

Assessment of Fired Clay from Rectory Farm, West Deeping, Lincolnshire (RFWD05)

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A small quantity of fired clay was recovered from archaeological excavations at Rectory Farm, West Deeping, undertaken in 2005 by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd (RFWD05). The finds probably all come from cylindrical loomweights, a type which was current in the Bronze Age and Iron Age. Several have been burnt after breakage and the colour range found on these fragments suggests that the clay from which they were made was saline.

Description

Fired Clay

Twenty fragments of fired clay were recovered (App 1). They come from no more than 12 objects and weigh in total 816 gm.

All were examined at x20 magnification using a stereomicroscope and the same fabric characteristics were observed in each case. The clay contains moderate quantities of rounded quartz sand, with grains up to 1.0mm across, and lesser quantities of rounded red and black ironstone up to 10mm across and rounded calcareous inclusions up to 10mm across, most of which have been leached or altered during firing. In one case, however, the original structure of these calcareous inclusions survived and could be seen to be oolitic limestone.

All the fragments could come from cylindrical loomweights, with an axial hole and flat ends. It appears that the standard firing was in an oxidizing atmosphere but for a short period of time, so that the core of the weight is black or dark brown and the margins, to a depth of at least 10mm, sometimes more, is oxidized brown. In some cases, however, the weight has been subjected to a higher temperature. This probably took place following or during breakage and the oxidation pattern suggests that the weights by this time were fragmentary. The colour range seen on these fragments indicates that the clay was saline and heated in the presence of calcium carbonate, probably including finely divided material as well as the large visible fragments.

Cylindrical loom weights first appear in the Bronze Age and are also found in Iron Age contexts. However, before the end of the Iron Age they had been replaced by pyramidal, horned weights in which the hole runs horizontally through the weight, about two thirds of the height.

Stone

A single fragment appears to be an unworked, rounded pebble, which is probably composed of partially decalcified limestone.

Assessment

Further work

Several of the weights should be illustrated as a record and for comparison with those from other sites. The fabric of the weights should be characterised using thin sections and chemical analysis to establish whether or not they were locally made, and to establish whether they have an elevated sodium content.

At 2008-9 rates, the drawing would cost £30.00 plus VAT and the thin section and chemical analysis would cost £312.00 plus VAT.

Retention

All the fired clay fragments should be retained and the stone could be discarded.

Appendix 1

Action	Context	class	Description	Form	Part	Nosh	NoV	Weight	Condition
	189	FCLAY	FEATURELESS LUMP BUT OF SIMILAR FABRIC AND APPEARANCE TO REMAINDER		BS	1	1	5	
DR;TS;ICPS	251	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL;130 DIA; HOLE 13 DIA;DARK BROWN CORE;BROWN MARGINS	LOOMWEIGHT	B	2	1	307	
	270	STONE	ROUNDED PEBBLE	GEO	BS	1	1	3	
	356	FCLAY	POSSIBLY CYLINDRICAL	LOOMWEIGHT?	BS	3	1	26	
TS;ICPS	393	FCLAY	PROBABLY FRAG OF BASE	LOOMWEIGHT	BS	1	1	28	BURNT WITH "SALT SURFACED" PINK
	393	FCLAY			BS	1	1	20	BURNT WITH "SALT SURFACED" PINK
TS;ICPS	428	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL; DARK CORE OXID MARGINS	LOOMWEIGHT	BS	2	1	139	BURNT WITH "SALT SURFACED" PINK
	477	FCLAY	ONE FLAT SURFACE	LOOMWEIGHT	BS	1	1	6	
	477	FCLAY		LOOMWEIGHT	BS	2	2	13	
DR;TS;ICPS	550	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL;FLAT BASED	LOOMWEIGHT	BS;B	4	1	188	BURNT WITH "SALT SURFACED" PINK
TS;ICPS	551	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL	LOOMWEIGHT	B	1	1	19	
TS;ICPS	748	FCLAY	CYLINDRICAL;ONE CURVED SURFACE	LOOMWEIGHT	BS	2	1	65	