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A preliminary report on material recovered in the excavations at Bolebridge Street, Tamworth.

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TAMWORTH, BOLEBRIDGE STREET. "BLUE ALLUVIUM" layer

Although the deposit is loosely described as alluvium, very little is known about its provenance and age, except that the deposit appears to be post-medieval in date. It is a rather sandy material with a certain amount of clay as might be expected of a water-borne deposit, and the sample was collected by spade from the bottom of a hole rather than from a section, due to the usual limitations of urban archaeology.

The biological remains are mainly seeds. Pollen analysis was not undertaken on this material, and there were few other macroscopic remains apart from fish bone, some molluscs that were too fragmentary for identification, some remains of ostracods and a very few beetle remains which have not been identified.

The seed list has been drawn up in alphabetical order of scientific names, with the general habitat of each plant indicated in one of three basic groups --- there are weeds, which are plants which grow on disturbed ground such as arable land because they do not compete well in closed stands of vegetation. The wayside group of plants do have a competitive ability and would be found in such places as roadsides and hedge banks nowadays. In the past they would probably have been important meadow plants, together with grasses which do not appear in this list because their seeds do not preserve very well. The plants which grow in damp places vary between ones which are found on damp ground, like Rorippa and those which grow in standing or flowing water like the Batrachian Ranunculus . The wide range of habitats represented by the plants identified from this material shows that it is unlikely to have come from a single area, for there are calcicoles and calcifuges as well as weeds, wayside and water plants. It is hard to tell how large an area would be needed to provide such habitats, but a stretch of river with some meadows and some arable land would probably be sufficient. Most of the plants found here would not be unexpected in the appropriate places round Tamworth today, although Agrostemma githago (corn cockle) has not been recorded in Warwickshire for a quarter of a century although its seeds frequently occur in archaeological material showing its former abundance.

Two other plants are of interest, Malva neglecta (dwarf mallow) not being recorded as a sub-fossil in the History of the British Flora although there seems to be little room for doubt in the identification. This plant has only sparsely been recorded around Tamworth, as is Montia fontana (blinks) according to the Computer-mapped Flora of Warwickshire which covers the country to the south of Tamworth.

This seed list has many similarities to those obtained from some other archaeological material such as floor layers from places like Hen Domen, a motte and bailey castle, and a Viking site in York, both cases where plant material had apparently been gathered from a range of places and eventually became incorporated into floor layers which were preserved. There are other possible signs of human activity such as the remains of charred grain which were too poorly preserved for identification, and in the apple/pear, raspberry blackberry and elder seeds, all of which represent potential food, although not necessarily so.

It would therefore seem that this "alluvium" is not entirely "natural" in content Some of the plant remains could have come from normal river action, particularly those plants which occur naturally along river banks. Some of the other remains point to human activities although this material could have been sorted and redeposited by river action.

The dating evidence is not very clear, but there seems to be value in studying remains which seem to be post-medieval, such as these, as well as earlier material. Tamworth seems to be a very promising site for the chance of obtaining preserved organic material of a range of ages, and in particular the Saxon material which would fill a large gap in our knowledge of the plant and animal life of that time.

References

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Godwin, Sir H. (1975). The History of the British Flora (2nd Ed.) Cambridge.

TAMWORTH, BOLEBRIDGE STREET. SEED LIST FROM BLUE ALLUVIUM

Agrostemma githago L. (corn cockle)	=1	weed
Atriplex sp. (orache)	2	weed
Ballota nigra L. (black horehound)	14	wayside
Carex sp. indet. (sedge)	6	damp places
Chenopodium cf. album L.(fat hen)	15	weed
Chenopodium murale L. (nettle-leaved goosefoot)	2	weed
Chenopodium rubrum/glaucum (goosefoot)	32	weed
Conium maculatum L. (hemlock)	1	wayside
Corylus avellana L. (hazel)	=1	other
Eleocharis uniglumis/palustris (spike-rush)	3	damp places
Galeopsis sp. (Hemp-nettle)	1	weed
Lamium cf. purpureum L. (red dead-nettle)	8	weed
Malus/Pyrus (apple or pear)	1	other
Malva neglecta Wallr.(dwarf mallow)	9	wayside
Montia fontana L. (blinks)	=1	damp places
? Papaver rhoeas L. (field poppy)	=1	weed
Polygonum aviculare agg. (knotgrass)	10	weed
Polygonum hydropiper L. (water-pepper)	18	damp places
Polygonum minus Huds.	1	damp places
Polygonum mite Schrank	1	damp places
Pteridium aquilinum L. (bracken)	frond fragments	wayside
Ranunculus cf. acris L. (meadow buttercup)	5	wayside
Ranunculus subgenus Batrachium (water crowfoot)	1	damp places
Ranunculus flammula L. (lesser spearwort)	1	damp places
Ranunculus repens/ bulbosus (buttercup)	6	wayside
Ranunculus ? sardous Crantz (hairy buttercup)	1	wayside
Ranunculus sceleratus L. (celery leaved crowfoot)	11	damp places
Reseda luteola L. (weld)	1	weed, former cultivar, calcicole.
Rorippa sp. (yellow-cress)	2	damp places
Rubus fruticosus agg. (bramble)	6	wayside

Tamworth Bolebridge St. seed list (continued)

Rubus idaeus L. (raspberry)	7	wayside
Rumex acetosella agg. (sheep's sorrel)	4	wayside, calcifuge
Rumex sp. (dock)	2	wayside
Sambucus nigra L. (elder)	299	wayside
Solanum nigrum L. (black nightshade)	79	weed
Sonchus asper (L.) Hill (spiny sow-thistle)	1	weed
Sonchus oleraceus L. (sow-thistle)	9	weed
Stellaria cf. media L. (chickweed)	8	weed
Urtica dioica L. (nettle)	33	wayside
Urtica urens L. (stinging nettle)	14	weed
Viola sp. (violet)	1	weed