

PROCEEDINGS  
OF THE  
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN  
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS  
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



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IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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## A SAXON GLASS BEAKER FROM DRY DRAYTON, CAMBS\*

### I. GLASS BEAKER FROM THE A604 ROAD, NEAR DRY DRAYTON, CAMBRIDGESHIRE

D. B. HARDEN

#### *Description* (Plate 1)

Beaker; body and most of trailing bluish-green, but one pale yellow zigzag trail in upper criss-crossing band. Intact, except for one slanting internal crack, c. 6 cm long, low down on body; bubbly and streaky, with black impurities; no visible weathering.

Vertical rim, lip thickened and rounded in flame; walls taper gently down to level of uppermost horizontal trailing, below which they taper even more gently down to lowest horizontal trailing, whence they curve more rapidly inward to smallish bottom, flattened on a marver, near edge of which part of ring pontil-wad is still *in situ*.

From about 4.5 cm below rim to 2.5 cm above bottom are four spaced-out groups of horizontally-wound spiral trails, nos. 1 and 3 of which (reading downward) are fourfold with overlapping ends and nos. 2 and 4 are similar, but twofold. Linking nos. 1 and 2 and nos. 3 and 4 and overlying them are two bands each comprised of a pair of fourfold criss-crossing zigzags with 'wish-bone' pointed angles, one overlying the other. In the upper band a pale yellow zigzag overlies a bluish-green one; in the lower band both zigzags are bluish-green.

Vessel free-blown; trails drawn on.

Height 18.6 cm. Diameter rim 7.9 cm. Thickness walls at mid-point 0.2 cm.

*Glass at the Fitzwilliam Museum* (Cambridge, 1978), 57, no. 118, fig. on p. 58; D. B. Harden, 'Anglo-Saxon and later medieval glass in Britain: some recent developments', *Medieval Archaeology*, XXII (1978), 6, pl. iv, C; *National Art-Collections Fund Annual Report* (1979), 48, no. 2771, with fig.; D. B. Harden, 'Section IV, early medieval', in *Glass in the British Isles: Bulletin de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre*, no. 8, 1977-1980 (Liège, date not stated), 54, 240, fig. 19.

#### *Discussion*

In its shape this vessel is, so far as my knowledge goes, unparalleled in Saxon or Frankish glass, although it bears a close relationship to the large bag-beakers, type VI *a*, a type believed to be of British origin.<sup>1</sup> The slight concavity near the top of the body and the rather snub-nosed bottom remind us forcibly of these large bag-beakers, but the absence of any bulging of the body near the bottom divorces it in profile from all hitherto known examples of that shape. Despite this difference in profile there is, I believe, no justification for creating a new type and we must count this vessel a fresh sub-type within type VI.

The layout of the decoration is also unparalleled on Saxon or Frankish glass, although the components of it – horizontal spiral trails and zigzag bands – are no strangers to the Saxon and Frankish decorative repertoire.<sup>2</sup> What is specially unparalleled is the superimposition of zigzag bands over spiral trails and of one zigzag band over another. Always elsewhere, so far as I recall, vertical loops or zigzag bands often meet horizontal spiral trails, but never overlap them, except accidentally for one or perhaps two revolutions.<sup>3</sup> Very rarely also do more than two groups of horizontal trails appear on one vessel.<sup>4</sup>

We may see comparable horizontal spiral trailing on many shapes in the Saxon type-series.<sup>5</sup> On the other hand, although round-angled zigzags and wavy trails are frequent enough on Saxon and Frankish glasses,<sup>6</sup> zigzags with 'wish-bone' pointed angles, as on this Dry Drayton vessel, occur, so far as I know, on one other shape only, variety *a* of the pouch-bottle, type VII, which has a horizontal spiral trail on the neck changing without a break into a zigzag trail with 'wish-bone' pointed angles on the body.<sup>7</sup> Seven

\*The Society acknowledges gratefully a publication grant from the Department of the Environment.

examples of this variety of pouch-bottle are known from England (six from Kent, one from Suffolk) and I can cite none from the continent: indeed the continent seems to have produced none of the other two varieties of pouch-bottle<sup>8</sup> either, and there is every reason to believe that pouch-bottles, like bag-beakers, are a British, not a continental, form and must have had their origin in Kent.

In its decoration, therefore, as well as in its shape, this Dry Drayton vessel has a fresh and unexpected outlook. Most of the features this vessel exhibits point unhesitatingly to a date in the 7th century. Its close typological relationship to the bag-beakers, type VI, a type belonging to the 7th century,<sup>9</sup> are one good indication. Another is the very noteworthy resemblance between its zigzags and those on the pouch-bottles of type VII *a*, another 7th-century type. There can be no question of this beaker being of earlier date. Typologically it could perhaps be later, but since its completeness and its place of discovery – far away from any known settlement-site – suggest that it must have been part of a burial of which the mechanical digger threw up no other traces, we may safely accept it as having been buried no later than the 7th century, after the close of which deposition of grave-goods with burials fell into desuetude.

Where was it made? Its shape and decorative pattern have been shown to be as unparalleled on the continent as they are in England, and since its closest relations, the other bag-beakers, were very probably made in Kent, it seems likely that this new form of bag-beaker may also be of Kentish manufacture. That its particular form of zigzag ornament with ‘wish-bone’ pointed angles, is also, seemingly, only found on another English type, the pouch-bottle, adds strength to this suggestion.

#### NOTES

1. D. B. Harden, ‘Glass vessels in Britain and Ireland, A.D. 400-1000’, in *Dark-age Britain: studies presented to E. T. Leeds*, ed. D. B. Harden (1956), 141, 163, fig. 25, type VI *a*, pl. xviii, *d*. On the likelihood of these bag-beakers being Kentish see also J. Ypey in *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, 8 (1957-8) 87-91.
2. In support of these views cf. the wide range of Saxon and Frankish material described in Harden, *op. cit.* in note 1; F. Rademacher, ‘Fränkische Gläser aus dem Rheinland’, *Bonner Jahrbücher*, 147 (1942) 285-344; W. von Pfeffer, ‘Zur Typologie merowingerzeitlicher Gläser mit Fadenverzierung’, in *Festschrift des Römisch-Germanischen Zentralmuseums in Mainz zur Feier seines 100 Jhr. Bestehens 1952*, Bd. III, 147-60; and *id.* ‘Fränkisches Glas’, in *Glastechnische Berichte*, 33 (1960), Heft 4, 136-42.
3. Cf., e.g., the broad-bodied cone-beaker from Faversham, Harden, *op. cit.* in note 1, type III *a* ii 1, fig. 25, pl. xviii, *b*., and a squat jar and bowl in Bonn, Rademacher, *op. cit.* in note 2, pls. 64, no. 2, and 65, no. 2.
4. I know no example in Britain. For the continent see, e.g., Rademacher, *op. cit.* in note 2, pls. 48, no. 2, and 71, no. 3.
5. Cf. Harden, *op. cit.* in note 1, fig. 25, *passim*.
6. Cf. *ibid.*, types III *b*, VIII *a* iii and iv, and XI *a*, Rademacher, *op. cit.* in note 2, pls. 64, nos. 1-2, and 65, no. 2; von Pfeffer (1952), *ut cit.* in note 2, fig. 3, nos. 14, 16, 18, 19.
7. Harden, *op. cit.* in note 1, 14, fig. 25, type VII *a* 2 (Sarre, Kent) and pl. xviii, *f*, type VII *a* 1 (Bungay, Suffolk).
8. *Ibid.*, 141, fig. 25, types VII *b* and *c*.
9. *Ibid.*, 141.

#### 2. A SAXON GLASS BEAKER FROM A POSSIBLE ROUND BARROW, AND A MEDIEVAL GALLOWS SITE AT DRY DRAYTON, CAMBS

ALISON TAYLOR

The beaker (Fig. 1), described above by D. B. Harden, was discovered by a workman in the bucket of his machine during improvements to the A604 in 1977, at TL 395630. Human bones were noted on the site and so an emergency excavation was carried out over a week-end, with voluntary assistance and co-operation from the Eastern Road Construction Unit. No further grave-goods were discovered but it became apparent that there had been a low mound, perhaps originally built to cover a Saxon burial accompanied by the beaker, which had later been used for a gallows, probably in the Middle Ages.

The site lies next to the Roman road that ran from Colchester through Cambridge to Godmanchester and Ermine Street. It was an important highway in the Middle Ages and parish boundaries follow most of its length. The turn to Dry Drayton where this beaker was found is on the parish boundary and at a cross-roads that was probably in existence quite early, being the quickest route between Dry Drayton and Oakington. The cross-roads are shown on a map of about 1809 in the County Record Office, which also gives a field-name near the site as “Gallas field”. Farm-buildings, and later a public house, the Bell, stood here, obliterating any upstanding mound, and the area has now been landscaped as part of the new road junction.

At least half the site had been removed before it was examined archaeologically, and the entire surface



was very disturbed to about 30 cm below the modern ground level. However, traces of a gravel mound were visible and a total of at least twelve skeletons recovered. Some were disturbed and disarticulated, others had been crushed by machinery and portions of most of them were missing. All were very near to the excavated surface, therefore the original depths of the graves were not known. The graves were extremely narrow, with the skeletons packed tightly into them, and in places they intercut each other. All appeared to be adults, but the conditions of the skeletons and their recovery were such that detailed analysis of the skeletons was not justified.

The dating of the mound to the Saxon period depends entirely on its association with the beaker. A complete vessel of this quality and fragility must almost certainly have been deposited originally as a grave-good, but there is a slight possibility that it could have been brought from elsewhere as a collector's item and later lost, perhaps in the cellars of the public house. Its discovery on or very near a gallows mound would therefore be coincidental. It is particularly unfortunate that its exact location could not be determined, and that the presence of so many bodies made it impossible to tell if one had been associated with the beaker.

Early Saxon burials have been commonly found but barrows and glass vessels of this date are both very rare. In Cambridgeshire two other Saxon barrows have been recorded: one, at Bottisham, was 75cm. high and contained an inhumation in a 1.7m. deep grave, accompanied by a pair of gilded bronze mounts with shell and garnet bosses.<sup>1</sup> The other site, at Linton, was a large oblong mound, 53m by 28m, containing 104 inhumations with rich grave goods. These grave goods included a cone beaker of thin greenish glass with incised linear decorations.<sup>2</sup> Necklaces with glass beads are not uncommonly found in Early Saxon cemeteries, but the only other glass objects known in this County are the beakers from Dry Drayton and Linton and a 'claw' beaker from Chatteris, found in 1757 with a skeleton, sword, shield boss and spear, possibly as a secondary burial in a barrow.<sup>3</sup>

Hanging and mutilation were the normal punishments in the Middle Ages, prisons generally only being used for people awaiting trial, and, until the thirteenth century they were frequently imposed by the lords of the manor who benefitted by being allowed to retain the goods the hanged thief had stolen. Later the justices of the peace, representing the Crown, came to have more control over capital punishment and most hangings took place at the County's judicial centre, which in the case of Cambridgeshire would be Castle Hill, Cambridge. Felons were not given burial in consecrated ground and would probably be disposed of without ceremony where they were hanged.

The Dry Drayton gallows were apparently owned and used by the Abbot of Crowland, who had the right of *infangenethef* on this manor.<sup>4</sup> Technically this meant he had the right to hang thieves caught red-handed on his land but, like many other lords, he often exceeded this right. One Abbot of Crowland hanged a man who stole sixteen eggs, although the theft occurred outside his liberty;<sup>5</sup> therefore it would not be surprising if these gallows were well-used.

Gallows, which are often remembered in names such as "Gallows" or "Galley" field or hill, were normally sited on parish boundaries, in order to be as far from human habitation as possible. The only surviving (and much restored) example in Cambridgeshire is the Caxton Gibbet on the A45. They were often placed on low mounds and it is likely that suitable historic or natural features might be used for convenience, although there is a possibility of folk-memory relating to certain places. The use of the Bran Ditch, another Early Saxon earthwork, for hanging and burying felons has been discussed by David Hill in an earlier volume of these Proceedings.<sup>6</sup>

This glass beaker and its site are of exceptional interest if they represent an Early Saxon primary burial in a round barrow. The location of such a barrow on a Roman Road is also significant as it indicates the highway was important in the seventh century, which also means that the parish boundaries could have been laid out at a very early date. Re-use of the site for a gallows was probably due to the convenient shape of the mound and its situation on a highway and parish boundary.

#### NOTES

1. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments *North East Cambridgeshire* (1972), 13.
2. R. C. Neville, "The Anglo Saxon Cemetery on Linton Heath". *Archaeol. J.* 11, (1854) 95-115.
3. Victoria County History, *Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely I* (1938), 312.
4. "Placita de quo Warranto", Royal Commission, 1818, 103.
5. "Placita de quo Warranto", Royal Commission, 1818, 519, quoted by H. S. Bennet in "Life on the English Manor 1150-1400" (1956), 196.
6. D. Hill, "The Cambridgeshire Dykes" *PCAS* 66 (1977) 126-8.

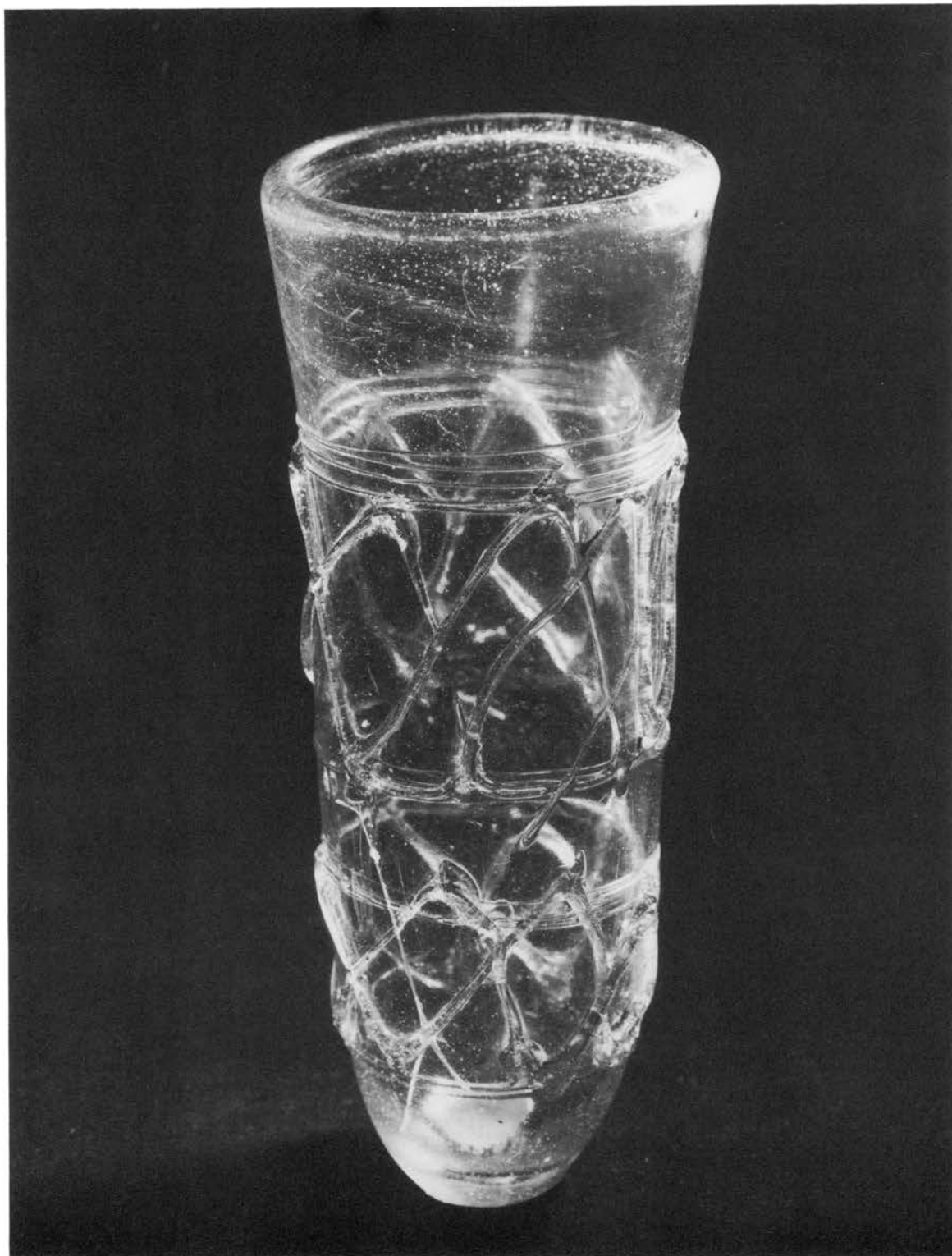


Plate 1. Saxon glass beaker from Dry Drayton, Cambridgeshire  
*Photograph by courtesy of the Fitzwilliam Museum.*

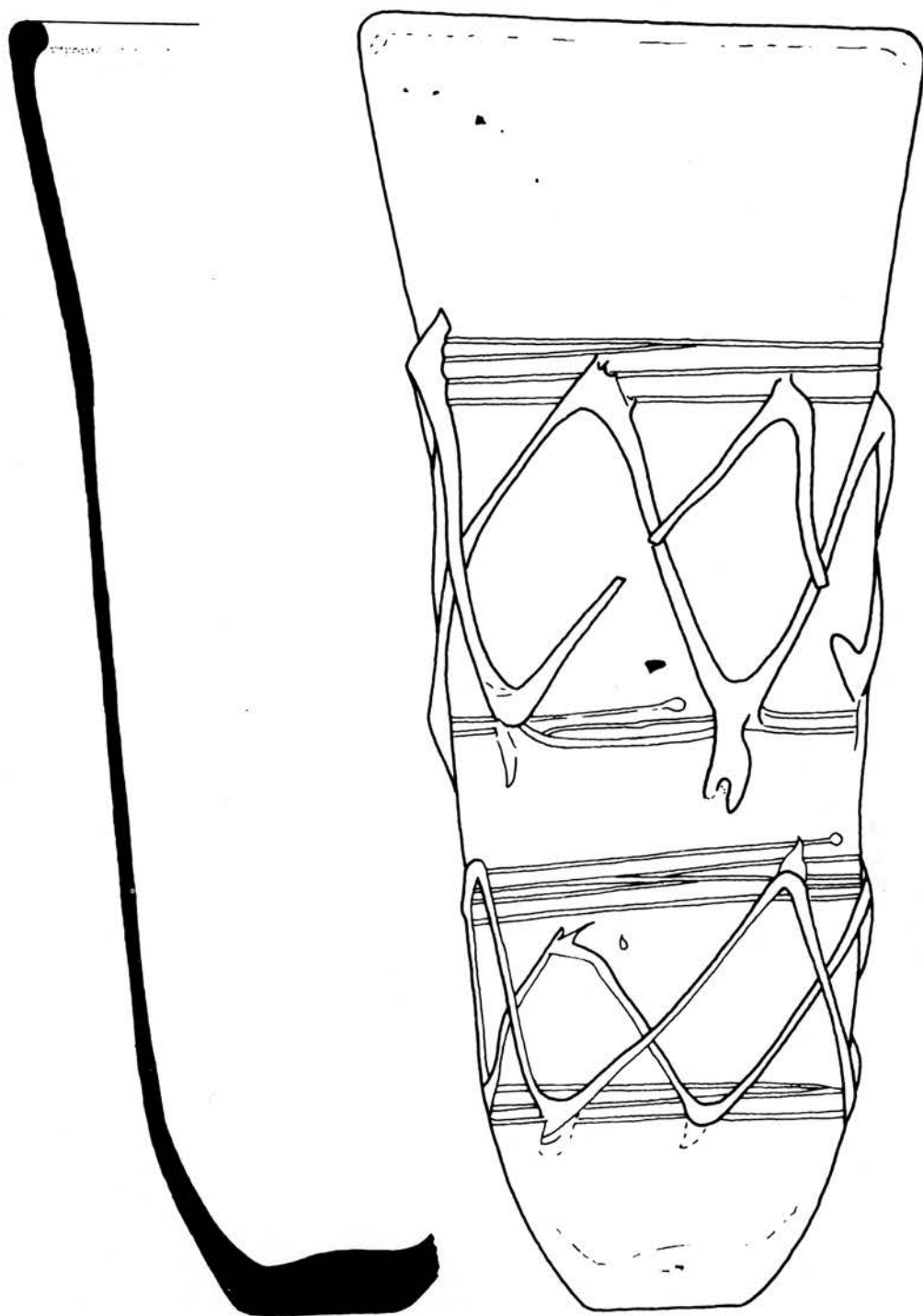


Fig. 1. Saxon glass beaker from Dry Drayton. Scale  $\frac{1}{1}$   
*From a drawing from R. Powell*



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