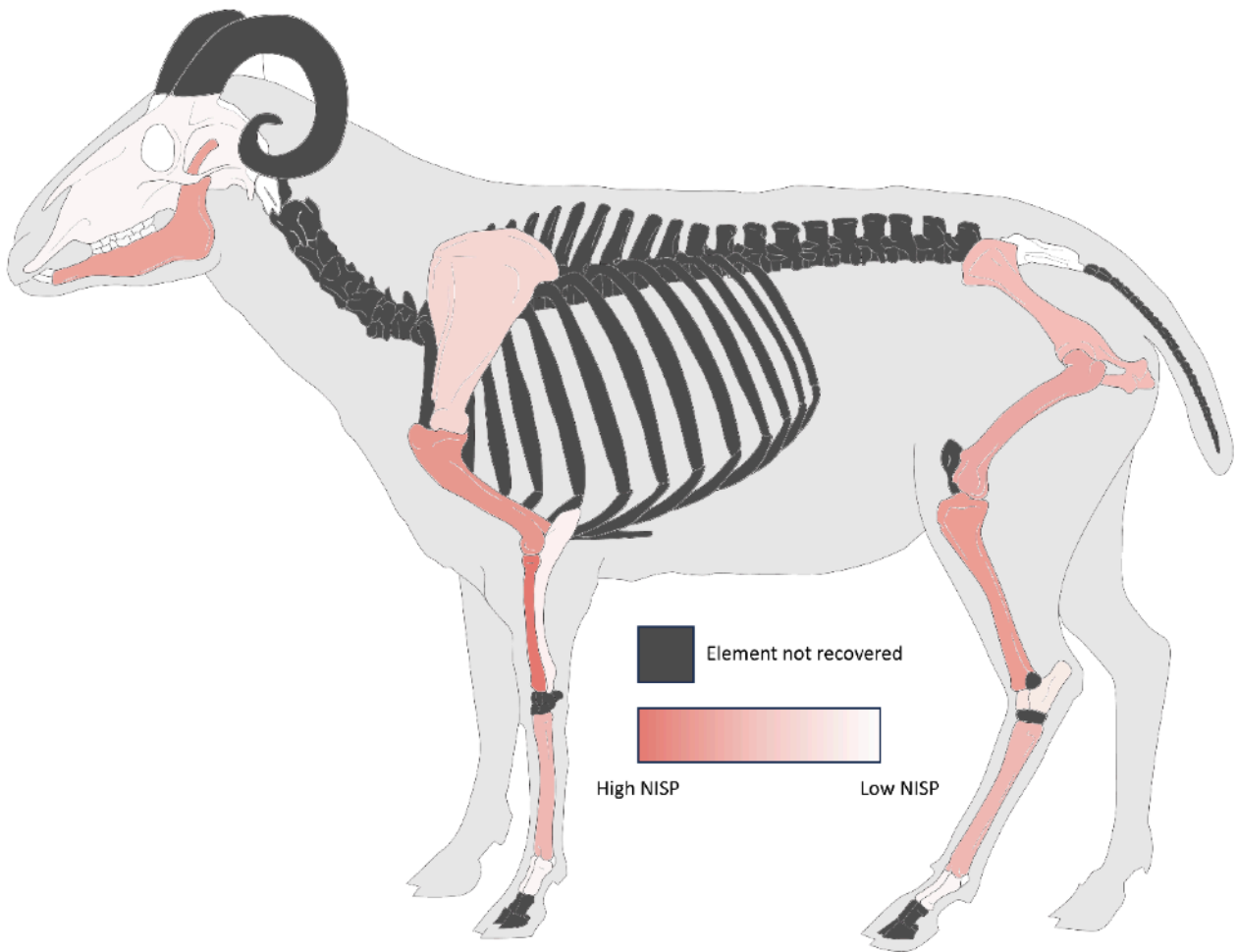


Castle Hill, Brompton Faunal Report

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Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society
Report 67: 2026



Castle Hill, Brompton

Faunal Report

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Summary

Between 2017 and 2021 the Society excavated on Castle Hill, Brompton-by-Sawdon to explore the nature of the medieval occupation of the area on the east edge of the village. The work followed on from a geophysical survey of the scheduled part of the hill top by James Lyall of geophiz.biz sponsored by the Brompton Local History Society in 2014 and an earthwork survey of the same area by the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society in 2016. This report is an assessment of the animal bones from the 2018, 2019 and 2021 excavations within the scheduled area which revealed parts of several medieval masonry buildings and the foundations of a massive stone boundary wall on the crest of the hill facing towards the village. The 2017 excavation was limited to two shallow trenches in an adjacent garden outside the scheduled area and the bones are not considered in detail in this report. The Castle Hill site is probably one of the three manors documented in the village in the medieval period and appears to have been abandoned in the 14th century. The Society's reports on the Castle Hill survey and excavation project are available to download from the Archaeological Data Service.

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Above: Aerial view of Castle Hill during the 2021 excavation.

Castle Hill Brompton Faunal Report

Introduction

Excavations undertaken at Castle Hill, Brompton, Scarborough, by the Scarborough Archaeological and Historical Society between 2017 and 2021 have produced a substantial faunal assemblage from a high-status medieval context. Ceramic dating indicates occupation between 1150 to 1400.

This report focuses on the analysis of faunal material recovered during the 2018, 2019, and 2021 excavation seasons. Material from 2017 has been excluded, as it originated from outside the scheduled area. A summary table of Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) from 2017 is provided at the end of this report (Table 6), with further details available in the supplementary material.

Methodology

Bone fragments were documented in accordance with established protocols for faunal analysis (Baker and Worley, 2019). Species identification was conducted utilising identification manuals, further supported by the reference collection housed at the University of York (Schmid 1972; Cohen and Serjeantson 1996; Cannon 1987; Hillson 2005). Fragments that could not be classified to a specific taxon were categorised by size, designated as small, medium, or large mammal or bird. Morphologically similar species were distinguished, when possible, based on published criteria, such as Zeder and Lapham (2010) for sheep/goats (*Ovis aries*)/(*Capra hircus*) and Tomek and Bocheński (2009) for Galliformes.

All bone fragments were counted towards the Number of Identified Specimens (NISP) total, except for those under 1cm in length (unless identifiable). Notably, there are many discussions regarding the inherent bias of interdependence of skeletal remains in which a single element may break up into many diagnostic fragments (Lyman 2008, 37). Thus, some animals may be disproportionately represented by a high number of identified specimens. Diagnostic zones are morphologically distinct areas on individual elements and can ensure non-repeatable elements are recorded. They are used to help decide which specimens to include in NISP counts and to help with minimum number of individuals (MNI) calculations. Thus, Watson's (1979) diagnostic zones (DZ) and Dobney and Reilly's (1988) diagnostic zones were used when identifying minimum number of elements (MNE), and MNI.

The MNE was established for each species by separating left and right sided fragments and using Dobney and Reilly's zones to determine the quantity of elements present (for more detail on the concept of MNE see Lyman 2008, 214-263). Fusion data and, in the case of

mandibles, evidence of tooth eruption were also taken into consideration. MNI was calculated as being equal to the largest MNE value (for more detail on the concept of MNI see Lyman 2008, 38-79). One of the issues with the MNI method is it overestimates the importance of rarer species in the sample (Lyman 2008, 46). To provide an accurate representation of the data, NISP, Watson DZ, and MNI were used to estimate the abundance of recorded species. Weight to the nearest gram was also used as a quantification method despite O'Connor's (2003, 133) belief this would be "distorted by retained sediment" to maintain full transparency.

The aging of mammals was assessed through the examination of the fusion status of postcranial bones and the eruption and wear patterns of teeth (Zeder 2006; Grant 1982; Payne 1973; Silver 1969; Reitz and Wing 2008; Zeder and Lapham 2006). Additionally, the presence of juvenile bird and mammal bones, characterised by their porous texture, was noted. The sex of pigs was determined based on the morphology of their canines and alveoli (Hillson 2005, 128-131).

Measurements of fused bones were conducted following the criteria established by von den Driesch (1976). Bones displaying pathological signs were systematically described in accordance with the guidelines provided by Thomas and Worley (2019). Taphonomic evidence was examined under low light magnification. Butchery marks were classified based on their type—chop, saw, cut or scrape—and were described in a systematic manner (Maltby 2019, 54). Evidence of gnawing and burning was also recorded. The overall surface condition of each bone fragment was evaluated using a 5-point scale, ranging from very poor (over 50% of the surface being powdery) to very good (characterised by a smooth, fresh surface) (Lyman 1994).

Taphonomy and Preservation

A total of 1,568 bone fragments were recovered from Trenches 1-9 at Brompton Castle, of which 36% were identified to species and 28% identified to size class (Table 1). The majority of fragments were recovered from Trenches 2, 5, 8, and 9.

	Quantity	ID	ID %	Size Class	Size Class %
Trench 1	45	12	49%	19	42%
Trench 2	377	99	26%	89	24%
Trench 3	14	4	29%	4	29%
Trench 4	50	17	34%	22	44%
Trench 5	188	54	29%	49	26%
Trench 6	43	17	40%	9	21%
Trench 7	64	21	33%	25	39%
Trench 8	167	64	38%	58	35%
Trench 9	620	276	45%	169	27%
Total	1568	564	36%	444	28%

Table 1: Quantity of animal bone from Trenches 1-9.

Most bones displayed moderate surface preservation, with average condition accounting for 94% of the assemblage (Table 2). The most poorly preserved bone was derived from a hearth deposit where bones were carbonised or calcined. Evidence of post-depositional disturbance was minimal, with few modern breaks recorded.

	Very Good	Good	Average	Poor	Very Poor
Trench 1		3	42		
Trench 2		5	333	32	7
Trench 3			14		
Trench 4		1	49		
Trench 5	1		183	3	1
Trench 6			42	1	
Trench 7		1	61	1	1
Trench 8		3	155	7	2
Trench 9	5	5	595	13	2
Total	6	18	1474	57	13

Table 2: Preservation of animal bone from Trenches 1-9.

Pre-burial taphonomy including butchery, burning, and animal gnawing was seen across the site (Table 3). The presence of burning, particularly within hearth contexts, supports the interpretation of food preparation waste rather than accidental destruction. Gnawing marks from carnivores and rodents demonstrate post-depositional exposure prior to burial.

Modification Type	Frequency
Butchery	41
Burning	50
Carnivore Gnawing	10
Rodent Gnawing	1

Table 3: Pre-burial taphonomy from Trenches 1-9.



Figure 1: Rodent gnawing on cattle phalanx.

Species Representation

Like most zooarchaeological assemblages, the dominant species represented are sheep/goat, cattle, and pig (Table 4). This is consistent with medieval consumption patterns. Depending on the quantification method employed, the proportional representation of domesticated species varies. While no single approach provides a definitively “correct” reflection of species abundance, NISP counts have been criticised for underrepresenting sheep/goat and pigs relative to cattle (for a detailed discussion of the strengths and limitations of NISP, see Lyman 2008, 27–38). This bias arises because cattle bones typically fragment into larger pieces that are more readily recovered and identified.

Cattle and sheep/goat are represented in comparable proportions when assessed through NISP, DZ, and MNI (Table 4). In biomass terms, however, cattle clearly dominate the assemblage, accounting for over one-third of the total bone weight. This suggests that cattle were the principal contributors to meat consumption at Brompton Castle. However, sheep/goat and cattle are represented in broadly similar proportions when assessed using NISP, DZ, and MNI. Notably, the majority of cattle and sheep/goat elements uncovered indicate a predominance of meaty portions (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Pig remains are notably more prominent in DZ counts than in NISP, indicating fragmentation bias affecting traditional counts. Unlike cattle or sheep, pigs offer limited secondary products. Their maintenance is costly, and their primary value lies in meat production. Relatively high recovery of pigs is an indicator that a site is of high-status because of this.

Mammals represented in smaller numbers include horse, red deer, cat, dog, hare, rat, and one human remain. Horse remains likely represent working animals rather than dietary refuse. The presence of red deer suggests access to hunted game, reinforcing the site’s elite status. Dogs and cats likely relate to site occupation rather than consumption, especially due to the lack of butchery marks on these remains.

Bird remains include both domestic and wild taxa. Identified bird species include chicken, goose, mallard, pigeon, pheasant, duck, waterfowl, and plover. Domestic fowl likely formed a regular dietary component, while wild birds suggest opportunistic hunting or even natural deaths.

Fish remains include cod and haddock. Given Brompton’s proximity to the North Sea, access to marine fish is logistically feasible but still indicative of dietary diversity beyond basic subsistence. Shells were also identified including oyster, whelk, moon snail, mussel, and limpet. Oysters were widely consumed in medieval England but were often associated with status dining in inland or elite contexts due to the need for transport and preservation. Their presence here suggests participation in broader consumption networks and possibly the use of food as a marker of social distinction.

Two frog/toad remains were identified. These are interpreted as local wildlife rather than dietary requirements.

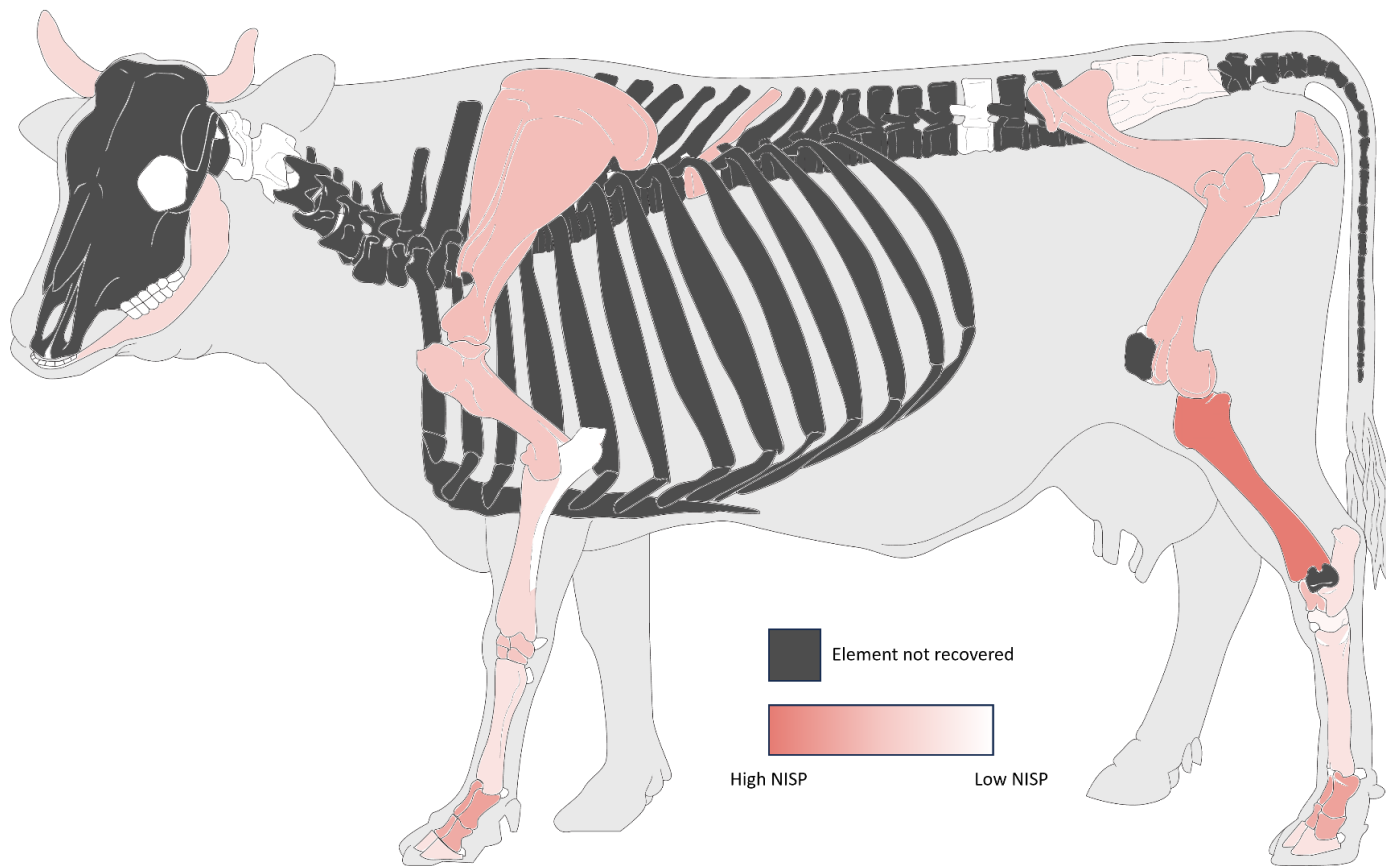


Figure 2: Elements of *Bos taurus* bones uncovered. Colour scale represents most to least present elements by NISP. Single element was chosen for vertebrae. (Vectorised skeleton template from ArchéoZoothèque).

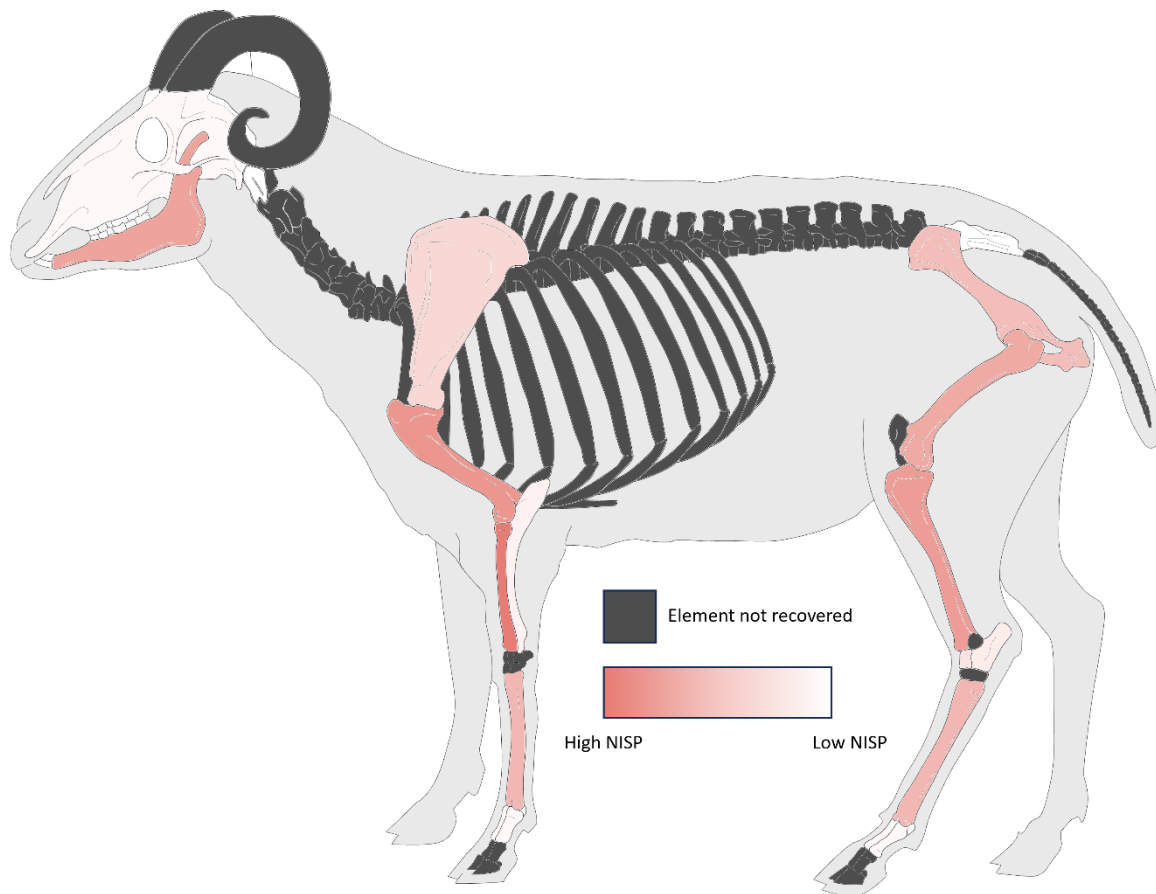


Figure 3: Elements of *Ovis/Capra* and *Ovis aries* bones uncovered. Colour scale represents most to least present elements by NISP. (Vectorised skeleton template from ArchéoZoothèque).

Taxonomic Name	Common Name	NISP	% NISP	DZ	% DZ	Weight (g)	% Weight	MNI
<i>Ovis/Capra</i>	Sheep/goat	187	11.9%	44	29.7%	1415	11.2%	8
<i>Ovis aries</i>	Sheep	9	0.6%	9	6.1%	86	0.7%	2
<i>Bos taurus</i>	Cow	171	10.9%	46.5	31.4%	4832	38.2%	8
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Pig	62	4.0%	22.5	15.2%	784	6.2%	3
<i>Equus sp.</i>	Horse	8	0.5%	4	2.7%	564	4.5%	1
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Red deer	2	0.1%	0	0%	35	0.3%	1
<i>Felis catus</i>	Cat	19	1.2%	12.4	8.4%	33	0.3%	1
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	Dog	13	0.8%	3.4	2.3%	88	0.7%	2
<i>Lepus sp.</i>	Rabbit/Hare	6	0.4%	2.4	1.6%	13	0.1%	1
<i>Rattus sp.</i>	Rat	2	0.1%	4	2.7%	2	0.0%	2
<i>Homo sp.</i>	Human	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	16	0.1%	1
<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Chicken	26	1.7%	N/A	N/A	32	0.3%	3
<i>Anser anser</i>	Goose	10	0.6%	N/A	N/A	34	0.3%	2
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	1	0.0%	1
<i>Columba livia</i>	Pigeon	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	1	0.0%	1
<i>Phasianus sp.</i>	Pheasant	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	1	0.0%	1
Anatidae	Ducks	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	1	0.0%	1
Anserinae	Waterfowl	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	2	0.0%	1
Charadriidae	Plovers	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	2	0.0%	1
Anura	Frog/Toad	2	0.1%	N/A	N/A	2	0.0%	1
<i>Gadus morhua</i>	Cod	4	0.3%	N/A	N/A	8	0.1%	1
<i>Melanogrammus aeglefinus</i>	Haddock	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	2	0.0%	1
<i>Ostrea edulis</i>	European Oyster	30	1.9%	N/A	N/A	169	1.3%	17
<i>Buccinum undatum</i>	Whelk	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	16	0.1%	1
Natacidae	Moon Snail	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	5	0.0%	1
Mytilidae	Mussels	2	0.1%	N/A	N/A	4	0.0%	1
Patellidae	Limpets	1	0.1%	N/A	N/A	2	0.0%	1
Identified Total		564	36.0%	148.2	100.0%	8150	64.4%	65
Large mammal		229	14.6%	N/A	N/A	2664	21.0%	N/A
Medium mammal		184	11.7%	N/A	N/A	649	5.1%	N/A
Small mammal		9	0.6%	N/A	N/A	15	0.1%	N/A
Medium bird		22	1.4%	N/A	N/A	31	0.2%	N/A
Indeterminate mammal		560	35.7%	N/A	N/A	1141	9.0%	N/A
Unidentified Total		1004	64.0%	N/A	N/A	4508	35.6%	N/A
Total		1568	100.0%	148.2	100.0%	12658	100.0%	65

Table 4: Species representation from Trenches 1-9. DZ = Watson's (1979) Diagnostic Zones.

Ageing Data

The small sample size of ageable mandibles in all specimens meant that they cannot be used to determine a trend in age. Additionally, there was a limited sample size of ageing data due to the fragmented nature of bones uncovered. However, fusion data from 29 cattle and 32 sheep/goat elements were analysed.

An examination of the fusion data (Figure 4) indicates that most cattle survived to mature age. The presence of older animals implies that cattle were retained for traction and possibly dairying prior to slaughter. Their eventual entry into the food chain reflects secondary use followed by meat exploitation.

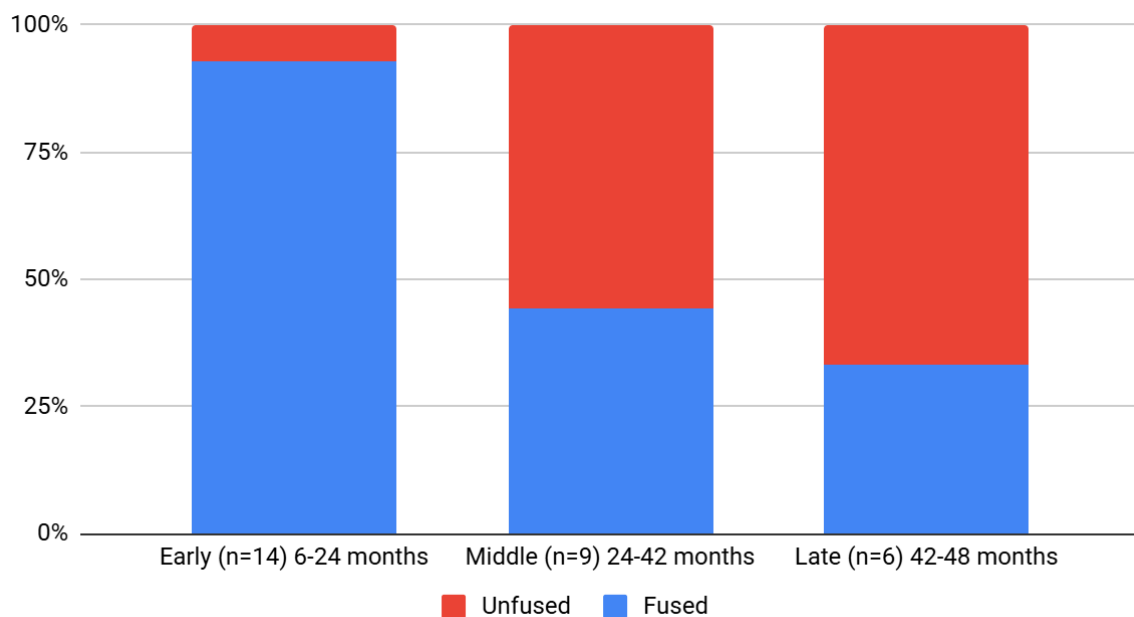


Figure 4: Cattle long bone fusion. Months according to Reitz and Wing (2008, 72). N= number of specimens.

The sheep/goat assemblage exhibits a mixed mortality profile, however leans toward the presence of mature individuals (Figure 5). The presence of some animals slaughtered prior to full skeletal maturity indicates an emphasis on meat production. However, the retention of individuals into adulthood suggests that secondary exploitation (wool and potentially milk) remained economically important.

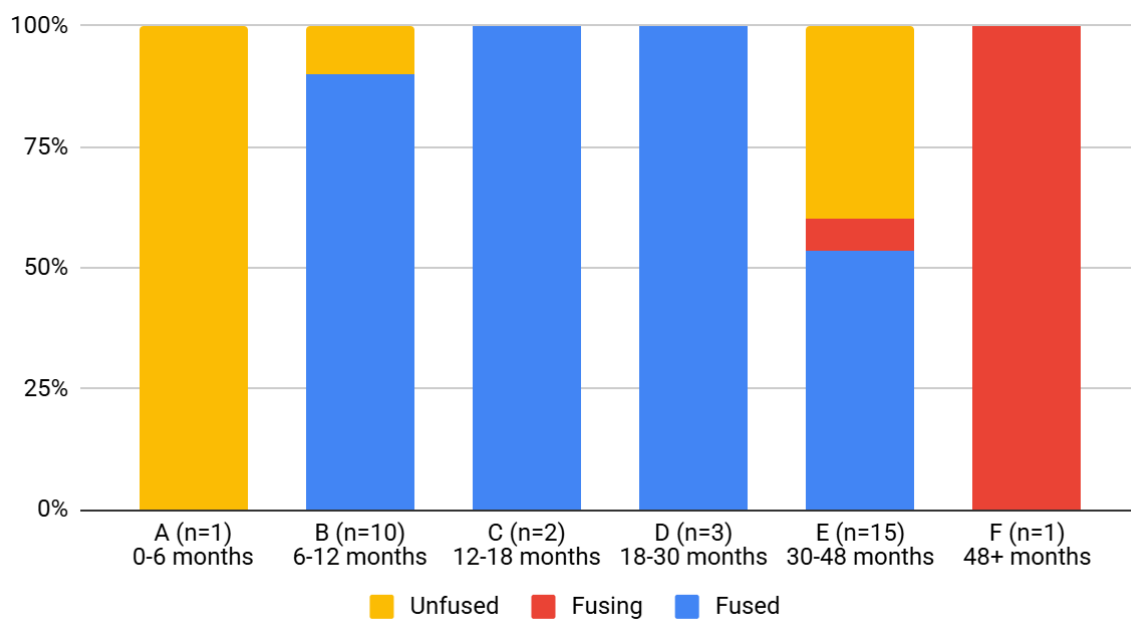


Figure 5: Sheep/goat long bone fusion (including *Ovis aries* and *Ovis/Capra*). Months according to Zeder (2006, 107). N= number of specimens.

Butchery

Butchery was recorded across multiple taxa and is characterised mainly by sawing, chopping, and cutting. Chop marks on large mammal long bones are indicative of heavy tool use, most likely cleavers or axes, to divide carcasses into manageable portions. Finer cut marks reflect secondary processing such as filleting and joint separation. The relative scarcity of marrow extraction signatures suggests that carcass processing was not driven by nutritional stress, but rather by portioning and preparation for consumption.

Sawing is notable for this time period. While not entirely uncommon, chopping with a cleaver was generally the preferred method for portioning an animal carcass rather than sawing (Seetah 2006). During the medieval period, sawing was typically associated with worked bones, yet the sawing observed on ribs suggests they may have been prepared as rib chops. Furthermore, the sawing marks on a cattle tibia could indicate its use in a beef shank meal (Figure 8).

Cattle bones show evidence of heavy chopping and sawing consistent with large carcass disarticulation (Figure 6). Sheep/goat remains display finer knife cuts linked to skinning and joint separation (Figure 7). Pig bones exhibit butchery associated with meat removal, supporting their role as a high-value meat animal rather than a secondary resource.

A single deer antler was recovered, showing evidence of sawing marks (Figure 9). It had been sawn from both ends toward the middle and then manually snapped in half which is a traditional method of breaking antlers. While antlers were often used to make tools or decorative objects, this particular piece remained unused.

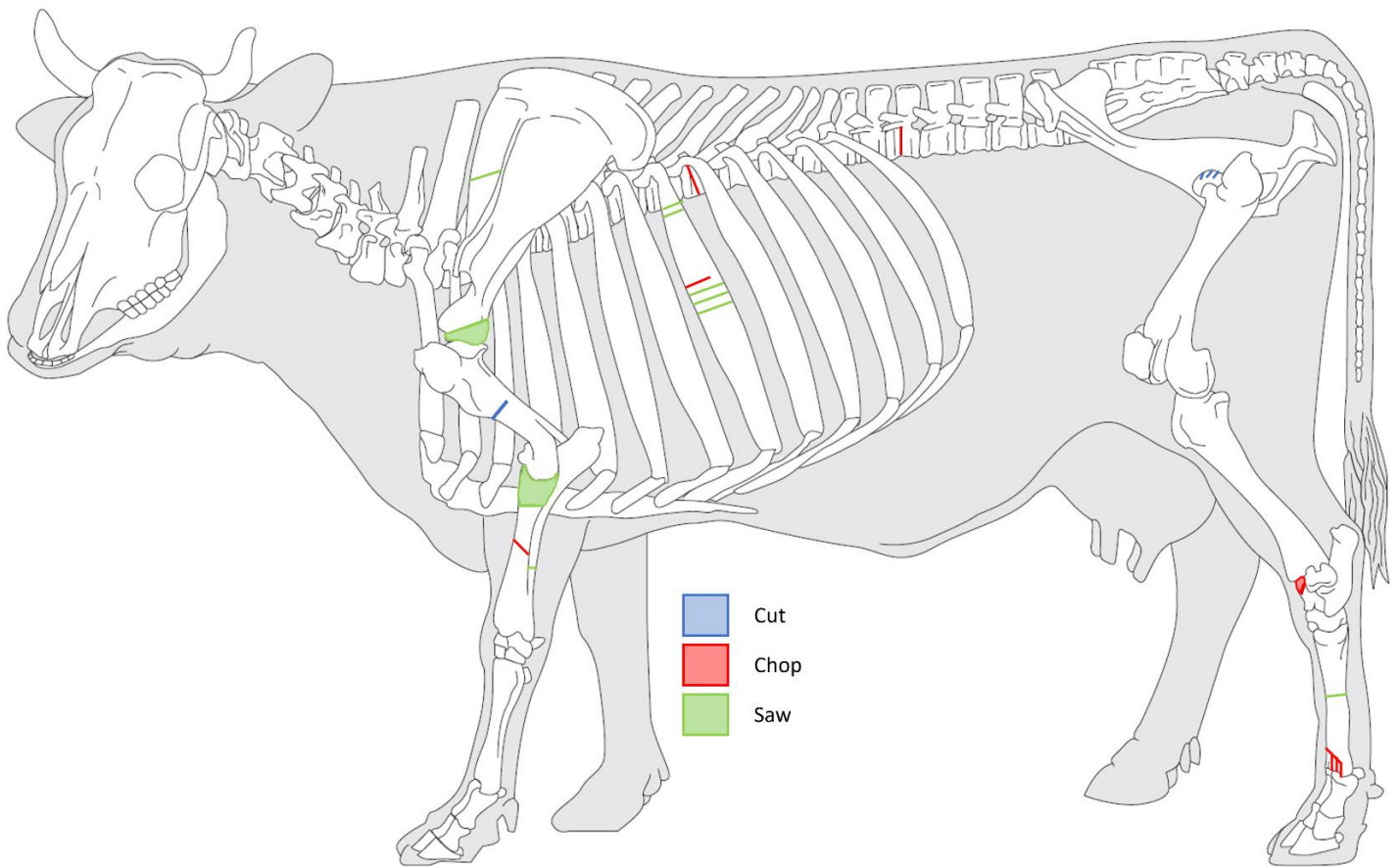


Figure 6: Butchery marks on *Bos taurus* and Large Mammal bone fragments. Shading specifies the section of the bone was completely removed. Single rib and vertebrae were chosen to identify all butchery marks on that element. (Vectorised skeleton template from ArchéoZoothèque).

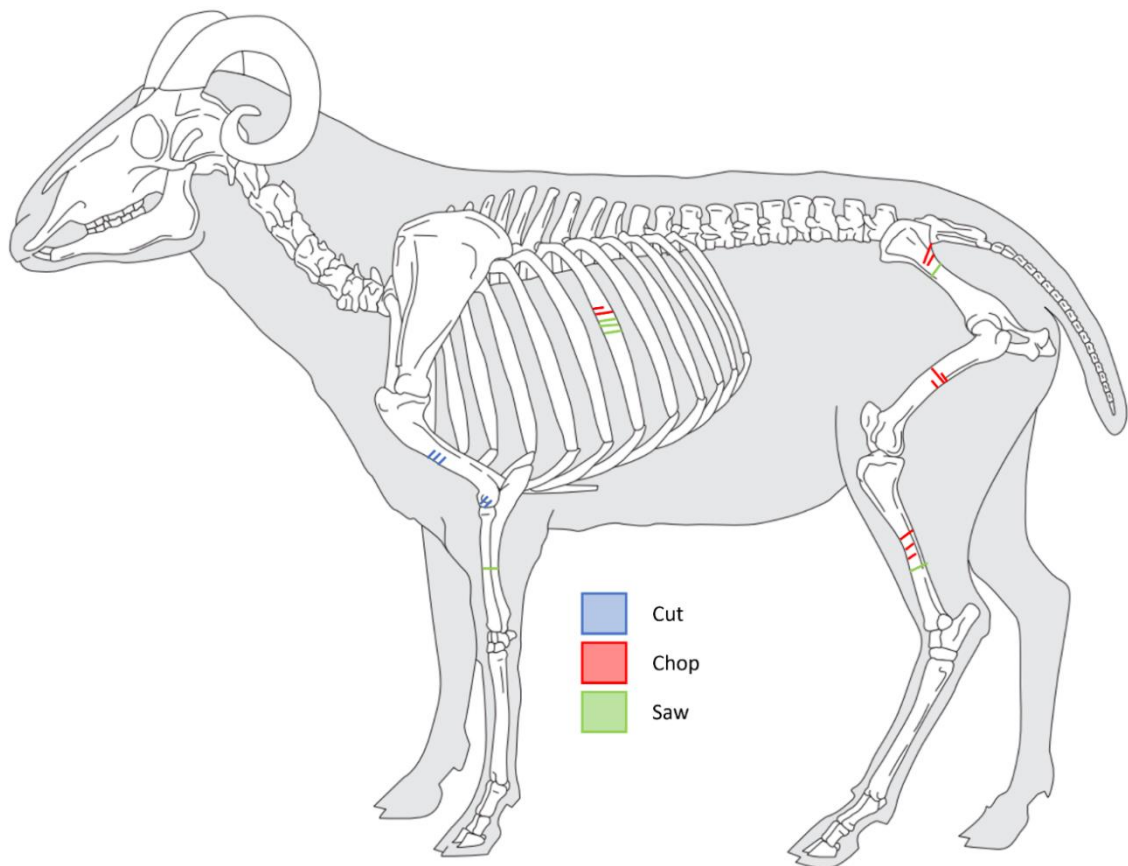


Figure 7: Butchery marks on *Ovis/Capra* and Medium Mammal bone fragments. Single rib was chosen to identify all butchery marks on that element. (Vectorised skeleton template from ArchéoZoothèque).



Figure 8: Sawing marks on *Bos taurus* tibia.



Figure 9: Sawing marks on end of *Cervus ephalus* antler.

Pathology

Two instances of pathology were identified in the assemblage. The first was a healed rib fracture from a medium-sized animal, likely a sheep (Figure 10). The presence of healing indicates that the animal survived for some time after the injury, suggesting it retained economic value beyond immediate meat consumption. This interpretation assumes the rib belonged to a sheep, though the fragment's small size and lack of diagnostic features make positive identification impossible.



Figure 10: Medium-sized mammal rib with healed fracture.

The second pathological case involved acquired tooth loss in a dog mandible (Figure 11). The mandible shows that the fourth premolar (P4) was lost during the animal's lifetime, as evidenced by healing in the tooth socket. This tooth plays a key role in food processing, so its loss would have reduced feeding efficiency. The most likely causes are periodontal disease or heavy wear. The healed socket indicates the dog survived for some time after losing the tooth, implying it could still feed and may have been cared for or tolerated by humans.



Figure 11: Canis familiaris mandible with P4 missing and healing tooth socket.

Bone Artefact

A worked bone artefact was recovered from the site (Figure 12). The object is best interpreted as a bone pin. It lacks an eye and is therefore unlikely to represent a sewing needle. While awls are known from medieval contexts in York, these typically differ in form, often being more symmetrically tapered or pointed at both ends (Ottaway and Rogers 2002, 2728), unlike the artefact found at Castle Hill.

The artefact has a distinct expanded head and a tapering shaft, consistent with bone pins used as clothing fasteners or hair pins. The enlarged head would have functioned to prevent the pin from slipping through fabric or hair.

Close parallels are known from medieval contexts, including an example from Oegstgeest, Netherlands, where a similar object was interpreted as a pin used to fasten a leather purse (Kromotaroeno 2022).



Figure 12: Bone artefact.

Summary

The Castle Hill faunal assemblage reflects a high-status medieval consumption pattern characterised by moderate pig exploitation, access to hunted game, use of marine resources, and significant oyster consumption. Pig is often associated with elite consumption due to higher feeding costs and less utility beyond meat. Although limited, the presence of red deer and wild birds indicates access to a socially restricted resource in many medieval landscapes. The presence of cod, haddock, and oyster implies dietary diversity beyond inland agriculture, though this may also be explained by their close proximity to the sea. Patterns of animal use reveal careful management and selective exploitation: cattle and sheep/goat were retained for secondary purposes such as traction, milk, or wool before entering the food chain, while pigs were maintained as high-value meat sources, reflecting both cost and prestige. Butchery evidence shows a deliberate approach to carcass processing, with heavy chopping, fine filleting, and selective sawing indicating organised preparation rather than subsistence-driven necessity. Overall, the Castle Hill assemblage is highly informative, with a diverse range of species that provides valuable insights into the site's status, diet, and patterns of animal use.

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Tables

Taxonomic Name	Common Name	Trench 1	Trench 2	Trench 3	Trench 4	Trench 5	Trench 6	Trench 7	Trench 8	Trench 9	Total
<i>Ovis/Capra</i>	Sheep/goat	1	25	1	3	14	10	3	30	100	187
<i>Ovis aries</i>	Sheep		1		1				3	4	9
<i>Bos taurus</i>	Cow	11	25		6	26	4	5	21	73	171
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Pig		26		5	9	1	1	4	16	62
<i>Equus sp.</i>	Horse						2	3	1	2	8
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Red deer		2								2
<i>Felis catus</i>	Cat		2							17	19
<i>Canis familiaris</i>	Dog			3					2	8	13
<i>Lepus sp.</i>	Rabbit/Hare		2					1	1	2	6
<i>Rattus sp.</i>	Rat							1		1	2
<i>Homo sp.</i>	Human								1		1
<i>Gallus gallus</i>	Chicken		9			3		5		9	26
<i>Anser anser</i>	Goose		4		1			2		3	10
<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	Mallard		1								1
<i>Columba livia</i>	Pigeon									1	1
<i>Phasianus sp.</i>	Pheasant		1								1
Anatidae	Ducks									1	1
Anserinae	Waterfowl									1	1
Charadriidae	Plovers									1	1
Anura	Frog/Toad								1	1	2
<i>Gadus morhua</i>	Cod		1							3	4

<i>Melanogrammus aeglefinus</i>	Haddock					1					1
<i>Ostrea edulis</i>	European Oyster									30	30
<i>Buccinum undatum</i>	Whelk				1						1
Natacidae	Moon Snail									1	1
Mytilidae	Mussels									2	2
Patellidae	Limpets					1					1
Identified Total		12	99	4	17	54	17	21	64	276	564
Large mammal		11	48	1	14	32	2	7	36	78	229
Medium mammal		3	34	2	8	16	7	11	20	83	184
Small mammal			2	1				1	1	4	9
Medium bird		5	5			1		6	1	4	22
Indeterminate mammal		14	189	6	11	85	17	18	45	175	560
Unidentified Total		33	277	10	33	135	26	43	103	344	1004
Total		45	377	14	50	188	43	64	167	620	1568

Table 5: NISP species representation from Brompton Castle separated by trench.

Taxonomic Name	Common Name	1001	1003	2002	Unstrata	Total
<i>Ovis/Capra</i>	Sheep/goat	7	1			8
<i>Bos taurus</i>	Cow	3	13			16
<i>Sus scrofa</i>	Pig	1	4			5
<i>Cervus elaphus</i>	Red deer		1			1
<i>Anser anser</i>	Goose		1			1
<i>Corvus sp.</i>	Crow	3				3
Identified total		14	20	0	0	34
Large mammal		7	3	1	1	12
Medium mammal		2	12			14
Small mammal		2			1	3
Medium bird			1			1
Indeterminate mammal		18	9		6	33
Unidentified total		29	25	1	8	63
Total		43	45	1	8	97

Table 6: NISP species representation from 2017 excavation outside of scheduled area.