Assessment of the Mortar and Plaster from the E-Campus Site, Sheffield, South Yorkshire (ECA 07)

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Seven samples of mortar and plaster, recovered during archaeological investigations of the E-Campus site in Sheffield was submitted for identification and assessment.

From the character of the associated finds and stratigraphy, the finds are probably all of late 19th century or later date.

Factual Data

Four samples of mortar and three samples of plaster were submitted for assessment (Table 1). They come from six contexts (context 1605 produced both mortar and plaster samples).

Table 1 Weight of samples

Context	MORTAR	PLASTER	Grand Total
205		69	69
1577	63		63
1604		44	44
1605	91	39	130
1606	87		87
1580 LOWER WALL	24		24
Grand Total	265	152	417

The mortar was examined at x20 magnification. All four samples appear to be lime mortars. Most are disaggregated, powdery samples which are probably contaminated with the sediment matrix in which they were found but lumps large enough for analysis survive in each case. Muscovite, sandstone, chert, coal and probable slag were noted in the mortars.

The plasters include a fragment from context 205 which has a thick lime plaster skim on a backing of grey cement containing abundant coal and slag sand. Context 1604 produced a fragment with a lime mortar similar to the other mortars with a thin lime plaster skin (with a light grey colour, perhaps from post-burial staining). A similar fragment, with a less pronounced stain, was recovered from context 1605.

Statement of Potential

There appears to be a single type of lime mortar present in the samples. The lime plasters differ in thickness and colour and a single example of a probable cement was present.

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Analysis of these materials, using thin section and chemical analyses, would allow the visual identifications to be checked and lead to further understanding of the manufacturing process and composition of the material.

However, it is not known how these samples relate to the structural history of the site and if they cannot be tied down to specific structures and periods then analysis would only be of general interest.

Storage and Curation

The plaster and mortar samples are stable and could be stored indefinitely in archive boxes with no special storage conditions or packaging. No detailed information on the archaeological context of the material was available but it is not considered to be an important fact when considering the retention of the collection (MAP2 A4.3.1).

It is suggested that all the samples are retained for analysis.

Appendix 1

REFNO	Trench	Context	class	Description	Form	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight
12	AREA A	1606	MORTAR	DISINTEGRATED WITH LUMPS; LARGEST LUMP 14-18 THICK	MORTAR	FRAGS	1	1	87
9	AREA A	1580 LOWER WALL	MORTAR	DISINTEGRATED WITH LUMPS; LARGEST LUMP 7 THICK	MORTAR	FRAGS	1	1	24
11	AREA A	1605	MORTAR	DISINTEGRATED WITH LUMPS; LARGEST LUMP 9 THICK	MORTAR	FRAGS	1	1	91
13	AREA A	1577	MORTAR	DISINTEGRATED WITH LUMPS; LARGEST LUMP 10-20 THICK	MORTAR	FRAGS	1	1	63
10	AREA A	1604	PLASTER	SOME DISINTEGRATION BUT LARGE LUMP 14 THICK PLUS; GREY SKIM UNDER 1	PLASTER/SKIM	FRAGS	1	1	44
		205	PLASTER	GREY PLASTER 16 THICK; WITH WHITE SKIM 2 THICK	PLASTER/SKIM	FRAG	1	1	69
14	AREA A	1605	PLASTER	SOME DISINTEGRATION BUT LARGE LUMP 8-12 THICK; FRAGMENTED WHITISH SKIM UNDER 1	PLASTER/SKIM	FRAGS	1	1	39

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