

## Post-medieval glass tools; what were they used for?

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### Introduction

Various accounts of post-medieval glass tools from Worcestershire and elsewhere have now been published (Whitehead, 2009; 2016a; 2016b; 2017). They demonstrate that glass was a valuable resource which could be converted into hand tools by the removal of flakes and by retouch, especially since the production of thick black glass hand-blown sack bottles in the seventeenth century.

This contribution discusses two bottle glass implements from Worcestershire and a more sophisticated tool from Bath City, Somerset.

### Discussion

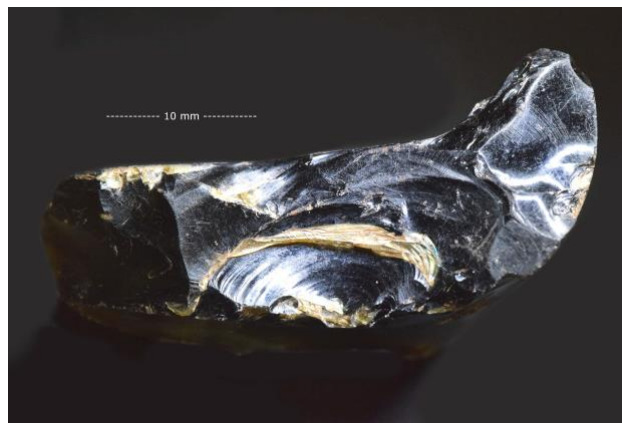
Both of the Worcestershire items originate from the land surface of settlements that have previously yielded glass tools and are known to have been worked on the open field system.

The item found at Little Comberton, Worcestershire (SO9643) on 9 August 2018 (01 to 03) is curious; were it prehistoric it might be regarded as knapping debitage. It is fashioned from a thick black glass bottle thought to date from caAD1700, from the point at which the kicked-up base meets the side. Both long edges have been subject to numerous superimposed flakelet removals from strongly focussed points of percussion; this has created a tool on which the worked edges are in greater or lesser degree concave.

The small size of the tool can be determined from the figures. The raw material is similar to the glass tools from Bredon Hill (Whitehead, 2009) and Old House Farm (Whitehead, 2016b).



01. Post-medieval bottle glass hand tool, Little Comberton, Worcestershire, 9 August 2018.



02. Utilisation detail, bottle glass hand tool, Little Comberton, Worcestershire, 9 August 2018.



03. Utilisation detail, bottle glass hand tool, Little Comberton, Worcestershire, 9 August 2018. Reference to 01 confirms the aspect.

The second item (04) was found on 27 March 2019 at Greenhill, Evesham, Worcestershire (SP0444), on part of the former Evesham Abbey estate. It is an elongate parallel-sided fragment of relatively thin (05) lustrous green bottle glass blunted at each end. It may date from the early decades of the twentieth century. One long side has been blunted probably as an index finger rest; the other (05) is defined by intensive utilisation which has removed numerous spalls of glass.



04. Post-medieval bottle glass hand tool, Evesham, Worcestershire, 27 March 2019.



05. Utilisation edge detail, bottle glass hand tool, Evesham, Worcestershire, 27 March 2019.

The Little Comberton tool in particular must have been used with a great deal of pressure (the possibility of it being an experimental piece seems unlikely), possibly to clean tined or corroded implements. It seems likely that both of these artefacts formed part

of a land worker's portable tool kit, but any specific applications are presently hard to determine simply by reference to form.

A glass tool from the fringe of Bath City, Somerset (ST7362), extends the distribution of artificial (*contra* natural, namely obsidian) glass artefacts, presumably also in the landscape of traditional agriculture. In this case a very convincing tool has been worked on the base of a hand-blown baluster-stemmed leaded glass goblet perhaps dating from the first half of the nineteenth century. It was found on 20 April 2019 embedded in the jointing of a limestone wall constructed about AD1900. The elegant relationship between form and functionality is somewhat reminiscent of the Little Comberton blue glass stopper tool (Whitehead, 2009).

In this case the stem base can sit between the first two fingers of the hand enabling increased and more concerted pressure to be applied to the working edge. The extensively utilised scraping edge is fabricated at an angle of 45°; a knife edge set at 90° to the line of the scraper (Figs 06, 07) has been dulled, possibly from cutting fibres or bundling material.



06. Post-medieval glass tool worked on the base of a hand-blown baluster-stemmed goblet, Bath City, Somerset, 20 April 2019.



07. Post-medieval glass tool, Bath City, Somerset, 20 April 2019. The dexterity with which the utilised scraping edge has been fashioned is clear.

There is one further point of discussion. It seems entirely probable that manufactured glass, like obsidian (Cann, Dixon & Renfrew, 1969), works best when relatively new. That being so, the ability to date the manufacture of the glass should provide a date for the manufacture of the tool.

### Conclusion

Further examples of post-medieval glass tools demonstrate their importance in the land worker's tool kit. This may go some way to explain why so many fragments of early black glass bottles are found in relation to complete ones. The raw material was evidently often selected by the fabricator with deliberation. Items of domestic

glassware owned by the more wealthy residents of Bath City and elsewhere (Whitehead, 2016) may have been purposefully set aside after breakage to fulfil a function as tools.

Manufactured glass shares the same properties of conchoidal fracture and lustre as natural glass i.e. silica-rich obsidian. Obsidian artefacts are particularly characteristic of prehistoric agriculture and it may be that post-medieval field workers found glass tools easy to manage and secure during a wide range of field-based activities.

Since I first aired the matter of glass tools a decade ago a number of people have shown me bottle glass tools which have evidently been made spontaneously with little prior preparation of the raw material. No doubt artificial glass tools still have much to reveal.

### Acknowledgements

I should like to thank Dr James Whitehead (Bath) for providing the goblet tool cited here.

### References

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