

Assessment of the Fired Clay from Fairfield Avenue, Chapel St Leonard (CSTL 05)

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A small collection of fired clay from Fairfield Avenue, Chapel St Leonard, recovered from archaeological fieldwork by Marc Berger, was submitted for identification. The most likely interpretation of the material is that it consists of parts of a rectangular tray and a ceramic "clip" used to secure two trays together and is briquetage, used in salt production. However, both the fabric and typology differ from standard late prehistory and Roman briquetage.

Description

Fired Clay

Eight fragments of fired clay were submitted. All come from the same context, Trench B 015 and all have a similar fabric.

The fabric has a fine sandy texture and is oxidized throughout. At x20 magnification moderate rounded and subangular fragments up to 1.5mm across are visible together with abundant fine-textured quartz sand/coarse silt, with grains up to 0.1mm across. The larger inclusions consist of quartz and sparse flint, and fine-grained white sandstone. In addition abundant straw fragments were present as voids, some containing white ash, indicating the complete burning of the straw.

These characteristics are typical of non-calcareous glacial tills in the Lindsey Marshes.

Seven of the fragments come from one or more crude, sub-rectangular trays. Two rim fragments are present which vary in the profile of the rim (in one case within the same sherd) and this means that differences in profile cannot be used to distinguish different vessels. These fragments have pronounced yellow "salt-surfacing" on interior and exterior surfaces. A single probable flat base sherd is present and this, together with four of the other sherds, has lost its interior surface, which has disintegrated.

The eighth fragment comes from a possible clip. Unlike the trays, it does not have salt surfacing although the fabric is otherwise identical.

The tray fragments are remarkably thick (about twice the thickness of most Iron Age and Roman briquetage in the area) and also differ from that material in fabric, since most briquetage in the Lindsey Marshes was made from marine silt and has a higher organic content.

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Assessment

The fired clay is probably debris from salt extraction. During the Roman period the use of clay trays to boil and concentrate the brine was replaced by the use of lead trays and therefore the material should be no later than the mid Roman period. However, it could be much earlier (Bronze Age?), and this might explain the unusual fabric and wall thickness.

Further Work

It would be possible to confirm the identity of the clay from which the tray fragments and clip were made using thin section and chemical analysis, but unless the material can be more closely dated this is probably of limited interest. The fragments should be drawn.

Retention

Featured sherds (rims, bases and the clip) should be retained for future comparison with other finds.