

## 7.1 Assessment of Anglo-Saxon Glass

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### *Introduction*

7.1.1 Four glass vessels and one fragment of glass were recovered from four separate graves within the Saltwood Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. The cone beaker from eastern cemetery grave W104 has been considered in a previous assessment and this report deals with the remaining vessels. These consist of a bell beaker from western cemetery grave C118, as well as a palm cup and another bell beaker from grave C151. In addition, a sherd of Roman vessel glass was recovered from central cemetery grave C53.

7.1.2 The study of the glass vessels is relevant to the following Fieldwork Event Aims:

*to establish a chronology for the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries;*

*To establish the range variation in burial rites, and to view possible change in rite over time;*

*To indicate the general development of each cemetery and their relationship to each other.*

### *Methodology*

7.1.3 All of the glass vessels have been inspected during the conservation process. Radiographs have also been consulted, alongside photographs and slides of the objects in their respective graves. At the time of writing, the glass vessels from the western cemetery are still being cleaned and packaged by conservation assistants. They will be inspected again when this process has been concluded.

### *Quantification*

7.1.4 The Anglo-Saxon glass vessels consist of bell beakers from grave C118 and grave C151, which was accompanied in that grave by a palm cup. The bell beakers are both in blue-green naturally-coloured glass and are complete. The example from grave C118 belongs to Harden's Group Vaii, of early or middle 6th century date (Harden 1956). The bell beaker from grave C151 belongs to Group Vb, of the same date. The palm cup from the same grave appears to have been produced in a white, cloudy glass. The form is not listed in Harden's scheme.

7.1.5 The fragment of vessel glass from grave C53 is merely a small body sherd and it cannot be securely attributed to any particular vessel type, although it is undoubtedly Roman. It is naturally-coloured.

### *Provenance*

7.1.6 All of the glass vessels, including the example from the eastern cemetery are broadly contemporary and can be dated to the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Their original provenance is unknown, although it is generally considered that they were not made in England and had been imported from the continent. Some forms of glass vessel may have been made in Kent, in emulation of those produced on the continent, but these do not include bell beakers or palm cups (Evison 1987, 94 and 98).

- 7.1.7 The provenance of glass of this period is complicated by the lack of known production sites and the proposed movement of raw glass across Europe. Only one production site is known for the early Anglo-Saxon period, and only two for the Middle Saxon period. It has been argued that quantities of raw glass, which existed as large, heavy slabs, were traded from the eastern Mediterranean at this time, and that this may explain the very 'Roman'-like constituents of early Anglo-Saxon glass from some Kent sites, and from Sutton Hoo. Equally, it could be remelted Roman vessel glass.

#### *Conservation*

- 7.1.8 The conservation of these vessels is currently ongoing and is for site archive level, and not for display. The complete but cracked vessels are not, therefore, undergoing restoration at this stage. They have been stabilised and are being gently cleaned. The contents of the vessel from grave C118 have been removed by excavation within the laboratory and can be sieved if required. There is no requirement to discard any of these objects, all of which are of considerable value.
- 7.1.9 All of the glass vessels are complete, with the exception of the Roman sherd, which was almost certainly reduced to a fragment at the time that it was deposited in the grave. They have suffered from the acidic soil conditions and there is some lamination of the original surface, but they remain substantially complete, if cracked in two cases. Their original profiles can be reconstructed and in each case the vessels themselves could be returned to their original form with the aid of a conservator.

#### *Comparative Material*

- 7.1.10 A variety of glass vessels from Kent cemeteries were listed by Harden and have been placed within a typological system (Harden 1956). Subsequently, new discoveries have been made. For bell beakers of type Viii, for example, only three examples were known, one of which has subsequently been shown to have come from Italy, and not from Kent.
- 7.1.11 New examples have come, however, from Howletts, Ozengell, Monkton, Mill Hill and Dover Buckland, bringing the overall total to ten, including the Saltwood example. Harden recorded four vessels of group Vb; three of which came from Kent. Subsequently, only one new addition can be made to this list (from Dover Buckland) and the Saltwood beaker brings the total to six. A further example from Faversham is lost and was never included in Harden's list, but it may have been very similar to the Saltwood example. A new survey of glass vessels from Anglo-Saxon England has been published recently (Evison 1999).
- 7.1.12 The palm cup is comparable to an example from St Peters, Broadstairs. The colour of the vessel is rare in Kent and will be reassessed when conservation work is complete.
- 7.1.13 The placing of two glass vessels in the same grave is not unusual, but in most cases the vessels are of the same type. It is less usual for two vessels of different varieties to be found in the same grave and the only other examples are Howletts grave 27 (a cone beaker and a bowl) and Kingston grave C6 (a pouch bottle and a squat jar). Grave 250 at Dover Buckland provided three different vessels, including two bell beakers and a bowl.

- 7.1.14 Fragments of Roman glass vessels have been found in a number of early Anglo-Saxon graves, including three of those from Dover Buckland (Evison 1987, 98-9). They have also been found at Chatham Lines, Kingston, Barfreston, Sibertswold, Stowting and Sarre in Kent, as well as in other counties. Glass was a rare commodity at this time and Meaney has suggested that it may have been kept for its colour and intrinsic interest, as fire-makers, or for cauterising wounds (Meaney 1981, 227-8).

*Potential for further work*

- 7.1.15 The study of the glass vessels is relevant to the following Fieldwork Event Aims:

*to establish a chronology for the Anglo-Saxon cemeteries;*

- 7.1.16 The fabrication of the glass vessels can be dated reasonably well, within a time frame of 50 years or less. In grave C118, the only other objects recovered were iron nails and the glass is therefore considered to date the burial. In grave C151 the two glass vessels were accompanied by a bead, a buckle, keys and a knife. No dating has yet been established for the buckle, and the knife and keys cannot be dated closely, so that here again the glass vessels are very important in establishing the date of the grave.

*to establish the range of variation in burial rites, and to view possible change in rite over time;*

- 7.1.17 A broader view of the deposition of glass vessels in Kent graves assists in establishing the nature of the burial rite. This is particularly evident with the examination of burials excavated under modern conditions, as at Dover Buckland (where glass vessels are abundant) and Mill Hill Deal. The lack of corroboratory evidence from the human bone at Saltwood is to be regretted and assignments of gender have usually to be made on the basis of the grave goods. Those clearly indicate the burial of a woman in grave C151, and the glass alone provides the evidence for grave C118. Most of the graves with glass vessels from the recent excavations at Dover Buckland were those of females, and those with fragments of Roman glass are usually female graves as well.

- 7.1.18 Variation in rite extends to the number of glass vessels in each grave, and to the types of vessels. Palm cups and bell beakers, for example, may have been used for different functions. Change of rite over time is not possible with the sample of glass vessels, because all of them come from a fairly narrow date range of the early and middle 6<sup>th</sup> century.

*to indicate the general development of each cemetery and their relationship to each other;*

- 7.1.19 The glass vessels are useful for dating purposes within the western cemetery and they corroborate the evidence from other objects, which suggests that this cemetery was in use by the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier.

7.1.20 The glass vessels are also relevant to a further research aims:

*trading systems in Early Anglo-Saxon England;*

7.1.21 Glass vessels have been considered by Huggett's review of imported grave goods in Early Anglo-Saxon England (Huggett 1988, 72-4 and fig 7). He noted Harden's suggestion that the majority of glass imported into England came in to Kent, and was re-distributed from there (Harden 1956, 148; Huggett 1988, 72). Bell-beakers and early forms of palm cups are considered to have been imported into England, rather than being produced in Kent, and they are well-represented at Dover Buckland as well as Saltwood, where most of the glass also consists of imported forms. The glass vessels should be considered alongside other imported objects in relation to trade routes and mechanisms for the period. We do not know precisely where the glass was being made, and whether it was in the Rhineland or northern or eastern France. It is possible, however, to establish the range and dating of material and to examine the trade routes across different periods of use of the site.

*To critically examine Anglo-Saxon glass technology*

7.1.22 The Saltwood glass could be analysed by energy dispersive Xray analysis with a scanning electron microscope. This is a destructive technique, for which a small sample of each vessel would be required (usually smaller than 1mm<sup>3</sup>). It would enable the constituents of the vessels to be compared with the samples studied to date from Kent. No wider comparisons, beyond the Anglo-Saxon series, could really be made

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