

Assessment of Metal Artefacts from land north of Boston Road, Sleaford (EPBR 08)

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A small collection of metal finds from an archaeological excavation on land north of Boston Road, Sleaford, carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology (Lincoln) Ltd was submitted to the authors for identification and assessment. The finds probably range in date from the Roman period to the modern period.

Description

Copper Alloy

Three copper alloy artefacts were submitted:

- 1. Context 1000. The handle of a bowl or similar vessel. The handle is made from a hollow tube, bent at right angles twice and flattened at the ends and riveted to the body of the vessel. No close parallels can be put forward but similar construction is used on post-medieval and modern sheet metal vessels.
- 2. Context 1101. One arm of a set of tweezers, broken at the hinge. The arm widens towards the end and shows no sign of decoration. Probably Roman.
- 3. Context 1300. A small cast object (Fig 1), possibly a bar-mount (Egan & Pritchard 1991 #16773). Bar-mounts were attached to belts and girdles in the later medieval period and used to attach purses, pendants and the like.



Figure 1

Iron

Sixteen iron objects were recovered. Eleven of these were nails, or parts of nails. Two come from pit 1107 and one of these is curved, probably indicating that it was removed from the wood to allow the wood to be re-used. The remainder come from Grave B or ditch 1504, which cut through this grave. Several of the nails have mineralised wood traces and all were probably from a coffin. Dimensions indicate the use of two sizes of nail, one with a 90mm long shank and the other with a 55mm shank. The latter was driven right through the wood and bent over at the end, indicating a combined thickness of 47mm for the wood. The shanks are between 4mm and 7mm square.

The remaining five items are listed here:

- 1. Context 819. A rectangular buckle with an iron pin attached at the middle of one of the longer sides. The x-radiograph indicates that the item was coated with non-ferrous plating.
- 2. Context 1108. An iron strip. The x-radiograph shows possible traces of rivets and possible evidence for the strip being folded over at one of the narrower ends. Therefore, perhaps a hinge. However, this is by no means a certain identification.
- 3. Context 1108. An iron strip with two possible nails attached. Probably associated with No.2 above.
- 4. Context 1108. A probable "Hearth bottom" identified by its rough plano-convex section and the presence of abundant vesicles in the x-radiograph. "Hearth bottoms" are a by-product of iron smithing, forming below the tuyere nozzle.
- 5. Context 1412. A pin. The x-radiograph shows much better preservation of the iron than in any of the other iron artefacts and a very regular profile, including a truncated conical head. We interpret this as part of an item of agricultural machinery of recent date.

Lead Alloy

Three fragments of lead alloy were recovered.

- 1. Context 1100. A nail. Only slight corrosion despite being present in topsoil so probably recent.
- 2. Context 1108. A strip, 30 mm wide and 2mm thick. The ends are snapped but it was at least 58mm long.
- 3. Context 1408. A melted runnel less than 1mm across but crumpled, torn and folded.

Assessment

Most of the items from the fills of features were associated with Roman pottery and it is likely that they are of Roman date. This is almost certainly the case for the finds from pit 1107 and the nails from grave B and ditch 1504.

The tweezers from context 1101 are of a type current in the Roman period.

Two finds from features are less certainly of Roman date. These consist of the rectangular iron buckle from Pit 820, for which parallels of late medieval date can be found but not, on a superficial search, from Roman deposits, and the pin from pit 1411 which is certainly of recent date.

Finds from the topsoil are probably of late medieval or later date: the possible bar mount from context 1300; the lead nail from context 1100 and the copper alloy vessel handle from context 1000.

Further work

If the finds from pit 820 suggest a Roman date then the buckle could be submitted to a specialist on Roman small finds for a second opinion.

The finds from pit 1108 include possible evidence for iron-smithing and all ought to be submitted to a specialist on Roman metallurgy to determine the identification of the hearth bottom and to consider whether any of the other finds might be unfinished artefacts or associated in some other way with iron smithing.

The possible bar mount should be illustrated, since it could not be closely paralleled in Egan and Pritchard's 1991 catalogue of medieval dress fittings from the City of London.

Retention

All of the finds from stratified deposits should be retained for possible future re-examination or sampling.

Appendix 1

period	phase	Context	material	form	wt	part	Action	description	diam	length
late medieval	Topsoil	1300	COPP	BAR MOUNT?	1	WHOLE			0	20
modern	Topsoil	1100	LEAD	NAIL	5	PART		STRAIGHT; ROUND HEAD 12 ACROSS	0	16+
modern	Pit 1411	1412	IRON	AGRICULTURAL PIN	86	WHOLE		MODERN	0	135
post-med+	Topsoil	1000	COPP	HANDLE	5	WHOLE		HANDLE BROKEN AWAY FROM A VESSEL; TWO HOLES AT EACH END OF A BENT ROD TO ATTACH IT - ONE BROKEN AND ONE WITH PIN HEAD IN SITU	0	58
roman+	Pit 820	819	IRON	BUCKLE	27	WHOLE		SINGLE CELL RECTANGULAR TINNED BUCKLE WITH ATTACHED CENTRAL PIN	0	44
roman+	interface	1101	COPP	TWEEZERS	1	PART		HALF A TWEEZERS - REST BROKEN OFF	0	33
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	LEAD	STRIP	33	PART			0	58+
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	IRON	STRIP	50	WHOLE?		POSSIBLE BUCKLE PLATE; STRIP FOLDED OVER CONTAINING POSSIBLE RIVETS	0	60
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	IRON	STRIP	64	WHOLE?		IRON STRIP WITH TWO POSSIBLE NAILS	0	70
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	IRON	NAIL	30	PART		CURVED NAIL; RECT HEAD 15 BY 20	0	55+
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	IRON	NAIL	22	PART		STRAIGHT; POSS CIRCULAR HEAD 20 DIA	0	50+
roman+	Pit 1107	1108	IRON	HEARTH BOTTOM	217	WHOLE	SPECIALIST: JANE COWGILL		85	
roman+	Pit 1407	1408	LEAD	SCRAP	5	PART		IRREGULAR EXTENT OF THIN LEAD SHEET, CRUMPLED, TORN AND FOLDED	0	
roman+	Grave B	1503	IRON	NAIL	6	PART		STRAIGHT	0	37

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roman+	Grave B	1503	IRON	NAIL	2	PART	STRAIGHT	0	44
roman+	Grave B	1503	IRON	NAIL	3	PART	STRAIGHT; MINERALISED WOODGRAIN	0	50
roman+	Grave B	1503	IRON	NAIL	9	WHOLE	STRAIGHT FOR 47 AND THEN TIP BENT; MINERALISED WOODGRAIN; SQUARE HEAD 15 BY 15	0	55
roman+	Grave B	1503	IRON	NAIL	7	PART	STRAIGHT; MINERALISED WOODGRAIN	0	60
roman+	Ditch 1504	1505	IRON	NAIL	26	WHOLE	STRAIGHT; MINERALISED WOODGRAIN; HEAD UNCLEAR	0	90
roman+	Ditch 1504	1505	IRON	NAIL	18	PART	STRAIGHT	0	57+
roman+	Ditch 1504	1505	IRON	NAIL	22	PART	STRAIGHT; MINERALISED WOODGRAIN; SQUARE HEAD 15 BY 15	0	60+
roman+	Pit 1603	1604	IRON	NAIL HEAD	7	WHOLE	SQUARE HEAD 15 BY 15	0	