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BRISTOL

A preliminary report on the plant remains
from BTE 73 Area III TU "Black Peat".

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This material from Bristol contains the seeds of a fair range of plants which might have been eaten, and subsequently passed through the gut. The presence of brambles, strawberries and raspberries alone might not be enough to suggest that they had been part of a human diet, for these plants are generally available for birds to consume the fruits and scatter the seeds. However there are apple pips, either from the cultivated varieties or from crabs, and bilberry seeds which would presumably have come a distance from the nearest moorland, for they would not have been found growing in Bristol itself. The two umbellifers, parsley and fennel are interesting. Fennel seed is known to have been used for flavouring, and it occurred in large numbers in a barrel midden in Worcester, approximately medieval in date. The occurrence of fennel here might also represent faecal material. Parsley is mainly grown for its leaves, but it seems possible that, like fennel, both the leaves and seeds can be used in food.

Although some of the weeds are rather catholic in habitat requirements, several listed here are mainly known as cornfield weeds, such as the corn cockle, mayweed and corn marigold. Material which contains these weed seeds often has signs that there was straw as well, but in this case the material was already processed and it is not possible to check this possibility.

The seeds of plants which grow on waysides and in rough meadows form another group frequently encountered in archaeological material. The habitat preferences of this group of plants are rather vague, but it would appear to represent the remains of rough hay containing plenty of weeds. Grasses are hardly represented in this group because their seeds, like those of the cereals, do not survive at all well unless carbonised. The columbine is an interesting plant which grows wild in the hedgerows near Bristol as well as being cultivated in gardens, so it is hard to tell where it may have been growing in this instance.

The group of plants from damp places forms a third class of useful plant material which, like the straw and hay, was probably used to cover floors and perhaps for other purposes such as thatching. The sedge tentatively identified might be one which is usually found in brackish water, but there is no other sign of the rather

estuarine conditions that might be expected from Bristol.

Heather, gorse and bracken remains, identified from their leaves or fronds, could also represent flooring material. Heather remains have been found in medieval York by D. Williams and was evidently an extremely useful plant in addition to flooring uses, for it provided bedding, brooms, thatch, rope, fuel, and dyestuff. Gorse has not often been found on archaeological sites, and this is possibly because it is not as versatile as heather, being mainly used for fuel, although it can be fed to cattle if the spiny leaves are crushed. Bracken makes good flooring, but it is risky animal bedding because it is poisonous if it has been gathered while green .

PLANT LIST. The remains are of seeds except where otherwise stated

<u>Edible Plants</u>	<u>Number</u>
<u>Foeniculum vulgare</u> Mill. (fennel)	1
<u>Fragaria vesca</u> L. (wild strawberry)	3
<u>Malus sylvestris</u> Mill. (apple)	11
<u>Petroselinum crispum</u> (Mill.) Nym. (parsley)	2
<u>Rubus fruticosus</u> agg. (bramble)	2
<u>Rubus idaeus</u> L. (raspberry)	2
<u>Vaccinium myrtillus</u> L. (bilberry)	2
<u>Weeds</u>	
<u>Agrostemma githago</u> L. (corn cockle)	=1
<u>Anthemis cotula</u> L. (stinking mayweed)	1
<u>Chrysanthemum segetum</u> L. (corn marigold)	1
<u>Papaver</u> cf. <u>argemone</u> L. (long prickly-headed poppy)	1
<u>Rumex obtusifolius</u> L. (broad-leaved dock)	1
<u>Rumex</u> sp. (dock)	7
<u>Stellaria media</u> L. (chickweed)	1
<u>Wayside Plants</u>	
<u>Aquilegia vulgaris</u> L. (columbine)	1
<u>Cirsium</u> sp. (thistle)	1
cf. <u>Geranium dissectum</u> L. (cut-leaved cranesbill)	2
Gramineae (grasses)	1
<u>Lapsana communis</u> L. (nipplewort)	1
<u>Leontodon</u> cf. <u>autumnalis</u> (autumnal hawkbit)	4
cf. <u>Potentilla sterilis</u> (L.) Garcke (barren strawberry)	26
<u>Prunella vulgaris</u> L. (self-heal)	2
<u>Ranunculus</u> cf. <u>acris</u> L. (meadow buttercup)	1
<u>Ranunculus repens</u> / <u>bulbosus</u> (buttercup)	1
<u>Solanum nigrum</u> L. (black nightshade)	2

PLANT LIST (continued)

Plants from damp places

<u>Carex</u> cf. <u>divisa</u> Huds. (divided sedge)	1	
<u>Eleocharis</u> <u>uniclumis</u> / <u>palustris</u> (spike-rush)	4	
<u>Lycanis</u> <u>flos-cuculi</u> L. (ragged robin)	1	
<u>Ranunculus</u> <u>flammula</u> L. (lesser spearwort)	2	
<u>Salix</u> sp. (willow)	1	capsule

Plants from heath, rough land

<u>Calluna</u> <u>vulgaris</u> (L.) Hull (ling)		terminal shoots
<u>Pteridium</u> <u>aquilinum</u> L. (bracken)		frond fragment
<u>Ulex</u> <u>europaeus</u> L. (gorse)		spines