

Some Recent Finds of Mediaeval Pottery

By E. M. JOPE

I. AN ASSOCIATED 13TH-CENTURY GROUP FROM CARFAX, OXFORD

DURING building operations at the SW. corner of Carfax in 1938 a mediaeval rubbish-pit was opened up, and from the bottom, about 20 ft. below the present ground level, a fair proportion of a 13th century associated group of pottery was recovered; had it not already been cut through in section before it was examined some of the vessels might have been recovered almost complete. This group provides evidence corroborating some of the conclusions put forward by R. L. S. Bruce-Mitford, who divides the pottery from the site of the Bodleian Library extension,¹ mainly coming from the bottom layers of mediaeval wells, into five ceramic groups dating from the late 12th to the early 14th century. In this Carfax pit examples belonging to the last two of these groups were found in association, thus confirming the typological sequence put forward. Additional evidence for the absolute dating of the two groups is given by the occurrence in this Carfax pit of a true baluster jug, a type well datable to the later 13th-early 14th centuries.²

A. Glazed Vessels

Pitcher (FIG. 17, no. 4) of fine hard buff fabric with red painted stripes and thin uneven green glaze. While this fabric and concave base must be considered with the Bodleian Well 9 group, the style, with painted stripes, is closely related to the earlier Well 1 group exactly as are some vessels from Well 9.³

Fragment (FIG. 17, no. 2) of the top of a small green-glazed pitcher of reddish sandy fabric with applied face-masks just below the rim. There are fragments of five more very similar vessels from various sites in Oxford,⁴ and one occurred in the Bodleian Well 9 group.⁵ On a parallel from Pevensey Castle, Sussex,⁶ this type is considered mid-13th century, and may perhaps be the precursor of the more realistic face-masks of the later 13th century.⁷

¹ *Oxoniensia*, IV, 115 ff.

² *Op. cit.*, 122.

³ *Op. cit.*, 102, fig. 24, C, H (Well 9); cp. *ibid.*, 100, fig. 23, B, C, G (Well 1).

⁴ Ash. Mus.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, 102, fig. 24, K, and pl. XI, 3.

⁶ Pre-1246, *op. cit.*, 121.

⁷ E.g. Winchester City Museum, two vessels found with coins of Henry III and Edward I. The same idea may also be seen on the French imported polychrome jugs of the later 13th century (*Archaeologia*, LXXXIII, pl. XXVI and fig. 14, d).

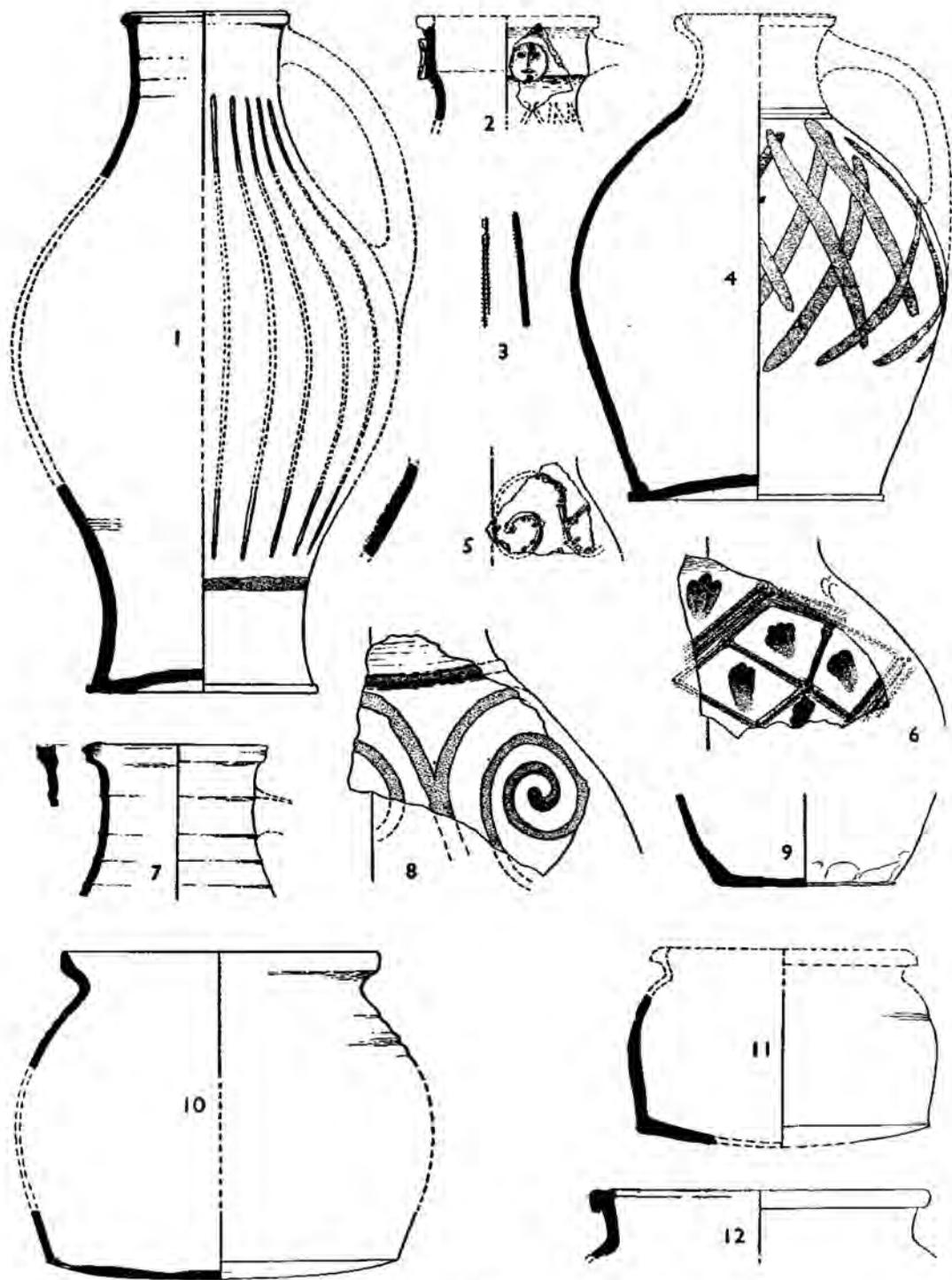


FIG. 17
 AN ASSOCIATED GROUP OF 13TH CENTURY POTTERY
 FROM CARFAX, OXFORD. Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$.

SOME RECENT FINDS OF MEDIAEVAL POTTERY

B. *Fragments of tall bulbous pitchers*

Pitchers (FIG. 17, nos. 1, 3), with applied strip decoration, in one case with superimposed rouletting (no. 3). The latter technique is to be seen on many vessels from Oxford itself,¹ and spreads to some extent over the Wessex area, appearing at Faringdon Clump (Berks.)² and Avebury (Wilts.).³

Vessels (FIG. 17, no. 8) with thickly painted spirals of red clay. One (not illustrated) is of a pale whitish fabric with a patchy thin green glaze and a painted base-ring with superimposed rouletting. No. 8 is of a rich buff fabric with transparent orange glaze, and is well paralleled by an example from Oxford (Ash. Mus. 1883.282).

Shoulder fragment (FIG. 17, no. 5) of sandy grey ware and dark green glaze with applied strip spirals decorated with punched holes, reminiscent of the Oxford pottery ram (Ash. Mus.) and vessels of Bodleian group C.⁴

The upper portion (FIG. 17, no. 6), of a green glazed pitcher of fine hard pale buff fabric with applied strips decorated with punched holes at the joins, dividing its surface into diamond-shaped panels having black applied pine-cone scale decoration in their centres. This style occurs in the Bodleian Well 9 group,⁵ and may be paralleled at White Castle (Glamorgan) in the earlier 13th century,⁶ though its fabric in this Carfax group suggests a connection with Bodleian Group C and therefore probably later in that century.

There are fragments also of two other pitchers (not illustrated) with applied strip spirals and diagonals, again decorated with punched holes. This appears to be a style peculiar to the Oxford potters, and will form the basis of a future study.

C. *Baluster Jugs*

A handle and rim section of a true baluster jug occurred and probably the fragments of one other; the top portion of a shiny green-glazed jug of buff fabric (FIG. 17, no. 7) is also related to this form. This provides a further indication that the date of this group lies in the later 13th century.

D. *Cooking Pottery*

Fragments (FIG. 17, nos. 9-12) of four cooking-pots in the group show two rim forms, two convex bases, and one flat base with a survival of the late Saxon technique of knife-trimming.⁷ No. 12 gives important dating evidence for its rim form, which occurs frequently in Wessex. There are several examples from Oxford itself,⁸ from Seacourt (Berks.),⁹ Faringdon Clump (Berks.),¹⁰ where it is associated with pottery in many respects similar to the Carfax group, from Combe (Oxon.),¹¹ Lansdown (Bath),¹² Avebury (Wilts.),¹³ and Cirencester.¹⁴ While the form is common in France in the 11th and 12th

¹ Cp. a pitcher from Radcliffe Square (*Antiq. Journ.*, xvi, 177, fig. 1, b).

² *Ibid.*, pp. 173 ff.

³ M.I.A.R. Museum.

⁴ *Oxoniensia*, iv, fig. 24, A.

⁵ *Op. cit.*, fig. 24, D.

⁶ *Antiq. Journ.*, xv, 323, fig. 1.

⁷ *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi, no. 10; *Oxoniensia*, v, 43.

⁸ Ash. Mus.

⁹ From S. A. Opie's excavations (1938), *Oxoniensia*, III, 168, 174.

¹⁰ *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi, 178.

¹¹ With a group of pottery not archaeologically associated but mostly of identical texture indicating a 13th century date, to be published in a forthcoming *Oxfordshire Arch. Soc. Report*.

¹² Museum of the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution.

¹³ M.I.A.R. Museum.

¹⁴ I am indebted to Mrs. B. H. St. J. O'Neil for this information.

E. M. JOPE

centuries, it has so far appeared in this country only in 13th century contexts, and even then apparently only in Wessex. It may be derived from a Roman prototype, and in Wessex is usually of a hard, well-baked, fine, shell-filled fabric with a thin wash of pale green glaze on the inner surface of the rim. The fabric seems at first sight to be derived from the shelly fabric of the East Anglian Late Saxon pottery, some of which is also derived from the same Roman prototype, and which does in fact spread westwards into Wessex in the late 11th and early 12th centuries.¹ However, no continuity can so far be traced between these two traditions in Wessex, there being a gap of fully a hundred years between them, during which all trace of the Roman prototype appears to be lost. The evidence suggests rather that this 13th century type is the result of an intrusive influence, probably from France, where the type is common even in the 12th century, and contemporary with the development of the bridge spout in the West Country,² which, although derived to some extent from the indigenous English form of spout attached to the rim, is not without French influence. A recent Old Sarum find suggests also a connexion between the form of some of the vessels of this type and the late 11th century globular cooking-pots common there and at Clarendon.³

II. POTTERY FROM BRILL AND SEACOURT

Several vessels with an unusual, highly exaggerated, undercutting of the rim moulding have been found at Brill (Bucks.)⁴ and Seacourt (Berks.)⁵ and are illustrated in FIG. 18. They are of a fine hard sandy buff fabric typical of the 13th century and later cooking-pots. The Seacourt examples may be given an upper limit of date somewhere during the 14th century,⁶ and although they are of a finer fabric than those from Brill, one rim form (no. 5) appears on vessels of exactly the same diameter from both sites. The rim type may be considered as an exaggeration of the clubbed rims so often encountered on the cooking-pots of the 13th and 14th centuries.⁷ Examples of vessels similar to these, but with less marked undercutting of the rim moulding, may be cited from Sandon Mount (Herts.)⁸ and Clarendon Palace (Wilts.),⁹ both of which belong probably to the 14th century. The Seacourt shallow bowls are paralleled

¹ *Oxoniensia*, v, 43 ff.

² *Archaeologia*, LXXXIII, 118; but see *Antiq. Journ.*, xv, 330 ff., for a revised dating earlier in the 13th century.

³ *Antiq. Journ.*, xv, 184.

⁴ Fragments of at least seven of these vessels found in a field NW. of Brill church in 1941 by Mr. Wetherby.

⁵ From S. A. Opie's excavations (1938); unassociated finds from the general spread over the site (*Oxoniensia*, III, 168, 174).

⁶ *Oxoniensia*, v, 31.

⁷ Bungay Castle (Suffolk), pre-1294; *Proc. Suff. Arch. Inst.*, xxii, 334.

⁸ *St. Albans and Herts. Architect. Soc. Trans.*, n.s. iv, 182, fig. 6, 15.

⁹ *Antiq. Journ.*, xvi, 82, fig. 9, 4.

SOME RECENT FINDS OF MEDIAEVAL POTTERY

from the kiln at Cheam (Surrey),¹ probably late 14th-15th century. FIG. 18, no. 6, is another bowl of exactly similar fabric from the same trench at Seacourt.²

There is some evidence for standardisation in the sizes of these vessels : all those from Brill and the one jar from Seacourt are of $7\frac{1}{2}$ or 10 ins. rim diameter, and the three bowls from Seacourt are all of 14 ins. rim diameter. This

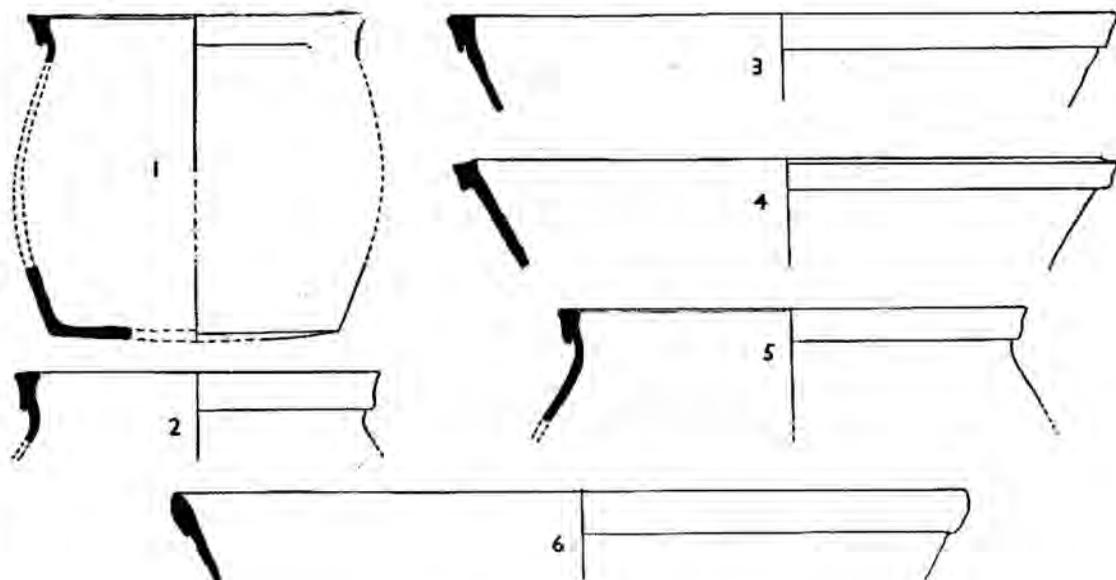


FIG. 18

MEDIAEVAL COOKING-POTTERY FROM BRILL (BUCKS.)
AND SEACOURT (BERKS.) Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$.

tendency towards standardisation of vessels in the 14th century has already been observed in the series of types found in graded sizes from the Cheam kiln,¹ and is an interesting illustration of the trend of the pottery industry towards the close of the mediaeval period, and of the industrial revolution of the 14th century.

¹ *Surrey Arch. Coll.*, xxxv, 85, fig. 6 and 86, fig. 8.

² Since the above was written the rim of a vessel similar to FIG. 18, no. 3, has been found by Mr. Crossley Holland in a moated homestead site (not marked on O.S. 6 in.) NW. of the church at Marsworth (Bucks.) and the writer has found one also from the deserted village site at Woodperry (Oxon.).

III. LATE MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM OXFORD

These notes are a preliminary survey of certain well-defined groups of pottery from Oxford which, by comparison with other datable groups, and (to some extent) upon internal evidence from five Oxford sites considered in conjunction (see Chronological Table, p. 79), may be ascribed to the later 14th and 15th centuries, though at this stage dating cannot be very precise.

The pottery (FIGS. 19-20) is of a fine hard buff fabric, often with a thin orange-red slip but usually with no glaze, and many of the vessels clearly show their descent from mediaeval forms by their everted rims, thumb-pressed



FIG. 19

LATE MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM OXFORD

(a) From Aston's Eyot (A.M. 1921.205); (b, c) From Carfax (A.M. 1931.521);
(d) From Bodleian Quadrangle. Sc. $\frac{1}{2}$

Phh. Ashmolean Museum.

decoration and (particularly) convex bases, occasionally (*e.g.* FIG. 19, *d* and FIG. 20, no. 9) with a marked knife-trimming round the base angle. This markedly convex base is a feature of a kiln-group found in Exeter, of very similar hard buff fabric, probably of not very different date; it may also be seen on a small jug from Aston's Eyot (A.M. 1921.205, FIG. 19, *a*), which is probably late mediaeval, and in the late 14th-15th century group from Bodiam Castle, Sussex,¹ and the feature is therefore not out of place in the 15th century. Certain features are introduced, such as the bowls (FIG. 20, no. 11), of less mediaeval appearance. This type appears by the 14th century,² it is known from the Cheam kilns,³

¹ J. N. L. Myres, *Sussex Arch. Coll.*, LXXVI, 223 ff.; see also the kiln-group from Shefford, Beds., *East Herts. Arch. Trans.*, IX, 33, fig. 3, no. 1.

² *E.g.*, G. C. Dunning, 'xivth Century Well at the Bank of England,' *Antiq. Journ.*, XVII, 414, fig. 1, no. 5.

³ *Surrey Arch. Coll.*, xxxv, 86.

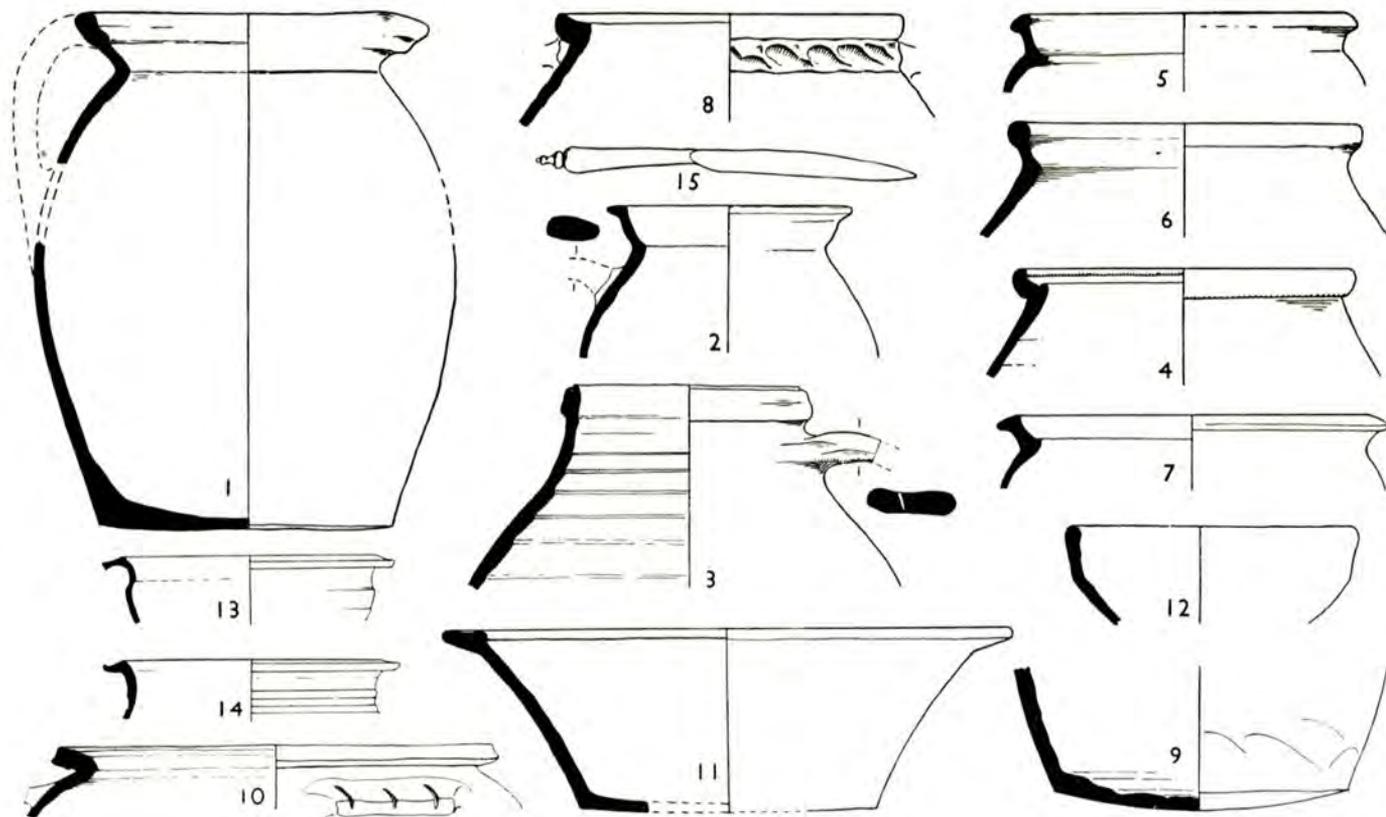


FIG. 20

LATE MEDIAEVAL POTTERY FROM OXFORD

Nos. 1, 2, 11 from Bodleian Quadrangle, 1941; nos. 3, 5 from Lincoln Hall, 1939 (*Oxoniensia*, iv, 198); nos. 4, 6, 8-12, 15 (an iron knife) from All Souls, 1941; no. 7 from Church Street, St. Ebbe's (*Oxoniensia*, III, 172); nos. 13, 14 from Oriel College, 1941. Nos. 4, 6-8 also occurred at Pembroke College, 1941. Nos. 4-8 have special provision for lid-seating; no. 8 probably had two handles, and has a thumb-pressed applied strip at the neck and an irregular wash of thin orange glaze over its upper surface. No. 9 shows traces of knife-trimming on the base. No. 10 probably had two handles. Sc. $\frac{1}{4}$

and is the ancestor of the yellow-glazed bowl common in Tudor times. Provision of a more definite seating for a lid is also characteristic of this later pottery in Oxford,¹ though it may be seen on what appears to be earlier pottery elsewhere.²

The tendency towards standardisation of forms and sizes noted above (p. 75) in the 14th century may also be seen in the later mediaeval pottery from sites in and around Oxford, of which some of the types are illustrated here.

A chief characteristic of this later pottery is the extremely restricted use of glaze as compared with its profusion in the 13th century, though the 'bibs' commonly found below the spout (FIG. 19, *b*) and the fortuitous spots of glaze on most vessels show that it was still in use, and it becomes very fashionable again by the Tudor period.

Although the fabrics are fine and hard, the general character of this late mediaeval pottery from Oxford is slap-dash. Particularly noticeable is the insecure jointing of handle and body; many vessels have either broken off or are already cracking at these points. Nevertheless their very hardness probably gave these vessels a longer life than that of the 12th and 13th century wares, and may account in some measure for the comparative scarcity of this later material, which was however, contributed to also by some economic depression in Oxford during the 14th and 15th centuries. Such examples of bad firing as FIG. 19, *c*, indicate that the attempt to achieve harder wares by use of higher temperatures was not accompanied in the Oxford region by an adequate understanding of how to control the increased risk of twisting and cracking which might result from this stronger firing. The Oxford potters of the late 14th and 15th centuries would appear to have imitated the fine styles of the London region, without acquiring their technical skill. FIG. 19, *b*, is, for instance, a poorly made imitation of a late 14th century type³ in the London region.

The Seacourt⁴ and Oriel⁵ groups show that in the Oxford region fine hard buff wares were in circulation for general use, as well as being employed for elaborately decorated jugs, at least by the later 14th century; some wares are so hard as to foreshadow the stonewares of the 16th and 17th centuries. This finding is well confirmed by a jug from Leicester datable to the later 14th

¹ See note 1, page 76.

² *E.g.*, at Lincoln: I am indebted to Mr. Graham Webster for showing me this pottery.

³ Cheam (*Surrey Arch. Coll., l.c.*); *London Museum Mediaeval Catalogue*, fig. 75, no. 5. An exactly similar vessel has recently been found at Sittingbourne (Kent), with a hoard of gold nobles of Edward I and Edward III. My thanks are due to Mr. Crossley Holland for showing me this vessel and some of the coins.

⁴ See p. 74, and *Oxoniensia*, v, 31 ff. The material drawn upon here is entirely taken from the finds made during Mr. S. A. Opie's excavations in June 1938 (*op. cit.*, 33).

⁵ *Oriel Record*, January, 1942, summarised in *Oxoniensia*, vi, 90.

SOME RECENT FINDS OF MEDIAEVAL POTTERY

century,¹ and by the presence of this very hard, almost stoneware amongst the material from the Cheam kilns,² probably again late 14th–early 15th centuries. Three small thin-walled vessels of this hard fine buff fabric were found in the Oriel group (e.g., FIG. 20, nos. 13–14), but none of the larger vessels characteristic of the All Souls and Bodleian Quadrangle (1941) material occur in the groups with an upper limit during the 14th century, and hence they may be regarded tentatively as belonging to the 15th century.

APPROXIMATE CHRONOLOGY OF OXFORD MEDIAEVAL POTTERY GROUPS

<i>Site</i>	<i>Dating</i>
(1) Bodleian Extension site, Broad Street (1938) ³	Later 12th to later 14th century
(2) Oriel College (1941) ⁴	Before late 14th century
(3) Seacourt (1938–9) ⁵	Before end of 14th century
(4) All Souls (1941) ⁶	Before building of cloister, 1495
(5) Bodleian Quadrangle (1941) ⁷	Before building of present Bodleian, 1613

¹ I am indebted to Mr. F. Cottrill for showing me this jug and its significance.

² See note 3, page 76.

³ *Oxoniensia*, iv, 89 ff.

⁴ See note 5, page 78.

⁵ See note 4, page 78.

⁶ Summarised in *Oxoniensia*, vi, 89.

⁷ Now in the Ashmolean Museum. From the Bodleian Quadrangle, collected by Mr. S. M. R. Gardner.