

Community Archaeology Study Days 2008/9



Making the Most of Brick and Tile

With Sandra Garside-Neville

13th December 2008

Feedback from the study day:

'The study days are a very valuable resource for non-professional historians.'

'Good explanation of process and good practical experience.'

Brick and tile, commonly known as Ceramic Building Material, are important for archaeological site interpretation. This is because the material is made from highly fired clay that does not decay, so there is often a lot of it preserved on



many sites in Britain. Information that can be gathered from brick and tile include dating, site characterization, taphonomy, and trade evidence. Different forms, fabric, and surface features on brick and tile allow for a narrower range of dates on a site. Ceramic Building Material can also be used to determine site function, since certain types of building indicate certain uses. Brick and tile aid in the reconstruction of building appearance, allowing for a more accurate picture of how specific buildings may have looked. Studying the specific type of brick and tile used provides clues as to whether the material was locally produced or imported, which permits more in-depth investigation of possible social contact and trade.

This study day allowed participants to learn about different forms of Ceramic Building Material from the Roman to Post-Medieval periods in England. We looked at different shapes of tile for roofs and floors, as well as the decorations and marks found on various examples. One important point discussed involved the common practice of stamping tiles or bricks with makers' marks, which lets us identify the people who lived and worked in an area at a certain period of time. We examined the ways that shapes and functions of tile



and brick changed through history. A reading list was provided, along with a list of useful sources of information, so that participants could learn more about Ceramic Building Materials in Britain. Participants took away a significant amount of new information about the importance of brick and tile in archaeology.

First picture: http://pub2.exeter.gov.uk/timetrail/07_middleages/object_detail.asp?photoref=2_7

Second picture: <http://www.iadb.co.uk/wgate/main/brick.php>