



Ribbed palm cup (7.6 cm. high), late-6th or 7th century found in 1722 in a coffin when building the present church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields. Given by Sir John Cotbatch to Sir Hans Sloane and now belongs to the British Museum. (British Museum)

GLASS IN LONDON

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THIS SUMMER to mark Dr. Harden's directorship the London Museum is holding an exhibition entitled "Glass in London," in which will be presented a brief survey of the glass used by Londoners since it was first introduced into the area by the Romans, up to the 20th century. All the glass dating from the first fifteen hundred years of London's life has been excavated and so has lost its original surface and clarity; many of the later pieces have been treasured possessions and so remained intact. In

this article I intend to draw attention to some of the important early excavated examples of particular interest to the readers of this magazine while pointing out the wide range of objects in the exhibition, of interest not because they have been excavated but because they demonstrate the skill and versatility of the glassmaker's art.

Examples of Roman glass from all periods of the occupation are exhibited although owing presumably to the destruction of the later layers by subse-

quent building operations, the bulk of them date from the 1st and 2nd centuries. The important group of A.D. 60-80 from a rubbish-pit on the site of St. Swithin's House, Walbrook includes a rhyton of the fine cut colourless glass only recently recognised as being so frequent at this early date. Typical container bottles of bluish-green glass, some intact, show the kind of glass more commonly found on Roman sites, although for this exhibition a fine range of colourless and geometrically cut glasses has been assembled. The value of graves as a source of glasses in both the Roman and pagan Saxon periods is clear; in many cases they survive intact unlike those pieces discarded and later rediscovered in rubbish pits. The 4th century flask from a grave in the Minories discovered with two glossy pottery flasks is an example.

The settlements of the Saxon invaders avoided the area of Roman London; the presence of only one glass from Central London in the exhibition, the palm cup discovered in a coffin under the portico of the old church of St. Martin-in-the-Fields in 1722

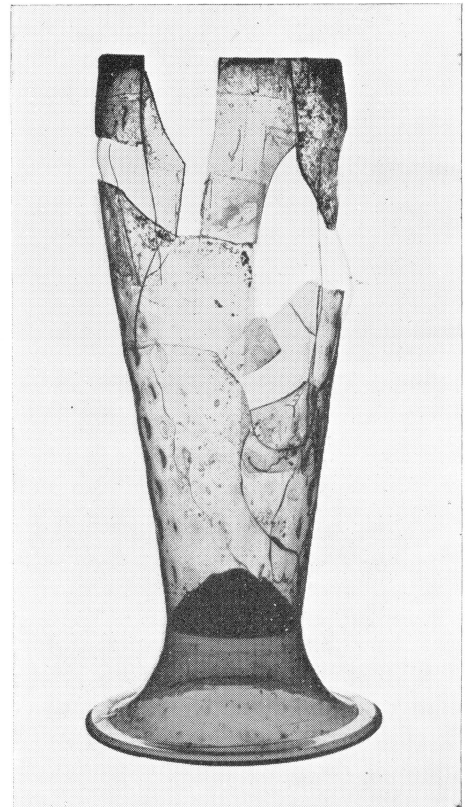
emphasises this. The 5th-6th century cemetery at Mitcham, Surrey, yielded glass from several graves, now distributed between the Archaeology and Ethnography Museum, Cambridge and the London Museum, which have been brought together for the exhibition, one a Roman survival and other contemporary Saxon pieces, such as the examples illustrated.

As a result of the adoption of Christian burial-customs and the consequent dearth of grave-goods, very little glass of the early Middle Ages is known and virtually no complete pieces apart from three near eastern bottles which may or may not have been lost in antiquity. All the glass exhibited dating from between the 8th and the 13th centuries is Mediterranean or Syrian in origin, since little locally-made forest glass of this period has been discovered in London and those pieces available are too fragmentary to be worth displaying. Among the exotics is a fragment from a painted and enamelled bowl found on the site of Cheapside House in 1959. This bowl



Wine glass stem, urinal (22.5 cm. high), and flask, 15th century from pit east of St. Swithin's House, Walbrook, closed c. 1500.

(Guildhall Museum)



Ale glass c.1600 from site of Honey Lane Market, Cheapside.

(Guildhall Museum)

belongs to the Syro-Frankish group of glasses of the 13th century and may have been made in Venice, in which case it is the earliest known example to reach London of that Venetian and Venetian-style glass.

No medieval glass kiln has yet been excavated or even identified within the immediate area of London, the kilns such as Chiddingfold in the thickly wooded areas of the Weald presumably supplying Londoners with glasses, urinals, bowls, medicine phials and the other objects of green glass which turn up on sites of the 14th to 16th century. Two important excavated groups of that period from the City are exhibited, one from a pit east of St. Swithin's House, Walbrook, which was closed c. 1500 but contained a wineglass stem of a century earlier as well as two typical forest glass pieces, a urinal and a phial. Casual finds from London have supplied several examples of the tumblers and flasks of the 15th century, some mould-blown with ribbed decoration.

By the early 16th century the development of the soda-glass industry of Venice and its spread through Southern Europe had greatly widened the range of glass available to wealthy Londoners, no longer dependent solely on the green glass of the Weald and the Netherlands. This is underlined in the exhibition by the fact that for the first time we are able to contrast fine imported glass from an excavated group of the late 16th century with other imported pieces in the Venetian style which have never been buried and so retain their original clarity and colour. The group, from a chalk-lined cesspit on the site of the Dyers' Arms, Cannon Street, contains coloured glass originating in the Netherlands, France and Spain, the last, a strangely-shaped flask of olive-green, being of particular interest because of its decoration with an elaborate floral pattern in gold.

With the 16th century we come to the period when glass makers can be named and glasses can with some certainty be attributed to particular makers; the fine engraved goblet dated 1586 is characteristic of that small group of engraved glasses attributed to the Venetian Jacob Verzelini who established his furnaces in two of London's disused monastic precincts, first in the Crutched Friars where he had been preceded by an earlier group of Italians whose work has not yet been identified and later in the old hall of the Augustinian Priory, Broad Street.

In the 17th century the proportion of fine glasses which have survived intact increases, but we are still dependent on excavation to provide evidence as to the appearance for example of the glasses made by Sir Robert Mansell at Broad Street between 1618 and c. 1650. The value of the sketches in the letters written by John Greene, the London glass seller, to his supplier in Venice, Aliesio Morelli between 1667



Medicine bottle, 18th century.

(London Museum)

and 1673, is enhanced by the discovery of comparable pieces in London rubbish pits of the period; two virtually complete examples, a tumbler and a double oil and vinegar flask are exhibited.

The glass of the later periods includes a small number of excavated pieces to demonstrate that the fine glasses which are now collectors' pieces were once used, broken and thrown away. To supplement the glass exhibited, we have assembled a wide range of illustrative material including maps on which the sites of the major London glass houses since the 16th century are indicated.

A catalogue has been prepared with an historical introduction.

The Museum has been fortunate in being able to borrow from private individuals and several museums; in particular the Guildhall Museum has most generously complemented our collections with theirs to provide as complete a picture as possible of London's glass.