AHK Report 3638

Site	:	Fison Way, Thetford
County	:	Norfolk
Code	:	THD 5853
Type of Site	:	Iron Age-Roman settlement with probable graves
Geology	:	Outwash gravels
Type of material	:	Land mollusca, phosphate estimates
Director	:	A. Gregory

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1. 2065: phosphate tests

This feature was a large retangular grave-like pit. Excavation produced no trace of a body or grave goods. A regular grid of soil samples was therefore taken from the base of the feature, from the surrounding natural sand and from an adjacent archaeological feature in order to determine whether phosphate concentrations within the proposed grave were detectably higher than those of the surrounding soil. To assess the potential value of full quantitative analysis, semi-quantitative estimates from a few samples were made using the method described by Schwarz (1967). Results are given in Table 1.

Sample Nos.	Context	'Scores'	Approximate phosphate concentratio
15,29,35,50,69	Natural sand	1-2	ca 0.08 - 0.4%
64,72	Adjacent feature	2	ca 0.15 - 0.4%
33,59,66,75	'Grave'	3-4	ca 0.4% - 0.8 or more

Table 1 : Phosphate test results

Whilst too much weight should not be attached to the suggested phosphate concentrations, the results do clearly show higher phosphate levels in the 'grave' and confirm that more systematic analysis is justified.

Schwarz, G.E. (1967) 'A simplified chemical test for archaeological field work' Archaeometry 10, 57-63.

2. 3309 : Land molluscs

In view of soil acidity at this site it was not anticipated that shells of land mollusca would, in general, survive. However 3309, a post-hole of a circular building, included some chalky material derived from the erosion of an associated dwarf wall and this had raised soil pH to levels where preservation of shells occurred. The sample from this feature was a dark yellowish-brown (10YR 4/4; moist) stoney sand with patched of degraded chalk and inlcuded charocal,charred cereals and weed seeds, chips of large mammal bone, some small mammal vertebrae and limb-bones and mollusca. Shells were extracted by the method of Evans (1972, 44). Specimens from a 5kg sample are listed in Table 2.

Cochlicopa sp.	(1)
Pupilla muscorum (Linné)	2
Vallonia excentrica Sterki	12
Vallonia sp.	17
Vitrina pellucida (Müller)	44
Oxychilus sp.	11
Limacid plate	1
Cecilioides acicula (Müller)	13
Helicella itala (Linné)	4
Trichia hispida (Linné)	40
Cepaea nemoralis (Linné)	4
Cepaea sp.	4
Cepaea/Arianta	12

Table 2 : Mollusca from 3309

The concentration of shells in the soil was low and the assemblage shows low species diversity. Open-country taxa (Pupilla, Vallonia, Helicella) comprise 23% of the total excluding Cecilioides. Snails characteristic of shaded conditions are rare: shells of Oxychilus account for 7% of the total. The remaining species are catholic, occurring in a wide variety of habitats, both shaded and open. Considered in isolation, the assemblage seems to indicate a mesic habitat within a generally open local environment. This is consistent with the archaeological context of the sample: the building would have provided protected conditions within the open settlement area. The presence of bone fragments has already been noted and this, together with the high combined percentage of the facultative carnivores Vitrina pellucida and Oxychilus sp. (36%), indicates that some food refuse was allowed to accumulate in the vicinity.

On the basis of this pilot study it seems that at Fison Way mollusc analysis has little to contribute to the interpretation of archaeological features of this type.

Evans, J.G., (1972) Land Snails in Archaeology London.