Anc Rept 1557

3pc

440

The Animal Remains

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Introduction

The bone material was in two groups; from period I the thirteenth-century ditch and the period II thirteenth and fourteenth-century long-houses and yards. The period I collection weighed only 2 lbs; the species present were cattle, sheep and dog. The other group weighed 20 lbs and there were the usual four species of farm animals (sheep, pig, cattle, horse) together with dog and domestic fowl. The wild species were red deer, roe deer and hare.

Method

All measurements are in millimetres to the nearest millimetre.

Proximal and distal widths are measured across articular surfaces only. The ageing of animals has been based on the eruption and degree of wear of teeth and on the fusion of the epiphyses of long bones without any attempt to express ages in years but merely in age groups - juvenile, young adult and mature adult.

Description of Material

Wild Animals

The remains of both species of deer consisted only of a few teeth with, in addition, the cast antler of a first season roe-buck. This seems to suggest that the carcases were not consumed on the site. The hare however probably was as several long bones and part of the skull were present.

Domestic Animals

Dog

The dog was represented in the twelfth-century collection by a single damaged bone. This was an ulna very similar in size to that of a labrador. The thirteenth-century remains were more numerous but probably all came from the same animal, a dog as big as a large Alsatian. They could have been from a wolf as these and large dogs cannot always be separated with certainty on

bone evidence. It is interesting that a canid metatarsal (100 mm), quite large enough to be of wolf was found at Gomeldon[43] a site of similar date to Wythemail.

Historically this is possible as the earliest date given for the extinction of the wolf in England is the end of the thirteenth century[44]. A later date, between 1485 and 1509, is given by Harting[45].

Sheep

Age There were no remains of juvenile animals. The lower third molars present are all, with one exception, fully erupted and show wear on all three cusps indicating fully mature adult animals. This is supported by the fusion of the proximal epiphyses of the humerus and tibia and the distal epiphyses of the radius.

Size Measurements are shown in Table I

(43) R. A. Harcourt. In J. Musty and D. Algar, 'The excavations at the Deserted Mediaeval Village Site of Gomeldon', Salisbury Mus. Res. Committee. Interim Report III (1966).

(44) Macpherson Fauna of Lakeland (1892) cited by J. W. Jackson, Trans. Cumb. and West. Antiq. and Arch. Soc. ecol. new ser. XIV (1914) 262-271.

(45) J. E. Harting. Extinct British Animals (1880) cited by J. W. Jackson op. cit. in Note 44.

Table IX Measurements of Sheep long Bones

	tl	pw	msd	dw	
Humerus	-	-	-	24 - 23 (6)	Wythemail
	130	-	15	28	Soay Ram. 0.361
	123	-	11	26	Soay Ewe 63.10
Radius	136	26	16	23	Wythemail
	140	25	15	22	"
	-	29.30(3)	-	-	"
	145	31	21	22	Soay Ram 0.361
	133	-	14	26	Soay Ewe 63.10
Metacarpal	113	20	13	21	Wythemail
	111	20	11	21	Soay Ewe 63.10

tl = total length pw = proximal width
msd = mid shaft diameter dw = distal width
0.361 Institute of Archaeology Collection
63.10 Writer's private collection

Numbers A minimum of five animals is represented.

Pig

This species provided only twelve fragmented specimens.

Cattle

Numbers The remains of not less than five animals were present.

Age Two of these are fully mature adults, one a young adult and one a young calf which is still so small that to have killed it deliberately for meat would have been pointless and it therefore probably died naturally.

Size The few measurements that were possible are shown in Table II together with those of similar bones from other sites and a comparable

modern breed - the Chillingham which stands about 4 ft. at the shoulder (122 cms).

Table X Measurements of Cattle Bones

Bone/Site		W	G	N	Ch
Calcaneum	tl	125	-	-	-
Astragalus	tl	53-63(3)	57	62-67(3)	60-74(3)
Metacarpal	pw	59-60(2)	51-67(4)	51-55(2)	-
	dw	50		50-68(2)	53-61(9)

W = Wythenhail G = Gonaldon[46] N = Northolt[47] Ch = Chillingham cow[48]

Figures in brackets indicate the number of specimens measured.

Fowl There were only three bones.

Horse

Two are represented; one markedly larger than the other. A complete metacarpal from the smaller animal closely resembles that of a New Forest type pony of approximately 12½ hands (50 ins: 127 cms.). The measurements were: 214 tl : 46 pw : 31 mad : 46 dw.

Discussion

The number of animals on this site, both sheep and cattle, five in each case, is so small that an attempt at any analysis must be undertaken with caution. Unlike those of pig the remains of ruminants, given suitable soil conditions, survive well and also equally well so that the numbers represented are probably a

(46) op. cit. in Note 43.

(47) Judith E. King, in J. G. Hurst, 'The Kitchen area of Northolt Manor', Med. Arch. accl. V. (1961) 295.

(48) F. A. Jewell, 'Cattle from British Archaeological Sites', in Man and Cattle, A. C. Mourant and F. E. Zeuner. Symp. Proc. Roy. Anthrop Inst. (1964) 80.

true picture of the relative numbers of the two species if not of the original absolute totals. Some measurements suggest that the cattle/sheep weight ration was of the order 10:1 so from this it is evident that much the greater part of the meat that was eaten was beef.

The object of keeping sheep in the thirteenth century was the production of wool[49] and in consequence they would only have been killed when their usefulness in this respect was at an end. This would normally be at an age of seven years or more. At any site where this is the pattern of sheep husbandry the majority of the bone remains will be those of fully mature animals. Such is the case at Wythemail. At sites where it occurs the presence of the bones of younger animals, especially among sheep, may be explained by the culling of those which have suffered premature loss or excessive wear of incisor teeth. Another possibility is the eating of animals dead from natural causes of which there will inevitably be some. It is far too readily assumed that all the bones of food animals found on archaeological sites are from stock deliberately killed. There is no evidence for this belief. In some protein-starved areas of the world the eating of dead as opposed to killed meat is commonplace and we cannot know whether or not peoples of earlier times followed the same practice.

(49) R. Trow-Smith, History of British Livestock Husbandry to 1700 (1957).