

Britannia 50 (2019): Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa* Mill.) in Britain: Re-assessment of its Status as a Roman Archaeophyte

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ONLINE TABLE 3. RESULTS OF THE DETAILED REVIEW OF GODWIN'S CITED FINDS OF SWEET CHESTNUT

Grid references have been updated using the National Record of the Historic Environment (NRHE) entries, unless otherwise stated.

BGS = British Geological Survey.

Status: '?' = unverifiable identification and/or chronology; 'X' = rejected (for reasons given in table).

Site name OS grid ref.	Time period	Material Feature / deposit type	Status as revised by this review	Original description	Comments and evaluation
Crayford brickearth pit, Kent TQ 517 759 (Stoneham's Pit) (Roe 1968, 146)	Interglacial. Age uncertain	Wood / charcoal (not determined) Brickearth pit	X Insecure context; contradictory reports; unverifiable	Kennard (1944, 127, 138) cites the original record of Ridley (1885) who, during a Geologists' Association (GA) field excursion to Crayford in 1885, reported finding 'a small fragment of the [sweet chestnut] wood ... in a brick-earth pit between Erith and Crayford, Kent ... It was in the lowest part of this stratum that the wood was found, together with Palaeolithic flint-flakes. Bones of the rhinoceros have been also found in the same pit, and in contemporaneous deposits remains of two other species of rhinoceros, the mammoth, and Irish elk, together with bones of still existing animals. There can be no doubt, therefore, of the date of the fragment, and it is hardly likely to have been introduced at so early a date.'	Primary source checked. The discovery of the 'wood' specimen was not mentioned in the formal Note of the GA Meeting of 1885 (Spurrell 1885) that Ridley had attended; and subsequent researchers have not reported seeing the specimen, including Reid who described the piece as 'charcoal' (Reid 1899, 146). Kennard (1944, 138–9) reported doubts by previous workers (Bevis and Griffin 1909, 37) and A.J. Wilmott (as a pers. comm.) about the identification of the wood as <i>Castanea sativa</i> , reiterating that it cannot be easily differentiated from oak ' <i>Quercus sessiliflora</i> ' and that the specimen should be re-examined, if it existed. Enquiries by R.J. of Prof. Schreve (who discusses the site in her PhD thesis, 1997), the BGS Archive and Oxford University Museum have revealed no trace of this specimen since its first recording by Ridley.

Bedham Hill, West Sussex TQ 0281 2160	Flandrian VIIb. Neolithic	Charcoal Hearth	× Insecure context	Keef (1940, 222–7) describes a series of flint-chipping sites and 5 hearths around the house named Mockbeggars lying on Bedham Hill above the River Arun valley. Keef excavated Hearth 1 – the only hearth from which (possible) sweet chestnut was recorded – in 1937 and Maby identified the charcoals found there. Keef (1940, 224) stated that ‘[t]he charcoal was from the following trees: Hawthorn, Beech, Holly, Common Oak, and Sweet Chestnut (?), i.e. the trees that grow in the district at the present day’. Keef (ibid.) records: ‘this hearth [Hearth 1] is so indeterminate, owing to objects from near-by Tudor rubbish-pits having been trodden into the hearth and to the bones being unidentifiable, that the hearth’s period must remain an open question at present.’	Primary source checked. The context for ‘Hearth 1’ where the ‘Sweet Chestnut (?)’ charcoal was found does not appear dateable – and the species identification itself was questioned (Godwin had a question mark by the site period).
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<p>Cissbury Camp, West Sussex</p> <p>TQ 13908 08031</p>	<p>Iron Age. Iron Age– Roman</p>	<p>Charcoal</p> <p>‘various cuttings’; but charcoal was only mentioned specifically from Pit 10</p>	<p>✕ Insecure context; not verified *</p>	<p>Curwen and Ross Williamson (1931, 31) reported Maby’s charcoal identifications: ‘As the date of all the specimens must range only between the fourth century B.C. and the fourth century A.D. it was not felt that a detailed list of the positions of individual specimens was necessary, especially as it would not be easy to distinguish always between Roman and pre-Roman examples. Out of 115 specimens examined, 16 distinct species of woods were determined, as follows: <i>Aesculus</i> sp., <i>Alnus</i> sp.?, <i>Buxus</i> sp.?, <i>Castanea</i> sp., <i>Cornus</i> sp., <i>Corylus</i> sp., <i>Euonymus</i> sp.?, <i>Fagus</i> sp., <i>Fraxinus</i> sp., <i>Populus</i> sp.?, <i>Prunus</i> sp.?, <i>Pyrus</i> sp., <i>Quercus</i> sp., <i>Rhamnus</i> sp.?, <i>Ulex</i> sp., <i>Salix</i> sp.’.</p>	<p>Primary source checked. The charcoal results are not differentiated by feature, nor are counts presented. Queries next to some of the taxa names were indicated with a ‘?’; however, there was no query indicated for either ‘<i>Castanea</i> sp.’ or ‘<i>Aesculus</i> sp.’. J. Salisbury (Worthing Museum and Art Gallery) has searched their archives for the Cissbury Camp charcoal specimens, but those known to be there could not be found (March 2017), so Maby’s record has not been verified.</p> <p>[A. Maxted (Brighton Museum and Art Gallery) located a tin in their archives labelled ‘Charred wood. Cissbury Mines, found by Mr E.H. Willett’, but this appears to have derived from an earlier excavation by Willett (in 1873–4, as referred to in Curwen and Ross Williamson (1931, 15)) and reported in Willett (1880) making no reference to <i>Castanea</i>.]</p>
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<p>Pevensy Roman fort (<i>Anderitum</i>), East Sussex</p> <p>TQ 6444 0477</p>	Roman	Wood Well	? Suspected misidentification; insecure context	<p>Godwin cited Salzmänn (1908): that paper describes a well fill that was excavated from the Roman fort at Pevensy. Salzmänn (1908, 135) reported A.H. Lyell's wood identifications: 'identified among the pieces of wood from the well: oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>), hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), willow (<i>Salix alba</i>), Maple? (<i>Acer campestre</i> [sic]), hawthorn (<i>Crataegus oxyacantha</i>) and beech (<i>Fagus sylvestris</i>).'</p> <p>A separate report, in Salzmänn (1909, 94–5), carries the same account of the excavation, almost <i>verbatim</i>, but now with 14 species of wood identified by A.H. Lyell: 'oak (<i>Quercus robur</i>), holm oak (<i>Q. ilex</i>), hazel (<i>Corylus avellana</i>), willow (<i>Salix alba</i>), maple (<i>Acer campestre</i> [sic]), hawthorn (<i>Crataegus oxyacantha</i>), beech (<i>Fagus sylvestris</i>), holly (<i>Ilex aquifolium</i>), mountain ash (<i>Pyrus aucuparia</i>), furze (<i>Ulex europaeus</i>), heath (<i>Erica arborea</i>), alder (<i>Alnus glutinosa</i>), sweet chestnut (<i>Castanea vesca</i>) and cherry (<i>Prunus cerasus</i>).'</p>	<p>Primary sources checked: Godwin's citation of Salzmänn (1908) appears to be an error, as it makes no reference to <i>Castanea</i> in the list of wood species recovered. However, the separate report on Pevensy (Salzmänn 1909) does refer to a specimen of <i>Castanea</i> recovered from the well fill. These two papers by Salzmänn refer to the same excavation for the same time period and are substantially identical throughout the two texts. The 1909 text makes no mention of a revision of the wood and plant species reported in the 1908 text. The list of wood species in the 1909 paper generates some questions about the accuracy of the identifications. <i>Erica arborea</i> (tree heath) is not indigenous to Britain, so, if the identification was correct, it must have been imported: no evidence of a pre-Roman or Roman introduction has been reported. <i>Prunus cerasus</i> (dwarf cherry) is not indigenous to Britain, but, according to Schweingruber (1990, 135), <i>P. cerasus</i> has the same wood anatomical characteristics as <i>Prunus avium</i> (wild cherry) – which is indigenous to Britain – implying that they are not separable microscopically. It is unclear why Lyell chose to report these two non-indigenous species instead of their native equivalents.</p>
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Woodcutts Common, Dorset ST 963 181	Roman	Charcoal Surface trenching; and the small well	× Misidentification	‘Fragments of the wood of the Spanish chesnut (<i>Castanea vulgaris</i> Lam.), as identified by Mr. Carruthers, F.R.S., of the British Museum, were found in this quarter, being the only wood found in the north-west quarter, in surface trenching’ (Pitt Rivers 1887, 191). ‘Fragments of chesnut, oak, ash, hazel and willow wood as identified by Mr. Carruthers, of the British Museum, were found in the filling of this well’ (Pitt Rivers 1887, 194).	Primary source checked: Godwin (1975) has cited the years of the Woodcutts (and Rotherley) excavations (1881–5) rather than the relevant excavation report (in this case, Pitt Rivers 1887). Identification of the wood (charcoal) was undertaken by W. Carruthers (Pitt Rivers 1887, 177–8). The charcoal material has been recovered from The Salisbury Museum and re-examined. No secure identifications of sweet chestnut were made by this research – see Table 2 for details.
Rotherley, Wilts. ST 949 195	Roman	Charcoal Pits 1, 39 and 49	× Misidentification **	‘Edible chestnut’ was the sole taxon recorded in each of the pits in which it was identified: Pit 1 – South-east quarter; Pit 39 – East quarter; Pit 49 – Main Circle (Carruthers in Pitt Rivers 1888, 230).	Primary source checked: Godwin (1975) cites Helbaek (1953 [<i>sic</i>]) in the site table entry for Rotherley, however, the correct reference is ‘Helbaek 1952’. Helbaek (1952, 229) does mention Rotherly [<i>sic</i>], but with respect to spelt wheat (<i>Triticum spelta</i>) and hulled barley: there is no mention of <i>Castanea</i> . For Rotherley, Godwin should have cited the excavation report by Pitt Rivers (1888), where identification of the wood (charcoal) undertaken by W. Carruthers is reported (Pitt Rivers 1888, 229–30). The original charcoal material has been recovered from The Salisbury Museum and re-examined. No secure identifications of sweet chestnut were made by this research – see Table 2 for details.
Christ’s Hospital, London TQ 3189 8144	Roman	Wood Pit B	× Insecure context	Godwin cited ‘Lyell (1912)’. Lyell contributed to Appendix III in Norman and Reader (1912, 334), which describes ‘woods’ found in various London excavations, identified by A.H. Lyell, including ‘Woods from Christ’s Hospital. Pit B. Birch (<i>Betula alba</i>), Hazel (<i>Corylus Avellana</i>), Oak (<i>Quercus Robur</i>), Sweet Chestnut (<i>Castanea Sativa</i>), Willow or Poplar’.	Primary source checked: Norman and Reader (1912, 334) describe Lyell’s four contexts under ‘Woods from Christ’s Hospital’, of which ‘Pit B’ is where the sweet chestnut was recorded. The description of the excavation provided by Norman and Reader (1912, 284–6) does not indicate a secure context for Pit B. The absence of any details of the specimen(s) identified by Lyell prevents re-assessment of the reported sweet chestnut find.

Red Hill, Goldhanger, Essex ? TL 925 087 ? TL 908 084 (location of record is unknown)	Roman or Celtic	Charcoal Salt production site	? Insecure context *	Godwin (1975) refers to ‘?Goldhanger’ on page 276 but there is no site entry for Goldhanger in <i>Section IV: Recorded Sites</i> . There is a site entry for ‘Redhills, Goldhanger, Essex’ (p. 74), for which ‘Reader 1907–9’ is cited as the source. However, the correct reference should be Reader (1909) and the relevant information on charcoals in that volume is by Lyell.	Primary source checked. Lyell (in Reader 1909, 187–8) provides a charcoal report, which includes <i>Castanea</i> , for ‘Red Hill, Goldhanger’, one of many features on the Essex coast generically described as Red hills. Unfortunately, the charcoal report does not state the specific Red hill at Goldhanger from which the finds were derived, nor does it give any information on the finds. Charcoal reported from later excavations (see Lyell 1911, 85) included ‘Horse-chestnut (?)’ but not sweet chestnut. Archived specimens were unsuccessfully sought.
Nuthampstead, (The Warren, Scales Park) Herts. TL 4200 3426	Medieval. A.D. 1300	Charcoal Hearth	? Medieval deposit	Charcoal identifications were carried out by Hyde (1946): out of eleven small fragments of charcoal were identified: three pieces of ash, three pieces of oak and two pieces of sweet chestnut (described as ‘part of a small branch with the base of a branchlet 0.6x0.8x2.0 cm; and more mature wood 0.8x1.0x2.1 cm’).	The charcoal assemblage from a hearth within a medieval moated site consisted of eleven fragments, of which two pieces were identified as <i>Castanea</i> . The site was dated to the thirteenth century (Williams 1946), so is considered too late to be ascribed to any Roman period activity. The charcoal specimens were not searched for.

* = ‘*Aesculus*’ (horse chestnut) wood charcoal was allegedly identified at the site.

** = ‘*Juglans*’ (walnut) wood charcoal was allegedly identified at the site.

Juglans regia is considered an archaeophyte of Roman origin in Britain; but *Aesculus hippocastanum* is considered an introduction to Europe (and thence to Britain) from the Balkans from around the sixteenth century (Lack 2002; Stace and Crawley 2015, 395–6), hence questioning the reliability of the ‘*Aesculus*’ identifications in the alleged Roman contexts.

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