

The crucibles from the Empire Cinema Site, Bedford.

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From considerations of form and fabric alone, most of the sherds examined could well be crucibles. However many of them show no signs of use as such; on these there is no vitrification of inner or outer surfaces (except a slight 'gloss' in some cases) and no traces of metal.

Some sherds have an extra outer skin of clay, often vitrified on its outer surface. This is found commonly on crucibles where it is thought to help conserve the heat in the pot during casting and make the crucible less susceptible to breakage from thermal shock. This suggests that the examples from Bedford with this extra layer of clay may well be crucibles although the degree of vitrification noted is far less than normal.

Only three sherds showed any signs of the metal they contained. One sherd (from context 120) contained tiny blobs of silver and two more (one each from contexts 103 and 341) had red patches in the 'glaze' on their outer surfaces. This is caused by the presence of copper and suggests that these sherds were parts of crucibles used to melt copper or one of its alloys. (The presence of copper was detected by x-ray fluorescence in the Ancient Monuments Lab. and the silver was confirmed by Steve Wyles at the Laboratory of the Government Chemist.)

The non-crucible sherds may well be lamps. Lauren Adams of the Lincoln Archaeological Trust has suggested this for the large amount of similar material from Lincoln which dates from the 9th to 12th centuries. She has found that the lamps and crucibles have similar forms there.