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**Technical report: Charred plant remains  
from a medieval oven at 33 Coleshill Street,  
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands  
(site code: 10607)**

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**Technical report: Charred plant remains from a medieval oven at 33 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands (site code: 10607)**

by

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**Summary**

*The washover from a single bulk sediment sample, recovered during excavations at 33 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, was submitted for analysis.*

*The washover consisted of charred cereal grain and charcoal. The latter included fragments from hazel and willow/poplar/aspen roundwood, and oak apparently from larger timbers. There were also some traces of modern roots.*

*The rather poorly preserved grain consisted mostly of rye with a few specimens that could be wheat or barley (but none identifiable with certainty). A few of the rye grains showed short emerging shoots but there was no clear evidence for the germination of a mass of grain as one would expect from a crop undergoing malting, for example.*

*This assemblage appears to be a single, presumably locally grown, crop perhaps burnt in the course of drying (the few grains showing emerging shoots perhaps indicating harvesting or storage under damp conditions). The crop had been well-threshed and was free of chaff and weeds. Rye is not an unexpected cereal to find at this period, though high concentrations of this kind are perhaps unusual.*

**KEYWORDS:** 33 COLESHILL STREET; SUTTON COLDFIELD; WEST MIDLANDS; TECHNICAL REPORT; MEDIEVAL; 13<sup>TH</sup>-14<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED GRAIN

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## Technical report: Charred plant remains from a medieval oven at 33 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands (site code: 10607)

### Introduction

An archaeological excavation was undertaken by Gifford and Partners Ltd at 33 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands.

The 'washover' from a single bulk sample ('BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) from Context 4, the fill of a medieval (probably 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century) oven, was submitted for analysis. A 'voucher' of unprocessed sediment from the same deposit was also submitted.

### Methods

The 'voucher' sample was inspected in the laboratory and its lithology recorded.

One large sample tub (approximately 15 litres) of the sediment was sieved to 300 microns by the excavator and the resulting washover was dried and submitted to PRS for examination.

### Results

Archaeological information, provided by the excavator, is given in square brackets. A brief summary of the processing method, and an estimate of the remaining volume of unprocessed sediment follows (in round brackets) after the sample number.

**Context 4** [medieval oven fill, probably 13<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> century]

Sample 2 (Approximately 15 litres sieved to 300 microns with washover; approximately 15 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

The raw sediment consisted of moist, gingery-brown, unconsolidated sand, with much charcoal.

The washover consisted of about 475 cm<sup>3</sup> of charred cereal grain and charcoal. The latter included fragments

from hazel (*Corylus*) and willow/poplar/aspens (*Salix/Populus*) roundwood (to 25 mm and 15 mm in maximum dimension, respectively) and oak (*Quercus*) apparently from larger timbers (to 20 mm). There were some traces of modern roots.

The grain, to judge from a subsample of a few tens of cm<sup>3</sup> inspected, consisted mostly of rye (*Secale cereale* L.) with a few specimens that could be wheat (*Triticum*) or barley (*Hordeum*) but none identifiable to these genera with certainty. A few of the rye grains showed short emerging coleoptiles (shoots) but there was no clear evidence for the germination of a mass of grain as one would expect from a crop undergoing malting, for example. Preservation of the grain was generally quite poor, many of the specimens having holes, some showing distortion; quite a large proportion of the grains were simply unidentifiable fragments of vesicular charred material. There was a certain amount of silt-coating on the material too. The finer (less than 2 mm) fractions appeared to consist entirely of wood charcoal fragments. No chaff was seen, except for a single rye spikelet comprising two grains and a fragment of rachis with the characteristic marginal hairs surviving. There were no weed seeds.

### Discussion

This assemblage appears to be a single crop perhaps burnt in the course of drying (the few grains showing emerging shoots perhaps indicating harvesting or storage under damp conditions). The crop had been well-threshed and was free of chaff and weeds. There is no reason to suppose it was not locally grown. Rye is not an unexpected cereal to find at this period, though high concentrations of this kind are perhaps unusual.

### Retention and disposal

All of the remaining sediment, together with the fossils extracted from the processed subsample, should be retained for the present.

### Archive

All material is currently stored by Palaeoecology Research Services (Unit 8, Dabble Duck Industrial Estate, Shildon, County Durham), along with paper and electronic records pertaining to the work described here.

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## **References**

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