

Southworth Hall Farm, Cheshire Assessment of charred plant remains.

Client report



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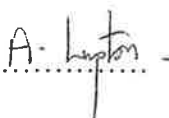
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SUMMARY

Oxford Archaeology North was commissioned by Liverpool Museum to advise on the environmental sampling strategy for charred plant remains and to assess the environmental samples from the excavation at Southworth Hall Farm, Southworth, Cheshire. Forty seven samples were selected by the excavators for the assessment. These were processed by flotation and the flots were assessed as to their potential to inform about the economy, environment and potential for dating of the site. Some charred plant remains were recorded in all samples although the quantities were small. Charred plant remains from crops were very limited with only occasional cereal grains identified. However, significant numbers of charred weed seeds were recorded in two, ?late prehistoric, samples and the analysis of these would inform about the ecology of the site. Ten samples, from ?Bronze age/late prehistoric and ?late prehistoric contexts, demonstrated a high potential for radiocarbon dating.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The samples were processed by the environmental department at Oxford Archaeology (South). The assessment of charred plant remains and report writing was undertaken at Oxford Archaeology North by Elizabeth Huckerby. The report was edited by Alan Lupton, who together with Carol Allen managed the project.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE PROJECT

- 1.1.1 Previous archaeological work at Southworth Hall Farm, Southworth, Cheshire NGR SJ 623941 in 1980 located a Bronze Age and Dark Age cemetery (Freke and Holgate 1990). This was followed in 1992 with a desk based assessment by Liverpool Museum (Cowell 1992) and in 1993 by a field walking and trial trenching evaluation by Liverpool Museum, which established that sites or potential sites from a number of periods were present at the site (Philpott *et al* 1993). This evaluation resulted in an excavation by Liverpool Museum in the Spring of 2003 and Oxford Archaeology North (OAN) was commissioned to advise on an environmental sampling strategy and to assess the environmental potential of the site.
- 1.1.2 Samples were taken by the excavators during this excavation from discrete and well secured contexts from possible Bronze Age, late prehistoric and Romano/British features. These features included a ditch, pits, post-holes, post pipes, gullies, layers and a possible buried soil. Forty seven samples were assessed for charred plant remains. The assessment was undertaken in order to establish whether plant material was present, the state of its preservation, the relative abundance of the remains, the possible significance of economic taxa and the presence of charred plant remains suitable for radiocarbon dating. A monolith was also taken through a possible buried soil for palynological assessment; however, this has been postponed until the results from the assessment of the soil micromorphology of the deposit are available, which are in turn dependent on the dating of the site.

2 METHODOLOGY

2.1 METHODOLOGY

- 2.1.1 The samples, from 10 litres to 40 litres in volume, were floated using a modified Siraf machine at Oxford Archaeology South; the flots were collected on 250 μ mesh and air-dried. The flots were scanned with a Leitz/Wild microscope and plant material was recorded and provisionally identified. The data are shown in Tables 3 and 4. The matrix components were also noted.

3 QUANTIFICATION

3.1 QUANTIFICATION

3.1.1 Forty seven samples were selected by the excavators for the assessment of charred plant remains. The number of samples and feature types from ?Bronze Age/late prehistory contexts are shown in Table 1 and from ?late prehistoric ones in Table 2.

3.1.2 One monolith was taken through a buried deposit provisionally identified as a buried soil by Dr Erica Guttman formerly of OAN now of the department of Archaeology at the University of Reading. This monolith is stored at OAN pending the results of the assessment of the soil micromorphology

| Feature type | No of samples |
|------------------------|---------------|
| Pit/post-hole | 4 |
| Pit | 5 |
| Gullies | 2 |
| ?buried soil | 1 |
| Layers | 2 |
| Tree hollow/post-holes | 2 |
| Total | 16 |

Table 1 number of environmental samples assessed from ?Bronze Age/late prehistory contexts

| Feature type | No of samples |
|----------------|---------------|
| Post-hole | 10 |
| Pit/ post-hole | 3 |
| Pit | 10 |
| Gullies | 4 |
| Total | 27 |

Table 2 number of environmental samples assessed from ?late prehistory

- 3.1.3 A single sample was selected from a Romano/British ditch and a further two (samples 260 and 261) from contexts for which there was no information available when the samples were assessed.

4 RESULTS

4.1 RESULTS see Tables 3 and 4

- 4.1.1 The flots were between 10ml and 150 ml in volume, with the majority between 10ml and 40ml. All flots demonstrated the preservation of some charred plant material, although most samples contained little evidence of economic crops. Occasional charred cereal grains were recorded in 16 samples. Occasional grains of wheat (*Triticum* sp), barley (*Hordeum*) and oats (*Avena*) and indeterminate grains were noted. Hazel nut fragments were identified in three samples (251, 255 and 256) from ?Bronze Age/late prehistory contexts (**2159**, **2002** and **2004** respectively).
- 4.1.2 Two samples (214 and 210) contexts **2127** and **2123**, from pit **2051**, contained significant quantities of charred weed seeds, both arable eg corn marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*), and grassland types eg small grasses and plantains (*Plantago*). These two samples were thought to date to the ?late prehistoric period.
- 4.1.3 Charcoal was identified in all samples and oak (*Quercus*), pine (*Pinus sylvestris*), and alder/hazel/birch-type (*Alnus/ Corylus/Betula*) were recorded; some roundwood was also noted. The preservation of the charcoal was often poor and the fragments were very small.
- 4.1.4 Other environmental remains recorded included fungal sclerotia, and very large numbers of ?invertebrate eggs possibly from parasites. Whether the latter are contemporary with the archaeological features or are the result of modern contamination is problematic. If they are contemporary with the archaeology they may give an insight into the possible use of the site.

5 DISCUSSION

5.1 DISCUSSION

- 5.1.1 The assessment of environmental samples for charred plant remains from Southworth Hall Farm, Southworth demonstrates that there is very limited potential for further analysis of charred plant remains. Evidence for the economy of the site and the surrounding environment is very restricted. Only two samples (214 and 210) from contexts **2127** and **2123**, both fills of pit **2051**, have the potential to inform about the local environment of the site in the late prehistory. The identification of large numbers of corn marigold seeds in these samples suggest that the contexts are more likely to date to the Romano/British period than earlier because it is not generally recorded from prehistoric contexts.
- 5.1.2 The presence of possible invertebrate eggs in the majority of the samples needs to be investigated by an appropriate specialist, as they may be indicative about possible uses of the site. However, their origin is problematic and they may result from grazing animals and therefore are modern contamination.

5.2 DATING OF THE SITE:

- 5.2.1 The dating of the site is of paramount importance and a number of the samples from all periods of the site do contain charred plant remains that are probably suitable for radiocarbon dating. These include cereal grains, charred weed and blackberry seeds, an axis from a catkin and possibly some charcoal either from roundwood or taxa such as pine. Sample and context numbers with potential for radiocarbon dating are listed below in Table 5:

| Sample no | Context no | Dating potential | Trench | Period |
|-----------|-------------|------------------------|--------|-------------------------------|
| 208 | 2093 | Possible | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 209 | 2122 | ?Round-wood charcoal | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 214 | 2127 | High | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 219 | 2205 | Possible | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 220 | 2206 | High | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 207 | 2050 | Good | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 210 | 2123 | High | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 229 | 2085 | Medium | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 211 | 2076 | Good | 105 | ?Late prehistoric |
| 243 | 2027 | Good | 100 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |
| 251 | 2159 | Good | 109 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |
| 255 | 2002 | Good | 104 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |
| 256 | 2004 | Good | 104 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |
| 246 | 2301 | Possible | 103 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |
| 247 | 2313 | Possible Pine charcoal | 103 | ?Bronze age /Late prehistoric |

Table 5 showing samples which contain material that is possibly suitable for radiocarbon dating

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1.1 It is recommended that two samples, 214 (context **2127**) and 210 (context **2123**) should be analysed for charred plant remains and that the results of this assessment should be included in a more detailed report following the dating of the site. Material for radiocarbon dating would need to be selected for submission to English Heritage for radiocarbon dating. If the assessment of the soil micromorphology confirms that the deposit is a buried soil it is recommended that the monolith from it should be assessed for palynological analysis.

7 TIME AND COSTS

7.1 CHARRED PLANT REMAINS

- 7.1.1 Three days to analyse two samples and produce a report by the environmental archaeologist at Oxford Archaeology North.

7.2 PALYNOLOGICAL ASSESSMENT

- 7.2.1 Three days to assess the potential for palynological analysis of the monolith from the possible buried soil, if required, by the environmental archaeologist at Oxford Archaeology North.

7.3 MANAGEMENT OF THE PROJECT

- 7.3.1 One day for OAN manager to manage the project

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| Trench | Cut | Feature | Sample | Context | Comments | Sample size in litres | Flot description | Plant remains | Potential |
|--------|------|---------------|--------|---------|---|-----------------------|---|---|-----------------------------------|
| 105 | 2057 | Post-hole | 201 | 2056 | Post-pipe | 10 | Flot 40ml, charcoal, oak+other, roundwood, poor preservation, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Cereals 1, oats/rye | Low |
| 105 | 2057 | Post-hole | 202 | 2056 | Post-pipe | 10 | Flot 35ml, charcoal 5, poorly preserved, oak+other taxa, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Charred weed seeds incl small legumes and <i>Hypericum</i> , <i>Chara/Nitella</i> oospores | None |
| 105 | 2057 | Post-hole | 206 | 2098 | Below S.201/202 | 10 | Flot 20ml, charcoal 3, poorly preserved, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Cereals 1, ?barley undiff, waterlogged seeds | Low |
| 105 | 2097 | Gully | 203 | 2096 | 2097 cuts 2093 (208) | 10 | Flot 10ml, charcoal 2, small, badly preserved, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2261 | Gully | 204 | 2084 | Final fill | 30 | Flot 50ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs 5+++ , modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2261 | Gully | 205 | 2101 | Stratigraphically below, S.204 | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2261 | Gully | 216 | 2124 | Stratigraphically below, S.205 | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 3, small fragments of poorly preserved charcoal, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2262 | Pit/post-hole | 248 | 2259 | Fill of feature cut by 2261 see samples 204, 205, and 216 | 10 | Flot 30ml, charcoal 4, some roundwood, <5mm, mixed taxa, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2121 | Pit | 208 | 2093 | Cut by gully 2097 | 40 | Flot 75ml, charcoal 5, oak+other, some >10mm, bud, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Cereals 1, undiff, tarry | Low, possible dating material |
| 105 | | Pit | 209 | 2122 | Pit, ?cut by 2261, s 204/205 | 20 | Flot 55ml, charcoal 5 poorly preserved, mixed taxa, roundwood, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia modern contamination | | None ? roundwood for dating |
| 105 | 2051 | Pit | 214 | 2127 | Final fill pit | 40 | Flot 150ml, charcoal 5, poorly preserved, oak?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Charred weed seeds 4, incl corn marigold, small grasses, plantain | Good high potential for dating |
| 105 | 2051 | Pit | 219 | 2205 | Primary fill of pit | 10 | Flot 10-15, charcoal 5, mainly very small fragments, oak+other taxa, some roundwood, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Charred weeds 1, small legumes | None ?dating material |
| 105 | 2051 | Pit | 220 | 2206 | Secondary pit fill grey/clay | 30 | Flot 20ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved, small?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Cereals 2, coleoptile ?barley, oats, charred weed seeds, corn marigold, <i>Chara/Nitella</i> oospores | Medium, high potential for dating |
| 105 | 2051 | Pit | 207 | 2050 | Same as 2127 but from opposite side of pit with | 40 | Flot 40ml, charcoal 4, some fragments >5mm, most small, poorly preserved, mixed taxa, | Cereals 1, undiff+oats?, charred weed seeds 2, 1 corn marigold | Low but dating |

| Trench | Cut | Feature | Sample | Context | Comments | Sample size in litres | Flot description | Plant remains | Potential |
|--------|------|---------------|--------|---------|---|-----------------------|--|--|--|
| 105 | 2051 | Pit | 210 | 2123 | hearth/oven material concentrated at base with wood stratigraphically under S.207 | 20 | ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination Flot 15-20ml, charcoal 5, well preserved, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | and grass Cereals 1, oats, charred weed seeds 5, incl corn marigold, grass and stinking mayweed | potential Good plus abundant material suitable for dating None |
| 105 | 2067 | Post-hole | 225 | 2066 | Only fill of 2067, which cuts earlier pit | 10 | Flot 20ml, charcoal 4, poorly preserved, ?invertebrate eggs 5, modern contamination | Small legume | None |
| 110 | 2181 | Post-hole | 226 | 2180 | Only fill of 2181, cuts earlier post-hole fill 2185 | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | | Low |
| 110 | 2186 | Post-hole | 227 | 2185 | See above S.226 | 10 | Flot 10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved, modern contamination | Cereals 1, undifferentiated wheat, charred weed seeds, corn marigold | Low |
| 105 | 2087 | Pit/post-hole | 228 | 2086 | Final feature in a complex of at least 3 features | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, oak+other poorly preserved, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2208 | Pit/post-hole | 229 | 2085 | Only fill of final feature in a complex of four intercutting features | 20 | Flot 40ml, charcoal 3, larger fragments oak+other, wood some part charred, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia modern contamination | Cereals 1 oat, charred blackberry, ?waterlogged seeds | None but material for dating |
| 105 | 2248 | Pit | 231 | 2225 | Final fill | 10 | Flot 50-75ml, charcoal 5, some >10mm, oak+other, fungal sclerotia modern contamination | Charred weed seeds 1, small legumes | None |
| 105 | 2248 | Pit | 232 | 2227 | stratigraphically below S.231 | 10 | Flot 30ml, charcoal 5, engrained, partially charred wood. Wood, fungal sclerotia modern contamination | Waterlogged <i>Rubus</i> seeds | None |
| 110 | 2183 | pit | 234 | 2182 | Later than above | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 4, poorly preserved, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2059 | Post-hole | 212 | 2058 | Fill of square feature | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | | Low |
| 105 | 2061 | Post-hole | 213 | 2060 | Fill of square feature | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 3, poorly preserved small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Possible charred tuber | Low |
| 105 | 2069 | Post-hole | 221 | 2068 | Post-pipe fill | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 4, poorly preserved small fragments, charred rush stems, modern contamination | | None |
| 105 | 2069 | Post-hole | 221 | 2068 | Post-pipe fill | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved small | | High |

| Trench | Cut | Feature | Sample | Context | Comments | Sample size in litres | Flot description | Plant remains | Potential |
|--------|------|-----------|--------|---------|---|-----------------------|--|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| 105 | 2065 | Post-hole | 224 | 2064 | | 10 | fragments, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | | |
| 105 | 2077 | Post-hole | 211 | 2076 | Square but not on same alignment as others ?RBL/ATER | 10 | Flot 20ml, charcoal 4, medium size, poorly preserved, modern contamination | Charred blackberry seeds | Low None dating potential |
| 105 | 2053 | Ditch | 200 | 2052 | | 20 | Flot <20ml, charcoal 4 small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs 5, modern contamination | | None |

Table 3 Southworth Hall Farm, Southworth: assessment of environmental samples for charred plant remains from late prehistory and Romano/British contexts. Charcoal, cereals and weeds assessed on a scale of 1=rare and 5=abundant

| Trench | Cut | Feature | Sample | Context | Comments | Sample size in litres | Flot description | Plant remains | Potential |
|--------|------|---------------------|--------|---------|---|-----------------------|---|---|---------------------------|
| 100 | 2026 | Gully | 242 | 2025 | Partially dug 1993, when produced pottery | 40 | Flot 25ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved some fragments >5mm, oak+other ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | ?Cereals 1, fragments, tarry, waterlogged seeds | None |
| 100 | 2028 | Gully | 243 | 2027 | Feature cut by 2026 | 40 | Flot 140ml, charcoal 5, mixed taxa, engrained, burnt rush stems, metal, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Cereals 1, undifferentiated, hazel nut fragments 3, charred weed seeds | Low but dating potential |
| 100 | 2030 | Pit | 244 | 2029 | Adjacent 2026 | 20 | Flot 25-30ml, charcoal 5, mainly oak, part mineralised, 5-10mm + smaller, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Waterlogged seeds incl <i>Ranunculus batrachium</i> type and <i>Carex</i> | Low |
| 119 | 2033 | Pit | 245 | 2032 | Very clay fill, poss pottery | 30 | Flot 15-20, charcoal 4, poorly preserved small fragments, metal?, modern contamination | | none |
| 114 | | Layer | 249 | 2378 | Possible buried soil | 40 | Flot 50ml, charcoal 2, very small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs 5, modern contamination | Cereals 1, poorly preserved wheat+undifferentiated, charred seeds 1, corn marigold and dock seeds | Low |
| 109 | | Layer | 250 | 2155 | May be fill of large amorphous feature | 40 | Flot 100ml, charcoal 5, fragments mainly <2mm, mixed taxa, ?invertebrate eggs, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Cereals 1, fragments | None |
| 109 | | Layer | 252 | 2156 | Stratigraphically below 2155 | 20 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved small fragments, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | | None |
| 109 | | ?pit | 254 | 2161 | Not sure whether fill of feature which cuts 2155 or variation within layer 2155 | 10 | Flot 10ml, charcoal 3, poorly preserved, possible pine, modern contamination | | None |
| 109 | 2160 | Pit | 251 | 2159 | 2160 cuts 2155 (S.250) | 10 | Flot 75ml, charcoal poor preservation, some oak, some roundwood, cinder? modern contamination | Hazel nut fragments 2, alder cone axis, charred weed seeds 2, incl blackberry and small legumes | Low good for dating |
| 104 | 2003 | Pit/post-hole | 255 | 2002 | Final fill | 10 | Flot 80-90ml, charcoal 5, larger fragments >2mm, <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> , possible pine cone scale, fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | Hazel nut fragments | Low but dating potential |
| 104 | 2003 | Pit/post-hole | 256 | 2004 | ? primary fill of 2003 or earlier feature | 10 | Flot 25ml, charcoal 3, poor preservation, some larger fragments, modern contamination | Hazel nut fragments 1 | None but dating potential |
| 101 | 2292 | Pit/large post-hole | 257 | 2283 | Primary fill of feature which is cut by 2280 (S.258) | 10 | Flot <10ml, charcoal 2, poorly preserved small fragments, modern contamination | Cereals 1, undifferentiated tarry appearance | None |
| 101 | 2280 | Pit | 258 | 2281 | Final fill of latest pit, which cuts 2283 | 20 | Flot 20ml, charcoal 5, poorly preserved small fragments, some roundwood?, invertebrate eggs. | Cereals 1, undifferentiated, charred weed seeds, small | None |

| Trench | Cut | Feature | Sample | Context | Comments | Sample size in litres | Flot description | Plant remains | Potential |
|--------|------|----------------------|--------|---------|---|-----------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 101 | 2286 | Pit/post-hole | 259 | 2285 | Adjacent to 2292 | 10 | modern contamination Flot <10ml, charcoal 3, poorly preserved small fragments fungal sclerotia, modern contamination | legume | None |
| 103 | 2311 | Tree hollow +p-holes | 246 | 2301 | Fill contained possible pottery ?post-hole/tree hollow, former possibly | 10 | Flot 125ml, charcoal 5, poorly preserved small fragments, mixed taxa incl conifer, ?invertebrate eggs, modern contamination | Cereals 1, undifferentiated, small legumes | Low, possible material for dating |
| 103 | 2314 | Tree hollow +p-holes | 247 | 2313 | No potential pottery but similar to S.246 | 10 | Flot 150ml, charcoal 5, <i>Pinus sylvestris</i> fragments 5-10mm, engrained with silt, modern contamination | | None but could be used for dating |
| | | | | | NO INFORMATION AVAILABLE | | | | |
| | | | 261 | 2095 | | | Flot <20ml, charcoal 4, some fragments >5mm, most small, modern contamination | | None |
| | | | 260 | 2291 | | | Flot 10ml, charcoal 4, oak+other, good preservation, some larger pieces, ?invertebrate egg, modern contamination | ?Cereals 1, undifferentiated | None |

Table 4 Southworth Hall Farm, Southworth: assessment of environmental samples for charred plant remains from Bronze Age/late prehistory contexts. Charcoal, cereals and weeds assessed on a scale of 1-5 where 1=rare and 5=abundant



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