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**The South Gate Cemetery of Roman Gloucester: excavations at
Parliament Street, 2001.**

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The South Gate Cemetery of Roman Gloucester: excavations at Parliament Street, 2001

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With contributions by H.E.M. Cool, Teresa Gilmore and E.R. McSloy

Introduction

Between January and June 2001 Cotswold Archaeological Trust (CAT; now Cotswold Archaeology) undertook a programme of archaeological recording on behalf of Persimmon Homes (Wessex) Ltd during residential development of land between Parliament Street and Old Tram Road, Gloucester (OS Nat. Grid SO 83031816). The site lay just outside Gloucester's Roman and medieval defences and 100 m to the east of Southgate Street (Fig. 1).

In 1994 a planning application was submitted for the redevelopment of a car park for housing, and shortly afterwards a second application was made for similar development of a contiguous site to the east. The archaeological potential of this area had been amply demonstrated by investigations on the adjacent Southgate House site in 1989 which had found a 1st-century AD metalled surface interpreted as a market place, a Roman inhumation burial and English Civil War defences (Atkin 1990, 3). Gloucester city council therefore required that archaeological evaluation of both sites be undertaken in advance of determination of the planning applications. The evaluations, undertaken in 1994 and 1996, established the presence of a series of truncated archaeological features of predominately Roman date, although Saxon pottery was retrieved from one ditch in trench 96/2. The archaeological features were sealed by a thick accumulation of post-medieval soils, typically 1.5 m deep (Garrod 1995; Sermon 1996). In the light of the evaluation results it was agreed with the city council that the proposed development would be founded upon a series of concrete piles, with archaeological recording during groundworks.

The site sloped gently downwards from north to south mirroring, if slightly exaggerating, the natural topography. A watching brief in the northern part of the site revealed solely the deep post-medieval soil accumulations identified in the evaluations. However, as development proceeded southwards (downslope) it quickly became apparent that there was a shallower accumulation of garden soil and that Roman deposits, including a number of burials, would be disturbed by construction. Prior archaeological excavation was therefore required in this area (Fig. 1). All graves were completely excavated whilst other features were sampled. Following completion of the fieldwork an assessment was made of the findings and an interim account published (Bateman and Williams 2002). In 2005 Cotswold Archaeology was commissioned to produce a fuller publication report to a specification agreed with Gloucester city council.

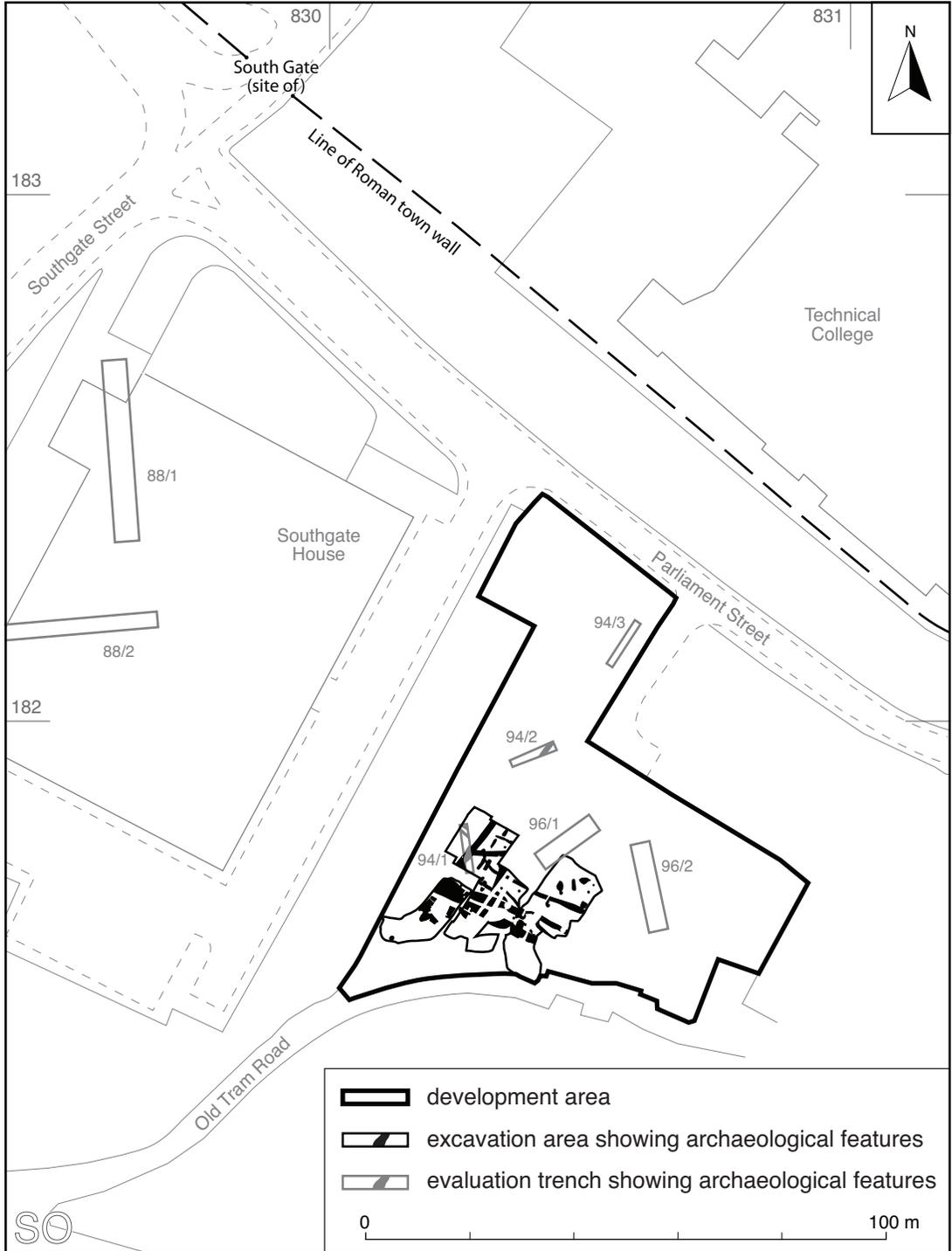


Fig. 1. Location of the excavation.

Results

The various cut features found have been assigned to five phases based upon their stratigraphic relationships, fill characteristics, and the dating evidence contained within them (Fig. 2). It is, however, worth noting the inevitable constraints upon this phasing. The features were heavily truncated and often only survived to a very shallow depth. This hindered attempts to ascertain stratigraphic relationships and also partly explains the small quantities of artefacts recovered. It should also be pointed out that the excavation area depicted on Fig. 2 represents a composite of individual house plots and associated access routes. The excavation area was never seen in its entirety during the fieldwork.

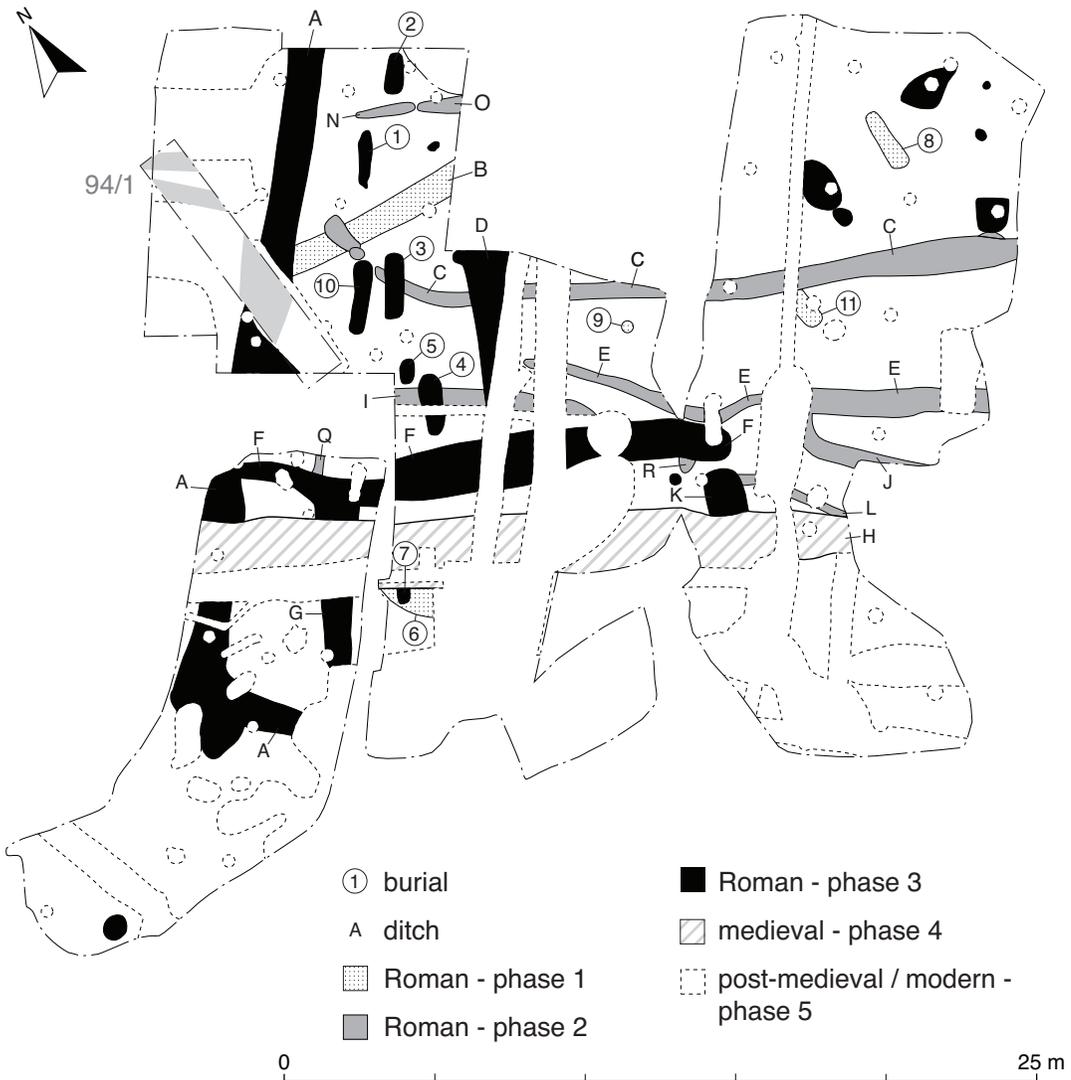


Fig. 2. Excavated features.

The underlying geology of the site comprised lower lias clay. In several places thin spreads of naturally deposited calcareous gravel overlay the clay and appeared to fill periglacial features or relict palaeochannels. The lias clay was also covered by an intermittent layer of alluvial silty clay, 0.2–0.3 m thick, the upper surface of which had been weathered. All Roman features cut these deposits.

No features were found which could be firmly associated with the 1st-century AD military occupation of Gloucester. The main discoveries comprised one cremation and eight inhumation burials. The cremation (Burial 9) was interred in a Severn Valley ware jar of which only the very base survived. A small chip of Central Gaulish samian ware found with the cremated contents dates to the 2nd century AD. It is possible that the cremation represents the earliest activity on the site (Phase 1) as cremation was the commonest form of Romano-British burial practice in the 1st and 2nd centuries AD to leave an archaeological trace, whereas inhumation was more prevalent from the 3rd century. This is by no means assured, however, as there was a local tradition of inhumation in the Severn valley in the early Roman period (Holbrook 2006), while 3rd- and 4th-century cremations occur sporadically within inhumation cemeteries (such as the cremation from the East Gate cemetery of Gloucester: Heighway 1980, 57, fig. 7).

Establishing a sequence for the inhumation burials is difficult. Burials 6 and 8 were the only two individuals buried on an alignment nearer N–S than NE–SW. In both cases the heads faced to the north, and the presence of iron nails in the two graves suggests that both were buried in wooden coffins (Fig. 4). Burial 6 was a female aged 26–35 years who was interred with a glass flask of exceptional design (see Cool, below). In addition to these two burials an undated, but similarly oriented, feature was found which might represent an unused grave cut (?Grave 11). Ditch B, *c.* 1.6 m wide, although not closely dated, is assigned to this phase by virtue of its alignment perpendicular to the graves (it was the only ditch on this alignment within the excavation area). It is difficult to date this activity. The glass flask from Burial 6 is likely to date to the second half of the 2nd or the early part of the 3rd century AD, but given that it was salvaged from a broken vessel, it is quite possible that it was buried long after its date of manufacture. The small quantities of pottery from the two grave fills are of little assistance for dating, while that from Ditch B comprises only late 1st- to 4th-century AD Severn Valley ware and a residual sherd of Iron-Age shell-tempered ware.

The next episode on the site (Phase 2) comprised the digging of a number of sinuous gullies (C, E, I, J, L, N, O, Q, R), the majority broadly aligned NW–SE, and thus parallel with the Roman city's defences. The gullies were less than 1 m wide and shallower than the other ditches on the site. Gully C cut Ditch B of Phase 1, and a number of the gullies were in turn cut by later burials and ditches. The latest Roman activity (Phase 3) is represented by inhumation burial on an essentially NE–SW alignment distinct from that used for Burials 6 and 8. Six inhumations (Burials 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 7) were found, with a possible unused grave (?Grave 10) adjacent and parallel to Burial 3. Burials 1 and 3 were laid with the head facing to the south-west, while Burial 2 faced to the north-east (Fig. 3). Burial 4 was buried face down with the head at the south-western end of the grave, while Burial 5, a 6–8 year-old child, was similarly aligned but the head had been removed and placed between the legs (Fig. 4). Burial 7, another prone burial, cut through the grave fill of Burial 6. The presence of several iron nails with Burials 1 and 2 indicates that these bodies at least were interred in wooden coffins. The burials appear to have been laid within at least two burial plots defined by Ditches A, D, F, G and K, each *c.* 1.1–1.8 m wide. A single human femur was recovered from the fill of Ditch A in evaluation trench 94/1, and this same ditch was also identified further to the north-east in evaluation trench 94/2. The pottery recovered from the grave fills, most notably a South-East Dorset black-burnished ware jar from Burial 7, would be consistent with a date in the second half of the 3rd or 4th century. Pottery from Ditch A included large sherds from a South-East Dorset black-burnished ware jar with flaring rim, and a sherd from an

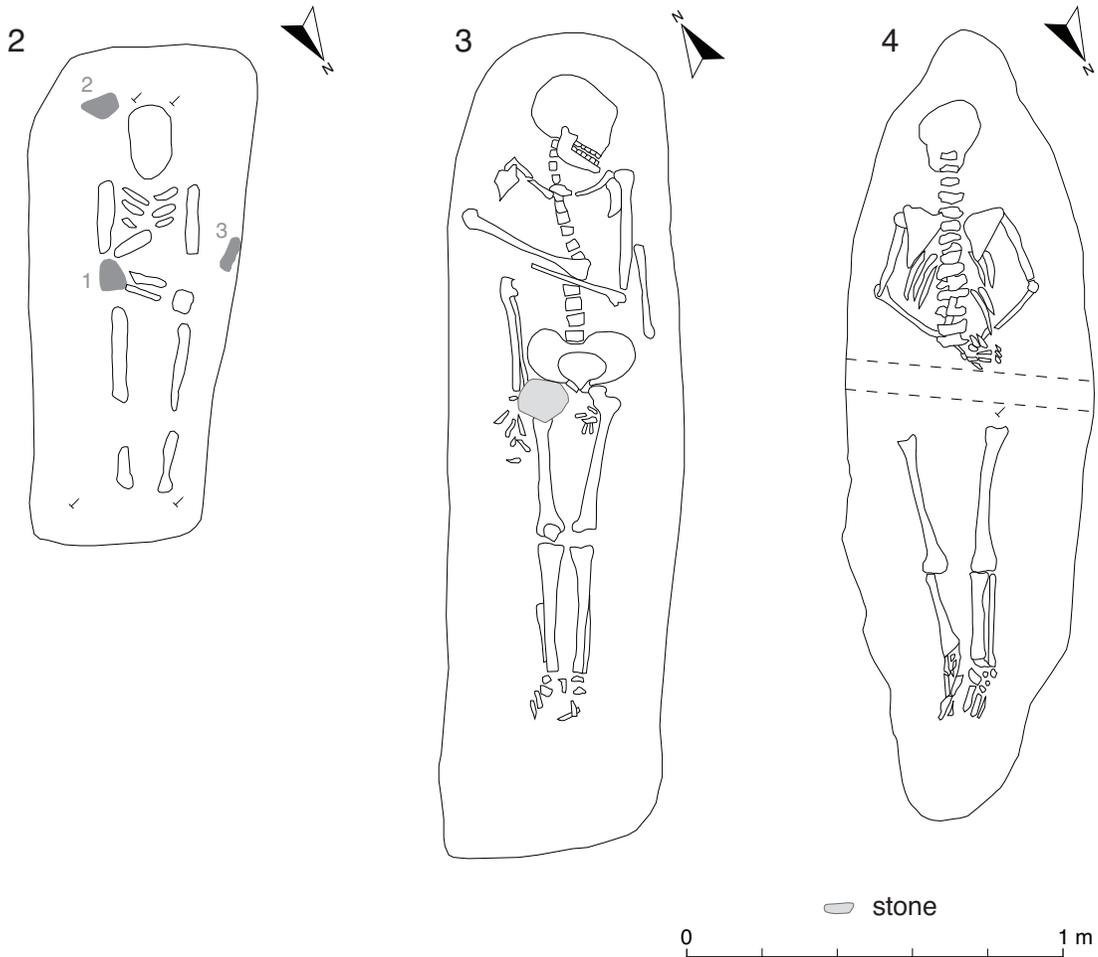


Fig. 3. Burials 2, 3 and 4.

Oxfordshire red colour-coated ware bowl, both of which probably date to after *c.*AD 270/300. The other features assigned to this phase produced little useful dating evidence.

In contrast to the 1996 evaluation no Anglo-Saxon features were found and medieval activity (Phase 4) was represented solely by Ditch H, up to 1.70 m wide and 0.67 m deep, which was dug at right angles to Southgate Street. The ditch yielded a single sherd from a strap handle in an oxidised, glazed, Malvernian fabric. Malvern Chase glazed wares were manufactured from the 13th to early 17th century, although the coarseness of the fabric and the speckled green glaze of this sherd suggest that it probably dates to the 13th–15th century. The whole site was covered with post-medieval soil accumulations, and later activity (Phase 5) was restricted to remnant pitting and disturbance associated in all likelihood with cottages (now demolished) fronting Old Tram Road.

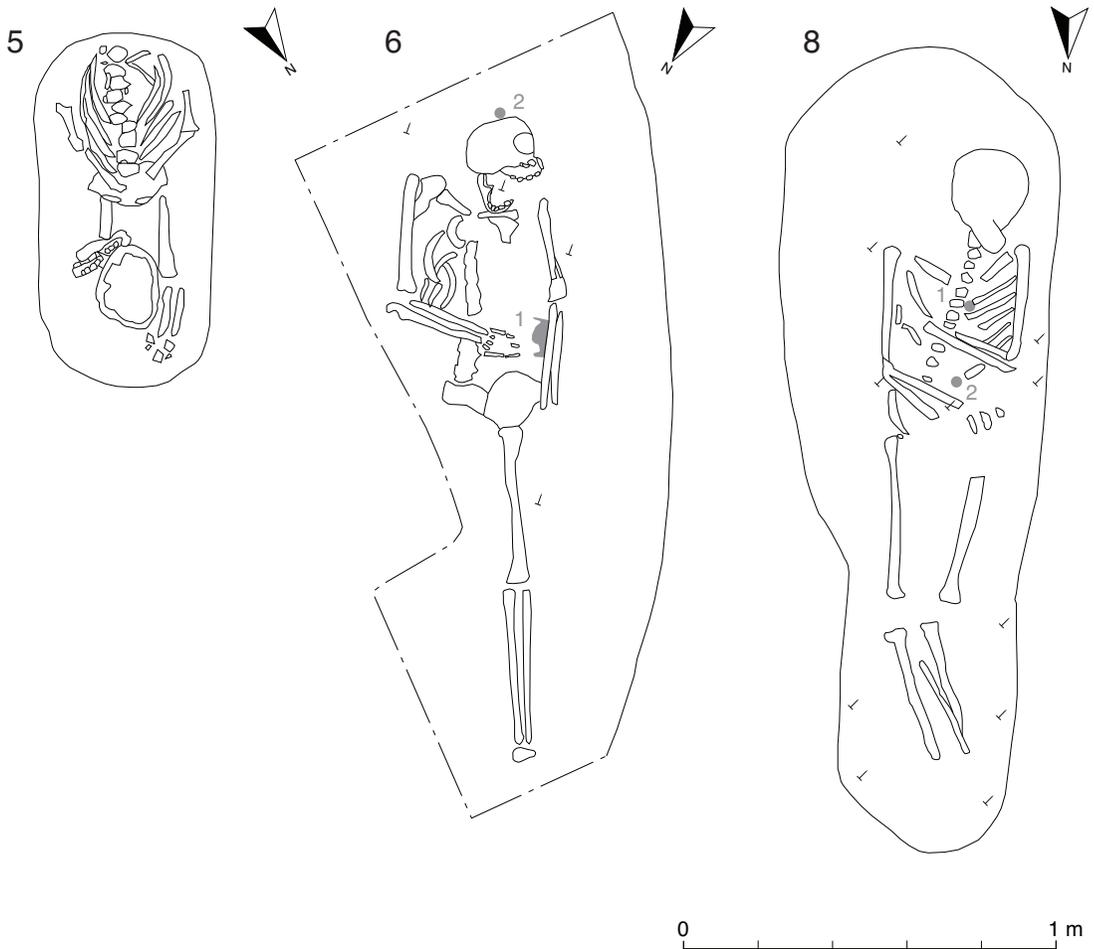


Fig. 4. Burials 5, 6 and 8.

The Glass Flask by H.E.M. Cool

The little flask found accompanying the woman in Grave 6 is a most remarkable find (Figs. 5 and 7). Though it looks complete, originally it would have formed a miniature inside a much larger vessel. Two similar examples found in graves in Cologne preserved both the inner and the outer vessels, and from them it can be seen that the larger outer vessel would have been of the same general shape as the inner one, though not so elaborately decorated (Fremersdorf 1959, 60–1 Tafn. 77–9). In the case of the flask from Gloucester, the larger vessel has broken at some point and the body has been carefully trimmed around the original base ring to produce the present appearance of a small two-handled flask on a stand. Fig. 6 shows what the complete, original vessel might have looked like.

The type of coloured decoration belongs to the distinctive style known as snake thread. There were both western and eastern Empire variants of this, the western typically having polychrome trails on a colourless ground. Given the distribution of the known examples of the western style, it is believed that they were made in the Rhineland (for general discussion see Harden *et al.* 1987,

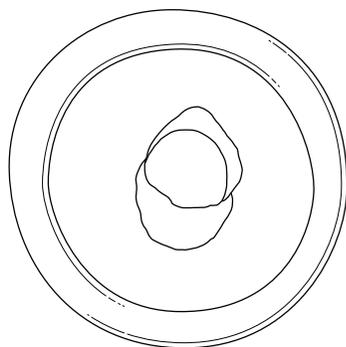
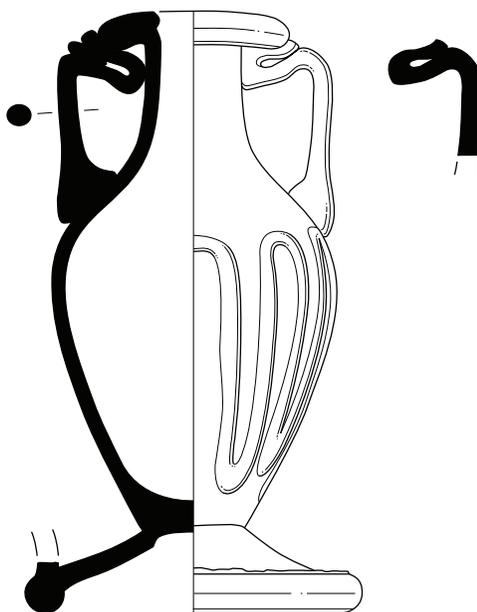
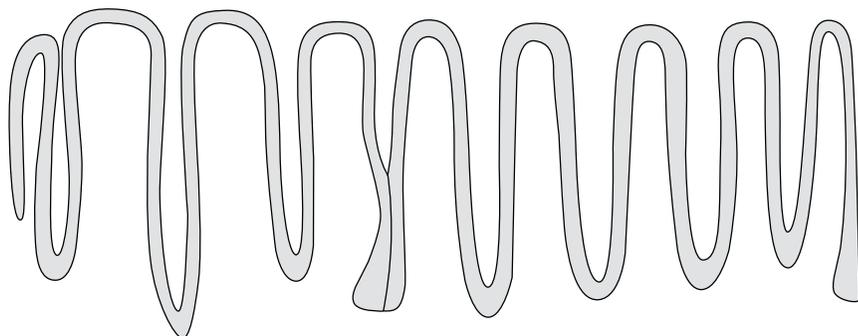


Fig. 5. Roman glass flask.

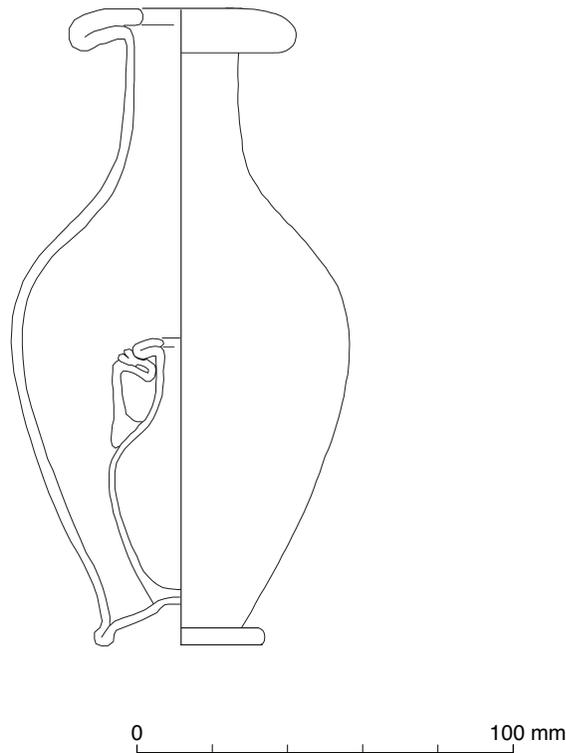


Fig. 6. Reconstruction of the original appearance of the complete glass flask.

105–8). The cemeteries around Cologne have produced numerous examples of a range of forms decorated in this way, and it seems likely that these vessels were being made in the vicinity. The Gloucester flask belongs to this Rhenish tradition and was undoubtedly an import. Snake-thread glasses were being made during the later 2nd century and into the 3rd century AD. In Britain, prior to this discovery, fragments from snake-thread vessels have been found in site assemblages but never as a grave good. Fragments from such vessels are not particularly rare in site find assemblages belonging to the later 2nd to mid 3rd century, but they certainly cannot be described as common (Cool and Price 1995, 62).

As most snake-thread vessels in Britain are known only from body fragments, the precise types of vessel they came from are generally unknown. It can be surmised, however, that most would have come from what appear to be the commoner forms, judged by their incidence in the Rhineland, i.e. beakers and flasks with stemmed feet and jugs (see Fremersdorf 1959). Indeed, where sufficient of the vessel is preserved in British contexts as at Aldborough, North Yorkshire (Charlesworth 1959, 54, pl. III.4), and Chichester (Charlesworth 1978, 269 no. 26, fig. 10.22), it is these forms that are found. The flask-within-flask form is rare even in the Rhineland and it might be questioned whether these were ever the part of the normal trade that brought most snake-thread vessels to Britain. It is noticeable that the graves around Cologne occasionally have other novelty snake-thread items which are generally not found elsewhere, such as a pair of unguent bottles in the form of flip-flop sandals and the dropper flasks made in the shape of helmeted heads (Harden *et al.* 1987, 134–7). It seems likely that the flasks-within-flasks should be seen in a similar light, as

examples of occasional products that required considerable expertise to produce (see below) and remained in the home market. They may even have been special commissions.

If this is correct, then it opens up intriguing questions about the woman in whose grave this little flask was found. We know that she died in Gloucester and had in either her possession, or the possession of one of her mourners, an item that would have been extremely uncommon in Britain. Was this the personal possession of an individual whose origins lay in the Rhineland and not in Gloucestershire? Of course we cannot know how old the flask was when it was placed in the grave. The original vessel can be thought of as being made *c.*AD 200, but was it a long-treasured and carefully looked-after item before whatever disaster struck that resulted in the breakage of the outer shell and the careful preservation and modification of the intact inner flask; or did disaster strike early? Was it the woman herself who had brought it, or was it her mother or grandmother? The possibility that the family was of immigrant stock is perhaps strengthened by the fact that here we have the only example of a snake-thread vessel placed in a grave in the entire province. The absence of snake-thread vessels in Romano-British graves is remarkable given the numbers seen in graves elsewhere in the north-west provinces (Price and Cottam 1998, 32). This is not because glass vessels were not being deposited in 2nd- and 3rd-century graves in the province (Cool



Fig. 7. The glass flask (photograph by Steve Russell).

2004, 372, table 8.38). Rather, given that snake-thread vessels would have been available, it seems a matter of deliberate choice. They were not deemed appropriate grave goods by the majority of the population who were rich enough to have access to them. In this they mirror the status of contemporary samian vessels which though common enough in site assemblages were also actively rejected as grave goods by the majority of the population (Evans 2004, 352). Where samian vessels occur in large quantities in the cemetery at Brougham (Cool 2004), it is probably because the community burying its dead there was an immigrant one. Are we seeing something similar here?

Moving on from these speculations, it may also be noted that the Gloucester flask provides some valuable information about how the original *tour-de-force* of the glassmaker's skill would have been produced. The base preserves traces of two pontil marks. Such marks result when a pontil iron is attached to the base of the vessel allowing the vessel to be removed from the blowing iron and the rim to be finished. (the process may be seen in steps 79–81 in Tait 1991, 224–5). The fact that there are two pontil marks shows that a pontil iron had been applied and removed twice. Discussion with Mark Taylor of the Roman Glassmakers suggests that the following stages would have had to be undertaken, and I am most grateful to him for his insights. The outer vessel would have been blown probably in the form of a bulbous beaker, the foot ring would have been formed and then it would have been attached to the pontil, removed from the blowing iron and placed in a kiln to keep hot. The small vessel would then have been blown and decorated, removed from the blowing iron so that the rim could be finished and its base reheated so that it could be attached to the inside of the base of the large vessel. The large vessel would be attached to a pontil iron again so it could be reheated and the neck and rim finished and handles attached if present. Mr Taylor noted that the process of reshaping would, of necessity, not be too lengthy as otherwise there would be danger of the inner vessel over-heating and deforming. For the same reason he thought that decoration on the outer vessel, other than perhaps a trail around the neck, would not be appropriate. This may well explain why the more complete vessels from Cologne do indeed have only a trail around the neck on the outer vessel. This is not an everyday product!

The Gloucester flask is therefore a most remarkable find. It is not just something that is pleasant to look at, but an artefact that opens up all sorts of avenues of enquiry about its owner and which also provides a vivid insight into the technical skills of the glass blowers of the Roman era.

The Human Remains by Teresa Gilmore

Eight inhumation burials, one cremation burial and a small collection of disarticulated human bone from two other contexts were analysed to determine age and sex. The sex of the inhumations was determined using morphological criteria and metric variation (Bass 1995; Brothwell 1981; Buikstra and Ubelaker 1994). The standard five sex classification was used: male, ?male, unknown, ?female, female. No attempt was made to assign sex to juvenile individuals. Juvenile age was determined using dental eruption (Van Beek 1983) and epiphyseal fusion (Schwartz 1995). Adult age was assigned by consideration of the skeletal parts present, dental attrition (Brothwell 1981), and degeneration of the auricular surface (Lovejoy *et al.* 1985). Stature was only calculated if a long bone had both epiphyses intact and could reliably be reconstructed. The single cremation was weighed and separated into different sieve fractions, 10 mm, 5 mm and 2 mm. Each section was weighed and the number of identifiable fragments noted and weighed. The colour and degree of fragmentation were also recorded. Detailed information about each individual is included in the grave catalogue. No detailed consideration of pathology has been attempted, although some provisional observations are contained in the archive.

The eight inhumations were generally very well preserved but did exhibit some fragmentation of the bone. Two were children, one was a young adult female, one was a young middle-aged

female, two were old middle-aged males, one was an old middle-aged female and one adult was probably male.

Grave catalogue

In the following catalogue descriptions of the skeletons are by Teresa Gilmore and the finds by E.R. McSloy. Where finds are numbered their location within the grave is marked on Figs. 3–4. Where alignments are given this commences with the head end of the body. Iron nails are catalogued according to Manning's 1985 typology.

INHUMATION BURIAL 1

Grave: Poorly-defined sub-rectangular grave up to 1.90 m long × 0.53 m wide, aligned NE–SW. That part of the grave containing the pelvis and upper leg had been truncated. Supine, extended burial.

Skeleton: c.45% present. Very good bone preservation, but fragmented. Sex: probably female. Age: young adult, 17–20 years. Stature: 158.5 cm.

Finds: three iron nails, Manning type 1b.

Pottery in grave fill: one sherd Malvernian grey ware, probably 3rd or 4th century AD.

INHUMATION BURIAL 2 (Fig. 3)

Grave: poorly-defined sub-rectangular grave c.1.4 m long × 0.5 m wide, aligned SW–NE. Supine extended individual with arms folded across the chest. A stone (1) had been placed on the right hip. Two animal bones (2 and 3) lay on the base of the grave cut.

Skeleton: c.45% present. Very good bone preservation, but fragmented. Sex: unknown. Age: 7–10 years.

Finds: three iron nails, Manning type 1b; one shaft fragment.

Pottery in grave fill: four sherds dating to broadly the 2nd to 3rd centuries AD, including white-slipped flagon fabric.

INHUMATION BURIAL 3 (Fig. 3)

Grave: sub-rectangular grave 1.7 m long × 0.4 m wide. Supine extended individual aligned NE–SW. Left arm extended by the side, right arm flexed across the chest. Legs extended. A stone had been placed just below the right hip.

Skeleton: c.90% present. Very good bone preservation. Sex: male. Age: old middle-aged adult, 36–45 years. Stature: 177.9 cm.

Pottery in grave fill: twenty sherds, broadly 2nd to 3rd century AD in date.

INHUMATION BURIAL 4 (Fig. 3)

Grave: poorly-defined sub-rectangular grave 2.2 m long × 0.7 m wide aligned SW–NE. Prone extended individual. Head faced downwards, arms were beneath the body and flexed slightly so hands were on stomach. Legs extended. The central part of the grave was truncated by a modern intrusion.

Skeleton: c.70% present. Very good bone preservation, but slightly fragmented. Sex: probably male. Age: old middle-aged adult, 36–45 years. Stature: 159.4 cm.

Finds: one iron nail, Manning type 1b.

Pottery in grave fill: four sherds, 2nd to 3rd century AD in date, including a SE Dorset BB1 flat-rimmed dish or bowl.

INHUMATION BURIAL 5 (Fig. 4)

Grave: very poorly-defined grave 0.7 m long × 0.3 m wide aligned SW–NE. Supine extended burial but with head removed and placed between the legs. Arms flexed with both hands placed over pelvis. Legs extended.

Skeleton: c.40% of skeleton present. Very good bone preservation, but fragmented. Sex: unknown. Age: 6–8 years. There were no surviving signs of the decapitation process as the cervical vertebrae and back of the skull were not present. The left femur, right proximal femur, right ulna, left distal humerus, left ulna and radius appear on visual inspection to be bowed. This might be indicative of a vitamin D deficiency disease such as rickets, although radiographs and further analysis will be required to confirm this preliminary diagnosis.

Finds: one iron nail, Manning type 1b.

INHUMATION BURIAL 6 (Fig. 4)

Grave: original shape truncated by modern features. Supine extended burial aligned SSE–NNW. Head inclined towards the west. Left arm extended by side, right arm placed across the chest. Only the left leg, which was extended, was present. Glass flask (1) may have originally been clasped in the right hand, although found with the top of the vessel pointing towards the feet.

Skeleton: c.65% present. Very good bone preservation, but fragmented. Sex: female. Age: young middle-aged adult, 26–35 years. Stature: 169.2 cm. The skeleton displays a number of non-specific characteristics which might be indicative of infection, although this diagnosis is not assured.

Finds: one iron nail, Manning type 1b; two nail heads.

1. Glass flask (Figs. 5 and 7). Slightly green-tinged colourless glass with some black impurities in the rim area. Rim bent out, up, in and flattened; cylindrical neck curving out smoothly to rounded shoulder and tapering lower body; thick flat base. Two clouded translucent blue handles, applied to shoulder, trailed up and in to neck, folded back beneath rim, return trail tooled on one side; two opaque yellow trails, one on each side, trailed up and down around body; junctions of trails below handles. Base of enclosing vessel has good quality colourless glass; tubular pushed-in base ring; concave base; central pontil scar, with traces of second; grozed body. Total height 82.5 mm; rim diameter 26 mm, base diameter flask 13 mm, base diameter enclosing vessel 45 mm, pontil scar diameter 14 mm.

2. Vessel glass. Six joining fragments in natural green coloured, very thin, glass. They probably derive from a tableware vessel of unknown form. These fragments are more likely an incidental component of the grave fill than a deliberately deposited grave good.

Pottery in grave fill: 13 sherds dating broadly from the mid 2nd to 4th century AD, including SE Dorset BB1 and a Severn Valley ware tankard with a fairly flaring form.

INHUMATION BURIAL 7

Grave: poorly-defined, heavily truncated grave dug through the fill of earlier Burial 6. Prone burial aligned NE–SW. Only the chest and lower arms remained. Lower arms folded across stomach.

Skeleton: c.15% present. Very good bone preservation. Sex: probably male. Age: adult (over the age of 18 but parts required for ageing not present).

Finds: one iron nail, Manning type 1b.

Pottery in grave fill: 4 sherds, mid 3rd to 4th century AD in date, including a SE Dorset BB1 jar with obtuse-angled lattice decoration.

INHUMATION BURIAL 8 (Fig. 4)

Grave: rectangular grave 2.00 m long \times 0.54–0.70 m wide. Extended supine burial aligned S–N. Head inclined to the west. The left arm was crossed over the chest and the right arm crossed over the pelvis. Both legs were slightly flexed. Iron nails clearly indicate the presence of a wooden coffin. Two white gravel pebbles (1 and 2) were recorded from this grave, but whether they were deliberately deposited as opposed to incidental occurrences within the grave backfill is questionable. The ritual placing of white quartz pebbles in graves is well attested in early medieval burials in Wales and elsewhere but has not so far been recorded in Roman Britain (Holbrook and Thomas 2005, 35–7).

Skeleton: c.90% present. Excellent bone preservation, but with some fragmentation. Sex: probably female. Age: old middle aged adult, 36–45 years. Stature: 167.3 cm.

Finds: Nine iron nails, Manning type 1b; two shaft fragments.

Pottery in grave fill: 15 sherds dating broadly from the mid 2nd to 4th century AD, including SE Dorset BB1 and Central Gaulish samian ware.

CREMATION BURIAL 9

Heavily truncated cremation set within circular cut c.0.25 m in diameter. Only the base of the cremation vessel, a Severn Valley ware jar, survived.

Cremation: c.40% of skeleton present. Fairly good bone preservation but heavily fragmented suggesting raking of the funeral pyre. Colour: white/grey but with a slight blueish tinge indicating a pyre temperature of 700–800⁰ celsius. Sex: unknown. Age: adult. Total weight: 486g; >10mm sieve fraction 133 g (27.3%); >5mm

sieve fraction 269 g (55.4%); >2mm sieve fraction 78 g (16.0%). The weight of the cremation suggests that only a sample of the original cremation has survived (McKinley 1993). Due to the small fragment size, few recognisable elements were present other than the parietal vault, cervical neural arch, humeral head, and femoral condyle. No evidence of pathology was noted on any of the fragments.

Pottery with the cremation: two sherds including a chip of 2nd-century A.D. Central Gaulish samian ware.

?GRAVE 10

A possible, but by no means assured, grave cut was found adjacent and parallel to Burial 3. It only survived to a depth of 50 mm and no human bone was recovered.

?GRAVE 11

A possible empty grave which was cut through by Ditch C. The feature survived to a depth of 0.17 m. No human bone was recovered.

Discussion by Neil Holbrook

Despite the small size of the excavation, the identification of part of a cemetery outside the South Gate of Gloucester is significant as little is known about the pattern of burial on this side of the Roman city save for antiquarian records of stone cists and cremations of possible Roman date found during construction of parts of the Dock basin (Lysons 1860, 68). It is difficult to assess the extent of the cemetery uncovered in the present excavation, although it is likely that we are dealing with a comparatively small cemetery unlike the extensive burial grounds outside the north and east gates of the *colonia* (Heighway 1980). To the north of the excavation area the 1994 evaluation trench 2 revealed a continuation of ditch A and a possible beam slot for a timber structure immediately to the north-east of it but no evidence of burial (Garrod 1995) (Fig. 1). Roman deposits had been completely destroyed in trench 3, while monitoring of a sewer trench along the south-western carriageway of Parliament Street in 1984 revealed only the medieval town defences (Garrod 1985, 47–8). To the east of the excavation area the 1996 evaluation trench 2 found only Roman pits and ditches, and no further burials were identified during the monitoring of (albeit limited) groundworks on this side of the main excavation area. To the west only a single inhumation burial aligned north–south was found on the Southgate House site adjacent to the Roman road frontage (Atkin 1990, 3).

The small, but possibly significant change in the alignment of the burials between Phases 1 and 3 is of note. The later burials may have been contained within ditched burial plots laid out on the same alignment as the *colonia* defences. The north–south orientation of the earlier burials is less easy to explain. Between these two periods it is conceivable that the sinuous Phase 2 gullies indicate a temporary cessation of burial in this area.

Within such a small group of burials it is of note that two were laid prone and one individual had been decapitated with the head placed in the grave between the legs. The proximity of prone and decapitated burials has been noted elsewhere, these rites perhaps being more prevalent towards the edge of Late Roman cemeteries (Phillpott 1991, 73–4). Philpott (*ibid.* 83–7) believes that decapitation was heavily influenced by beliefs contained in Celtic religion, in particular the supposed healing powers of the severed head. In this case we may wonder whether decapitation served either to free the spirit from a crippled body (there is a suggestion that the child suffered from rickets) or else imbued the soul with powers to heal its ailments. As prone and decapitated burial was never a common aspect of Romano-British burial practice this treatment was presumably only afforded to those who were considered to have had an abnormal lifestyle or death. Decapitated burials occur in small numbers in Late Roman urban cemeteries in South-West England, for instance 6 out of 362 burials at the Bath Gate cemetery, Cirencester (McWhirr *et al.* 1982, 108–9);

7 out of 259 burials at the Lankhills cemetery, Winchester (Clarke 1979, 141–2, 372–5); and 3 out of *c.* 1,300 burials at the Poundbury cemetery, Dorchester (Farwell and Molleson 1993, 152, 227). Decapitated burials have been found elsewhere in Gloucester, although an extraordinary number were found within that part of the North Gate (Kingsholm) cemetery excavated at Gambier Parry Close in 1984. Here nearly a half of the 70 bodies had been decapitated, while a nearby contemporary ditch contained a number of human crania all lacking their mandibles (Frere 1985, 300–2). It is particularly unfortunate that this important site remains unpublished.

Burial 6 is clearly unusual. A woman in her late twenties or early thirties was buried with a glass flask which she probably originally clasped in her right hand. The flask was not sealed and it is not known whether it contained any substance (as glass is not porous the chance of any residue being preserved within it is slim: Ian Freestone pers. comm.). Cool (above) highlights the uniqueness of this vessel in Roman Britain and the fact that similar flasks have not so far been found as grave goods elsewhere in the province. It is unfortunate that we cannot date the burial closely. The flask could have been an heirloom already generations old by the time of burial (for example burial 356 in the 4th-century AD Bath Gate cemetery, Cirencester, was interred with a 1st-century AD glass flask: McWhirr *et al.* 1982, 132, MF2/5D14). Half of the graves which contained glass vessels at the Lankhills cemetery, Winchester, were considered to be those of people who were buried in an ‘intrusive’ custom suggesting that they originated in the lands bordering the middle Danube (Clarke 1979, 209), and the origin of the glass vessel with Burial 6 has led Cool to speculate whether the woman might have originated from the Rhineland. Future isotropic analysis of this skeleton might provide data to test this hypothesis.

Burials 2 and 3 had stones placed over the right hip. There is nothing remarkable about the stones themselves, and further analysis of the Roman cemeteries of Gloucester will be required to ascertain whether this custom is repeated elsewhere, in which case it can be presumed to be a deliberate act. Otherwise it may just be a coincidence.

Little evidence was found for the post-Roman uses of the site. A single ditch containing Saxon pottery (Gloucester Type Fabric 300 and 301) was found in evaluation trench 96/2 (Fig. 1), but no further evidence of this period was recovered from the main excavation. Medieval Ditch H can be interpreted with reasonable confidence as the boundary between the properties of Glede’s Croft (to the north) and Jordan’s Croft (to the south) recorded in a 1442 terrier of the Gloucester property of Llanthony priory (Rhodes forthcoming). This attribution is on the basis of measurements contained in deeds which show that the property known as The Butts lay to the north of the city boundary marked on Hall and Pinnell’s 1780 map of Gloucester (Gloucestershire Archives, MA 71). Glede’s Croft lay immediately to the south of The Butts, and that both it and Jordan’s Croft were arable land in 1442 may explain why the Roman features discovered in the excavation had been so truncated. There is a reference to ‘great gravel pits’ in The Butts in 1629 (Gloucestershire Archives, GBRJ 3/1, f. 239), although there was no evidence from the excavations of similar workings in these lands. The development of the Southgate suburbs in the medieval period can be traced from house rentals within St Owen’s parish (Herbert 1988, 69) and Speed’s 1610 map of Gloucester depicts properties on either side of Southgate Street with open ground to their rear. The Southgate suburbs were razed prior to the siege of Gloucester in 1643 and appear to have remained undeveloped until the construction of an infirmary in 1755. Hall and Pinnell’s plan of 1780 and Causton’s map of Gloucester in 1843 (Gloucestershire Archives, MA 117) show that the excavation lay within the bounds of extensive gardens and orchards immediately to the east of the infirmary buildings, a fact that explains the depth of post-medieval soil present. The infirmary was demolished in 1989 and Southgate House was built in its place.

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