



making sense of heritage

Land at Damson Parkway, Solihull

Charred Plant Remains
By Sarah F. Wyles



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Introduction

Sufficient numbers of charred plant remains were found within four soil samples to merit further study. These samples were recovered from pit 1035 and construction cut 1047, with the remaining pair coming from the same intervention dug into ditch 1252. The sampled features were either components of the building or lay in its immediate vicinity.

Methods

The bulk samples for charred remains were processed by standard flotation methods; the flot retained on a 0.5 mm mesh, residues fractionated into 5.6 mm, 2 mm and 1 mm fractions. The coarse fractions (> 5.6 mm) were sorted for artefacts and ecofacts, weighed and discarded.

At the analysis stage, all identifiable charred plant macrofossils were extracted from the flots, together with the 2 mm and 1 mm residues. Identification was undertaken using stereo incident light microscope at magnifications of up to x40 using a Leica MS5 microscope, following the nomenclature of Stace (1997) for wild species and the traditional nomenclature as provided by Zohary and Hopf (2000, tables 3 and 5), for cereals and with reference to modern reference collections where appropriate, quantified and the results tabulated (Table 1).

Results

Cereal remains dominated these assemblages. The majority of remains were of hulled wheat, emmer or spelt (*Triticum dicoccum/spelta*), with a small number of possible grain and rachis fragments of free-threshing wheat (*Triticum turgidum/aestivum* type) present. Chaff elements outnumbered grain fragments, particularly in the large assemblages from pit 1035 and fill 1069 in ditch 1252.

The glume base and spikelet fork fragments identifiable to species were those of spelt wheat (*Triticum spelta*), with no clear evidence of emmer wheat (*Triticum dicoccum*). There was evidence of germination on some of the hulled wheat grains,

together with coleoptile fragments, within the assemblages from pit 1035 and ditch 1252. Other potential crops include celtic beans (*Vicia faba*) recorded from ditch 1252. A few fragments of hazelnut (*Corylus avellana*) shell were also present in this feature.

The weed seed assemblages, dominated by seeds of oat (*Avena* sp.) and brome grass (*Bromus* sp.) are typical of grassland, field margins and arable environments, with no indication of the use of a number of different soils. The presence of hazelnut shell fragments may be indicative of foraging in hedgerows and scrub.

Discussion

The assemblages from Damson Parkway appear representative of general Romano-British rural settlement activities. Spelt wheat was the dominant wheat over much of lowland Britain during the occupation (Greig 1991) and it was the main type recovered here.

The composition of the assemblages is broadly similar to those recovered from other sites in the region, such as the former Hockley Chemical works, Alcester (Pelling 2001) and elsewhere (Monckton 1999a and b; Moffett 1986 and 1996; Colledge 1989).

The analysed assemblages at Damson Parkway are likely to indicate the dehusking of hulled grain stored as semi-cleaned grain or in spikelet form (Hillman 1981; 1984). This is where the crop has been stored after the initial threshing, winnowing and sieving, often out in the fields. The stored material is then pounded to release the grains (dehusking) before being sieved and sorted ready for use. The levels of germinated grain and coleoptile fragments are not as high as some recorded at the Hockley Chemical works (Pelling 2001), where it was thought that malting waste from brewing was used as fuel. There is no clear evidence that this was occurring at Damson Parkway, however.

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Table 1: Charred Plant Remains

Phase	Group	RB			
			Building group 1251	Boundary group 1252	Ditch group
Feature type		Pit	Construction cut	Ditch	
Cut		1035	1047	1062	
Context		1036	1048	1069	1070
Sample		1.4	1.3	1.1	1.2
Vol (L)		2	11	35	31
Flot size		40	15	150	100
%Roots		2	5	2	5
Cereals	Common Name				
<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L. <i>sl</i> (grain)	barley	-	-	2	-
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L. (glume bases)	spelt wheat	100	3	50	5
<i>Triticum spelta</i> L. (spikelet fork)	spelt wheat	5	1	1	-
<i>Triticum dicoccum/spelta</i> (grain)	emmer/spelt wheat	95	3	34	3
<i>Triticum dicoccum/spelta</i> (germinated grain)	emmer/spelt wheat	8	-	7	1
<i>Triticum dicoccum/spelta</i> (spikelet fork)	emmer/spelt wheat	75	2	225	9
<i>Triticum dicoccum/spelta</i> (glume bases)	emmer/spelt wheat	720	16	15	46
<i>Triticum turgidum/aestivum</i> (grain)	free-threshing wheat	cf. 8	cf. 1	cf. 3	cf. 1
<i>Triticum turgidum/aestivum</i> (rachis frags)	free-threshing wheat	9	-	2	3
Cereal indet. (grains)	cereal	115	15	75	22
Cereal frag. (est. whole grains)	cereal	50	5	30	5
Cereal frags (rachis frags)	cereal	-	-	-	1
Cereal frags (coleoptile)	cereal	2	-	3	-
Other Species					
<i>Corylus avellana</i> L. (fragments)	hazelnut	-	-	1 (<1 ml)	1 (<1 ml)
<i>Chenopodium</i> sp.	goosefoot	-	1	2	-
<i>Atriplex</i> sp. L.	oraches	-	-	1	-
<i>Rumex</i> sp. L.	docks	-	2	6	1
<i>Brassica</i> sp. L.	brassica	1	-	1	1
<i>Vicia</i> L./ <i>Lathyrus</i> sp. L.	vetch/wild pea	5	-	4	1
<i>Vicia faba</i>	celtic bean	-	-	-	1
<i>Crepis</i> sp. L.	hawk's-beard	1	-	-	-
<i>Tripleurospermum inodorum</i> (L.) Sch. Bip.	scentless mayweed	-	1	-	1
<i>Poa/Phleum</i> sp. L.	meadow grass/cat's-tails	1	-	-	1
<i>Avena</i> sp. L. (grain)	oat grain	28	3	20	2
<i>Avena</i> sp. L. (floret base)	oat floret	1	-	-	-
<i>Avena</i> L./ <i>Bromus</i> L. sp.	oat/brome grass	105	10	85	15
<i>Bromus</i> sp. L.	brome grass	35	3	32	2
Parenchyma/Tuber		-	-	-	1



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