

AAH Apt 3218

(Article 1972). Plant remains from the Tullie House (Annetwell Street) excavations.

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The excavations were visited on 1st May 1979. Samples of organic deposits were taken from floor levels and wooden drains (see Table). 2½ Kg of each soil sample was washed in the laboratory through a series of sieves down to 150µ mesh and subjected to paraffin flotation, while checking residues.

All identifiable plant material, with the exception of wood, was picked out microscopically together with insect material. Identifications, which are of fruits or seeds unless otherwise stated, are listed in the accompanying table.

In terms of ecological interpretation there is very little difference between the various samples, so the results will be discussed as a species list for these levels.

The largest component is weeds of arable and wasteland. This group, often dominant in urban deposits, includes both annuals and perennials successful in the much-disturbed areas associated with human activity. Probably most of these are very local in origin, growing beside paths, on midden heaps, against walls etc, but some might have been introduced with crop material.

Plants of wet places are also well represented. There is no indication of standing open water but many plants of marsh or fen are present. The preservation of organic material and the presence of so many drainage channels on the site could indicate a nearby marshy sump. The presence of Montia fontana ssp. chondrosperma seeds in such abundance indicates a sandy soil with a high water table. Sedges and other plants could have been gathered in quantity from local riverside meadows for use

as flooring or thatching material.

Food plants, either crops or gathered wild plants feature in the list. The only cereal is barley, of which two carbonised grains were found, which was probably cultivated locally. Corn spurry seeds indicate arable land with an acidic, sandy soil, and many of the "wasteland" component also grow as weeds of arable land.

Figs were probably imported from more southern areas, even from Europe, and would have been an important fruit for winter use.

Remains of sloe, hazel, blackberry, raspberry and elder probably indicate the collection of fruits and nuts from nearby woodland. The other tree fruits, birch and elm are both winged and could have travelled some distance.

Calluna (heather) could have come from a sandy open woodland present locally but is also characteristic of heathland, moorland and acid bog. Shoots as well as seeds were recovered, suggesting that it was gathered and brought to the site for a particular purpose, probably being used in building, bedding or as brushwood over wet areas. Its carbonisation suggests incorporation in a building which was subsequently burnt down or perhaps the burning of old bedding material,

The types of edible plants present and their relative paucity indicate that this area of the site was probably not used for large scale food preparation or eating, rather the casual eating of fruits and nuts whilst performing other tasks. The botanical evidence is entirely in keeping with a busy thoroughfare and courtyard area.

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