

# Cambourne New Settlement

Iron Age and Romano-British settlement  
on the clay uplands of west Cambridgeshire

Volume 2: Specialist Appendices

Web Report 9  
*Slag, by Phil Andrews*



# Cambourne New Settlement

## Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement on the Clay Uplands of West Cambridgeshire

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Volume 2: Specialist Appendices  
Part 1. Artefacts  
Part 2. Ecofacts

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## Slag

By Phil Andrews

The extensive excavations at Cambourne produced only 5504 g of what was initially identified as metalworking debris. However, subsequent examination has shown that less than 1 kg of this material derives from ironworking, almost certainly smithing, and all of this comes from Lower Cambourne.

A fragment (323 g) of a probable smithing hearth bottom came from context 415, the fill of a large enclosure ditch of Romano-British date, and what may be a fragment (444 g) of another came from context 2241 within a ditch junction containing material of Late Bronze Age to Roman date. The latter fragment was noticeably denser with a very flat upper surface and a hemispherical bottom. To these may be added two fragments of undiagnostic slag from contexts 1227 and 1339 weighing a total of 84 g.

Much of the remainder of the material (*c.* 4.03 kg) comprises very vesicular fuel ash slag, grey in colour with a honeycombe-like structure, and the majority of this is also from Lower Cambourne. Such material has been recorded on several late prehistoric sites elsewhere, but does not have any clear association with metalworking. However, it would have been formed in a high temperature process, either deliberately or accidentally, and is perhaps most likely to be at least in part clay-derived. Indeed, the largest quantity (2.610 kg), from context 1872, the fill of a small, undated pit, included a large lump (525 g) of grey burnt clay. A further 854 g of vesicular fuel ash slag came from context 2112, the fill of a ditch which included pottery of Late Bronze Age to Romano-British date, with smaller quantities from Little Common Farm (442 g) and Knapwell Plantation (276 g), sites of predominantly Middle/Late Iron Age date.

Other material, with a total weight of 218 g, comprises natural concretions.

Twelve excavations were carried out by Wessex Archaeology within the Cambourne Development Area. Situated on the clay uplands west of Cambridge, which have seen little previous archaeological investigation, the results presented here are important in demonstrating the ebb and flow of occupation according to population or agricultural pressure.

Short-lived Bronze Age occupation was followed in the Middle Iron Age by small farming communities with an economy based on stock-raising and some arable cultivation. The Late Iron Age seems to have seen a recession, perhaps partly due to increased waterlogging making farming less viable.

From the mid-1st century AD new settlements began to emerge, possibly partly stimulated by the presence of Ermine Street, and within a century the area was relatively densely occupied. Several farmsteads were remodelled in the later Romano-British period, though none seems to have been very prosperous.

Dispersed occupation may have continued into the early 5th century at least, followed by a hiatus until the 12th/13th century when the entire area was taken into arable cultivation, leaving the ubiquitous traces of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture.

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