

Fired Clay
By
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Introduction

A total of 221 (2793 g) fragments of fired clay were recovered from 33 contexts (32 features) at Latton Lands, including ditches and gullies, pit and postholes, a waterhole and a quarry. The great majority of this assemblage consisted of oxidised, amorphous fragments that that is thought to derive from hearths, ovens and from the accidental firing of clay. Objects comprised part of a triangular loom weight (FC2), parts of either a weight or pieces of oven furniture and an unidentified thick, rim shaped fragment. These results are tabulated below (see table 1.1).

Also noted was a base fragment of cylindrical loom weight (FC1) which had been decorated with round toothed comb impressions. This was recovered from a soil sample (177) removed from pit 1750 during the watching brief at Latton Lands (Stansbie and Laws, 2004, 115). The pit was, at the time of publication, considered to contain no dating evidence although a date of middle to late Bronze Age was considered likely; this fragment of loom weight is early or middle Bronze Age in date.

Table 1.1: Showing breakdown of fired clay by type

Type	Object Count	Fragment Count	Weight (g)
Amorphous		185	1464
Part of object	1	1	63
Oven debris	2	28	933
Triangular Loom weight	3	25	400
Possible weights	1	1	15
		217	2632

Table 1.2: Showing breakdown of fired clay from context 1751 by type

Watching Brief	Type	Fragment Count	Weight (g)
Context 1751	Cylindrical loom weight	1	25
Context 1751	Part of object above?	3	136
		4	161

Methodology

The fired clay was examined for evidence of wattle or other impressions, possible objects and structural pieces. A record was made of the various fabrics.

Fabrics

The majority of the assemblage, as outlined above, consisted of amorphous fragments. These were all manufactured from a sandy fabric; the only identifiable object manufactured from this fabric was a large squared block which may have derived from a kiln or an oven.

Those fragments positively identified as loom weight fragments were manufactured from a closed clay containing no sand or silt but with rare naturally occurring calcareous veins along which the object had often split. The fact that these fragments were generally not oxidised may also be significant, although the amorphous sandy clay was much more numerous and not always oxidised.

Those fragments (17 amorphous fragments and one unidentified object) which did contain inclusions appeared not to have undergone any process of paste preparation, with many of the inclusions representing naturally occurring materials rather than deliberately added temper.

A Fine sandy clay with fine shell inclusions (Structural clay fabric).

B Fine silty clay, rare inclusions (Loomweight fabric, miscellaneous).

Loomweights

Three fragments of three typical early to middle Iron Age triangular 'loom weight' type objects were recovered.

A single fragment of triangular 'loom weight' was recovered from pit 3491 which contained early or middle Iron Age pottery, burnt stone and animal bone. It consisted of a rectangular fragment with one surface, through which a piercing had been made. The surface around this piercing was very irregular and the inside was marked by scratches which may have been either caused by the post-excavation cleaning of the object or by its use.

A single fragment of a smaller triangular, pierced weight was recovered from context 3904 within posthole 3905. A total of 24 fragments were recovered from context 2801 from within the terminus of curvilinear ditch 2800 (LALA03). These refitted to make the top corner of an uneven and poorly made triangular 'loom weight'. The context in a ditch terminus suggests the possibility that this object was part of a placed deposit.

A further fragment (from posthole 2891) had a single, smoothed, curved surface.

The most common presumption, with regards to function, has been that these objects are loom weights relating to warp weighted looms. This is, however, by no means absolutely certain. It is clear that similar shaped objects of a much larger size and heavier weight were not used on looms and it is accepted that they may have more than one likely function. Wild (Wild 2003, 32) asserts that it is the belonging of an object to a recognisable set which marks a loom weight out from any other kind of weight. In volume 6 of Cunliffe's Danebury series, Poole demonstrated reasonable doubt as to the function of triangular, pierced clay objects (Poole 1995, 285-6) and furthermore provided the results of research (based on a number of large assemblages throughout the south west) which suggested a heavy tendency for such objects to be associated with oven structure, daub and clay rather than with other textile related objects. Poole made a distinction between chalk and clay triangular objects; use wear of a sort consistent with that expected on a loom weight is often observed on the former but never on the latter. These objects are typically early to middle Iron Age in date.

Oven Material

A total of 28 (933 g) fragments of oven material were recovered from context 3568 (posthole 3567) and context 1082 (gully fill 1084). Some of the fragments from 3567 refitted to form a very thick block with a sharply formed edge and one bottom surface (which was covered with organic impressions). The lack of a complete wall thickness prevented an estimate of size. It was very fragmentary and incomplete and did not have any other significant artefactual associations (one shell tempered body sherd was recorded), but it is likely to have derived from an oven. Supports for oven plates are often hefty.

Object

One shaped fragment with a triangular section, was oxidised to a red-brown colour on the external face and had the appearance of a very fat rim. This was recovered from context 973, a ditch which contained the most significant Roman pottery assemblage from the site (see Stansbie **). The fabric was most similar to the unwedged fabric used for the manufacture of the fired clay and bore traces of finger

wiping across the internal face. It is not easy to identify this object but it is possibly the lip of a small oven (Cynthia Poole Pers. Comm.). This object could be interpreted as the rim of a very coarsely made early Bronze Age vessel, which would be supported by the shape and poorly oxidised firing, though the degree to which the clay was unprepared makes this unlikely.

Amorphous

A total of 185 (1464 g) fragments (see Table *) of amorphous fired clay were recovered from 29 contexts. These had no discernible form or function but undoubtedly derive from ovens and hearths used for domestic and industrial activities. Most, if not all of this material is fired a reddish-brown colour.

Comment on the decorated fragment of cylindrical loom weight from the watching brief

Fragments of a loom weight were recovered from pit 1750 during the watching brief at Latton Lands, which took place in 2002. This pit also contained organic remains and some human bone. The weight was recovered from the soil sample and not included in the subsequent publication.

The fragments included the flat base, into which was impressed four lines of round toothed comb impressions. The clay was, like the triangular loom weight from LALA04, manufactured from a poorly wedged, laminated clay containing no inclusions. The object is very fragile, as the laminated and badly fired clay flakes away very readily. It is not absolutely clear that the other fragments, two of which bear part of a piercing, are part of the same object, although it is likely.

Objects of this type can be dated to the early or middle Bronze Age, which would be consistent with the Deverel Rimbury pottery recovered from those excavations. The comb impressions are found on pottery of both dates. A more complete cylindrical loom weight from Blackbird Leys was decorated with lattice patterns created using an impressed round toothed comb but otherwise, this is likely to be unique.

Discussion

Fired clay is a good indicator of domestic and industrial activities, which includes cooking, textile production and pottery manufacture. The assemblage was found in a

variety of features across the site at Latton although, for a site this size, the size of the assemblage and quantity of objects identified was low (Cynthia Poole *Pers Comm.*). The area covered by the excavations during 2001 recovered only fragments of early or middle Bronze Age cylindrical loom weights whilst those carried out during 2003 and 2004 both recovered fragments of early to middle Iron Age triangular loom weights. No objects were found within the area excavated during 2002 (which includes the early Bronze Age enclosure).

Catalogue

FC1. SS 177. Pit 1750. Context 1751, 1752, 1753. Fragment of loom weight which has been decorated with impressed round toothed comb. Piercing approximately 15 mm wide.

FC2. SF 278. Pit 3491. Context 3492. Triangular loom weight. One piercing measuring 9 mm where the fragment has broken, revealing the piercing in section, and 11 mm at the end.

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Table 1.3: Showing quantification of fired clay by context, type and date.

Site Code	Context	Type	Date	Fragment Count	Weight (g)
LALA04	804	Amorphous		2	36
LALA01	973	Object	Early or Middle Iron Age	1	63
LALA01	1082	Amorphous		10	40
LALA01	1082	Object		6	59
LALA01	1126	Amorphous		2	10
LALA01	1211	Amorphous		12	75
LALA01	1240	Amorphous		12	27
LALA01	1290	Amorphous		5	11
LALA01	1678	Amorphous		1	13
LALA01	1751	Loom weight?	Early or middle Bronze Age	3	136
LALA01	1751	Cylindrical loom weight	Early or middle Bronze Age	1	25
LALA01	1883	Amorphous		1	5
LALA01	1899	Amorphous		3	14
LALA02	2328	Amorphous		3	4
LALA02	2345	Amorphous		1	25
LALA02	2376	Amorphous		1	2
LALA02	2571	Amorphous		6	20
LALA02	2714	Amorphous		1	26
LALA03	2801	Triangular loom weight	Early or Middle Iron Age	23	243
LALA02	2848	Amorphous		2	94
LALA03	2889	Loom weight?		1	15
LALA02	2924	Amorphous		1	5
LALA02	3130	Amorphous		5	80
LALA04	3319	Amorphous		1	4
LALA04	3356	Amorphous		3	14
LALA04	3466	Amorphous		16	88
LALA04	3492	Loom weight?	Early or Middle Iron Age	1	125
LALA04	3511	Amorphous		1	9
LALA04	3568	Amorphous		44	606
LALA04	3568	Plate? Kiln lining	Late Prehistoric	22	874
LALA04	3571	Amorphous		2	41
LALA04	3705	Amorphous		18	48
LALA04	3711	Amorphous		1	5
LALA04	3719	Amorphous		8	73

LALA04	3757	Amorphous		1	17
LALA04	3870	Amorphous		18	31
LALA04	3904	Triangular loom weight	Early or Middle Iron Age	1	32
LALA04	3918	Amorphous		4	41