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# Fired clay fragments from Poundbury Camp, Dorset.

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A number of fragments of fired clay were examined as it was thought they might be prehistoric crucible sherds.

All but one sherd (FC 844, Sl. 52) were of a similar fabric, sandy but only lightly tempered and most of these were partly oxidised and partly reduced fired. To melt metal in a crucible reducing conditions must be enforced or the metal will be oxidised and lost. Prehistoric crucibles were usually heated from above so it is quite common to find partly oxidised fragments; it is usually the outer surface that is oxidised.

Only two of the main group of sherds show any sign of use as crucibles (one piece of FC 898, bag 2 and FC 731, Sl. 51). Both are nearly completely reduced fired and have vesicular inner surfaces with traces of bronze adhering. The fabric used is not very refractory so the strong heating required to melt metal has affected the crucible, giving it a vesicular (spongey) structure. These changes are most marked at the surface but continue for a few mm into the sherd.

The rest of the sherds show no signs of having been used as crucibles and in some cases their shape makes this an unlikely function. Some may come from the less strongly heated parts of crucibles and some could be from moulds, though the shapes are again not very convincing.

The one odd sherd (FC 844) was rather more heavily tempered than the rest and was thinner (7 mm as opposed to c. 10 mm). It was mostly reduced fired and had traces of bronze on its inner surface. It was not as vesicular as the other two definite crucible sherds but showed some signs of being affected by the heat on its inner surface.

All three crucible sherds must, on the basis of their fabrics, be pre-Roman. FC 898 and FC 731 are most likely to be Bronze Age but FC 844 may be later. The metalliferous deposits on all three sherds were examined by x-ray fluorescence. Copper and tin were detected in all cases; no signals for lead or zinc were noted. The alloy being melted was in all cases an unleaded bronze.