

Palaeoecology Research Services

**Assessment of biological remains from excavations at
Kerricks Farm, Duncow, Dumfries and Galloway (site
code: IC2.02)**

by

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Summary

Nine bulk sediment samples recovered from excavations at Kerricks Farm, Duncow, Dumfries and Galloway, were submitted for an assessment of their bioarchaeological potential. Six of the samples were associated with a Bronze Age barrow and three of these with cremations from within the barrow's centre.

Burnt bone fragments recovered during processing were returned to the excavator to be forwarded to the human bone specialist.

No ancient invertebrate remains were recovered from the samples and ancient plant remains were restricted to small quantities of charcoal of no interpretative value. No further work from an archaeobotanical or archaeoentomological point of view can be justified for this material.

All of the remaining unprocessed sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be processed for the recovery of remains other than those of plants and invertebrates.

KEYWORDS: KERRICKS FARM; DUNCOW; DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY; ASSESSMENT; BRONZE AGE; BARROW; PLANT REMAINS; CHARRED PLANT REMAINS; HUMAN BONE; CREMATION

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Introduction

A Bronze Age barrow was revealed near Kerricks Farm, Duncow, Dumfries and Galloway (NGR NX 960 836), during archaeological monitoring of topsoil stripping, along the proposed corridor of the second Scotland to Ireland interconnector pipeline, by Northern Archaeological Associates.

The barrow was excavated radially (50%), while the central cremation pits were fully excavated. Bulk samples ('BS' *sensu* Dobney *et al.* 1992) were taken from all of the barrow ditch deposits and the cremation pits were 100% sampled.

Methods

Six of the nine submitted sediment samples (those associated with the barrow) were inspected in the laboratory and their lithologies were recorded, using a standard *pro forma*, prior to processing, following the procedures of Kenward *et al.* (1980; 1986), for recovery of plant and invertebrate macrofossils.

The washovers resulting from processing were examined for plant and invertebrate macrofossils. The residues were scanned for larger plant macrofossils and other biological and artefactual remains.

The samples from those contexts associated with cremations (contexts 1709, 1721 and 1722) were processed primarily for the recovery of burnt human bone. Where present bone fragments were removed during processing when seen. The dried residues were sieved to 4 mm and the less than 4 mm fractions were bagged separately to be returned to the excavator for delivery to the

human bone specialist. The greater than 4 mm fractions were sorted and any additional fragments of human bone added to those recovered during processing and also returned to the excavator to be forwarded to the human bone specialist. In each case the individual tubs of each sample (9 from Context 1721 and 3 from each of Contexts 1709 and 1722) were sieved separately and any recovered bone was dried and placed in a bag labelled with both the context number and the tub number (to preserve information relating to the distribution of the fragments within the context).

Results

The results of the examination of the washovers are presented in context number order. 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 (duplicated from the context numbers by PRS for internal record keeping purposes).

The sediment description for each of the samples was almost identical: Moist, mid grey-brown, crumbly to unconsolidated, very stony, ?slightly clay sandy silt. Stones (2 to 60 mm) were abundant and larger stones (60 + mm), modern rootlets, and seedlings (except for Contexts 1712 and 1715) were present.

All of the residues from processing were composed of mineral material ranging from fine sand through to large stones/pebbles (to approximately 100 mm), and, occasionally, fine modern rootlets that had not separated off in the washovers.

No ancient invertebrate remains were recovered from the samples.

Context 1709 [secondary fill of pit 1720, overlying fill 1721. The deposit had been disturbed through modern ploughing activity, spreading it beyond the boundaries of cut 1720]

Sample 1709/T (75 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

The washover of about 300 cm³ consisted largely of modern roots, with traces of modern insects, earthworm egg capsules and a few modern weed seeds; there were only a very few fragments of charcoal (to 5 mm in maximum dimension).

Fragments of burnt bone recovered were returned to the excavator as described under Methods above.

Context 1712 [fill of re-cut of barrow ditch]

Sample 1712/T (22 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; approximately 20 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

The small washover of about 150 cm³ was largely of modern roots, with traces of modern weed seeds, earthworm egg capsules and a little charcoal (to 10 mm).

Context 1714 [secondary fill of barrow ditch]

Sample 1714/T (20 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; approximately 20 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

There was a small washover of about 20 cm³ of modern roots, with traces of modern weed seeds and a little charcoal (to 5 mm).

Context 1715 [primary fill of barrow ditch]

Sample 1715/T (20 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; approximately 20 litres of unprocessed sediment remain)

The small washover of about 20 cm³ consisted mainly of modern roots, with a trace of modern weed seeds and of coal and charcoal (both to 5 mm).

Context 1721 [fill of central (and largest) pit 1720 in the centre of the barrow containing the remains of a scattered cremation]

Sample 1721/T (200 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

The small (for 200 kg) washover of about 400 cm³ was of modern roots, with a little charcoal and burnt bone

fragments (both to 5 mm) and a few modern weed seeds and earthworm egg capsules.

Fragments of burnt bone recovered were returned to the excavator as described under Methods above.

Context 1722 [fill of smaller pit 1724 in the centre of the barrow containing a cremation urn possibly with contents intact]

Sample 1722/T (55 kg sieved to 1 mm with 300 micron washover; no unprocessed sediment remains)

There was a small washover of about 250 cm³ which comprised modern roots, with modern earthworm egg capsules and a little charcoal (to 5 mm) and a single ?cinder clast (15 mm).

Fragments of burnt bone recovered were returned to the excavator as described under Methods above.

Discussion and statement of potential

No ancient invertebrate remains were recovered from the samples and ancient plant remains were restricted to small quantities of charcoal of no interpretative value.

Recommendations

No further work from an archaeobotanical or archaeoentomological point of view can be justified for this material.

Retention and disposal

All of the remaining unprocessed sediment samples may be discarded unless they are to be processed for the recovery of remains other than those of plants and invertebrates.

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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