

Assessment of the finds from the Old Library, Selsdon, Surrey (OLS03)

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Approximately 91 fragments recovered from an archaeological evaluation carried out at the Old Library, Selsdon, by Lindsey Archaeological Services (LAS). These fragments represent no more than 77 artefacts, which range in date from the early prehistoric to the modern period. The finds are of animal bone (ANBN), ceramic building material (CBM), concrete, flint, other stone, pottery and iron (Table 1).

Table 1

date	Data	ANBN	CBM	CONCRETE	FLINT	POTTERY	STONE	IRON	Grand Total
med	NoV					6		6	
	Nosh					9		9	
mod	NoV		1			14			15
	Nosh		1			14			15
mod?	NoV	12							12
	Nosh	12							12
msax	NoV					2	3		5
	Nosh					2	13		15
prehist	NoV				16	4			20
	Nosh				16	4			20
roman	NoV					8		1	9
	Nosh					9		1	10
sn	NoV					1			1
	Nosh					1			1
?	NoV	2			7				9

Nosh 2				7			9	
Total NoV	2	12	1	23	35	3	1	77
Total NoV	2	12	1	23	39	13	1	91

Description

Animal bone

Two fragments of animal bone were recovered. Neither shows any sign of working and they are probably domestic refuse. It is unlikely, given the abraded nature of the medieval and earlier pottery, if this bone would have survived for centuries on this site and a post-medieval or modern date is likely.

Ceramic Building Material

Six fragments of ceramic building material were found. One is probably from a brick of post-medieval or later date and the remainder are fragments of flat roof tiles. Although such tiles were probably used in the area from the mid 12th century onwards the appearance of these pieces suggests a post-medieval or modern date.

Concrete

A single fragment of concrete was recovered. It is probably of modern date.

Flint

Twenty-two fragments of flint were recovered from the site. Ten show no signs of working but have been burnt. Some of these are clearly rounded pebbles, of the type which occur widely throughout the Thames Basin in Tertiary and later strata.

The remaining 12 flints are all humanly worked. Three are unworked flakes of the kind produced when preparing a core for blade production. Eight are blades with some evidence for secondary working. One is either a core or a scraper (or perhaps a core reused as a scraper). Some of the flint is fresh and black in appearance. Others have a light brown colour. Patination is absent. A small amount of cortex is present and the impression given is that these objects were produced from fresh flint, either mined or collected from the chalk outcrop, rather than working Tertiary or later pebbles.

Pottery

Prehistoric

Four fragments of prehistoric pottery were recovered, all from context 62.

One fragment has a smooth fabric with grog temper. Such tempering has been used since the Early Bronze Age.

Two fragments were tempered with crushed white flint. This tradition is widespread in southeast England and is certainly present in the early, middle and late Iron Age.

One fragment has a fine sand temper and is of a type found in the Iron Age.

Roman

Six sherds were positively identified as being of Roman date and a further two were likely. Although the sherds are abraded so are quite large and perhaps evidence of activity in the immediate area rather than plough scatter. This interpretation is supported by the fact that two of the sherds appear to come from the same vessel.

Barbara Precious comments that they include a wide-mouthed bowl in a coarse sandy fabric (consisting mainly of polished greensand quartz grains) which is likely to be of 2nd to 3rd-century date and four greyware sherds in a fine sandy fabric. Two of these sherds probably come from the same bowl, of 3rd/4th-century type, one is the ribbed handle from a flagon or, more probably, jug, and the fourth is from an closed vessel. There are also two sherds of grog-tempered ware, both of which are too small for close identification.

Anglo-Saxon

Two sherds of chaff-tempered pottery were recovered, from contexts 54 and 62. Both come from extremely thick-walled vessels, probably used for storage rather than cooking.

Chaff tempering appears to have been present throughout the early Anglo-Saxon period but as a proportion of all pottery used it increases steadily during the period and is the main coarseware used in the 7th and 8th centuries in the Thames basin. It is uncertain whether the use of the ware continued to the middle of the 9th century as in the Lundenwic settlement in the City of Westminster the proportion of Ipswich ware in use rose to such an extent that it suggested that the chaff-tempered was no longer used.

The appearance of the fabric is very similar to that of early to mid Anglo-Saxon wares from various sites in the Thames basin, of which the closest to Selsdon known to the author is at Clapham. Both sherds are abraded but one is large.

Saxo-Norman and medieval

Ten sherds of Saxo-Norman to medieval pottery were recovered. Many of these were small and abraded. One sherd was tempered with shell and is visually comparable with fabric ESMH from the City of London, where it was dated to the early 11th to mid 12th centuries (Vince and Jenner 1991). Six sherds were tempered with rounded quartz sand in which polished, iron-stained grains are common. In the main these sherds do not appear to be wheelthrown but the fabric is very similar, if slightly coarser,

than that of Limpsfield ware. An 11th to 12th century date is likely but a later one cannot be ruled out. One sherd came from a glazed jug in a light-bodied, sandy fabric. The fabric is similar but not identical to Kingston-type ware and is more similar to the ware produced at Maidstone, Kent. It is probably 13th or 14th-century in date. The sherd is larger and less abraded than the other medieval sherds.

Modern

Fourteen sherds of flower pots were recovered, from contexts 52, 53 and 54. Although flower pots were in use in the London area in the 18th century these examples appear to be of 19th or 20th-century date.

Stone

Three collections of small lava fragments were found, all from context 62. They probably all come from a single quern. Most such lava quern fragments found in England come from the Eifel mountains. They were imported during the Roman, mid Saxon and medieval periods but are particularly common in the mid Saxon period.

Iron

A single lump of iron slag was found, in context 62. The slag is vesicular with no traces of charcoal or other fuel attached.

Assessment

Although all the finds are redeposited in medieval or later ploughsoil, they indicate that human activity in the area began in the early prehistoric period (Mesolithic to Early Bronze Age). The lack of flint debitage, however, suggests that the activity may not have consisted of occupation. The date of the burnt flints is unknown. Mounds of such stones have been dated to the Bronze Age, however, where they are interpreted as a form of sauna, used to induce an altered state, although they could also have been used in cooking. Later prehistoric activity is also attested and probably dates, at least in part, to the Iron Age. Activity is also present in the Roman period.

Although the Anglo-Saxon evidence consists of only two sherds and the possibility that the lava fragments are of mid Saxon date, this is actually quite a significant find. Croydon is the site of a large early Anglo-Saxon cemetery and a 9th century coin hoard was also found nearby but there is little known of mid Saxon activity in the area.

The medieval finds, in the main, suggest manuring of ploughsoil rather than settlement or other activity nearby.

Finally, the flower pots, ceramic building material, concrete and probably the animal bone all probably date to the modern period (the 19th or 20th centuries).

Bibliography

- Vince, A. G. and Jenner, M. A. (1991) "The Saxon and Early Medieval Pottery of London." in A. G. Vince, ed., *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: 2, Finds and Environmental Evidence*, London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Spec Pap 12 London Middlesex Archaeol Soc, London, 19-119.