

BECKFORD

Beckford lies about 4 miles east of Tewkesbury in the valley of the Carrant Brook, between the western escarpments of the Cotswolds and Bredon Hill. Close by there are the three hillforts of Bredon Hill, Danes Camp Conderton and the Knolls on Woolstone Hill. Aerial photographs at Beckford showed many circular and larger rectangular enclosures over a considerable area (about 10 acres). These proved to be features with a range of dates—Medieval, Roman, Iron Age and Bronze Age, the Iron Age being the most important period. Glacial sands and gravels underlie the deposits in which the archaeological features are preserved, these are being dug out by contractors. Each year since 1972 an area has been preserved for archaeological excavation, the sand and gravel is claimed after the site has been investigated. Jan Wills directed the 1976 excavation.

The area of the Iron Age site for excavation in the 1976 season was seen in aerial photographs to have large concentrations of circular pits. Three of the pits were half sectioned and excavated, the pits having diameters of about 1.5m. Whilst trowelling it was noticed that carbonised grains were being cut through in appreciable numbers. So it was decided in this instance that it would be profitable to try to retrieve as many of the grains as possible from the pitfill. It was found to be most efficient if on site two people were employed in the process of separation of the seeds; one to excavate and the other to wash and sieve the soil from the pits. Approximately $\frac{1}{3}$ bucketfull of soil was sieved at a time, the bucket was filled with water and the larger lumps of soil were broken down manually whilst the whole mixture was agitated to release any seeds. The soil was sandy and did not prove too difficult to disaggregate. This process was repeated three times in the hope of maximum recovery of seeds. The sieve (500μ) caught the seeds and any other material which floated. This float was taken to the laboratory where it was washed and sieved more carefully. The material was kept under water for examination and a low power microscope was used when sorting. The carbonised seeds and various mollusca were separated out from the rest.

On average one bucketfull of pitfill was producing approximately six seeds. These seeds were not on the whole well preserved but because of the

quantities collected there were some amongst the many which were good enough to allow for identification. The carbonised grains showed distortions due to heating, often specimens were vesicular.

A number of samples of pitfill were collected in order that more careful separation could be carried out in the laboratory. The number of seeds recovered could then be compared with the number recovered on site and a check made on the efficiency of the process. This has not however been attempted yet.

No project for the investigation of carbonised remains from the site was planned for the 1977 season excavation. Three samples have been collected by the director which showed an abundance of charred plant material. These are being investigated and already one sample has produced about 200 grains of barley (all showing good preservation). Also a quantity of briquetage is being examined for grain impressions and hopefully it will be possible to make latex copies of these.

Provisional seed list for Beckford 1976.

(all seeds listed being carbonised)

Carex cf extensa/ panicea	Sedge	2	Common in wet places and fens.
Bromus- mollis- secalinus L.	Rye-brome	M	Grows alongside cultivated crops.
Galium sp.	Bedstraw family	28	
Lithospermum arvense L.	Corn gromwell	3	Grows mainly in arable land.
Polygonum L. convolvulus	Black bindweed	I3	Common in waste places, arable land and beside ponds.
Sambucus nigra L.	Elder	I	Waste places, esp' ch' of disturbed base rich soils.
Veronica hederifolia L.	Ivy speedwell	II	Common on cultivated land.
Vicia cracca L.	Vetch	36	Grows in grassy and bushy places.

Cultivars

Hordeum cf vulgare	Barley	M	Cultivated land.
Triticum cf spelta L.	Spelt wheat	M	" "
Triticum cf aestivo-compactum Schiem.		M	" "
+ many spikelet fragments.			

Provisional list of mollusca.

Ceciloides acicula(MULLER)	Blind snail	M	Subterranean species, common in areas which have been cult- ivated.
* Oxychilus (Miller) allarius		M	Very catholic in habitat and tolerant of acid conditions.
* Oxychilus(MULLER) cellarius		M	Common woodland species.
Pupilla muscorum L.		2	An open country species ch" of grassland habitats.
* Vallonia cf excentrica/pulchella		M	Grassy habitats.

* Not yet checked.

Environmental report for Beckford 1976.

The carbonised grains show some of the crops that were being grown locally at the site. No statistical tests were applied to the quantities of seeds retrieved. As with the Iron Age sites from other parts of the country it would seem that Triticum spelta (Spelt wheat) was an important crop together with Hordeum vulgare (Barley). Initial examination of the three samples from the 1977 season shows a concentration of barley, it would be difficult to postulate whether one crop was secondary to another.

The weed species represented in the charred seeds give some indication of the immediate environment. Those which grow on cultivated land are important to give associations with the crops they grew along side. Comparisons with other sites may lead to a clearer picture of the farming practices which were involved during the Iron Age. The other weed seeds represent species which favour waste places and disturbed ground eg Sambucus nigra, Polygonum convolvulus, wet land eg Carex spp. and grassy habits eg Vicia sp.

The mollusca add to and give strength to the information gained from the seeds. The abundance of Ceciloides acicula stresses the presence of land which was recently cultivated and absent of longstanding grassland.

There were no concentrations of seeds within the pits, just a random scattering throughout the fill. No attempt should be made to extrapolate from these results a possible original use for the pits.

Bibliography

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plants in the Netherlands.