Assessment of the Stone Finds from St Wilfred's Road, Cantley, South Yorkshire (SWCD-05)

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A small quantity of stone finds from archaeological fieldwork at Cantley, South Yorkshire undertaken by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd was submitted for identification and assessment. The site revealed some enclosures of Roman date and the stone finds include fragments of rotary quern, made from Millstone Grit and Mayen Lava and a probable weight, made from Millstone Grit. Other finds are unworked cobbles, some of which might have been burnt.

Description

Cobbles

Three rounded cobbles, of a fine-grained quartz sandstone, were submitted. Two of these (from contexts 309 and 311) have a red surface colouration and cracks which suggest that they have been burnt. If so, this may have been either because they were used as a hearth base or because they were used to heat water by being burnt in a fire and then thrown into water. Such cobbles probably came from the Triassic Sherwood Sandstone, which outcrops extensively in south Yorkshire and is also a major constituent of Quaternary gravels.

Querns

Fragments of two rotary querns were submitted. One, SF3 from context 311, is the top stone of a Millstone Grit quern. The Millstone grit was obtained from quarries and the nearest outcrop to Cantley would be in the Sheffield area.

The other, from context 318 is a fragment of Mayen Lava quern. This fragment has one flat face, which identifies it as the bottom stone of the quern. Mayen or Niedermendig lava is a vesicular lava which was quarried in the region around Mayen, Rheinland-Pfalz, Germany.

Rotary querns were introduced to the midlands in the early Roman period but continued to be used throughout the Anglo-Saxon and early medieval periods, although they probably became less common in the late Saxon period as a result of the widespread use of mills.

Weight

A probable weight was recovered from context 306. It is made from Millstone Grit and consists of a circular disk, 85mm in diameter and 49mm thick. In the top surface there is a small central depression. Cobbles of Millstone Grit of this size could have been found in the

local Quaternary gravels, but it is more likely that this weight is a minor product of the quarries used for the quernstones.

It is possible that this depression was used to anchor a metal suspension loop, although, if so, there is no trace of lead remaining. Such weights were used with steelyard balances and would therefore not need to be a precise weight, since the steelyard can be calibrated to take account of variations in weight.

Assessment

Retention

The quern fragments and the weight should certainly be retained for future study. Similarly, a case can be made for retaining the burnt cobbles (for example, it is possible to obtain a date for the last burning from using thermoluminesence, although without a measurement of background radiation at the site of burial the date would be quite broad).

Further Work

The weight and the Millstone Grit quern fragment should both be drawn.

Context	REFNO	subfabric	Object	Nosh	Weight	Action	Description	Part	diameter	TH	Condition
306	SF2	SSTMG	WEIGHT?	1	672	DR	CIRCULAR WITH FLAT TOP AND BOTTOM;SMALL HOLE DRILLED IN TOP	BS	85	49	COMPLETE
309		COARSE-GRAINED SST (SSTMG?)	GEO	1	502			BS	0		BURNT;BROKEN
311		FINE-GRAINED SST	GEO	1	204			BS	0		
311		FINE-GRAINED SST	GEO	1	198			BS	0		BURNT;BROKEN
311	SF3	SSTMG	QUERN	1	1502	DR	TOP STONE	BS	0		
318		MAYEN LAVA	QUERN	1	301		PROBABLY FRAGMENT OF LOWER STONE	BS	0		