

MY DAY OF ARCHAEOBOTANY

July 28, 2017 Lisa_Lodwick Day of Archaeology 2017, Environmental Archaeology, Fieldwork, Iron Age, UK

My last Day of Archaeology [post](#) was back in 2014, as I was finishing my Phd and doing a spot of field school teaching in the [final season](#) of the Silchester Town Life Project – a long term archaeological excavation within a Roman town in southern Britain. Since completing my Phd, I have been fortunate to be employed as a post-doctoral research assistant in the Department of Archaeology at the University of Reading. My time has been split between working on the second monograph of the [Rural Settlement of Roman Britain](#) project, and undertaking archaeobotanical analysis on various sites excavated by the Silchester projects. At the moment, I am looking at samples from a site excavated as part of the [Silchester Environs Project](#), which is exploring the first millennium BC landscape around Silchester. Several prehistoric enclosures were identified in Pamber Forest on the basis of Lidar and field survey. Trenches were excavated in spring 2017, revealing part of a late prehistoric settlement with a ring gully and possible evidence for charcoal-making. Pottery places some of the occupation in the Iron Age, but post-excavation dating and analysis are all ongoing.



Excavation within Pamber Forest showing multiple phases of activity. Photo credit: Silchester Environs Project.



Flotation sample ready for analysis

Silchester lies in an area of sandy-clay soils and gravels, to the north-east of the calcareous Hampshire Downs. We have a good understanding of farming practices on the chalk downlands, but little idea of farming in the area around Silchester prior to the development of the Late Iron Age *oppidum*. The hinterland of Silchester sees limited developer-funded archaeology, so it is really important that this project is able to undertake intensive sampling of excavations to recover a range of environmental remains. Bulk samples were taken during excavation of a range of features, and then processed in a flotation tank to separate charred plant remains and charcoal from the sediment.

My day went something like this:

09:00 Arrive at Work.

Drink coffee. Check emails.

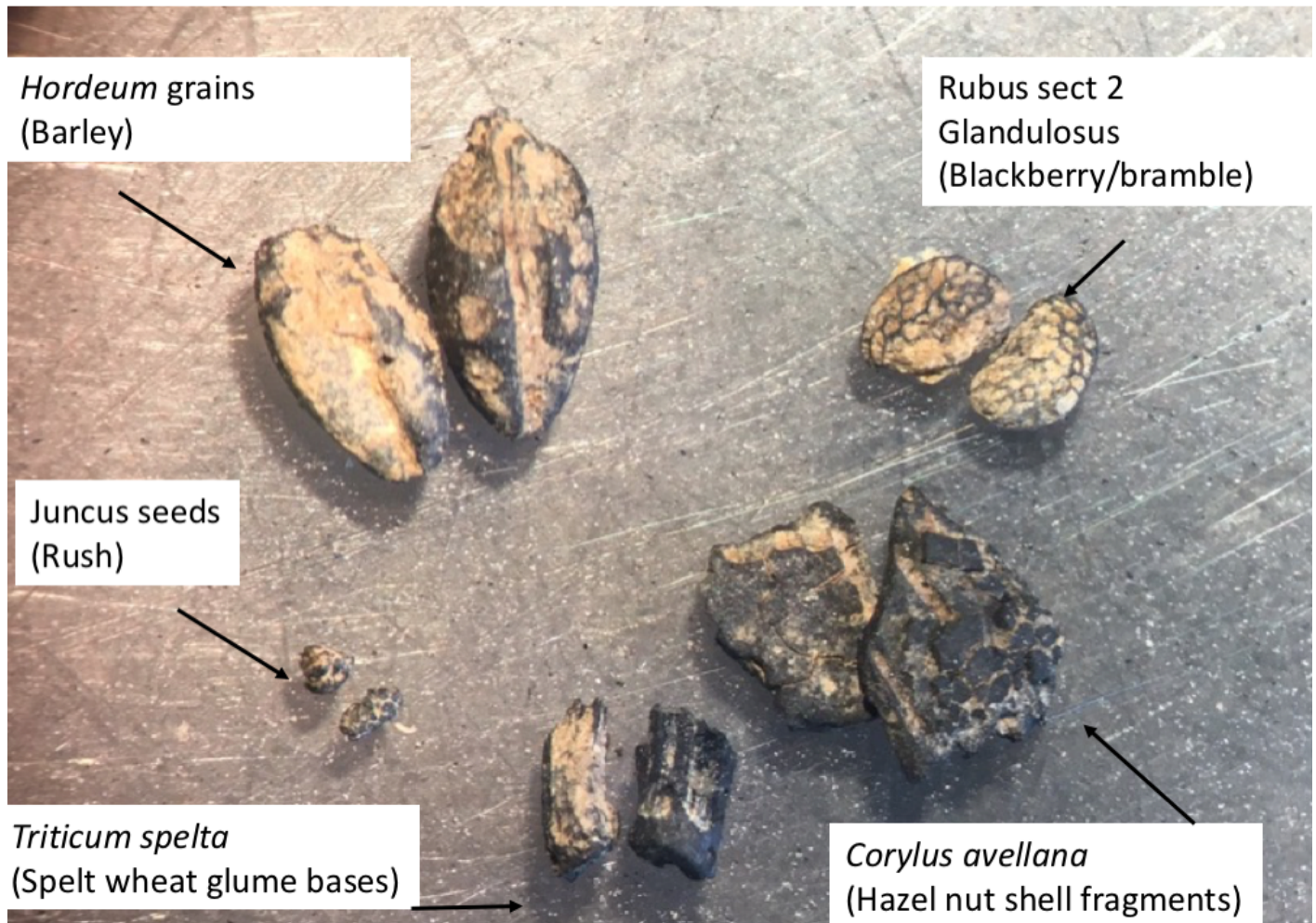
09:10 Begin microscope work.

I had spent the last two days assessing the samples from this site – undertaking a quick scan of the flots under the microscope and scoring the abundance of different grains, chaff, weed seeds and charcoal, plus recording the presence of any modern contamination. Charred plant remains were overall very rare, so I initially selected several samples which contained at least five items. I split each sample into size-fractions, and then get to work sorting at the microscope.

11:00 Coffee break with other members of the department. Reading has a lovely bunch of staff and students, and it's nice to hear how different projects are progressing.

11:30 Continue microscope work for the rest of the day (with a quick lunch break). Luckily my samples contained an interesting range of plant remains – barley grains, spelt wheat glume bases, blackberry seeds, hazel nutshell, a few rush seeds and some other weed seeds. This range of plants is typical for the Iron Age in this area, but the quantities recovered are very low – especially when compared to later

Iron Age settlements around Basingstoke. This suggests that arable farming was not undertaken at a very large scale. That said, the preservation conditions in Pamber Forest aren't great – the site is in an area of woodland, and many of the samples contained lots of modern roots. Radiocarbon dating will be undertaken on some of these plant remains in the future to check that they aren't intrusive from later activity. More excavations are planned for the future, and i'm looking forward to seeing what turns up in the samples.



The results of my day.

The site was excavated by the [Silchester Environs Team](#). Thanks go to the Calleva Foundation for their generous continuing support, also to the Englefield Estate, the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, Natural England and James Strang for their help and allowing us access to Pamber Forest and Simm's Copse.

Read about the ongoing Silchester excavations [here](#), and follow progress on [twitter](#) and [facebook](#).