

1.1 Assessment of the Charred Plant Remains and Charcoal

by Ruth Pelling

Introduction

- 1.1.1 A sample was recovered during watching brief works for the recovery of charred plant remains and charcoal, in order to characterise the isolated Romano-British (late 2nd-4th century AD) feature from which the sample was recovered.
- 1.1.2 The recovery and study of the material was undertaken in accordance with the Fieldwork Event Aims (see section 2, main report), in particular 1-3 and 5.

Methodology

- 1.1.3 A sample of 40 litres was processed by bulk water flotation and the flots collected onto a 250 µm mesh sieve. The flots were air dried slowly before being submitted for assessment. It was hoped that the sample would give some indication about the cereal economy of the site. The flots were assessed by scanning under a binocular microscope at x10 magnification. Any seeds or chaff noted were provisionally identified and an estimate of abundance made. Random fragments of charcoal were fractured and examined in transverse section at x10 and x20 magnification. The results of the assessment are noted in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Charred remains noted in the sample

Sample	Cxt	Vol. Deposit (l)	Vol Flot (ml)	Feature	Grain	Chaff	Weeds	Charcoal	Notes
1	44	40	250	Pit	+	+	+	++	Rhizomes

Key: +=1-10, ++= 11-50

Quantification

- 1.1.4 The flots measured approximately 250 ml in volume.
- 1.1.5 Charred plant remains were present in low numbers, with less than 10 items each of grain, chaff and weeds. The grain identified includes *Hordeum vulgare* (barley) and *Triticum spelta* (spelt wheat). Occasional monocotyledon rhizomes were noted, which could be derived from a grass, including the cereals. Their presence might indicate the use of turf as fuel, although there is no other evidence for this. Alternatively they might demonstrate the harvesting of cereals by uprooting. Two charcoal taxa were provisionally identified, Pomoideae (apple, pear, hawthorn etc) and *Quercus* sp. (oak).

Provenance

- 1.1.6 The sample is derived from the fill of a possible quarry pit which is likely to have been re-used for rubbish disposal. The cereal remains are likely to be derived from small-scale cereal processing, deposited with the charcoal, perhaps derived from the same burning episode, or fire.

Conservation

- 1.1.7 The flots are in a stable condition and can be archived for long-term storage.

Comparative Material

- 1.1.8 The cereal species recorded are well attested for Romano-British sites in southern Britain (see Greig 1991). Within the CTRL route, similar deposits representing small-scale cereal processing debris were also recorded at Hockers Lane. This is

very different to the deposits sampled from Thurnham Villa for which much larger scale cereal processing is represented.

Potential for further work

- 1.1.9 Given the absence of good cereal remains and the limited charcoal, the sample offers no potential for further work. Spelt wheat and hulled barley, were the cereals most commonly cultivated during the Romano-British period in southern Britain. The samples provide no potential for extending this species list. The remains are characteristic of low levels of re-deposited remains of cereal processing activity.

Bibliography

Greig, J, 1991 The British Isles, in *Progress in Old World palaeoethnobotany*, (eds W van Zeist, K Wasylikowa and K-E Behre), 299-334