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The development of the cultural landscape around Diss Mere, Norfolk, UK, during the past 7000 years

Sylvia M. Peglar

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Abstract

Diss Mere is a small lake around which the town of Diss has developed. Pollen analysis of the lake sediments deposited during the last 7000 years yielded a rich pollen and spore flora. Numerical methods were used to sort the pollen taxa into recurrent groups, which are groups of taxa with similar occurrences through time. With the aid of the recurrent groups the pollen diagram was interpreted in terms of the vegetational history of the catchment. The calcareous sediments were unsuitable for radiocarbon dating, but a chronology was established by correlation with nearby sites and by comparison with historical records.

People may have lived in the mid-Holocene forest, and created small clearances prior to the *Ulmus* decline. After the *Ulmus* decline at ca. 3000 BC, the forest became more

open, but eventually human activity declined, and clearings were colonised by secondary scrub. Subsequently, Bronze Age people lived by the lake. They cleared substantial parts of the *Quercus/Corylus*-dominated forests on the slopes and the *Tilia*-dominated forest on the plateau above. Dereliction and scrub development, particularly by *Taxus*, at the end of the Bronze Age, was followed by Iron Age colonisation. Superior technology lead to almost complete forest clearance and farming of the catchment, and the origin of the town. The town developed through Medieval time, and cultivation became specialised with *Cannabis* (hemp) and *Linum* (flax) cultivation. After the collapse of the hemp industry, arable farming prevailed. The lake became highly eutrophic due to nutrient addition from farming and from the town. Eventually a proper sewage treatment was installed. The uppermost pollen record reflects the conversion of the non-urbanised part of the catchment to parkland.



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