

Report on the "Heart" from Waltham Abbey Chapter House

By Helen C M Keeley.

During excavations at Waltham Abbey Chapter House by Mr A Havercroft an 11th century lead container was found, which may have held the remains of a human heart (possibly that of Bishop Harold). The unknown material from the container was examined, for gross morphology and in thin-section, and subjected to certain chemical tests.

The lump of material appeared to consist of organic matter and a certain amount of soil (including small stones); a few bone fragments were also noted. The highly organic nature of the material was confirmed by (a) extensive deflagration in molten potassium chlorate and (b) intense brown colouration of the solution when added to 3N sodium hydroxide.

The thin sections did not show any particularly diagnostic features, apart from the obviously organic nature of the material (see figures 1 and 2).

Comments.

It has been shown that the unknown material from the 11th century lead container is highly organic in nature. It may be the remains of a human heart but it is not possible to confirm this.

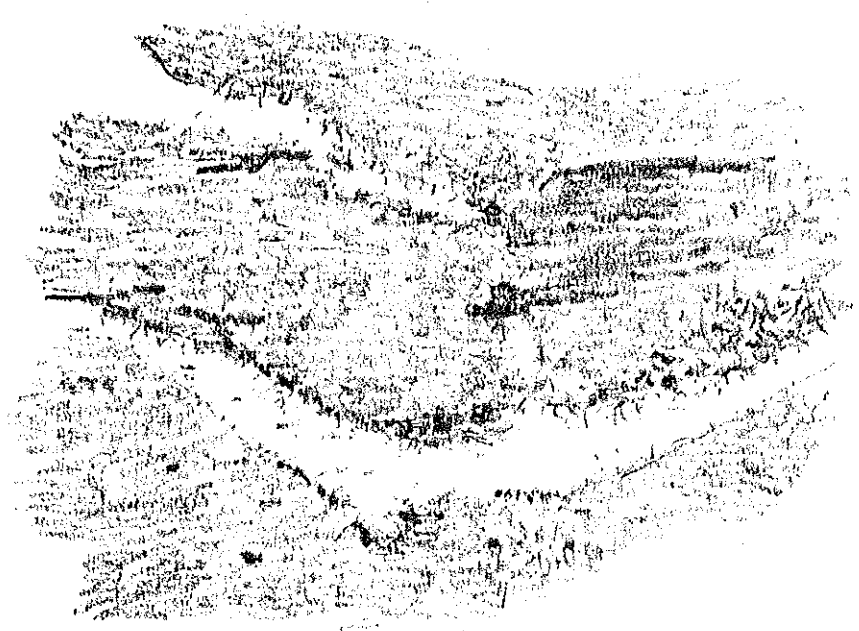


Figure 1. Drawing of part of a thin section of the "heart" from Waltham Abbey Chapter House.

By J. Whitaker.

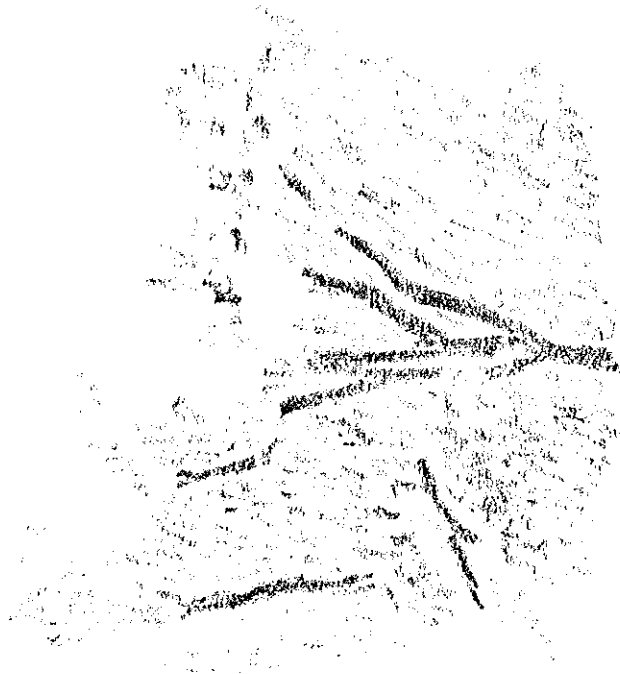


Figure 2. Drawing of part of
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