

A CLOSELY DATED GROUP OF LATE MEDIEVAL POTTERY FROM MOUNT GRACE PRIORY

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with a note on the imports by J G Hurst

Summary

This paper examines a closely dated group of pottery from a dissolution context at Mount Grace Priory and discusses the group in the context of extant 16th century documents.

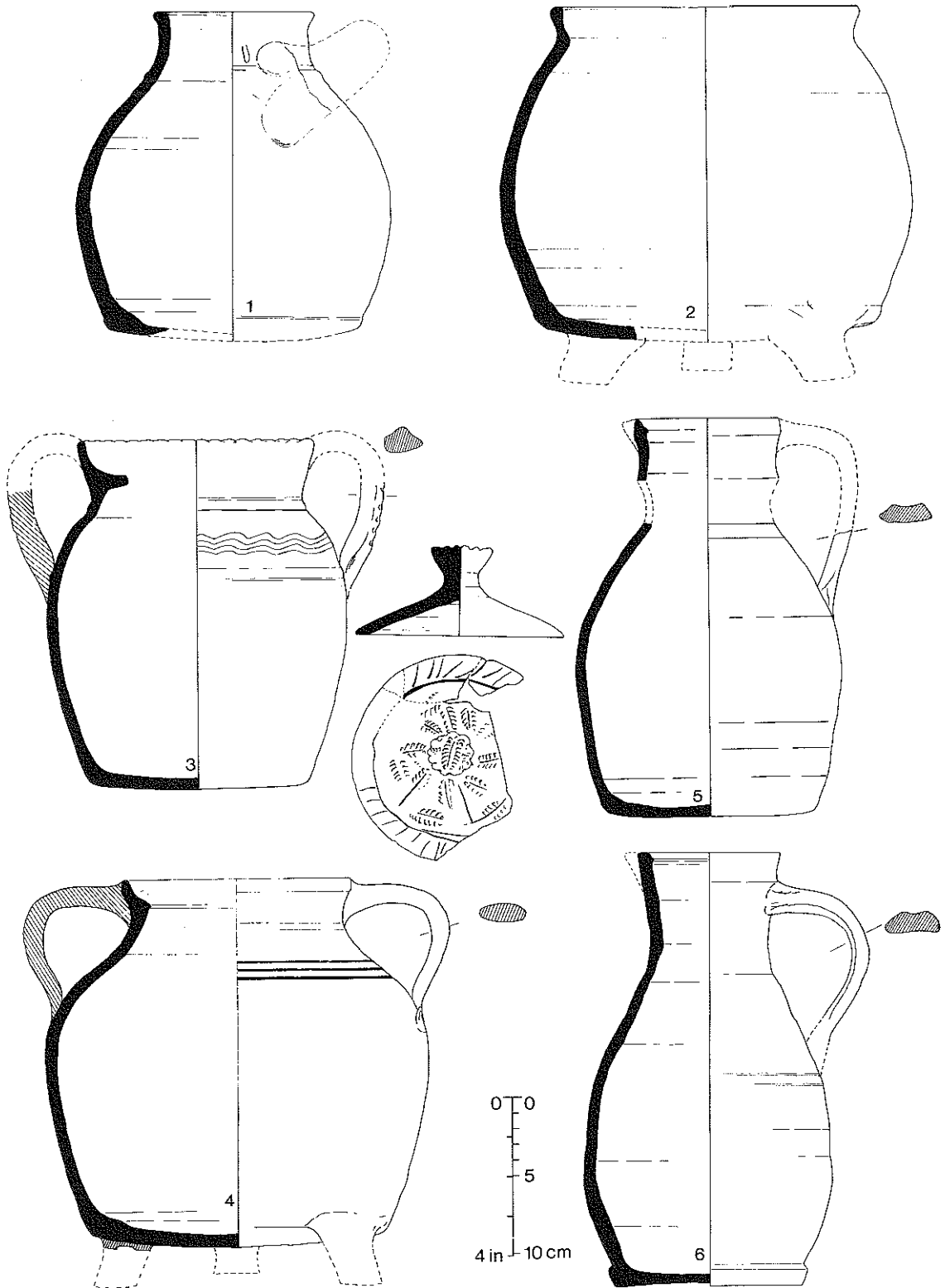
It is rare to find groups of medieval pottery which can be dated with any certainty, or be identified with a particular use. Excavation of the garden of a cell in the Carthusian Priory of Mount Grace (NGR SE 449985) in 1985 produced such a group from a dissolution context. It comprised a group of twenty-four vessels which had clearly been thrown into the garden at the closure of the house, and which had been immediately sealed below a thick deposit of slates cast down from the roof of the cell. It almost certainly comprises the pottery in use within that cell up to the day that the house was suppressed. The methods employed by the Commissioners of the Court of Augmentations in the closure of monastic houses are well known from the instructions they were given in their commission; they were to take the surrender of the house, to be formally confirmed by the monks in Chapter; to assign pensions to the dispossessed religious who were to leave at once; and to convert the assets of the house to hard cash. Following early suppressions where delay had led to widespread looting, as at Roche (Dickens 1959, 123-26, moveable goods were to be auctioned immediately along with the stock and foodstuffs.

The surrender deed for Mount Grace was signed on 18th December 1539, the day the monks departed forever. The pottery group discussed here must, therefore, have been deposited on or shortly after that date, for the site was not re-occupied until 1653 when Thomas Lascelles built a house among the ruins.

The pottery group was found immediately outside the garden door of the pentice on the east side of Cell 8, spread over an area of no more than five square metres. The number of sherds from each of the vessels recovered suggests that they were thrown out whole, missing sherds being accounted for by loss during excavation or by slight disturbance from Sir William Hope's excavation of the garden which had disturbed the sealing demolition deposits, or by the cutting of a drain through the deposit before 1905. Twenty-one vessels were worth illustration (Figs. 1-2). The group was analysed and drawn by JR, and was placed in its historical and archaeological context by GC.

The group was as follows:

1. Urinal in a reddish-orange gritty fabric with large pieces of quartz and grog visible in the tempering, apparently a local product. The vessel has an olive green to brown glaze on the outer surface to the base and extending some 25-30mm down the inside of the rim. Within, the vessel has a thick white deposit, confirming its use. There is a fragmentary incised device on the belly of the vessel.
2. Cooking pot in a slightly gritty buff-orange Humber ware fabric, unglazed externally but with a patchy, thin lead glaze on the inside of the rim and towards the base. The vessel is sooted externally.
3. Cooking pot and lid in Hambleton ware. The handled lid is decorated with a stamped design, whilst the body of the vessel is decorated with a combed "wavy line" pattern and pie-crusting on the rim.
4. Tripod-footed cooking pot in Hambleton ware, the feet, of unknown length, being thrown as tubes and plugged to the base. The shoulder of the vessel is relieved with three incised lines and the rim has a lid-seating.
5. Jug in Hambleton ware.
6. Jug in a soft, orange fabric whose tempering of quartz is mixed with large fragments of chalk and grog. An olive green to brown glaze covers the external surface and extends down the inside of the neck. The fabric has not been identified though it is within the general tradition of the area.
7. Chalice in Cistercian ware, with underglaze pipe-clay decoration, identified as a Wrenthorpe product. The form has not previously been recorded.
8. Type IV cup in Cistercian ware.
9. Type IV cup in Cistercian ware.
10. Drinking jug in yellow glazed white Beauvais earthenware, apparently without decoration (Hurst et al 1986, 106-110).
11. Bowl in tin-glazed Seville Columbia plain earthenware (Hurst et al 1986, 59-61).
12. Dish in tin-glazed Seville Columbia plain earthenware.
13. Dish in tin-glazed Valencia Lustre ware (Hurst et al 1986, 40-63). The pattern on the inner surface is barely visible in ultra-violet light and cannot be reconstructed.



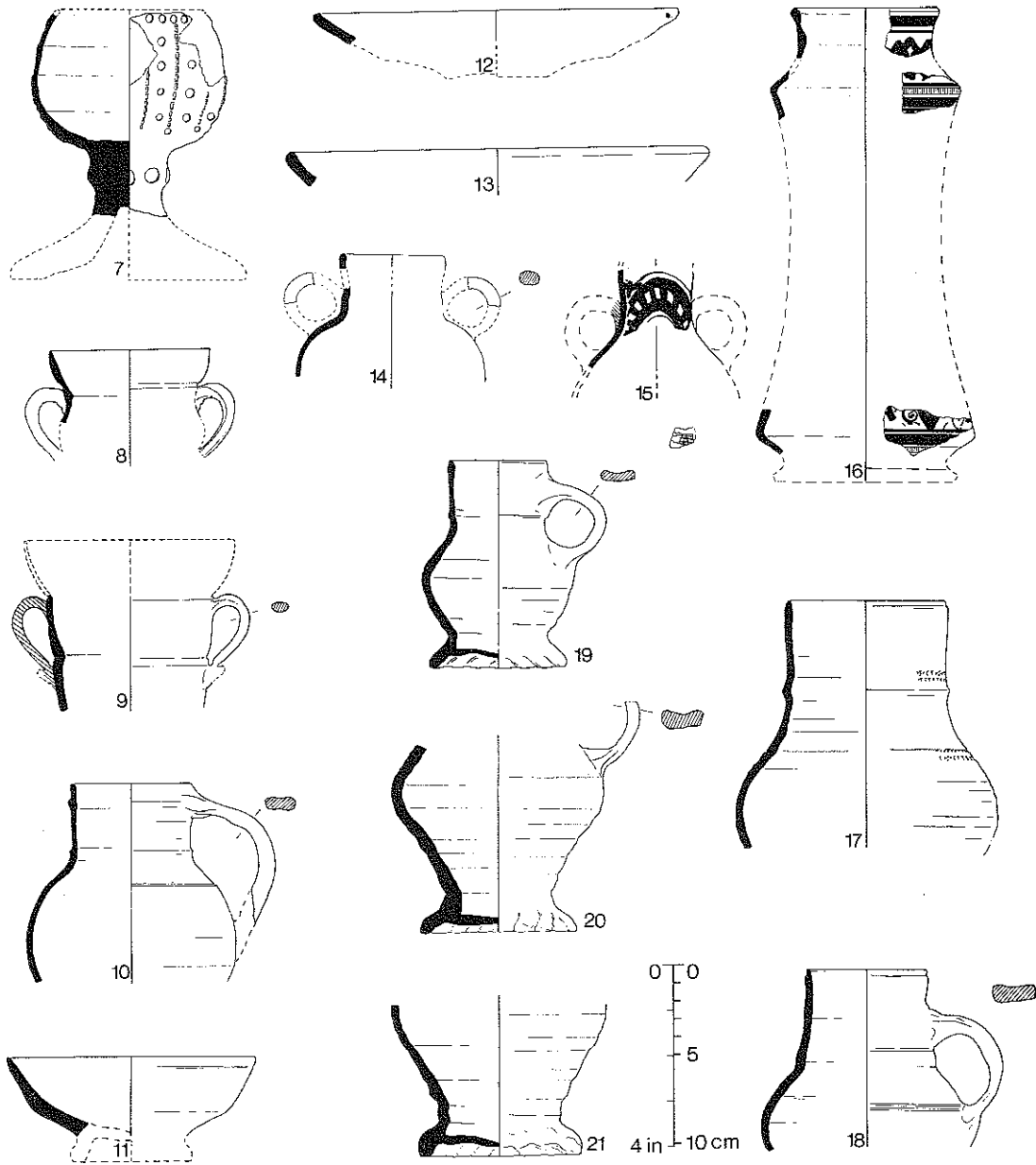
14. Flower vase in South Netherlands maiolica, with overall cobalt blue decoration externally but with plain white tin-glaze inside. There is no trace of the conventional IHS monogram (Hurst *et al* 1986, 117-119).
15. Flower vase in South Netherlands maiolica with a fragmentary medallion enclosed within a ladder motif, all in cobalt blue. A single sherd with lattice decoration might suggest that the central panel depicted a floral scene.
16. Albarello in South Netherlands maiolica with polychrome decoration externally, comprising bands of blue, orange and green at both carinations.
17. Large drinking pot or jug in Langerwehe stoneware (Hurst *et al* 1986, 184-190).
18. Drinking jug in Langerwehe stoneware.
19. Drinking jug in Raeren stoneware (Hurst *et al* 1986, 194-198).
20. Drinking jug in Raeren stoneware.
21. Drinking jug in Raeren stoneware.

Not illustrated were a further two vessels in Langerwehe and a further vessel in Raeren stoneware, all apparently drinking pots.

The Imported Wares

by John Hurst

It is of interest that there is a large proportion of imported pottery. Of the twenty-four vessels recovered six are local, three are regional imports but no less than fifteen are continental imports. This in itself suggests some status and affluence. By the early 16th century German stoneware was imported in vast quantities into Britain and has been found in peasant houses, so the four Langerwehe and four Raeren vessels are of a type which would be found in any household of the period for drinking. Langerwehe stoneware is most common in the 15th century but was largely supplanted by Raeren after 1500. It is, therefore, unusual to see as many Langerwehe as Raeren drinking jugs. The same large amount of Langerwehe has been found elsewhere at Mount Grace (L. Keen *pers comm*) and has also been suggested at other sites in the north east, e.g. Newcastle, York and Sandal Castle. It may be, therefore, that although Raeren seems to have gained a monopoly of trade in the south by 1500, in the north east Langerwehe was still imported in considerable quantities. As the highly decorated contemporary Cologne jugs are found on many English sites, it is perhaps odd that the Mount Grace monk did not have one.



South Netherlands Maiolica is a type fossil of most sites between 1500 and 1550 but it is rare to find more than a single vase on most sites. The ladder medallion vase is the most common type but the overall blue vases are less common. It is of interest that the monk bought, or acquired, a plain example as he might have been expected to have one with the IHS sacred monogram. In view of the attempted association of IHS vases with ecclesiastical establishments the fact that he had two apparently secular examples shows that it is not always possible to define the use of a vessel from its decoration. Although their use as flower vases may be distorted by their frequent occurrence in annunciation scenes it is quite possible that the monk had a pair for this purpose. The albarello is much more unusual. This would have come as a container for dry drugs or other preparations but these were not readily available at apothecaries until the end of the 16th century. This albarello would therefore be a special purchase or gift.

Beauvais yellow or green glazed jugs are found on many sites in Britain in the first half of the 16th century, especially from dissolution deposits. The better ones have a medallion on the front, often the English royal coat of arms, so this plain example was the cheaper version. They are usually only found singly as it is likely that, although they are more colourful than the German stoneware, they broke very easily and the stoneware would have a longer life.

Valencian lustreware is fairly widespread by the second half of the 15th century but becomes less common in the 16th century when it is largely replaced by Netherlands tin glaze in most homes and Italian in the better quality ones. It is, therefore, slightly archaic for the Mount Grace monk to have a Valencian dish in the 1530s. Most of his dishes and bowls would be of metal or wood as local pottery examples were not made in England until the 17th century. The two most unusual vessels are the Columbia Plain bowl and dish from Seville. A bowl and a dish of these undecorated wares were the regulation issue to Spanish soldiers, sailors, and are only found in any quantity in the south of England where they may have been acquired from visiting sailors or captured ships. They are most common in the Americas where they were in daily use by the Spanish settlers. There is no evidence that Columbia Plain was traded to Britain and there are few more examples of the decorated Isabela Polychrome version. The Mount Grace bowl and dish, as a set, suggests some direct Spanish contact either by a Spanish visitor or a monk travelling on a Spanish ship, or with Spain itself. The only other site with a major quantity of Seville pottery is the Hospital of St James at Drogheda in Ireland (K. Campbell *pers comm*) where the same problem of origin arises.

The Mount Grace group of imports is therefore of considerable interest, in contrast to the usual odd sherds which cannot be put in context, showing which examples a monk might acquire of both common and more rare types. But the mechanism by which Carthusian monks, or Mount Grace itself, obtained the various types can only remain speculation in view of the limitations of the archaeological evidence.

Discussion

It is important that such a group of pottery should be seen in the context it was used. It comprised only a small part of the household goods of a Carthusian monk, and indeed because it was thrown out at the suppression it must have been the least valuable cultural material in the cell. Remarkably, a document survives that describes the moveable contents of a cell at Mount Grace Priory (State Pps Dom). It comprises a list of the items brought by a monk of the London Charterhouse when he transferred to Mount Grace in 1519/20:

'Be yt Remembyrd that I Dane Thomas Golwyne monke professyd of the howse of London had wt me by the lycens of the honorable ffader prior of the sayd hows of London Dan William Tynbegh: when I departyd from London un to Mownte Grace All these things under wrytten the xxv day of January in the yere of owre lorde ml cccccxix.'

Imprimis iij habytys as they come by cowrse
Itm ij newe stamyn shyrtys and j olde
Im ij newe stamyn colys and j olde
Itm ij newe hodys and j olde
Itm a newe coote lynyde and an olde mantell
Itm a wyde sloppe furryd to put ouer all my gere of
the gyfte of my lady Conuay
Itm a newe cappe and an olde
Itm a newe pylche of the gyft of Mr Saxby
Im an olde pylche. And iij payer of hosen
Im iij payer of newe sokks ij payer of olde
Im iij olde sylces and a lumbare
Itm a new payer of korkyde shone lynyd and j payer of
doblede solyd shone
Itm a payer of blanketts and ij goode pylows and ij
lytelle pylows and a kosshyn to knele on
Iym a newe mantell by the gyfte of syr John Rawson
Knyght of the Roods
Itm a lytelle brasyn mortar wt a pestyll gevyn by the
gyfte of a frende of myn
Itm ij pewtyr dysshes ij sawcers an a podynger a
lytelle square dysshe for butter
Itm a new chafyng dysshe of laten gevyn to us and ij
newe tyne botylls gevyn by a kynsman of owrs
Itm a brasyn chafer that ys to hete in water
Itm a brasse panne of a galon gevyn to us lyke wyse
Itm a lytelle brasyn skelett wt a stele
Itm a payer of newe felt boots and ij payer of lynyd
sleppers for matyns Itm a fayer laten sconse
These boks drawen to gether by lyne be yn velome

Itm a fayer wrytten yornall made by the cost of
 masters Saxby hauynge a claspe of syluer and an
 ymage of seynt Jerom gravyn ther yn. The seconde
 lef of aduent begynnyth ierusalem alleluia this
 boke standyth in makynge iiijli
 Itm a fayer wrytten primer wt a kalendar and many
 other Rewls of owre religion ther yn
 Itm a fayer wrytten sawter wt a fayer ymage of seynt
 Jerom theryn in the begynnyng the ijde lef of the
 sawter begynnyth te erudimini
 Itm a large fayer boke wrytten wt the lessons of
 dirige and the psalmys of buryinge and letany and
 the Response theryn notyd
 Itm a boke wrytten conteynyng certeyn masses wt the
 canon of the Masse and a kalendar in the begynnyng
 of the boke wt a fayer ymag of Jhesu standyng befor
 Itm a lytell penance boke wrytten
 Itm a wrytten boke of prayers of diverse saynts wt
 ymags lymned and dirige wrytten ther yn
 Itm a wrytten boke of papyr wt divers storeys of ars
 moriendi ther yn
 Itm a printyd portews by the gyft of mr Rawson
 Itm a yornall a printyd primer gevyn by mr Parker
 Itm a lytell legent aurey in print
 Itm a shepds kalender in printe
 Itm ysops fabylls in printe
 Itm directorium aureum in printe
 Itm a complete frame for to wefe wt corsys wt xix
 polysses of brasse and xix plumetts of lede wt ij
 swordys of yryn to worke wt in the frame
 Itm a dowbyll styll to make wt aqua vite that ys to
 say a lymbeke wt a serpentyn closyd both yn oon

The normal contents of a Carthusian cell are clearly laid down in the Rule
 of the Order (Statuta, Cap xvi) established in 1259 but still current in
 the 16th century:

For his bed: a pallet; a felt if it can be had; also for it a
 plain, thick cloth, not lined; a pillow; a quilt or covering of
 sheep's skins, covered with a coarse cloth.

For his clothing: two hair shirts; two tunics; two pilches, one
 worse the other better; likewise two cowls; three pairs of
 boots; four pairs of socks; pelles; a cap; night shoes and day
 shoes; fat also for greasing them; two lumbar; a girdle; all
 of canvas and coarse.

And whatsoever belongs to the bed or clothing, of whatever colour
 or thickness it be, be he cloisterer or prelate, he shall not
 mind. Nethertheless, it is lawful for priors and others going
 beyond bounds to have clothes a little better, and for necessity
 lighter than these have who stay at home, in which, as in other
 things, all curiosity and niceness shall be avoided. For among
 all monks, and especially among us, it is ordered that meanness

and coarseness of clothes and everything else we use, worthlessness, poverty, and self abasement belong.

The inmate of a cell also has two needles, thread, scissors, a comb, a razor for the head, a hone or stone, and a strop for sharpening.

For writing: a desk, pens, chalk, two pumices, two ink horns, a penknife, two razors or scrapers for scraping parchment, a pointer, an awl, a weight, a rule, a ruler for ruling, tables, a stylus.

But if the brother is of another craft, which very rarely happens among us, for almost all whom we receive, if it can be done, we teach to write, he has suitable tools for his craft.

And there is given to him two pots, two plates, a third for bread and a lid for it. And there is a fourth, somewhat bigger, for washing up. Two spoons, a knife for bread, a flagon, a cup, an ewer, a salt, a pan, a towel, tinder for his fire, fuel, a strike-light, wood, a chopper. But for real work an axe.

The final entry in Cap xiv of the Statutes remarkably lists the pottery vessels that a Carthusian monk should possess, along with the necessities of life. Such basic provision might seem sparse, but it should be remembered that each monk lived alone, his food brought to him twice a day from a central kitchen by a lay brother. The pottery provided was literally the basic needs of a single man.

Excavation at Mount Grace has confirmed the other objects listed in the two documents. Thrown into the garden of Cell 8 along with the worthless pottery were a number of books, or at least their bindings, for numerous copper-alloy book-mounts were found in the same general area. From earlier excavations by Laurence Keen (*pers comm*) considerable evidence has been recovered for manuscript production, with the discovery of pens, prickers, styli, and coloured pigments for illumination. A stone mould for casting what looks suspiciously like type for book printing was also recovered. The Carthusians led a simple and strict life most certainly, but the cells they lived in were well appointed and contained items of the best quality. The pottery group from Cell 8, containing a high percentage of imports, would not be out of place on a site of the highest quality. However, it should be seen in the context of Dan Thomas Golwyne's brass mortar, tin bottles, pewter vessels, latten and brass chafers and his brasen skillet. Such vessels would have found a ready market at the suppression and therefore do not occur with any frequency in excavated contexts. Sadly, we cannot tell which cell Golwyne occupied, and he was no longer a member of the community in 1539, for his name does not occur on the pension list (Letters and Papers xiv f 258, xv f 555). No connection can be made between him and the pottery discussed here, but his list of possessions brought from London and the important group of pottery found in 1985 give a remarkable insight into the goods to be found

in a Carthusian cell at the dissolution, and the relative importance of pottery in such a household. The group presented above is indeed remarkable, not necessarily as pottery, but for the light it throws on contemporary documents. The fact that it can be closely dated is an added bonus.

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