

# ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

## REPORT

3853

<b>SERIES/No</b>	CONTRACTOR
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<b>TITLE</b>	Spicers Almshouses, Bristol. The fish bones

## SPICERS ALMSHOUSES, BRISTOL.

Some 383 fish bones were recovered, all by hand picking except 289 and 254 which were sieved samples. The following species were identified, elasmobranchs, conger eel (*Conger conger*), eel (*Anguilla anguilla*), herring (*Clupea harengus*), sprat (*Sprattus sprattus*), cod (*Gadus morhua*), haddock (*Melanogrammus aeglefinus*), whiting (*Merlangius merlangus*), ling (*Molva molva*), hake (*Merluccius merluccius*), and plaice (*Pleuronectes platessa*). The table indicates the species found in each group:

	LW	KW	KR	KZ	HK	HL	KW	HE	DR	GF	TOTAL
	101\75		101\75	101\75							
		101\75	254	289							
		SS228									
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ELASMO.	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	2
C. EEL	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	2
EEL	-	1	9	7	-	-	-	-	-	-	17
HERRING	-	1	8	5	14	10	-	-	-	-	38
SPRAT	-	-	2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2
COD	1	-	-	-	3	-	2	-	-	-	5
GADOID	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	5
HADDOCK	-	1	-	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	2
WHITING	-	-	-	2	1	1	-	-	-	-	4
LING	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-	2
HAKE	-	-	1	-	2	3	-	-	-	-	6
PLAICE	-	-	-	-	-	38	1	-	-	-	29
FLATFISH	-	1	-	1	4	-	-	-	-	-	6
UNIDENT.	-	12	96	35	50	59	30	-	-	19	281
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TOTAL	2	16	97	51	56	105	34	1	1	19	382
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It is interesting to note that the eel vertebrae were all recovered from the sieved samples, except for one bone.

All the species are marine fish, representing sea fishing except for the eel which although partially marine, was probably trapped in rivers.

Various fishing methods are suggested depending on the preferred habitats of individual species. Hake and haddock (living on and near the sea bed respectively) would have been caught on lines, as would ling and cod both being deep water fish. Whiting, found in shallow inshore waters would probably be caught on lines and in nets, sprats and herrings would be caught in the latter. The west of England received its herrings from Ireland and Bristol was the chief centre of their distribution, (Wilson 1973, 32). Plaice can be caught on lines, or in shoreline traps called 'kiddies' (Wheeler 1979, 80) and conger eels on lines on rocky shores. Eels may have been trapped in streams in eel-bucks (Ibid

61) often found associated with mills and weirs. Further information on the habitats and distribution of these species can be found in Wheeler 1978.

The Almshouse by nature of its purpose and situation in one of the poorer parts of Bristol would have provided mainly cheap staple food and many of the species identified could be so categorised. Dried, salted and pickled fish tended to be cheap, and could be available all year round. Bristol men later took part in the fifteenth century Icelandic fishery where cod was salted and dried on board, before sailing home (Wilson 1973, 34.).

I would like to thank Mr A Wheeler (BMNH) for his help and the use of his reference collection.

#### REFERENCES

- A Wheeler. Key to the Fishes of Northern Europe. Warne 1978.
- A Wheeler. The Tidal Thames. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1979.
- C Anne Wilson. Food and Drink in Britain. Constable 1973.