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Out of the Shade: Plant Remains and Wood Charcoal from the Rural 'Dark Age' Site of Dando Close, Wollaston

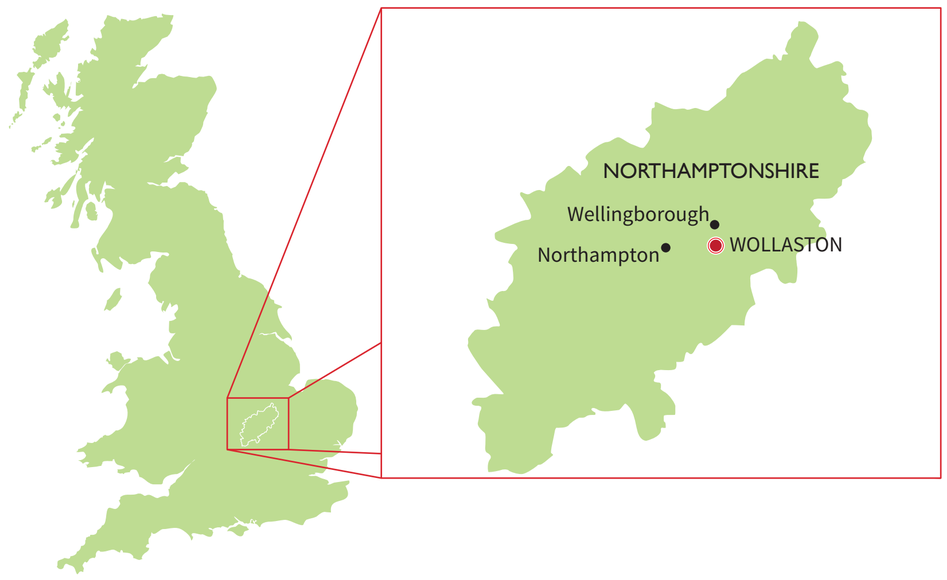
Dando Close, Northamptonshire, England was excavated between 2000 and 2002 by The Heritage Network ahead of development (Semmelmann & Ashworth, 2003).

The settlement was occupied throughout the Anglo-Saxon period (c.450 -1066 AD).

No earlier Roman or later medieval occupation was identified.

Excavations uncovered ten rectilinear post-built structures and eight sunken-featured buildings.

Material culture was predominantly domestic with small-scale craft and industries including weaving and metalworking.



	Early Saxon 3 Samples	Mid Saxon 7 Samples	Late Saxon 6 Samples
Chenopodium album L.	251	21	23
Atriplex sp.	43	2	3
Stellaria media L.			1
Stellaria palustris Retz.		9	
Spergula arvensis L.	2		
Silene vulgaris Garcke.	19	1	8
Polygonum sp.	2	1	
Rumex sp.	5	2	5
Rumex acetosa L.		1	7
Rumex acetosella L.	4	1	3
Rumex crispus L.	3	1	9
Raphanus raphanistrum L.	2		
Trifolium-type sp.			3
Stachys sp.		1	
Crepis sp.			1
Artemisia absinthium L.			1
Anthemis cotula L.	116	24	41
Juncus sp.	30	11	37
Eleocharis sp.			1
Carex sp.	4	3	2
Poaceae	46	9	19
Indet.	15	6	

Figure 1: Weed assemblage by phase

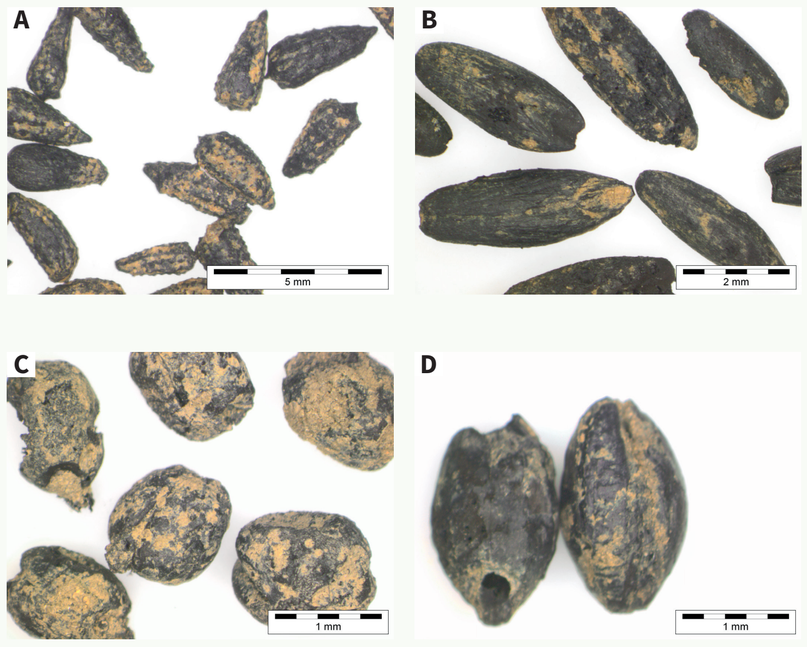


Figure 2: *Anthemis cotula*; *Avena* sp.; *Triticum aestivum*; *Hordeum vulgare*

Agricultural Economy

Hordeum vulgare and *Avena* sp. were the most common cereals throughout the occupation of the site, perhaps cultivated as a 'dredge' crop and made into bread or biscuits (Banham & Faith, 2014).

While early Anglo-Saxon assemblages are often dominated by *Hordeum vulgare* and *Avena* sp., the paucity of *Triticum aestivum* from the Mid-Saxon period is unusual (Hamerow, 2004).

Anthemis cotula, an indicator of heavy clay cultivation, is associated with *Triticum aestivum* from 700 AD suggesting intensification of the ploughing regime (Smith, 2011).

Weeds are dominated by members of Chenopodiecea suggesting spring sowing.

No wild food plants were recovered suggesting they were not an important component of the Anglo-Saxon diet, a phenomenon that has been identified by Sykes (2011) who suggests they were deliberately avoided for cultural reasons.

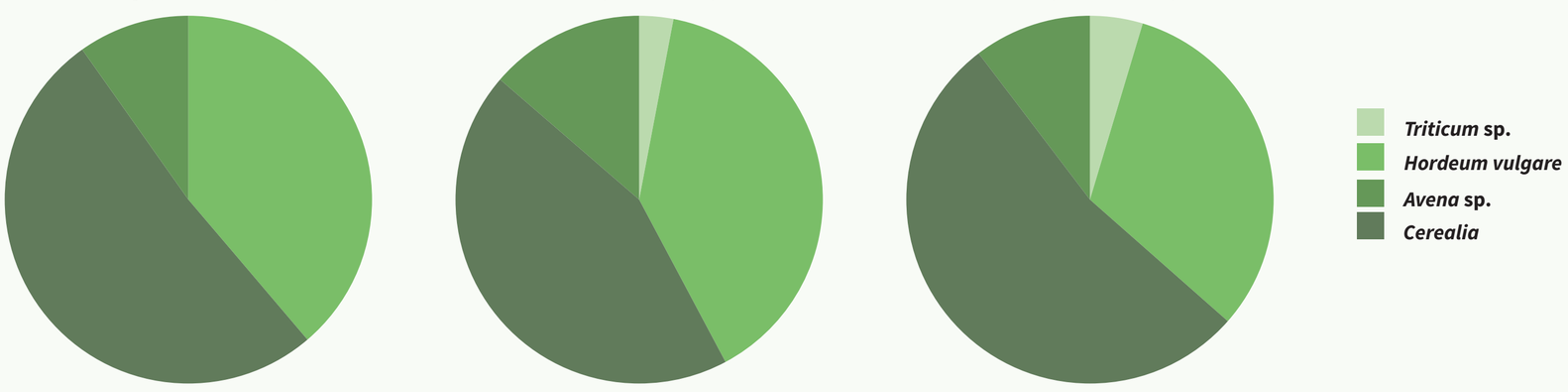


Figure 3: Proportions of cereals by phase

Anthracological Assemblage

Quercus deciduous, the dominant species of both samples, suggests that a *Quercus* woodland was located close to the settlement. Low curvature of the annual rings suggests the Mid-Saxon *Quercus* charcoal derived from a single burnt structural timber (Dufraisse, 2006).

Riverine taxa of *Populus/Salix* are likely to have derived from driftwood (Théry-Parisot *et al*, 2010) from the tributary stream of the River Nene located nearby.

Radial cracks, a positive indicator of the charring of damp wood (Keepax, 1988), were identified in 43% of the Maloideae charcoal fragments, suggesting that they were freshly cut when burnt. These fragments potentially represent the coppicing of *Malus*/*Pyrus* trees within the local area.

Figure 4: Taxa Representation in the Early Anglo-Saxon Period

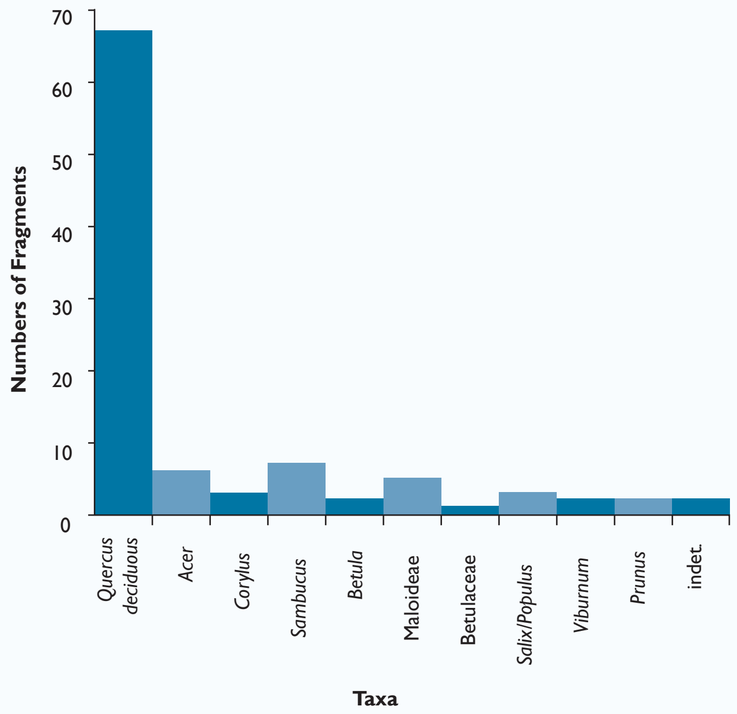
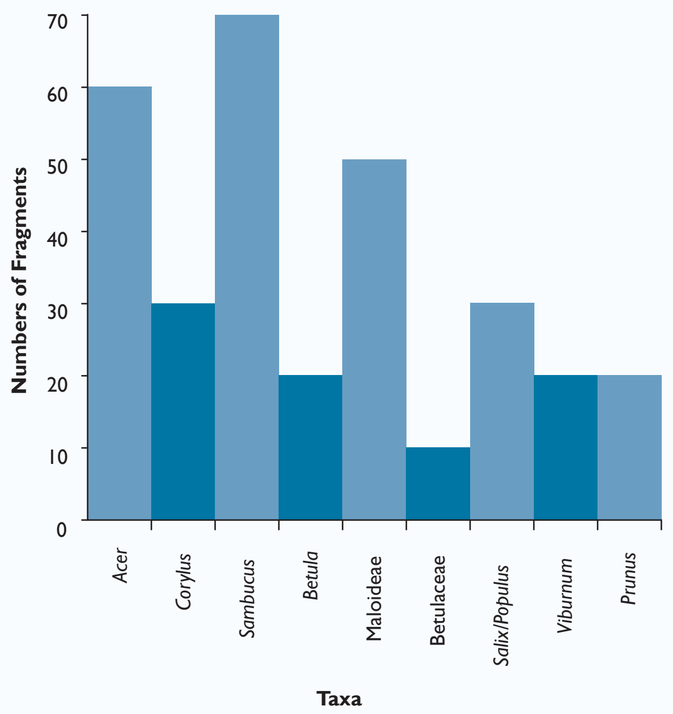


Figure 5: Taxa Representation in the Early Anglo-Saxon Period excluding *Quercus*



Conclusions

The absence of pre-Roman and later medieval features features makes Dando Close a significant purely Anglo-Saxon site.

The dominance of *Hordeum vulgare* and *Avena* sp. is unusual compared to other sites in the Midlands where *Triticum aestivum* and *Secale cereale* tend to tend to be the main cultivars by the Mid-Saxon period.

Intensification of the agricultural regime occured from the Mid-Saxon period.

The settlement must have been adjacent to agricultural fields of Hordeum vulgare and Avena sp., and located close to a Quercus-dominated woodland environment, while people potentially practised coppicing of Maloideae trees.

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