe stem.

Context 1131

Sample 3 Mid olive-brown, moist, plastic, silty clay with small (<2 cm) bone fragments and plant fibres visible.

A 1 kg 'test' sub-sample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains. The resulting flot contained tiny, ferruginous concretions, numerous undiagnostic pieces of plant tissue and

two complete insect wings (probably of an aphid). The lack of any other insect remains in the flot and the extemely good physical condition of the wings suggests that they are probably modern contaminants. The tiny (41 g dry weight) residue consisted mainly of quartz sand with some ferruginous concretions (2-4 mm), and traces of bone and charcoal.

Context 1135 [Sample taken to ascertain whether or not this was a natural deposit]

Sample 4 Mid grey-brown, moist, plastic, clay with small stones and plant fibres.

A 1 kg 'test' sub-sample (/T) was processed by paraffin flotation to extract insect remains. The resulting flot was barren except for a few, very small fragments of charcoal, coal and undiagnostic plant tissue. The minute (19 g dry weight) residue consisted of sand, coal, bone, brick/tile, mortar and a little plant detritus (mainly root/rootlets) with traces of fish bone, fish scale, mussel shell, charcoal and cinder. This material may have been a 'natural' deposit, but probably was not part of the glacial deposits regarded as 'natural' in the archaeological sense.

Context 1137 [Under a thick natural alluvium deposit]

Sample 5 Mid grey, moist, crumbly, sandy silt with burned limestone/mortar.

This sample was judged to be unworthy of any action beyond that of describing the sediment.

Context 2051

Sample 6 Mid brown, moist, slightly crumbly, plastic, silty clay with a slightly gleyed appearance.

The whole of this small (0.8 kg) sample was washed by hand through a 300 micron sieve and the residue allowed to drain and air dry. The minute (3 g dry weight) residue consisted of sand with traces of brick/tile and coal.

The gleyed appearance of the sediment suggests that it has been subject to the effects of a fluctuating water table at some time after deposition.

Context 2067

Sample 7 Charcoal rich ash.

The whole of this small (0.55 kg) sample was washed by hand through a 300 micron sieve and the residue allowed to drain and air dry. The resulting, rather large (0.25 kg dry weight), residue was mostly coal with some mortar, brick/tile and pieces of glassy and metallic slags.

Context 2068

Sample 8 Mid brown, moist, yeasty-textured, clay/silt with a few plant fibres.

The whole of this small (0.9 kg) sample was washed by hand through a 300 micron sieve and the residue allowed to drain and air dry. The minute (12 g dry weight) residue consisted of sand with traces of charcoal, brick/tile, mortar and a little plant detritus (roots/rootlets) with traces of coal and mussel shell.

Implications

Very little work is implied by the results of the above analyses, but context 1135 should be studied more fully.

A small contingency cost should be allowed for any waterlogged deposits which may be encountered.

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.