

Ancient Monuments Laboratory  
Report 188/88

HOUSESTEADS FORT 1984 - THE WOODEN  
ARTIFACTS FROM CONTEXTS H20/10/42  
AND H20/10/48.

A Clapham

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#### Summary

Four wooden artifacts were analysed from context H20/10/48 and the species of wood identified. Two objects were found to be made from Hazel (Corylus avellana L.) and two were made from exotic woods, Sweet Chestnut (Castanea sativa Mill.) and Silver Fir (Picea abies Mill.).

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Housesteads Fort 1984 - The Wooden Artifacts from contexts H20/10/42 and

H20/10/48.

INTRODUCTION

Four wooden artifacts, a wedge (Lab. No. 851428B), a half bung (Lab. No. 851228A), a peg (Lab. No. 851429A) and a bung (Lab. No. 851431A) were from Housesteads Fort. The wedge and half bung were found in context H20/10/42 and the peg and bung from H20/10/48. The two contexts were located immediately above the early 2nd century roadway leading to the North Gate of Housesteads Fort. Both contexts form part of the same dark grey soil layer which is sealed below a thick clay spread and above the tightly packed road surface. Both contexts are thought to represent rubbish thrown out from the Fort.

METHODOLOGY

The objects were picked out from the samples taken from the two contexts by Dr. B. Knight., Senior Conservator of the Ancient Monument Laboratory. These were then cleaned and freeze dried.

The identification of the wood was carried out using an epi-illuminating microscope. Schweinguber (1982) was used as a guide to identification.

As the pieces of wood were artifacts care had to be taken in the preparation of the objects for identification. This was done by scraping a small area and exposing an undamaged section.

Taxonomy follows that of Clapham, Tutin and Warburg (1962).

## RESULTS

The species used to make the wooden artifacts are as follows: The wedge (Lab No. 851428B) was identified as hazel (Corylus avellana L.) as was the peg (Lab. No. 851429A). The half bung (Lab. No. 851428A) was made of Silver Fir (Abies alba Mill.) and the bung (Lab. No. 851431A) of Sweet Chestnut (Castanea sativa Mill.).

## DISCUSSION

Only two artifacts are made from wood that is native to Britain, the wedge and peg. Hazel is usually found growing in hedges and scrubland as well as at woodland edges, it is a very common shrub, and has many uses, such as providing flexible twigs for thatching and hurdles although here the wood has been put to a different use.

The other two artifacts are made from Silver Fir and Sweet Chestnut and are not native to Britain. The native status of Sweet Chestnut was uncertain for a long time as it appeared to thrive and produce seed most years. Evelyn (1664) was unsure about the native status of the tree while Ray (1690) was uncertain if the tree was indigenous. It was not until 1769 that the tree was thought to be exotic (Barrington 1769). The pollen evidence for Sweet Chestnut is lacking and where the pollen grain does occur it is usually thought to be a modern contaminant (Rackham, 1980).

The archaeological evidence shows that there is no certain identification of Sweet Chestnut before the Roman Period (Rackham 1980). Most of the records are from Southern England and Essex (Godwin, 1975). Although, it is possible for Sweet Chestnut could have been growing in Britain by 2nd century A.D. (after being introduced by the Romans) it is more likely to have been imported from

areas from where it is native in Southern Europe, north to Austria, S.W. Germany and France; Algeria, Asia Minor, Caucasus and W. Persia (Clapham et al 1962).

The only records for Silver Fir are from Roman contexts (Whitaker, 1986) in Britain. Silver Fir is a native of the mountains of central and southern Europe from south Germany to the Pyrenees, Corsica, Apennines, Albania and Macedonia (Clapham et al 1962).

It would appear that those artefacts made from hazel were probably made in Britain whilst those made from Sweet Chestnut and Silver Fir were most likely made from timber grown on the European continent, where they are native.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The four wooden artifacts were found in contexts representing domestic rubbish found immediately above the 2nd century A.D. roadway. Two of the artifacts were of hazel (Corylus avellana L.) which was probably grown in Britain, the other two artifacts, a half bung and a bung were made of Silver Fir (Abies alba Mill.) and Sweet Chestnut (Castanea sativa Mill.) respectively. These two species are not native to Britain and it is most likely that the artifacts were made from timber imported from the European mainland where the trees are native.

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<u>LAB. NO.</u>	<u>SITE CODE.</u>	<u>DESCRIPTION.</u>	<u>IDENTIFICATION.</u>
851428A	H20/10/42	Half-bung	<u>Abies alba Mill.</u> Silver Fir.
851428B	H20/10/42	Wedge	<u>Corylus avellana L.</u> Hazel.
851429A	H20/10/48	Peg	<u>Corylus avellana L.</u> Hazel.
851431A	H20/10/48	Bung	<u>Castanea sativa Mill.</u> Sweet Chestnut.

TABLE 3.      IDENTIFICATIONS OF WOODEN ARTEFACTS FROM HOUSESTEADS 1984.