

Cambourne New Settlement

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

Volume 2: Specialist Appendices

Web Report 8

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Fired clay, *by Kayt Brown*



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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Ceramic Building Material

By Kayt Brown

Small assemblages of ceramic building material were recovered from Lower Cambourne and Jeavons Lane. The assemblages were quantified by context, fragment count and weight. Given the small quantity of material no detailed fabric analysis was undertaken, although broad fabric groups were noted. Fragment thickness and any distinguishing features such as combing were also recorded.

Lower Cambourne

A total of 46 fragments (4862 g) of Romano-British ceramic building material was recovered. The assemblage is in relatively good condition. Although fragment size is variable, there are a few large fragments and the combing on box flue has survived.

Fabrics

The majority of material occurs in a broad sandy fabric group, displaying varying quantities of sand and iron inclusions and occasional mica. Two fragments occur in a fabric containing sparse flint inclusions. A further eight fragments occur in a very distinctive shell-tempered fabric, comparable with fabric 1 at Milton Keynes where it is one of the most common tile fabrics and probably locally produced (Zeepvat 1987). This fabric has also been identified in London (Museum of London fabric code 2456; Pringle 2002, 159), where it is thought to be a late Romano-British import from the tile kilns at Harrold, Bedfordshire (I. Betts pers. comm.).

Types

Roofing materials were represented by two *tegulae* and a single *imbrex*. Two box-flue tiles displayed wide bands of curving combing. An edge, corner and a circular vent hole were visible on a third box-flue fragment. All the box flue fragments occurred in the shell-tempered fabric, varying in thickness from 17 mm to 22 mm, as did a further four fragments. These fragments did not have any distinguishing features, but are the same thickness and also likely to be box-flue. In the Milton Keynes area a shell-tempered fabric (fabric 1) is dated to the mid-late 3rd century, continuing into the 4th century, and it is one of two fabrics used for the manufacture of box-flue and *voussoir* tiles, accounting for 42% of these tile types at Bancroft Villa (Zeepvat 1987). The remainder of the assemblage comprised plain tiles ranging from 15 mm to 32 mm in thickness, but with groupings at 17 mm, 25 mm, and 30 mm. Tiles that measured greater than 35 mm were classed as bricks, of which two examples were recorded.

The ceramic building materials were recovered principally from ditch fills, with few fragments from other feature types. None of the material came from features relating to any possible structures, or from layer 1326 which produced considerable quantities of other Romano-British find types. The occurrence of this material, particularly the box-flue, would however indicate a substantial building within close proximity to the area excavated.

Jeavons Lane

A small assemblage of Romano-British ceramic building material was recovered, comprising 40 fragments and weighing 5812 g. It was noted that it occurred in a single broad fabric group; oxidised with varying quantities of sand, sparse to moderate amounts of ferruginous pellets and mica. One plain tile contains a large, rounded gravel inclusion (2 mm). The only exception to this group is a single *tegula* in a sandy fabric containing sparse, angular flint. Three *tegulae* fragments were recorded, with the remainder of the assemblage comprising plain tile, ranging in thickness from 18 mm to 35 mm, although this group may also include undiagnostic fragments of *tegula*. Five brick fragments 36–44 mm thick were also identified. Over half the assemblage was recovered from Phase 3 features, of which 15 fragments are from layer (1326) related to hollow 80111 associated with buildings A and B.

Fired Clay

By Kayt Brown

Lower Cambourne

A total of 1845 fragments (12,377 g) of fired clay was recovered from Lower Cambourne. The material was quantified by context, count, and weight and any visible features indicating function were also recorded. No detailed fabric analysis was undertaken as it became clear during assessment that the range was likely to be highly restricted. The vast majority of material occurred in the sand and chalk tempered fabric ubiquitous at all the sites at Cambourne. This is variably fired, through generally oxidised, often with pale clay swirls visible on the surface. It has a sandy clay matrix with moderate amounts of poorly sorted chalk, occasionally up to 7 mm across, and rare, moderately sorted fine sub-angular flint. The assemblage is in a poor condition, comprising predominately small, abraded, featureless fragments with an average weight of 6 g. Of the 321 contexts to produce fired clay, only 24 contained 100 g or more, while 10 g or less was recovered from over 130 contexts.

The largest element of the assemblage, the amorphous fragments, were scattered across the site with no clear concentrations, either spatial or chronological. A large number of contexts produced small quantities of material and the occurrence of material by feature type is recorded in archive. The majority of fired clay was retrieved from ditch and gully fills, amounting to 71% of the assemblage (by count and weight). Although much of this miscellaneous material is likely to be structural in origin, and was recovered from features associated with structures, such as drip-gullies 1155 and 1169, wattle impressions survived on very few fragments. A number of fragments recovered from context 5722 may also have had some form of structural purpose, measuring 7 mm thick and with at least one flat surface. All are in an iron-poor version of the same chalk-tempered fabric as most of the assemblage. Some 74 fragments were recovered from the suggested oven structure 1417, none of which displayed any evidence of exposure to high temperatures, although they may still represent some form of lining for this structure.

Few examples of loomweights were recovered. There was single example of a cylindrical loomweight, of which approximately 50% survived, from posthole 523. A further fragment, from gully 5601 displayed a pre-firing perforation but insufficient remained to determine the form. The only example of a possible triangular loomweight comprised a number of small fragments from gully 5220.

Possible briquetage, that is vessels used in the manufacture and transport of salt production, was recovered from two contexts. The material from a context in drip-gully 1169 occurs in a silty fabric with rare oolitic limestone, rare quartz and moderate elongated voids. Both fragments are oxidized and measure 15 mm in thickness. The 19 fragments from ditch fill 2416 are oxidised on the external surface and the fabric contains sparse, moderately sorted sub-angular quartz, sparse ferruginous material, grog, shell and elongated voids. All the briquetage is likely to represent containers, rather than any structural elements. Salt production has been well documented in the Fenland areas (Lane and Morris 2001; Hall and Coles 1994)

and it is likely that this material represents evidence for trade in this commodity at this site and at Little Common Farm, where briquetage was also recovered.

Knapwell Plantation

A total of 581 fragments (3152 g) of fired clay was recovered. No fabric analysis was undertaken but it was noted that almost the entire assemblage occurred as oxidized fragments in the sand- and chalk-tempered fabric common at all other sites at Cambourne, although a few sherds occurred in a sandy fabric. All the data is held on an access database which forms part of the archive. The assemblage is in poor condition with an average fragment weight of 5 g and comprises predominately amorphous fragments, unidentifiable to type. Although much of this material is likely to represent daub, there were few examples where wattle impressions survived.

The material was recovered from many features across the site, including a number of postholes and those associated with roundhouses 60245, 60321, and possible structures 60799 and 60197, the latter producing over 50 fragments of fired clay and over 40 pottery sherds. A single fragment of a triangular loomweight was identified from ditch 60431, associated with Romano-British pottery. Three other fragments, two with pre-firing perforations may also be from loomweights, but insufficient survives to determine their shape. These were recovered from pit 60080 and gullies 60160 and 60112, all phased to the Middle Iron Age.

Little Common Farm

A small assemblage of 146 fragments (2793 g) of fired clay was recovered from 41 contexts. The overall average fragment weight of 19 g is skewed somewhat by the occurrence of a small number of large structural pieces. The vast majority of material occurred in the same sand and chalk fabric observed on the other sites, the exception to this being a small number of fired clay objects described below.

Small, featureless fragments, mainly oxidized, comprise the bulk of the assemblage. These were recovered principally from ditch fills, with a small amount from post-holes. Despite the fragmentary nature of the assemblage a number of types were identified. A complete, centrally perforated, cylindrical bead or small weight (23 mm in diameter, 20 mm high) in a sandy fabric with rare angular flint was recovered from ditch 90525. Part of another centrally perforated bead in a silty clay matrix with no visible inclusions, came from pit 90449. Also from this pit were two joining sherds of an organic-tempered, roughly circular clay plate measuring approximately 200 mm in diameter with a central perforation approximately 20 mm in diameter. The clay plate is quite vesicular, roughly made, with a reduced core and variably fired surfaces. A further two fragments may be from the same object. The material is very like briquetage, the ceramic material used in the production and transport of salt (Lane and Morris 2001), four fragments of which were identified in the pottery assemblage from Little Common Farm. The central perforation would indicate that this object served a structural purpose rather than as a container.

A number of fills within ditch 90037 also produced structural objects in the form of part of a trapezoidal 'belgic brick' and a fragment from a rectilinear object, possibly a fire bar, and a triangular wedge-shaped object. All these items could be portable kiln

furniture, used to support the floor of a kiln or oven or used in salt production (Swan 1984, 55–66). No additional evidence was found for pottery or salt production from the material assemblage, although a few fragments with vitrified surfaces were recovered from ditch 90525 and pit 90354 indicative of exposure to high temperatures, possibly more industrial than domestic.

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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