

ASSESSMENT OF PLANT REMAINS

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 A total of 46 bulk samples with individual volumes of 2-70 litres were taken during the excavation phase. The total volume of soil processed was 878 litres, with 435 litres of this coming from the fills of a feature containing plant remains, which was initially thought to be a possible oven or corn drier (URS 1998, 13).

2 Methodology

- 2.1 Due to the high clay content of the soil, each sample was soaked in a weak hydrogen peroxide solution (<1%) prior to processing. After this, bucket flotation to remove lighter biological material was carried out to produce a washover onto 0.5mm mesh. The soil remaining in the bucket after this process was then sieved to 2mm. Washovers and residues from each sample were dried and examined briefly.

3 Quantification

- 3.1 A number of features, including ditches, gullies, pit fills and the fill of a post hole were sampled. These generally produced small washovers, of 20ml or less. Most of these contained only a few cereal grains (less than 10) and small amounts of charcoal, although there were several where charred remains were a little more common. These included the upper fill of a ditch (sub-group 45), several ditch fills (sub-groups 14 and 20), the fill of a burnt feature (sub-group 10). Most of these are features assigned to Phase 3 (Table 10).
- 3.2 The principal results of interest, however, came from the eleven samples taken of the pit fill (sub-group 21). Samples taken from this feature were very rich in charred cereal remains, some containing several thousand grains. The bulk of these are grains of oat (*Avena*). Lower numbers of grains of rye (*Secale cereale*) and free-threshing wheat (*Triticum*) and occasional grains of barley (*Hordeum vulgare*) were also present. Cereal chaff was present in one sample. Weed seeds, especially brome grass (*Bromus* subset *Eubromus*) were common, and possible pulses were also seen.

4 Conservation

- 4.1 The charred remains are in an excellent state of preservation. They are currently stored in sealtight plastic bags. No conservation work is required on them. They take up only a small amount of space and, given the rarity of plant remains of this period from East Kent, it is recommended that they are retained in long-term storage.

5 Comparative Material

- 5.1 There is little comparative material of early medieval date from rural sites in East Kent. The principal assemblages against which these remains can be compared are the much smaller assemblage from Mersham and the plant remains from Monkton on the Isle of Thanet (Wiltshire forthcoming). The plant remains from Townwall Street, Dover are contemporary, although they stem from an urban context (Campbell forthcoming). The earlier evaluation report noted also the presence of botanical remains from other CTRL sites at Boys Hall Road and East of Pluckley Road (URS 1998, 25).

6 Potential for further work

- 6.1 The potential for analysis of the principal assemblage here is very high and further work on the assemblage is strongly recommended. The site information is reasonable, allowing the assemblage to be placed within a dated framework. Relatively little is known of the crop history of East Kent and the composition of this assemblage is unusual by the standards of other areas of southern Britain. Further work should produce information on agricultural practices and crop processing techniques relating to the farmsteads, and also on the contemporary environment.
- 6.2 Detailed analysis of the plant remains from the pit may help to establish the function of the feature, or determine if the assemblages are redeposited burnt refuse. The large numbers of oat grains present may suggest that the feature is not a corn drier, as oats do not usually require drying. It will be particularly important to examine spatial differences within the feature for evidence of its use. Analysis of the charcoal will provide evidence of fuel types.
- 6.3 The plant remains are directly relevant to the Fieldwork Event Aim to:
Recover charred plant material and other economic indicators for palaeo-economic studies.
- 6.4 This assemblage, although centred on a single period, provides significant information relating to agricultural practices and crop processing techniques within a rural environment at that time.

Table Ten

Summary of Principal Excavated Contexts with Plant Remains

<i>Site</i>	<i>Context</i>	<i>Sub-Group</i>	<i>Group</i>	<i>Phase</i>	<i>Sample No.</i>
CAT Excavation	47	45	7	3	9
CAT Excavation	82	14	8	3	15
CAT Excavation	138	12	12	3	29
CAT Excavation	144	20	8	3	30
CAT Excavation	156	21	11	3	35,36
CAT Excavation	165	20	8	3	43

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