

Sealed Bottles from All Souls College

By JEREMY HASLAM

AS was pointed out in the last volume of *Oxoniensia*,¹ the cellars of All Souls College contain well over a thousand wine bottles of the 18th and early 19th centuries which are all sealed with its name or initials. This unique accumulation of sealed bottles shows several features which make it of great interest, and of value in determining the development of the form of hand-blown wine bottles from the 1750s onwards. Not only are the documentary records of the purchase and use of the bottles very full (as I tried to show in my previous article), but the collection of 19 different seal types on different bottles is also the only virtually complete sample of the different types from one College which now exists.²

One of the features of this accumulation of bottles, which is of considerable importance, is that the documentation of both the organization of the College cellars, when wine was laid down there by the Fellows for their own use, and also the purchase of bottles, allows not only their provenance but also the dates of their use to be defined with considerable accuracy. I have discussed this fully in my previous article, and have shown that the earlier bottles at least were made in Stourbridge, by one Mrs. Batchelor,³ and were acquired by the College probably from 1749 until the early or mid 19th century. The forms of the different bottle types, as well as their string rims, show a steady change from the former date until about the 1830s or 1840s, and because it seems likely that (with three exceptions) these bottles were made in the same

¹ J. Haslam, 'Oxford Taverns and the Cellars of All Souls in the 17th and 18th Centuries', *Oxoniensia* xxxiv (1969). The present paper is a continuation of this, and extends the observations made, in particular, in the section on 'The origin of the sealed bottles'.

² The history of this hoard is rather sad. About 20 years ago there were well over 6,000 bottles, most of which were smashed over the years to clear more space in the cellars. The Butler of the College also tells me that Fellows still used these bottles to store their own wine up till the 1920's. However, in spite of the present rather attenuated character of the collection, it still remains the only original collection of 18th-century bottles left in any of the College cellars, and it is still statistically probable that it contains most of the seal types which appeared on bottles acquired by the College. (The writer is at present making a record of the different seal types from the other Colleges which are known to have had their own sealed wine bottles.) I am most grateful to Dr. P. Salway, formerly both Domestic Bursar of All Souls and Editor of *Oxoniensia*, who allowed me to sort through these bottles in the summer of 1968; also to the Manciple of the College, Mr. B. F. Watson, and the Head Butler, both of whom were most generous with their time and assistance.

³ The Dennis Glasshouse. See *V.C.H. Staffs.*, 11, 226. Also D. R. Guttery, *From Broad Glass to Cut Crystal* (1956), 36-7; and J. Haslam, *op. cit.*, note 51.

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factory at Stourbridge⁴ (which was the nearest glass-manufacturing town), they provide a group which can legitimately be made to show a meaningful typological sequence.

Another important feature of this accumulation is that the thousand-odd bottles of which it consists can be divided into several distinct types, each of which is represented by a number of bottles which have seals stamped with the same matrix or die. Moreover, each different seal type is represented, with only a few exceptions, by a different bottle type, with diagnostic features—such as external dimensions, type of string rim, and type of pontil mark—which differ to a greater or lesser degree from those exhibited by other types. Although the number of bottles of each type remaining in the cellars varied considerably (from over 300 of some types to only 10 or 15 of others), the individual bottles of one type were all remarkably similar, which would indicate that they were manufactured at one time by the same person or 'chair' (a team of workers). It appears therefore that individual orders for bottles from the College were manufactured in the same batch, each bottle being stamped with a seal which was specially cut for the one order. When sorted into seal types, therefore, the different types of bottle can be easily distinguished, and comprise a series which can be taken as representing stages in a process of development of about 80 years. The types of bottle can thus be arranged in a sequence which reflects a rough progression in date of manufacture, using as a guide the fact that wine bottles tended to become taller and thinner from the early 18th century,⁵ from the time they were first blown by hand into cylindrical moulds in the 1730s,⁶ until machine moulding was first used at Bristol in 1811.⁷ If the bottles from All Souls are arranged in this way, it can be observed that the types of string rims shown by the bottles in this sequence exhibit a more or less steady development through 3 types which can be characterized as follows:⁸ (see FIGS. 10 and 11).

String rim type i (bottle types 1–5, 12): The string rim (applied after the paring off of the bottle top while held at the base by the pontil) consists of one circle of glass applied just below the end of the neck. It is tooled slightly downwards to make a rim roughly triangular in profile, and in the same operation the neck-end is usually smoothed over. This is a common method

⁴ The Dennis glasshouse is the only 17th century undertaking still surviving. *V.C.H. Staffs.*, II, 226.

⁵ I. Noel Hume, 'The Glass Wine Bottle in Colonial Virginia', *Journal of Glass Studies*, III (1961), 105.

⁶ A bottle in the possession of the writer, which is dateable to about 1730, has a distinctive mark of a wide cylindrical mould on the body.

⁷ By Jacob Wilcox Ricketts and his son Henry of Bristol. See I. Noel Hume, *op. cit.*, 94.

⁸ This is a provisional typology, relating only to the All Souls bottles, and to the period 1760 to 1840. Further work on the development of wine bottles, which the writer is undertaking, will in due course enable these observations to be related to a general typological sequence for English bottles.

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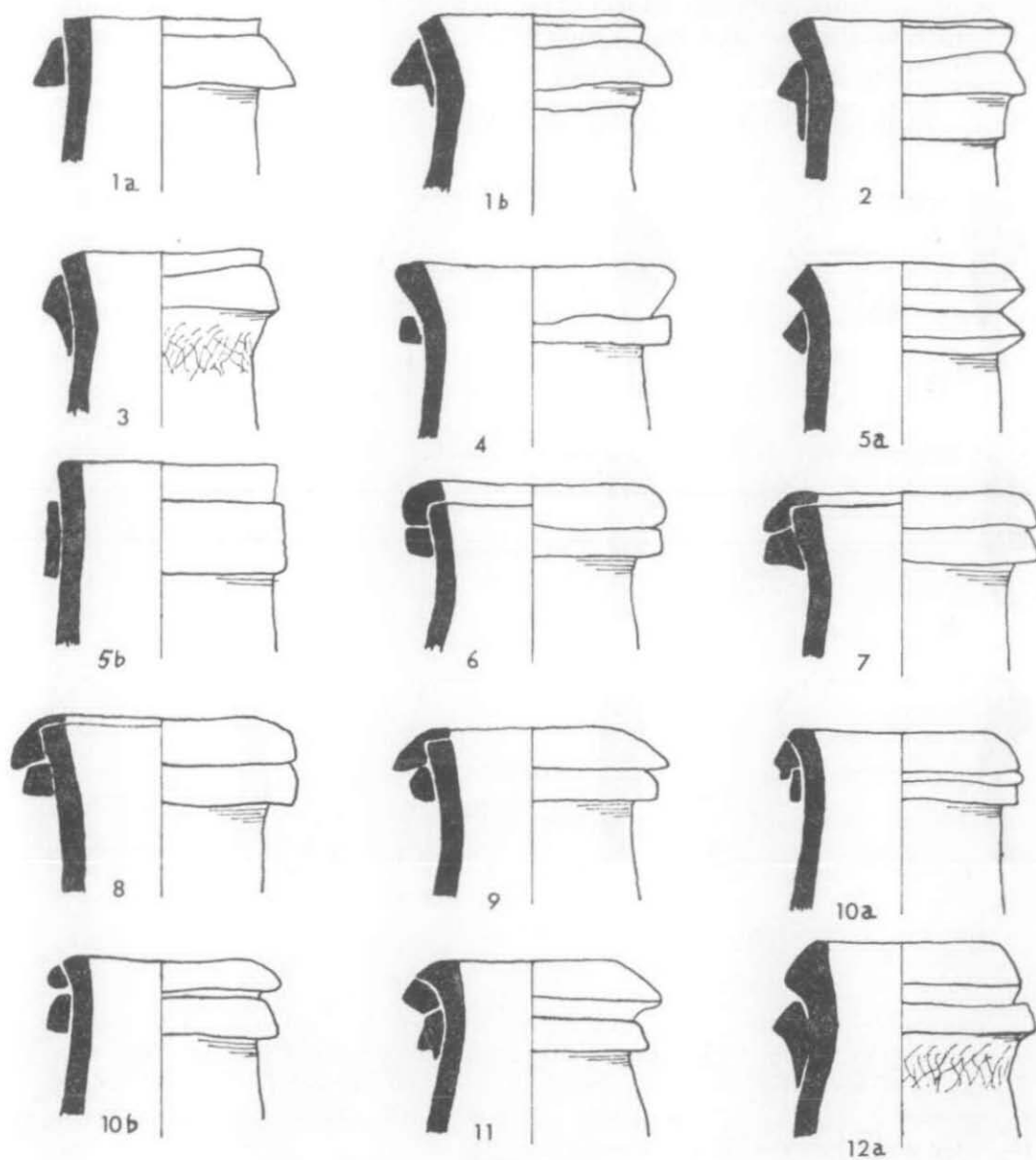


FIG. 10
Scale 1 : 1.

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of manufacture in the second half of the 18th century. In the 17th and early 18th centuries the neck end is merely left as it had been pared off—as in bottle type 1a.

String rim type ii (bottle types 6–11, 13–16) : The string rim consists of two applications, the first, as in type i, a little below the neck, and the second

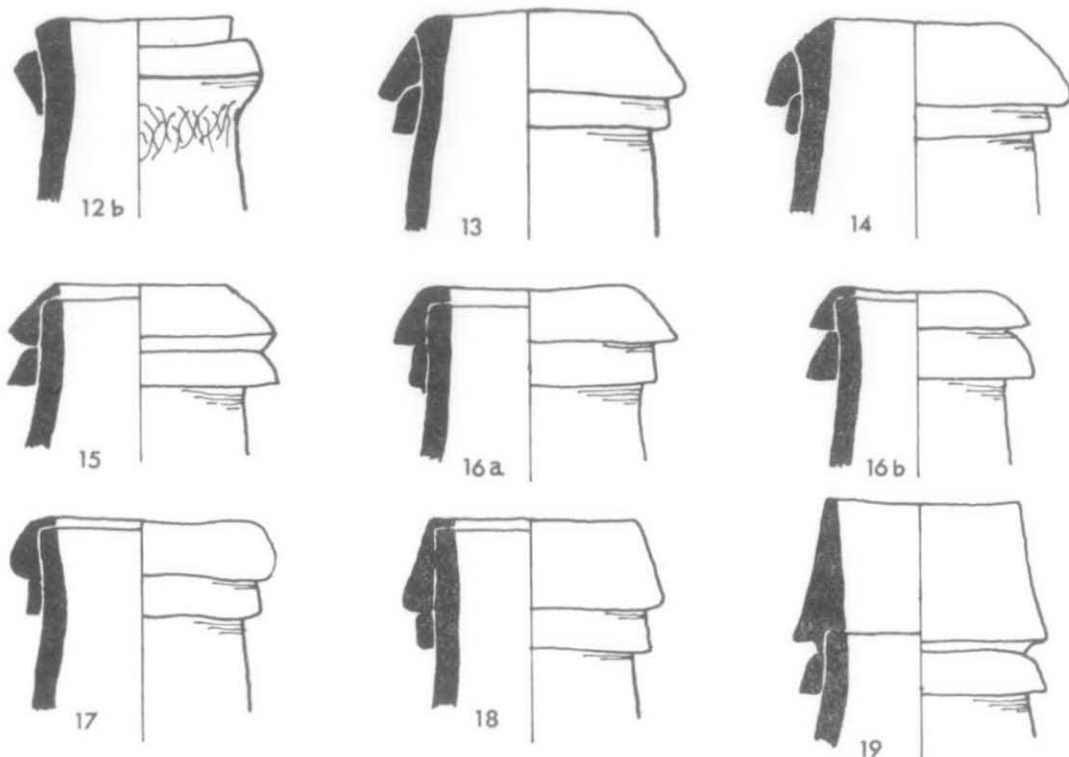


FIG. 11

Scale 1 : 1.

immediately around the end of the neck and over the first rim. This second application is then tooled downwards by hand, forming a double string rim. Often the second application overrides the end of the neck of the bottle (as in types 6–9, 15–16). (It is possible that this latter feature may represent a later stage than the rims of types 10, 11, 13 and 14.)

String rim type iii (bottle types 17–19) : A double string rim is applied as in type ii, but instead of being shaped manually, is pressed into an open mould

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while still being held by the pontil. The mould-pressed string rims of these three bottle types display a uniformity which those of the other types do not show. This development appears to be concurrent with the introduction of machine moulding of the body, shown also by types 17-19 (see PL. X).

As regards the documentary evidence for the validity of this sequence, the records are somewhat equivocal, for the items recording the purchase of bottles by the College in the 18th century in the Wine Cash Books and New Tiding Books of the All Souls accounts do not appear to be complete.⁹ Most of the entries relating to the purchase of bottles seem to be unrelated in time to entries recording payment for their carriage, and it is therefore not possible to tell exactly how many consignments of bottles arrived at the College. There are also fewer entries for payment of bottles than there are types still existing, and so it is again not possible to suggest definite dates for the bottles when they are arranged in a probable chronological sequence (as in PLS. IX and X). However, the recorded dates of the purchase of bottles from Mrs. Batchelor are of interest. Between Michaelmas 1749 (the date of the institution of the cellars) and 28 Oct. 1751 she is paid £91 19s. 1d. for an unknown quantity of bottles sufficient to last the College for the next nine years. The next recorded delivery is in 1760, when she is paid £30 on 8 Dec. It is possible also that Mrs. Batchelor's factory was the source of the consignment paid for on 14 June 1763. After this date, their source was a Mr. Strange, who was a china and glassware dealer in Oxford, but it seems reasonable to suppose that his own source of supply was Stourbridge, the nearest glass manufacturing town, and that he acted as an agent for the College.

It appears, however, that all the ten thousand-odd bottles bought between 1749 and 1751 have disappeared.¹⁰ The bottles of types 1 and 2 are of forms which are too tall and thin for these mid-18th century dates,¹¹ and would in all likelihood represent those bottles for which payment was recorded on 28 Dec. 1760 and 14 June 1763. (It does not seem possible to relate to these purchases the charges for delivery of bottles, recorded on 4 June 1760 and 27 July 1761.) Bottles of types 1a, b and c, all of which have different mould diameters, all have the same seal type (no. 1, PL. XI), which would seem to indicate that they were made at slightly different times, or by different people, in the same factory. Bottle type 2 represents a type distinguishable from bottles of type 1 by being slightly taller and thinner, and by the slightly

⁹ See Haslam, *op. cit.*, 69.

¹⁰ The Head Butler has told me that he has observed a number of bottles of a much squatter form than the earliest the writer found (as no. 1, Pl. IX). These have no doubt suffered in general clearing of the cellars.

¹¹ See I. Noel Hume, *op. cit.*, 100-105. Compare his illustrated types 14, 15, 19 and 20.

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different seal (PL. XI). The dies for seals 1 and 2, however, have obviously been cut by the same hand, and therefore come from the same factory, and this characteristic, together with the fact that the glass of both these types is of a much darker brown colour than that of the others, would suggest a reasonable similarity in date. It seems probable therefore that the bottles with seal type 1 can be dated with some certainty to 1760-61, and those with seals of type 2 to 1763. The seal of type 4, however, also shows characteristics which make it possible that it has been engraved by the same hand as types 1 and 2. The 'u' in particular is closely similar, as well as the final 's' of 'Souls', and the other letters show the influence of the same hand, though in a more practised and assured style. If this is correct, then bottles with this seal could well be those for which payment was made on 17 Dec. 1768, and which are recorded as being bought from Mr. Strange. This would lend greater probability to the suggestion that Strange continued buying bottles for All Souls from Mrs. Batchelor's glasshouse in Stourbridge.

Between 1761 and 1768 there is no record of payments for either the carriage or the purchase of bottles. There are in existence, however, several examples of a bottle sealed 'All : Souls College 1764' (bottle and seal type 3), represented in Oxford by one bottle from the Ashmolean.¹² This type, and type 12, are quite distinctive from the other bottles in that both are not only made of a much paler green metal than the other types, but also have a distinctive pinched neck and up-tooled string rim (see FIGS. 10 and 11). It seems probable therefore that these two types have a different provenance from any of the others. It is rather odd, though, that no record exists in 1764 of the payment for the only dated bottles from All Souls.

The provenance of none of the other bottles can be placed with the certainty of types 1 and 2, although as pointed out above, the bottles of type 4, bought from Strange, probably came from Mrs. Batchelor's glasshouse as well. With the exception of types 5a and 5b, which are anomalous in that the seal of type 5 is represented on two different bottle types, and in that the string rims of both are unlike the usual types for English bottles of the period, all the other bottles fall into place in a fairly uniform series characterized by a development of the string rim from type i to type iii, and a fairly steady, but by no means uniform, increase in the proportion of height to width measurements. The three half-bottles ('pint' bottles in the College accounts) are similar in every respect except size to the 'quart' bottles which bear the same seals, and were therefore in all probability made by the same 'chair', and in the same batch as their larger brothers. Only a very few of these have

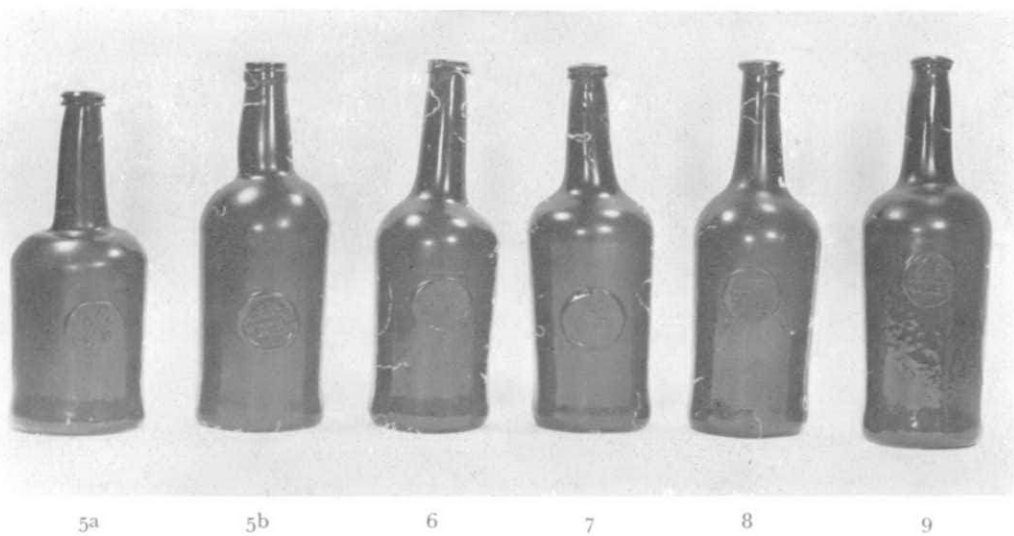
¹² A.M. 1921.1077. None of these were found in the College cellars. The Head Butler says, however, that he noticed one or two about 15 years ago.

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remained in the cellars, though it is possible that the frequent use of pint bottles which the College accounts indicate meant that most, if not all, of the deliveries of the large quart bottles included their pint-sized counterparts. Certainly the bottles bought in 1749 and 1750 included both quarts and pints (both of which types have disappeared), for pints are frequently mentioned in the accounts as being used in these years, as well as in almost every other year.

Another feature brought out by the series of seals (PL. XI) is that many of them are attributable to the same die cutter, who apparently, as indicated above, cut a new seal for each batch of bottles ordered by the College. Seal types 1 and 2 are obviously cut by the same hand, and compare in style very unfavourably with the polished engraving of type 3. As suggested above, the seal of type 4 bears several points of resemblance to seals 1 and 2 and may also be tentatively ascribed to the same hand, although it shows a somewhat more advanced or practised technical ability. The seals of types 6, 7, 8 and 9 are unmistakably by a single hand, and types 13 and 14 are by another, less skilled than the engravers of the stylish and rather beautiful seals 10 and 11. Types 15, 16, 17 and 18 must also be by a single, but different, hand. Nothing more can really be said about the seals themselves; the several engravers, of widely varying ability, must remain for the most part anonymous and undateable. However, perhaps further investigation of the sealed bottles and the 18th-century archives of other Colleges will provide parallels not only for these same engravers, but also for other bottles whose documentation is as well attested as those from All Souls.

PLATE IX



ALL SOULS BOTTLE TYPES

PLATE X



10a

10b

11

12a

12b

13

14



15

16a

16b

17

18

19

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PLATE XI



Types of All Souls bottle seals ; a little more than half actual size.