

Assessment of the Fired Clay from Church Lane/Willington Road, Kirton, Lincolnshire (CLKB 05)

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A small collection of fired clay from an archaeological evaluation carried out on land at Church Lane/Willington Road, Kirton, Lincolnshire, by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd was submitted for identification and assessment.

The finds include a clay ball, presumably used for gaming, as well as indeterminate fired clay, some of which may be associated with salt extraction whilst other pieces are probably from daub structures.

Description

Fired Clay

All of the fragments present were made from a silty clay, typical of the Lincolnshire Fens and Lindsey Marshes. The fragments could, however, be grouped together into four fabric groups:

- a) Fine silt with no other inclusions visible
- b) Coarse silt with sparse rootlet holes/animal burrows.
- c) As (b) with brown mottles
- d) As (b) with abundant organic inclusions

The ball is approx 32mm diameter and has slight facets due to the forming process. Nevertheless, it was highly spherical and when complete could have rolled well. The surface of the ball has spalled/chipped away over about half of the surface.

The remaining fragments have no signs of their use except for the piece from context 314 which has reed impressions and appears to have been squeezed between two wattles. It is therefore probably a piece of daub. The other examples with abundant organic inclusions are probably also daub fragments.

The fragments without abundant organic inclusions include two large lumps from context 312. These have no faces and show no signs of being worked by man at all. It may be that these are burnt "turf" blocks, a type of debris often found in association with salt extraction

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(the turf was spade-cut and used to support a trough). All have been fired to a similar temperature in oxidizing conditions. This too is consistent with the salt extraction theory. However, there are no fragments of overfired clay, which by their distinctive range of colours indicate heating of a calcareous clay in contact with salt. Such fragments would have been conclusive evidence for salt extraction.

Assessment

The ball was presumably used for gaming. Clay is not often used for this purpose because of the brittleness of the material (as indeed can be seen in this example). The size of the ball suggests a game such as "marbles" rather than bowls. Given the date of the associated finds (late 9th to 10th centuries) it would be worth undertaking some research to see if similar balls, of any material, occur on Scandinavian sites of this date. A photograph and drawing of the ball should be made in order to facilitate the search for parallels.

Because of its fragility, and the presence of adhering soil, the ball should be submitted to a conservator for packaging and cleaning.

Costing

The cost of conservation and packaging has not been established.

Research: 4 hours at £23 per hour, plus VAT

Illustration: £20 plus VAT

Photograph: £25 plus VAT

Total: £137 plus VAT.

Appendix

REFNO:	Action:	Context:	Form:	SUBFABRIC:	Nosh:	NoV:	Weight:	Description:
SF16		205		SILTY;A ORGANICS	4	4	5	
SF16		205		SILTY;ROOTLETS/BURROWS	5	1	12	
SF01	DR;PH	312	BALL	SILTY	1	1	26	32MM DIAM;HAND MOULDED
		312		SILTY;ROOTLETS;MOTTLED	1	1	108	EVENLY OXIDIZED
		312		SILTY;ROOTLETS;MOTTLED	1	1	76	EVENLY OXIDIZED
		312		SILTY;ROOTLETS	4	4	37	EVENLY OXIDIZED
		312		SILTY;ROOTLETS;MOTTLED	3	3	20	EVENLY OXIDIZED

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REFNO:	Action:	Context:	Form:	SUBFABRIC:	Nosh:	NoV:	Weight:	Description:
SF02		314		SILTY;A ORGANICS	1	1	3	BLACK THROUGHOUT
