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Ancient Monuments Laboratory
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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME
PREHISTORIC POTTERY FROM BARROW
HILLS, RADLEY, BERKS

D F Williams PhD FSA

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Summary

Six sherds of prehistoric pottery from the 1983 and 1984 excavations were thin sectioned. This showed the main inclusion types to be: Flint, Grog, Shell and Flint/Quartz sand. All of the pottery may well have been made locally.

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A NOTE ON THE PETROLOGY OF SOME PREHISTORIC POTTERY FROM BARROW

HILLS, RADLEY, BERKSHIRE

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Introduction

A small number of prehistoric sherds from the 1983 and 1984 excavations at Barrow Hills, Radley, were submitted for a detailed fabric examination in thin section under the petrological microscope. The main objective of the analysis was to confirm the validity of a provisional identification of sherds in the hand-specimen and allocation to fabric groups. The site at Barrow Hills, Radley, is situated on Kimeridge Clay and Valley Gravel, closeby to Upper Portland Beds and Lower Greensand.

Petrology

On the basis of the range of non-plastic inclusions present in the Barrow Hills sherds sampled, a number of fabric divisions have been made. The original fabric numbering of the samples has been retained.

(1) Flint

RBH 84 931/1 Fabric F Unidentified inclusions B:1 Prehistoric: area of pits.

Frequent angular pieces of flint/chert up to about 3mm across, with a scatter of silt-sized quartz grains and flecks of mica. In the hand-specimen some of the flint appears to be slightly ochreous. Flints occur in some numbers in the

Glacial deposits around Radley, and this sherd may well represent a local product.

(2) Grog tempered

RBH 83 2061/D/1 Fabric G Unidentified inclusions A:1 Outer ditch of Neolithic oval barrow.

A fairly clean clay matrix containing angular inclusions of grog (i.e. crushed up pottery), a scatter of sparse quartz grains, flecks of mica, some iron ore, clay pellets and ?mudstone. This sherd appears to have been made from poorly prepared clay, with evidence of many air pockets and linear cracking of the clay matrix clearly visible in thin section. There was no sign of glauconite in the section, an inclusion type suggested by the designation A:1. Due to the nature and widespread use of grog tempering in Late Neolithic and Bronze Age pottery, it is difficult to suggest an origin for these sherds, other than a fairly local one on that basis alone (Clark, 1970; Peacock, 1970; Darville, 1982).

(3) Shell

RBH 83 2144 (278) Fabric S Sh Unidentified inclusions A:1 Feature associated with the Neolithic oval barrow.

RBH 84 2061/P/1 Fabric Sh Unidentified inclusions C:1 ?limonite Outer ditch of Neolithic oval barrow.

RAD BH 83 2061/G/1 (270) Fabric S Sh (v) Unidentified inclusions A:1 Outer ditch of Neolithic oval barrow.

In thin section sherd 2061/G/1 can be seen to contain frequent inclusions of shell. In a few cases it is possible to see some recrystallization of calcite in the shell suggesting that at least some of it is fossiliferous. Also in the section are a number of elongate voids commensurate with the shape of the pieces

of shell present. These voids no doubt once held shell which has since been lost in the firing of the pottery or due to adverse soil conditions at the site. Also present in the fabric are some grains of quartz, flecks of mica, a little iron ore and a few fine-textured argillaceous pieces - ?mudstone.

The other two sherds in this group lack the visible shell of 2061/G/1 but contain frequent voids of a similar shape to those in the latter sherd to suspect that they too once held inclusions of shell. Also present were the same range of additional inclusions described above.

There was no sign of glauconite/limonite in any of the three sections, an inclusion type suggested by the designation A:1.

The presence of fossiliferous shell in 206/G/1 probably points to the local Jurassic clays as the origin for the raw materials for all three sherds.

(4) Flint/Quartz Sand

RBH 84 4647/B/1 Fabric FS Unidentified inclusions D:1 Later Prehistoric pottery

Frequent subangular quartz grains up to 0.50mm across and a scatter of small pieces of angular flint, with flecks of mica and some argillaceous material. The degree of rounding of these argillaceous pieces suggests clay pellets rather than grog, but it is difficult to be certain.

The presence of flint once again suggests a fairly local source.

References

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