

## **Roman struck flint and glass**

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There seems to be an unspoken assumption in the literature that struck flint is an artefact of the early prehistoric period. This has been challenged recently with regard to material on later Bronze Age and Iron Age sites (Young & Humphrey 1999). It is also worth challenging it with regard to flint on Roman sites. Sometimes there are brief discussions of Roman flint tools (see for example Miles 1977, 143 and Cool et al 1995, fig 755), but the best evidence for the continuing use of flaked tools into the Roman period is often to be found in the glass assemblage.

### **Flaked glass**

Fragments of Roman glass that show deliberate flaking, and occasionally retouch, are a not uncommon element of most glass assemblages I've looked at. Often what you are looking at seems to be a scraper that you would have held in your finger tips. Sometimes they are larger and though gripped with the finger tips would have extended back into the hand. The widespread use of glass vessels in the Roman period must have provided a useful source of raw material that could be flaked to a sharp edge. On many Roman sites, after all, broken vessel glass would have been more easily available than flint.

The favourite material is the blue/green square bottle. These are utilitarian vessels very common from the later first to mid third centuries. They are probably favoured because wall fragments can often be several millimetres thick. Another bit often favoured is the lower attachment of a jug handle. The broken length of the handle provides the grip and the attachment itself is flaked to provide a sharp edge.

Examples of these flaked pieces can be found in various glass reports. Denise Allen was probably one of the first to draw attention to the phenomenon in print. You should note that being glass specialist, I (and occasionally others) often refer in print to the fragment as having been grozed. Technically this is incorrect as it would imply the fragment had been trimmed with a grozing iron as pieces of window glass were for medieval painted windows. There is no evidence for the use of the grozing iron in the Roman world so I am guilty of incorrect and lazy terminology. The pieces were flaked, just like flint.

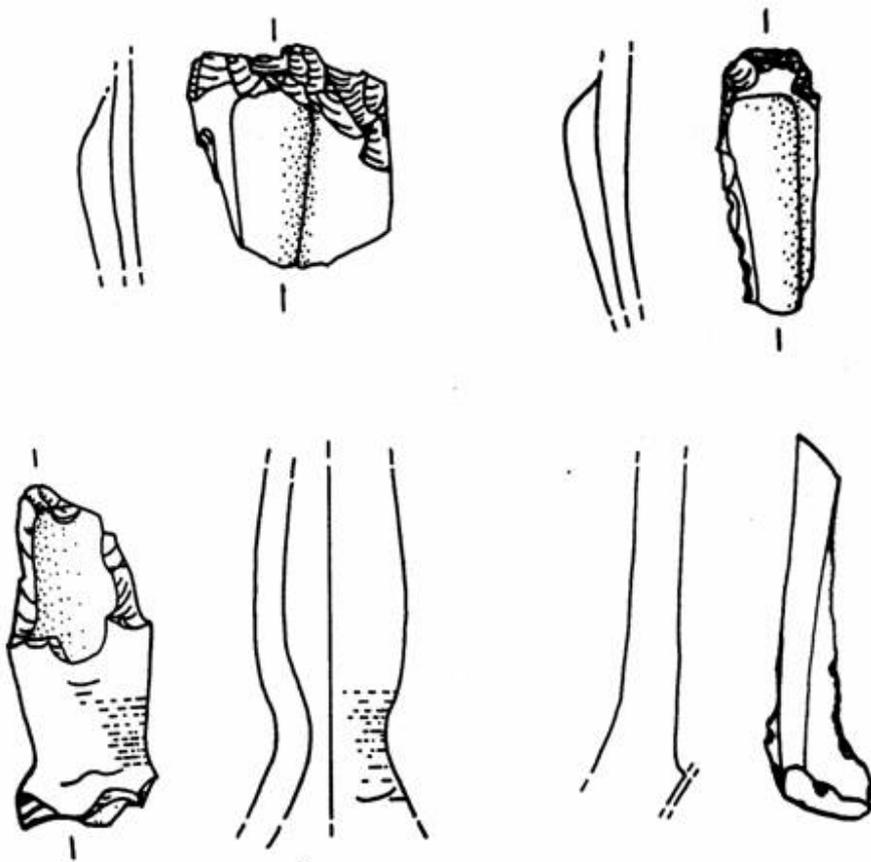
Most of the types I have come across can conveniently be seen in the Colchester report (Cool and Price 1995) as we had the fragments drawn to show the flaking. Some flaked lower handle attachments can be seen on fig. 8.11 (nos. 1132, 1133, 1139). Three flaked neck fragments can be seen on fig. 9.15 (nos 1268, 1274 and 1282). Fragments of thick prismatic bottle bases battle with flaked edges can be seen on Fig. 11.9 (nos. 2156 and 2160). The re-use of bottle

body fragments can be seen at Exeter (see Allen in Holbrook & Bidwell 1991, 228 nos. 66, fig. 96) and Wilcote (Cool in Hands 1993, fig. 82 no. 42). A slightly atypical example was found at York where a concave base has three edges flaked to sharp edges. Here the central concavity here would have made this a pleasant thing to hold. (Cool et al 1995, fig. 745 no. 6233).

Some examples of flaked glass from the excavations at Wroxeter are shown below.

### **Roman glass fragments from Wroxeter**

These have been flaked like flint to serve as tools. The top two are fragments of pillar moulded bowls, a common first century type. Bottom left is the neck of a 1st to 2nd century jug. It is unusual for the entire neck to be used in this way. Bottom right is a typical utilisation of a handle fragment.



## References

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