

Report on the metalworking remains at
Faughan Hill, Co. Meath (17E0238)

Introduction

In 2017, two trenches were excavated at the site of hilltop enclosure complex on Faughan Hill, near Bohermeen, Co. Meath. Two fragments of possible metalworking waste were recovered. One piece consists of slag of unclear nature with adhering heat-affected clay while the other piece represents vitrified material which could have derived from a range of heat-related activities.

Description of the material

The excavations at Faughan Hill yielded two fragments of possible metalworking remains (Dowling and Schot 2017).

The first fragment (100g) was retrieved from C.229, the upper fill of enclosing ditch C.234 and possibly representing the final backfill of that ditch. The metalworking waste consists of black fayalitic (iron silicate) slag which shows slight flow structure and has adhering vitrified clay with inclusions of small stones (Fig. 1-2). There are no indications of non-ferrous metals nor of the fuel-type used. The clayey material is heavily vitrified all over and on the contact area with the slag, visible on the base of the piece (Fig. 3), coloured red due to the heat.

The second fragment of possible material possibly related to metalworking is a small globule of shiny, grey and light material (1g) (Fig. 4). It was recovered from C.103, a layer of gravelly clay present across the site and likely the result of recent bulldozing.

Interpretation

Dark fayalitic slag with flow structure is the characteristic waste of early bloomery iron smelting but also occurs among black smithing assemblages and can be produced as a result of copper-producing processes (Rondelez 2015). Clay was typically used in smelting furnace or smithing hearth construction and parts usually became vitrified during the metalworking process. Due to the lack of further diagnostic features, the piece could date anywhere from the prehistoric to modern times. Non-destructive analyses could be considered to determine if the slag is the waste of a ferrous or non-ferrous metalworking process.

The globule is typical waste of high-temperature processes which could be related to metalworking but also other industrial or even domestic uses of fire.

Bibliography

Dowling G. and Schot R. 2017 Archaeological excavations at Faughan Hill, Co. Meath, 2017. Unpublished Final Stratigraphic Report, The Discovery Programme.

Rondelez P. 2015 Report on the metalworking remains excavated at the Stradbally Waste-Water Treatment Plant site, Stradbally More, Co. Waterford (14E0431). Unpublished Specialist Report, the author.

Figures



Fig. 1. Slag with adhering stone from C.229, upper surface



Fig. 2. Slag with adhering stone from C.229, upper surface



Fig. 3. Slag with adhering stone from C.229, lower surface



Fig. 4. Globule of vitrified material from C.103