Req. 4 3337

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| Site: | Blackdyke Farm |
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| Parish: | Hockwold cum Wilton |
| County: | Norfolk |
| Site Code: | 5308 (F. Curtis Site 68) |
| Director: | F. Healey |
| Type of Site: | Occupation deposit |
| Period: | Beaker |
| Geology: | Chalk Marl |
| Type of material: | Sediments, misc. biological remains |

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Introduction

Besides the strictly archaeological objectives of trial-trenching at this site it was hoped that an examination of sediments and biological remains would provide information on local conditions during the Beaker occupation of the site and on subsequent habitat change. In the event, it was found that drainage had lowered the water-table to such an extent that the peats and subjacent archaeological deposit had become extensively disturbed by moles, rabbits and roots penetrating from nearby elder scrub, and were also being re-worked by an active soil fauna including earthworms and nematodes. These factors have resulted in the destruction of most biological remains originally present, in cross-contamination between layers and in the introduction of modern contaminants. Thus, although the soils and sediments at this site include a high proportion of largely amorphous organic material, preservation conditions proved to be little better than in archaeological deposits at upland sites on sand.

The deposits

Soils in the immediate vicinity are developed on thin Fen Peat (Adventurer's Series, shallow phase; Seale and Hodge 1976, 12 and Map). The subdued microrelief of the area has resulted in the formation of slightly thicker surface peat layers in hollows. Consequently, although ploughing was found to have completely disturbed the surface peats on the crests of hummocks, some less disturbed peat survived at the base of the A_{OP}horizon in hollows, overlying the occupation deposit. The section in Trench 3 showed the following sequence:

(Mean depths) 1. 0-25cm. Aophorizon. Black stoneless structureless peaty loam; fibrous and fleshy roots common; merging boundary. 2. 25-35cm. Bo horizon. Black sandy peat; blocky structure; friable, but hard when dry; some small wood fragments; rare small flint fragments (some heat-shattered); roots; merging boundary. 3. 35-45cm. Occupation layer. Dark greyish-brown structureless humose sand with patches of clean sand and peat-filled root channels; slightly stony, with small flints (some heat-shattered) and very rare small chalk fragments; bone, pottery fragments; roots; sharp boundary. 4. 45-55cm. Greyish-brown structureless sand with peat-filled root channels; rare small chalk fragments and flints; fine

roots; merging boundary.

5. 55cm+

Chalk marl. Greyish-brown to white sandy silt loam to sandy clay loam with yellowish-brown mottles and peatfilled root channels, abundant small-medium chalk lumps.

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The section in Trench I, at a slightly higher elevation, showed more extensive plough disturbance.

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Mean depths.

1. 0-35cm.

2. 35-45cm.

A_{op} horizon. Black stoneless structureless peaty loam; fibrous and fleshy roots common; merging boundary. Occupation layer. Dark greyish-brown to dark grey structureless humose sand with peat-filled root channels and discrete patches of clean sand, slightly stony, with small flints (some heat-shattered) ; bone, pottery, flint flakes; roots; sharp boundary. Yellowish-brown sand with peat-filled root channels; small-medium chalk fragments and flints; roots; merging boundary.

4. 50cm+

45-50cm.

3.

Chalk marl.

After washing, the sand component of the occupation Tayer was indistinguishable from that of the subjacent sandy horizon, consisting predominantly of rounded and subangular quartz grains. The amorphous organic component of this occupation deposit must be derived partly from dumped organic refuse and partly from inwashed material. It appears that the occupation deposit is simply a trampled and disturbed part of this natural sand, incorporating domestic debris.

Biological remains

All deposits beneath the A_{op} horizon in Trench 3 were sampled and a single sample was taken from the occupation deposit (2) in Trench 1. The samples (4kg. from the occupation layers; lkg. from other deposits) were disaggregated and washed out over a 250 micron mesh sieve. Organic material was separated by water flotation, collecting the flots in a 250 micron mesh and the mineral residues were washed over a 500 micron mesh. The organic fraction was initially sorted in a wet state but when the poor preservation of the material became apparent it was dried to accelerate sorting. The following material was present:

Bone

Mammal bone fragments were recovered from Tr I (2), and this layer also produced small mammal bone including a rodent incisor. The latter material is potentially intrusive.

Molluscs

In view of the fact that the sediments above the chalk

marl were non-calcareous, the few land molluscs present are presumably recent and intrusive. They comprise <u>Pupilla muscorum, Vallonia excentrica, Cochlicopa</u> sp., <u>Trichia sp. and Cepaea</u> whorl fragments.

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Uncharred plant remains. Modern roots were present in all samples, together with a few poorly-preserved seeds of ruderals (<u>Stellaria</u> <u>media</u>, <u>Silene</u> sp., <u>Urtica dioica</u>, <u>Chenopodium</u> sp, <u>Polygonum</u> sp., and <u>Sambucus nigra</u>). The latter species is most abundant, and since elder scrub was present just next to the site there can be no doubt that these seeds are contaminants.

<u>Charred plant remains</u> There was a concentration of charred material, thought to be <u>in situ</u>, in the samples from the occupation layer. The charcoal consists of small twiggy fragments, not definitely identified. The sample from Trench I Layer 2 produced a single charred emmer-type wheat grain (Triticum dicoccum Schübl).

Discussion

The main finding of this investigation is that drainage has resulted in aeration of the sediments with consequent disturbance and humification. How far this is applicable to other sites in the Hockwold area can only be established by further work, but obviously at this site detailed palaeo-ecological studies comparable to those undertaken at Bronze Age Fen-edge sites in the Mildenhall area (Murphy, forthcoming) are not possible.

Nevertheless some information has been gained. In stratigraphic terms the site conforms with the sequence known from elsewhere on the Fen-edge: second millenium B.C. deposits formed probably in relatively dry conditions are overlain by peats, reflecting higher local water-table levels. It is unfortunate that the surviving peat at this site was too disturbed for Cl4 dating to be attempted, and the date of the beginning of peat formation here therefore remains unknown. From an economic point of view the bone recovered in this and earlier excavations will provide at least some information on stock-rearing, and the presence of a charred emmer-type grain indicates some reliance on cereal production, though only more extensive sampling will determine the importance of arable farming. It may, however, be of significance that even this very smallscale sampling has produced some evidence of cereal growing.

Seale, R.S. and Hodge, C.A.H. (1976) <u>Soils of the Cambridge and Ely District</u>. Soil Survey. Special Survey No. 10. Harpenden.