EXCAVATIONSAT MELLOR



Report on the vessel and window glass



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MELLOR: FINDS

ACI	ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS		
1	Introduction	3	
2	VESSEL GLASS	3	
3	WINDOW GLASS	8	
4	SUPPLEMENT TO THE ROMAN POTTERY REPORT	9	
5	BIBLIOGRAPHY	11	
6	ILLUSTRATIONS	13	

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MELLOR: FINDS

1 Introduction

1.1 In 2010, Oxford Archaeology North (OA North) was commissioned by the Mellor Archaeological Trust to report on a limited range of finds, principally the metalwork, from a succession of excavations at or around the Old Vicarage, Mellor (SJ 982 889). These were undertaken annually, and included work from 1998 to 2009 (Site codes OVM98 to OVM09). These reports were submitted in 2011, and OA North was subsequently commissioned to produce a further report on the vessel and window glass from the site, and to prepare a comment on a small number of fragments of Romano-British pottery, to add to an extant specialist report.

2 VESSEL GLASS

- 2.1 In all, 953 fragments of glass were examined, 652 of vessel glass and the remainder flat glass, most likely to be from windows. They vary in their state of preservation, but in general survive remarkably well. There is occasional iridescence, some surface dulling, and, on occasion, fragments are quite scratched and abraded. Fragment size is generally small, with few vessels represented by more than three fragments. As a result of this, it has proved impossible to provide any valid estimate of the number of vessels present, although it is clear that there were considerable numbers. On occasion, there were part-melted fragments, and it seems likely that a substantial proportion of the assemblage derives from domestic middens, which could account for its highly fragmentary nature.
- 2.2 Like other finds from the site, most of the assemblage was unstratified, or from highly disturbed topsoils, and thus there is little to be gained from a consideration of their stratigraphic position. It is clear, however, that the vessel glass was particularly concentrated in Trench 15 (excavated in 2001), with lesser concentrations in Trench 1 (2002), Trench 24 (2004), and Trench 70 (excavated in 2009), although there do not appear to be any particular trends in the material from these locations (Table 1).

Excavation season	Site sub-division	Vessel	Window
OVM (year unspecified)	General unstratified	11	0
OVM98	Context 1, trench unspecified	4	4
	Context 106, trench unspecified	1	1
OVM99	General unstratified	2	0
	Trench 3	9	5
OVM00	General unstratified	4	4
	Trench 1	2	7
	Trench 2	10	12
	Trench 3	12	5
OVM01	Context 1, trench unspecified	23	15
	Context 2, trench unspecified	1	2
	Trench 15	82	26
OVM02	Trench 1	48	31

	Trench 2	36	4
	Trench 3	1	1
	Trench 16	2	0
	Trench 25	1	1
OVM03	Context 440, trench unspecified	4	1
	Trench 3	24	1
	Trench 6	15	8
	Trench 7	12	10
	Trench 18	29	17
	Trench 21	16	21
	Trench 23	18	9
	Trench 24	9	5
OVM04	Trench 17	3	2
	Trench 26	7	5
	Trench 27	41	15
	Trench 31	1	0
OVM05	Trench 35	6	2
	Trench 36	27	15
	Trench 37	11	3
OVM06	General unstratified	31	6
	Trench 43	29	11
	Trench 44	5	3
	Trench 45	1	2
	Trench 46	12	1
	Trench 49	45	7
	Trench 51	7	13
OVM09	General unstratified	1	0
	Trench 70	40	16
	Trench 71	9	10
Total		652	301

Table 1: Distribution of vessel and window glass

- 2.3 **Roman material:** despite the expectation that there might be Roman vessel glass, based on the presence of Roman pottery and other finds from the site, no Roman vessel or window glass was noted.
- 2.4 Medieval and early post-medieval vessel glass (to c 1670): some 27 fragments were recognised as being fine table glass of very late medieval/early postmedieval date, and the principal interest of the entire assemblage lies with these vessels. All fragments were relatively small, but in remarkably good condition, most being completely unweathered, and with no sign of mineralisation, something to which some glass of this date can be very susceptible (Wilmott 2002, 7). Many of the vessels are in greenish high-potash glass, often referred to as 'forest glass', which, in the medieval period, was regarded as of poor quality (Charleston 2001, 257). Technological improvements in the early sixteenth century (op cit, 258) gave a better-quality product, and the good condition of this kind of glass from Mellor suggests strongly that it all dates to the mid-sixteenth century or later. Early seventeenth-century glasshouses have been excavated at Bickerstaff, near Ormskirk, in Lancashire (dated to c 1600; Hurst Vose 1995) and Haughton Green, Denton, near Manchester (dated to c 1615-53; Hurst Vose 1994), and it is quite likely that much, if not all, of the greenish glass from the site originates from one or the other. There are, in addition, several fragments in a greyish-colourless metal, sometimes known as façon de Venise, copying

- expensive imports from Venice, and often made in the Low Countries (Wilmott 2002, 20). There are also three fragments in a deep manganese purple, the source for which has not been determined, although Hurst Vose (2011, 183) notes a few fragments of manganese-tinted glass from Bewsey Old Hall in Cheshire.
- 2.5 Most of the fragments are small and relatively undiagnostic as to vessel shape, but it is likely that most derived from cylindrical or pedestal beakers, widely used as beer glasses (Wilmott 2002, 36). Both were fashionable from the midlate sixteenth to the end of the seventeenth century, and both were in widespread use (Charleston 2005, 229). Whilst both vessel forms have similar rims, their bases differ significantly, and the few base fragments seen in this group are all from cylindrical beakers. The earliest (Plate 1) was unstratified, but from Trench 27 (2004), and is the complete base of a small, plain cylindrical beaker (the diameter of the base is c 50mm) in a greyish-colourless metal, having an applied base-ring with rigaree decoration around the base. The form was particularly common in the first half of the seventeenth century (Wilmott 2002, 37, type 1.1). Contemporary examples are known locally from Norton Priory, near Warrington (Hurst Vose 2008, 365, fig 254.73) and Chester (see, for instance, OA North 2011). Base fragments from Trenches 2 (OVM02, unstratified) and 3 (OVM00, context 3002) are from broadly similar beaker bases, this time in greenish glass and decorated with an opticblown net (sensu Wilmott 2002); both lack a base ring, suggesting them to be marginally later in date. A similar fragment, unstratified, but from Trench 26 (OVM04), appears to have optic-blown ribs, although at the base of the vessel they are extremely faint.
- 2.6 Rim fragments from similar vessels, or from larger pedestal beakers, also came from several trench assemblages. An upright rim, with ribbed and wrythen decoration, in façon de Venise glass (Plate 2) was from Trench 25 (OVM02, unstratified); similar rims in greenish forest glass were from Trench 18 (OVM03) context 301, and Trench 71 (OVM09), unstratified. An unusual rim fragment in dark red or purple (Plate 3) came from Trench 27 (OVM04, unstratified) and is probably decorated with thick-cut trailing (Wilmott 2002, 40); again, it can be dated to the mid-sixteenth to mid-seventeenth century. The remainder of the early post-medieval vessel fragments were very small and could not easily be assigned to a particular form. Most were in greenish glass, but there were two further dark red/purple fragments, clearly from a different vessel, in Trench 70, context 1 (OVM09). Most are probably from beakers, but there was also a small fragment from a brownish-colourless vessel with a constricted neck decorated with optic-blown ribs, from Trench 3, context 3002 (OVM00). A small fragment from the shoulder of a similarcoloured vessel, again with a constricted neck, was from Trench 15, context 1 (OVM01). A single small applied handle (Plate 4), in greyish-colourless façon de Venise glass, was unstratified from Trench 27, and is probably from a seventeenth-century bowl or posset, like those seen at Nonsuch Palace (Charleston 2005, 249).
- 2.7 There was also a small amount of more utilitarian greenish glass, probably locally sourced, from Bickerstaff and Haughton Green. The neck and rim of a

small bottle (Plate 5) was found in Trench 3 (OVM00, context 3002). Its exact form cannot be determined, but it could derive from a small square-sectioned case bottle (Wilmott 2002, 87) or an apothecary's vial (Charleston 2005, fig 120.122), and dates to the later seventeenth century. It must be noted, however, that case bottles continued to be produced well into the eighteenth century (Noel Hume 1969, 62), and a probably eighteenth-century fragment came from Trench 1, context 1 (OVM02). A small base in dark green glass, found in the 2000 season (OVM00, unstratified), is also likely to be of seventeenth-century date, and although the form cannot be identified with confidence, could also be from an apothecary's vial.

- 2.8 There was a considerable amount of dark olive-green vessel glass (239 fragments, *c* 37% of the total vessel glass assemblage). This was characteristically used for wine bottles from the late seventeenth century, throughout the eighteenth (when it was at its most popular) and on into the nineteenth century (Noel Hume 1969, figs 8-13). Most of the datable vessels from Mellor can be placed in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century on form; an early 'shaft and globe'-type bottle was unstratified in Trench 70 (OVM09), and can probably be dated to *c* 1650 (Wilmott 2002, 89). Others, from many of the trenches excavated, are of the squatter 'mallet' form, dated to the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries (Noel Hume 1969, figs 8, 9).
- 2.9 The amount of relatively expensive drinking vessels from the site seems to suggest that the later sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a prosperous time for the inhabitants of this part of Mellor. They seemed to have embraced the growing fashion for glass drinking vessels (replacing stoneware; Charleston 2005) with enthusiasm. In the later medieval period, fine glassware was the preserve of the wealthiest households (Keys 1998, 230), but in the sixteenth century, with the growth of the English glass industry, access to fine glassware was becoming easier, and its use was percolating down through the social classes (Wilmott 2002, 23). Silverware remained the material of choice for the vessels of the wealthiest, as can be seen in contemporary probate inventories (see, for instance, that of Sir Thomas Butler of Bewsey, dated 1579 (Lewis *et al* 2011, 18-19, table 1), which mentions both silverware and drinking glasses), but imported glassware, like the *façon de venise* bowl or posset from Trench 27, was undoubtedly a luxury item.
- 2.10 Without doubt, the residents were obtaining many of the 'forest glass' vessels from local producers, as several glasshouses are known in the locality and appear to have been supplying a number of local sites, including Norton Priory (Hurst Vose 2008) and Bewsey Old Hall (Hurst Vose 2011) in Cheshire, the inhabitants of both of which were probably of similar or higher social standing. Mellor was also obtaining more expensive luxury goods from further afield, with some of the drinking vessels possibly imported from the Low Countries. The presence of a significant quantity of dark green bottles, used for wine or other alcoholic drinks, seems a natural adjunct to the emphasis on high-quality drinking glasses, and again points to a certain concern for the better things in life.

- 2.11 Eighteenth-century and later vessel glass: there is little that can be identified as fine glass of eighteenth-century date, although a few colourless fragments from the feet of wine glasses, came from Trench 1, context 1 (OVM02), Trench 18, context 303 (OVM03) and Trench 36, context 2 (OVM05). All of them have the edge of the foot folded under, which is characteristic of vessels of early eighteenth-century date (Bate nd, 29), and they probably pre-date c 1730 (Bickerton 1984, 6). Nothing remains, however, of the stems or bowls of these vessels, apart from two small fragments of colourless engraved vessels, probably leaded, and possibly of eighteenth-century date, from Trench 3, context 1 (OVM03). Later wineglass fragments, from a single vessel with a turquoise bowl on a colourless plain stem, came from unstratified material in the 2006 season, and are probably late nineteenth or twentieth century in date. There are, in addition, several small fragments of Nailsea-type glass, in this case a small dark green vessel with marvered splashes and streaks of opaque white and pale blue. Fragments of a small base (Plate 6) came from unstratified material recovered in 2006, and of an elongated narrow neck from Trench 7 (OVM03) context 1. The Nailsea glasshouse began production in 1788 and continued to produce a wide range of vessels until the end of the nineteenth century (Vincent 1975), but it must be noted that 'Nailsea-type' glass was produced by several other manufacturers, who may have continued to produce such vessels over a longer period (ibid).
- 2.12 More utilitarian eighteenth-century vessels included fragments from the rims and necks of two small pharmaceutical bottles in pale bluish-colourless metal, from Trench 21, context 2 (OVM03), which might date to the last quarter of the century. Apart from these, eighteenth-century vessels are restricted to dark green wine bottles (see *Section 2.7*). The majority of these date to the late seventeenth and earlier part of the eighteenth centuries. This apparent decline in deposition over the century might suggest some change in the status and or habits of the occupants of the site but, as so little of the glass was recovered from securely stratified contexts, this must remain a subjective speculation.
- 2.13 The fragmentary and poorly stratified nature of the assemblage drastically reduces the significance of the nineteenth-century and more recent vessel glass from the site, and it is pointless to report on it in any detail. There is a wide range of tablewares, including pressed flint glass, imitating cut crystal, first produced in Britain *c* 1830 (Notley 1997, 6). There is a range of mould-blown bottles with applied rims dating to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and machine-made bottles, post-dating the introduction of the technique to Britain in 1907 (Hurst Vose 2008, 369). Again, it can only be a speculation, but the range and quality of the glassware used at the site during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries reflects a much more modest lifestyle than that of the seventeenth century.

2.14 Select Catalogue of vessels:

Base of cylindrical beaker with applied base ring (Plate 1). The base has rigaree decoration. Greyish-colourless *façon de Venise* glass. Good condition, slightly dulled, incomplete.

Ext diam: 50 mm

OVM04, Trench 27, unstratified, late sixteenth-mid-seventeenth century

An upright, fire-rounded rim, with ribbed and wrythen decoration, in *façon de Venise* greyish-colourless glass (Plate 2). Good condition, incomplete.

Diam: *c* 60 mm; Th: 1-2.5 mm

OVM02, Trench 25, unstratified, late sixteenth-seventeenth century

An upright, fire-rounded rim, with thick, cut trailed decoration, in very dark red or purple glass (Plate 3). Excellent condition, incomplete.

Diam: *c* 60 mm; Th: 1-3 mm

OVM04, Trench 27, unstratified, late sixteenth-seventeenth century

4 Small applied loop handle with remnant of the vessel wall, probably from a bowl or posset (Plate 4). *Façon de Venise* greyish-colourless glass. Excellent condition, incomplete.

L: 23 mm

OVM04, Trench 27, unstratified, late sixteenth-seventeenth century

5 Neck and rim of small bottle or vial (Plate 5). Dark green metal. Fair condition, incomplete.

Diam: 32 mm

OVM00, Trench 3, 3002, late seventeenth century

Fragments of a small base small in dark green with marvered splashes and streaks of opaque white and pale blue (Plate 6). Nailsea-type glass. Good condition, incomplete. Diam: *c* 70 mm

OVM06, unstratified, late eighteenth-nineteenth century

3 WINDOW GLASS

- 3.1 In all, there were 301 fragments of flat glass for windows (Table 1), ranging in date from the sixteenth-seventeenth century to the modern day. Like the vessel glass, it was generally in very good condition, but fragments were small, seldom more than c 40mm in maximum dimension, and most were mid-pane fragments.
- 3.2 Early post-medieval window glass: there were, in total, 98 fragments of early post-medieval window glass, ranging between 1mm and 2.5mm in thickness, and in a range of colours (dirty greenish to bluish green) typical of potash-rich 'forest glass'. Where it could be determined, all seemed to be cylinder ('muff') blown, and there were small straight sheet-edge fragments, with a distinctive fire-rounded edge (Charleston 2001, 253), from Trench 1, context 1 (OVM02), Trench 27, unstratified (OVM04), and Trench 51, context 1 (OVM06). Such glass was made at both Bickerstaff (Hurst Vose 1995) and Haughton Green (Hurst Vose 1980; 1994) alongside vessels (see Section 2), and is broadly contemporary. Muff glass was the predominant form of window glass at this time, persisting into the early eighteenth century, to c 1720, when crown glass became predominant (Hurst Vose 2011, 181).
- 3.3 Although the fragments were small, grozed and diamond-cut pane edges survived on 13 fragments, suggesting that the glass came from small diamond-shaped quarries, which would have been set within lead kame to form window lights. The use of a diamond point for glass cutting began in the sixteenth century (Archer 1985, 9), and remains in use to the present day. In one or two cases, differential weathering has preserved the line of the leadwork.

- 3.4 **Eighteenth-century and later flat glass**: window glass is markedly more difficult to assign a date to than vessel glass, and most of the later glass can only be assigned the broadest of date ranges. There is nothing obvious to suggest the use of crown glass, in widespread use from c 1720 to c 1850 (Hurst Vose 2011, 181), on the site, although one or two fragments vary considerably in thickness over a short distance, which is a characteristic of this kind of glass.
- 3.5 Cast window glass came into production from the late eighteenth century, in St Helens (Barker and Harris 1994, 112) and, since then, several different mechanised processes have been used to produce plain and textured sheet glass (Hurst Vose 2011, 181). There are, in addition, a few fragments of coloured sheet, presumably originating in 'stained' glass used in nearby domestic buildings. Two small fragments from Trench 15, context 2 (OVM01) are cased ruby glass, with decorative patterns formed by cutting away the thin layer of red glass, and there is a small square cased ruby quarry from Trench 3, context 3002 (OVM00); these are likely to be of nineteenth-century date.

4 SUPPLEMENT TO THE ROMAN POTTERY REPORT

4.1 A small group of Romano-British pottery was examined (Table 2). Deriving mainly from Trenches 70 and 71, excavated in 2009, they were not submitted for inclusion in the main pottery report by Ruth Leary. This group comprises 31 sherds, weighing 457g. Several fragments from trenches excavated earlier were also encountered in the mixed boxes of finds examined. These are included in Table 2, and tabulated (Table 3), but it seems possible that they have been included in earlier catalogues, and thus are likely to appear in Leary's archive report (Leary nd).

Excavation season	Site sub-division	No fragments	Weight (g)
OVM99	General unstratified	2	-
OVM02	Trench 20	1	-
OVM03	Trench 18	4	-
OVM05	Trench 33	2	-
OVM08	Trench 65	4	-
OVM09	Context 1, trench unspecified	2	52
	Trench 70	20	197
	Trench 71	9	208
Total		44	457

Table 2: Distribution of Romano-British ceramic vessels examined for this report

4.2 Examination of the pottery reiterates Leary's comment (Leary nd) that the condition of the pottery was poor, most of the sherds being small and abraded, having suffered from burial in acidic soil conditions. The pottery was highly fragmented with many tiny scraps defying firm identification, and some fabric divisions are affected by these conditions. It is very likely that a proportion of the oxidised ware group was originally white or red slipped. There seems nothing in the small group examined that is not represented in the fabric series presented by Leary, and the same terminology is used here.

Excavation Season	Site sub- division		No fragment	Weight (g)	Description
			S		
OVM99	General unstratified	9999	2	4	Small undiagnostic body sherd and chip
OVM02	Trench 20	152	1	30	Bead rim, large vessel, coarse vesicular fabric
OVM03	Trench 18	305	2	14	Greyware jar, early rim
OVM03	Trench 18	305	1	8	Body sherd, vesicular or calcite-gritted
OVM03	Trench 18	305	1	24	Rim fragment, form suggests Dales ware, but fabric does not seem shelly
OVM05	Trench 33	20	2	22	Reduced calcite-gritted fabric, very hard-fired. Flat base
OVM08	Trench 65	2	4	24	Three body, coarse oxidised; one body greyware
Totals			13	126	

Table 3: Other fragments of Romano-British pottery examined

- 4.3 An additional three fragments (90g) of Black Burnished ware 1 (BB1) were recorded: one body sherd from a small jar from Trench 70, context 2; and two joining body sherds from a jar from Trench 71, context 181, fill of pit 180. In both cases, the vessels seem to bear an acute lattice, and there seems every reason to date to the Antonine period, as proposed by Leary (nd).
- 4.4 Seven fragments (118g) fall within Leary's greyware group. Four vessels are represented, two jars, a bead-rim bowl, and a perforated fragment, probably from a strainer of some kind. One of the jars, a neckless everted-rim jar of late first/early second-century date, from Trench 70, context 362, resembles one in Leary's GRA12 fabric, although the fabric of this example is clearly different, having a marked black surface.
- 4.5 Fifteen fragments (137g) fall within Leary's oxidised ware group (nd). Most are abraded body sherds, and no attempt can be made at an estimate of the number of vessels represented. Most appear to fall within her general Cheshire Plains oxidised ware group, and one (6g), from Trench 70 context 362, shows the remnant of a cream external slip (FLB1). Also included in this group is a single small fragment from the base of a Severn Valley (SV) ware vessel (4g), from Trench 70, context 359. There is also one fragment (20g) in an open vesicular ware from the topsoil (context 1), which does not seem to resemble the shelly fabrics described by Leary, having a noticeable amount of mica visible on the surfaces. Although clearly from immediately below the rim of a relatively small everted-rim jar, nothing more can be said of the form. A single unidentifiable scrap (2g) was from Trench 70, context 2. In addition, four joining fragments (64g) of a mortarium came from Trench 70, context 68. This is probably a Mancetter-Hartshill (MH) product.

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ILLUSTRATIONS

LIST OF PLATES

Plate 1	Base of cylindrical beaker
Plate 2	Façon de Venise glass beaker, with ribbed and wrythen decoration
Plate 3	Rim fragment in dark red or purple glass
Plate 4	Small applied handle, in <i>façon de Venise</i> glass, probably from a bowl or posset
Plate 5	Neck of a small bottle, probably locally manufactured
Plate 6	Small fragment of Nailsea-type glass, with marvered splashes and streaks of opaque white and pale blue



Plate 1: Base of cylindrical beaker



Plate 2: Façon de Venise glass beaker, with ribbed and wrythen decoration



Plate 3: Rim fragment in dark red or purple glass



Plate 4 Small applied handle, in façon de Venise glass, probably from a bowl or posset



Plate 5: Neck of a small bottle, probably locally manufactured



Plate 6: Small fragment of Nailsea-type glass, with marvered splashes and streaks of opaque white and pale blue