

ST MAGNUS (SH 75) City of LondonThe Fish Bones

Some 67 fish bones were recovered during excavations, later sieving of bulk soil samples did not yield any more fishbone.

The following species were identified; roker (Raja clavata), elasmobranchs, herring (Clupea harengus), cod (Gadus morhua), haddock (Melanogrammus aeglefinus), whiting (Merlangius merlangus), ling (Molva molva), dory (Zeus faber), black sea-bream (Spondylusoma cantharus), mackerel (Scomber scombrus), plaice (Pleuronectes platessa).

All these species are sea fish and suggest a number of fishing methods. Cod appears in all phases, and together with ling is suggestive of a deep water fishery in all periods. Today the southern limits of the distribution of ling are the northern North Sea to Yorkshire so, unless its distribution has changed in recent time, due to heavy fishing or climatic change, this species would be transported a great distance probably dried or salted. Cod has been a staple food fish throughout history and was often marketed dried or salted as stockfish.

The haddock lives close to the sea bed in depths of 40-300 metres (Wheeler 1978, 152) shallower than cod and ling, and could be caught off the south east coast, probably on lines. Whiting are common in shallow inshore waters and are also found off the south east coast, both haddock and whiting were preserved when the slowness of transport precluded the economic marketing of fresh fish.

The roker is also common in shallow water, especially in the breeding season and was probably caught on lines as would have been the plaice. Both could have been caught in the intertidal zone where they feed at high tide being trapped in 'kiddles' which caught the fish on their return with the tide to deeper water (Wheeler 1979, 80). These traps are age old and are mentioned in the Magna Carta.

The herring fishery developed with the manufacture of fine meshed 'drift nets', whose first use is not known, mackerel might also be caught in such nets (Wilson 1973, 27). The herring was abundant in the North Sea until its present over-fishing and was smoked, salted and pickled.

Dory is rare today in the southern North Sea, which is its northerly limit, ~~an~~inshore solitary fish it breeds in summer in the English Channel. Dory make very good eating and have long been prized.

The black sea-bream is found in the English Channel, and in summer may migrate further north, one of its favourite breeding grounds is off Littlehampton on the gravel. This fish is rare in the Thames Estuary (Wheeler 1979, 191) and was probably caught on a line.

Size comparisons were made against modern reference specimens whenever possible, the dentary of the dory was slightly larger than that of a modern specimen of total length 65 cms, so the St Magnus specimen was a large one and therefore probably a female (Wheeler 1978, 190). The size of the other species were not remarkable.

A knifecut was seen on the vertebral column of a black sea-bream from context 286 (a Roman deposit), and also on the vertebral centrum of a cod from context 99, the most recent phase, (fourteenth century).

This collection of bone spanning the Roman to Medieval periods consistently produced the same staple food fish, i.e. cod, ling, haddock, and whiting as well as some more luxurious items such as dory and sea-bream, suggesting a variety of fishing activities.

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References

- A Wheeler. 1978 Key to the Fishes of Northern Europe. Warne.
A Wheeler. 1979 The Tidal Thames. Routledge and Kegan Paul.
C Anne Wilson. 1973. Food and Drink in England. Constable.

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ST MAGNUS, FISH.

PHASE	CONTEXT	SPECIES	ANATOMY
<u>ROMAN</u>			
<u>Period 1 Phase 1</u>	286	Cod	1 dentary
		Black sea-bream	1 vertebral centrum
		Unident.	6 fin rays
			4 fragments
	357	Ling	1 preopercular
<u>Period 1 Phase 6</u>			
<u>C4th</u>	301	Unident	6 fragments
<u>Period 2 Phase 1</u>			
<u>C8th-10th</u>	163	Dory	1 dentary
	293	Mackerel	1 vert cent
<u>River silt dump</u>		Plaice	1 vert cent
<u>Late Saxon</u>			
<u>Period 2 Phase 2</u>	195	Unident	1 fin ray
	220	Plaice	2 vert cent
		Black sea-bream	1 vert cent
<u>C9th-10th silt</u>		Whiting	1 vert cent
		Cod	2 vert cent
		Unident	2 fragments
	221	Plaice	1 vert cent
<u>Saxo-Norman</u>			
<u>Backfill to waterfront</u>	37	Cod	1 vert cent
<u>1050 AD - 1100 AD</u>		Cod\ling	1 opercular frag
		Haddock	1 cleithrum
		Plaice	1 vert cent
		Mackerel	1 premaxilla
		Unident	3 vert cent
<u>Period 3 Phase 3</u>			
<u>Late C11th riversilt</u>	184	Cod	1 vert cent
<u>Early C12th river silt</u>			
	192	Cod	1 parasphenoid
		Ling	1 vert cent
		Koker	1 denticle
		Herring	1 quadrate
			1 ceratohyal
		Haddock	1 quadrate
		Gadoid	1 vert cent
		Elasmobranch	1 vert cent
		Unident	2 skull frag
			10 frags
<u>Period 3 Phase 5</u>			
<u>Mid C12th floor make-up</u>	62	Cod	1 parasphenoid
		Herring\sprat	2 otic bullae
<u>Early C13th river silt</u>			
	146	Cod	1 opercular
<u>Period 4 Phase 2</u>			
<u>Later Medieval 1300-1350 AD</u>	99	Cod	2 vert cent