

# Oval Flasks with wrythen ribs

(A summary by Roman Glassmakers)

(All drawings are at scale 1:2)

These flasks first appear in England during the 16th century, and continue in use until the end of the 17th century. Parallels exist from France and Germany, and from Belgium, where one found at Malines has been dated to the later 15th century.

Amongst the artefacts recovered from Henry VIII's warship, The Mary Rose, which sank in 1545, were three of these flasks in pale green glass (see p.2 of this paper). They were found in the Barber-surgeon's chest, and may have been used to store corrosive or volatile liquids, or perhaps scented water or oils for use after shaving, as described by Fioravanti, in his 'Specchio Universali' of 1565.

They have been found on several late 16th and 17th century English glasshouse sites, including Hutton, Bickerstaffe and Haughton Green, lending weight to the possibility that they were manufactured in England as well as on the Continent.

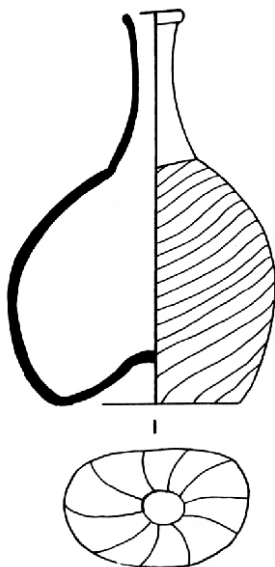


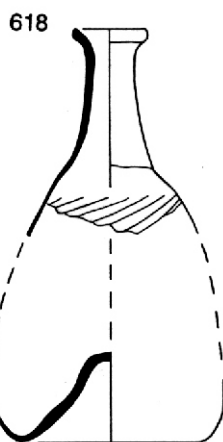
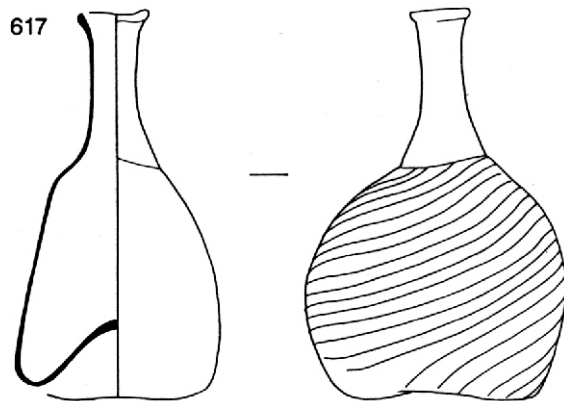
Figure 102 Oval flask with wrythen ribs

Oval Flask with Wrythen Ribs (Willmott 2002, Fig. 102)

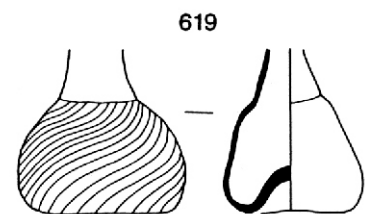
These are surprisingly thick and heavy, given the small size of the vessel and the limited subsequent inflation. The ribbing stops abruptly at the lower neck...

Norwich (See Haslam, Fig. 66, no. 617)

Height: 104mm



Haslam 1993, Fig. 66, p.100

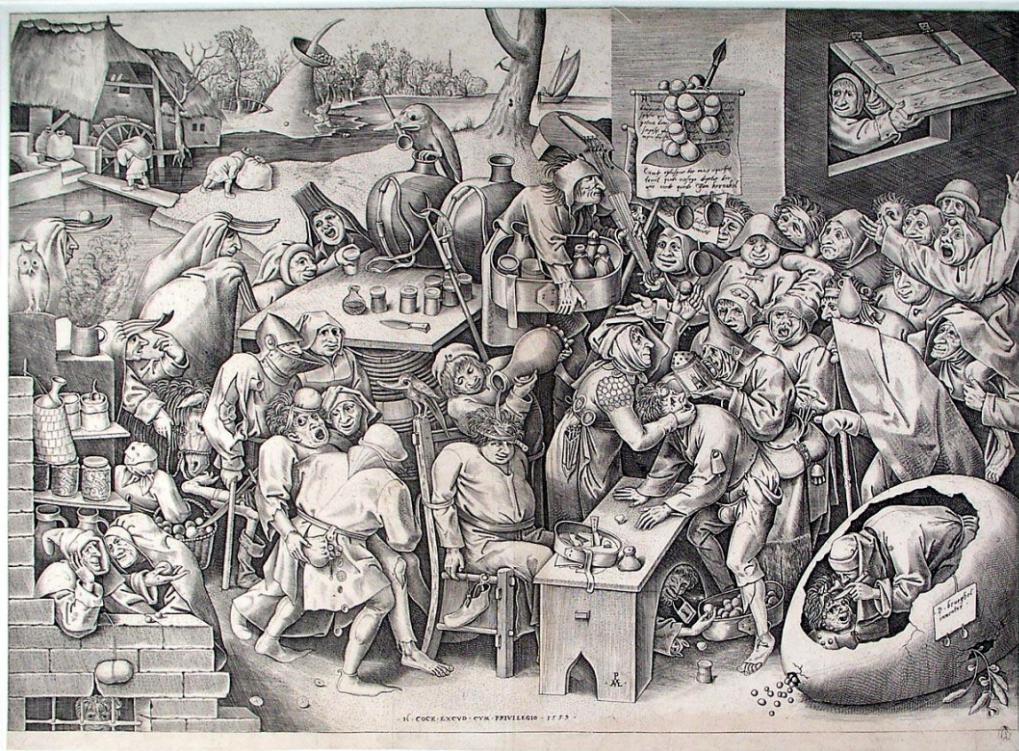


Flasks of 16th century type (Fig. 66)

617: Complete flask; pale blue-green glass; decorated with spiral mould-blown ribbing on second gather. Unstratified. Height: 104mm.

618: Neck and base of small bottle; pale green glass, much weathered; spiral mould-blown ribbing with simple out-turned rim, and body laterally flattened. 1600-1700. Reconstructed height: 110mm.

619: Neck and body of small bottle, similar to 617 and 618; pale green glass; spiral mould-blown ribbing on second gather on body, and body laterally flattened. Height: 44mm.



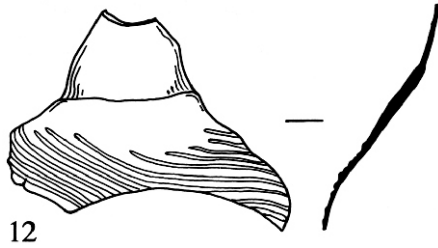
De heks van Mallegem (1559) by Pieter Bruegel the Elder (c.1525-1569)  
Engraved by Pieter van der Heyden (1530-1575)  
Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

This detail of the tabletop shows an oval flask with wrythen ribs

Small oval flask with wrythen ribs  
Made in Germany  
Late 15th century  
Height: 4.5cm

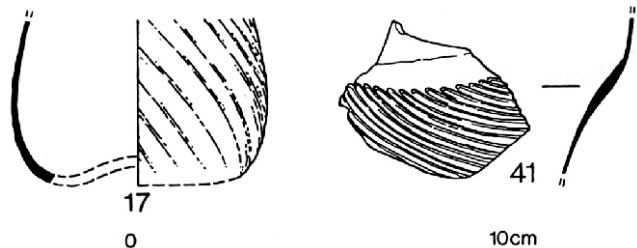


Illustration from Lensink, H. And L.(2008)  
'Glas: Een greep uit vijf eeuwen  
glasgeschiedenis' PolderVondsten:  
[www.poldervondsten.nl](http://www.poldervondsten.nl)



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Bickerstaffe, Lancashire Fig. 6, p.11  
Height of fragment: 40mm.



17

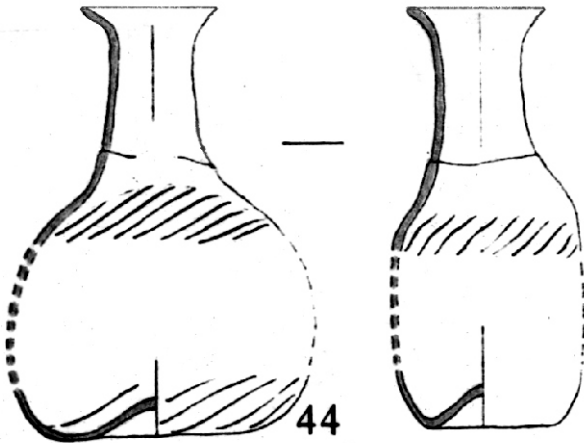
41

0 10cm

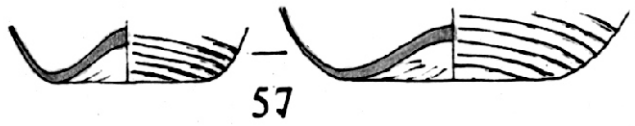
FIG. 8

FIG. 10

Haughton Green: green vessel glass



44



57



60

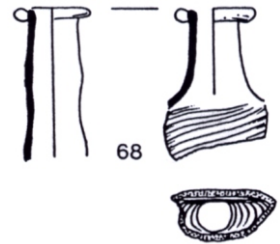
FIG. 63

**HUTTON AND ROSEDALE**  
Glass bottles from Hutton



Exeter, G.68:

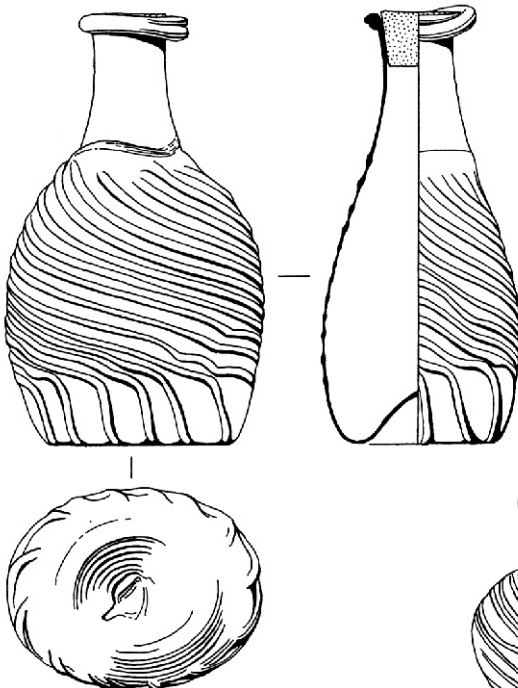
Associated with pottery c.1550-80. Fragment of the neck and shoulder of a flask. Green glass with enamel-like weathering decorated with wrythen mould-blown ribbing, probably on a second gather. This German type was made on English sites such as Hutton and Rosedale, Yorkshire.



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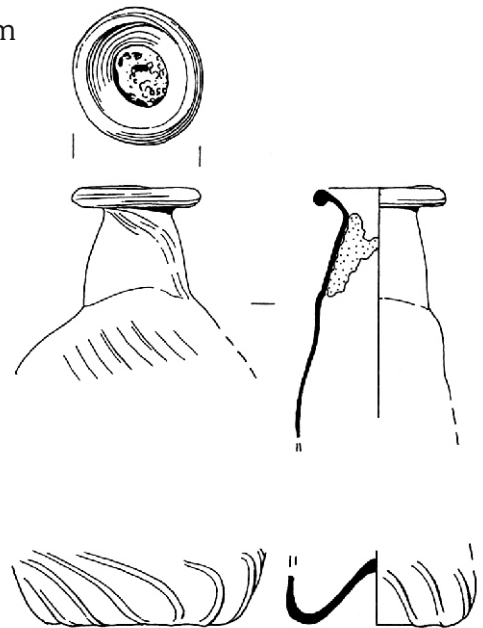
Charleston 1984,

Bottles recovered from  
The Mary Rose



80A1540

80A1565



80A1631

These flasks are made by gathering a second gather of molten onto a relatively cool first gather of glass which has been blown and shaped into a long tube. The upper portion of this tube forms the neck and lip of the vessel, whilst the second gather is blown out to form the body. The junction of the two gathers may be seen at the shoulder of the bottle.

The pattern is formed by optic-moulding, with the decoration in high relief. The wyrthen decoration is formed by moulding vertical ribs in an optic mould and twisting the bubble in the mould to create a spiral pattern.

The body is flattened on the marver (a large, flat stone or metal plate) whilst soft, before attaching it to a pontil, removing it from the blowing iron and shaping the lip. The finished bottle, like all other glass objects, is allowed to cool slowly in the lehr to remove stresses and to prevent breakage from thermal shock.



MoL 80.12/39: Gateway House, 1 Watling Street (City of London)  
Height 62mm  
Flask neck and upper part of body, pale green glass, rim slightly flaring, wyrthen decoration on body.  
Mortimer Wheeler House (Ceramics and Glass store - Post-Medieval section)

12 Glass flask, English Late sixteenth or early seventeenth century (Victoria and Albert Museum, London)

#### Selected References:

Willmott, Hugh (2002) 'Early post-medieval vessel glass in England c. 1500-1670' Council for British Archaeology: CBA Research Report 132 p. 82. Type 21.2

Crossley, D. W. and Aberg, F. A. (1972) 'Sixteenth-Century Glass-Making in Yorkshire: Excavations at Furnaces at Hutton and Rosedale, North Riding, 1968-1971' *Journal of Post Medieval Archaeology* 6 pp.136-141 (fig. 61), 146 (figs. 64 - 65)

Hurst Vose, Ruth (1994) 'Excavations at the 17th century glasshouse at Haughton Green, Denton, near Manchester.' *Journal of Post Medieval Archaeology* 28 pp.26-30 (figs. 9-11, nos. 26-68)

Hurst Vose, Ruth (1995) 'Excavations at the c.1600 Bickerstaffe Glasshouse, Lancashire' in *Journal of the Merseyside Archaeological Society* Vol. 9, 1995 pp. 1-24 (pp. 9-12 (figs. 5,6, nos. 3-19))

Haslam, J. (1993) 'Glass Vessels' in Margeson, S. (ed) (1993) 'Norwich Households - Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971-78' *East Anglian Archaeology Monograph* No. 58 (Norwich Survey) pp.97-117 (pp.104-105 (fig. 70, nos. 653-658))

Charleston, R. J. (1984) 'The Glass', in Allan, J. 'Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Exeter, 1971-80' *Exeter Arch. Report* 3, pp.258-278. Exeter: Exeter City Council

More 16th - 17th century oval wrythen flasks in the Museum of London  
(Mortimer Wheeler House, Ceramics and Glass store - Post-Medieval section)

[www.museumoflondon.org.uk/ceramics/pages/glass.asp](http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/ceramics/pages/glass.asp)

(Bottles, 17th and 18th century - Small globular bottles, and Phials and small, short-necked bottles)



A12605: Whitecross Street (Islington; City of London) Height: 105mm, Width: 73mm  
Body of colourless glass flask, green tinge. Broken at neck, oval, bulbous body with wrythen decoration. Base has a kick and rough pontil mark.



A20610: Leadenhall Street, Cornhill, London (City of London) Height 105mm, Width: 70mm  
Flask of blue-green glass. Straight neck topped with an uneven applied rim. Oval, bulbous body with wrythen decoration. Base has a kick and rough pontil mark.



NN23689: Height: 105mm, Width: 73mm  
Flask of green glass. Straight neck topped with an uneven applied rim. Oval, bulbous body with wrythen decoration. Base has a kick and rough pontil mark.



NN23762: Height: 70mm, Width: 65mm  
Flask of green glass. Broken at base of neck. Oval, bulbous body with wrythen decoration. Base has a kick and rough pontil mark. Attached label states 'Mr J Howel 112. 1873'.