

ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

REPORT

2854

SERIES/No CONSULTANT
AUTHOR Prof R F Tylecote
TITLE Visit to Southampton. 3 Nov 1978

Visit to Southampton - 3rd November 1978.

I was shown a comparatively small amount of slag which had been taken from the Hamwih site excavations. It is clear that the great majority of this is smithing hearth bottoms material.

We went to the site and saw a large number of pits - clearly mostly for rubbish; not one of them had been used as a smithing hearth (or smelting furnace) and it is dubious whether any of them had been used for any metallurgical activity at all. There were, however, some flat areas showing considerable reddening of the underlying brickearth with a certain amount of paving or tiling put on top. These were probably domestic and are unlikely to be connected with smithing. Brickearth reddens very easily at relatively low temperatures to quite considerable depths.

There were one or two pieces of slag and a good scatter of charcoal in some of the areas of the excavation which had been left for us to examine but, again, this was no more than smithing material. There were also two pieces of copper-base waste although most of the greenish material collected was judged to be vitrified fuel ash and clay with some iron content.

In the office there was one crucible sherd, only, amongst the entire contents of a box of selected samples. It was reddish on the outside and full of rather coarse grit - broken flint - and about 12 mm thick; it was, in fact, the rim of a bag-shaped crucible - typical of the Migration period. This confirms the non-ferrous metallurgy.

Among the burned flints there was one nodule that was clearly different; it had the diagnostic laminated (Liesegang) appearance, and on cracking it there was no doubt that this was an ironstone nodule. Whether it had been brought, transported or merely deposited in the Bracklesham Beds I would not like to say. I think it is just an accidental occurrence and has been superficially fired like many of the flint or chert pebbles that are found on this site.

I conclude that, in the Saxon period, a small amount of ironworking (smithing) was carried out. No doubt there was an industrial area somewhere in the city which shows much greater evidence of this process. The excavators were asked to classify their material in the usual way, and to weigh it in due course so that we can expect to get some idea of the extent of the total activity.

R.F. Tylecote