

APPENDIX 12 PLANT AND INSECT
MACROFOSSILS*Allan Hall & Harry Kenward*

Macrofossil plant remains derived from bulk-sieved samples representing ten contexts were examined. These included seven samples that came from the material immediately under the graveyard – Contexts 328, 349, 352, 366, 432, 435 and 441. The other three contexts were 126 (post hole fill), 419 (layer beneath cobbled surface) and 442 (silt build-up over cobbled surface 443), of which only Context 419 yielded more than a very few identifiable remains. With the exception of post hole fill 126, all these deposits predated the churchyard. For the most part the plant remains in these deposits were uncharred ('waterlogged'), with a little wood charcoal but no other charred plant fragments apart from a very few cereal grains and a single charred sedge nutlet. Preservation of the plant (and insect) material was generally moderately good and certainly typical of many urban occupation deposits with moderate to low concentrations of waterlogged remains. Data pertaining to these samples are fully recorded in the archive report at the National Record of the Historic Environment of Scotland.

Though small, the assemblages of remains were typical of urban medieval occupation deposits and most of the fruits and seeds probably originated in weeds growing in the vicinity or arriving with materials such as hay and straw or other plant litter. The regular occurrence of fragments from heather certainly pointed to a component arriving from moorland or perhaps peat (eg in the form of heather brushwood or turves). Although beetle remains were extremely rare and mostly rather fragmentary, there were several well-preserved spider beetles in at least five samples. All of the taxa were typical of occupation deposits of the period and probably represented moist organic matter, including material ejected from buildings. The presence of *Trox* perhaps hinted at dumps of bone or animal skins, but these might also have lived in dry nests within structures. The few earthworm egg capsules present were not unexpected in deposits of this kind, though the occasional small freshwater snails presumably originated with the aquatic plants in imported cut wetland vegetation or water from a pond or stream. None of the assemblages showed the predominance of any particular kind of material.

Most notable among the taxa recovered were the remains of fig seeds (present in eight of the ten samples), small fragments of madder root (traces in four samples) and weld seeds (in four samples), as representatives of 'useful' plants and, in the case of the fig and madder, imported commodities. It is significant that a fragment of red wool textile, dyed with madder, was recovered from an underlying silt deposit, Context 349 (Appendix 8). Madder does not appear to have been recorded previously from archaeological deposits in Scotland, though it is known from the Anglo-Scandinavian and medieval periods from York (Kenward & Hall 1995 and Hall unpublished data), and medieval deposits in Beverley, East Riding of Yorkshire (McKenna 1992; Allison et al 1996) and Bristol (Jones & Watson 1987; Jones 1998). It was widely used in Europe in the medieval and post-medieval periods as an everyday source of red dye for textiles. Grierson (1986) gives a brief account of its history of importation and use in Scotland.

Weld, too, has a long history of use as a dye (providing shades of yellow), though it is also a plant likely to have been growing as a weed of disturbed soils, as it is today. The occurrence of the two together in the same deposits lends support to the suggestion that it was here being used as a dyeplant and by the same token it might be argued that the remains of heather might also represent imported dyestuff.

Fig is known from a number of sites in Scotland in the medieval period, so this record from Edinburgh is a useful addition to the growing body of evidence. Previously it has been identified from Paisley Abbey (Dickson 1996), at least seven sites in Aberdeen (Fraser & Dickson 1982; Kenward & Hall 2001) and from a late medieval to early post-medieval deposit as far north as Kirkwall, Orkney (Hall 1982). The seeds presumably represent imported dried fruits in all these cases. A few of the other remains from the Parliament House assemblage seemed likely to have arrived with the fig seeds as food waste: the traces of grape pip in one sample, and of raspberry, blackberry and perhaps even sloe. Clearly these were the more decay-resistant kinds of remains.

Though limited, the results of these analyses demonstrated the value of investigation of deposits of this kind, especially in an area where very few studies of plant and animal remains in archaeological occupation deposits have been undertaken.