

Assessment of the finds from Methley Primary School, West Yorkshire (OSA04 WB06)

Alan Vince

Following an archaeological evaluation at Methley Primary School, West Yorkshire carried out by On-Site Archaeology which produced a collection of post-medieval and later finds, a watching brief was carried out, also by On-Site Archaeology (Site Code OSA04 WB06). A total of 97 artefacts were recovered from this watching brief, representing at most 59 separate objects and weighing 991 gm (Table 1).

The watching brief finds include a sherd of prehistoric pottery and two sherds of late medieval pottery but otherwise are similar in character to those from the evaluation, indicating activity on the site in the late 17th/18th century and later.

Description

Ceramic Building Material

Four fragments of ceramic building material were recovered. One was too small for identification, one was from a brick and two from pantiles. The fabric of the brick, examined at x20 magnification using a stereo microscope, consists of poorly mixed Coal Measures red-firing and white-firing clays with a quartzose sand containing sandstone fragments. The pantile fragments are of two fabrics: one contains abundant subangular quartz sand together with sandstone fragments in a red-firing groundmass whilst the other is made from a Coal Measures whiteware clay.

All three fabrics could be produced from local raw materials. Without greater local knowledge, it is not possible to date any of the finds closely although they are probably 17th-century or later in date.

Clay Tobacco Pipes

Nine fragments of clay tobacco pipe were recovered. Seven are undecorated stems with bore diameters which indicate an 18th or 19th-century date. One bowl fragment has a decorated seam and is rouletted around the rim. It is probably also of 18th or 19th-century date. Another bowl was produced in a decorated mould, producing a fluted bowl with a plain spur. This form is of early 19th-century or later date.

Fired Clay

Two groups of fired clay fragments were recovered, from contexts 1061 and 1079. Both are very similar in character, although the material from 1079 is much more fragmentary.

The clay is oxidized red throughout with no signs of gradation in firing and contains sparse rounded quartz grains, rounded ironstone inclusions, and abundant organic matter in a groundmass containing quartz and muscovite silt.

None of the fragments have any surfaces, nor are there any signs of wattle impressions. Furthermore, there is no sign of the clay being mixed. These features suggest that the clay might actually be baked subsoil rather than humanly worked clay. It would still, however, indicate human activity, such as a hearth.

Pottery

Prehistoric

A single sherd of prehistoric pottery was found, in context 1165. The sherd comes from the wall of a roughly cylindrical vessel and is about 10mm thick (the outer surface has been destroyed). The vessel has a black core and inner margin and an oxidized outer margin. This probably indicates that the pot was fired in an inverted position so that oxygen could not reach the inner surface. The fabric contains sparse coarse rock fragments, including a broken pebble, about 4mm across, and sandstone fragments. The groundmass is fine-textured (much finer than the fired clay, above).

The thick wall and inverted firing suggest that this sherd came from a Middle Bronze Age urn but the sherd should be sent to a specialist in the pottery of this period for confirmation.

Medieval

Two sherds of late medieval or early post-medieval date were recovered. That from context 1084 is from a Coal Measures Whiteware or Midlands Purple jar or jug. The vessel has a blistered external glaze, probably indicating the presence of an iron-rich slip, and has horizontal grooved decoration. It might be a product of the Rawmarsh kilns, which operated in the later 15th to 16th centuries.

The second sherd is an unstratified piece of Midlands Purple ware. This ware was produced during the late medieval and early post-medieval period, for example in the Staffordshire Potteries.

Post-medieval

Fifteen sherds of post-medieval pottery were recovered. They include one stratified piece, from context 1039 (a Staffordshire Mottled ware tankard). The remainder were unstratified. Two of the vessels are blackwares made from Coal Measures whiteware clay with a coarse sandstone-rich sand temper. Three sherds of slipware, despite being made from Coal Measures whiteware clay, do not appear to be Staffordshire products and are presumably locally-made. The remainder are all of types produced in Staffordshire during the later 17th

and early 18th centuries (STBU, STMO and STRE). A number of the pieces are spalled, indicating exposure to frost, perhaps in ploughsoil or topsoil.

Early Modern

Twenty-seven sherds of early modern pottery were recovered. They include a trivet or still used for the production of brown-glazed vessels (perhaps teapots?). The form of the trivet, which is moulded, suggests a later 19th-century date. Kiln furniture of similar date was found during the evaluation and the possible sources are discussed in the report on those finds (Vince 2004). . The remaining pottery is of 19th and early 20th-century date and includes no Creamwares or other late 18th to early 19th-century material.

Assessment

The prehistoric potsherd indicates activity on the site in the prehistoric period, perhaps the Middle Bronze Age. The date of the fired clay is unknown. With these exceptions, the pottery sequence starts in the 16th century and may be continuous, if sparse, from there to the end of the 17th century. There are, however, no distinctive late 17th and early 18th-century wares present and it is therefore likely that the activity giving rise to these pottery finds ceased well before c.1700 and perhaps did not restart until the middle of the 19th century. These conclusions are similar to those arrived at from the study of the pottery from the evaluation, although that collection included two sherds of Creamware, indicating an earlier restart date for the early modern activity.

Retention

The finds from stratified deposits should be retained for future study whereas the unstratified material, all of which has been identified and recorded, could be discarded.

Illustration

None of the finds requires illustration or photography.

Further study

It is possible that further information about the prehistoric sherd could be acquired if it were submitted to a specialist in prehistoric pottery, such as Carol Allen. The sherd is, however, too small for characterisation studies to be carried out on it.

Publication

None of the finds requires publication.

Tables

Table 1

class	NoSh	NoV	Wt (gm)
cbm	4	4	109
ctp	9	9	35
fclay	39	2	278
mpot	2	2	25
ppot	42	41	542
prehpot	1	1	2
Grand Total	97	59	991