

7.1 Assessment of Ceramic Loomweights

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Introduction

7.1.1 Four fragments of ceramic loomweights came from three separate contexts, all but one of which lay within the western part of the excavation area. The exception is a fragment of a loomweight which was recovered from a grave fill. All of the fragments were hand-recovered.

7.1.2 The study of these objects assists in the following Fieldwork Event Aims:

to establish a dated sequence for the origin and development of the settlement;

To recover dated environmental and economic indicators.

Methodology

7.1.3 All of the fragments have been examined to determine their original object form. No detailed work has been carried out on their fabrics and no sampling has been undertaken, given the small size of the assemblage.

Quantification

7.1.4 The fragments include three which are of Anglo-Saxon date and one piece which has no diagnostic features but is likely to belong to the same period. One of the Anglo-Saxon pieces is part of a loomweight of annular type, which is likely to be of Early Anglo-Saxon date. The identification of the other two pieces are a little less certain but one appears to come from a loomweight of intermediate or bun-shape and it should, therefore, be of Middle or Late Saxon date. The fragment from a grave within the central cemetery is part of a loomweight which is probably also of annular type, making it broadly contemporary with the burial.

Provenance

7.1.5 The loomweight fragments derived from two separate contexts within the western (occupation?) part of the site and from one grave C14 in the central Anglo-Saxon cemetery. The fabrics of each item have not been examined in any detail but it is likely that all of them were made locally. They all survive in reasonable condition, although they are fragmentary.

Conservation

7.1.6 All of the fragments have been examined and cleaned by a conservation assistant. They have been packaged and can be stored as a bulk commodity. Further analysis would be non-destructive and would not conflict with their storage requirements. It would principally involve the examination of fabrics, together with the reconstruction of the original sizes and weights of the objects.

7.1.7 Most of the fragments are not worthy of display but they may form the basis of future research into textile implements. On that basis, they should not be discarded.

Comparative Material

- 7.1.8 Early Anglo-Saxon loomweights have not been found in East Kent in any numbers. The absence of settlement traces of Early Anglo-Saxon date from East Kent means that loomweights are correspondingly scarce. Examples of annular, intermediate and bun-shaped loomweights have principally been found in Canterbury and annular loomweights are known also from Darenth and from *Sandtun* (Blockley *et al* 1995, 1173-7; Philp 1973, 155 and fig 46.462-3; Riddler forthcoming). A bun-shaped loomweight was recovered from previous work to the north of Saltwood Tunnel (Willson 1985, 234 and fig 2.30). Their distribution in East Kent has been described in the relevant specialist assessment text for ARC MSH98 (URL 2000).

Potential for further work

- 7.1.9 The small group of loomweights will assist in the following Fieldwork Event Aims:

to establish a dated sequence for the origin and development of the settlement;

- 7.1.10 Although the loomweights are fragmentary, almost all of them can be identified to type, and placed within a broad dating framework. This assists in the phasing of the western part of the excavation area. They can also be related to the earlier find which, although described as an intermediate form of loomweight, is of bun-shape and is more likely to be of Late Saxon date. In conjunction with other broadly contemporaneous diagnostic artefacts, it may be valid to investigate the spatial arrangement of Early Anglo-Saxon items throughout the possible occupation site.

to recover dated environmental and economic indicators;

- 7.1.11 Alongside a fragmentary bone or antler double-pointed pinbeater fragment and an iron weaving batten, the loomweights are indicators of weaving, which was being carried out at or near the excavated area. They can be viewed alongside the desiccated and mineralised textile remains found in a number of the graves from each of the cemeteries. Some of these textiles may have been imported, others made on site. The overall evidence is relatively sparse but it does consist of these various strands, which can be woven together. It is rare for all of these different elements to be present on the same site.

- 7.1.12 The study of the loomweights also assists in further research aim for the project:

Late Saxon Settlement at Saltwood;

- 7.1.13 Early Anglo-Saxon and early medieval phases have been identified for this landscape but there may appear to be nothing much in between, other than a few sherds of Middle and Late Saxon pottery. Although unlikely, the ceramics and ceramic objects raise the possibility that there was also some form of very Late Saxon activity at Saltwood, possibly a precursor to the more coherent evidence for early medieval occupation of the site.

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