Assessment of finds from Denge Security Main, Kent (DSM 44)

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Various finds from trial trenches excavated by Network Archaeology Ltd on the line of Denge Security Main were submitted for identification and assessment.

Description

Clay and Stone

A group of clay fragments from context 203 were submitted. They are angular and partially coated with dark, sandy soil. The largest is c.50mm long but may have cracked and fragmented after excavation. The fragments are blocky and show no signs of firing or of human working at all, apart from one which is pierced by two parallel cylindrical holes, c.8mm diameter. The clay contains no fossils or clastic grains and is traversed by numerous root holes up to 0.5mm diameter.

These fragments appear to have been natural clay redeposited in the feature. The lack of visible inclusions suggests that this was probably a marine or estuarine clay and clays laid down in such conditions occur widely in the south-east. Without local comparanda it is not possible to say whether the clay was dislodged from the subsoil (described as a non-calcareous fine loam) into which the feature was cut or was carried some distance from its source.

A second group of clay fragments from the same feature consists of pieces of sandy red clay. These were interpreted as being burnt but are probably a clay-iron cemented sand. The sand is composed of well-rounded quartz grains, most of which have a matt surface, suggesting deposition in desert conditions.

This material is probably of Lower Cretaceous date and deposits of this date underlie the subsoil on the site.

Finally, a collection of fragments of a grey, porous, fossiliferous limestone were recovered in the same feature. These fragments are partially rounded, and the largest is c.50mm long. Several fossil shells and casts were present. These include flat, prismatic shells of inoceramids as well as smaller ornamented shells. The groundmass consists of finely divided bivalve shell fragments (including inoceramid shell) with possible ostracod shell and sponge spicules. Without local comparanda it is not possible to say whether this material

came from the Lower Cretaceous deposits which underlie the subsoil on the site or were carried from further afield. The rounding of some of the fragments suggests perhaps that they formed as calcareous concretions in a non-calcareous matrix or that the parent limestone had suffered some chemical erosion.

Taken as a group, these finds suggest that fresh geological deposits were redeposited in the filling of this feature but without further knowledge of the circumstances of the excavation no further inferences can be made.

Ceramic Building Material

Ten fragments of flat roof tiles were recovered, from contexts 200, 300, 400 and 401.

Two fabrics are present. The first contains sparse inclusions of red clay/iron ore, rounded quartz (including water-polished grains) and angular chert (contexts 300, 400 and 401) and the second has a calcareous body with salt-surfacing (contexts 200 and 400).

The calcareous tiles are less abraded than the others which might suggest that they are later in date. Flat tiles can only be broadly dated without stratigraphic evidence, from the mid 12th to the 17th centuries (or possibly even later).

Table 1

Context	Fabric	Number	Weight
200	Calcareous	5	204
300	Non-Calcareous	1	41
400	Non-Calcareous	1	56
400	Calcareous	3	113
401	Non-Calcareous	1	2

Copper Alloy

Context 301 produced a rough ingot of metal, 54mm long and 21mm maximum width which from its weight (63 gm) and colour appears to be a leaded bronze. The object is quite heavily corroded in comparison to the other copper alloy finds from the site and this may suggest an earlier date.

Context 400 produced four copper alloy objects:

- an unused square-headed rivet (undatable). 3 gm
- a circular button with a loop fastener (probably late 18th or 19th century). 1 gm
- the end of a cartridge case (late 19th or 20th century). 7 gm
- a fragment of plated sheet metal, probably the lid of a small box (19th or 20th century). 1 gm

Context 200 produced four copper alloy objects:

- a circular button 14mm diameter with a loop fastener (18th or 19th century). 1 gm
- a circular button, 14mm diameter made of a silver/grey alloy with a loop fastener (18th or 19th century). 2 gm
- a cast/stamped polygonal button, maximum diameter 15mm with a stamped double circular band filled with diagonal dashes. Possible traces of an iron loop fastener (19th ro 20th century). 1 gm
- a fragment of chain 33 mm long composed of 8 links. 2 gm.

Iron

Context 200 produced four fragments of nails (total weight 8 gm)

Context 400 produced three nails, one of which is classifiable as a tack (2 mm diameter and 34 mm long). Total weight 9 gm.

Lead

Two fragments of lead or lead alloy were recovered from context 400.

The first is a roughly triangular fragment of sheet metal which has one rough and one smooth surface (consistent with having been poured onto a rough surface) and three clipped sides (2 gm).

The second is a lead shot, 8mm diameter (4 gm). There are two methods of producing lead shot: casting in a two-part mould and dropping from a shot tower into water. This fragment appears to have been cast, but there is no clear evidence for the seam or for finishing. A 17th to 19th-century date is likely.

Pottery

Medieval

Context 401 produced an abraded sherd of white-slipped, copper-green glazed red earthenware. The fabric is tempered with well-sorted rounded quartz sand with grains up to 0.5mm across in a groundmass containing quartz and muscovite silt. Probably 13th to 14th centuries. 4 gm.

Post-Medieval

Context 204 produced a sherd of brown-glazed red earthenware bowl of unknown source. Probably of 17th to 19th-century date. 12 gm.

Assessment

Most of these finds are unstratified and of medieval or later date. The exceptions are the various fragments of redeposited geological strata and potentially the copper alloy ingot fragment from context 301.

The flat roof tiles are probably indicative of a structure nearby since they are larger and less abraded than the medieval and post-medieval pottery. The remaining finds are typical of casual losses and finds from manuring scatters and do not necessarily indicate occupation nearby. The lack of 18th to 19th century pottery contrasts with the suggested dating of the copper alloy finds but is probably due to selective recovery.

Given the unstratified nature of most of the finds and their likely recent date is it suggested that most could be discarded. However, the copper alloy ingot, and the medieval and post-medieval pot should certainly be retained whilst the redeposited geological strata are capable of being more closely identified, should this prove to be archaeological signficant for the interpretation of their context.

The copper alloy ingot requires a conservation assessment since it does not appear to be in a stable condition.