

A medieval bird-shaped lamp or 'salt' from Norwich

Paul Blinkhorn and Pat Chapman*

The site

A medieval ceramic bird-shaped lamp or 'salt', possibly unique, was found in Norwich in 2007 during an archaeological evaluation at St Mary's Works, Duke Street (NGR TG 227 092), lead by Mark Holmes of Northamptonshire Archaeology.

The site was bounded by Duke Street to the east, St Martin's Lane to the north, Oak Street to the west and St Mary's Alley to the south, and was sandwiched between St Martin's and St Mary's churches. Medieval rubbish and quarry pits were sealed by 15th- to 16th-century homogeneous garden soils, which were cut by buildings and associated features of 18th-/19th-century date and also truncated by the construction of a shoe factory in 1926.

The 'bird' was recovered from a quarry pit that had truncated medieval pits in the north-east corner of the site.

The bird

This extremely unusual piece is in medieval Grimston ware of the 13th to 15th centuries, manufactured at the eponymous production centre near Kings Lynn, Norfolk. It is modelled in the shape of a bird, 200mm long, and is nearly complete although the wing-tips are broken off and the stem protruding from the base is broken at the point where it was pierced (Figures 1 and 2). The pale yellow-green glaze survives patchily across the entire body and stem.

The function of this piece is not certain, but it seems most likely it was either a small lamp or a container for salt at the table (a 'salt'). The back of the bird between the wings forms a shallow dish, and in this area the glaze is heavily encrusted as a result of use, probably through chemical action. The pierced stem is perhaps where the bird was pinned onto a wooden base or stand.

This ceramic bird appears to have no direct parallels and is perhaps unique amongst English medieval pottery. Nothing like it was noted during the excavation of the medieval kilns at Grimston (Leah 1994), and the overview of the Norwich pottery by Jennings (1981) similarly does not contain anything like it in Grimston ware.

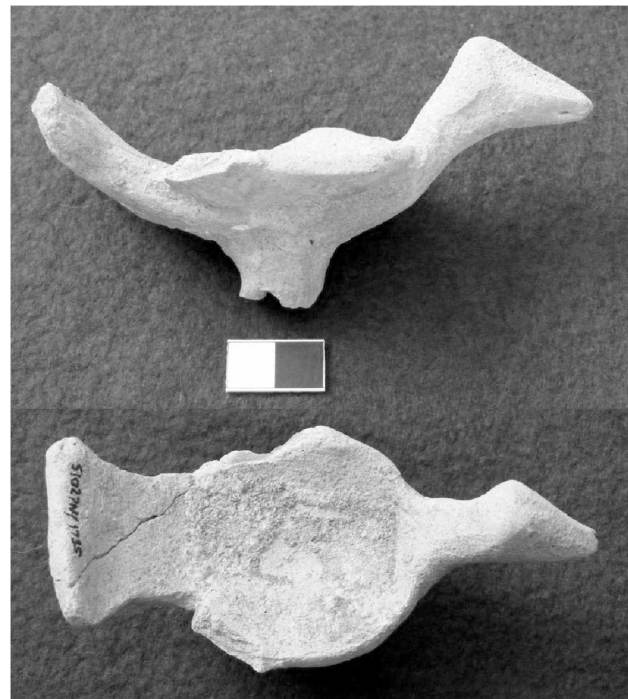


Figure 1
The bird-shaped lamp or 'salt' from Norwich. Scale 20mm



Figure 2
View of the Norwich bird-shaped lamp or 'salt'

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References

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Jennings, S 1981 *Eighteen Centuries of Pottery from Norwich*, East Anglian Archaeol 13.
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Résumé

Un récipient original, peut-être unique en son genre, provenant de fouilles réalisées à Norwich est décrit et illustré à des fins de référence ultérieure.

Zusammenfassung

Ein ungewöhnliches und möglicherweise einzigartiges Gefäß aus einer Ausgrabung in Norwich wird für zukünftige Bezugnahme beschrieben und illustriert.