

Assessment of Net Sinkers from Branston Island, Lincolnshire

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Four stone objects from Branston Island, Lincolnshire, were submitted for identification and assessment. They are most likely to be net sinkers and were constructed from two distinct stone facies, both limestones and both probably obtained from the Jurassic strata which form the Lincoln Edge.

Description

Typology

Each of the objects is formed as a rough cylinder with rounded edges and a circular cross-sectioned hole. There is, however considerable variation in dimensions (Table 1).

The holes appear to have been made using a drill, although the tell-tale wear marks from the use of the drill do not survive on the heavily weathered surviving surfaces. Nevertheless, there is variation in the hole diameter and the orientation of the holes. In three cases the hole is perpendicular to the cylinder but in the fourth it is at an angle. In one case the hole is widened. This is likely to be due to the drill slipping during construction rather than wear since the widenings are not in the same direction on either side of the stone. In two cases the boring is roughly central and in the other two the holes are eccentric.

Each of the objects is heavily weathered, so that no original surfaces survive. There is, however, no obvious sign of wear or abrasion, such as might be expected if a rope was threaded through the hole. Despite this, the objects are probably net sinkers. The alternative identification would be as loom weights but the slanting bore hole in U/S/1 probably argues against this interpretation. Furthermore, the range of sizes and weights would not provide an even tension for the warp. A third option, that the stones, were thatch weights, can probably be discounted on the grounds of the weight of the smallest stone.

The use of a drill to make the holes in the stones probably implies the use of an iron bit, which would indicate a date in the Iron Age or later. No closer dating is possible from the objects themselves.

ID	Stone type	Weight (Gm)	Height	Diameter	Hole bore diameter	Angle of boring	Position of hole
087	Fossiliferous limestone	1013	53mm	109mm	16mm	Perpendicular	Eccentric
U/S/1	Fossiliferous	372	35mm	85mm	7mm	Slanting	Eccentric

	limestone						
U/S/2	Oolitic limestone	514	45mm	75x85mm	7mm	Perpendicular	Central
U/S/3	Oolitic limestone	212	33mm	67mm	16mm	Perpendicular	Central

Petrology

The objects were constructed from cream-coloured limestones of two lithologies. The first is an oolitic limestone consisting of tightly packed micrite ooliths with a mixture of micrite and sparry calcite cement. This rock contains a few bivalve shell fragments, of similar size to the ooliths.

The second rock is a fossiliferous limestone. It consists of a micrite groundmass, probably containing quartz silt not visible at x20 magnification but giving a harsh feel to the hand specimen. The fossils consist of a range of microfossils and sparse bivalve shells replaced by coarsely-crystalline calcite of light brown colour. Both rock types occur within the Lincolnshire Limestone and it is possible that a petrologist familiar with the detailed outcrop of this series might be able to provenance the sources more closely.

Assessment

These objects have an intrinsic interest and would repay further study as part of a wider survey. This might provide closer dating and either confirm or refute their suggested function. They should all be illustrated since each one has unique features.