

7.1 Assessment of Prehistoric Worked Bone

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Introduction

7.1.1 A fragment of an antler tine and part of the beam was recovered from the fill of the ring ditch for the prehistoric burial within ARC SLT98C. It survives in poor condition, although it can be identified to species and element.

7.1.2 The object is relevant to the following Fieldwork Event Aim:

to identify the nature of the prehistoric activity and determine its extent and place in the landscape,

Methodology

7.1.3 The object was recovered by hand excavation and was removed to Canterbury. It was examined there and identified. It was then transferred to the City of Lincoln Conservation laboratories, where it was stabilised and packaged. It has been examined both in Canterbury and Lincoln.

Quantification

7.1.4 The fragment consists of a section of antler beam with the accompanying brow tine. It survives in very poor condition, most of the antler having disappeared and been replaced by sand, which retains the shape of the original object. Details of wear patterns manufacturing marks are therefore obscured and cannot be seen.

7.1.5 No other objects of this type were recovered from the excavations. However, this particular example survived fortuitously and further implements of this material could easily have decayed rapidly in the acidic soil conditions.

Provenance

7.1.6 The object was recovered from the fill of the ring ditch for the prehistoric burial in ARC SLT98C. It came from a section taken towards the north-eastern part of the ring ditch and was well-stratified within that fill. It is likely to have come from the local area.

Conservation

7.1.7 The object has been stabilised and appropriately packaged in Lincoln, so that further handling is minimised. There is no requirement to radiograph the object and an examination of its surface suggests that it is now formed largely of sand, rather than antler. Details of wear patterns and manufacturing marks could not be seen during a simple, visual inspection, but may appear under microscopic examination in the laboratory. The elements of the antler which are present can, however, be recognised, and it can be identified as a fragment from a red deer antler.

7.1.8 The relative lack of bone within the surviving, mineral-replaced object means that it is unlikely to be useful for C¹⁴ dating, due to the lack of surviving collagen.

Comparative Material

- 7.1.9 Red deer antlers were widely used in prehistoric England as implements, notably within the flint mines at Grimes graves, but also elsewhere, principally as tools for the excavation of ditches and pits (Megaw and Simpson 1979, 99). As such, they are frequently found within ditch fills, or close to features that they were used to excavate, as is the case here. They are not common in Kent, in all probability because of the poor survival of bone and antler throughout the county.

Potential for further work

- 7.1.10 The object is relevant to the following Fieldwork Event Aim:

to identify the nature of the prehistoric activity and determine its extent and place in the landscape,

- 7.1.11 The antler tool is likely to be of Late Neolithic or Early Bronze Age date, on typological grounds, although its poor state of survival makes any such statement a little tentative. It was presumably used to excavate the ring ditch, although being in effect a mineral-replaced fossil, it is unlikely that the contemporaneity of the antler with the ring ditch can be tested through radiocarbon dating. Detailed, microscopic analysis of the surface may help to identify wear patterns or details of manufacture, which are not visible from a simple, visual inspection. It is unlikely, however, that much will be forthcoming, given the poor survival of the object.
- 7.1.12 It is a useful indicator of the manner in which the ditches were excavated and, in this respect, it is unfortunate that it does not survive in good condition. It is not possible to determine whether it has been naturally shed (or was cut from the animal) but the former possibility is the most likely.

Bibliography

Megaw, J V S and Simpson, D D A, 1979, *Introduction to British Prehistory* (Leicester)

