

# ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

## REPORT

2520

**SERIES/No** CONTRACTOR

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**TITLE** Carbonised cereals and crop weeds  
from Sudbury

Carbonised cereals and crop weeds from Sudbury (SUY 014).

*P. Murphy*  
Carbonised seeds were recovered from two contexts:

43, an early medieval pit, and \_\_\_\_\_, a small gully, possibly of Iron Age date. Uncarbonised seeds of Sambucus nigra were also present, in both features. 2.5 litre samples were taken from each of the three main layers in pit 43 (29, 30 and 36), and from subsidiary charcoal lenses within layer 30. Carbonised material was extracted by simple water flotation, collecting the flot in a 250 micron mesh sieve.

The cereals and weed seeds identified are listed in Table .  
The remains of crop plants recovered from pit 43 closely resemble those which have been described from other early medieval sites in the area (e.g. Ipswich, Norwich, Tasburgh: All Murphy, forthcoming) and detailed descriptions will therefore not be given. The wheat grains from \_\_\_\_\_ are distorted, and poorly preserved, but they are elongate in form.

Sample No.		1	2	3	4	5	7
Feature No.		43					?
Layer No.		29	30	30	30	36	?
% flot examined		100	5	10	100	100	100
Cereal grains	Cereal indet. ca	12	3	-	37	7	5
	<u>Avena</u> sp. ca	1	2	2	4	2	-
	<u>Hordeum</u> sp. ca	3	1	3	12	-	-
	<u>Secale cereale</u> L. ca	1	-	2	-	-	-
	<u>Triticum aestivum</u> sl. ca	11	2	1	34	3	-
	<u>Triticum</u> sp. ca	-	-	-	-	-	8
Cereal chaff	<u>Hordeum</u> sp. ri	-	-	1	-	-	-
	<u>Avena</u> sp. fb	-	1	1	-	-	-
	<u>Avena sativa</u> L. fb	-	-	-	3(c)	-	-
	<u>Avena</u> sp. af	-	-	1	-	1	-
	Cereal indet. ri	-	1	4	3	-	-
Nut	<u>Corylus avellana</u> n.fr	1	1	-	1	-	-
Weed seeds.	<u>Brassica/Sinapis</u> sp. s	-	-	11	8	3	-
	<u>Agrostemma githago</u> L. s	-	1	-	3	1	-
	<u>Cerastium</u> sp. s	-	39	14	1	-	-
	<u>Chenopodium album</u> L. s	-	2	-	5	-	-
	<u>Malva</u> sp. nu	-	1	-	-	-	-
	cf. <u>Linum</u> sp. (b) s	-	1	-	-	-	-
	<u>Vicia</u> spp. s	4	2	2	13	1	-
	<u>Polygonum convolvulus</u> L. nu	1	-	1	1	-	-
	<u>Rumex acetosella</u> agg. nu	-	-	-	1	-	-
	<u>Rumex</u> sp. nu	-	-	-	1	3	-
	<u>Polygonaceae</u> indet. nu	-	-	1	2	1	-
	<u>Galium aparine</u> L. s	-	1	1	-	-	-
	<u>Sambucus nigra</u> L. (a) s	4	1	1	-	-	1
	<u>Anthemis cotula</u> L. cy	5	22	8	54	1	-
	<u>Lapsana communis</u> L. cy	-	-	1	-	-	-
	<u>Compositae</u> indet. cy	-	1	-	-	-	-
	<u>Carex</u> sp. nu	-	1	-	-	-	-
	<u>Bromus mollis/secalinus</u> ca	1	2	1	13	-	-
	<u>Gramineae</u> . ca	2	2	1	22	4	1
	Indet. bu	-	-	1	-	-	-
	Indet.	1	7	8	10	4	-

TABLE Fruits and seeds from St. Gregory's Street, Sudbury

Abbreviations:

af	awn fragment	n.fr	nutshell fragments
bu	bulbil	nu	nutlet
ca	caryopsis	ri	rachis internode
cy	cypsela	s	seed
fb	floret base	indet	indeterminate

Notes:

- a) uncarbonised
- b) 1.6 mm long: beak damaged
- c) one lower and two upper florets

## Discussion

The fruits and seeds recovered from pit 43 are all common in samples from early medieval sites in East Anglia. The cereals are oats, rye, barley and bread/club wheat, and a typical range of arable weed seeds is also present, together with carbonised hazel-nut shells. The samples are, however, unusual in their composition, which is summarised in Table

Sample No.	1	2	3	4	5
Cereal grains	28	8	8	87	12
Main cereal	Wheat	?	?	Wheat	?
Spikelet fragments*	0	2	7	3	0
Weed seeds	18	83	51	134	18
Hazel nuts	1	1	-	1	-

\* excluding oat awns.

Table : Numerical composition of samples from pit 43

There are relatively large numbers of carbonised weed seeds compared to the numbers of cereal grains, particularly in samples 2 and 3.

Cereal deposits of this general type from prehistoric sites have been interpreted as the residue from grain cleaning (Dennell 1974, 279); they consist of the weed seeds from the harvested crop, together with a proportion of the smaller cereal grains, the chaff having already been removed by the initial processes of threshing and winnowing. It seems probable that these samples from Sudbury represent the waste products of similar grain cleaning activities, carbonised whilst being burnt as refuse, and disposed of in pit 43. The carbonised hazel-nut shells were presumably introduced into the deposits at some subsequent stage.

The cereals from the gully, could not, unfortunately, be identified to species, but they are possibly spelt or emmer grains. This would be consistent with an Iron Age date for the feature.

~~\* particularly in samples 2 and 3.~~

Dennell, R.W. (1974) Botanical evidence for prehistoric crop processing activities.

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