



Lea Manor Farm, Aldford, Chester,

Cheshire

Palaeoenvironmental Assessment



Oxford Archaeology North

October 2014

Nick Higham

Issue No: 2014-10/1575

OAN Job No: L10794

NGR: SJ 435 579

Document Title: Lea Manor Farm, Aldford, Chester, Cheshire

Document Type: Palaeoenvironmental Assessment Report

Client Name: Nick Higham

Issue Number: 2014-10/1575

OA Job Number: L10794

National Grid Reference: SJ 435 579

Prepared by: Denise Druce Sandra Bonsall
Position: Environmental Project Supervisor -
 Officer Environmental
Date: October 2014

Checked by: Denise Druce Signed 
Position: Environmental Project Officer
Date: October 2014

Approved by: Rachel Newman Signed 
Position: Senior Executive Officer:
Date: October 2014

Oxford Archaeology North

Mill 3, Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD
t: (0044) 01524 541000
f: (0044) 01524 848606

w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk
c: info@oxfordarch.co.uk

© Oxford Archaeology Ltd (2014)

Janus House
Osney Mead
Oxford
OX2 0EA
t: (0044) 01865 263800
f: (0044) 01865 793496

Oxford Archaeology Limited is a Registered Charity No: 285627

Disclaimer:

This document has been prepared for the titled project or named part thereof and should not be relied upon or used for any other project without an independent check being carried out as to its suitability and prior written authority of Oxford Archaeology being obtained. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for the consequences of this document being used for a purpose other than the purposes for which it was commissioned. Any person/party using or relying on the document for such other purposes agrees, and will by such use or reliance be taken to confirm their agreement to indemnify Oxford Archaeology for all loss or damage resulting therefrom. Oxford Archaeology accepts no responsibility or liability for this document to any party other than the person/party by whom it was commissioned.

CONTENTS

SUMMARY	2
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
1.1 Circumstances of the Project.....	4
1.2 Methodology	4
2. RESULTS	5
2.1 Results.....	5
3. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS	6
3.1 Discussion and Recommendations	6
BIBLIOGRAPHY	7

SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned in September 2014 by Nick Higham to assess the flots and residues from one environmental bulk sample taken from a Roman ditch recorded during archaeological investigations at Lea Manor Farm, Aldford, Chester (SJ 435 579). The bulk sample came from the base of the ditch. The sample was 1700ml in volume and was processed by OA North for the assessment of palaeoenvironmental remains. Although the paucity of palaeoenvironmental material meant that there was no potential for further analysis, the surviving remains provide very tentative evidence for the utilisation of heathland resources in the area during the Roman period.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Oxford Archaeology North would like to thank Nick Higham for commissioning the work. Sandra Bonsall processed the samples at the offices of Oxford Archaeology North in Lancaster, and also carried out the assessment of the plant remains. Denise Druce assessed and identified the charcoal and edited the report. The project was overseen by Denise Druce and Rachel Newman.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was asked by Nick Higham in September 2014 to undertake the palaeoenvironmental assessment of an environmental bulk sample taken during the excavations at Lea Manor Farm, Aldford, Chester (SJ 435 579). The single 1700ml sample (I2) came from the base of a Roman ditch.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

- 1.2.1 The sample was processed using hand flotation, where the flot was collected onto a 250µm mesh, air-dried and examined under a binocular microscope. The residues were also scanned for environmental remains and finds. The contents of the flot, such as charred plant remains (cpr), waterlogged plant remains (wpr), charcoal, snails, or bone, were recorded. The presence of modern contaminants, such as roots, insect eggs and modern seeds, was also noted. Where present, remains are quantified on a scale of 1-4, where 1 is rare (less than five items), 2 is frequent (6-25 items), 3 is common (26-100 items), and 4 is abundant (>100 items). Plant nomenclature follows Stace (2010).
- 1.2.2 Any charcoal fragments within the bulk sample were quantified and provisionally identified where possible. Other charred remains, such as Poaceae (grass) stem or tuber/rhizome fragments, were also quantified as these are useful indicators of the make-up of the fill. Charcoal identifications were made with reference to Hather (2000) and modern reference material.

2. RESULTS

2.1 RESULTS

2.1.1 The results of the assessment are presented in Table 1. The sample was highly minerogenic with little organic preservation. Charred plant remains (cpr) were rare, but included a single heathgrass (*Danthonia decumbens*) and a small grass (Poaceae) seed. Other charred remains were similarly rare, and comprised a single rhizome/tuber fragment and rare Poaceae stem fragments. Comminuted charcoal was abundant, and although many of the larger (>2mm) fragments were too poorly preserved for identification, a few resembled ericaceous wood of either heather (*Calluna* sp) or heath (*Erica* sp). Small (<2mm) fragments of ceramic building material (cbm) and hardened/baked sediment were also recorded.

Context no	Flot size ml	Matrix	Charred plant remains	Other remains	Comments
<i>12</i>	10	Roots/indeterminate plant matter (2), Charcoal <2mm (4) >2mm (2), sand (4), gravel (4), Poaceae (grass) stem fragments (1)	1 <i>Danthonia decumbens</i> (heathgrass) seed, 1 small Poaceae (grass) seed, 1 rhizome/tuber	Ceramic building material (1), hardened/baked sediment (1)	Charcoal, mostly indeterminate, although some fragments resembled possible Ericaceous wood

Note: 1=< five items; 4=>100 items

Table 1: Results of the assessment of plant remains and charcoal from Lea Manor Farm, Aldford, Chester

3. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 DISCUSSION

- 3.1.1 The lack of organic material in the sample suggests that conditions in the ditch were relatively dry. Consequently, no seeds preserved through waterlogging have survived. The presence of cbm, charcoal and other charred material, however, indicates that some waste material from nearby activities became incorporated into its fill. The recording of possible ericaceous wood, a rhizome/tuber fragment, and a single heathgrass seed is of interest, and may, very tentatively, provide evidence for the utilisation of heathland vegetation at the site. Peat turves and heather would have provided an excellent resource for fuel, construction and fodder (Greig 1991).

3.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.2.1 A fuller analysis of the plant remains would not add to the present study. Therefore no further work is warranted.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Greig, J, 1991 The British Isles, in W Van Zeist, K Wasylkowa, and KE Behre (eds), *Progress in Old World palaeoethnobotany*, Rotterdam, 299-332

Hather, JG, 2000 *The identification of the northern European woods*, London

Stace, C, 2010 *New flora of the British Isles*, 3rd edn, Cambridge



Mill 3
Moor Lane Mills
Moor Lane
Lancaster
LA1 1QD
t: (01524 541000
f: (01524) 848606
e: oanorth@oxfordarch.co.uk
w: www.oxfordarch.co.uk

Director and Chief Executive:
Gill Hey BA PhD MifA FSA

Private Limited Company Number: 1618597

Registered Charity Number: 285627

Registered Office: Oxford Archaeology Ltd.
Janus House, Osney Mead, Oxford, OX2 0ES