Assessment of Worked Stone from the Alkham Valley main, Kent (AVM-36)

Alan Vince

Two fragments of stone from archaeological fieldwork in advance of the Alkham Valley Main, Kent, undertaken by Network Archaeology Ltd were submitted for identification and assessment.

Neither fragment shows certain evidence for human working but both stones are likely to have been brought to the site, either by natural means during the Quaternary period or by human agency.

Description

Stone

Context 7199 produced a fragment of fine quartzose sandstone, with an average grain-size slightly over 0.1mm. The stone contains moderate dark grains and sparse muscovite laths of similar size to the quartz. It does not react with acid. One face is smooth, possibly polished and its opposite face is convex and smooth. All other faces are hackly and probably due to later damage.

It is possible that the stone is a rubber from a saddle quern but also possible that it is a cobble with two generations of erosion and not humanly worked. Most of the sandstones which outcrop in the southeast of England are coarser-grained and less well consolidated than this example but the top of the Ashdown Sand is similar in verbal description (Gallois 1965, 24-5). This rock outcrops in the centre of the Weald anticline and is exposed at the coast at Hastings. It is not know (to the author) whether cobbles of this rock occur further northeast along the coast as a result of longshore drift.

Context 7743 a an oval-sectioned rod 60mm long and 40 mm wide. It is composed of a quartz sandstone with abundant silicious sponge spicules and a calcareous cement. The only possible human artefact with similar features to this stone would be the handle of a stone mortar of 12th-century or later date. Mostly likely, however, this is an unworked fragment of stone.

A possible source for this rock would be the Malmstone facies of the Upper Greensand, whose verbal description is similar (1965, 38).
Assessment

Although neither of these rocks is definitely humanly worked, both are of rock types which do not outcrop in the Alkham Valley and would not be expected to outcrop in Quaternary valley deposits there. It is therefore possible that they are artefacts.

Bibliography