

In July 2006, archaeologists from the University of Bristol with involvement from Atkins Heritage, embarked on a contemporary archaeology project with a difference; the ‘excavation’ of an old Ford Transit van, used for field archaeology projects for some years prior to its new life in works and maintenance.



The Van – with Cassie Newland and John Schofield

The project aim was to investigate a characteristic type of contemporary place, and to establish what archaeology can contribute to understanding the way society and specifically archaeologists use these places. The van was ‘excavated’ systematically, recording all features, structures, deposits and artefacts, as well as introducing specialists for particular tasks (Newland *et al.* 2007). As part of the excavation, a small sample of fibrous hair-laden material from within the cabin of the vehicle was investigated as to whether any insect remains were present. This contained a surprisingly diverse assemblage comprising 119 individuals from 60 beetle taxa.



Some beetles of The Van: *Anobium punctatum*, *Sitophilus granarius*, *Ahasverus advena*, *Cartodere constricta*, *Ernobius mollis* and *Oryzaephilus surinamensis* (Top Left to Bottom Right)

The beetle assemblage was heavily dominated by woodworm, *Anobium punctatum* (12% all individuals). These are accompanied by a community of 13 other woodland, including bark beetles (e.g. *Dryocoetinus villosus*), canopy taxa (*Phyllobius pyri*, *Polydrusus cervinus*), predatory taxa (e.g. *Cerylon histeroides*) and taxa of heavily decomposed wood (*Orthoperus* sp.). This implies that the wooden panel flooring of the vehicle was in an advanced state of decay.



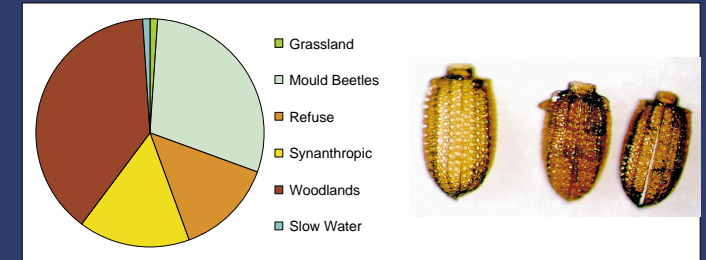
Above: Artefact scatter and objects recovered during excavation

Synanthropic taxa were abundant, including three common pests of stored grain; *Oryzaephilus surinamensis*, *Sitophilus granarius* and *Cryptolestes ferruginus*. Numerous mould beetles were present, most of which are common in decaying plant debris. These included four individuals of the distinctive *Aridius nodifer*, most commonly found on rotting wood (Hinton 1945, Palm 1959) and three taxa of the minute genera *Cartodere* and *Dienerella* (*D. ruficollis*, *D. filum* and *Cartodere constricta*)



Above Left: Excavation in progress and environmental sampling (above right)

Archaeologically this is clearly a building assemblage, containing few ‘outdoors’ taxa and a number of taxa characteristic of a ‘House Fauna’ (Hall and Kenward 1990, 398-399; Kenward and Hall 1995, 662-667). The number and condition of the woodworm would suggest an infested timber construction. An environmental context for the ‘building’ is suggested by a number of the *phytophagous* taxa, which are characteristic of waterside environments (e.g. *Phyllotreta* and *Longitarsus* sp.). Nearby woodland is also implied by weevils of the genera *Polydrusus* and *Phyllobius* and the 10-Spot Ladybird, *Adalia decempunctata*.



Above Left: Proportion of individuals recovered per ecological group

Above Right: Individuals of *Cartodere constricta* recovered from the van.

The assemblage recovered includes a variety of components considered characteristic of the stable manure ‘indicator group’ proposed by Kenward and Hall (1997). These include taxa considered indicative of stored hay (*T. stercorea*), grain, ‘house fauna’ taxa and stable manure decomposition (*Acritus nigricornis*). This strongly implies the presence of material which is at least ‘stable manure like’ – nutrient rich compost incorporating traces of foodstuffs and deposited within a building, apparently the detritus of many years field service.

### Bibliography

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