AHk Report 467/8

Site:	Gilberd School, Colchester
County:	Essex
Code:	GBSA and B
Director:	P. Crummy
Type of site:	Urban
Period:	Roman-Medieval
Type of material:	Carbonised plant remains

Gilberd School, Colchester

Methods

Samples were collected at this site from the Boudiccan destruction layers (GBSA L47, GBSB L35, L39, L69, L89), from some 1st century contexts related to military activity at the site (GBSA F232, F254, L123) and from 2nd-3rd century rubbish pits (GBSA F27, GBSB F25). The samples were processed in a bulk sieving/flotation tank (Kenward et al 1980) with 0.5mm meshes to collect the flot and 1mm. meshes to retain the residue. To complete recovery of carbonised plant remains it proved necessary to re-float the residues in the laboratory. The dried flots were sorted under a binocular microscope at low power. Plant remains identified are listed in Table .

Food plants

The samples included small numbers of cereal grains and spikelet fragments of spelt (Triticum spelta), six-row hulled barley (Hordeum vulgare) and wild or cultivated oats (Avena sp). The rubbish pit F25 produced a single abraded seed of horse-bean (Vicia faba var. minor). Carbonised fruitstones of bramble (Rubus fruticosus) and sloe (Prunus spinosa), and fragments of hazelnut shells (Corylus avellana) came from the Boudiccan layers L35 and L39.

Sample composition and taphonomy

The samples from the Boudiccan destruction layers contained large quantities of charcoal, mostly of oak (Quercus sp), with burnt daub from the superstructure of buildings destroyed in AD 60/1. At other sites in Colchester, including Balkerne Lane and Culver Street, the Boudiccan layers have also produced large quantities of carbonised cereals and other crops, indicating storage of food-stuffs within buildings (Murphy 1984 and forthcoming), but at the Gilberd School only thin scatters of cereal remains were present. Interpretation of such sparse assemblages is difficult, but presumably they represent small-scale accidental spillages of cereals, strewn on floors, which became carbonised when buried by burning debris. There is certainly no evidence for the use of any of these buildings as granaries.

Several of the samples from GBSB, notably Sample 49 from L39, a burnt layer within the re-used barrack block, produced fruits and seeds of grassland plants, including Ranunculus acris/repens/bulbosus, Ranunculus flammula, Stellaria palustris/graminea, Montia fontana, Medicago/Trifolium-type, Vicia/Lathyrus sp,

Sample no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	46
Context no.	L47	F27	L47	L47	L47	L47	L47	F254	F232	L123	L35
Bag no.	1649	1476	1599	1601	1600	1648	1711	2245	2244	1762	312
Triticum sp	-	4	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
Triticum sp (spb)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Triticum spelta L (spf)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hordeum vulgare L emend Lam	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-
Hordeum sp	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Avena sp	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cereal indet	-	1	-	-	-	1	1	3	-	-	2
Cereal indet (frags)	-	-	+	+	+	-	-	-	-	-	+
Vicia faba L var minor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ranunculus acris/repens/bulbosus	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ranunculus cf flammula L	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ranunculus sp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Stellaria palustris/graminea	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Montia fontana L subsp chondrosperma	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Atriplex patula/hastata	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Chenopodium album L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chenopodiaceae indet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malva sp	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Medicago lupulina-type	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Medicago/Trifolium-type	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Trifolium sp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Vicia/Lathyrus sp	1co	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2co
Leguminosae indet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Potentilla sp	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rubus fruticosus agg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prunus spinosa L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

47	48	49	50	56	59	60	61	62
35	L35	L39	L39	L69	L69	L89	L89	F25
14	315	316A	316B	559	599	600	607	608
-	-	-	67	-	-	-	-	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	2	-	-	10	2	-
1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
1	-	-	-	-	-	2	3	4
+	-	-	+	-	+	+	+	+
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
-	-	13	-	-	1	-	-	-
-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3	-	3	-	-	1	13	-	1
-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	1	-	1co	-	-	-	-	1
-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
1	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-
4+frags-		-	-	-	-	-	-	-

-	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-
2	-	27	3	-	-	25	-	1
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
+	+	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-
-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
4	3+cf2	11	3	-	-	5+cf3	-	1
-	1	9	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	2	-	1	1+frags	-	-
-	-	17	7	-	-	13	2	-
-	-	-	+	-	-	-	-	-
4	84	40	6	2	3	2	3	3
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	2

Potentilla sp, Prunella vulgaris, Plantago lanceolata, Eleocharis sp, Carex spp. and Gramineae, and these were associated in some samples with carbonised culm fragments of grasses. Nutlets of Rumex spp. were also fairly common. Similar, but much larger, assemblages from Culver Street, associated with concretions derived from animal dung, are interpreted as sweepings from byres burnt as refuse (Murphy, forthcoming). The Gilberd School samples did not contain faecal concretions, but the carbonised assemblages are nevertheless thought to represent charred residues from burnt hay. This could perhaps indicate that animals were housed in some of these buildings, though the use of hay for domestic flooring is perfectly possible.

The samples of carbonised plant remains from the 1st century military features and 2nd-3rd century refuse pits are very sparse and are not interpretable. The military features F232 and L123 contained no identifiable seeds. F27 contained a few macrofossils preserved by phosphatic mineralisation, a form of preservation commonly occurring in cess pits.

References

Kenward, H.K., Hall, A.R. and Jones, A.K.G. (1980) 'A tested set of techniques for the extraction of plant and animal macrofossils from waterlogged archaeological deposits'. Science and Archaeology 22, 3-15.

Murphy, P. (1984) 'Carbonised cereals and crop weeds from Buildings 38, 41 and 45', in Crummy, P. (1984) Colchester Archaeological Report 3: Excavations at Lion Walk, Balkerne Lane and Middleborough pp. 105, 108, 110.

Polygonum aviculare agg	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Polygonum cf lapathifolium L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-
Polygonum convolvulus L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1frag	-	-	-
Rumex acetosella agg	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Rumex sp	-	-	1	1	-	1	-	2	-	-	1
Polygonaceae indet	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Corylus avellana L (frags)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+
Veronica hederifolia L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Prunella vulgaris L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Labiatae indet	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Plantago lanceolata L	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Galium aparine L	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
Eleocharis sp	-	-	-	-	-	cf1	-	1	-	-	1
Carex spp	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-
Bromus mollis/secalinus	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-
Gramineae indet	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Gramineae indet (culm fragments)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	+	-	-	-
Indeterminate seeds	-	5	2	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	2
Indeterminate seeds (mineralised)	-	4	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Indeterminate stem frags (mineralised)	-	+	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sample size (number of buckets, approx. 12 litre capacity)	1	5	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1

Table : Carbonised and mineralised plant macrofossils from the Gilberd School, Colchester (GBSA and B).

Unless otherwise indicated taxa are represented by fruits or seeds.

Abbreviations: co - cotyledon; frag - fragment; indet - indeterminate; spb - spikelet base; spf - spikelet fork.