

The Post-Conquest Vessel Glass

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Introduction

A small assemblage of vessel glass dating to the late medieval and post-medieval periods was retained from the Radford excavations, although the majority of this material is without identifiable context, and therefore relatively uninformative. Consequently the glass is reported on typologically rather than contextually, although where possible parallels are drawn with comparable material from other sites.

Discussion

For the purposes of the typological discussion, the glass can be divided into three chronologically defined groups that relate to broader activities taking place on the site. These also relate to wider trends in glass consumption over the period, and therefore some suggestion of wider activities occurring at the abbey can be tentatively made.

Monastic period

Surprisingly little late medieval vessel glass belonging to the Benedictine phase of the abbey survives. This might, in part, be due to the nature of the material itself; most later medieval glass was made from a potash-rich composition that decays easily in certain soil conditions. Nonetheless four vessels belonging to this period can be identified, although they only survive in very fragmentary form. The first of these is the thick convex tapering base from a hanging lamp, GL1. This form, often illustrated in medieval manuscripts, could either be suspended from a chain or probably more frequently inserted into a wooden holder. Although difficult to date accurately, they first appear on monastic sites in the 12th century and continue in popularity until the end of the 15th century (Charleston 1984, 31).

The second typical medieval form present in the assemblage is the urinal, GL2, a glass vessel used extensively in medical diagnoses during the Middle Ages, a topic that has seen extensive scholarly discussion (e.g. Talbot 1967). The fragment from Glastonbury represents the thick curved base of the urinal, rather than the thinner-blown sides, but as is typical as it is the portion most likely to survive.

The final fragments of late medieval glass are from two separated globular flasks, GL3-4. Such flasks are a common medieval form, found on all varieties of context, and produced in large numbers on domestic glassmaking sites (Willmott 2005, 60). The two fragments from Glastonbury are both portions of pushed-in base that, just as with the urinal, was the thickest portion of the vessel and the one most likely to resist devitrification in the soil.

Although a small and limited assemblage, the vessel glass belong to this phase is typical of what might be expected from a monastic context. The best comparable, although much larger, assemblage is from the Benedictine house at Battle, where excavations in the eastern range produced the remains of nine lamps, twelve urinals and thirteen flasks (Charleston 1985, 139-42). However, what is interesting at Glastonbury is the absence of any finer tablewares, especially as these tended to be made in a higher quality more durable soda glass, although perhaps this is not surprising given the small size of the overall sample.

Post-Dissolution Period

The most interesting and diverse range of drinking glasses and containers come from the period following the dissolution, *c.* 1540-1640. Not only does this represent the date at which the majority of the robbing of the former monastic buildings was presumably taking place, it also reflects a period when the high-quality English glass industry was starting to flourish, before it reached a hiatus with the onset of the Civil War. Although the assemblage is only a small and rather fragmented one, it does contain a surprisingly representative sample of the types of glasses being consumed in England at this time. The lack of identifiable context for almost all of these vessels impedes a more sophisticated interpretation, but it seems likely that these glasses originated from affluent households nearby to the abbey.

Two of the drinking glasses are rather more ordinary pedestal beakers, GL5-6. Made in a poorer quality green-tinted glass, these vessels were amongst some of the earliest of the new forms produced in England following the arrival of immigrant glassmakers from the continent from the mid-16th century onwards. Pedestal beakers rapidly became the most common form of drinking ware during the late Tudor period (Willmott 2002, 45), and are found on almost all classes of sites, so their occurrence here is not particularly surprising.

More unusual are several examples of 16th-century goblets. These are made in a much better quality soda-rich glass and are almost colourless except for a grey or yellow tint. Although too fragmented for more certain attribution, it is possible that at least some of these might actually be early English products of the 1570-80s, when the fineware industry was transformed by establishment of furnaces in London initially by Jean Carré and then Giacomo Verzelini shortly after (Willmott 2005, 72). GL7, a goblet with a short inverted baluster stem decorated with vertical ribbing, is typical of this early period of English manufacture and therefore almost certainly has domestic provenance. GL8 and GL9, both goblets with rounded knops, are harder to provide a firm attribution for. The rounded stem knop was a popular style employed by glassmakers across Europe during the late 16th century, so whilst they could also be London products, they might equally have come from Antwerp or even Italy. The final goblet stem fragment, GL10, is the upper portion of a mould-blown lion mask. This form also appeared during the second half of the 16th century and remained popular well into the subsequent one, being a staple produce of virtually every European glasshouse. Some work on categorising mould types has led to the specific identification of English types (Willmott 2000), although the Glastonbury example is far too fragmented for this to be possible. Three further fragments from good-quality drinking vessels are also present in the assemblage. Two, GL11-12, are curved portions from different goblet bowls, whilst GL13 is a fragment of goblet base. However, in the absence of more diagnostic features little more can be said about these, save that they date from the late 16th or early 17th century.

A number of small containers belonging to this period were also recovered. The first, GL14, is the small portion of a rim, neck and shoulder from a fine quality bottle made in a colourless soda glass and decorated with heavy, but even, ribbing. Although the majority of the vessel is missing, making precise identification and function difficult, this clearly dates to the 16th century, making it a rare and fairly high status item.

More utilitarian in nature are fragments of two different rims and the body from several small square-section case bottles, GL15-18. Made in a mixed alkali glass with a heavy green tint, these vessels first appeared during the 16th century and continued in popularity right until the

19th century. These examples from Glastonbury are all earlier types, dating to the late 16th or early 17th centuries, are quite small and could have been used for containing all manner of domestic liquids and foodstuffs. A slight variation on the design of these bottles can be seen with a further example, GL19, which is hexagonal in cross-section rather than square. This type of bottle, although rarely found in most parts of England, has been recovered in quite large numbers at the late 16th-century glass furnace at Woodchester, Gloucester (Daniels 1950, 11), suggesting they might have been a more specialised West Country product

The final glass fragment belonging to this period is a small piece of cast mirror glass, GL20. Mirrors are one of the most little understood areas of glass research, probably because they often go unrecognised archaeologically due to the soluble nature of their tin and mercury 'silvering'. Despite considerable evidence to the contrary, it is still often erroneously stated that mirrors were produced by casting and polishing sheets of glass only from the 1670s onwards (Davison 2007). However, it is now known that by the very early 16th century the Venetians had perfected the manufacture of high quality cast glass 'sites' that were either fully finished in Murano, or exported in raw, cast but unpolished form for finishing elsewhere. The example from Glastonbury is interesting as it has a scored line running parallel to its edge, a feature seen on a large of those found on the Venetian wreck at Gnalić, which sank in the 1580s whilst transporting a cargo of glass that included over 550 mirrors (Lazar & Willmott 2006, 68-72).

Later Post-Medieval Glass

The political unrest of the mid-17th century heralded the end of the domestic fineware glass industry with a cancellation of all previously granted monopolies and patents, and there appears to have been relatively little demand for drinking glasses any way at this time. Consequently it is unsurprising that there are no fragments from any type of tableware dating to the period c. 1640-1700 at Glastonbury.

There are, however, four drinking glasses dating to the 18th century, all made in a good quality lead crystal that is typical for vessels of the period. GL20 is a relatively undiagnostic handle, which probably comes from a tankard or mug, but could also belong to a jug. More easily identifiable are the upper base and drawn stem from a typical English-made wine glass of the early to mid 18th century, GL21. Dating to slightly later in the same century, GL22 is a fragment of lower wine glass bowl decorated with heavy polygonal facet cutting, a common decorative technique of the second half of the 18th century. The final drinking vessel is the lower portion of a baluster stem from an early 19th-century wine glass, GL23.

The greatest number of vessel glass fragments from the site, however, come from post-medieval wine bottles (summarised in Table 1). The form first occurred in the 1650s, and within two decades had become the most common form of glassware produced in England, until the advent of mechanised press moulding in the 19th century. All levels of society used wine bottles, not only for their nominated purpose, but also as containers for the long-term storage of any liquid, and as such are ubiquitous on all post-medieval sites. The one fragment of note is the portion from an embossed seal, GL24, which was applied to the shoulder of the bottle as an identifying mark. Unfortunately only the partial inscription remains "ME... GLAS... 177..." but this is sufficient to identify it as having belonged to a local resident of the 1770s.

Catalogue

Monastic period

GL1) 1 fragment of convex stub base with external pontil mark from a hanging lamp. Completely devitrified potash-rich glass. 13th-15th century.
GSGA 1991/19 G110. 1957 CL11, SF4059. Unstratified. Illustrated

GL2) 1 fragment of very thick convex base with an external pontil mark from a large urinal. Green potash-rich glass with very heavy weathering. 13th-15th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL3) 2 fragments of pushed-in base from a small globular flask. Green potash-rich glass with extreme weathering and devitirification. Base diameter uncertain. 15th-16th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL4) 1 fragment of pushed-in base from a small globular flask. Light green potash-rich glass with very heavy surface weathering. Base diameter uncertain. 14th-early 16th century.
GSGA 1991/176 G317. Unstratified.

Post-dissolution

GL5) 1 fragment of pushed-in base with a pointed kick from a plain pedestal beaker. Green potash-rich glass with very heavy weathering. Base diameter uncertain. Mid 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL6) 1 fragment of pushed-in base with a flat kick from a plain pedestal beaker. Green potash-rich glass with very heavy weathering. Base diameter uncertain. Mid 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL7) 1 fragment of flaring base and fine inverted baluster stem, decorated with vertical ribbing, from a small goblet. Grey tinted soda rich glass with many fine air bubbles and little weathering. Base diameter uncertain. Mid to late 16th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL8) 1 fragment of compressed round knop and very fine upper and lower merese from a goblet. Grey tinted sod-rich glass with few air bubbles and little weathering.
Mid to late 16th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated

GL9) 1 fragment of rounded knop with upper extension from a goblet, joined directly without mereses to a flaring base and bowl. Yellow/grey tinted soda-rich glass with little weathering.
Mid to late 16th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated

GL10) 1 fragment of upper mould-blown lion mask stem from a goblet, decorated with gadrooning. Clear soda-rich glass with no weathering. Late 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL11) 1 fragment of curved goblet bowl. Clear soda rich glass with very light weathering.
Late 16-early 17th century.

GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified.

GL12) 1 fragment of curved goblet bowl. Clear tinted soda rich glass with very light weathering. Late 16-early 17th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified.

GL13) 1 small fragment of flaring base with under-folded edge from a goblet. Clear soda-rich glass with heavy surface weathering. Base diameter uncertain. Late 16th century.
GSGA 1991/472/2 G46. 1963 AHCT E Extension 3 S cut 1, SF7055. Context 7073

GL14) 1 fragment of flat everted rim, short neck and flaring shoulder from a small bottle, decorated with prominent optic-blown spiral ribbing. Grey tinted soda-rich glass with little weathering. Rim diameter 28mm. Late 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL15) 3 joining fragments of everted rim and short neck from a case bottle. Devitrified potash-rich glass. Rim diameter 40mm. Early to mid 16th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL16) 1 fragment of everted rim and short neck from a small case bottle. Blue green mixed alkali glass with heavy weathering. Rim diameter 39mm. Late 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL17) 1 fragment of flat body from a small square section case bottle. Green potash-rich glass with very heavy weathering. Diameter uncertain. Early 17th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL18) 1 fragment of low pushed-in base from a small octagonal bottle. Green potash-rich glass with very heavy weathering. Base diameter 42mm. Early 17th century.
GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

GL19) 1 fragment of rounded edge from a sheet of cast mirror glass plate, with line scored on its lower face parallel to the edge. Clear bubble free soda glass with no weathering. Late 16th-early 17th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified.

Later post-medieval

GL20) 2 joining fragments of plain solid handle, probably from a tankard. Clear lead glass with little weathering. 18th century. GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified.

GL21) 1 fragment of flaring base with under-folded edge and short drawn stem from a plain trumpet-shaped wine glass. Clear lead glass with light weathering. Base diameter 64mm. Early to mid 18th century.
GSGA 1991/91/12 G222. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL22) 1 fragment of lower bowl from a wine glass, decorated with polygonal facet cutting. Clear lead glass with light weathering. Mid to late 18th century.
GSGA 1991/1391 G37. Unstratified.

GL23) 1 flaring base and lower baluster stem from a wine glass. Clear lead glass with light weathering. Base diameter 60mm. 19th century.

GSGA 1995/103/261/5b G228. Unstratified. Illustrated.

GL24) 1 fragment of wine bottle seal from a cylindrical wine bottle. Embossed “Me.. Glas.. 177..”. 1770s.

GSGA 1988/1064 G13. Unstratified.

TABLE 1	Shaft & Globe c. 1650-1680	Onion/Bladder c. 1680-1730	Squat Cylindrical c. 1730-1760	Tall Cylindrical c. 1760-1800
GSGA 1988/1064 G13		68	14	3
GSGA 1991/1391 G37		1	3	
GSGA 1991/148/1 G53				1
GSGA 1991/66/15 G214		3		
GSGA 1991/71/7 G217		2	1	
GSGA 1991/45/8 G226	1			

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