## 7.19 ASSESSMENT OF THE MARINE MOLLUSCA

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*Summary*

7.19.1 The small assemblage of marine molluscan remains recovered from the site has been identified and weighed. Oyster, cockle and mussel were represented in several samples, winkle and tellin were represented in single samples; see table One for details.

*Introduction*

7.19.2 Marine molluscan shells were recovered by hand during excavation and from the bulk sample residues taken from pit and ditch fills.

*Methodology*

7.19.3 The samples were sieved onto nested 2mm and 1mm meshes after carrying out bucket flotation onto 0.5mm. mesh. The 2mm fractions from each sample were sorted in their entirety and searched for molluscan remains.

*Quantification*

7.19.4 The marine shells recovered by hand consisted of 54 partial or complete oyster shells with a total weight of 732g. The sieved samples produced a wider range of species. Cockle and mussel shell was common in a few samples, but generally the remains consisted of small quantities of fragmentary oyster, mussel and cockle shell (Table One). Winkle and tellin were recorded in single samples, as were the calcareous tubes of marine annelid worms (commonly found adhering to shells) and a crustacean claw.

### 7.19.5 Table One

*Marine Molluscs*

| Context | Sample | Group | Sub-Gp | Phase | 10-50% | 1-10% | <1% | Trace |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 309 | 1000 | 22 | 139 | 3 | | | Oyster | |
| 309 | | | | | | | Mussel | |
| 309 | | | | | | | Cockle | |
| 314 | 1001 | 17 | 32 | 3 | | | | Shellfish |
| 314 | | | | | | | | Crustacean Claw |
| 330 | 1003 | 26 | 36 | 4 | | | Oyster | |
| 330 | | | | | | | Mussel | |
| 328 | 1004 | 10 | 33 | 3 | | | | Oyster |
| 328 | | | | | | | | Mussel |
| 324 | 1005 | 10 | 141 | 3 | | | | Oyster |
| 324 | | | | | | | | Mussel |
| 341 | 1006 | 0 | 0 | 0 | | | Mussel | |
| 347 | 1007 | 6 | 25 | 3 | | | Mussel | |
| 353 | 1009 | 33 | 99 | 5 | | | | Mussel |
| 350 | 1011 | 10 | 166 | 3 | | | | Shellfish |
| 362 | 1012 | 22 | 167 | 3 | | | | Shellfish |
| 374 | 1016 | 7 | 26 | 3 | | | Cockle | |
| 366 | 1017 | 11 | 27 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 383 | 1019 | 6 | 131 | 3 | Mussel | | | |
| 403 | 1022 | 11 | 129 | 3 | Mussel | | | |
| 403 | | | | | Cockle | | | |
| 414 | 1023 | 6 | 130 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 419 | 1024 | 6 | 130 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 440 | 1028 | 11 | 164 | 3 | | Cockle | | Mussel |
| 432 | 1029 | 12 | 146 | 3 | | | | Oyster |
| 432 | | | | | | | | Mussel |
| 499 | 1039 | 12 | 179 | 3 | | | Oyster | |
| 499 | | | | | | | Mussel | |
| 510 | 1042 | 20 | 120 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 515 | 1044 | 6 | 180 | 3 | | | Mussel | |
| 516 | 1045 | 6 | 180 | 3 | | | Shellfish | |
| 518 | 1047 | 6 | 180 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 518 | | | | | | | | Cockle |
| 519 | 1048 | 14 | 65 | 3 | | | Mussel | |
| 567 | 1064 | 13 | 107 | 3 | | | Shellfish | |
| 570 | 1067 | 23 | 111 | 3 | | Mussel | | |
| 573 | 1070 | 4 | 101 | 2 | | | | Mussel |
| 574 | 1071 | 4 | 101 | 2 | | Oyster | Cockle | |
| 584 | 1075 | 4 | 171 | 2 | | | Mussel | |
| 584 | | | | | | | Cockle | |
| 587 | 1076 | 13 | 162 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 589 | 1077 | 9 | 13 | 3 | | | | Mussel |
| 599 | 1080 | 13 | 161 | 3 | | | Mussel | |
| 622 | 1089 | 2 | 160 | 2 | | | Cockle | |
| 618 | 1090 | 3 | 115 | 2 | | | Mussel | |

*Provenance*

7.19.6 All of the material described above is of marine origin, and it suggests that East Kent fishermen were either providing these resources at Mersham markets, or that, in the light of the documentary evidence (see Appendix 7.21), some of the Mersham fishermen had access to marine resources.

*Conservation*

7.19.7 All of the material is inherently stable and has been packaged for long-term storage.

*Comparative material*

7.19.8 Marine molluscs were found in abundance at Townwall Street (Dover) in early medieval contexts. Most of that material has not been studied in any detail, however, and there is a general lack of analysis of marine remains from East Kent sites. This enhances the value of the Mersham assemblage, which, although small, is worthy of publication in a summary form at least, as a significant part of the dietary evidence for the site, particularly in the early medieval period, in particular (25 of the 34 samples are from Phase 3).

*Potential for further work*

7.19.9 The lack of comparative studies from elsewhere in East Kent is to be regretted, but that does not diminish from the value of this assemblage which appears to represent not inconsiderable component of the dietary regime (and thus the trading connections) of Mersham in the early medieval period. The material is generally unspectacular and there is too little for any detailed quantification to be carried out. No further work is required on the specimens. Nonetheless, the material does warrant summary publication, as valuable evidence for the presence of marine molluscs prepared for consumption at an inland site.

## 7.20 ASSESSMENT OF THE LAND SNAILS

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*Summary*

7.20.1 A sample of flot from washover floatation was presented for assessment. The assemblage contained a number of large and apical fragments of *Helix aspersa,* which is a Roman introduction, and also one *Candidula* sp., which is a medieval one. The assemblage is post-Roman and probably medieval or later. The composition of the assemblage indicates terrestrial, synanthropic habitats. No further work is recommended.

*Introduction*

7.20.2 One sample was received from CAT for assessment of the land snails. The sample (number 1025) was from a flot from washover floatation. It was from one of the fills of an early medieval pit (context 422, sub-group 63, Group13, Phase 3) that appears to have been cut specifically to dispose of metal-working debris.

7.20.3 The assessment aims were to;

- quantify shells to indicate if statistically viable analysis was possible;
- characterise the assemblage;
- indicate if there was change in the local environment over time;
- examine if the assemblage will determine whether ditches or other features contained water;
- indicate the potential resolution of interpretation.

*Methodology*

7.20.4 The available material was scanned under a x10 to x30 stereo-binocular microscope to identify the basic mollusc taxa/species present and, crudely, quantify the total numbers in the fractions received, from which it can be determined whether the total assemblages are likely to be statistically viable for analysis.

7.20.5 For assessment of the snails it is normal to assess the flots that contain the majority of the floating shells. There is some minor inherent bias in the flots as some species and shell fragments will not have floated and may only be present in the unextracted residues. The flot is likely to contain shells that are less likely to break (*i.e.*, larger robust species and very small species). Nevertheless the flots normally contain the majority of the shells in any sample and are more representative of the total assemblage. By contrast the residues usually contain shell fragments, the majority of which are non-apical and undiagnostic.

*Quantification*

7.20.6 The residue was very ‘dirty’ and contained a large quantity of fine sand. Although shells were very abundant, the taxonomic range was very limited and thus, with high numbers of shells, simple quantification was of little significance.

7.20.7 The results are given in Table 1 and are presented in habitat preferences rather than taxonomic order for ease of reference.

**7.20.8 Table One**

*Land Snails*

| ***Context*** | ***422*** |
|---|---|
| ***Sample*** | ***1025*** |
| OPEN COUNTRY | |
| *Candidula* sp | A |
| CATHOLIC SP | |
| *Trichia hispida* | A |
| *Monachia* cf *cantiana* | A |
| *Helix aspersa* | C |
| SHADE LOVING | |
| *Discus rotundatus* | C |
| *Aegopinella nitidula* | B |
| *Oxychilus* sp. | B |
| BURROWING SPECIES | |
| *Ceclioides acicula* | B |
| | 100+ |

KEY: A 10 items or more
B 5 to 9 items
C 4 items or fewer

*Provenance*

7.20.9 The assemblage contained a number of large and apical fragments of *Helix aspersa,* which is a Roman introduction, and also one *Candidula* sp., which is a medieval introduction. The assemblage is post-Roman and probably medieval or later. The composition of the scanned assemblage seems to indicate strongly terrestrial habitats; many of the species present although classed shade-loving (according to Evans 1972), are synanthropic and may be found in garden habitats, debris and rock rubble.

*Conservation*

7.20.10 All of the material is inherently stable and has been packaged for long-term storage.

*Comparative material*

7.20.11 Comparable material is ubiquitous but of little value in terms of addressing the Fieldwork Event Aims or Landscape Zone Priorities.

*Potential for further work*

7.20.12 Very high shell numbers were present and statistically viable analysis is possible. To provide a total assemblage would require sorting the residue, ideally to 0.5mm, in order to recover other species. However, the assessed assemblage indicates a regime favouring synanthropic species and further analysis would probably not be of great environmental value for this site.

### 7.20.13 Bibliography

Evans, J.G. 1972; *Land Snails in Archaeology*, London Seminar Press.