BRLMF18 Brightwell Oxfordshire

Fired Clay

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A large quantity of fired clay was recovered amounting to 1852 fragments weighing 5562, most of which (98%) came from sieved samples from just two contexts 2151 and 2152. The remaining fired clay consisted of a third small sieved group and three tiny indeterminate scraps of hand collected material. All the sieved samples produced wattle supported structure. A summary record was made with the CBM archive record in an Excel file (BRLMF18_CBM_record.xlsx), supported by more detailed descriptive notes in a Word file (BRLMF18_FC_report.docx) and wattle measurements in a separate Excel file (BRLMF18_FC_wattles.xlsx).

The two samples from the fill (contexts 2151 and 2152) of pit 2150 were identical material and no doubt derived from a single structure. These were made in a cream coloured clay fabric, occasionally pale grey, or rarely with an orange or reddish tinge or streak. The fabric was very light, soft fine silty clay fabric and very porous from the addition of a high density of fine organic matter (probably in excess of 50%), which may have been incorporated as dung. The smaller group from context 2008 was made in a fine sandy – silty micaceous clay, fired to pale grey, dark grey – black, orange and red in colour. Some pieces contain a high density of medium sand of quartz and black iron. It was fairly soft, but did not contain the fine organic content of the other samples, though occasional straw stem impressions were visible.

All the diagnostic material was characterised by wattle impressions on the back face of fragments. The fragments have a single flat moulded surface, generally quite rough and irregular, often undulating, sometimes with depressions from finger tips pressed into the surface or fingers wiped across surface forming grooves and corrugations. The smaller scraps were frequently amorphous and these have been discarded during recording.

On the reverse over 400 wattle impressions occurred singly and in multiple groups. Where several occurred on a single fragment it was clear that these consisted of rods interwoven around upright sails. The sails were identified where their relationship to the rods were clearly visible; it is possible that some of the larger impressions categorised as rods may include sails surviving as single impressions. Several sails formed adjacent pairs, and not all the rods regularly alternated around sails, but often adjacent rods passed the same side of the sail. Nearly all the impressions were roundwood, though a few split or squared impressions were noted. The largest split timber measured over 43mm wide x >17mm th and a roundwood pole 50mm in diameter occurred adjacent to a pair of sails. Both these larger poles may have formed part of the framework to which the smaller wattles were attached.

The rods ranged in size from 5 to 28mm diameter with the main peak in numbers at about 13-15mm diameter. The sails measured 18-37mm with most concentrated between 19 and 26mm diameter. Wattle sizes from feature 2150 are illustrated in Fig. 1. Details for the individual contexts are recorded in the archive. The size of the wattles is consistent with those found in daub associated with oven structures rather than buildings though the latter cannot be entirely discounted, especially in view of the possibility of the fabric containing a large proportion of dung possibly in an earthen mix rather than pure clay, which is a traditional mix for building daub (Graham 2004, 28). However, the size pattern of the wattles is similar to those most commonly found on fired clay interpreted as oven structure, and which usually measure 7-18mm in diameter with the mean, mode and median clustered

at 12-15mm (e.g. Cunliffe & Poole 1991, 141). Where fired clay with wattle impressions has been certainly linked to buildings, the size tends to be larger concentrated in the range from 15 to 30mm with a peak at about 20mm, such as those found at Dunkirt Barn, Hampshire (Poole 2008, 168) associated with a second century burnt timber framed building and 20-36mm diameter with a peak at about 30mm at Springhead Kent, where roller stamping on the exterior indicated use as building daub (Poole 2011, 318).

The few larger impressions suggest that the wattles may have been woven as a panel, such as hurdle and inset or attached to a larger framework. This could occur either as a panel in a rectangular timber framed structure or set within an oven structure as a drying floor for a crop processing oven.

The main group of fired clay was found in an oblong pit (2150) with rounded ends measuring 1.1m long by 0.41m wide and 0.24m deep. Such a feature is compatible in size and shape with simple Roman ovens, though no in situ burning was noted at the time of excavation. However, burning has been observed in some cases to occur only around the rims of the features (Cunliffe & Poole 2008, 94), which could be easily truncated by cultivation of the soil or during machining of the site. The association of large quantities of charcoal or carbonized plant remains supports the possibility of the feature being a small oven base. The wattle supported structure may have formed a suspended floor, possibly for use as a drying floor for crop processing.

The fired clay is not intrinsically dateable and the largest group from feature 2150 has no associated dateable artefacts. The other contexts containing fired clay (4, 31, 2115 and 2208) are all associated with middle-late Iron Age or prehistoric pottery. In view of this it is likely that the fired clay from feature 2150 is broadly contemporary.

References

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Figure 1: Diameters of wattle impressions on fired clay from Feature 2150 (context 2151 (sample 2009) and context 2152 (sample 2007) combined)