

# ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

## REPORT

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M van der Veen

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**TITLE**

Plant remains from the Milfield  
Cemeteries

Plant Remains from the Milfield Cemeteries.

Excavator: Roger Miket  
Roman Fort Museum  
South Shields.

by: Marijke van der Veen

Introduction

Two second millennium ring-ditches near Whitton Hill (grid ref. NT 933 347) were partly excavated in 1982. The analysis of the plant remains recovered in the 1982 samples was discussed in Van der Veen 1982. During the summer of 1983 some further excavations were carried out on these sites and three more samples were collected for botanical analysis. The contexts and volume of the samples is given in Table 1. The results are given in Table 2, and are discussed below.

In addition to the Whitton Hill site, a small scale excavation was carried out at Pace Hill, Crookham ( NT 915 374 ). Here three burial cists with inhumations were found and one inhumation burial in a shallow scoop, containing a Beaker vessel. The preliminary date for the burials is second millennium B.C., probably slightly later than the Whitton Hill cremations. Five samples were collected from this excavation. The contexts and volume of the samples is given in Table 3. The results are given in Table 4, and are discussed below.

Results: Whitton Hill.

In the 1982 samples some cereal grains were found, in addition to hazelnut shell fragments and arable weeds. In the 1983 samples no cereal grains were present, but instead some cereal chaff was found. Three rachis internodes of barley were found in sample 2. The fragments were very small, only the lower half of the internode was preserved. Consequently, they could not be identified to species. Sample 3 contained a fragment that might also be a barley rachis internode, but there is some uncertainty about this fragment. Sample 3 also contained a glumebase of a hulled wheat : emmer wheat or spelt wheat. The venation pattern is most similar to that of spelt wheat : a prominent vein with several other veins running parallel. The width across the articulation scar is 0.81 mm. With just one fragment it is difficult to present a definite identification. Spelt wheat is not thought to have been cultivated in England until the first half of the first millennium B.C., although there is the isolated find from Neolithic Hembury (Field et al. 1964). This find has received much attention, but no agreement seems as yet to exist on its reliability. The radio-carbon dates from Whitton Hill are not yet available. Unfortunately,

the glumebase comes from a post hole outside the penannular ditch, and thus cannot, with one hundred percent certainty be taken to form part of the burial structure.

One fragment of hazelnut shell was found as well, in addition to three unidentifiable plant fragments.

#### Results: Pace Hill.

The results from these five samples were very meagre indeed. One fragment of a hazelnut shell from cist No. 2 and two unidentifiable fragments from cist No. 3, was all that was recovered from these samples.

#### Discussion

The presence of chaff fragments in the Whitton Hill samples is unusual in that they would form the first recorded chaff fragments in Grooved Ware contexts. However, the dating of the deposits is not entirely without problems, and I would prefer to wait with an interpretation of the material until the radio-carbon dates become available.

The virtual absence of plant remains from the Pace Hill samples might be directly related to the fact that we are dealing with inhumations on that site. While one can envisage several activities that may produce carbonised plant remains in cremation burials, this is more difficult in the case of inhumation burials. So far, very little work has been done on either, and it is very difficult to assess whether the near absence of plant remains at Pace Hill is a common feature on inhumation sites. The early Bronze Age inhumation site at Manor Farm, Lancashire, equally produced very little in the form of plant remains.

#### References:

- |   |        |  |
|---|--------|--|
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Marijke van der Veen  
Biological Laboratory  
Department of Archaeology  
University of Durham.

Table 1 ; Contexts and volume of the Whitton Hill samples.

|          |   |  |             |
|----------|---|--|-------------|
| Sample 1 | : | WH83 - Site 1 - enclosure ditch, bottom fill   | - 9 litres. |
| Sample 2 | : | WH83 - Site 2 - possible ground surface within the enclosure, immediately north of- cremation 1, in pit Y. | 7 litres    |
| Sample 3 | : | WH83 - Site 2 - from isolated posthole outside the penannular ditch, F VI.                                 | - 5 litres  |

Table 2 : Results from Whitton Hill samples.

|   | <u>sample 1</u> | <u>sample 2</u> | <u>sample 3</u> |
|---|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Hordeum sp., rachis internodes (barley)         | -               | 3               | -               |
| cf. Hordeum sp., rachis internode (barley)      | -               | -               | 1               |
| Glumebase Triticum cf. spelta (cf. spelt wheat) | -               | -               | 1               |
| Corylus avellana (hazelnut), shell fragment     | 1               | -               | -               |
| Indet   | -               | 1               | 2               |
| <hr/>   |                 |                 |                 |
| Total   | 1               | 4               | 4               |

Table 3 : Contexts and volume of the Pace Hill samples.

|          |   |   |              |
|----------|---|---|--------------|
| Sample 1 | : | PH83 - cist 1 - basal layer of cist                                 | - 3.4 litres |
| Sample 2 | : | PH83 - cist 2 - from eastern side of cist interior, above flagging. | - 7 litres   |
| Sample 3 | : | PH83 - cist 3 - from basal layer cist (interior)                    | - 10 lites   |
| Sample 4 | : | PH83 - burial 4- contexts of beaker                                 | - 1 litre    |
| Sample 5 | : | PH83 - burial 4- from exterior of beaker                            | - 2.5 litres |

Table 4 : Results from the Pace Hill samples.

|  | <u>sample</u> | <u>1</u> | <u>2</u> | <u>3</u> | <u>4</u> | <u>5</u> |
|--|---------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Corylus avellana, (hazelnut), shell fragment | -             | 1        | -        | -        | -        | -        |
| Indet  | -             | -        | 2        | -        | -        | -        |
| <hr/>  |               |          |          |          |          |          |
| Total  |               | 0        | 1        | 2        | 0        | 0        |