

Notes

A NEOLITHIC POLISHED FLINT AXE FROM STANTON HARCOURT

Before their destruction through extensive gravel workings, the fields to the south-west of the village of Stanton Harcourt revealed a rich lattice of prehistoric settlement patterns in aerial photography taken in the 1930s.¹ In the midst of this, the Neolithic henge monument known as the Devil's Quoits once stood, a circular feature with originally 36 standing stones, approximately 100 metres in diameter.²

In the course of gravel extraction in the last 15 years, this surface has been progressively removed only to yield evidence of another era of human activity at the gravel base, in the form of lower Palaeolithic handaxes. Regular visits by R.J. MacRae, with the help of local gravel diggers, have produced over fifty artefacts from the gravels. In the wake of these finds the present writer has searched the gravels over the last five years but without success.

However in February 1995 the long search was rewarded with a totally unexpected bonus in the form of a polished flint axe, discovered at the foot of the reject heap during the final phase of gravel extraction. The find was made near the site of the former Smiths weighbridge (SP 411052), approximately 400 metres north of the Devil's Quoits. The appearance of a Neolithic axe amongst gravels that are approximately 200,000 years old would seem anomalous, but the reject pile frequently contains 'modern' debris and overburden material.

The axe is 105 mm. long, with a central width of 50 mm., maximum width 61 mm. and maximum thickness 31 mm. (Figs. 1-2). It tapers markedly away from the blade and is characterised by faceted edges. The implement is made from a mottled grey flint and is unpatinated. Apart from some chips at the narrow end it is in excellent condition. Although polished all over, some traces of the original flake scars remain. Close examination shows striations that reveal the direction of grinding that its maker followed, along the length of the implement. The blade, looked at end on, shows a slightly wavy S-shape and is very sharp.

The axe belongs to the 'thick-butted' type which Holgate places in the early Neolithic period c. 3500-2700 bc.³ From its rather small size it is likely to have been resharpened several times although it retains a wide blade. The fractures at the hafted end are not fresh and may have been the cause of its abandonment as further paring down of the hafted end would have resulted in an uncomfortably short implement.

It would appear that, despite the proximity of a major henge site, there have only been five other polished axes found in the area (see Table on p. 399).

¹ D. Benson and D. Miles, *The Upper Thames Valley, An Archaeol. Survey of the River Gravels* (1974), fig. 11.

² A. Barclay, M. Gray and G. Lambrick, *Excavations at the Devil's Quoits, Stanton Harcourt, 1972-3 and 1988* (1995).

³ R. Holgate, *Neolithic Settlement of the Thames Basin* (BAR British Ser. 194, 1988), 10.

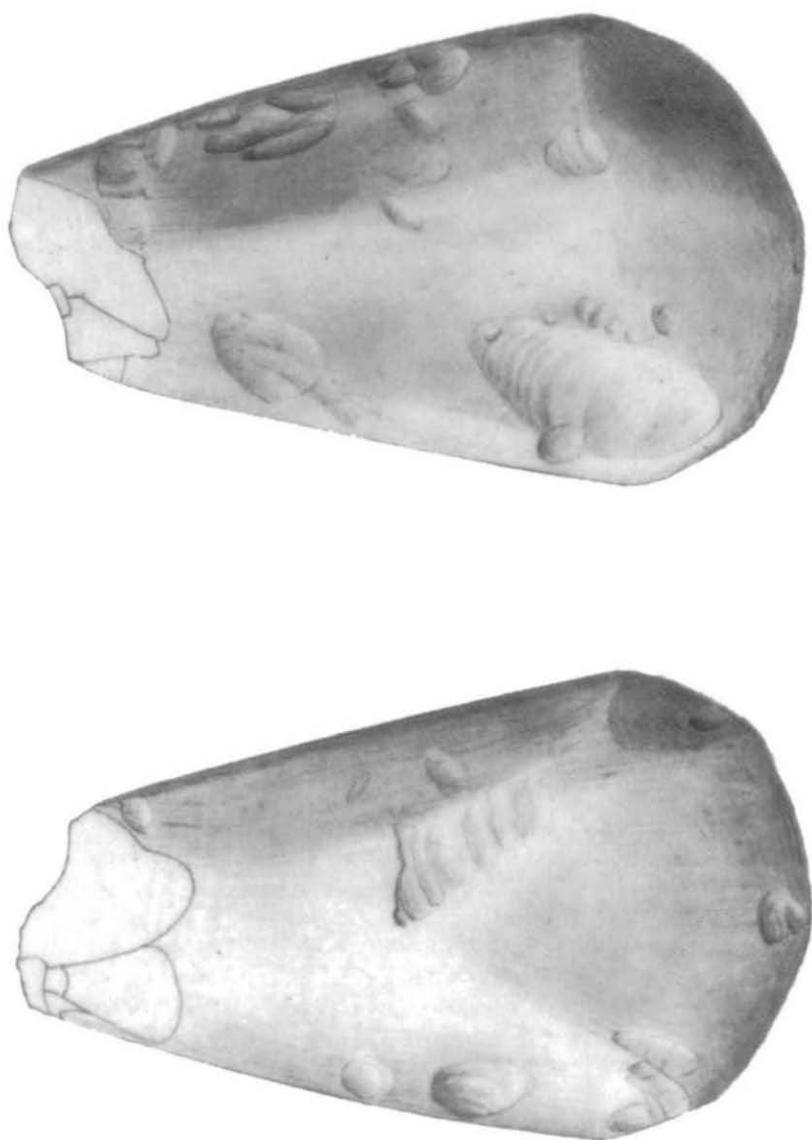


Fig. 1.

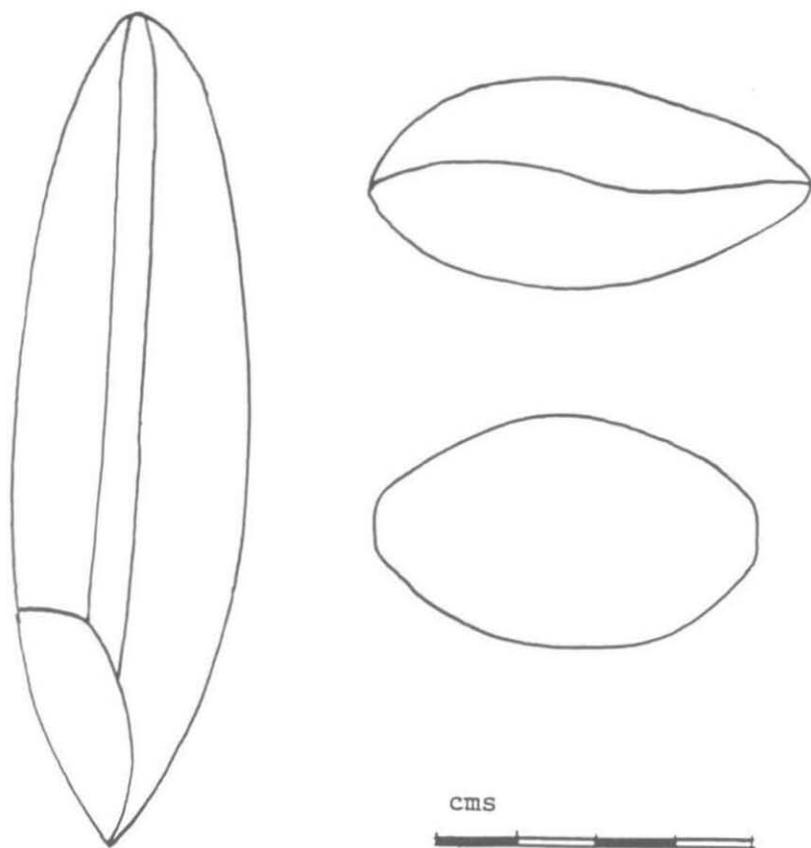


Fig. 2. *Left*: side profile; *above right*: blade end section; *below right*: central section.

MAP REFERENCE	DESCRIPTION	REF.
SP 401053	Thick butted stone	Holgate, ⁴ Table 15, no. 14
SP 403045	Grey-green stone 126 × 59 × 25	Holgate, Table 15, no. 15
SP 401055	Thick butted oval, rounded edges flint 137 × 50 × 35	Holgate, Table 14, no. 56
SP 392045	Thick butted oval, faceted edges, flint 188 × 72 × 41	Holgate, Table 15, no. 16
'Windrush floodplain'	Sandstone, 127 × 73 × 33	F. Roe in T. Allen, F. Healy and G. Lambrick, <i>Gravelly Guy, Stanton Harcourt</i> (forthcoming)

⁴ Op. cit. note 3.

Although the present find was not *in situ* it has probably not strayed far from its original location. The map (Fig. 3) shows the axe finds in relation to the Windrush and the Devil's Quoits.

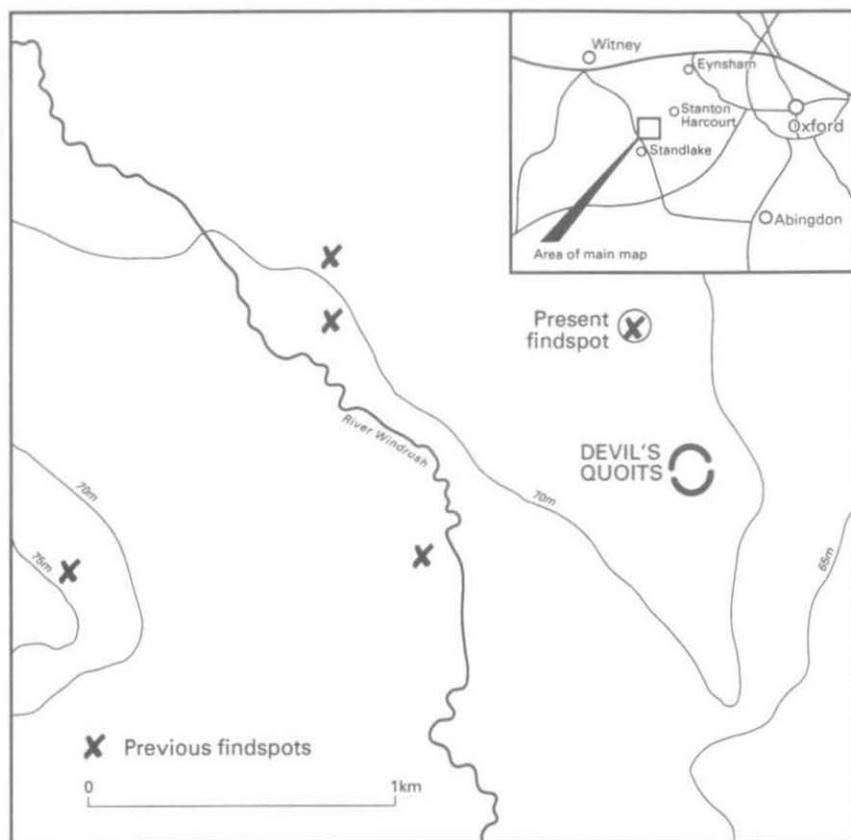


Fig. 3. Location map, showing other axe finds.

The faceted edges of the present find are an interesting feature. A high proportion of Cumbrian axes (which are not of flint but stone) are faceted.⁵ Out of over 800 polished axes from the east Midlands examined by Moore,⁶ by far the most common flint ones had faceted edges. Information about the proportion of faceted axes further south is not available.

Bradley and Edmonds point out that 'at some [henge monument] sites it seems as if a convention existed that axes were not to be deposited inside these enclosures.'⁷ But 'by contrast,

⁵ T.G. Manby in *Stone Axe Studies* (CBA Res. Rep. 23, 1979), 65-79.

⁶ C.N. Moore in *ibid.* 82-6.

⁷ R. Bradley and M. Edmonds, *Interpreting the Axe Trade* (1993), 52.

axes are frequent finds outside these earthworks'. The limited evidence from Stanton Harcourt appears to corroborate this suggestion.

Polished axes may have had a ceremonial or social function as well as a practical use. Generally, the larger items or ones of exotic material, are thought to be ceremonial. Our present humble axe would appear to have ended up, even if it did not begin, as a practical implement whose owner laboriously reground the surfaces until it was finally too small to give further service.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is grateful to Gill Hey and Philippa Bradley for the guidance and advice they gave in the writing of this article.

TERRY HARDAKER

A FAKE SCARAB SEAL FROM ARGYLE STREET, EAST OXFORD

The seal was found in the garden of a late Victorian terrace by the occupant, Mrs S. Girdler,¹ who subsequently brought it to my attention, requesting information concerning its likely origin and date.

Description (Figs. 1–2a): This object consists of two elements, an upper body and a lower surface with a cut seal. The upper body is carved with a series of narrow incised lines that resemble a crouched *Scarabaeus* beetle. It is 9 mm. in height, and the surface details consist of a head and an undecorated wing case, which is flanked by a pair of neatly folded legs; each of which are cut with horizontal strokes that imitate hairs. Drilled longitudinally through the body of the beetle is a narrow thread hole, which measures 3 mm. in diameter. Its profile is extremely uniform and is aligned slightly left of the central axis.

The lower surface is in the shape of a rounded oval, measuring 22 × 16 mm. (Fig. 1). Surrounding the lower edge of the seal is a faint incised border, which links with a series of decorative 'fillers' or 'panels'.² These carvings have prominent diagonal tooling and are located on either side of a central cartouche. This contains three elements which are positioned in a vertical alignment and set within a rounded oval border (Fig. 2a). The characters are interpreted as follows, upper first: a circle; a horizontal bar with a partially serrated upper surface; and an upwardly facing beetle. It appears to represent the 18th Dynasty king, Tutmosis III.

Analysis of the seal using an EDXRF system³ confirms that it has been carved from a magnesium-silicate substance. This compares favourably with the rock steatite, a soapstone, which was extensively used in the 2nd Millennium BC to carve scarab seals. The seal is hard

¹ I am grateful to Mrs S. Girdler for permission to publish and investigate the seal.

² I would like to thank Mr J. Ruffle of the Oriental Museum, Durham, who informs me that these fillers have no meaning, and are purely decorative.

³ Energy Dispersive X-Ray Fluorescence; this analysis was kindly conducted by Mr P. Clogg of the Department of Archaeology, University of Durham.

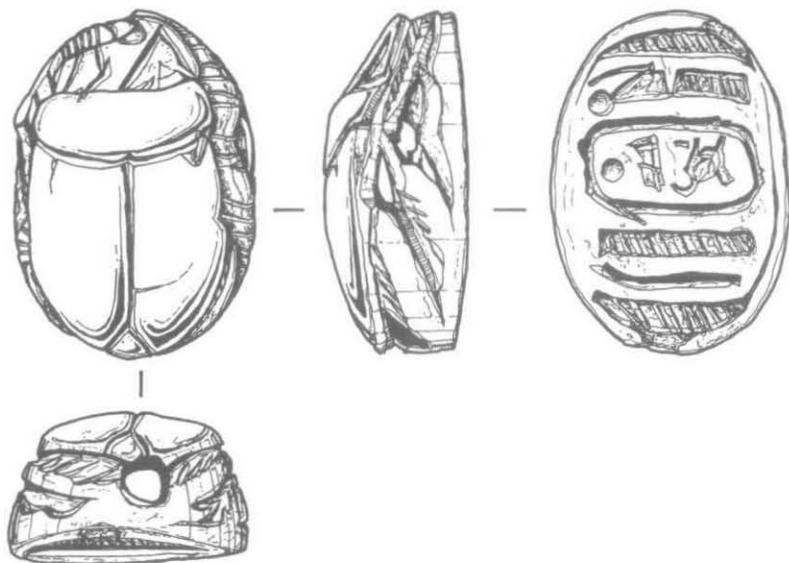


Fig. 1. The Scarab (Scale 1:1).

and pale grey in colour, which suggests that it has been fired.⁴ The surface of the seal also contains traces of nickel, copper and zinc, which may indicate that it was once coated with a glaze.

Discussion: Regrettably, although the seal probably originated in Egypt, it must be regarded as a 'clever fake'. Firstly, this object is clearly 'out of place' when one considers its context of deposition in a suburban English garden; also its location within the topsoil suggests that it represents a casual loss, dropped sometime within the last 100 years.

Stylistically, the scarab can be paralleled to excavated examples,⁵ particularly those carved



Fig. 2. *a*: The bastard copy of King Tutmosis III; *b*: The true seal of King Tutmosis III.

⁴ Prior to firing the rock was soft and easy to carve; see A. Lucas and R. Harris, *Ancient Egyptian Materials and Industries* (1962), p. 421.

⁵ P.E. Newberry, *Scarabs* (1908), pp. 73-4, Figs. 71, 73.

within the reign of the 18th dynasty king, Tuthmosis III (Fig. 2b). However, detailed examination reveals that the overall quality of the carving is very crude and unskilled. This can be clearly seen in the central cartouche, which is in fact a bastardised copy of the official seal of king Tuthmosis III; compare Fig. 2a and 2b. Also, the centralised thread hole is not conical in profile, or cut from both sides. It would therefore appear to have been drilled with a steel tipped bit and not a traditional bow drill.

The person who created this object was probably working from an original scarab, which most likely dated to the 18th Dynasty. They clearly went to great lengths to authenticate their work, using the rock steatite and even applying a surface coating, which would have helped disguise the poor craftsmanship. Presumably, therefore, this scarab was created as a 'trinket', for sale to the European tourist, sometime during the last 150 years.

OLIVER JESSOP

FROM RUBBISH TO UNIQUE ARTEFACT: AN UNUSUAL ARCHAEOLOGICAL HOARD FROM CHASTLETON HOUSE

Summary

The archaeological investigation of Chastleton House has led to the discovery of an important collection of mid 17th-century glass and earthenware containers, including five near-complete glass wine bottles. Seals applied to the shoulders of the bottles suggest a date of manufacture before 1656 and these could be the oldest bottles of their type for which a firm latest possible date can be established. They occupy an important place in the typology of wine bottle forms established for the second half of the 17th century and this underlies the importance of publishing descriptions and drawings of these vessels.

The archaeological context

Chastleton House near Chipping Norton was acquired by the National Trust in 1991. Following its acquisition an archaeological watching brief was established to work in tandem with the two-year conservation programme initiated by the Trust in 1994 and it was during the earliest stages of the work that the bottles were discovered.

The archaeologists were asked to investigate the floors of the basement rooms, some of which are flagged, others nothing more than beaten earth. As a consequence of lightly trowelling the earth floor of the small room beneath the east stairs (Fig. 1) a small square hole was discovered between the four columns supporting the base of the staircase. The hole measured about a metre across in either direction and after excavation proved to be about a metre in depth with sides cut vertically into the compacted mix of earth and rubble limestone making up the floor of the room. It had been completely backfilled, mostly with the same rubblestone and earth mix (002), though the upper part of the fill (001) consisted of a thin layer of darkish silty soil containing flecks of lime plaster, nails and a single brass spile from the aperture of a cask.

It was from the lower context (002) that the fragments of glass and earthenware were recovered. However, these were not the only items, since included in the hoard was a bone-handled knife, part of an embossed leather belt and the moulded stem of a wine glass carrying the head of a lion in relief. Though none of the vessels were complete when excavated, sufficient

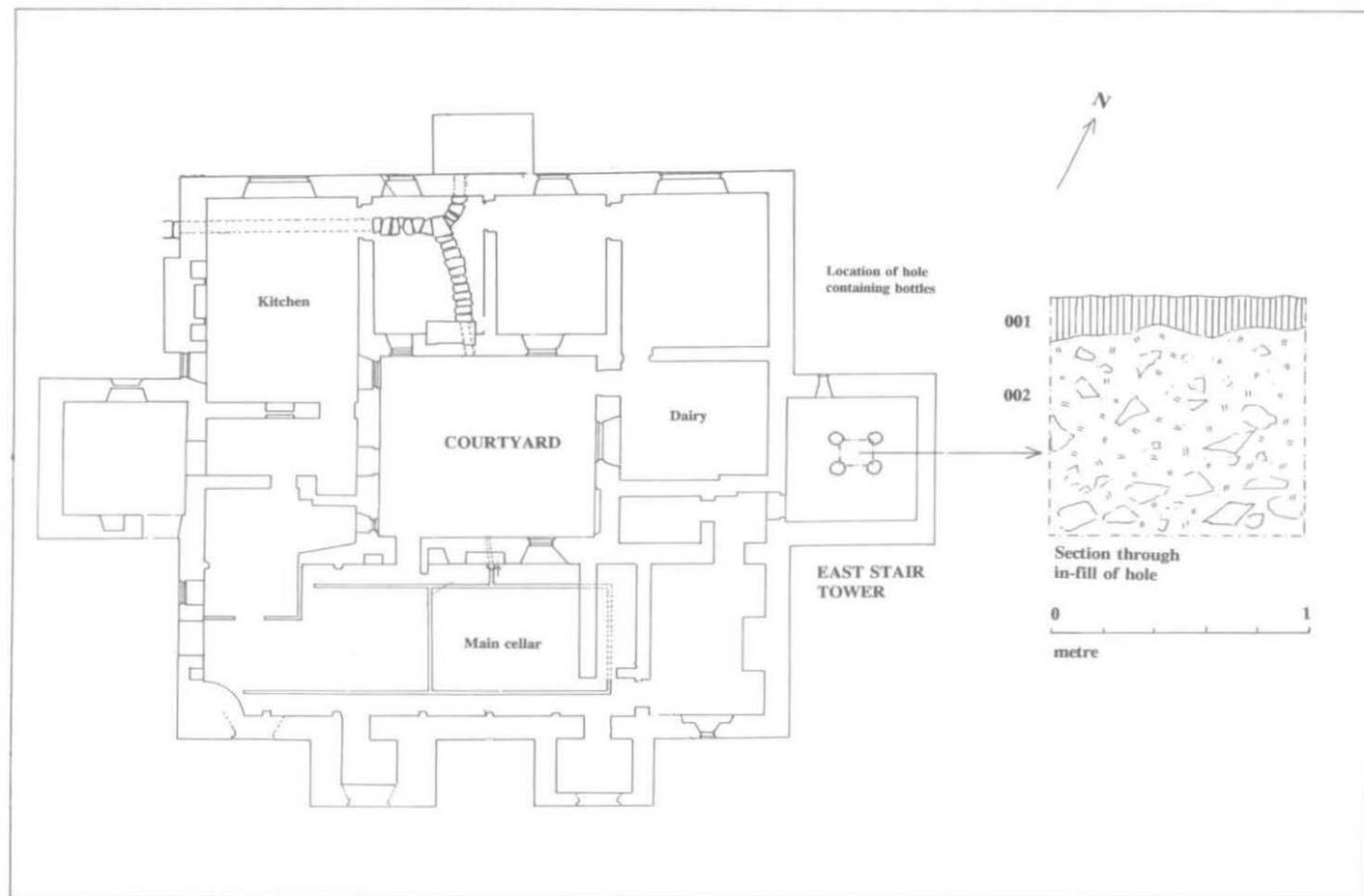


Fig. 1. Chastleton House, plan of the basement showing the pit containing the hoard below the east staircase.

glass and earthenware were recovered to allow for the almost complete reconstruction of five of the bottles and three of the earthenware vessels. One of the glass bottles was recovered as two halves, suggesting that when it was thrown into the hole it was complete. In addition to the four near-complete vessels there were a number of glass necks and shards which could not be reconstructed into a complete form and this would suggest that when the hoard was thrown down it consisted of both whole and broken vessels.

The nature of the hoard remains something of a mystery, as indeed does the purpose for which the hole was originally excavated. The hole slightly undercuts the bases of the columns but it could easily have been cut after their construction. The seals on the bottles would suggest a date of circa 1650 for their deposition, perhaps 1656, in which case the deposit almost certainly postdates the columns, although the date for the construction of the columns is by no means certain since it is known that the stairs above were rebuilt during the early part of the 19th century.¹

The bottles

Fig. 2

1. Shaft and globe shape with tall, slender neck, curved shoulders and rounded body. Shallow kick-up to base of vessel. Height 210 mm, maximum diameter 144 mm. Light olive green glass. It has a broad tapered string rim at the top of the neck with a stepped profile. An HI seal on the shoulder created by two separate stamps. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.303).

2. Similar to no. 1 but with slightly more angular shoulders. Height 210 mm, maximum diameter 142 mm. Light olive green glass. String rim slopes downwards slightly. HI seal on shoulder created with two stamps. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.301).

3. Shaft and globe shape virtually identical with no. 1 but slightly more angular kick-up. Height 213 mm, maximum diameter of body 146 mm. Light olive green glass. String rim slopes downwards slightly and has a slight vertical projection where it was initially applied to the body of the bottle. HI seal on shoulder created with two stamps. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.302).

4. Shaft and globe shape, virtually identical with no. 1 but slightly more rounded body. Height 213 mm, maximum diameter 139 mm. Light olive green glass. Broad string rim with similar vertical projection to no. 3. This bottle is not complete but is likely to have had an HI seal. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.305).

Fig. 3

1. Rounded globe shape body with squat cylindrical neck, slightly flared at the top. Height 188 mm, maximum diameter 140 mm. Light olive green glass. String rim has stepped profile and projections on topside and underside where it was initially applied and trailed away from the bottle. No seal on shoulder. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.304).

2. Neck and part of shoulders of a shaft and globe shape bottle. Light olive green glass. Projection on underside of string rim.

3. Neck and part of shoulders of a squat shaft and globe shape bottle. Light olive green glass. The neck is much shorter than on any of the other vessels. The string rim has a downward projection on the underside.

4. Neck and part of shoulders of a shaft and globe shape bottle. Light olive green glass. Slight projections on the top and bottom of the string rim.

5. Neck and shoulders of a shaft and globe shape bottle. Light olive green glass. Projections from both surfaces of the string rim.

¹ The National Trust, *Chastleton House, Analysis of Internal Fabric*, vol. 3, p. 105.

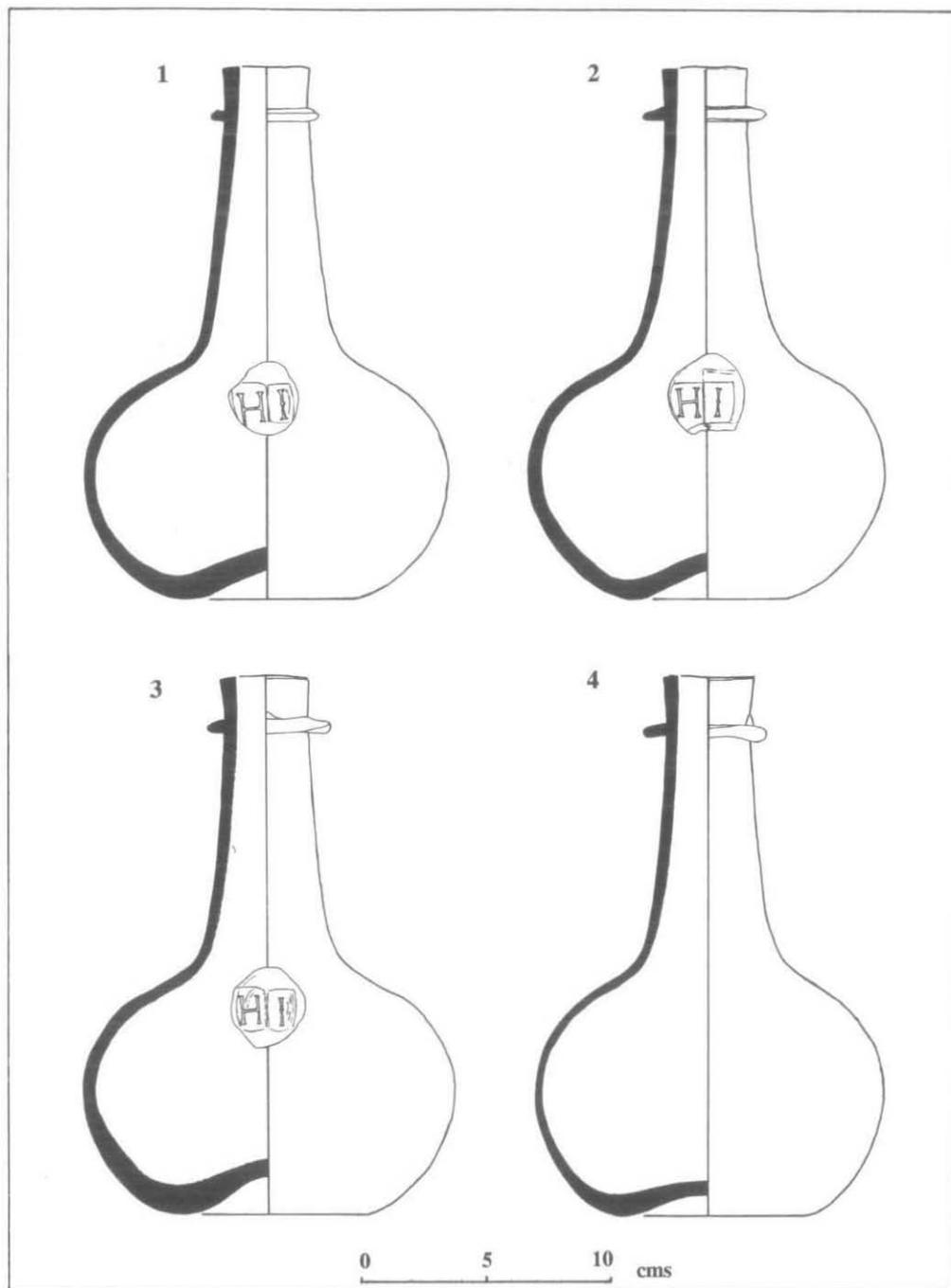


Fig. 2. Glass bottles recovered from the pit in the basement of Chastleton House.

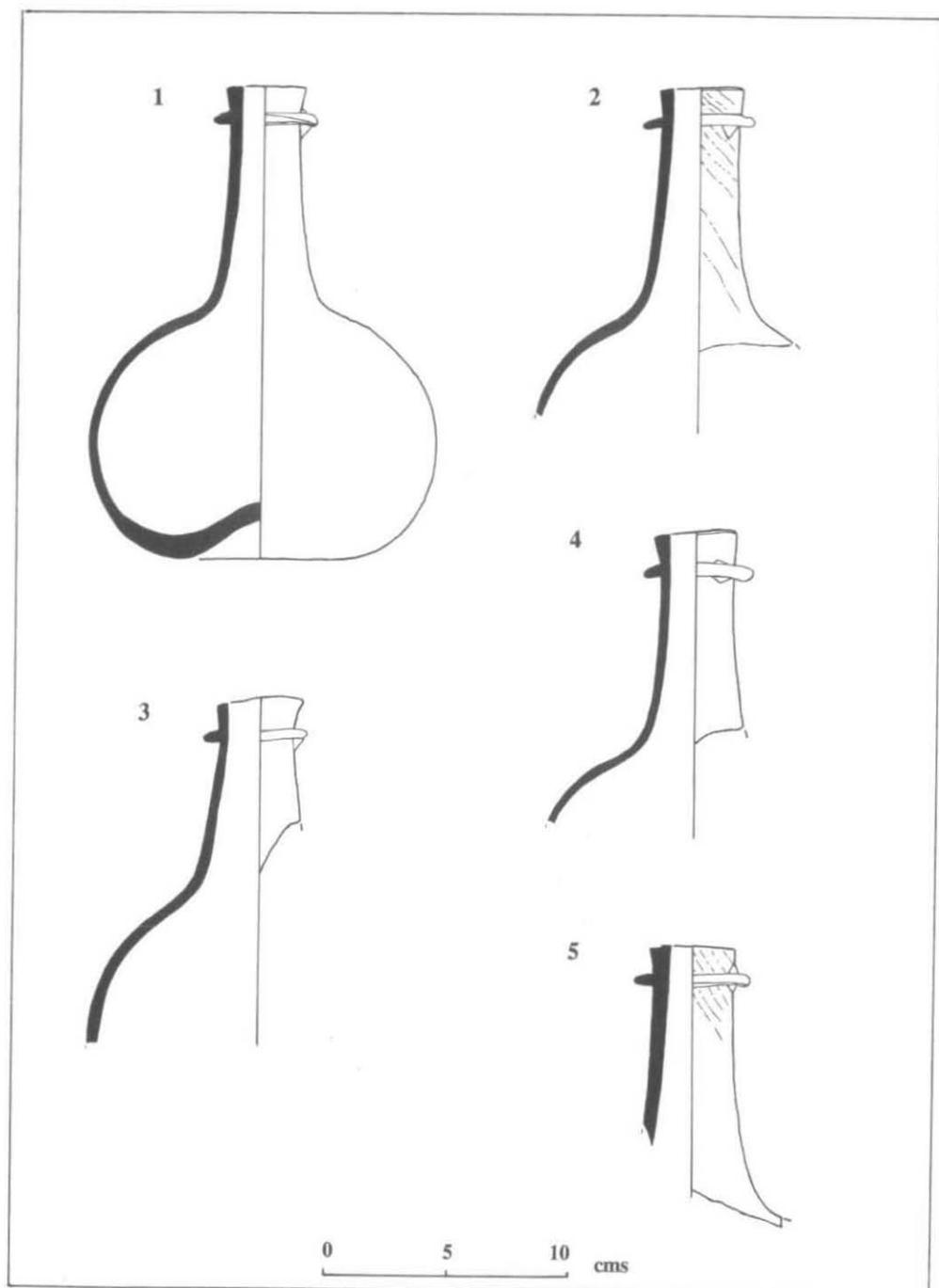


Fig. 3. Glass bottles recovered from the pit in the basement of Chastleton House.

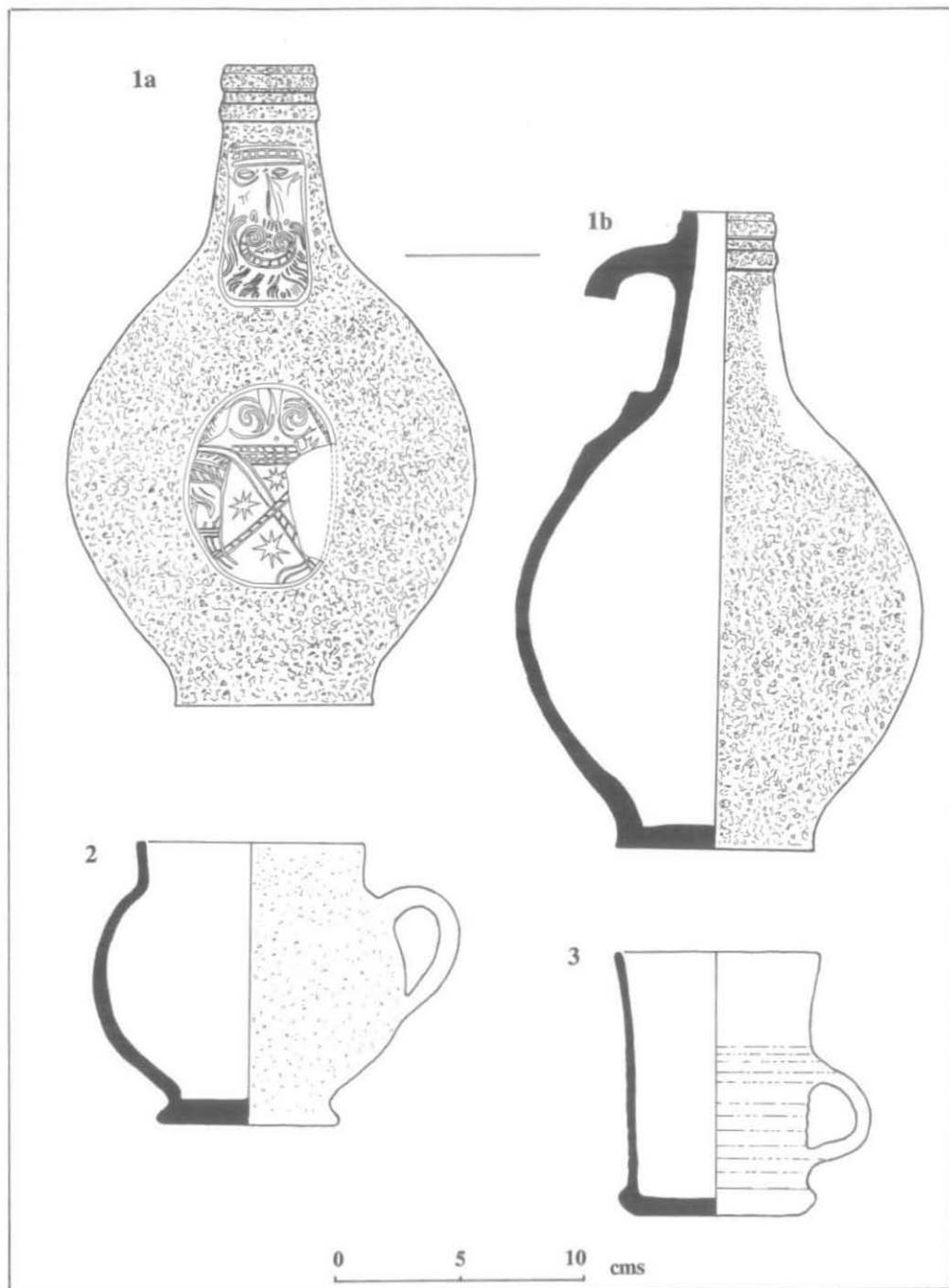


Fig. 4. Earthenware recovered from the pit in the basement of Chastleton House.

*Earthenwares**Fig. 4*

1a/1b. Stoneware Bellarmine jar with grey/light brown speckled saltglaze. Height 254 mm, maximum diameter 160 mm. The two motifs are stamped into the fabric of the jar, uppermost in the neck the face of Cardinal Bellarmine, and below this an oval with a diagonal cross flanked by four stars (part missing). (N.T. ref.no. CHS.C.306).

2. Globe shape ceramic cup with a single handle, cylindrical neck and slightly flared base. It has a light red fabric and the body is coated with a light green glaze containing numerous tiny white granules, possibly pieces of flint or chalk? Possibly Surrey/Hampshire border ware.

3. Small cylindrical cup with a single handle, slightly flared at the mouth. It has a hard red fabric and a dark purple/black lead glaze covering the entire vessel. The lower half of the body is very lightly ribbed. (N.T. ref. no. CHS.C.307).

Discussion

Surviving examples of the shaft-and-globe-shape glass wine bottle which can be dated are extremely rare. Professor Martin Biddle has collected and published a typology of 17th-century bottles which can be firmly dated from the evidence on the stamped seals and only three of these vessels can be assigned firm dates before 1660.² The earliest of these dates to circa 1650. The earliest with a firmly dated seal dates from 1657. The Chastleton bottles carry the HI seal which almost certainly indicates that these were the possession of Henry Jones who succeeded his father Walter Jones in 1633. Henry died in 1656. The bottles must therefore date from the period between 1633 and 1656, and 1650 might be a reasonable approximate date to assign to their manufacture, especially since the shaft-and-globe-shape almost identically matches the shape of the three dated bottles previously referred to.

Several aspects underlie the significance of this collection. They are particularly important because a firm date can be given for the last possible year of manufacture. To find a hoard of this size – five bottles have been reconstructed and there are necks for another four bottles (though strangely without the bases) – undoubtedly makes this a very important collection. They occupy a critical place at the start of the chronological development of the glass wine bottle form which evolved rapidly through the second half of the 17th century from the shaft and globe profile through to the squat onion shaped bottle which had become prevalent by the 1690s. A typology such as this must be a valuable tool to the archaeologist concerned with the dating of post-medieval contexts where bottle glass is available. The whole vessel is unlikely to be available but the shape of the bottle base, or perhaps a neck with a string rim still attached, is likely to give a fairly firm date when placed alongside an accurately dated typology.

It would seem almost certain that the bottles came from a single source of production and as a collection they are important for studying the technique of manufacture. The four vessels illustrated in Fig. 2 are almost identical in size and shape and three of the four carry the HI seal. The complete bottle in Fig. 3 (no. 1) has a slightly shorter neck matching the four neck-and-shoulder pieces but otherwise it has the same globe shape body. These five vessels do not appear to have carried seals. Each of the nine vessels is made from the same olive green glass and most carry the projecting lip or lips on the string rim, suggesting that the individual glassblower who made the bottles stuck to a strict routine in the method of manufacture. The aforementioned typology differentiates between two sizes of bottle, one of approximately 26 fl. oz. and the other, the 'half bottle', of approximately 15 fl. oz. The Chastleton

² M. Biddle, *Nonsuch Palace*, 2, fig. 127 (English Heritage Archaeological Monographs, in press).

bottles fall quite accurately into the former category and what is lacking in the height of the neck is countered by the slightly broader body.

A third aspect underlying the significance of these bottles is that they remain in the context in which they were utilised and subsequently discarded. It is perhaps ironic and no mere coincidence that they were recovered from the basement. The basement housed the cellars where the wine would have been drawn and brought to the table in the Hall, possibly using the bottles as containers. Alternatively wine may have been stored in the bottles in the cellars. Either way, with the seals on the shoulders they would have been suitable for presentation at the table of Henry Jones. It might not be too fanciful to surmise that immediately after Henry's death these items were no longer appropriate for gracing the table of his son, Arthur Jones, and they were therefore discarded into the shallow pit between the columns, along with the other items such as the earthenware and the knife.

Whatever the story behind the deposition of these items they have now been 'restored' to something resembling their former graceful appearance and will be available for inspection when the house opens to the general public in 1997. They may initially have been discarded as a hoard of unwanted rubbish but they can now take pride of place alongside many of the items of contemporary furniture and fittings in Chastleton House.

GARY MARSHALL