

Technical report

Analysis of plant remains from Gortnahown 3, Co. Cork (E2477)

By Penny Johnston

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http://eachtra.ie/new_site/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/gortnahown3-journal.pdf

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Appendix 5 Plant remains

By Penny Johnston

Introduction

This short report details the results of plant remains analysis from Gortnahown 3, Co. Cork (E2477). The site comprised a series of prehistoric features, including structural features (stake-holes and post-holes), pits and hearths.

Methodology

The samples were collected on site as bulk soil and were processed using machine-assisted floatation (following guidelines in Pearsall 2000). The floating material (or 'flot') from each sample was collected in a stack of geological sieves (the smallest mesh size was 250µm). When all the carbonised material was collected the flot was then air-dried in paper-lined drying trays prior to storage in airtight plastic bags. The samples were scanned under low-powered magnification (x 10 to x 40) using a binocular microscope.

Results

The results of preliminary scanning are presented in Table 1. A total of 14 samples were scanned. Seeds were recovered from just three samples: C.34 (S.6), C.45 (S.14) and C.47 (C.29).

Sample	Context	% scanned	Charcoal	Seeds
1	24	100	Low	Absent
3	26	100	Low	Absent
5	5	100	Medium	Absent
6	34	100	Medium	Low
14	45	100	Low	Low
20	53	100	Absent	Absent
22	55	100	Low	Absent
24	20	100	Low	Absent
28	12	100	Low	Absent
29	47	100	Low	Low
33	8	100	Medium	Absent
34	77	100	Low	Absent
37	80	100	Low	Absent
39	4	100	Low	Absent

Table 1: Scanned samples from Gortnahown 3, Co. Cork (E2477)

Where plant material was found, it was only retrieved in small quantities. The identified material (presented in Table 2) included hazelnut shell fragments, barley grains and a small amount of weed seeds.

Context	47	34	45
Sample	29	6	14
Hazelnut shell fragments (<i>Corylus avellana</i> L.)			4
Cleavers (<i>Galium aparine</i> L.)			2
Barley grains (<i>Hordeum vulgare</i> L.)		1	4
Indeterminate cereal grains	1		

Table 2: Plant material in samples from Gortnahown 3, Co. Cork (E2477)

Hazelnut shell fragments are a ubiquitous find in archaeobotanical assemblages in Ireland. Hazelnut shell is a waste product, not directly consumed, but removed before the nut was eaten, and therefore very likely to be burnt with domestic rubbish. The nut shell is hard and resistant to decay, this ensures that it survives archaeologically. These combined factors ensure that fragments of hazelnut shells are commonly found in charred plant remains assemblages dating to a great variety of periods (Monk 2000).

The only cereal type found was barley. This is a common cereal type recovered from Irish prehistoric deposits; more likely to be found in Bronze Age (see Johnston 2007, 73) rather than Neolithic assemblages, but known from both periods and from occasional assemblages dated to the Iron Age.

References

Johnston, P. 2007 Analysis of Carbonised Plant Remains, pp. 70 – 79 in Grogan, E., O'Donnell, L. and Johnston, P. *The Bronze Age Landscapes of the Pipline to the West*. Bray, Wordwell.

Monk, M. 2000 Seeds and soils of discontent. An environmental archaeological contribution to the nature of the early Neolithic. In Desmond, A., Johnson, G., McCarthy, M., Sheehan, J. and Shee Twohig, E. (eds.) *New Agendas in Irish Prehistory*. Bray, Wordwell.