ANCIENT MONUMENTS LABORATORY

REPORT

3908

SERIES/No CONTRACTOR

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TITLE Mollusca and impressions of plant material on some Medieval bricks from Norwich

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Mollusca and impressions of plant material on some medieval bricks from Norwich

Six bricks and fragments whose fabrics included mollusc shells or impressions of shells and plant material were examined.

1. 147N A. Impressions only
   Cerastoderma sp.
   Indeterminate small gastropods (? Hydrobiidae)
   Indeterminate plant stem impressions
2. 149N B (912) Shells and impressions
   c.f. Valvata piscinalis
   Bithynia tentaculata (abundant : shells and opercula)
   Lymnaea sp.
   Planorbis cf. vortex
   Planorbis sp.
   Sphaerium/Pisidium (immature valves)
   Freshwater mussel shell fragments
   Ostracods
   Indeterminate plant stem impressions
3. 149N (917) Impressions
   Cerastoderma sp.
   Indeterminate small gastropods (? Hydrobiidae)
   Indeterminate plant stem impressions
4. 171N (6)
   Impressions of grass culms, leaves and partial inflorescences
   Not cereal or Phragmites
5. 302N (1793) Shells
   Valvata piscinalis
   ? Bithynia tentaculata
   ? Lymnaea sp.
   ? Planorbis sp.
   Sphaerium/Pisidium
   Indeterminate plant stem impressions
6. The Old Barge. Impressions only
   Cerastoderma sp.
   Indeterminate small gastropods (? Hydrobiids)
   Indeterminate plant stem fragments

Many of the mollusc shells present could not be closely identified since they were either partly obscurred by the fired clay fabric or alternatively occurred as impressions only. Nevertheless it is possible to distinguish two groups of bricks.

The examples from 147N, 149N, 917 and the Old Barge include valves of Cerastoderma sp. (cockle), together with small gastropods. These indicate that the clay used had been deposited in an intertidal environment. The nearest source of such clay is the Broadland 'Upper Clay', an estuarine sediment formed in lower reaches of the East Norfolk river valleys during a transgression broadly corresponding to the Roman period. It could have been extracted from shallow pits.

However, similar estuarine clays are widespread along the North Sea coasts of the Low Countries. It is also possible that intertidal mud from the contemporary shore was used for brickmaking in the Middle Ages.

Bricks from 149N B 912 and 302N 1793 contain assemblages of freshwater molluscs including species characteristic of well-oxygenated flowing water. It appears that the sediment used for these bricks was freshwater river mud. All river valleys in the vicinity of Norwich contain such deposits.

The impressions of plant material on the bricks were not identified.

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