

Small finds from Kirkness, the Scottish Seabird Centre excavations, 2004-05.

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Coarse Stone

- SF 95 Whetstone. Large, elongated sub-rectangular siltstone whetstone, both ends and sides rounded, with abrasion marks remaining from manufacture. Unfinished attempts to perforate either end, with deep, concentrated peckmarks on one face (D 8.5 & 7 mm) and less-distinct, dispersed peckmarks on the other surface. All surfaces are smoothed and abraded from use. One face has seen extensive use, being heavily dished along one edge with associated polish. Both ends have been flattened by later use as a pounder (18 x 15mm, 28 x 16 mm). A series of short linear grooves and abrasions on two opposing edges and one face overlie previous polish and abrasion, suggesting the tool saw secondary use as a sharpening stone. Perforated whetstones are well attested at Early Historic and medieval sites: a similar large manufactured whetstone with a perforation in one end for suspension comes from Whithorn (Nicholson 1997, 454-5) and examples with unfinished perforations are known from Coppergate and Fishergate, York (Ottaway & Rodgers 2002, 2797). L 215 W 43 T 30 mm. Rough cobbling, context 1239.
- SF 100 Burnisher. Flat, sub-rectangular siltstone burnisher with rounded corners and edges. One end is squared with a distinct linear abrasion facet (42 x 6 mm) along the width of one face. The stone tapers in width and thickness to a blunt, irregular rounded end which has been bi-facially abraded either as the result of use as a grinder or in an attempt to shape the stone. Both faces and rounded edges are smoothed and highly polished through use with a dark glossy sheen throughout, particularly along the edges. L 133 W 50 T 23 mm. Matrix of slab floor [1280], context 1281.
- SF 153 Possible pounder. A small flattened ovoid sandstone weathered cobble. Indistinct pitted areas are present at both rounded ends; due to the coarse uneven surface of the stone it is unclear whether this is the result of use or weathering. L 85 W 75 T 30 mm. context 1287.
- SF 157 Fragment of larger shaped stone of uncertain character. Sub-square block of sandstone; three edges are broken. Two opposing flat faces have distinct dispersed peckmarks from shaping. L 73.5 W 65.5 T 60.5 mm. Context 1287.

Vitrified material

A very small quantity (just over 50g) of vitrified material was recovered from throughout the excavated area, from residual contexts. The majority of pieces are small and fragmentary, and are thus difficult to classify with any certainty. Most fragments consist of low-density non-magnetic vesicular glassy vitrified material. Low-density slag is formed when material such as earth, clay, stones or ceramics is subjected to high temperatures. These can be formed during any high temperature pyrotechnic process and are not necessarily indicative of industrial activity. Three samples are magnetic but need not be residues from iron working; that from context 1178 is so small and fractured it could equally be a corrosion spall from an iron object and, although magnetic, the sample from context 1093 appears to be rounded (?waterworn) gravel with no obvious iron content.

Glass

SF 180 Small curved fragment of post-medieval iridescent green-blue glass; highly abraded, possibly water worn. L 28 W 8 T 8 mm. Posthole, context 1076.

Lead

SF119 Barrel-shaped, slightly irregular hollow lead weight or bead with a swollen centre and narrowed ends. The object has been formed by rolling a thin lead sheet (1 mm thick), the edges overlapping, with little attempt to disguise the join. Both ends have been damaged, perhaps through use. L 29 W (at waist) 10 W (at end) 7 T 1 mm. Charcoal-rich deposit, context 1309.

Discussion

This small assemblage is not chronologically distinctive, but adds a little information about the site's use. The vitrified material is mostly undiagnostic low-density material; none can be attributed to iron production. The small abraded glass fragment was recovered from post-medieval deposits and shall not be discussed further. The coarse stone and lead object, however, are of more significance. Whetstones and burnishers are commonplace finds on early historic/medieval domestic sites and the possible pounder is consistent with this date. The burnisher (sf 100) came from rubble-rich soils related to the abandonment/collapse of the early historic structure (context 1281) and the whetstone (sf 95) came from medieval cobbling (context 1239). Both show extensive wear, with the whetstone (sf 95) showing evidence of additional use as a sharpening stone. Deep peckmarks indicate an abandoned attempt to perforate the object, but it is unclear whether the intention was to suspend it or to alter its function from a whetstone to a weight. A similar large perforated whetstone was recovered from mid-ninth century contexts at Whithorn (Nicholson 1997, 454-5). Perforating such large stones for suspension creates a point of weakness and it may have been abandoned for this reason. Whetstones with similar abandoned perforations come from medieval Coppergate and Fishergate, York (Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2797).

The fragment of a larger shaped stone (sf 157), and the possible pounder (sf 153) came from a layer of midden (context 1281) which contained pottery of possible early historic date [has this been confirmed?] and it can be inferred that the stone is of similar date.

The lead weight or bead (sf 119) is of significance due to its unusual form, but the lack of typological analysis of lead objects makes dating uncertain. Lead was rarely used in prehistoric Britain but was in common use in the Roman and medieval periods, particularly for practical applications rather than ornamental items. The fine barrel-shaped form and fairly careful shaping of the Kirkness object could imply a decorative function rather than a simple weight, but the lack of parallels for Early Historic and medieval lead ornaments suggests it is a weight. The use of lead for small weights is common by the medieval period and can be found in a range of sizes and shapes, from simple rolled-sheet cylinders such as those from medieval London (Egan 1998, 310), to small cast, perforated discs as recovered from excavations at Perth (Ford 1987, 130, ill 64, no. 60). In most instances, no further attempt was made to shape the object beyond its initial production. Although lacking the distinctive swollen centre and barrel-shape of the Kirkness example, several similar elongated

cylindrical weights produced from rolled lead strips come from Fishergate, York: three examples were recovered from contexts associated with the Anglian settlement, four from 11th-12th century deposits (Rogers 1993, 1320, fig.637, no. 5480 & 5482), whilst the majority of such weights came from medieval features (Ottaway & Rogers 2002, 2747-49, fig.1352, no 15260, 15261, 15263 & 12564).

References

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- Ottaway, P & Rogers, N 2002 *Craft, industry and everyday life: finds from medieval York. The archaeology of York, Volume 17: the small finds*. York: CBA
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Archive

- SF 114 Elongated tabular sandstone. No obvious signs of working. L 170 W 69.5 T 29 mm. Context 1318.
- SF 123 Fragment of a flat tabular siltstone cobble. L 133 RW60.5 T 33 mm. Context 1097.
- SF 139 Small sandstone fragment with adhering ?iron pan. Not worked. L 34 W 28 T 11 mm. Context 1310.
- SF 153a Thin curved fragment of an ovoid sandstone cobble. Natural. L 138 W 74 T 30 mm. Context 1287.
- SF 160 Asymetric flat oval sandstone cobble, fractured at one end. L 116 W 63 T 18 mm. Context 1287.
- SF 167 3 natural cobbles. No obvious signs of use. L 52 W 52 T 5 mm; L 89 W 86 T 30 mm; L 120 W 83.5 T 25 mm. Context 1287.
- SF 168 10 adjoining fragments of a flat tabular sandstone. Natural. RL 65.5 W 44 T 14.5 mm. Context 1287.
- SF 172 6 small fragments of red sandstone. Probably further fragments of sf 168. Context 1287.
- SF 219 Three natural stone fragments thickly covered in a dark-brown sand and gravel rich residue. This appears natural. L 48.5 W 29 T 23 mm; L 29 W 21 T 10 mm; L 25.5 W 22 T 7 mm. Context 1141.
- SF 380 Uneven tabular fragment with natural pitted surface throughout. L 180 W 96 T 46 mm. Context 1298.
- SF ? Flat tapering elongated ovoid sandstone pebble. No obvious evidence of use. L 89.5 W 34.5 T 15 mm. Context 318.3.
- SF ? Two joining fragments of a rounded elongated ovoid pebble, recently broken. L 102 W 29.5 T 25 mm. Context unknown.