

## MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM GREAT YARMOUTH

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### *Circumstances of the Find*

THE finds were recovered from a building site in the centre of the old Walled Town. Grid. Ref.: TG 52460754. A Victorian Public House known as The Crown Hotel at the south-east corner of Regent Street and King Street was demolished down to cellar floor level, except for a small area in the north-west corner of the site which was not "cellared". The concrete cellar floor was 7 ft. 6 in. below pavement level and comprised a large cellar at the east and two small cellars in the south-west corner. The cellar walls were of brick, probably nineteenth-century work, with flat brick buttresses at intervals. The brickwork was left intact so no section could be obtained. It was observed that in the south wall, alongside Row 70, some remains of flint and mortar walling of an earlier building had been incorporated in the brick walling and the brickwork had also been run, by insertion, under the flint work (see D, Fig. 1, inset). Two test holes were dug by the workmen in the uncellared area; one on the north side against Regent Street and one at the west to find the limit of the footings of the adjacent party wall. A sketch section, combining these test pits is shown as Section A/B (Fig. 2). It would seem that this area was always a yard or entrance passage to the property, prior to the building of the hotel. The workmen next broke through the concrete floor of the cellar and dug a trench north-south, some 20 feet long, and 3 feet inside the east front. It was 2 ft. 6 in. wide and 2 ft. 6 in. deep. It was at this point that the work came to my notice and explaining my interest, I asked the men to save any pottery sherds that they could. The main part of the sherds and the miscellaneous finds came from this trench, including the Aardenburg jug fragments. Also noticed were several animal bones, pig, sheep and ox with short horn cores. As soon as excavation was completed, concrete foundations were laid in the trench, hence I could only get a quick sketch of part of the section (C section, Fig. 2). When doing this it was seen that the base of the trench, though of clean sand, did show traces of dark soil, but no further investigation could be made. Later a similar trench was dug east-west in the middle of the site but by now a full labour force was in action and there was no opportunity to obtain further sections. The original workmen, however, did recover some further sherds from here, including the animal-head jug fragment and the Rouen jug handle.

It would seem that at some time in the fourteenth century a floor of some nature had been laid thus excluding the wares of later centuries from this deposit.

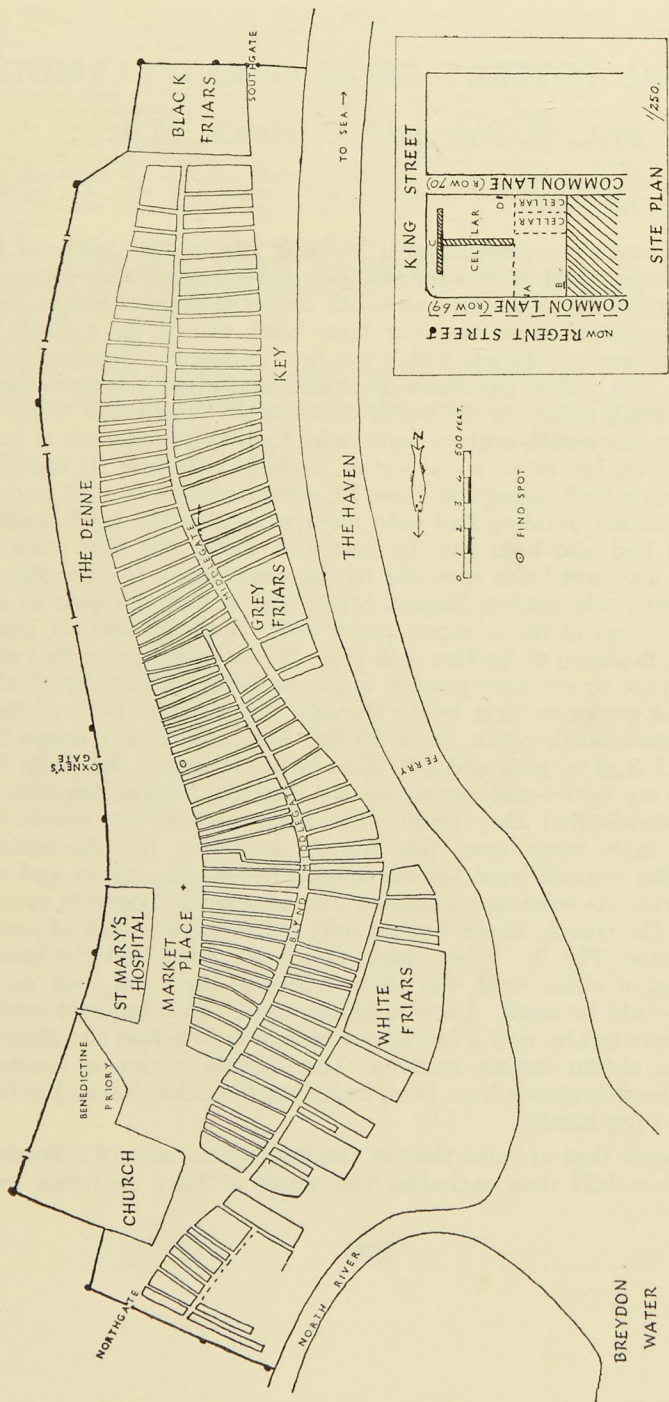


Fig. 1. Conjectural plan of Yarmouth in the 14th century showing Town walls completed

*Topography of the site*

The site is in the middle of the old Walled Town on the high ridge which forms the "backbone" of Yarmouth. The ground slopes down to the Quay, some 285 yards to the west, and in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries would have as its eastern boundary, common land—The Denne, and beyond this the sea-shore, *c.* 850 yards to the east. Although a Charter for building a Town Wall was granted by Henry III in 1261, it is not thought that building began till 1284 and was not fully completed until *c.* 1380. It is not known what, if any, earlier defences Yarmouth possessed. The site is nearly opposite what probably was an established trackway to the sea, later to be known as Oxney's Gate—a Town Wall Gate. Yarmouth's well-known town plan sets up "island" sites bounded by common lanes or Rows. Our site is the eastern end of one such island, bounded on the north by Row 69, now part of Regent Street (cut through in 1812), on the south by Row 70, on the East by The Denne (now King Street) and on the west by Blynd Middlegate (now Howard Street). (See plan Fig. 1 inset.) The O.D. shows the Quay to be some 14 ft. lower than the street level of our site. The Crown Hotel was built *c.* 1880 and wine and spirit merchants had been in occupation since 1813. The property was then described as a house, warehouse and stables but probably covered more ground to the west than the present site. From 1777, linen drapers were in possession. In a conveyance of that year "cellars and yards" are mentioned. In 1747 the property is described as a capital messuage with houses, yards, etc. the seller being a baker. Swinden's plan of Yarmouth (*c.* 1740) shows an L-shaped building with the long arm along King Street and open space behind to the west. A pictorial representation of Yarmouth, the so-called Elizabethan map (*c.* 1590) shows the west side building line of King Street well developed. The street now called King Street (or the King's Street—seventeenth century) would seem to make a natural trackway on the edge of the common giving direct approach to the Market Place and the Church for people living in the south part of the town. The Common was not sold for building plots till 1677 thus defining the east side of King Street for the first time. Prior to this, property in this area is said to abutt on the Denne—no mention is made of a street, lane or common way. Hence it would seem that the whole area was regarded as Common and it was not thought necessary to give the track a special name. It follows that the building line here was controlled by the limits set by the common.

## THE POTTERY

## COOKING POTS

This group is of importance in showing the range of types in use in the late thirteenth-early fourteenth centuries closely associated with the highly decorated jugs described below. The fabric and rim form is very common on thirteenth-century sites in Norfolk, especially in Norwich<sup>1</sup>. Of special significance is the fact that almost all the vessels show rough tooling at the neck. This has previously been regarded as mainly an early medieval feature

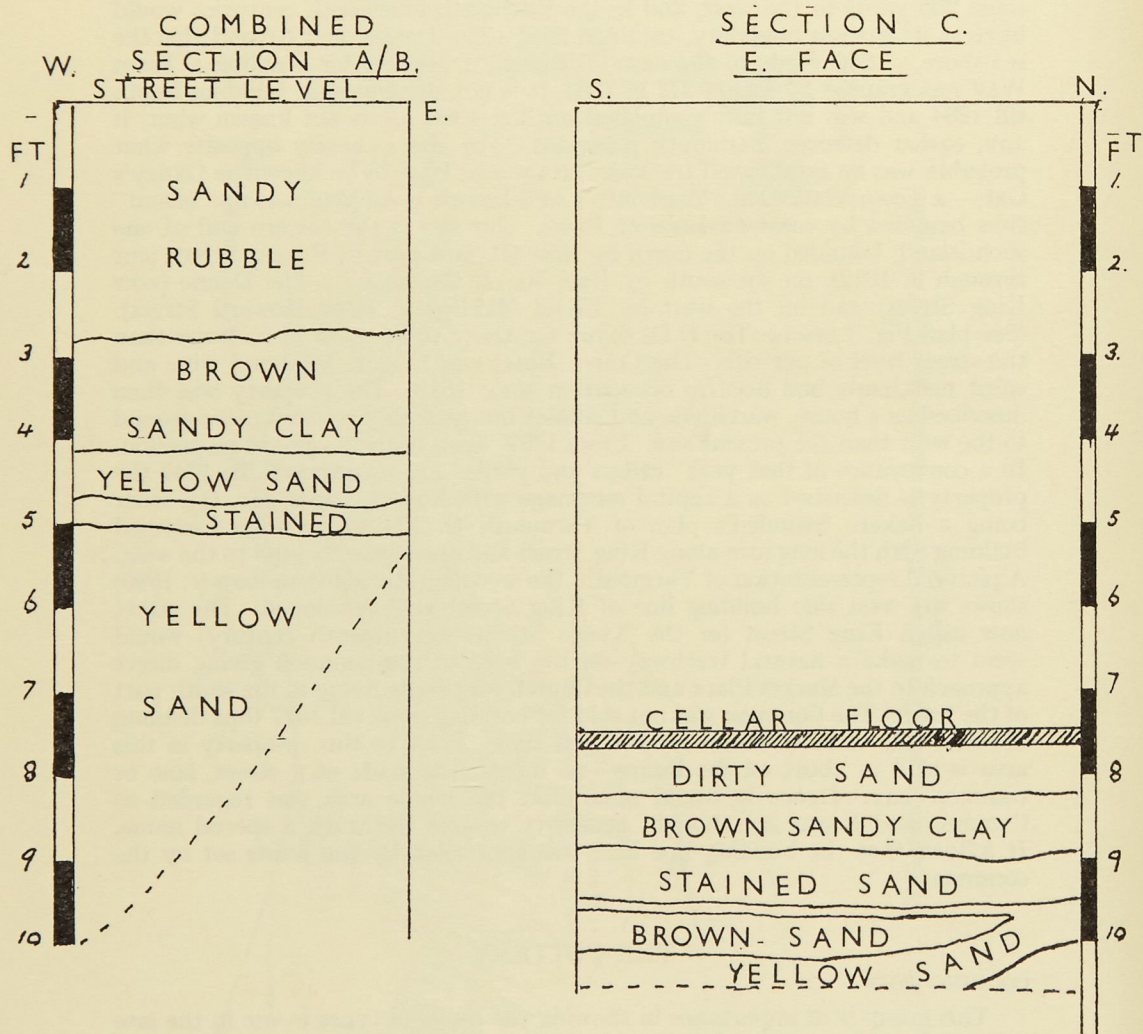


Fig. 2. Sections A/B and C (see page 279)

but it is now demonstrated to last into the full medieval period. The kiln source for this fabric is unfortunately not yet known but in view of the large number of sites in Norwich which are producing this ware it is likely to be somewhere in the eastern part of the county. The other main Norfolk thirteenth-century fabrics, coarse grey sandy ware and a coarse brown sandy ware, are not represented in this group.

### Fig. 3

1. Rim dark grey ware, small white grits, overfired, simple outward sloping rim and rudimentary inner bead, harsh texture.
2. Rim dark grey gritty ware, upright neck, top of rim convex, inner bead, black exterior and top of rim.
3. Rim brown core, gritty, dark grey surfaces, grooved under outer rim, pronounced inner bead.
4. Rim light grey sandy ware, slightly hollowed, no inner bead, neck slightly everted.
5. Rim light grey sandy ware, flattish rim, pronounced inner bead.
6. Rim light grey sandy ware, outward sloping, hollowed, fire-blackened outside, slight inner bead.  
Rim medium grey ware, similar to No. 5.
8. Base, thin hard light grey sandy ware, fire-blackened outside, sagging base.
9. Base, similar but thicker vessel.  
Thirteen other base sherds of similar ware and form.
11. Decorated body sherd. Dark grey gritty ware, buff/grey outer surface, black inner, with triangular section applied strip.

### BOWLS

12. Heavy flanged rim, dark grey gritty, convex top of rim, rounded edge, hand trimming outside under flange, slight bead inner. Top of rim and inside light grey. Fire-blackened outside.
13. Similar ware, pronounced inner bead. Wavy incised line on top of rounded flanged rim, straight-sided form, fire-blackened outside.
14. Dark grey, harsh texture. Thumb impressed inner edge of rim surplus clay carried over pronounced bead giving frilly effect, round edge, knife slashing outer neck, roughly finished off, fire-blackened outside.  
Forty-two plain wall sherds.

### OXYDIZED LOCAL WARES

The source of this distinctive fabric is again not yet known but it occurs on more than eight sites in Norwich itself and only on about nine other sites in the rest of the county, whilst the three wares previously mentioned occur

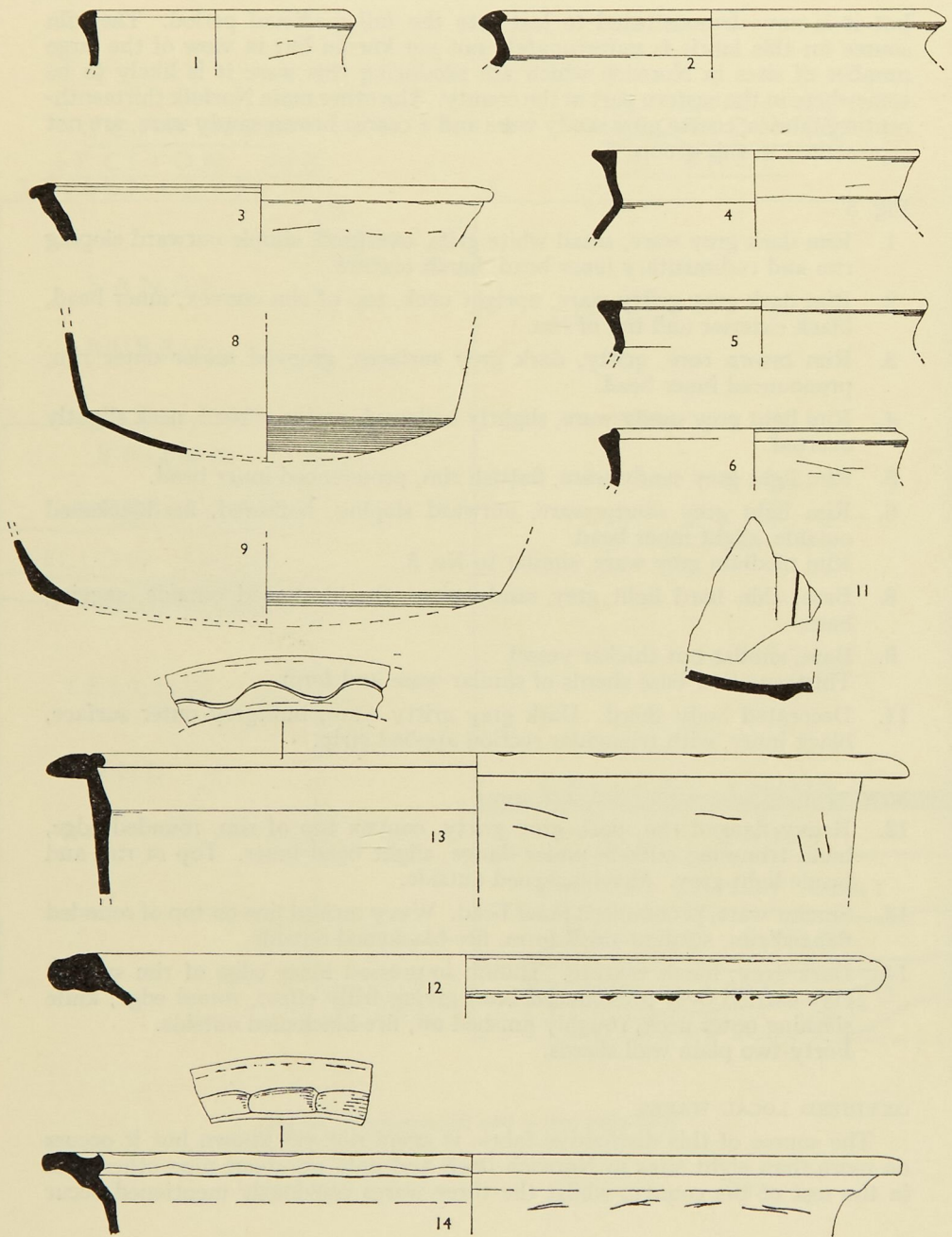


Fig. 3. Medieval Pottery: Cooking Pots and Bowl (quarter)

on more than thirty sites in different parts of the county. There is a similar cauldron with an elbow handle, although it has a simpler rim and a round section to the handle, from White Lion Street, Norwich (N.C.M. 327.964).

Fig. 4

1. Cauldron, dark grey ware with light red surfaces, flat rim, squared, inner bead, strap handle level with and smoothed into top of rim has slight central groove. A break shows applied clay for a second handle. Globular form. Patchy olive green glaze; sparsely on wall, rim top, top of handle. Spots of glaze inside. Thin applied strip on body, same clay and glaze.
2. Strap handle, medium grey, red/brown surfaces, olive brown glaze top side of handle, two heavy finger impressions at join.
3. Strap handle, dark grey, red/brown surfaces, olive brown glaze top side of handle, central groove.
4. Strap handle, dark grey ware, small grit, light red surfaces, shallow central groove, spots of green glaze.
5. Base, dark grey ware, small grit, buff surfaces, sagging, possibly thin green glaze at top of pot which has weathered off, fire-blackened at base.
6. Base, dark grey gritty ware, red surfaces, outer red/brown, patch olive glaze, sagging, well-spaced deep finger impressions.
7. Base, light grey sandy ware, light red outer surface, sagging, finger impressions in groups of three, spots of olive glaze at base.

#### OTHER GLAZED JUGS

Fig. 4

8. Handle, buff/pink ware, round section, twisted rib, mottled green glaze. Rod handles with twisted ribs as opposed to the straight vertical ribs of Lincolnshire, are very typical of Norfolk and are known from at least fourteen sites in the county and six in Norwich itself.
  9. Light grey sandy ware with pink surfaces, glossy streaky olive green glaze, applied strip decoration dark brown. Round section handle which has been pushed into wall of jug.
  10. Light grey/buff fine ware, buff surfaces, part glazed mottled green, decoration of horizontal combing.
  11. Sandy buff ware, olive green glaze outside. Has been luted to vessel but broken off cleanly. Finger decorated terminal for strap handle.
  12. Light grey/buff ware, pale green glaze, applied strip decoration which is rouletted.
- Twenty-six small fragments all variously glazed.

#### GRIMSTON WARE

Is the most common jug fabric in Norfolk occurring on more than forty sites in the county and twenty-five sites in Norwich itself. It was also traded south

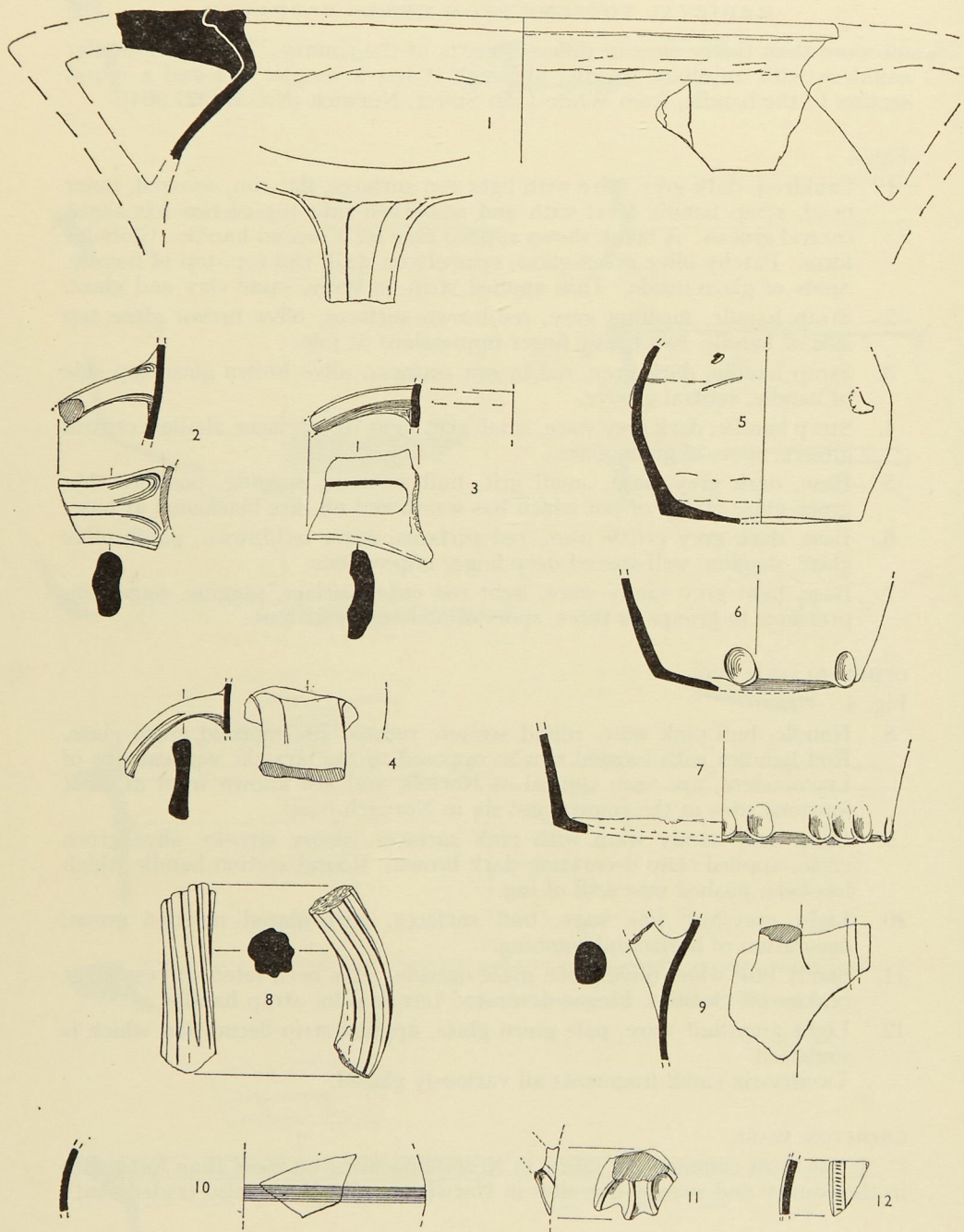


Fig. 4. Medieval Pottery: Local Oxydised Wares 1 to 7, other Glazed Wares 8 to 12 (quarter)



into Suffolk, north into Lincolnshire and westwards to Cambridge and Huntingdonshire.<sup>2</sup>

The fabric, with its distinctive glaze, has a very wide date range from the thirteenth century to the fifteenth century but the face, arm and scale jugs were made in the period 1250-1350.

Fig. 5

1. Rim, light grey sandy ware, flat top, rounded cordon, unglazed.
2. Rim, dark grey ware, buff surfaces, thin green glaze outside.
3. Strap handle, medium grey, buff surfaces, olive brown glaze top side of handle, finger pressed. Shows nail incisions immediately under rim—start of face jug decoration.
4. Base, dark grey ware, off white outer surface, dark grey inner, finger impressed, slightly sagging, splash of thin green glaze.
5. Base, dark grey ware, small grit, light grey inner surface, pink outer, knife trimmed, sagging. The bottom of base shows adhesions of another pot having been placed on it during firing and a spread of olive brown glaze, presumably from that pot runs over the base edge showing that the pot was fired upside down.
6. Jug fragment, dark grey ware, small grit, fragment shows formed "arm", finger-nail decorated, with "fingers" finishing just below rim, luted to vessel, making auxiliary handle. Olive green glaze.
7. Wall sherd, dark grey gritty, strong grooving, buff outer surface which had thin olive glaze on upper part of body and scale decoration, dark brown glaze.
8. Wall sherd, dark grey, pink inner, scale pattern decoration glazed dull olive green and brown, in zones.  
Wall sherd from globular jug, dark grey gritty, light red surfaces, outer covered thinly with olive green glaze.
10. Small fragment, similar but thinner ware, from neck of a jug, glazed olive green, decoration of alternate green and brown scales.
11. Light grey sandy ware. Vessel has been lightly rouletted in horizontal bands then glazed olive brown.

#### SCARBOROUGH WARE

The buff fabric, glossy green glaze, the patches of orange and green glaze and the small sharply defined vertical strips with rouletting are very characteristic of the products of the Scarborough kilns. Scarborough ware has a very wide distribution all along the east coast, northwards into Scotland, southwards to many sites in Lincolnshire and East Anglia with examples going as far south as Kent and Sussex and eastwards across the North Sea to Holland.<sup>3</sup> The sherds in this group must represent at least five different vessels, making Yarmouth one of the most productive sites for this type.

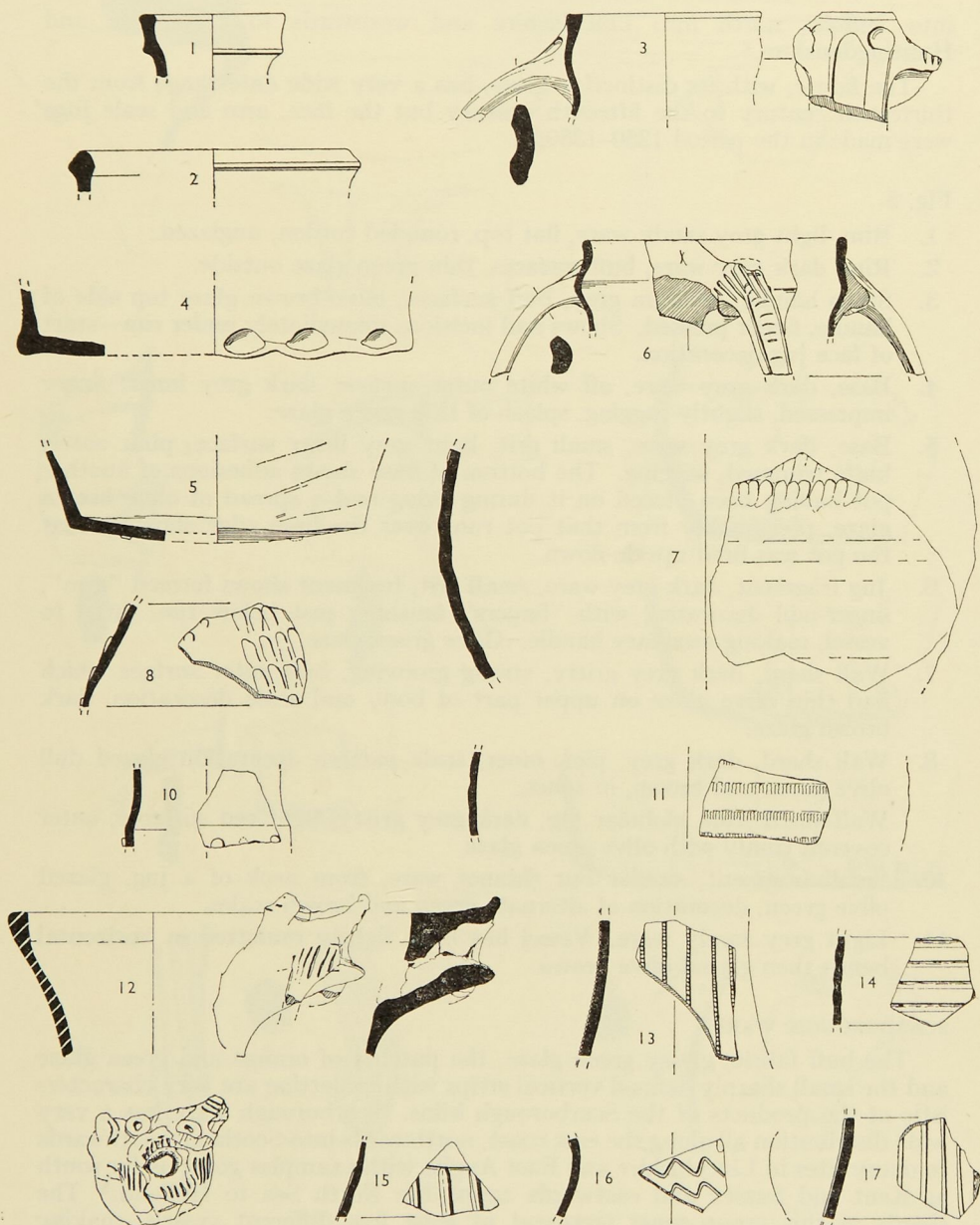


Fig. 5. Medieval Pottery: Grimston Wares 1 to 11, Scarborough wares 12 to 17 (quarter)

## Fig. 5

12. Jug spout in form of animal's head with two applied arms with hands forcing open animal's mouth to form spout. Buff pink ware, overall glossy yellow green crackled glaze with touches of leaf green glaze, drips only inside.
13. Buff ware, green glossy glaze outside. Decoration of rouletted vertical ribs giving a raised dot effect.
14. Light grey/buff ware, glossy dark green glaze outside, horizontal grooved decoration.
15. A pinker ware, dark green glaze outer, ribbed decoration.
16. Buff ware, exterior dark green glossy glaze, incised zig-zag decoration.
17. Similar ware and glaze to No. 13 but the ribs are plain.

## AADENBURG WARE

The fabric, slip, glaze and decoration of this jug are all characteristic of jugs made in Flanders in the vicinity of Aardenburg, north of Bruges.<sup>5</sup> This ware is known from eight sites in England stretching from Norwich and Great Yarmouth in the east to Wales. There are two other finds from Norfolk, one from the Corn Hall site, Norwich (N.C.M. 84.965) and one from the South Denes Power Station site, Great Yarmouth (N.C.M. 150.955).

## Fig. 6

1. Twenty-five fragments making up about two-thirds of the wall of large ovoid jug—rim, spout, base and handle not recovered. Thin dark grey ware with small grit, red inner and buff outer surfaces. A white slip has been applied to the upper part of jug on the exterior, then glazed a light mottled green finishing in a fairly even line c. 4 in. from base which is unglazed except for casual spots. A scar where the glazing takes on a dark brown colour indicates the broken off handle. The design consists of vertical lines of embossed rosettes, pushed out from inside, zoned between vertical applied strips—single strip, then rosettes, two strips then rosettes. All strips rouletted and also leaving roulette impressions on the pot itself.

## ROUEN WARE

The rod handle with spurs at the top and the brown rouletted strip on a yellow background is a typical product of the Rouen area<sup>4</sup>. Rouen jugs are found on twenty-nine sites in England, mainly along the south coast and up the east coast as far as Durham and west into Ireland. Four other examples are known from sites in Norfolk. At Feltwell, a similar rod handle (N.C.M. 201.965), sherds from Marks & Spencer site, King's Lynn, found by Miss Helen Parker in 1963 and from North Lynn, found by Mr. Eric Talbot in 1967. There is also an almost complete example dredged up from the River Waveney at Harleston (N.C.M. 619.965).

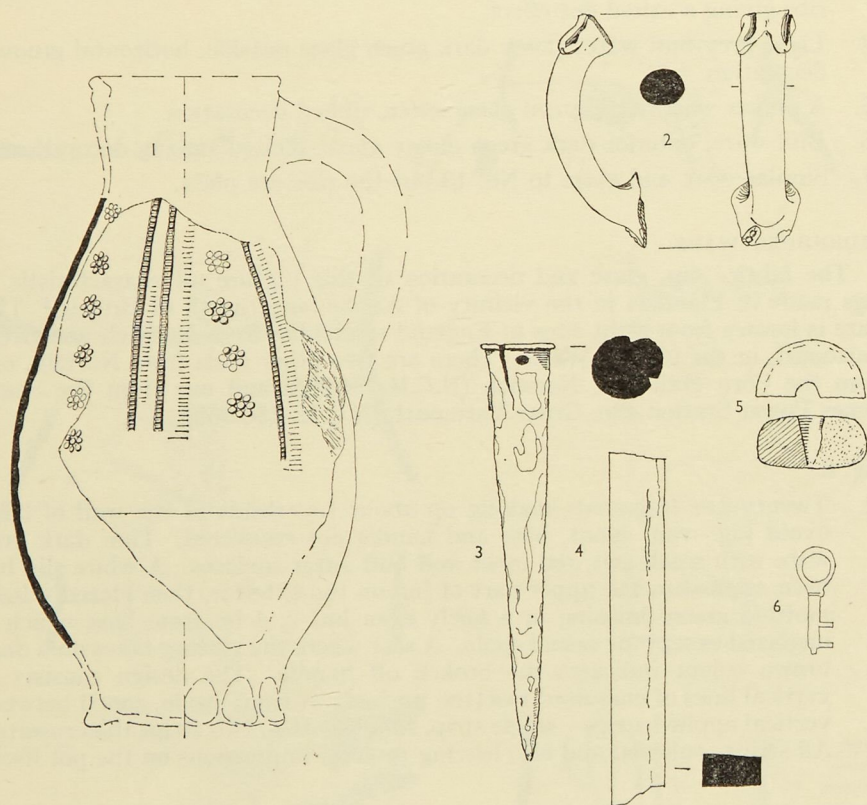


Fig. 6. Imported Pottery: Aardenburg 1, Rouen 2 (quarter)  
 Miscellaneous Finds: 3—Iron, 4—Whetstone, 5—worked stone (all quarter),  
 6—Bronze key (half)

Fig. 6

2. Handle, buff ware, spurs at top: just reaching the bottom of handle a segment of applied strip in red clay, rouletted. Sparse thin pale yellow glaze on outside of handle.

## MISCELLANEOUS FINDS

Fig. 6

3. IRON OBJECT. Pointed,  $8\frac{1}{2}$  in. long, circular section, *c.*  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. diameter at top, then tapers.  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. below top it is pierced by a circular hole,  $\frac{1}{4}$  in. diameter, going right through, harsh treatment has caused two clear fractures, running 1 in. down the body from the top. The pierced hole appears to be for a thong or cord to be passed through.
4. WHETSTONE. Schist, 7 in. in length broken both ends, quadrangular, all four sides smoothed,  $1\frac{1}{4}$  in. by  $\frac{5}{8}$  in. approx.
5. WORKED STONE. Half a bun-shaped centrally pierced fragment of limestone *c.* 2 in. diameter by  $1\frac{1}{8}$  in. thick. The hole starts at  $\frac{1}{2}$  in. diameter and narrows but owing to the break it is difficult to re-construct. May have been broken before piercing was completed.
6. BRONZE KEY. Length  $1\frac{1}{8}$  in., circular bow, solid stem, diameter  $\frac{1}{8}$  in., two wards.

GOAT HORN. Shows attempts at cutting this horn into usable pieces but apparently abandoned.

## CONCLUSIONS

The pottery from this sealed deposit is of considerable importance for our understanding of Norfolk Medieval Pottery as it demonstrates the type of local cooking-pots, bowls and jugs associated with decorated Grimston ware jugs from west Norfolk and imports from Scarborough, Northern France and Holland. All these fine decorated jugs from various sources should fall within the period 1250-1350. The local oxydized wares with their patches of internal glaze should be fourteenth century in date following on the grey reduced wares. As about 75 per cent of the coarse wares are reduced, a date range of about 1300 or early fourteenth century might be reasonable for this group.

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Yarmouth's autumnal Herring Fair, of ancient origin, was an important event in the mercantile year and attracted ships both from the Cinque Ports and the Continent. It is interesting to find in the local Court Rolls that already by 1298 the bailiffs are writing to the bailiffs and schabins of Aardenburg regarding an outstanding debt due to a Yarmouth merchant.<sup>6</sup> Under the same system (withernam) in the same year they are also writing to Scardeburgh<sup>7</sup>, and to Rouen in 1290.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup>J. G. Hurst, "Excavations at Barn Road, Norwich 1954/5", *Norfolk Archaeology*, XXXIII (1963), 157-161.

<sup>2</sup>*Proc. Camb. Ant. Soc.*, LIX (1966), 93, with other references.

<sup>3</sup>G. C. Dunning, "Report on Scarborough ware found at Kildrummy Castle", *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, XCVI (1962/3), 233-6.

<sup>4</sup>K. J. Barton, "Medieval Pottery at Rouen", *Arch. J.*, CXXII (1965), 73-85.

<sup>5</sup>J. A. Trimpe Burger, "Ceramik uit de bloeitijd van Aardenburg", *Ber. van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, XII-XIII (1962/3), 495-547.

<sup>6</sup>Yarmouth Court Rolls, C4/20, m.1.

<sup>7</sup>Yarmouth Court Rolls, C14/19, m.1.

<sup>8</sup>Yarmouth Court Rolls, C4/12, m.13.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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