A post-medieval bottle glass tool from Bretforton, Worcestershire.

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Introduction

A bottle glass tool recovered from unenclosed arable land at Bretforton, Worcestershire is of interest for a number of reasons. Firstly it reasserts the association of retouched glass tools with traditional arable agriculture (Whitehead, 2017; 2019). Secondly the bottle, and therefore the tool, can be dated with some precision.

Discussion

On 14 September 2019 a post-medieval bottle glass scraping tool (01, 02, 03) was recovered from a traditional agricultural holding at Bretforton, Worcestershire (VC37 SP04).

Fig. 01. Post-medieval bottle glass scraper, Bretforton, Worcestershire, 14 September 2019.

The tool is fabricated from an upper body fragment of a medicine bottle originally embossed with the words 'Granular Citrate of Magnesia' arranged as in 02. This was produced from the late 19th century into the early 20th century and this mid-blue glass bottle is believed to date to about AD1890. This is evidently the first occasion on which a glass tool has been dated by a commercial trade name.

Fig. 02. Post-medieval bottle glass scraper, Bretforton, Worcestershire, 14 September 2019. The position and form of words moulded in relief on the bottle, the first letter of each line being discernible on the artefact.

The tool is a steep-sided concave scraper which shows utilisation traces along the edge (03). It is not clear whether the concavity was created by use or by retouch; either way the fabricator had a preconceived intention of shape, presumably to fulfil a special function. The scraping edge is finely resolved conveying the probability that the fabricator had special knowledge of how such glass may react to contact with particular materials such as antler, bone or wooden edge rubbers, or incidentally by extended use in contact with such materials.
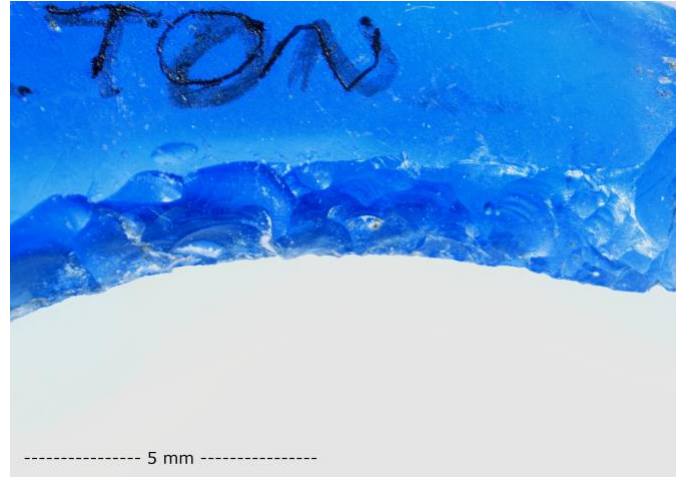

Fig. 03. Post-medieval bottle glass scraper, Bretforton, Worcestershire, 14 September 2019. Details of the scraping edge.

It is almost impossible to imagine the true need for a concave scraper of this size other than to scrape or clean a firm object with a curved surface! Such an object might also be part of the cottage economy, for example an antler or bone knife handle or even an apple scoop (04), if it is not venturing too far into the fanciful. Any comparable activity may well require a specially prepared tool.

Fig. 04. Apple scoop for the use of edentulous geriatrics, Ashton-under-hill, Worcestershire, May 1981, fashioned from the metacarpal bone of a goat *Capra hircus* L. Image courtesy of Mrs Marie Saunders.

Earlier documentary evidence for the use of post-medieval glass tools would be invaluable but seems to be entirely lacking and in

extended conversations with experienced land workers I never heard them mentioned. Such tools apparently extended throughout the growing lands of the Vale of Evesham and are traceable back to Romano-celtic time (Whitehead, 2009) probably within living memory of, or even within the practice of, flint-knapping and as far south on the Cotswold Hills as Bath City, but also presumably much further.

Conclusion
This distinctive Bretforton tool may form part of the traditional land worker's or cottager's kit or it may have been fabricated for a specific purpose occupying a few moments of time. The scraping edge is created by many small removals and a consistently angled face of some 55º suggesting that the tool may have had special application.

Historical documentary evidence of such artefacts would be highly desirable.

References
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