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ANIMAL BONES FROM FOXCOTTE, DESERTED MEDIEVAL VILLAGE, HANTS

REPORT TO H.B.M.C. NO.

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A small quantity of animal bones (1,327 fragments) resulted from the excavation of pits and buildings probably in use until the mid 17th century A.D. There was in addition some later use of the area which may have produced material. Table 1 gives a list of the layers included in each of the phase divisions. Layers underlined contained reasonable samples of bone (> 50 fragments).

Species Present

Most of the bones were those of domestic ungulates - horse, cattle, sheep, and pig. The elements represented are shown in Table 2. In the absence of any certain goat bones all the ovicaprid bones were classified as 'sheep' although a minority of them bore anatomical criteria distinguishing them to that species. 'S-size' fragments are probably mostly sheep as pig bones are fairly distinctive even when very fragmentary. 'C-size'fragments are likely to be mostly cattle. The bones were highly fragmented with a quarter of them only identifiable as fragments of long bones ('l.b.fragment' in Table 2). The preservation varied very much according to the type of deposit in which they were found.

Other domestic species represented were the dog, cat, fowl, and goose. Wild species were poorly represented but included some native species of bird - the partridge, Perdix perdix; crow or rook, Corvus sp.; and a mallard, Anas platyrhynchos. It is conceivable that the last could have been a domestic bird but the bone is a good match for mallard with no evidence of domestication.

Three non-native species were also represented. The rabbit, Oryctolagus cuniculus, and fallow deer, Dama dama, are generally accepted to have been introduced in post-Norman times (Corbet and Southern 1977). In the Medieval Period they were subjected to considerable human manipulation through the practices of warrening and emparkment, respectively. It is always a difficult matter to decide whether rabbit bones are contemporary with a deposit and the derivation of these remains, especially the partial immature skeleton in Area A, Layer 5, should be confirmed. Two rat long bones were a good match for the black rat, Rattus rattus, the species expected in pre-eighteenth century deposits. It is not certain that these bones originated from inside the walls. They came from Area G Layers 232 and 271. Details of these less common finds are in Table 3.

TABLE 1 LAYER NUMBERS SHOWING PHASING ASSOCIATIONS USED
(Those underlined contained 50 or more fragments)

PHASE 1 (13th/14th Century A.D.)

AREA A	2,3,5,14,15,33A
AREA C	2
AREA F	2
AREA G	4,205,207,208,213,217,224,234,265,266,269,304,305
JCB clearance (well)	

PHASE 2 (15th Century A.D.)

AREA G	2,5,200,210,211,223,225,227,231,232,235,237,238,241, 243,245,247,249,251,271,297,298

PHASE 3 (Post-medieval)

AREA H	407,408,412,417,420,421,422,423,424,425,426,427,432, 433,444,447,449,450,454,458 (16/17th C),464,468, 470 (16/17th C)

PROBABLY MEDIEVAL

AREA C	3
AREA G	1,201,215,219,244,248,250,263,278,279,
AREA H	410,460,465,466

MIXED MEDIEVAL & POST-MEDIEVAL

AREA B	quarry pit
AREA D	quarry pits
AREA E	quarry pits
AREA G	233,236,242
AREA H	401,411,413,415,448,453

TABLE 2 BONES OF DOMESTIC UNGULATES

	horse	cattle	sheep*	pig	s-size	c-size	TOTAL
horn core			1				1
cranium		6	3	8	5	12	34
hyoid		1					1
maxilla		1	5	13			19
mandible		30	46	10		13	99
vertebra	2	19	4	6	5	15	51
rib		29	2	2	62	38	133
scapula	1	18	5	11	2	11	48
humerus		5	8	20		2	35
radius		13	25	7	1		46
ulna		4		12		1	17
pelvis	2	9	16	4		3	34
femur	1	6	3	5	2	1	18
patella		1					1
tibia	2	15	48	10		6	81
fibula				9			9
carpal/tarsal	1	9	2	2	1		15
metapodial	1	20	21	8			50
phalanx	2	6	2	2			12
loose teeth	4	38	62	31			135
l.b.fragment					239	71	310
fragment					55	63	118
TOTAL	16	230	253	160	372	236	1267

* This category includes all bones only identified to 'sheep or goat'

TABLE 3 BONES OF OTHER SPECIES

	fallow	dog	cat	rabbit	rat	fowl	goose	crow	partridge	duck	unidentified bird	unidentified mammal	TOTAL
antler	3												3
mandible		1					1						2
sternum						1							1
coracoid						4				1			5
rib											1		1
scapula						2							2
humerus			1			5							6
radius						1	1			1			3
ulna						3	1						4
pelvis				2									2
femur				3		5							8
tibia			1	2	2	4							9
metapodial	2			5				1	1				9
phalanx	1												1
l.b.fragment											1	3	4
TOTAL	6	1	2	12	2	25	3	1	1	2	2	3	60

Details of the Assemblage

The largest samples of bone were from layers which contained post-medieval pottery or were of mixed or uncertain origin. The bones associated with 15th Century pottery showed the largest spread of species (Table 4) and the 13th/14th Century and 16th/17th Century samples were very small. The most interesting specimens often came from mixed layers and it was not possible to pinpoint certain finds as accurately as had been hoped. Table 4 gives the occurrences of the various species in the dateable layers. The solitary dog bone was found in a layer containing mixed material of medieval and post-medieval date. Despite this scarcity of dog bone many of the bones from all periods showed carnivore gnawing (Table 5).

In view of the importance of such rural medieval material an attempt was made to use the bones to shed more light on changes of useage in the different periods. It was hoped that this may later help to clarify which was residual medieval material in post-medieval deposits and which was post-medieval contamination in medieval payers. The different types of butchery were therefore recorded in detail and the state of preservation of the fragments also recorded.

The overall occurrence of butchery is shown in Table 5. The incidence of erosion seemed to be much greater in the earlier medieval deposits and it is likely to be due to the type of deposit from which bones came. The ones from pits were best preserved. Despite the high degree of erosion the dog gnawing and butchery (with both knives and heavier implements) was noticeable. There was evidence of splitting of cattle and sheep carcases down the midline of the vertebral column in some of the medieval material but not in any layers securely dated to either medieval phase. Evidence for the introduction of this practice as early as the 11 Century A.D. was found at Flaxengate, Lincoln, (O'Connor 1982) and it would be interesting to know when it became common practice in rural areas.

The bones associated with 15th Century pottery showed a higher incidence of burning than those from other phases. Most of the butchery evidence from this phase came from ribs which showed a

TABLE 4 SPECIES REPRESENTED IN THE DIFFERENT DEPOSITS

	13/14th C	15th C	16/17th C	Later PM
Major domestic				
horse	✓			✓
cow	✓	✓	✓	✓
sheep	✓	✓	✓	✓
pig	✓	✓	✓	✓
dog	in mixed layer only.			
cat		✓		
fowl	✓	✓	✓	
goose		✓	✓	
Other Species				
fallow	✓	✓		
rabbit	✓		✓	
rat		✓		
partridge		✓		
crow		✓		
duck			✓	
Number in sample	135	308	38	430

characteristic anterio-posterior chopping on both cattle and sheep. This was not seen on the few 13/14th Century ribs available.

The post-medieval bones included two cases of sawing in layers associated with 17/18th Century and 18/19th Century pottery respectively. There were two cases of very efficient midline splitting in Area H, layer 464, associated with deposits dated to the 17/18th Century.

Interesting Individual Finds

Some immature animals were represented - a kitten in G 5 (15th C) and piglets in G210 (15th C) and floor layers in H 458 (16/17th C). Young pig occurred in H 464 (17/18th C). The only finds of calf bones were two late layers in H 464 and H 468, the latter also contributed some large cattle and an associated ulna and radius of goose.

A cattle metatarsus with a severely pitted arthritic proximal joint was in G 279 associated with medieval pottery (Plate 1).

The metatarsus, metacarpus and phalanx of fallow deer were found in JCB clearance in the area of a well.

Conclusions

Such a collection of rural medieval material is a rarity in Wessex and is a useful addition to the present medieval and post-medieval programme now being undertaken at the Faunal Remains Unit to complement earlier work in the Iron Age and Saxon Periods (Coy and Maltby n.d.). The detailed records (for example those of tooth wear sequences and all measurements) will ultimately be used for comparisons in the region. It is hoped that phase differences such as the incidence of different types of butchery can be refined as a diagnostic tool for quick dating assessments of Wessex rescue material.

Sadly in the case of Foxcotte, with its thin and difficult stratigraphy and continuous use, much of the material is too mixed to use in this way. With hindsight too it is important to stress that maximum recovery of animal bone from an important site like this is likely to provide more detailed knowledge. There is evidence from the range of anatomical elements presented in Table 2 that selection of bones occurred at excavation - probably inadvertently as small bones like sheep phalanges are easily missed. Any future excavation on a site like this would benefit knowledge

TABLE 5 PERCENTAGES OF BONES SHOWING EROSION, GNAWING OR BUTCHERY

phase	13/14thC	15th C	Post-Medieval
number in sample	135	308	468
eroded	19%	1%	2%
gnawed	11%	15%	19%
butchered	10%	3%	5%

if resources could be found for water sieving in well stratified areas, especially any occupation areas within buildings.

Archive

The accompanying archive for reference at Test Valley Archaeological Committee contains :

1. An annotated list of the context numbers used in the computerised record. Areas A to H were numbered 1 to 8 consecutively. The first figure in the 4 figure context number is therefore an Area Number and the other three are used for layer number.
2. A context-ordered summary catalogue giving all identifications to species and anatomy.

These were produced using the CONLIS and CONMT programmes, respectively, from the Ancient Monuments Laboratory. More detailed results are available in computer readable form at the Faunal Remains Unit.

References

CORBET G B & SOUTHERN H N 1977 The Handbook of British Mammals 2nd edition Blackwell

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