

Assessment of a floor tile from Spalding (PBS04)

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A fragment of decorated floor tile was recovered from a watching brief at Spalding carried out by Lindsey Archaeological Services.

Description

The tile comes from context 106, a hearth, and is the only retained find. It is an unglazed fragment from a square tile, in the order of 158 mm square and 19 mm thick. The decoration consists of a relief stamp with a central heraldic shield enclosed in a raised circular band. There is no sign of wear on the very sharp surfaces of the tile and neither is there any evidence for the tile having been set in a floor or wall.

The fabric is sand-tempered and contains abundant rounded grains of quartz, some of which are water-polished and derived from a lower Cretaceous sandstone, such as the Spilsby Sandstone. Rounded fragments of chalk (identified by their microfossils), angular grey flint and black and dark brown iron-rich inclusions were also present. The groundmass is fine-textured with no sign of either quartz silt or mica.

Discussion

The condition of the fragment suggests strongly that it was never used and the absence of glaze suggests it may be waste. The sand temper is indicative of a sand derived from lower and Cretaceous strata whilst the clean matrix is only matched locally by Jurassic clays such as the Oxford Clay. The lack of quartz and mica silt certainly discounts a fenland silt origin for the clay. It is likely that the parent clay is a boulder clay composed of material derived from the Oxford Clay, Spilsby Sandstone and Chalk but a source in the Vale of Ancholme is also possible. It is also possible that the tile originated to the south of the fens and relief tiles of this type were produced at Bawsey in the late 13th and 14th centuries. If the tile is indeed waste then it implies the existence at Spalding of suitable boulder clay and would indicate contact between Spalding and tilers from Norfolk. The die cutting is well-executed and it is very unlikely that such a die would have been cut except by a skilled tiler, for the production of a larger order of tiles. It is therefore likely that even if the tile is indeed locally-made that the die was obtained from the Bawsey tilery.

Recommendations

The tile requires illustration and photography. The drawing should then be compared with the Bawsey tiles to see if a precise match can be found. To establish whether or not the tile is made from a boulder clay a thin section and chemical analysis of the tile fabric should be

undertaken. A search through any fired clay, clay samples or other ceramic building material from the site might also be productive.

Costing (at 2004/2005 rates):

Illustration: £15 plus VAT

Photography: £25 plus VAT

Searching for comparanda: £45 plus VAT

Thin section analysis and report: £22.50 plus VAT

Chemical analysis and report; £23.50 plus VAT