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**Evaluation of plant and invertebrate remains
from a deposit at 15-17 Coleshill Street,
Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands
(site code: 10531)**

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Evaluation of plant and invertebrate remains from a deposit at 15-17 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands (site code: 10531)

by

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Summary

A single sediment sample, recovered during excavations at 15-17 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands, was submitted for an evaluation of its bioarchaeological potential.

No very clear picture emerged from the mainly well preserved and fairly abundant identifiable plant remains recovered from the sample. The 'flot' contained abundant fragments of immature insects, mostly apparently fly pupae. There were rather more aquatic beetles than might be expected to be contributed by 'background fauna', suggesting that there was water nearby, or at the site of deposition, or that waste water was discharged onto the forming deposit. Terrestrial fauna was mostly taxa typical of intensive occupation sites, with a substantial component indicative of moderately to very foul decomposing matter.

More detailed recording of the insect remains from this deposit could improve our understanding of the nature of the site. This would be of particular interest in view of the fact that it comes from a town whose environmental past is poorly known. The interpretative value of further study of these remains is dependent on securing reasonably tight dating of the deposit, however.

KEYWORDS: 15-17 COLESHILL STREET; SUTTON COLDFIELD; WEST MIDLANDS; EVALUATION; UNKNOWN DATE; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; INVERTEBRATE REMAINS

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Introduction

An evaluation excavation was undertaken by Gifford and Partners Ltd at 15-17 Coleshill Street, Sutton Coldfield, West Midlands.

Plant and invertebrate remains were examined in a single submitted subsample from a clay layer sealed beneath the remains of a 19th century stable (thought by the excavator probably to be the natural infilling of a hollow/terrace dip on the hillside; there was no direct dating evidence).

Methods

The sediment sample was inspected and its lithology recorded using a standard *pro forma* prior to processing, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for the recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The flot and washover resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residue was examined for larger plant macrofossils and other biological (and artefactual) remains.

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 numbers.

Context 11 [?natural infilling of a hollow/terrace dip on the hillside]

Sample 1/T (3 kg processed to 300 microns with paraffin flotation and washover; approximately 9 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

Moist, mid to dark brown (lighter in places), brittle to crumbly (working soft), silt. Fragments of ?brick/tile, ?charcoal and wood were present.

There was a very small residue (dry weight 120 g) of small stones and sand, with a little charcoal, small fragments of ?brick/tile (to 6 mm) and slag (to 10 mm), and some pieces of ?pin.

The subsample yielded a large washover of about 100 cm³ of woody debris, mainly decayed wood, including fragments of fine willow twig (to 25 mm in maximum dimension); indeed, perhaps all the wood may have originated in twigs of various sizes. Also present were traces of charcoal (to 10 mm), cinder (to 15 mm) and coal (to 5 mm). No very clear picture emerged from the mainly well preserved and fairly abundant identifiable plant remains in this subsample. Many were seeds or fruits from woody taxa, especially elder (*Sambucus nigra* L.) and may indicate a period of abandonment. There were also traces of several taxa which might indicate importation of materials from heathland—a leaf (spine) of gorse (*Ulex*), traces of shoot and leaf-base of a moss in the genera *Polytrichum* or *Pogonatum*, and frond fragments of bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn). For the rest, the plant remains were weeds of waste places and none was present in more than very small numbers.

The 'flot', which was of modest size, contained abundant fragments of immature insects, mostly apparently fly pupae (though puparia were conspicuously rare). Preservation was somewhat variable, from average to rather poor (E 2.0-4.0, mode 2.5 weak; F 1.5-3.5, mode 2.5, weak, following the scheme of Kenward and Large 1998). There were rather more aquatic beetles than might be expected to be contributed by 'background fauna', suggesting that there was water nearby, or at the site of deposition, or that waste water was discharged onto the forming deposit. Terrestrial fauna was mostly taxa typical of intensive occupation sites, with a substantial component indicative of moderately to very foul decomposing matter. A few species originated from vegetation, having either been imported or arriving as background

fauna. Two *Sitona* sp. might conceivably have been associated with gorse. There were no grain pests.

There was in addition, a spot subsample (taken from the sample during inspection), consisting of a fragment of twig up to 160 x 15 mm which was of willow (*Salix*).

Discussion and statement of potential

More detailed recording of the insect remains from this deposit could improve our understanding of the nature of the site. This would be of particular interest in view of the fact that it comes from a town whose environmental past is poorly known. The interpretative value of further study of these remains is dependent on securing reasonably tight dating of the deposit, however.

Recommendations

If appropriate dating were available, it would be worth recording the insect remains from this deposit in detail.

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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