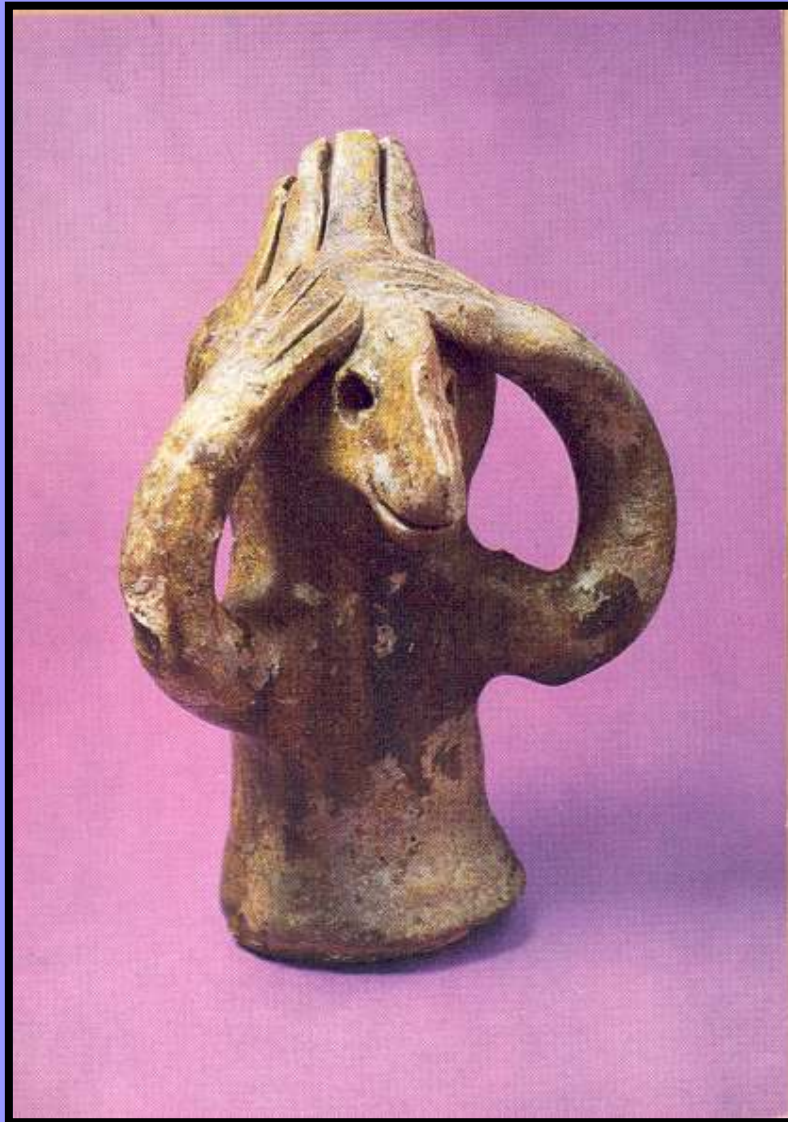


**Weoley Castle:
The Ceramic Building Material**



by
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An Archaeological Overview of Weoley Castle, Birmingham

Summary

Weoley Castle is a fortified, medieval manor-house situated four miles to the southwest of Birmingham city centre in the historic county of Worcestershire (National Grid Reference SP 02158275). The site entered into the ownership of Birmingham City Council in *c.*1930 and thereafter two campaigns of archaeological excavation were undertaken; between 1932 and 1940 and 1955 and 1962. More recently the site has been subject to an ambitious initiative, “*The Weoley Castle Development Project*”, joint funded by Birmingham City Council, The National Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage. The aims of the project were to consolidate the surviving masonry, to increase community understanding of and involvement with the monument and to re-assess the finds collection and surviving archaeological archive. The following reports form the third strand of the initiative, “*An Archaeological Overview of Weoley Castle, Birmingham*”. The project was undertaken by Barbican Research Associates, managed by Stephanie Rátkai and monitored by Birmingham City Museum and Art Gallery and was submitted in final form in August 2011, consisting of a series of reports on the archaeological archive, the ceramic finds and the small (portable) finds etc. The reports were presented in PDF format and will be available on-line, hosted by BRA (see www.barbicanra.co.uk for links). Hard and digital copies of the reports will be held by BMAG at selected museum properties. It is intended that the reports will form the basis for a synthesised monograph publication intended to bring knowledge of this important monument and the results of its past excavations to a wider audience.



Contents

An Archaeological Overview of Weoley Castle, Birmingham consists of the following reports; the high-lighted titles indicate which section the reader is currently examining.

Archaeological Archive

Weoley Castle – an appraisal of the surviving Archaeological Archive by Stephen J. Linnane

Weoley Castle – the reduced archive, 2.0 Pre-war Excavations

Weoley Castle – the reduced archive, 3.0 Post-war Excavations, 3.1 The Trenches

Weoley Castle – the reduced archive, 3.0 Post-war Excavations, 3.2 The Moat

Weoley Castle - the reduced archive, 3.0 Post-war Excavations, 3.3 The Western Interior

Weoley Castle – the reduced archive, 3.0 Post-war Excavations, 3.4 Periods I-III

Weoley Castle - the reduced archive, 3.0 Post-war Excavations, 3.4.7 The Wooden Kitchen

Ceramics

Weoley Castle: A Reappraisal of and Report on the Pottery by Stephanie Rátkai

Appendix 1: Early Cooking Pot Fabrics

Appendix 2: Deritend Ware

Appendix 3: Iron-Poor Wares

Appendix 4: Iron-Poor Fabrics: Whiteware

Appendix 5: Sandy Micaceous and Micaceous wares

Appendix 6: Late Medieval Wares

Appendix 7: Midlands Purple Ware and Later Fabrics

Appendix 8: Cistercian Ware

Appendix 9: Regional Imports

Appendix 10: Continental Imports

Small Finds

An appraisal of the portable finds from Weoley Castle, Birmingham by Quita Mould

Weoley Castle: small finds catalogue by Quita Mould

Structural Finds

Weoley Castle: The Ceramic Building Material by Stephanie Rátkai

Weoley Castle: The loose architectural stones, an assessment by Dr. Richard K. Morris

Weoley Castle: The decorated window glass by Stephen J. Linnane

Weoley Castle: The Medieval Floor Tiles by Stephen J. Linnane

Weoley Castle: Ceramic Building Materials

By Stephanie Rátkai

1. Flat Roof-tile



Figure 1a: Flat Roof-tile Type FTA



Figure 1b: Flat Roof-tile Type FTB

The most complete examples of roof furniture came from the 1930s excavations (location MCC A616). The completeness of the tiles suggests that they came from the moat. According to notes taken by the author in 2006, the crested ridge tiles (below) were 'associated with the bridge abutment'. Neither of the two illustrated tiles (figure 1a-b) had mortar adhesions and they may never, therefore, have been used. Two types of flat roof tile were noted:

Type FTA had a single central nib. Dimensions c. 300mm x 150mm

Type FTB had a central nib and two nail holes on either side of the nib. Dimensions c. 280mm x 180mm.

Both tiles appear to have been made in a local clay which resembles (macroscopically) Deritend ware. A small amount of wasted medieval roof-tile was found on Moor Street, Birmingham and there is little doubt that both flat and ridge tile were made in the town (Hodder *et al*, 2009).

In 1477 an Act was passed in an attempt to standardise roof-tile production (Salzman 1952, 230). The Act stipulated that flat tile should be 10.5 by 6.25 inches. This is the

approximate equivalent of 260mm x 155mm. As we can see the Weoley examples were somewhat longer and Type B, somewhat wider. Unfortunately no complete or near complete tile survived from the Bull Ring sites so it is not now possible to see if the dimensions of the Weoley tiles are mirrored by those from Birmingham.

Ceramic roof-tile was one of several options for roofing buildings in the Middle Ages, others being thatch, wooden shingles, tilestone and lead. Each had their advantages and disadvantages in relation to cost, durability and fire hazard. In the centre of Birmingham ceramic roof tile appears to have been in use from the 13th century (Hodder *et al* 2009, 311-12), perhaps understandably, as the risk of fire was ever present in medieval towns.

Ceramic roof tile has been noted at other moated sites in Birmingham such as Kent's Moat, Gannow Green and Hawkesley Farm (Hodder 2004, 120-21). In addition to being used for roofing, ceramic tile was used, set on edge, to form hearths and oven bases, as at Weoley itself, and also Gannow Green, Kent's Moat and at Edgbaston Street, Birmingham (Patrick and Rátkai 2009). Hodder (2004, 106) also notes the use of broken tile in wall construction at Kent's Moat.



Figure 2: Complete roof tile (1990A 324), Type FTA.

A thoroughly blackened, sooted tile (Figure 2) also formed part of the material from the 1930s excavations. This may have been used as part of an oven or hearth or may be circumstantial evidence for a fire at the castle site, although the clay body of the tile does not appear to have been subjected to any intense heat.

At least one tile had paw prints in the surface (Figure 3). The size and shape suggest they were made by a small domestic cat. Paw prints, particularly those from cats are not uncommon and testifies to the cat's unerring ability to wander where it is least wanted.



Figure 3: Paw prints on the surface of a tile

2. Ridge Tile

Several examples of crested ridge tiles were noted among the material from the 1930s excavations (MCC A616).



Figure 4a: Crested Ridge Tile, Type RTA



Figure 4b: Crested Ridge Tile, Type RTA



Figure 4c: Crested Ridge Tile, Type RTA

Type RTA (Figure 4a-c) was the most common type. The crest consists of a crudely formed 'hook' or 'horn' at either end of the tiles. An idea of how the roofline would have appeared can be seen in Figure 5. Some of the ridge tiles appear to have been unglazed. Glazed examples had a rich red-brown-tan glaze like Figure 4b.



Figure 5: Crested Ridge Tiles, Type RTA

Similar crested ridge tiles (Patrick and Rátkai 2009 figure 8.14) are known from Edgbaston Street, Birmingham. Both examples were glazed and are substantially less complete than the Weoley tiles. Further examples of this type were noted at Floodgate Street (Tibbles forthcoming)

Type RTB was represented by a single but substantial example (Figure 6). The ridge tile has evidently never been cleaned. The crests are knife-cut and angular. The crest form appears to be uncommon in the West Midlands and a source outside the area is a possibility.



Figure 6: Crested Ridge Tile, Type RTB

Type RTC consists of a single crest fragment. Like Type RTB it may not be a West Midlands type. The surviving crest (Figure 7) is rounded with a deep thumb impression on either side of the crest. It is possible that the complete tile would have had a continuous run of crests along the apex of the tile, unlike Types RTA and RTB.

Discussion

From the existing archive, it appears likely that during excavations in the 1930s, 1950s and 1960s, roof tile was not routinely kept and only complete or inherently interesting examples were retained. It is therefore impossible to gauge how great a quantity of tile was present both on the moat platform and from within the moat fills. It is also unfortunate that there is now no record of the exact provenance of the more complete tiles (generally from the 1930s' excavations, 1990A accession numbers) which might have indicated what buildings they had come from.

Lead offcuts indicate that some buildings were roofed in lead and the 1424 Survey (Symons 1989,



Figure 7: Ridge Tile Crest, Type RTC

46-47) specifically mentions that the Chapel was roofed in lead. The 1424 Survey is noticeably reticent on specifying the type of roofs on the other buildings on the platform but then goes on to note that the buildings in the Outer Court, thought to be to the west of the moat platform, were roofed in thatch (a Laundry and a Stable) or

stone (a Barn, a Stable, a Dairy and a Gatehouse). From this one might deduce that the remaining buildings within the moated area did in fact have ceramic tile roofs, the only roofing material not specifically mentioned in the text. It is interesting to note that at Weoley, it is the ancillary, 'low status' buildings, not directly used by the lord and his household, which were roofed in thatch and stone.

Accession No.	Location	Description	Type	Mortar	qty
2000.A2.66.3	N Tower (east side)	ridgetile	RTA		1
2000.A2.89.3	N Tower (east side)	ridgetile tan glaze (possibly crested)			1
2000.A2.89.3	N Tower (east side)	ridgetile		y	1
2000.A2.87.9	NE Tower	flat rooftile nibbed			1
2000A2.16.52	Wooden Building (on east side)	flat rooftile			1
2000.A2.66.6	Moat	flat rooftile			1
2000.A2.66.6	Moat	flat rooftile			1
2000.A2.66.6	Moat	tile roundel (c. 90mm dia)			1
2000.A2.82.6	Bakehouse (cobbled floor of Tower)	flat roof tile			1
2000.A2.82.10	Bakehouse (oven ?fill)	flat roof tile	FTA	y	1
2000.A2.85.2	Granary (pier base 4)	tile roundel (c. 50mm dia)			1
2000.A2.128	Drawbridge abutment	flat rooftile			1
2000.A2.128	Drawbridge abutment	flat rooftile	FTB		1
2000.A2.128	Drawbridge abutment	ridgetile	RTA		1
2000.A2.128	Drawbridge abutment	ridgetile (hole for louver or finial attachment)			1

Figure 8: Rooftile from Oswald's Excavations

Figure 8 summarises the rooftile from Oswald's excavation, viewed by the author. Although the quantity is small, it does demonstrate that tile was found across most of the site. Two of the flat tiles are of interest (**Figures 9 and 10**). These were both from Area F (The Bakehouse). Both were crude examples. The one from the oven (**Figure 9**) had only the scar of the nib and had two sets of deep impressions in the centre of the tile, apparently made by the same implement. The other tile, somewhat less complete, had what appeared to be a large paw print in the left hand corner (see **Figure 10**). The size of this is consistent with a large dog. On the opposite side of the tile, gouges in the clay, may have been caused by the same animal. At one point the gouge is so deep that it has gone through the tile completely, leaving a small hole. Both tiles were 18cm in breadth. It is likely that both tiles were used structurally rather than as roofing material. An area of mortar was visible on the sanded side of **Figure 9**.

At various points in the castle's history at least three roof-lines must have been visible; one with horn-like protrusions (Type RTA), one with angular cut crests (Type RTB) and one with a probably serrated appearance (Type RTC). Whether all three roof-lines were ever visible contemporaneously is open to conjecture. Some of the buildings may, of course, have had undecorated ridge tiles. Crested ridge tiles were relatively expensive. In 1353, 52 crested ridge tiles cost 3*s.4d*; flat roof-tile in 1355 cost 2*s. 6d per* 1,000 and plain ridge tile 2*s. 6d per* 100 in 1363 (Salzman 1952, 230-

31). The differential in price continued in the 15th century, since in 1437 flat tile cost between 4*s* and 4*s* 6*d* *per* 1,000 and in 1432, 36 crested ridge tiles cost 3*s* 6*d* (*ibid.*).



Figure 9: Flat rooftile with deep impression (accession 200A2.82.10)



Figure 10: Flat rooftile with ?paw impressions (accession 2000A2.82.6)

3. Other Roof Furniture

A singular ceramic item (Figure 11a-c), was discussed by Gerald Dunning in the interim excavation report (1963, 83-84). It is part of a zoomorphic finial which is dated by Dunning to the late-13th or early-14th century. The nearest parallels for the finial can be found in France and to date no comparable figure has been identified in Britain (pers. comm. B. Hurman). As Dunning notes, the resemblance to French cathedral gargoyles is striking (see Figure 12). Figure 13 shows the approximate angle of the figure when attached to the finial. In effect the figure would be looking downwards to the ground.

The fabric of the piece indicates that it was unlikely to have been made in Birmingham.

4. Miscellanea

A flat roof tile from the 1962 excavations, scratched to form a makeshift gaming board, is noted in the Minisys record, where it is described as being possibly for the game of Fox and Geese. This item was not seen by the author. *Ad hoc* gaming boards scratched onto tile, slate and stone occur on many castle and ecclesiastical sites. They presumably represent the pass-times of the lower orders, such as the castle guard. These boards contrast with those known from documentary records to have been owned by the higher echelons of society, which could be made of exotic woods and highly decorated (Mortimer 2004, 117). An inventory of the early 1320s, lists among the possessions of Roger Mortimer, the first Earl of March, a chessboard painted with gold and another gaming board made of aromatic nutmeg.

As can be seen in Figure 8, two tile roundels were noted in the material from Oswald's excavations; one from The Granary and one from The Moat. The roundels are made from flat roof tile which has been chipped to form a roughly circular disc. Such finds are not uncommon, especially on castle and urban sites. Several uses have been suggested and include, gaming pieces and stoppers. None of them is an entirely satisfactory explanation.



Figure 11a-c showing front, side and rear views





Figure 12: Gargoyle, Notre Dame Cathedral, Paris.



Figure 13: Approximate orientation of the figure when attached to the finial, suggested by Dunning.

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