

SOMERFORD KEYNES, NEIGH BRIDGE: THE WORKED STONE

by Fiona Roe

There are 15 worked stone object from Somerford Keynes. A further 7 pieces of monumental and architectural stone include a carved limestone eagle and shield, which are described by M. Henig (SKNB Sculpture).

Grinding of corn was an essential occupation, and querns predominate amongst the objects, as might be expected (Table 1), together with a millstone fragment and two mortars. The sharpening of tools was also important, and whetstones too are relatively numerous. The pot burnisher was again a fairly standard Roman tool, but the prehistoric metal smithing tool is an unusual find.

The monumental stone, in the form of an eagle and shield, is clearly of importance, but there is little stone that was clearly used for architectural purposes. Three unworked fragments are Jurassic limestone of varieties suitable for use as freestone, and so may have been utilized for carving, if not for building. A shaped limestone slab may represent paving, while Old Red Sandstone and Pennant Sandstone were Roman roofing materials.

Objects

Not all the objects appear to be of Roman date. The most notable exception is the metal smithing tool or “cushion stone” (SF 812, (164/H)), which is a type of artefact known to occur in Beaker contexts (Clarke 1970 II, 573, note 56), although recorded examples are few in number. One that is closely comparable in shape came from the recent excavation of a richly equipped Beaker burial near Amesbury, Wiltshire (Fitzpatrick 2003 149 & illus). The find from Somerford Keynes appears, on macroscopic examination, to be made from Cornish greenstone, quite possibly Group I, and the use of this variety of stone would be consistent with a Beaker date. One of the quern fragments (SF 875, (25)) is made from a micaceous variety of Old Red Sandstone which is not a suitable rotary quern material, so that the fragment may come from a saddle quern, which could possibly be linked with middle Iron Age pottery from the site (see SKNB pottery). One of the rotary quern fragments (SF 765 (427)) is not typically Roman in shape or size, being a small and thick example that might fit into a late Iron Age/early Roman context.

The remaining objects all have a distinctive Roman flavour. Rotary querns of disc type are typical of the period (SF’s 636, 637, 874), as are whetstones worn to a rod shape (SF’s 483, 769), together with flatter ones made from broken roofing tile (SF’s 578, 865 & perhaps 642). Mortars of Jurassic limestone must have been commonly used in the Cotswolds (SF’s 281, 829), while pot burnishers, with characteristic glossy surfaces, are well represented in the area (SF 832). Most of the larger Roman sites seem to have been equipped with millstones (SF 887).

The materials used for the Roman objects are all typical of the region, rotary querns made from Upper Old Red Sandstone being particularly common on local sites, including Longdoles Field at Claydon Pike (see page ***). Most of the stone for artefacts was brought in from outside the area (Table 2). Only the pebble used for the pot burnisher

could have been collected close to the site, from local river gravels. The shelly and rather coarse-grained limestone used for the two mortars can be matched at the Roman quarries on the outskirts of Corinium, 7 km to the north (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, 31). The Forest of Dean was a significant source area, especially for the good quality stone needed for corn grinding, but also for whetstones. Other whetstones came from further afield, and ones made of Kentish Rag are well represented on other Gloucestershire sites, including Claydon Pike. These small items could have been easily distributed, but the millstone fragment represents considerable organization in order to transport Millstone Grit from a source area near Sheffield.

Table 1: Summary of worked stone objects and materials

<i>Object</i>	<i>stone</i>	<i>total</i>
Saddle quern	Lower Old Red Sandstone Brownstones	1
Rotary quern	Upper Old Red Sandstone, sandstone and quartz conglomerate	4
Millstone	Millstone Grit	1
Mortar	Jurassic limestone, shelly, some ooliths	2
Whetstone, rod	Kentish Rag	2
“ “ , re-used tile	Lower Old Red Sandstone Brownstones	2
Whetstone/polisher	Pennant sandstone	1
Pot burnisher	Quartzitic sandstone	1
Metal smithing tool	Cornish greenstone	1

Table 2: Summary of sources for worked stone

LOCAL

<i>Stone</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>uses</i>
Quartzitic sandstone	Pebble, local river gravels	1 pot burnisher
Oolitic limestone with shell fragments	Corinium, Roman Quarries	2 carved pieces
Shelly limestone, some ooliths		2 unworked fragments
Fine-grained shell fragmental limestone		2 mortars
Oolitic limestone	Probably local, or just possibly from Roman quarries around Painswick	1 fragment paving or architectural stone

IMPORTED

<i>stone</i>	<i>source</i>	<i>uses</i>
Lower Old Red Sandstone Brownstones	Forest of Dean	2 whetstones
Upper Old Red Sandstone, Sandstone		1 probable saddle quern
Upper Old Red sandstone, Quartz conglomerate		2 rotary querns
Pennant sandstone	Forest of Dean or Bristol Coalfield	2 rotary querns
Kentish Rag	Maidstone area of Kent	1 whetstone or polisher
Millstone Grit	Pennines around Sheffield	1 fragment
Greenstone	Cornwall	2 whetstones
		1 millstone fragment
		1 prehistoric metal smithing tool

Building and monumental stone

The local Jurassic limestone could be utilized in many ways, not least for carved statuary. The shield (SF 282) and eagle (SF 283) are both made from oolitic limestone containing scattered larger shell fragments, and this can be matched at the extensive Roman quarries in the Great Oolite Series at Corinium. Two fragments of similar limestone (SF's 284, 515) may also have been carved, but could equally well have been used as building stone. A worked slab of finer-grained, shell fragmental limestone (SF 747) probably came from the same source. Another unworked fragment (SF 542) is different, since it is a freestone consisting entirely of ooliths. This type of limestone is known to have been quarried during Roman times in the Lower Freestone of the Inferior Oolite around Painswick (Price 1999, 26), but a more local source is possible.

The presence of stone roofing tile at Somerford Keynes is less easily explained, since ceramic roofing tile was readily available on the site. However both Lower Old Red Sandstone and Pennant sandstone were used for roofing in the area generally, as for example at Step Stairs Lane, Cirencester (Cotswold Archaeology, in prep). It seems likely that broken pieces of tile, whether of Old Red Sandstone (SF's 578, 865) or Pennant sandstone (SF's 642, 946) were collected from other local sites to be re-used for sharpening, a good case of opportunism.

Bibliography

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