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The charred plant remains from Cuxton, Kent

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1 INTRODUCTION

Seven environmental samples were taken from the Anglo-Saxon cemetery site at Cuxton (ARC CXT98). Preservation of plant remains was found at assessment to be poor, but an assemblage of charred cereal remains and weed seeds was noted in one sample from early Iron Age pitfill [342], and these have been identified and quantified.

2 METHODS

The samples were processed by flotation, using meshes of 0.25mm and 1.0mm to catch the flot and residue respectively. Both fractions were dried and the residue sorted by eye, while a low-powered binocular microscope was used for sorting the flot. Plant macrofossils from pit fill [342] were then identified, quantified, and recorded on the MoLAS ORACLE database. The plant taxa identified from each sample are shown in Table 1.

3 RESULTS

Over 100 charred plant items were recovered from the sample, of which 32% were cereal grains, 22% cereal chaff, and 46% weed seeds. The majority of grains were from wheat, and probably included both emmer (*Triticum dicoccum*) and spelt (*Triticum spelta*). Both of these species were identified from chaff fragments, with spelt glume bases and spikelet forks slightly more common than emmer. Occasional grains of 6-row barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) and oats (*Avena* sp.) were also recovered, as well as a single oat floret whose condition was too poor to identify to species. Occasional cereal awn fragments were also found. A variety of weed seeds comprised the largest part of the assemblage, most of them common arable weeds, and including corn gromwell (*Lithospermum arvense*), corn spurrey (*Spergula arvensis*), bedstraw (*Galium* sp.), mallow (*Malva* sp.) and wild grasses (Poaceae).

4 DISCUSSION

Study of the charred plant assemblage from pitfill [342] indicates that at least two wheats, emmer and spelt, were in use on the Cuxton site during the early Iron Age, as well as 6-row hulled barley and possibly oats. Emmer was the main wheat species in use in this country during the Bronze Age, but spelt became widespread during the Iron Age, and both cereals have been found on other sites of similar date within the CTRL project. The relatively high ratio of weed seeds and chaff to grain suggests that the crop or crops, from which these

remains had come, had been only partially cleaned. It is possible that pit [343] had been used for storing semi-cleaned grain, with the wheat still enclosed in its spikelets, but the small size of the assemblage suggests that it is more likely to come from general domestic waste, including residues of crop cleaning by-products, used as fuel.

The majority of the weed seeds in the assemblage could not be identified to species, but corn spurrey and corn gromwell are both arable weeds of relatively acid soils, and as this site lies on chalky ground, it may be that the cereals were grown some distance away.

5 BIBLIOGRAPHY

Greig, J, 1991 The British Isles, in (eds) *Progress in Old World Palaeoethnobotany* (eds W Van Zeist *et al*), Rotterdam

Table 1: The charred plant remains from Pit [343]

	group:	**4**
	subgroup:	**64**
	context:	**342**
	sample:	**11**
Latin name	**common name**	
cereal grains		
Triticum dicoccum L.	emmer wheat	9
Triticum cf. *dicoccum*	emmer wheat	2
Triticum spelta L.	spelt wheat	8
Triticum dicoccum/spelta	emmer/spelt	5
Triticum sp.	wheat	6
Hordeum vulgare L.	6-row barley	5
cf. *Hordeum vulgare*	6-row barley	1
Avena sp.	oats	5
total grains		41
cereal chaff		
Triticum cf. *dicoccum*	emmer glume base	3
Triticum spelta L.	spelt spikelet fork	2
Triticum spelta L.	spelt glume base	10
Triticum cf. *spelta*	spelt glume base	1
Triticum dicoccum/spelta	emmer/spelt glume base	11
Avena sp.	oat floret	1
Cerealia	indet. cereal awn	+
total chaff (excluding awns)		28
other plants		
Papaver sp.	poppy	1
Spergula arvensis L.	corn spurrey	2
Chenopodium sp.	goosefoot etc.	6
Atriplex sp.	orache	1
Malva sp.	mallow	3
cf. *Trifolium* sp.	clover	2
Rumex spp.	docks	5
Myosotis sp.	forget-me-not	1
Lithospermum arvense L.	corn gromwell	8
Hyoscyamus niger L.	henbane	2
Euphrasia/Odontites sp.	euphrasia/red bartsia	1
Galium sp.	bedstraw	7
Eleocharis palustris/uniglumis	spike-rush	2
Carex spp.	sedges	3
Bromus spp.	brome grasses	2
Poaceae	grasses	8
indeterminate	bud	4
total weed seeds		54