

Assessment of Finds from West Deeping (RFWD03)

Alan Vince and Kate Steane

A small collection of finds from archaeological investigations at West Deeping, undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd in 2003 were submitted to the authors for identification and assessment. They consisted of fragments of fired clay, most, or all, of which come from loom weights of a distinctive and unusual form and fragments of ceramic building material including a possible Roman piece as well as field drain.

Description

In total 31 fragments were recovered, representing no more than 15 objects and weighing 2.819 Kg (Table 1).

Table 1

Data	CBM	FCLAY	STONE	Grand Total
Sum of Nosh	2	24	1	31
Sum of NoV	2	12	1	15
Sum of Weight	137	2668	14	2819

Ceramic Building Material

A fragment of field drain was recovered from context 106. Field drains are mostly of mid 19th-century and later date but could date back to the later 18th century.

A fragment from context 171 is heavily abraded and comes from a rounded tile. Whilst it might also be from a field drain the degree of weathering suggests an earlier date and it is possibly a fragment of *imbrex* of Roman date.

Fired Clay

Twenty-eight fragments of fired clay were recorded. They come from five contexts and where the fragments are large enough to tell, they come from loom weights (contexts 45, 77 and 167. The fragments from contexts 27 and 140 are probably also from loom weights.

All the fragments have a similar fabric. The fabric contains moderate rounded fragments of clay/iron compounds, possible flint, and oolitic limestone all up to 3.0mm across and abundant rounded quartzose sand grains, up to 1.0mm across. Some of these are polished and of Lower Cretaceous origin and some are spherical with a matt surface. The groundmass contains abundant quartz silt with sparse muscovite. This is likely to have been made from a local glacial till.

The best preserved piece comes from context 45. The weight has a slightly tapering conical body, c.125mm tall and c.130mm diameter at the base, with a flat base and a rounded top. A

The Alan Vince Archaeology Consultancy, 25 West Parade, Lincoln, LN1 1NW

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hole with an oval cross section, 15mm wide by 18mm tall, runs through the weight with its centre about 70mm from the base. The weight is oxidized throughout with a grey to black flash mark running across the sides and top of the weight. The pattern of firing indicates that this mark occurred before the weight broke in half vertically.

All of the fragments are completely oxidized and this may suggest that they were deliberately fired (or just that the fabric is particularly "open" allowing oxygen to quickly penetrate the fabric).

The form of this loom weight has not been precisely paralleled. Examples dating to the Bronze Age either have a cylindrical form, with a flat top and bottom and a vertical hole or a tapering cylindrical form, taller than this example, with a rounded top but still with a vertical hole. Pyramidal weights with a horizontal hole, similar to that on the current example, tend to be found in Iron Age contexts. Since the West Deeping weight is typologically intermediate between the Bronze Age and Iron Age types it probably dates to the later Bronze Age or early Iron Age (perhaps showing the influence of the later form on makers more used to making the earlier cylindrical form).

A fragment from context 167 is clearly of similar form but the body is more ovoid in cross-section, ranging from c.75mm to 100mm in diameter. The oval form also suggests the influence of the pyramidal form.

The identification of similar weights as loom weights has been questioned by some researchers and they are usually found singly rather than, as in the Anglo-Saxon period, in groups representing the destruction by fire of a warp-weighted loom. However, the Anglo-Saxon pieces are often found on the floors of sunken-featured buildings whereas any similar conflagration in the prehistoric period would normally not survive, since the floors were at ground level. Furthermore, there is the suggestion that on this site, at least, the weights were deliberately fired before use. Firing would have enabled the weights to retain their integrity in water, which would open up possible uses as thatch weights or net sinkers (although they are rather large and heavy for such a use). The West Deeping fragments occur in features which might be wells, or ritual shafts (pers comm M Allen). If the former, then perhaps the weights could have been used to sink a bucket below the water line. The grey/black flash mark found on the weight might be due to a length of burning rope resting on the weight, for example, although it is equally consistent with the results of a loom burning.

Assessment

Future work

The two most complete fragments should be reconstructed and drawn.

It would then be worthwhile conducting a wider search for dated parallels for this type of loom weight.

Fired clay artefacts can be approximated dated by thermoluminescence (TL-dating) and if no other means of dating the features in which they were found exists then it might be worth investigating this option.

It would also be interesting to investigate how close to the findspot suitable glacial till exists. This would involve a mixture of fieldwork, use of geological maps and the British Geological Survey field notes made when this area was mapped or revised followed up with chemical and petrological analysis of the weights themselves.

Retention

The finds should be retained for potential future study.

Appendix 1

Context	class	cname	Description	Form	Nosh	NoV	Action	Weight
27	FCLAY	FCLAY		LOOMWEIGHT?	1	1		28
27	FCLAY	FCLAY		FCLAY	3	1		15
45	FCLAY	FCLAY	TAPERING CYLINDRICAL LOOMWEIGHT; 120MM HIGH; HOLE 15MM DIA	LOOMWEIGHT	2	1	DR1	1516
45	FCLAY	FCLAY	PROB FRAGMENTS OF OTHER TWO LOOMWEIGHTS	LOOMWEIGHT	7	2		60
77	FCLAY	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL LOOMWEIGHT	LOOMWEIGHT	1	1		61
77	FCLAY	FCLAY		FCLAY	2	2		20
106	CBM	PMTIL		FIELD DRAIN	1	1		77
140	FCLAY	FCLAY		FCLAY	1	1		14
167	FCLAY	FCLAY	TAPERING CYLINDRICAL LOOMWEIGHT; 95MM ACROSS; HOLE 12MM DIA; AT LEAST 95MM HIGH	LOOMWEIGHT	8	1	DR2	775
167	FCLAY	FCLAY	TAPERING CYLINDRICAL LOOMWEIGHT; AT LEAST ONE - COULD BE FRAGMENTS OF MORE	LOOMWEIGHT	3	1		179
167	STONE	STONE	POSSIBLY INCLUSION IN LOOMWEIGHT		1	1		14
171	CBM	RTIL?		IMBEX?	1	1		60