

## 6 The Carbonized Remains by Mhairi Hastie

### 6.1 Introduction

During the excavations, bulk soil samples and a number of 'special' samples (primarily fragments of charcoal) were taken for palaeo-environmental analysis.

The samples were processed and assessed by Sheila Boardman in 1994. The sample fractions not sorted during the assessment stage were submitted to Headland Archaeology in 2002 for further post-excavation analysis. Plant remains removed from the samples and previously identified by Sheila Boardman were lost during the interim period. Consequently, further analysis could not be carried out on this material.

The following report concentrates on the carbonized plant remains. The summary tables amalgamate the results from the sample assessment as identified by S Boardman (Banks & Boardman 1995), with the carbonized plant remains removed and identified from the available sample fractions not originally sorted during the assessment stage.

A mixture of cereal, weed seeds/fruits, flax seeds and hazelnut shell were recovered from a number of the samples albeit in low quantities. The presence of naked barley, hulled barley and emmer grain is consistent with the prehistoric date for the site indicated by pottery recovered from a number of the archaeological features.

The absence of any high concentrations of cereal remains suggests that most was not charred *in situ*. The plant material recovered is likely to represent the remnants of food/grain burnt during food processing or corn drying that had been reworked and redeposited across the site.

### 6.2 Results

#### 6.2.1 Distribution

A mixture of carbonized plant remains, including cereal grains, seeds/fruits of wild taxa and one chaff fragment, were recovered, although no samples contained more than 15 identifiable cereal grains.

Seven areas (A, B, C, D, E and U) were excavated during the fieldwork. Carbonized plant remains were recovered from three of these areas – B, C and F – the bulk of which were in Area B.

#### 6.2.2 Cereal remains

The most commonly encountered element was carbonized cereal grain including hulled barley (*Hordeum vulgare*), naked barley (*Hordeum vulgare*

var *nudum*) and wheat tentatively identified as emmer wheat (*Triticum cf dicocum*). In addition, one emmer glume base fragment was recovered from context 698 [Area B: burnt deposit (context 699)] and one barley internode was recovered from Context 1102 [Area F: shallow scoop (context 1130)].

#### 6.2.3 Weed seeds

Small quantities of seeds/fruits of wild taxa were recovered from a number of samples including: *Bilderdykia convolvulus* (black bindweed), *Carex* spp (sedge), cf *Aphanes* sp (parsley piert), *Rumex* spp (dock), *Chenopodium album* (fat hen), *Polygonum* sp (knotgrass), *Spergula arvensis* (corn spurrey), *Stellaria media* (corn marigold), *Brassica cf rapa* (white cabbage/mustard) and Gramineae indet (grass family). In addition, one grain and one tuber of *Arrhenatherum* sp (oat-grass) were also recovered.

#### 6.2.4 Potential economic species

Two seeds of cultivated flax (*Linum usitatissimum*) were recovered from context 460 [Area B: burnt deposit (context 715)] and low quantities of hazelnut shell (*Corylus avellana*) were recovered from contexts 547, 649 and 671 (all from Area B).

### 6.3 Discussion

#### 6.3.1 Concentration and distribution

The quantity of plant remains is low and there is no evidence for any *in situ* burning. In all cases it is unlikely that the plant material relates to the original function of the feature from which they were recovered.

The lack of any obvious conflagration deposits within the excavated areas suggested that the plant remains area likely to be remnants of food or grain burnt during preparation/cooking activities or small-scale corn drying, and then reworked or re-deposited across the site. The slight increase in plant remains, particularly from pit fills in Area B, may suggest that the burnt grain or food debris was being dumped in the pits along with other rubbish.

#### 6.3.2 Plant assemblages

The plant assemblages consisted principally of cereal grain and seeds/fruits of wild taxa with occasional

fragments of charred hazelnut shell and two flax seeds. The recovery of both naked and hulled barley along with emmer grain corresponds well with the archaeological evidence indicating a prehistoric date for the features.

The quantity of weed seeds/fruits and other plant remains recovered was low, limiting the potential for discussion of these remains. The wild taxa present are commonly associated with cultivated land or waste places and were probably brought to the site via clothing, tools and with the harvested crops.

Hazelnut shell and flax seeds have been recovered from other prehistoric sites and the recovery of such remains at Maybury, albeit in low quantities, fits a well-established pattern. The low quantities recovered, however, are not sufficient to allow detailed discussion.

## 6.4 Summary

- A limited amount of carbonized plant remains were recovered from the site.
- The majority of plant remains were recovered from Area B with pit fills containing slightly larger average quantities of plant remains.
- The presence of naked barley, hulled barley and emmer cereal grains corresponds well with the prehistoric date indicated by pottery recovered from a number of the archaeological features.
- There is no evidence for *in situ* burning of plant remains and the material is unlikely to be associated with the original function of the features from which they were recovered.
- The lack of any obvious conflagration deposits within the excavated areas suggests that the plant material recovered is probably remnants of grain accidentally burnt during food processing or corn drying.