

Site: Foundation Street, Ipswich

County: Suffolk

Reference No: IAS 5801

Type of site: Urban occupation

Period: Mid-Saxon to Medieval

Geology: Terrace gravels

Director: K. Wade

Type of material: Charred and mineralised plant remains

IAS 5801 (Foundation Street, Ipswich): Plant Remains.

Introduction

Samples taken from refuse pits at IAS 4302, 4801, 5502 and 7402 have given a provisional species list of plants utilised in Saxon and medieval Ipswich (Murphy, forthcoming). In the writer's opinion it is unlikely that further detailed study of samples from refuse pits at sites on the dryer gravel soils of Ipswich will produce significant amounts of new information. It is possible that a few new taxa of minor importance might be recovered, though it may be doubted whether such results would justify the time spent. In addition the mixed character of seed assemblages from secondary refuse contexts makes their interpretation in terms of human activities very difficult. With limited time available it seems better to concentrate attention on those deposits from the town which, by virtue of their contexts, composition or preservation conditions, are likely to produce new data rather than merely duplicating data already obtained.

Methods

At this site large scale machine flotation and wet-sieving of samples from pits was carried out on site, mainly for the recovery of fish-bone. Large quantities of flot were produced, but for the reasons outlined above this has not been examined in detail. Instead the flot has been scanned over fairly rapidly to assess its potential value. Samples containing mainly carbonised cereals, mineralised Prunus and Rubus fruitstones and large numbers of Sambucus seeds were not thought to merit detailed study since they appeared to be virtually identical to samples examined at the sites mentioned

above. The flot has, however, been retained for future study, should this be thought worthwhile.

0065

Waterlogged brown (10 YR 4/3) sediment*; rare small sub-angular flints; abundant phosphatic concretions (up to 10cm); mineralised fruits, seeds and textile fragments; mineralised fly pupae and woodlice; oyster and mussel shell fragments; fishbone, small mammal bone; avian eggshell. *(The concreted character of this deposit makes description of soil texture impossible).

The soil sample from this medieval pit was examined in detail; plant material identified is listed in Table 1. The plant remains in this deposit are preserved largely by mineralisation - the replacement of plant tissue by calcium phosphate. Fluctuating groundwater levels have probably resulted in periodic drying of the deposit. The phosphate in such deposits is probably of biogenic origin, and the calcium may have come from lime thrown into the pit as a sterilising agent (Green 1979). Small quantities of mineralised seeds have been isolated from most other deposits examined at Ipswich, but here the content of calcium phosphate is much higher, and indeed the sample included large phosphatic concretions. The species list is very short, consisting largely of cultivated plants. Most of these are represented by material which could have passed relatively unaltered through the human digestive tract: fig achenes, fragments of grape pips, fruitstones of blackberry, elder seeds, mulberry seeds, scraps of bean testa and cereal pericarp. The remaining material could represent floor sweepings thrown into the pit, or perhaps straw etc. deposited in an attempt to suppress odours. The sample is a fairly typical example of a cess deposit of a type common at medieval urban sites, but,(since attention has been focussed on Saxon features),not before examined at Ipswich.

0065 continued

It gives the first records of *Vitis vinifera* (grape), *Ficus carica* (fig) and *Morus nigra* (mulberry) from the town. Mulberry is a surprisingly rare species in medieval deposits from Southern Britain; at Winchester, by way of comparison it has been recovered only from one or two contexts (F. Green, pers. comm.), and may perhaps have been a luxury foodstuff not widely consumed.

Green, F. (1979) Phosphatic mineralisation of seeds from Archaeological Sites *Journal of Archaeological Science* 6, 279-284.

<i>Ficus carica</i>	99	(+117)
<i>Vitis vinifera</i>	32	(+7)
<i>Morus nigra</i>	(2)	
<i>Rubus fruticosus</i>	(9)	
<i>Rubus</i> sp. (frags)	7	
c.f. <i>Prunus</i> sp. (internal endocarp casts)	(2)	
c.f. <i>Triticum</i> sp. (testa with part of pericarp)	(1)	
<i>Triticum aestivum</i> (rachis internodes)	(2)	
<i>Triticum aestivum/compactum</i> (rachis internodes)	(3)	
<i>Vicia faba</i> c.f. var <i>minor</i> (testa frags with hilum)	(3)	
<i>Papaver</i> c.f. <i>rheas</i>	1	
<i>Chenopodium album</i>	(3)	
<i>Conium maculatum</i> (frag)	(1)	
Umbelliferae indet	(18)	
<i>Juncus</i> sp.		+ (not counted)
Unidentified stem frags etc.		
Sample weight		4Kg (wet)

Table : Mineralised plant remains from 0065

Taxa are represented by fruits or seeds unless otherwise indicated. Specimens recovered from the non-floating residue are listed in brackets.