

Neolithic wheat trial at Hengistbury Head Visitor Centre – Summary

Val Simcock

Objective -

Linking the collection to items in the garden

Choice of example -

As gardeners, growing a plant and food source appealed as first attempt

Reference to collection -

In the collection at Hengistbury, the panel describing settled Neolithic life refers to growing grain

Place grain growing in timeline -

Neolithic period (c.5,000 to 4,000 years ago)

E.g. Settlement at Hengistbury 4,000 years ago would have cleared and cultivated ground to grow grain as a staple food

Choice of variety -

Requested advice from Butser Ancient Farm who grow prehistoric grains and kindly donated Emmer and Einkorn wheat ears, both typical of what may have been grown in Neolithic

Processing wheat ears

Individual wheatears rubbed between gloved hands, removing chaff and leaving seed still in husk. Husk prised open to reveal seed. Seeds stored in paper bags awaiting sowing

Tools typically used for cultivation -

Very few prehistoric tools with exclusive gardening interpretation, but a few under broader term of agricultural/gardening. Neolithic flint picks probably hafted onto a handle and used for cultivation similar to modern mattock, roughly breaking up ground. Antler picks could be used similarly, although little evidence. Evidence of 'spade marks' from number of prehistoric sites in UK – presumably some sort of wooden spade was used. For harvesting, simple blades found with edge gloss suggesting mounted in a handle and used like a sickle. Axeheads possibly used for pruning/coppicing, felling

Cultivation -

Ground thoroughly dug, weeded, raked to fine tilth

Sowing -

Grain sown first week of April 2017 in drills 1.5 inches deep, seeds 5/6 inches apart, rows about 8 inches apart

Acknowledgements:

Butser Ancient Farm www.butserancientfarm.co.uk

Hengistbury Head Archaeology Trail, Peter Hawes and Mark Holloway 1994

Martin Green