

3.9 Metal, slag and glass from Sand | Andrew Heald & Fraser Hunter *with contributions by Stuart Campbell & Dawn McLaren*

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3.9.1 Introduction

The material is first presented as a catalogue with wider discussion at the end. The following abbreviations are used: L = length, W = width, T = thickness, D = diameter, H = height, m = mass. In some cases pieces were catalogued on site and the original N numbers have also been recorded. For non-ferrous metals, the alloy type was determined by non-destructive energy-dispersive X-ray fluorescence (XRF) analysis. The results are from surface analysis only, and thus are affected by corrosion. Stuart Campbell kindly commented on some of the medieval and later non-ferrous material; his comments are incorporated as noted below. Iron work identifications and measurements were supplemented from X-rays. [Appendix 9](#) contains a full summary of metal finds from all the SFS sites, and a full catalogue of nails and slag is in [Appendix 10](#); only basic details are noted here. Square sectioned rod fragments with no other distinguishing features were assumed to be nail fragments.

3.9.2 Metal finds

3.9.2.1 Copper alloy

Casting waste irregular droplet, 5×3×3mm, m0.1g. Leaded bronze. A2B NE Spit 6, Context 17

Casting waste irregular droplet, 9×7×5mm, m0.7g. Leaded bronze. A1B SE Spit 2, Context 1/2.

3.9.2.2 Iron

Knife tip? Straight edge, shallow curving back. L26mm, H10mm, T4mm. A6B NE Spit 1, Context 1.

Nails four fragments A2B Spit 3, Context 29; A6B SW Spit 2, Context 17; B1B SW Spit 4, Context 24; B4B Spit 1, Context 1/3.

Flake 7.5×6×2mm. B24B SW Spit 6, Context 13.

Lump undiagnostic. 19×11×7mm. B5B NE Spit 3, Context 1.

Fragment undiagnostic. 11×7×4mm. B21B NE Spit 1, Context 1.

3.9.3 Glass beads | Dawn McLaren

Turquoise glass bead globular, slightly flattened at one end. The surface shows that the bead was formed by winding a glass rod around a core. Its iridescent surface suggests a potash glass and a late medieval – early post-Medieval date (?15th–18th century). D4.5mm, H4mm, hole D2mm. B25A SE Spit 3, Context 13.



Illus 478: Sand – glass beads

Deep blue translucent glass bead cylindrical, short. Slightly uneven with a D-shaped section. D4.2mm, H2.6mm, central perforation D2.2mm. A4B NW Spit 2, Context 17.

Deep blue translucent glass bead globular, D-shaped section. The surface of the bead is very eroded. D2.8mm, H1.5mm, central perforation Dc0.8mm. B5B NE Spit 4, Context 1/2.

Deep blue translucent glass bead globular, slightly uneven D-shaped section. D1.3mm, H0.8mm, central perforation Dc0.3mm. B8B Spit 2, Context 1.

3.9.4 Other glass

Post-medieval vessel glass, olive green: 2 sherds from A5B Spit 1, Context 1; 1 from A6B Spit 1, Context 1; 3 from A6B SE Spit 2, Context 17; 1 (N22) from Test Pit 1 (1999 excavations) Spit 5.

Modern clear glass: 2 sherds (N 30) from B1 turf, Context 1; 1 (N36) from B26B Spit 1, Context 1.

3.9.5 Vitrified material

Amorphous slag fragment L14mm, W12mm, T10mm. 1.2g. A2B NW Spit 3, Context 29.

Small amorphous slag fragment L3mm, T2.5mm. B2A SW Spit 4, Context 13.

Slag sphere L3.2mm, T2.8mm. B5B NW Spit 3, Context 1.

Fuel ash slag fragments 9.9g. B21A NW Spit 2, Context 1.

3.9.6 Slag

494g, primarily unclassified ironworking (125g) and a plano-convex smithing hearth base (343g), plus a small quantity of hammerscale and slag spheres ([Appendix 9](#)). The distribution focuses strongly on the squares around the junction of trenches A and B, with limited scatter beyond.

3.9.7 Discussion

Most of these finds come from higher spits Spit 3 and above and they are presumably more recent than the Mesolithic activity in the rockshelter. The slag remains, including a hearth bottom indicate a single short lived episode of blacksmithing, and the presence of two melted copper alloy fragments in the same area suggests that limited bronze working also took place here.

The glass beads generally conform to Guido's Group 7 (iv) ([Guido 1978:70](#)); the short cylindrical form of A4B NW Spit 2 is a variant. The type is a common one with a broad date range from the early Iron Age to the post-Roman period, and cannot be more closely dated. Similar globular beads are known locally from Dun Ardtreck ([MacKie 2000:383–384&391](#)) and Dun Beag on Skye ([Callander 1921:130](#)).

The recovery of the particularly small example (B8B Spit 2) during sieving is a valuable indicator of the tiny beads which are rarely found on excavations; without wet sieving it is unlikely that this minute object would have been detected, emphasising the bias in our knowledge of beads. Its tiny size suggests that it was probably a decorative item on a tassel or part of a beadwork pattern rather than from a necklace.

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