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REPORT

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SERIES/No CONSULTANT

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TITLE Animal Bones from TATTERSHALL COLLEGE

(AM. 680051/2.) 3pc

Animal Bones from Tattershall College

The bones in this collection are in two separate groups; the earlier is of twelfth to thirteenth century date and contained 230 identifiable specimens; the later group is dated to the mid sixteenth century with 130 specimens.

The species represented were, with one exception, the same in both periods: cattle, sheep, pig, horse, dog, red and fallow deer and birds. In the thirteenth century group there was, in addition, one specimen of otter. Human remains, three specimens in one and five in the other, were also present in both periods. The collection is too small to allow an analysis of age at death.

Table 1. Minimum Numbers of Individuals

	Cattle	Sheep	Pig	Horse	Dog	Red deer	Fallow	Otter
12th/13th	4	4	5	2	1	1	1	1
16th	1	6	2	1	1	1	1	-

Cattle

Measurable specimens were few but their dimensions are similar to those from other approximately contemporary sites (3. 4. 5. 6.) and indicate fairly small animals. The number of specimens in each group was not great enough to show any change in size. Only one horn core was present, which, from its stoutness, was probably from a bull.

Table 2. Measurements of Cattle Long Bones

	t.l.	p.w.	m.s.d.	d.w.	Century
Humerus	-	-	-	67-75 (2)	12th/13th
Radius	-	-	-	56 (1)	"
	-	-	-	66 (1)	16th
Tibia	-	-	-	48 (1)	12th/13th
Metacarpal	-	50 (1)	-	-	"
Metatarsal	-	-	-	54 (1)	16th
Astragalus	lateral length			58-60 (3)	12th/13th
Lower third molar	total length			32	"
				35	16th
1st Phalanx	-	23-28 (6)	-	-	12th/13th
		22 (1)	-	-	16th
Horn core	basal circumference			185	"

t.l. = total length p.w. = proximal width
m.s.d. = mid shaft diameter d.w. = distal width
All measurements in millimetres and extremities measured across articular surfaces only.

Sheep

The dimensions of sheep bones from the Neolithic to the Mediaeval seem to remain virtually unaltered and those from this site are no exception, resembling closely those of the long limbed slender Soay.

The horn cores indicate that there were horned animals among both ewes and rams; two in particular were very large and heavy.

Table 3. Measurements of Sheep Long Bones

	t.l.	p.w.	m.s.d.	d.w.	Period	m.s.d. %
Humerus	-	-	-	29 (2)	12th/13th	-
				27-29 (6)	16th	-
Radius	144	28	16	23	12th/13th	-
	145	28	15	-	"	-
	-	27-28 (3)	-	-	"	-
	140	28	17	23	16th	-
Metacarpal	127	28	15	27	12th/13th	11.8
	-	23-24(2)	-	-	"	-
Tibia	-	-	-	23-26 (6)	"	-
Metatarsal	121	19	11	23	"	9.1
	-	20 (2)	-	-	"	-
	131	22	15	27	16th	11.4*
	142	22	14	27	16th	9.85≠

m.s.d. = m.s.d. as % of t.l.

* Probably a ram ≠ Probably a wether

In the sixteenth century group there were two vertebrae, one cervical and one lumbar, both split lengthways suggesting that the butchery technique of splitting carcases down the middle of the spine was employed. The earliest period from which the writer has encountered this method is the thirteenth century but it has been described from the Iron Age. ([redacted]).

Pig

The presence of five animals in the earlier group is indicated by that of five left scapulae but the total number of specimens was in fact only fourteen. From the 16th century the number of specimens was very similar. The only measurements it was possible to take were of two distal humeri (27 and 28 mm.) and four proximal radii (27-29 mm.)

Horse

This animal was represented by teeth, phalanges and metapodials. The dimensions indicate animals of 13-14 hands, (135-143 cms.), similar to those from various other contemporary Mediaeval sites. None of the specimens from the 16th century were measurable.

Table 4. Measurements of Horse Long Bones

	t.l.	p.w.	m.s.d.	d.w.	Site	
Metacarpal	215	48	31	45	Tattershall College	12th/13th
	227	50	35	51	" "	"
	210	45	30	46	Gomeldon (3)	
	214	46	31	46	Wythemail (4)	
	237	51	33	52	Badby (5)	
Metatarsal	260	46	31	49	Tattershall College	12th/13th
	251	45	25	45	Gomeldon (3)	
1st Phalanx	71	46	34	42	Tattershall College	12th/13th
	81	53	37	45	" "	"

The metatarsal carpal from Badby suggests a slightly larger animal of 15 hands (152 cms.). The twelfth century animal represented by a complete radius (327 mm.) at Cambridge was about 13 hands (135 cms.).(6)

Dog

There were only four specimens in the entire collection; two were mandibles, one from each group, both from terrier size animals. One had a total length of 129 mm. with a tooth row (molars and premolars) of 70 mm. and in the other the tooth row was 63 mm.

Red Deer

This species provided seven specimens including a rather unusual one from the thirteenth century group. This was the basal portion of an antler sawn off short and attached to a portion of cranium. Immediately below the burr a perfectly round hole of 12.9 mm. diameter had been drilled right through the pedicle.

Fallow Deer

There were only three specimens. A complete radius (12/13th C) had the dimensions - 182 t.l. - 22 m.s.d. and 30 d.w.

Birds

The species were the same in both groups, domestic goose, duck, probably mallard, domestic fowl, both ordinary and bantam and heron. The herons might have been taken by falcon but as they were immature birds would equally have been easy targets for the crossbow.

Discussion

The remains of cattle, sheep and pigs are undoubtedly those of food animals, either slaughtered deliberately or else eaten after natural death. To decide, however, whether horse remains on Mediaeval sites are in the same category is more of a problem, the solution of which is in no way helped by a study of contemporary records which do not mention the matter at all. (9.).

Johnson (8.), quoting earlier sources, thinks a ban on eating horseflesh was applied by leaders of the early Christian church and this belief is repeated in a more recent work. (2.). Zeuner refers to "the taboo against eating horseflesh" but produces no supporting evidence. (10.).

A study of the relative numbers of whole and broken long bones from a given site is not as helpful as it might seem. The presence of a high proportion of long bones with broken shafts is often quoted as evidence that the species in question was eaten but, while such a conclusion may often be correct, it would seem to be based on a shaky foundation because the same result could be produced by other factors: disturbance, sinking of the soil or reburial for example. Similarly the opposite assertion is unlikely to be valid for it is perfectly possible to remove the flesh from a carcase and leave not so much as a mark on any bone, as a visit to a knackers' yard will readily confirm.

It would seem that until further evidence is available the question must remain unanswered.

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