

# Cambourne New Settlement

Iron Age and Romano-British settlement  
on the clay uplands of west Cambridgeshire

Volume 2: Specialist Appendices

Web Report 3

*Glass, by Rachael Seager Smith*



# Cambourne New Settlement

## Iron Age and Romano-British Settlement on the Clay Uplands of West Cambridgeshire

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Jacqueline I. McKinley, Robert Scaife, Nicholas A. Wells and Sarah F. Wyles

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Volume 2: Specialist Appendices  
Part 1. Artefacts  
Part 2. Ecofacts

**Wessex Archaeology Report No. 23**

Wessex Archaeology 2009

Published 2009 by Wessex Archaeology Ltd  
Portway House, Old Sarum Park, Salisbury, SP4 6EB

<http://www.wessexarch.co.uk>

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ISBN 978-1-874350-49-1

Project website

<http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/projects/cambridgeshire/cambourne>

WA reports web pages

<http://www.wessexarch.co.uk/projects/cambridgeshire/cambourne/reports>

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## Glass

By Rachael Seager Smith

With the exception of five complete or almost complete vessels found inside a large late Roman shelly ware storage jar (see below), glass was comparatively rare at Cambourne, with only an additional 33 pieces, weighing 140 g, being recovered. Of these, four (74 g), were bottle glass fragments of post-medieval or modern date, the others being of Romano-British date. Glass was most common at Lower Cambourne, where the assemblage included a piece of window glass with a fire-rounded edge. A second piece of window glass, also from Lower Cambourne (context 63605), hints at the presence of a fairly substantial and sophisticated structure(s) somewhere in the vicinity.

The other pieces were all from vessels but most were small and featureless. The only diagnostic pieces comprise a lightly tinted greenish colourless fragment with self-coloured, unmarvered trailed decoration from segment 01233 of ditch 01001, pale green fragments from a jug or flask with a narrow cylindrical neck from segment 01373 of ditch 01151, both Phase 3, and a yellowish green piece with horizontal, self-coloured, unmarvered trailed decoration, possibly a convex cup or beaker (Price and Cottam 1998, 103–4, fig. 39) from context 02266.

Similarly small quantities of Romano-British glass have been recovered from other excavations in the area around Cambridge, for example at Castle Hill (Liversidge 1999), sites along the route of the A1 (Ellis *et al.* 1998) and Eaton Socon (Gibson 2005). Clearly it was available, at least in small quantities, even to the rural residents of this east Midlands area, but factors such as desirability, affordability and relevance of this relatively exotic material, and its easy recyclability need to be considered when trying to explain why it is not better represented in the archaeological record.

Of particular interest are the five glass vessels which had been placed in a large pottery jar and then deliberately deposited in the upper fill of an enclosure ditch (context 3010) at Lower Cambourne. The vessels (Fig. 44, 1–5) comprise:

- **one biconical jug with funnel mouth (Fig. 44, 1)** (Isings 1957, form 120a; Price and Cottam 1998, fig. 72; Obj. no. 505). Fairly strong green bubbly glass; in use in the later 4<sup>th</sup> century; quite common; sometimes found in burials. One complete example from a grave dated to second half of 4<sup>th</sup> century (probably *c.* AD 360–380) in the Butt Road cemetery Colchester (Cool and Price 1995, 147, fig. 8.11, no. 1160) as well as frags from a second vessel in a post-medieval/modern context at the same site (no. 1161). There is also an example in a deposit of late 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century glass, pottery, and pewter vessels from Dorchester on Thames, Oxfordshire (Harden 1939, 293). Evidence from Colchester suggests that the form was introduced during the period *c.* AD 300–350, gradually declining in use or availability during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Cool and Price 1995, 220–1);
- **three cylindrical bottles with opposed dolphin-shaped (looped) handles (Fig. 44, 2–4)** (Isings 1957, form 100; Price and Cottam 1998, fig. 94; Obj nos 502A and B, and 504). In use later 3<sup>rd</sup>–third quarter of 4<sup>th</sup> century; quite common on settlements, but sometimes found in burials. Evidence from

Colchester suggests that the form was introduced during the period *c.* AD 230–300, and remained popular until the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Cool and Price 1995, 219–21). Lightly tinted bubbly glass, varying from greenish colourless to light green – characteristic of the 4<sup>th</sup> century;

- **one hexagonal bottle with opposed dolphin-shaped (looped) handles (Fig. 44, 5)** (Price and Cottam 1998, fig. 95; Obj. no. 503). In use late 3<sup>rd</sup>–third quarter of 4<sup>th</sup> century; not common – no complete example from Britain). Lightly tinted greenish colourless and very bubbly glass. Roughly cracked off rim. Decorated with optic-blown diagonal ribbing before being blown into a hexagonal mould. No raised design on base but a darker green spiral is apparent within the glass. Evidence from Colchester suggests that the form was introduced during the period *c.* AD 300–350, gradually declining in use or availability during the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century (Cool and Price 1995, 220–1).

All three of these forms probably used for serving liquids (perhaps wine) at table.

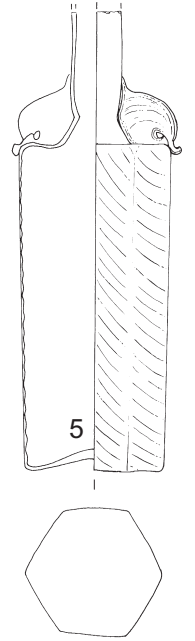
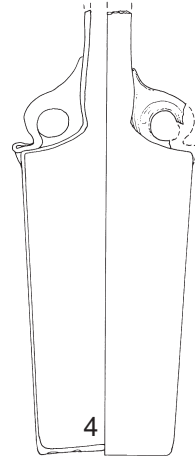
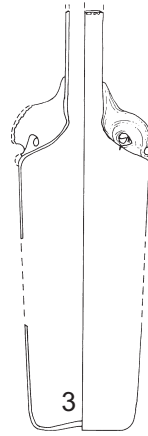
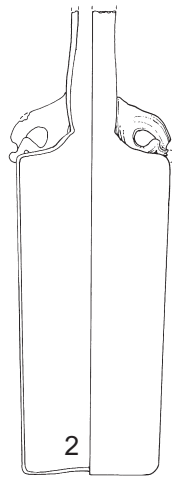
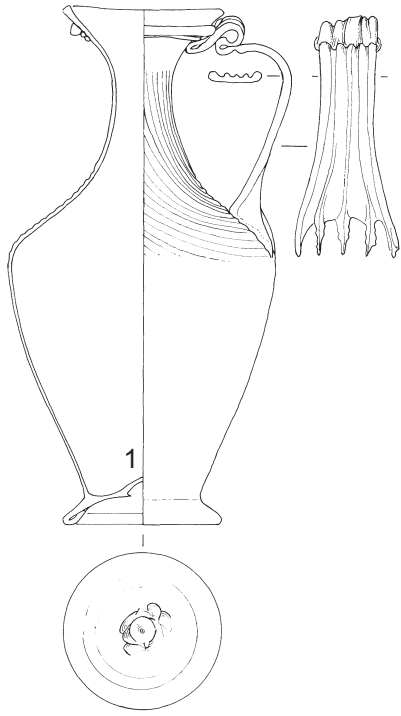
The vessels were placed in the jar in a complete form (some fragments may have been lost from the upper part of the jar as this had been slightly truncated). Such a deposit of complete vessels in a non-funerary context is very unusual, and cannot be regarded as the result of the deposition of normal domestic debris.

Other 4<sup>th</sup> century glass ‘hoards’ include the following recorded by Price (2000, 5):

- 11 vessels inside a bronze bowl inside a wooden bucket deposited in a pit cutting 4<sup>th</sup> century occupation levels at the Saxon Shore fort at Burgh Castle, Norfolk;
- Four 4<sup>th</sup> century glass vessels plus other objects inside a large pottery jar from the Vicarage garden Dorchester on Thames. Included a biconical jug with funnel mouth. Harden (1939) suggested that they accompanied a cremation burial, but they may have been deposited for safekeeping or another, perhaps votive, purpose;
- Two fairly complete vessels from a rural settlement at Wint Hill, Banwell, Somerset. There are few details of the location, but they were possibly stored in a container of wood or a wall-cupboard;
- A completely decomposed vessel (?a pipette-shaped unguent bottle) found inside a wooden box with jet and shale jewelry at the Orchard Street site, Chelmsford. Few details but interpreted as votive or a hoard.

Notable glass vessels from burials in Cambridgeshire have been recorded by Liversidge (1977) and include:

- Litlington. Blue glass flagon with blown ribs and facemask at base of handle, 2<sup>nd</sup> century, imported from Seine–Rhine area; part of a small keg-bottle or barillet, 3<sup>rd</sup>–4<sup>th</sup> century, also from Seine–Rhine area;
- Girton. Small cylindrical beaker and a glass bowl possibly imported from Egypt amongst other glass and pottery vessels, an iron lamp and hanger, and other fixtures and fittings from a chest containing cremated human remains;
- Hauxton. A unique flask plus two bowls and a bottle, all probably Rhineland (Cologne) imports – *c.* AD 150–250.





Twelve excavations were carried out by Wessex Archaeology within the Cambourne Development Area. Situated on the clay uplands west of Cambridge, which have seen little previous archaeological investigation, the results presented here are important in demonstrating the ebb and flow of occupation according to population or agricultural pressure.

Short-lived Bronze Age occupation was followed in the Middle Iron Age by small farming communities with an economy based on stock-raising and some arable cultivation. The Late Iron Age seems to have seen a recession, perhaps partly due to increased waterlogging making farming less viable.

From the mid-1st century AD new settlements began to emerge, possibly partly stimulated by the presence of Ermine Street, and within a century the area was relatively densely occupied. Several farmsteads were remodelled in the later Romano-British period, though none seems to have been very prosperous.

Dispersed occupation may have continued into the early 5th century at least, followed by a hiatus until the 12th/13th century when the entire area was taken into arable cultivation, leaving the ubiquitous traces of medieval ridge and furrow agriculture.

ISBN 978-1-874350-49-1



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