

Site: Rectory Road, Orsett
County: Essex
Reference No: A13 1980
Director: A. Wilkinson
Type of site: Iron Age
Geology: Pleistocene terrace gravels.
Type of Material: Charred cereals and crop weeds

Rectory Road, Orsett, Essex: Cereals and crop weeds

Five samples containing carbonised crop remains were submitted for examination. RR278 was a 5cm thick layer of cereals covering the entire floor of a grain storage pit. A 17.7kg sample was received; charred plant remains were extracted from a 5kg sub-sample of this by water flotation in the laboratory, collecting the flot in a 250 micron mesh sieve. The flot was further sub-sampled before sorting. The remaining samples were of lenses of charred material contained within ditch silts. The flots of these were completely sorted.

Plant remains identified are listed in Table 1.

Discussion

Spelt, emmer and six-row hulled barley, the three cereals in these deposits, are common in Iron Age samples. There is little contemporary material from S. Essex with which to compare the Rectory Road samples, though an Iron Age pit within the Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure at Orsett has produced a deposit of six-row hulled barley with some emmer (Hubbard 1978, 294).

The samples are of two types. RR 278 consists largely of spelt wheat caryopses, with relatively little chaff and few weed seeds; it appears that this sample represents a crop which had been processed before carbonisation. This processing removed most of the weed seeds, with the principle exception of brome grass caryopses, but left some chaff with the grain. Storage conditions were such that very few grains had germinated before being carbonised. The excellent state of preservation suggests that the cereals were carbonised in the pit or were dumped straight into it without having been exposed to weathering.

The cereals from the remaining samples are more damaged and weathered. Presumably they were washed or blown into accumulating ditch fills from a variety of sources. These samples are, indeed, more heterogeneous in character with a higher proportion of weed seeds, and also (in SC 250) remains of cereal straw.

Hubbard, R.N.L.B. (1978) 'Carbonized seeds', in Hedges, J. and Buckley, D. (eds) 'Excavations at a Neolithic Causewayed Enclosure, Orsett, Essex, 1975. PPS 44, (1978), 294

		BSB 61	SC177	SC249	SC250	RR278
		(a)(c)		(a)(b)		(a)
Cereal indet.	ca	7	2	25	36	44
Cereal indet	cn	-	-	-	2	-
<u>Triticum sp.</u>	ca	-	-	23	39	684(d)
	pf	-	-	-	-	+
	af	-	-	-	+	+
	ri	-	-	-	-	4
	gb	-	-	2	4	14
	sb	-	-	1	1	17
	spf	-	-	1	1	-
<u>Triticum spelta</u>	gb	-	1	1	1	29
	spf	-	1	-	1	23(e)
	spi	-	-	-	-	4(f)
<u>Triticum dicoccum</u>	gb	-	-	2	c.f.5	c.f.1
	spf	-	-	2	1	c.f.1
<u>Hordeum vulgare</u>	ca	-	-	-	-	19
<u>Hordeum sp.</u>	ca	1	-	-	5	-
<u>Ranunculus acris/repens-type</u>		-	-	-	1	-
c.f. <u>Brassica sp.</u>		-	-	-	1	-
<u>Chenopodiaceae indet.</u>		-	-	3(g)	-	-
<u>Rumex acetosella</u>		-	1	-	-	-
<u>Polygonum c.f. convolvulus</u>		-	1(h)	-	-	-
<u>Bromus mollis/secalinus</u>		-	1	9	20	23
<u>Gramineae indet.</u>		-	-	-	2	1
Indet.		-	1	-	1	3
Sample wt (kg)		5	1.7	2.8	5	5
% flot sorted		100	100	100	100	12.5

Table 1 : Carbonised cereals and crop weeds from Rectory Road, Orsett

Abbreviations: af awn fragments ri rachis internodes (all brittle-rachis type)
ca caryopses spi spikelets
cn culm nodes spf spikelet forks
gb glume bases sb spikelet bases
pf pericarp fragments

All other specimens are fruits, seeds, etc.

Notes: (a) Includes Cecilioides acicula
(b) Includes Vallonia sp.
(c) Much charcoal.

- (d) Includes 3 grain-pairs, with adpressed ventral surfaces, the remains of spikelets.
- (e) One terminal spikelet.
- (f) 3 one-grained; 1 two-grained.
- (g) Lacking testas.
- (h) Fragment.