

Assessment of the Stone Finds from the A4146, Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass, Buckinghamshire

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A small group of stone finds from archaeological fieldwork on the line of the A4146 Stoke Hammond and Linslade Western Bypass were submitted to the authors for identification and assessment. Two, from Site B, are probably saddle querns of prehistoric date, one from site C may be a honestone probably made from an erratic pebble, and a third is a honestone of Norwegian Rag, of medieval date, from Site D Tr 5. A fourth fragment, from Site E, is of Upper Cretaceous Chalk, but shows no signs of use. Unless the local glacial till contains Chalk this piece must have been brought to the site, probably as building stone.

Description

Stone

The stones were examined at x20 magnification (Table 1). Those from Site B appear to be a rubber and saddle quern. They are made from different sandstones which appear to be modified boulders rather than freshly-quarried stone. Both come from the same complex of features and could have been used together. Saddle querns were used in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, being replaced by rotary querns during the Iron Age.

The object from Site C South is made from a fine-grained black rock, probably of basic igneous origin. The object has a roughly rectangular cross-section and the four faces are flat and smooth, giving the appearance of being polished. The ends are less obviously humanly-worked, nor is there any sign that they have been broken subsequent to the polishing. If this is indeed an artefact it is difficult to see what it might be. Given the exotic nature of the stone, it is possible that it was polished and used as a status symbol. Olwen Williams-Thorpe *et al* have shown that igneous erratics occur in the Quaternary deposits of Hertfordshire and Buckinghamshire ({Williams-Thorpe, Aldis, et al. 1999 #46333}) and thus the object might be from a local gravel/boulder clay.

The hone from Site D is a small, ellipse-sectioned stone, seemingly complete. Norwegian Ragstone was quarried at Eidsborg, in southern Norway and is found in large quantities on sites in Eastern England. The importation seems to have started in the 10th century, well before the Norman conquest, but increased sharply in the later 11th century and continued into the 14th century (Pritchard 1991, 155-160).

The fragment of chalk from Site E shows no signs of working, nor of weathering, and could be either a fragment of building stone or a glacial erratic (although chalk was not noted

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amongst the inclusions in the fired clay from the A4146 sites, which appear to be made from boulder clay).

Table 1

Subfabric	Form	Nosh	Weight	trench	context	period code	context group	description
FINE-GRAINED SANDSTONE	RUBBER	1	1392	SITE B	22019	IA/EROM	GP 22003	ONE WORN SURFACE
FINE-GRAINED BLACK ROCK	OBJECT	1	248	SITE C SOUTH	39001	ND	SUBSOIL	FOUR POLISHED FACES
FERRUGINOUS SANDSTONE	SADDLE QUERN	2	1802	SITE B	22025	ND	GP 22003	
MICA SCHIST	HONESTONE	1	39	Site D Tr 5	4129	EMED	F4012	fill of probable ditch 4130/4009; same as 4002
CHALK	GEO	1	51	Site E	60096	EMOD	SUBSOIL	Same as subsoil 60002

Assessment

It is likely that the saddle quern fragments were made from locally-available sandstone boulders, collected from the boulder clay, and therefore show no evidence for an organised trade. This is also true for the unidentified black rock from Site C South. The honestone and possibly the chalk fragment, however, come from organised industries, located in Norway and, probably, the Chilterns respectively.

Further Work

The saddle quern fragments, unprepossessing as they are, and the hone should be illustrated. The black rock from Site C should be drawn and then the surface examined at high power to examine the wear traces (which would distinguish between a natural polish and an artificial one). If it is concluded that the object is indeed humanly worked then it should be submitted to Rob Ixer for petrological analysis.

Bibliography

Pritchard, F. A. (1991) "Small Finds." in A. G. Vince, ed., *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: 2, Finds and Environmental Evidence*, London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Spec Pap 12 London Middlesex Archaeol Soc, London, 120-278.