

CHAPTER 4

Eating and Drinking

This chapter demonstrates that our period sees a considerable expansion in the range and quality of items associated with eating and drinking, a phenomenon which can also be observed in urban households (French 2021, 140). Dining was an important social activity within the medieval household. Hospitality provided a means to influence and display, or construct, social relationships and identities. The table was a stage for the negotiation of status relationships, between genders, age groups and members of the extended household (e.g. Green 2017; Hadley 2005; Willmott 2005; Woolgar 2016). We begin by considering the table itself, before discussing objects associated with eating, hand-washing and drinking. This analysis draws primarily on the evidence of the escheators' and coroners' records. Objects of pewter and wood are rare archaeological survivals; however, archaeology does provide insights into the use of glass drinking vessels, largely absent from the historical datasets.

At the table: tables and tablecloths

It was only in the latter part of our period, with the creation of spaces such as parlours, that larger pieces of relatively fixed furniture, such as tables, began to appear (Hamling and Richardson 2017, 120–4). These may have been purchased, or formed a part of the 'standard', being the possession of lord or landlord (see Field 1965, 121). Within the escheators' lists there are 44 cases where the only objects associated with dining are tables. It is likely that these were multipurpose objects, potentially used for a range of household activities within a multifunctional hall. Tables are commonly listed with trestles (Table 4.1), suggesting that the table was a portable object which could be erected and taken down as required, highlighting the fluidity of medieval domestic space. This is a pattern which is reflected across medieval society

How to cite this book chapter:

Jervis, B., et al. 2023. *The Material Culture of English Rural Households c.1250–1600*. Pp. 99–129. Cardiff: Cardiff University Press. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18573/book10.d>. License: CC-BY-NC 4.0

Table 4.1: The occurrence of tables in the escheators' and coroners' records.

Object	Escheators'		Coroners'	
	No. items	No. Lists	No. Items	No. Lists
Tabula [table], with trestles	57	31	29	19
Tabula [table], with trestles	10	10	3	3
Mensal' [table]	21	19	5	4
Tabula mensal' [dining table]	8	6		
Mensal'/Tabula mensal', with trestles	29	19		
Board/Tableboard			36	10
Board/Tableboard with trestles			4	3
Board/Tableboard with frame			3	3
Plank table & frame			1	1
Plank			1	1
Folding table	1	1	1	1
Little table (with four feet, covered with green)			1	1
Tabula dormantz [fixed table]	2	1		
Trestles	9	5	8	2
Table frame			1	1

(Eames 1977, 217). It is unclear where an item is listed simply as 'table' whether this relates to a solid piece of furniture, a table-top or a set of table and trestles. Buxton (2015, 148) comes across similar ambiguity in early modern probate inventories and proposes, in that context, that the term 'table' is distinct from a table-top and trestles. Such a distinction cannot be securely proposed here given the prevalence of trestle tables within the escheators' records. One exception is the two *tabule dormantz* belonging to John Moigne of Warmington, Northamptonshire, in 1405 and valued at 8d, which were clearly fixed tables (see Eames 1977, 223).¹²⁵ There are also references to a *tabula mensalis*, which can be variously interpreted as a dining table or a trestle table, with values ranging from 4 to 16d. A few are valued at around 20d, suggesting more solid pieces of furniture. More typical are the two *tabule mensal'* belonging to William Leder, a franklin (elite freeholder) of West Lavington (Wiltshire) in 1404, valued at 2s.¹²⁶

¹²⁵ E45; these tables are further described as 'old and rotten'.

¹²⁶ E28.

The coroners' lists also include several entries for 'table' with no mention of trestles, but generally exhibit a greater level of distinction between table and table boards than the escheators' lists. The values ascribed to tables within the coroners' records are varied. This is nicely illustrated in the list of Thomas Bull-ock, a tailor of Hawkhurst (Kent), who committed murder in 1577. He had two tables (2s), a long table (12d) and a square table (4d).¹²⁷ Other examples are George Bowre of Kingthorpe (Yorkshire) who had a square table valued at 3s 4d in 1588, while Reynold Carter, a chandler of Chiddingstone (Kent), had in 1570 an old table valued at 2d, plus a 'plancke table'.¹²⁸ The size of a table and its condition thus appear to have played a role in the determination of value. Within the escheators' records, John Coupere of Wellingborough (Northamptonshire) and Sibyl Thedeware of Rockland St Mary (Norfolk) each had a small table (*parua tabula*), valued at 5d and 2d respectively.¹²⁹ In many cases tables were valued along with benches or stools, for example John Wyvenden of Hawkhurst (Kent), had a 'plain table and trestle set in the ground', with a form (bench), cupboard and two old chairs, valued together at 2s in 1576, suggesting these items were of low value individually.¹³⁰ An increasing diversity in the types of tables used in the home can also be traced through wills and probate records (Sear and Sneath 2020, 137–8).

Some households had multiple tables. William Burton, of an unidentified location in Kent or Middlesex, who was outlawed by civil suit in 1404, seems to have had at least two. The term *tabul'* (whether singular or plural is unclear) crops up twice in his list. In both cases, the term appears within a collection of objects listed together and valued as a group.¹³¹ A similar case is that of Richard Vttockestre, parson of Lyminge (Kent), outlawed by civil suit in 1382. He had four trestle tables (valued together at 13s 4d) and a further two tables (valued with four benches at 3s 6d), possibly suggesting a distinction between portable trestle tables and fixed tables.¹³² Henry Pruet of Hampshire, outlawed in 1404, is listed as having three tables (three tables and three pairs of trestles).¹³³ These are valued with three benches at 4s 4d. Similarly, Richard Clifford of Chiswick (Middlesex), outlawed by civil suit in 1422, had three trestles and three tables, plus forms (benches).¹³⁴ That these items are often grouped with benches for the purpose of valuation suggests that they were primarily understood as associated with dining, rather than having a principal role as workbenches, although they could have also fulfilled this function. There is nothing within the escheators' records to suggest a link between trestles and lower status households;

¹²⁷ C547.

¹²⁸ C346; C208.

¹²⁹ E304; E627.

¹³⁰ C230.

¹³¹ E12.

¹³² E642.

¹³³ E36; the document is partly illegible, but 'trestles' presumably follows 'pairs'.

¹³⁴ E608.

trestles are listed among the belongings of clergy, a merchant, and a goldsmith. Occupations are listed too rarely within the coroners' records to analyse this relationship, however.

Whereas the table likely had a range of functions, tablecloths are clearly associated with dining. The importance of tablecloths in elite dining can be traced back to the early medieval period (Jervis, Whelan and Livada 2017, 256), and Woolgar (2016, 192) highlights how in many cases the importance of napery surpassed that of the furniture underneath. Indeed, the customals studied by Birrell (2015, 17) enshrine the rights of tenants to eat in a 'dignified' fashion, implying a concern not only with being provided with food, but also with the opportunity to consume appropriately including, perhaps, the use of a tablecloth. While we must bear in mind the caveat that tableware may have been included within the catch-all category of 'household utensils', the acquisition of a tablecloth without pewter ware or specialist consumption vessels may be indicative of aspirational behaviour among those at the lower end of society. Generally, these were valuable items. In 1404 William Leder, the Wiltshire franklin, had two tablecloths, valued at 4s (more than his two trestles and tables valued at 2s 8d altogether), and in 1435 William Chitynden, a labourer of Cranbrook (Kent) had two, valued at 20d, showing how these objects were used by households at each end of village society.¹³⁵ Within the escheators' lists, values assigned to cloths range from 4d to 10s, and therefore they must have varied considerably in material, size and condition. The same is true of those in the coroners' records. For example, in 1551 Thomas Thomas, possibly a tanner, of Longbridge Deverill (Wiltshire) had three linen tablecloths valued at 4s, but William Sparke, a yeoman of Loddon (Norfolk) had two (material unspecified) valued at only 8d in 1519.¹³⁶ The list of the Wiltshire clergyman John James provides some further insights into these variations. He had a diaper (probably patterned silk) tablecloth valued at 10s, a Holland (a fine linen made in the Netherlands) tablecloth valued at 3s 4d and another tablecloth worth 16d.¹³⁷ The material of these cloths was clearly an important factor in determining their value. The escheators' records provide 20 cases where a tablecloth, but no table, is listed as the only object associated with dining. It may be the case that tables were excluded from the list for some reason, perhaps being considered an immovable item associated with a property. It was, however, common for napery to be passed on through wills, particularly down the female line, and this may account for the occurrence of cloths with no associated furniture (Hamling and Richardson 2017, 135).

Of particular interest are instances where households possessed multiple tablecloths. For example, as noted William Leder possessed two tablecloths, as well as two tables and two trestles.¹³⁸ Another case is John Meselyn, of an

¹³⁵ E28; E918.

¹³⁶ C126; C133.

¹³⁷ C382.

¹³⁸ E28.

unidentified Kent or Middlesex location, outlawed by civil suit in 1404. Meselyn possessed a table, two tablecloths and 'other *naperie*', perhaps napkins or further tablecloths.¹³⁹ The table is valued with other items, but the cloths and naperie are valued together at 12d. In one case, that of Nicholas Shawe of Mere (Wiltshire), who broke out of prison in 1401, the list includes two tablecloths (one valued at 12d and the other at 6d), as well as two napkins (valued at 10d).¹⁴⁰ In around half of cases (34/56) where households possessed a tablecloth, at least one napkin or towel was also present. However, there are two cases, William Mauldeson of Wintringham (Yorkshire; outlawed in 1422) and Robert Smyth of Sutton, Wiltshire (outlawed by civil suit in 1408) where the only objects associated with dining are napkins (in both cases their other possessions include animals, agricultural produce, tools and other furnishings as well as basic kitchen equipment; Smyth's napkin is valued at 6d).¹⁴¹ Overall, the evidence for tables and cloths shows variability in the arrangements of particular households and in the value and character of these objects, with cloths seemingly being particularly popular objects within non-elite households.

Eating utensils and pewter ware

The most basic eating utensils, trenchers of stale bread, would not have been worth recording. Trenchers, probably of wood, occur in six coroners' lists; the six belonging to the Wiltshire clergyman John James in 1577 are noted as being 'fine' and stored in a box.¹⁴² Wooden vessels recovered from our sample of archaeological contexts (which survive only where the wood is mineralised or deposits are waterlogged) are exclusively turned bowls. An example from Wakefield (Yorkshire; Birmingham Archaeology 2009) carries decorative incisions. A vessel from Abbeytown (Cumbria; Grampus Heritage 2012) was cut in half and may be a mazer which was cut to remove its silver or gilt band. Bowls vary in size. Two examples from 75–87 Main Street Cockermouth (Cumbria; Leech and Gregory 2012) have a diameter of approximately 180mm, but a larger example from Carlisle had a diameter of 560mm (Newman 2011), suggesting that it was not used for individual food or drink consumption. Other examples, from Exmouth (Devon; Weddell 1980), Dinna Clerks (Devon; Beresford 1979), Ripon (Yorkshire; Finlayson 2001b) and Berwick-upon-Tweed (Northumberland; Lancaster University Archaeology Unit 2000) appear undecorated.

Most of the eating utensils listed in both the escheators' and coroners' records are pewter ware. Most scholarship on medieval and early modern pewter has focused on questions of manufacture (see Homer 1991 for an overview). London was the centre of the pewter industry, but in the fifteenth century pewterers are

¹³⁹ E8.

¹⁴⁰ E1437.

¹⁴¹ E563; E1281.

¹⁴² C45; C146; C158; C382; C472; C547.

recorded in several large towns, including Canterbury, Northampton, Southampton and Ipswich (Homer 1991, 68). The most comprehensive study of the archaeology of medieval pewter is that of Weinstein (2011), who presents an overview of both manufacture and use, including scientific analysis of materials and a survey of forms from archaeological contexts. Prior to our period, pewter was mostly used in the church, but by the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries its consumption in domestic (particularly high status and urban) contexts was rising (Hatcher and Barker 1974, 43; Weinstein 2011, 216). Hatcher and Barker (1974, 46) associate this increase with a rise in living standards after the Black Death and perceive it as a part of a wider increase in the quality and use of items of furniture (discussed in Chapter 5). The sixteenth century saw a substantial growth in the pewter industry, and pewter ware became increasingly prevalent in the homes of rural households (Weinstein 2011, 55–6). Pewter was widely available at markets and fairs in the late medieval and early modern period (Hatcher and Barker 1974, 253). It is likely that this mechanism, rather than purchasing direct from pewterers, was the principal means through which rural households acquired pewter. This may, in part, account for the odd quantities of items present in some lists, as markets and fairs may have facilitated the acquisition of single objects rather than complete sets, in accordance with the purchaser's means. Pewter is distinct from copper alloy and iron in that it is not well suited to the manufacture of cooking vessels. Therefore, its introduction marks a fundamental change both in the perception and value of dining vessels and of dining itself in the later middle ages, perhaps inspired by larger communal gatherings in higher status contexts experienced, for example, around the harvest. The escheators' and coroners' datasets offer a unique opportunity to track the introduction of pewter vessels in non-elite households. It is unfortunate that the composition of pewter means that it does not often survive in the ground, with none present within the archaeological sample analysed here.

The most numerous tableware vessels are those associated with the serving and eating of foodstuffs (Table 4.2). Among the escheators' records the most abundant items are dishes (typically listed as being of pewter or tin; there are only five lists which contain wooden dishes). Most commonly these occur in sets of six or, occasionally, 12 as is typical for plate in general (Woolgar 2016, 178; Weinstein 2011, 75) (Figure 4.1). The next most common are platters, typically of pewter or tin, but with occasional wooden examples. These also seem to commonly occur in multiples of three, particularly in lists with larger quantities of these vessels. These items are suggestive of the display of foodstuffs in the centre of the table, perhaps indicative of the consumption of sliced meats (see Weinstein 2011, 72). The presence of 35 saucers, across 11 escheators' lists (typically occurring in multiples of three), is particularly noteworthy as this implies the preparation of flavoured sauces to be served at the table (see Woolgar 2016, 84–92). Where the material is stated, these are of pewter (Figure 4.1).

In the majority of cases, the only pewter items listed are dishes, typically in groups of three to six (Table 4.3). There are, however, instances where households had more. Edward Knyght of Seend (Wiltshire) had 8 pewter dishes

Table 4.2: The occurrence of eating vessels in the escheators' and coroners' records.

Object	Escheators'		Coroners'	
	No. items	No. Lists	No. Items	No. Lists
Vessels (specific type not stated)	190	23	27	11
Dish	229	41	220	37
Charger	11	5		
Platter	55	16	119	30
Saucer	34	11	80	22
Salt cellar	22	12	22	14
Pewter Pot	2	1	6	5
Bowl	2	2	33	10
Pottinger	5	1	24	10
Chafing dish			17	15
Custard dish			5	1
Egg dish			1	1
Porringer			3	3
Pottinger & Platter			12	1
Trencher			46	6

(valued at 16d) and John Treby, a clerk from Devon, had 12 tin dishes.¹⁴³ The list of Thomas Molundre, parson of Great Brington (Northamptonshire), is distinctive in having four chargers and three platters as the only tableware (no valuations are given), which is surprising given his diverse range of kitchen equipment, including tools for roasting and a mortar.¹⁴⁴ Perhaps here we are seeing the larger vessels that were used to serve the potentially elaborate dishes prepared by this household, while the smaller eating vessels, perhaps wooden trenchers, are omitted from the list. Other lists have a more varied range of tableware. The most diverse is that of Richard Swalwa, a goldsmith of Great Torrington (Devon), who possessed six dishes, five pottingers, three saucers, one pot and a pewter salt cellar (valued together at 2s 4d) along with a quite complex range of kitchen equipment.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, Robert Tyuerton, a 'leech' of Woodnewton (Northamptonshire) possessed two platters, four dishes, four

¹⁴³ E14; E55.

¹⁴⁴ E298.

¹⁴⁵ E517.

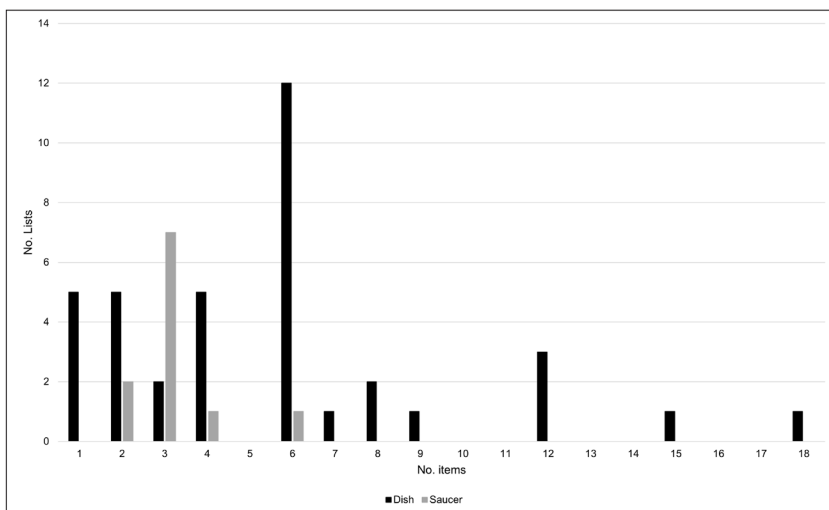


Figure 4.1: Occurrence of dishes and saucers in the escheators' lists. The bars indicate the number of lists which contain the stated number of dishes and saucers.

sauces and a pewter salt cellar as well as a table cloth.¹⁴⁶ These examples demonstrate that reasonably well-off households, with a wide variety of goods, might only have a limited range of pewter tableware.

Salt cellars occur in multiple escheators' lists. These were often the centre-piece of the table (Woolgar 2016, 186), so the occurrence of these items in pewter, and in one case silver, is significant for understanding how middling households (including two clerics, a leech and a yeoman) may have sought to emulate the practices of the elite table, where it was increasingly being used as a flavouring as well as a preservative. The price of salt dropped steadily across the fourteenth to sixteenth centuries, but remained a moderately expensive commodity, restricting its accessibility to households (Bridbury 1955, 152; Sear and Sneath 2020, 70–1).

The symbolism of the salt cellar is demonstrated through the later medieval and early modern practice of placing it in front of the diner of the highest social status, resulting in the expression that someone is 'above' or 'below' the salt (Buxton 2015, 164). This symbolism likely relates to the metaphorical status of salt as a holy and purifying substance (Yeoman 2018, 182). Yeoman (2018, 191) suggests that the act of filling the salt cellar, placing it on the table and then removing it for storage in the buttery or pantry can be likened to the performance of eucharistic rituals, in which objects are processed in and out of the church. Medieval eucharistic thought framed domestic practice, from the saying of prayers in the bed chamber to the serving of food (French

¹⁴⁶ E307.

Table 4.3: Combinations of pewter vessels occurring in the escheators' records.

Dish	Platter	Charger	Saucer	Salt Cellar	Pot	Bowl	Pottinger	Misc. Vessels	No. Lists
X									22
X	X								5
				X				X	2
X	X	X	X	X					1
X			X	X					1
X	X	X	X						1
X			X						1
X	X		X	X					1
X	X			X		X			1
X			X	X			X		1
X				X					1
X	X		X						1
X						X			1
X								X	1
X		X							1
X	X	X		X					1
	X		X	X					1
	X								1
	X	X							1
	X		X						1
	X			X					1
				X					1
					X				1
			X						1
								X	20

2014, 46). For example, Gardiner (2008) highlights parallels between liturgical and domestic behaviour around dining, and it is perhaps fruitful to consider these in the context of an increasing presence of religious items in the home after the Black Death (French 2021, 191–5; Kolpacoff Deane 2013). Following the Reformation, the melting down of church plate and its refashioning into

domestic objects may also have afforded this material a religious significance. As Walsham (2017) argues, the transformation of liturgical objects into commodities stripped them of their potency, yet consumers may have been aware of the potential or actual liturgical origins of their tableware. These liturgical connections can be situated within a broader suite of tableware in other materials which provided a means to subtly display religious devotion or provide material experiences, once provided by the church, in the home (Hutton 1995; Walsham 2008; 2017).

The full set of pewter tableware was referred to as ‘the garnish’ and comprised 12 platters, 12 dishes and 12 saucers (Weinstein 2011, 75). This full complement of wares is not present in our lists. Rather than acquiring ‘sets’, households acquired what they could afford and adapted their use into existing and emerging dining practices (see also French 2021, 143). Indeed, as French (2014, 53) highlights, we might expect households to change their eating habits gradually, as they adopted not only new tableware but developed tastes for different types of foods, cooked in different ways. Additionally, small households did not require the large sets needed for formal dining, meaning they had different requirements to the metropolitan merchants and companies who were the earliest adopters of pewter in large quantities. Division of sets could also occur, as pewterware was split between heirs (French 2014, 50). The proportion of escheators’ lists within an individual decade that include at least one item of pewter never rises above 11% (Figure 4.2). The value of these items is difficult to ascertain, as many are valued within groups of other items. Pewter dishes appear relatively cheap, however. John Stanke, a butcher of Andover (Hampshire), had three valued at 12d in 1404, for example.¹⁴⁷ Even salt cellars were not prohibitively expensive. John Moigne’s two pewter salt cellars were valued at 12d in 1405, although the silver examples owned by the cleric Richard Fysshare of Attleborough (Norfolk) in 1448 were considerably more valuable (two ‘worn’ items valued at 20s).¹⁴⁸ Individual items of pewter appear to have been within reach of those of modest means. However, these households found the cost of obtaining a suite of complementary vessels prohibitive, placing acquisition of a full set, or more specialist items, out of the reach of some households.

A rise in pewter use can be charted through the later fourteenth century, peaking in the second quarter of the fifteenth century, after which point lists become less detailed (Figure 4.2). The later fourteenth century sees an increase in the average number of pewter items in lists, with this dropping and remaining fairly stable through the first half of the fifteenth century. This, coupled with the increasing occurrence of at least one pewter item in lists, is suggestive of a rising number of households acquiring pewter, but in low quantities. Few occupations are listed before the 1410s; however, in this decade individuals listed with pewter ware include two yeomen, a husbandman and a clerk. Clearly at

¹⁴⁷ E30.

¹⁴⁸ E45; E126.

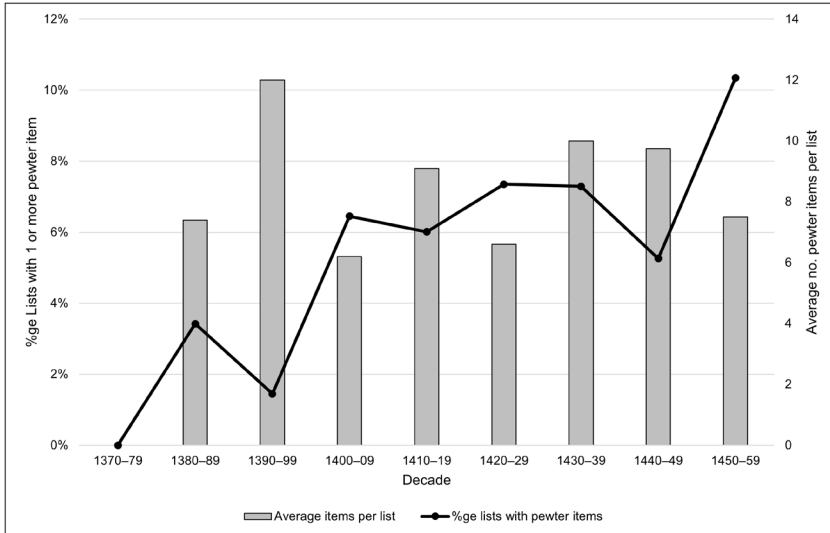


Figure 4.2: Proportion of escheators' lists containing pewter items (line chart), and the mean quantity of pewter items (bar chart), by decade.

this early stage, a century or so earlier than studies such as Weinstein's suggest, pewter was starting to find its way into rural homes.

Evidence of the use of other metals to make serving vessels is provided by archaeological evidence of copper alloy platters from Dartford (Kent; TVAS 2014) and Wharrah Percy (Yorkshire; Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010) and a possible iron plate from the manor house at Aston (Yorkshire; Wiles 2011). There are three similar copper alloy dishes on the database of the Portable Antiquities Scheme; however, these items are very rare when compared to copper alloy cooking vessels (Figure 4.3).¹⁴⁹ Despite their scarcity, these vessels perhaps indicate the use of cheaper metals to adopt new habits of serving and eating in some households. While pewter, with its liturgical associations, was perhaps a particularly meaningful material, wooden vessels could also carry meaning through decoration, as Yeoman (2017) shows in her analysis of elaborately decorated early modern trenchers (perhaps the 'fine' examples belonging to John James carried such decoration). The evidence is suggesting two things: firstly, that households needed to acquire a broader range of vessels, including items suitable for serving solid foods, such as platters or chargers; and secondly, that pewter was increasingly the preferred material for these vessels. It is probably simplistic to see this as material substitution in pursuit of the emulation of high-status dining practices. Instead, it represents a process of adaptation to the availability of new materials, foodstuffs and experiences. These included

¹⁴⁹ NMS-073775; WAW-F6F236; LON-691E76.



Figure 4.3: Examples of lead alloy and copper alloy dishes reported to the PAS. A: Fragment of a 14th–15th century tin alloy/pewter dish, probably a shallow plate-type vessel from Tanworth-in-Arden, Warwickshire PAS Reference WAW-F5CC16; B: Fragment from a 15th–17th century copper alloy dish-like vessel from Aston Canlow, Warwickshire (WAW-F6F236). Reproduced under CC-Share Alike Licence. Images: Birmingham Museums Trust.

sensations of taste and texture, but also opportunities for the display and performance of piety and identity.

A similar range of items are present in the coroners' lists, although there are some changes in the relative importance of certain objects (Table 4.2). Dishes remained the most common vessel. Platters were the second most important items and salt cellars remained relatively common. The vessels listed are more diverse, including pottingers, porringers and specialised items such as the egg dish and custard dishes belonging to John James.¹⁵⁰ A major difference is the relative importance of bowls and also the presence of latten chafing dishes, interpreted as items to keep food warm at the table. This diversification is suggestive of a sixteenth-century maturation of the new dining practices hinted at in the escheators' lists.

Silver and pewter spoons

Sets of silver spoons are often thought to have been acquired as a means of storing wealth. However, they may also have had a role in the more ritualistic elements of dining, perhaps used on special occasions such as weddings, and they may be understood as having liturgical associations (Goldberg 2008, 134). Goldberg (2008, 134–5) argues that silver spoons were symbolic possessions, signifying good manners and good breeding, but could easily be converted into cash if needed. He contrasts the acquisition of silver spoons by urban 'bourgeois' households with the holding of wealth in livestock and land

¹⁵⁰ C382.

by rural households (discussed further in Chapter 9). The evidence from the escheators' and coroners' records supports this to some degree. On the whole, where occupation is listed, spoons can be clearly related to the 'middling sort' of late medieval and Tudor society: merchants, administrators, yeomen and the clergy. A link with towns is harder to sustain; where settlement is stated, 48% of the escheators' lists including silver (or probably silver) spoons are related to places with either borough charters or identified as a market town in 1600, but the remainder are from categorically rural contexts, while the majority of occurrences in the coroners' records are also from rural households.

There are nine escheators' lists where silver spoons are the only objects associated with dining other than tables and table linens. Typically, there are multiple spoons listed, usually 6 or 12. Of particular interest are the possessions of husbandman John Ferrou of Sevenhampton (Wiltshire), whose goods were confiscated in 1415. He possessed two 'broken' silver spoons valued at 4s, alongside two tablecloths (but no table) and five napkins.¹⁵¹ Another individual from an unambiguously rural settlement is Geoffrey Geney, a franklin of Sutton (Suffolk), outlawed by civil suit in 1433, who had a dozen silver spoons.¹⁵² These, as well as a small number of other examples within the dataset, demonstrate that substantial rural tenants clearly aspired to, and were able to, acquire silver spoons, but that these were particularly valuable possessions.¹⁵³ Others in this group include administrative officials and clergy: William Stokker, a clerk of Fornsett St Mary or St Peter (Norfolk), and Thomas Crishale, vicar of Barton Bendish (Norfolk, but outlawed in Middlesex), both possessed six spoons valued at 10s.¹⁵⁴ Others potentially fall within the class of small-town residents who invested in items of silver in the manner suggested by Goldberg. These include John Maister, a merchant of Havant (Hampshire), who had six spoons valued at 10s as well as three napkins and three tablecloths, and Geoffrey Potet of Dartford (Kent), who in 1381 had six spoons valued at 6s, a tablecloth and napkin, a table and two trestles.¹⁵⁵ Among the coroners' lists only one inventory lists spoons as the only object associated with dining; Jane Batty, a spinster of Warrington (Yorkshire), had two silver spoons valued at 3s in 1543.¹⁵⁶ In all, silver spoons occur in four lists, with latten or pewter spoons in a further two.

In considering the motivations behind the acquisition of these objects, we can turn to archaeological evidence to examine the form, appearance and meaning of spoons. Silver and pewter spoons are rare in the archaeological dataset. A silver spoon bowl was recovered at Wharram Percy (Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010) and a pewter slip-top spoon was recovered from a sixteenth-century context at Wye (Kent; Griffin 2013), which related

¹⁵¹ E237.

¹⁵² E1522.

¹⁵³ E.g. E788 John Robynson of Giringlinton in Craven, Yorkshire (1417).

¹⁵⁴ E1285; E1534.

¹⁵⁵ E122; E656.

¹⁵⁶ C43.

historical research suggests was probably associated with a yeoman household. A pewter apostle head spoon was excavated at Inner Ashley Wood (Wiltshire; Stallybrass 1906) and fragments of pewter or copper alloy spoons were excavated from a further eight sites. At the time of writing (June 2019) there are 41 silver or silver gilt spoons in the Portable Antiquities Scheme database (Figure 4.4). These are remarkably uniform in style: where the handle survives the majority are decorated with an acorn knop, with a smaller number having a diamond point terminal, features which typically date from the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries (Egan 2010, 246). In his study of medieval dress accessories, Cassels (2013, 175–80) draws on various references to acorns in medieval literary and visual culture to argue that they can be regarded as ‘implicit symbols of patience, modesty and chasteness’. As with pewter ware, and within the context of increasing domestic devotion in the later fifteenth century, such spoons can be considered among a suite of objects with religious significance which entered the home (French 2021, 144). After the Reformation, they perhaps acquired further significance, allowing for the persistence of tactile and embodied engagement with spiritually loaded objects, substituting the experiences which would previously have been central to church worship (see Walker Bynum 2012, 270; Walsham 2017). Such an interpretation can be advanced through the consideration of a further significant group: spoons in silver, pewter and copper alloy with anthropomorphic ‘maidenhead’ knops. These are likely to be fifteenth- or sixteenth-century apostle spoons which could be given as christening gifts. Other spoons also carry religious iconography. Pewter examples from Yorkshire, Suffolk and Norfolk have crosses etched into the bowl and a spoon from Shropshire is incised MATER.DEL.MEMENTO.MEI (Mother of God, Remember Me) and carries a crude engraving of the Virgin and child. This inscription is also carried on a copper alloy example from Somerset, and a pewter spoon from the Isle of Wight. In probate inventories there is a strong association between silver spoons and chambers, which were places of reflection and prayer (Hamling and Richardson 2017, 41–2). Similar associations between spoons and personal devotion have been advanced in studies of these objects from continental Europe (e.g. Poulsen 2004, 60; Sundmark 2017; Ardavičiūtė-Ramanauskienė 2018).

Another feature of the PAS sample is the presence of copper alloy spoons decorated with silvering or tinning, and often in similar forms to silver spoons, presumably intended to imitate silver or pewter examples. These include three which carry anthropomorphic decoration and may be apostle spoons. This iconography supports Goldberg’s link between spoons and liturgical practice. The PAS data, as well as the occasional occurrence of these items in the households of rural husbandmen, demonstrate the possession of spoons by rural, as well as urban households. While offering stores of wealth, the occurrence of spoons in pewter and copper alloy, as well as silver, suggests a desire to acquire objects for other reasons: perhaps representing an investment in piety, not simply to represent this quality, but to enable the performance and experience of devotion within domestic contexts.



Figure 4.4: Examples of silver and pewter spoons reported to the PAS. A: 14th–15th century silver spoon with acorn knob from Newington, Oxfordshire (PAS Reference BERK-203428); B: Silver spoon dating to c. 1375 with pointed knob from East Knoyle, Wiltshire. Features leopard head and wheat-sheaf marks (DOR-235972); C: Anthropomorphic knob from a copper alloy maidenhead or apostle spoon dated c.1400–1600 from Bishops Waltham, Hampshire (HAMP-71D2020); D: Silver-gilt knob depicting a Wildman motif from Rendlesham, Suffolk (SF-0B2F53); E: Silver gilt spoon handle with acorn knob from Enmore, Somerset. Reproduced under CC Share Alike Licence (A) and CC By Attribution Licence (B; C; D; E). Images: Oxfordshire County Council; Hampshire Cultural Trust; Suffolk County Council; Somerset County Council.

Handwashing

Other vessels, namely ewers and basins (sometimes referred to as lavers), are specifically associated with the ritual of handwashing before a meal. Water would be poured over the hands from the ewer over the basin, finding a parallel in the way that priests washed their hands while preparing to perform the eucharist. Whereas silver spoons and plate have liturgical associations through their material, these items can be understood as having a more direct liturgical significance, introducing to mealtimes an act associated with the mass (Redknap 2010, 155). In particular, the occurrence of examples with acorn grips on the handles situates these objects within the same aesthetic realm as silver spoons and dress accessories. These items are considerably more abundant in the escheators' records (occurring in 85 lists) than the coroners', suggesting that this ritualised dining practice had declined in importance by the sixteenth century, although it certainly persisted, and pewter ewers continued to be manufactured (Weinstein 2011, 90). The material is rarely noted, but examples of brass, lead and pewter ewers can be found in the escheators' records.¹⁵⁷

There is a single ewer fragment within the archaeological dataset. This is a copper alloy spout moulded into the shape of a dog's head from the rectory at Wimbotsham (Norfolk; Shelley 2003). These are the most frequently occurring type of ewer recorded in the PAS database (Figure 4.5; see also Lewis 1987; Redknap 2010 for other examples). The distribution of these is spread across England but appears concentrated on a band running approximately from Somerset to Norfolk (Figure 4.6). Compared to metal cooking vessels, they are noticeably absent from the south-west, Sussex and Essex (although they are reasonably abundant in Kent), as well as from Yorkshire and the west midlands. This is reflected, to a degree, in the escheators' and coroners' dataset, with ewers being particularly prevalent in Kent, Wiltshire, Northamptonshire and Norfolk and occurring rarely in lists from Worcestershire, Yorkshire, Devon and Cornwall (Figure 4.6). Both datasets therefore suggest a degree of regionality in the regular acquisition of specialist handwashing vessels.

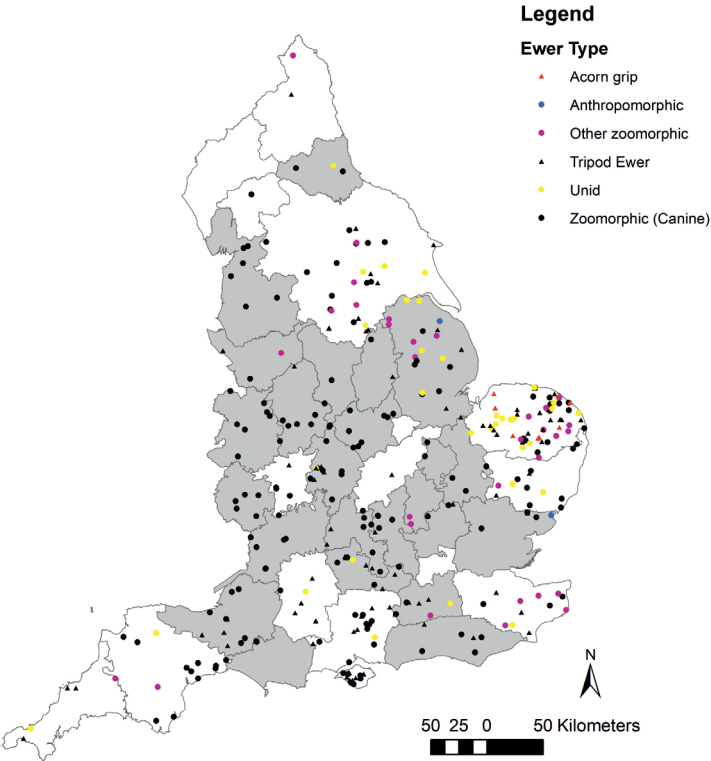
Verhaege (1991) has noted the increasing prevalence of vessels in both ceramic and metalware for handwashing from the thirteenth century. He suggests that as this element of dining became popularised, specialist items started to be produced in cheaper materials. He highlights a distinction between the ewer (typically a jug-like vessel, sometimes with feet) and the aquamanile, typically an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic vessel, often depicting horses, other animals, mythical creatures or, occasionally, knights on horseback. Aquamaniles were also made in ceramic and the distribution of the production centres making these items is noticeably similar to that of ewers recorded in the PAS database. For example, they were produced at Brill Boarstall (Buckinghamshire) (Mellor 1994) and at Lyvedon (Northamptonshire). These ceramic examples

¹⁵⁷ Additionally, silver ewers appear in the list of William Wawe (E86) but these are probably stolen property.



Figure 4.5: Examples of ewer types in the PAS dataset. Top: Dogs head ewer spout from Broughton Gifford, Wiltshire (PAS Reference NMGW-0508C5). CC By Attribution Licence: Portable Antiquities Scheme. Bottom: Foot from tripod ewer from Calbourne, Isle of Wight. CC Share Alike Licence: Frank Basford.

were a relatively short-lived phenomenon, primarily dating to the thirteenth and early fourteenth century, making them a fairly minor component of the suite of specialist handwashing material culture. The presence of ewers in non-elite households shows a concern with handwashing and, as Verhaege suggests, the manufacture of vessels in pottery and cheaper metals is suggestive of the popularisation of this practice. It is likely that other vessels such as ceramic jugs



Dog's head spout	175
Tripod ewer leg	99
Zoomorphic	23
Acorn grip	8
Lion head spout	6
Horse leg	3
Bird/eagle spout	2
Camel spout	2
Anthropomorphic	2

Figure 4.6: The distribution of ewer fragments by type reported to the PAS (June 2019).

were also used for handwashing, but cannot be identified as such due to their multipurpose character.

Within the escheators' sample, some of the ewers and basins were clearly quite old, being described as worn or old in three instances. Lists usually include both an ewer and a basin (or in a small number of cases, multiples of each), but seven basins appear without a ewer and 14 ewers appear without a basin. Peter Mapelton of Hampshire (outlawed in 1417) had three ewers and three basins, while John Moigne of Warmington (1405, ewers and basins valued at 10s), Thomas Paccheherst of Kent (1407, ewers and basins valued at 3s 4d) and Robert Erheth of Erith (Kent) (1407, ewers and basins valued at 4s) all had two pairs, the latter also possessing a range of drinking vessels.¹⁵⁸ Why these households may have required more than one set of basins and ewers is unclear, but may be indicative of the display as well as practical use of these vessels, or the inheritance of items after a household had been established. The occurrence of either a basin or a ewer in isolation may suggest that some of these objects had an alternative function, or were used alongside vessels of other materials; for example, basins may have been paired with ceramic aquamaniles or jugs. Ewers and basins are typically valued together, most commonly at around 20d.

In contrast to the escheators' records, ewers or lavers occur in only four corners' lists, and in all but one case these occur with a basin. Analysis of the occurrence of handwashing equipment in escheators' lists shows a relatively sudden decline in its occurrence from the 1420s (Figure 4.7). Buxton's (2015, 155) analysis of probate records from Thame shows that ewers and basins

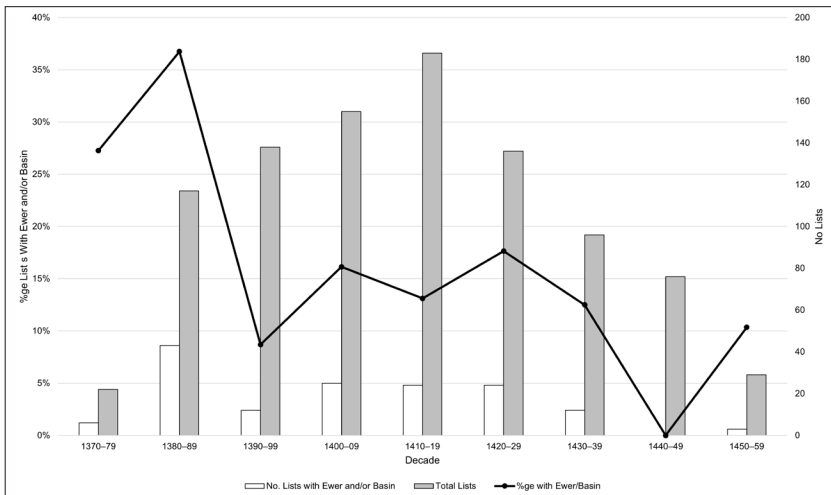


Figure 4.7: The occurrence of handwashing equipment in the escheators' records by decade.

¹⁵⁸ E510; E1339; E45; E1336.

were still in use in the early seventeenth century, typically among yeomen and artisans, but he argues that their low incidence suggests a fading of their use, a phenomenon which our data suggests occurs over a longer period. This corresponds with archaeological evidence which suggests the peak period of popularity for these vessels was the mid-to-late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (Redknap 2010, 158).

Drinking vessels

Drinking vessels appear very rarely in the escheators' and coroners' chattels lists. In part, this is likely to be due to the increasing use of ceramic drinking vessels in the later fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (Gaimster and Nenck 1997), but also the cost of pewter items (Weinstein 2011, 90; note there are no individually valued pewter drinking vessels within our sample to test this assertion) and the widespread use of drinking vessels in leather and wood (Wood 2005). Six types of drinking vessels occur in the escheators' records, the most common being cups and mazers. There are 14 craters (bowls for the serving of drink), with occasional drinking horns, two chalices and a tankard (which may be a barrel). Several lists include multiple items associated with drinking (Table 4.4).

Drinking vessels are particularly difficult to interpret, as they often appear where the context or content of a list suggests that the goods were stolen. A good example is the case of Alice, servant of the deceased parson of Islip, whose possessions comprised six silver spoons, a mazer, a chest and silver pieces. Given that her goods were seized for felony, it is reasonable to assume that these goods were stolen, although it is also possible that the late parson had bequeathed them to her. There is no definitive evidence either way; the document does describe the items as Alice's goods, but one may not wish to take this too literally.¹⁵⁹ Another example is the case of William Wawe, a yeoman from Northcott (Middlesex) who had five silver craters, a gold crater and four silver gilt craters.¹⁶⁰ Wawe was hanged for his crimes, which likely included the theft of these vessels. The list of the goods of Thomas Fuller, yeoman of Lymington (Hampshire), is also unusual and suggestive of theft, his goods including a variety of elaborate drinking vessels alongside cash and a breviary.¹⁶¹ A final illustrative example is Alexander Johnson who fled for felony in 1424, and whose goods were in the hands of the parson of Bradfield Combust (Suffolk).¹⁶² These goods include a chalice, a silver adorned belt and two religious books, suggesting that these were stolen church contents. This example leads us to other ambiguous cases, where drinking vessels were the possessions of clergy.

¹⁵⁹ E822 (*bonorum et catallorum...que fuerunt Alicie seruient'...*).

¹⁶⁰ E86.

¹⁶¹ E1120.

¹⁶² E629.

Table 4.4: Summary of drinking vessels occurring in the escheators' records.

List No.	Name	Year	Occupation	Item	Quantity	Value (d)	Value per item (d)
107	William Spenser	1428	–	Mazer (murra)	2	320	160
200	Thomas Idery	1415	–	Mazer (murra)	1		
215	Hugh Cetur	1414	Clerk	Gilt mazer (maser deaurat')	1	60	60
249	William Cook	1390	–	Mazer (maser)	1		
282	Stephen Tannere	1413	–	Tankard (tankerd)	1	4	4
339	Patrick Goldsmyth	1418	–	Silver adorned mazer (mazorium debile cum ligamine argent')	1	16	16
				Silver band for cup (ligamen argent' pro cipho) and silver boss for cup (prentys argent' pro ciphis)	2	24	12
348	William Wodeward	1418	Yeoman	Ash-wood cup (ciphos fraxin')	3	2	0.7
407	John Northern	1437	–	Mazer (murra)	1	160	160
484	John Reynold	1418	Yeoman	Mazer (maser)	1	192	192
519	Thomas Serle	1422	–	Silver cup (ciphos argent')	2	160	80
				Small horn (parv' cornu)	1		
577	Richard Buryman	1422	–	Silver cup (tacea argent')	1	96	96
585	William Clerk	1417	–	Silver adorned horn (cornu argent' harneis')	1		
610	John Knot	1422	–	Horn (cornu)	1	66	66
738	William Thome	1381	–	Silver and gold bound cup (ciphas ligatas cim argento et auro)	>1		

(Continued)

Table 4.4: Continued.

List No.	Name	Year	Occupation	Item	Quantity	Value (d)	Value per item (d)
768	Thomas Isenden	1384	–	Worn silver-bound cup (ciphos ligat' cum argento debil')	2	40	20
789	George Braweby	1426	–	Silver adorned mazer (murra hernes' cum argento)	1	240	240
869	Thomas Totyng	1392	–	Silver-adorned mazer (murra arraiat' cum argento)	1	240	240
1182	Margaret Burdon	1444	Widow	Silver mazer (murra de argento)	1	160	160
1339	Robert de Erhethe	1407	–	Silver cup (ciphus argentis)	1	40	40
				Mazer (ciphus de murro)	2	24	12
1394	Thomas Megson	1399	Vintner	Mazer (murrum)	1		
1504	John Wynkelman	1430	–	Silver cups (ciphos argent')	3	960	320
1514	Thomas Aykebergh'	1430	Yeoman	Horn fitted with silver (cornu cum argento harnesiāt')	1	480	480
1523	John Spurnell	1433	Labourer	Silver crater (cratere de argento)	1	120	120
Probable Stolen Goods							
86	William Wawe	1428	Yeoman	Silver crater (crater' argent')	5	3600	720
				Gold crater (magn' crater' stant de auro cum rubeis et alijs lapid')	1	9600	9600
				Silver-gilt crater (crater' argent' et deaurat')	4	6400	1600
629	Alexander Johnson	1424	–	Chalice (calicis)	1	800	800
822	Alice ?	1392	Servant	Mazer (murre)	1		

(Continued)

Table 4.4: Continued.

List No.	Name	Year	Occupation	Item	Quantity	Value (d)	Value per item (d)
Probable Stolen Goods							
1120	Thomas Fuller	1458	Yeoman	Mazer (ciphi vocat' a Nutte)	1	240	240
				Silver and gilt bound mazer (murr' circumligat' cum argent' deauarat')	3	720	240
				Horn cup silver gilt-bound with silver gilt feet (ciph' voc' a horne ligat' cum argent' deaurat' cum pedibus de argento deaurat')	1	160	160
				Silver crater (crater' argent')	1	120	120
1177	William Monk	1444	–	Crater (crater')	1	120	120
				Mazer (murr')	1	40	40
Possible Liturgical Vessels							
516	John Lideford	1422	Clerk	Silver cup (ciphos argent')	3	480	160
525	Adam Malet	1419	Rector	Adorned mazer (cipho de masere harnis')	1	120	120
587	John Ely	1417	Chaplain	Silver cup (ciphos argent')	3		
				Mazer (masers)	2		
1193	Henry Hole	1439	Vicar	Crater (crater')	1		
1299	John Wyn	1411	Clerk	Mazer (masers)	2		
1349	Thomas Kyrkeby	1407	Chaplain	Chalice (calix)	1		
1503	John Waryn	1430	Clerk	Silver cups (ciphos argent')	4	2400	600

These could have been personal possessions, but may also have been liturgical vessels. This is almost certainly the case for the chalice belonging to the chaplain Thomas Kyrkeby, and could also be the case in other instances, such as the mazer belonging to the rector Adam Malet and the silver cups and mazers belonging to the chaplain John Ely.¹⁶³ Finally, it is possible that the silver band for a cup and silver mazer belonging to Patrick Goldsmyth were stock, rather than his own goods.¹⁶⁴

With these caveats in mind, it becomes apparent that drinking vessels were not common possessions of non-elite households, and where they do occur, they were typically mazers or cups. A distinction between mazers and cups is difficult to make. Mazers are typically of maple, with metal adornment, although there is considerable variability in their value, from 40d to 240d/£1. In the majority of cases their material is not listed, but one is identified as 'silver' and another as 'gilt', while two are listed as 'silver adorned', one as 'silver bound' and another as 'silver-gilt bound'. The cups are also listed as 'silver' (eight), while one is listed as ash and one entry is the 'silver boss for a cup', presumably of wood. Mazers and cups were valuable items, finding parallels in the particularly extravagant items found in both elite secular and ecclesiastical households (Woolgar 2016, 56–7). The two mazers belonging to William Spenser of Methwold (Norfolk; 1428) are valued at 26s 8d and the one belonging to John Northern of Glandford (Norfolk; 1435), at 13s 4d.¹⁶⁵ In both cases it is unclear whether these were stolen goods or the felon's own possessions. Another, adorned with silver and belonging to George Braweby of Old Malton (Yorkshire), was valued at 20s.¹⁶⁶ He committed theft in 1426, and this may be a stolen item, although the item is listed in the middle of an array of other more typical domestic items.¹⁶⁷ There are silver craters, one belonging to John Spurnell, a labourer who committed suicide in 1433, and the other to the above Thomas Fuller, both valued at 10s.¹⁶⁸ Given the value of these items, it is perhaps likely they were recovered, stolen objects.

There are only a few cases where drinking vessels can confidently be identified as the possessions of the felon. Where the occupation is stated, these include three yeomen, William Wodeward, John Reynold and Thomas Aykebergh.¹⁶⁹ Others appear to be relatively wealthy agriculturalists, for example William Cook of Yarm (Yorkshire) had a mazer as well as six silver spoons, several animals and 40 sown acres.¹⁷⁰ In other cases, such as that of the clerk Hugh Cetur, mazers occur in fairly comprehensive lists of the possessions of clergy, suggesting that they were domestic possessions rather than liturgical

¹⁶³ E525; E587.

¹⁶⁴ E339.

¹⁶⁵ E107; E407.

¹⁶⁶ E789.

¹⁶⁷ E1120.

¹⁶⁸ E1523.

¹⁶⁹ E348; E484; E514.

¹⁷⁰ E249.

apparatus.¹⁷¹ Similarly, Thomas Serle of Liskeard (Cornwall) had goods suggesting that he had a comfortable lifestyle.¹⁷² In other cases, lists containing drinking vessels are seemingly incomplete, making the wider context of their consumption difficult to determine.

Woolgar (2016, 55–60) discusses the importance of communal drinking to medieval society, emphasising the role of shared cups in building various types of communal bonds, the crater sitting in the centre of the table to replenish the drinking vessels. Both Woolgar (2016) and French (2021, 59) highlight the value of mazers as mnemonic objects, particularly through their bequest to religious houses where the ritual use of these objects would preserve the memory of the benefactor or as heirlooms. Donation to religious houses would have taken them out of circulation and may therefore depress the number of these items appearing in the escheators' records. Finally, the shared cup carried further symbolism through its association with the eucharist, as can be seen through its role as a literary device in medieval writing (Bellis 2011). The range of people owning drinking vessels in the escheators' lists is instructive. It consists of a vintner, yeomen, clergy, with a single labourer and a widow, the majority of whom would have been able to maximise the symbolic capital of engaging in shared drinking and who, importantly, were in a position to afford both these expensive vessels and the wine to drink from them (Table 4.4).

The coroners' records show a marked contrast to the escheators' in the range of drinking vessels present and, because of the circumstances of seizure, are less likely to be stolen items. Cups occur in five lists, in two cases being identified as being made of pewter. It is noticeable that the range of people owning these cups is typically of lower status than those listed in the escheators' lists, consisting of two widows, a shepherd and a labourer. Pewter goblets occur in two lists, one relating to the Wiltshire clergyman John James.¹⁷³ Other notable contrasts with the escheators' records are the pots and pitchers associated with ale consumption belonging to Henry Cooper, the stoneware ceramic drinking vessels belonging to George Bowre and John James, and the drinking glasses belonging to John James.¹⁷⁴ Bottles occur in the lists of William Purches, John James, Edward Purkheme and Nicholas Cussyn (the latter's is specifically described as an *aqua-vitae* bottle).¹⁷⁵

Stoneware mugs or jugs imported from the Rhineland are the most common drinking vessel occurring in the archaeological record (see Gaimster and Nenck 1997). The occurrence of glass in the archaeological dataset is noteworthy, given its general absence from the escheators' and coroners' records. Previous analyses have demonstrated that the use of glass was not widespread in medieval England. Tyson (2000) concludes that glass use was limited to the

¹⁷¹ E215.

¹⁷² E519.

¹⁷³ C382.

¹⁷⁴ C346; C382; C447.

¹⁷⁵ C308; C317; C382; C428.

wealthier, higher status members of society, including ecclesiastical figures, the urban elite and aristocracy, with it being rarely used in rural contexts (indeed she notes only one occurrence of imported glass at a village site, at Seacourt, Berkshire). Tyson also notes a temporal shift in glass use, with the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries being characterised by the occurrence of imported tablewares, and the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries by domestic utilitarian vessels (such as those used for distilling), with occasional finds of imported Venetian glass. For the sixteenth century, Willmott (2002) notes the continuing association of glass with elite and urban sites.

Within the archaeological dataset gathered here, several sites fit with the categories identified by Tyson and Willmott. The evidence principally comes from the hinterlands of major ports. From the area around London, drinking vessel glass has been recovered from Camden (AOC Archaeology 2001) and Islington (MOLAS 1998b; 2001; AOC Archaeology 2001) on the edge of the city of London and Creedy's Yard, Greenwich (Cooke and Philpotts 2002), the latter probably being associated with a high-status waterfront residence. Fragments of bottle glass and a possible Venetian drinking vessel come from Spital Street, Dartford, interpreted on the basis of faunal and ceramic remains as an affluent small-town household which had access to Mediterranean ceramics (TVAS 2014). Glass also comes from ports themselves: a flask from Barnstaple (Devon) is possibly of Spanish origin (Markuson 1980) and glass fragments also come from Berwick-upon-Tweed (Northumberland; Hunter and Moorhouse 1982; Mabbitt, Frain and Hodgson 2010). Within the hinterland of Hull, vessel glass comes from Low Fishergate, Doncaster (Yorkshire; McComish *et al.* 2010) and from the manorial site at Aston Hall, Sheffield (Yorkshire; Wiles 2011). Two shards from Lydd (Kent) may be intrusive later material, but perhaps demonstrate how rural households at the coast had access to a wider range of imported commodities than comparable inland households, as demonstrated by the variety of imported pottery from the site (Barber and Priestly-Bell 2008). There are, however, a small number of other site types represented in the sample. Small towns are represented by fragments of three glasses of sixteenth/seventeenth-century date from the Greyhound Hotel site, Fordingbridge (Hampshire; Harding and Light 2003) and fragments of vessel glass came from medieval contexts at Ripon (Yorkshire; Finlayson 2001a), Bishop's Waltham (Hampshire; possibly associated with an episcopal building; Lewis 1985), Corbridge (Northumberland; from a ditch, associated with fourteenth- and fifteenth-century pottery; Jones 2004) and Swindon a phial fragment, perhaps associated with an industrial process; Foundations Archaeology 2004). Fragments from a distillation vessel were also recovered from Laughton-en-le-Morthen (Yorkshire; Roberts and Rowe 2007). Most unusual, however, are fragments from four rural sites: a kicked (flared) base from a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century context at Wye (Kent; a probable yeoman house; Griffin 2013), the base of a forest glass drinking vessel (fourteenth–seventeenth century) from a ditch at Woodrow, Melksham (Wiltshire; Cotswold Archaeology

2016) and a fragment (sixteenth–seventeenth century) from a robber trench at Snodland (Kent; Dawkes 2010). While low in quantity, this evidence, largely from recent development-led excavations, shows that glass was perhaps more accessible than previous evidence has suggested, at least by the end of our period.

Tableware assemblages

Complex assemblages of tableware including vessels for a range of functions, as well as tables and napery, are rare in both the coroners' and escheators' lists. There is only one escheators' chattels list featuring a full range of tableware incorporating all of the functions discussed in this chapter. Thomas Isenden, probably a cloth dealer (see Chapter 8), of Sutton Valence (Kent), had a table (16d), two tablecloths and napkins, as well as a ewer and basin, four silver spoons (4s), two silver bound cups (3s 4d) and six pewter pieces (12d) when he was outlawed in 1383.¹⁷⁶ A further particularly complex collections was that of Hugh Cetur, a clerk from Woodchurch (Kent), who committed murder in 1414. He possessed a table and trestle (8d), two platters and two pewter saucers (8d), a salter or salt cellar (2d), a ewer and basin (2s), a gilt mazer and seven silver spoons (7s).¹⁷⁷ Finally, William Wodeward, a Worcestershire yeoman (whose goods are not individually valued) possessed a tablecloth and two napkins, six pewter dishes, a pewter platter, a charger, 12 wooden dishes and a salt cellar, as well as a ewer and basin and three ash wood cups in 1418.¹⁷⁸ We can see in all of these cases households of what might be termed a 'middling sort', that invested in elaborate dining. Even so, the valuations of these objects suggest that individual vessels of pewter were affordable. It was the acquisition of sets, as well the acquisition of silverware, which was prohibitively expensive. That such dining arrangements were aspirational might be demonstrated through the investment in tablewares by those slightly further down the social scale, for example [?] Bassyngham (forename unknown), a husbandman of Faxton (Northamptonshire) had at least two tables (valued with other furniture at 3s 4d), three 'old' saucers and seven pewter platters (valued together at 20d) and two 'old' basins and ewers (20d) in 1438.¹⁷⁹

Similarly, particularly complex groupings of tableware are rare in the coroners' records, with a range of items representing each element of tableware (drinking, eating, handwashing, spoons and napery) occurring in only two remarkably different lists. In 1535, William Mursshall, a labourer of West Greenwich (Kent), had a folding table plus a pair of trestles and a table, a linen tablecloth, two latten basins, two wooden platters, a latten spoon and two pewter cups

¹⁷⁶ E768.

¹⁷⁷ E215.

¹⁷⁸ E348.

¹⁷⁹ E314.

(these items are not individually valued).¹⁸⁰ In contrast, John James, a wealthy Wiltshire clergyman, had a wide range of items including specialised serving vessels, glassware and ceramics.¹⁸¹

It is more common for a smaller range of items to occur together. For example, where handwashing equipment occurs alongside food serving vessels in the escheators' lists, typically we see a diverse range of objects represented: in 23 cases, handwashing equipment occurs alongside a range of eating items, which typically include dishes. For example, Robert Senyng of Linton (Kent), accused of treason following the Peasants' Revolt in 1381, had six pewter platters, six pewter dishes and three pewter saucers (valued together at 18d), and a ewer and a basin (18d), as well as a tablecloth and a napkin (18d), while John Wryde, of Ospringe (Kent), possessed three chargers, 15 pewter dishes and four old pewter salt cellars (valued together at 30d), an 'old and worn out (*perusitat*)' basin and ewer (24d), and two tablecloths and two napkins of worn canvas (12d).¹⁸² The variability in the range of vessels present reveals that households took a variety of approaches to developing dining culture, implying a process of adaptation rather than emulation, presumably informed by a range of contextual factors, including market access, personal experience and concerns with personal piety. These findings mirror those of French's (2021) analysis of the acquisition of tableware by London households, in which she identifies religious references as a key component of dining experiences and the emergence of new ways of using tablewares as they became accessible to a wider variety of households.

In the escheators' records (once those items which are probably stolen are excluded), drinking vessels often occur with spoons or among the most diverse assemblages of tableware. The acquisition of drinking vessels may be understood as an investment in the adoption of aspirational lifestyles, as well as a demonstration of the ability to afford these expensive items (Table 4.4). It is reasonable to assume that other goods associated with dining were present in these households but were subsumed into the category of miscellaneous 'household utensils'.

In a small number of escheators' lists, a single type of dining object occurs alongside silver spoons. For example, in 1422 Thomas Knyth, a tanner of Great Torrington (Devon), possessed six spoons (6s) and a ewer and basin (2s).¹⁸³ In three other cases, spoons occur with ewers.¹⁸⁴ There are seven examples where the only tableware items are those for drinking and silver spoons, an example being the list of William Spenser of Methwold (Norfolk), dating to 1428, who had two mazers (valued at 26s 8d) and 12 spoons (valued at 20s).¹⁸⁵

¹⁸⁰ C487.

¹⁸¹ C382.

¹⁸² E677; E901.

¹⁸³ E736.

¹⁸⁴ E773; E775; E1584.

¹⁸⁵ E107.

Other cases where spoons occur with a limited range of tableware are the lists of Robert Neuton of Oakham (Rutland; five spoons (6s) with pewter (3s) and wooden vessels), dating to 1431, Richard Fysshare, *magister* or *custos cantarie* of the church of Attleborough (Norfolk), who possessed six spoons (6s 8d) and two silver salt cellars (20s) in 1448, and John Stille of Hampshire or Wiltshire (precise location unknown) who had two dishes (4d) and three spoons (2s) in 1404.¹⁸⁶ While we must be open to the possibility that only certain items were seized, the occurrence of salt cellars, understood as a particularly prestigious item of tableware, and silver spoons in these lists is interesting, and possibly suggestive of choices being taken in the acquisition of a limited range of items of pewter ware which could fulfil a display, rather than functional, purpose, while holding their value.

To better understand the acquisition and use of these objects, it is productive to think about the performance of dining itself. Willmott (2005) has devised a means of classifying objects as 'mobile' or 'static', and as being for 'individual' or 'communal' use. Mobile items are those which might be passed around a table while static items are those which stay associated with a particular place. A total of 723 items within the escheators' lists can be classified through this scheme, of which 398 might be considered as 'communal' items (e.g. tablecloths, platters, ewers and basins, mazers) and 323 might be considered 'individual' items (e.g. napkins, dishes). The majority of items are 'static' (n=455), and as might be expected, there is a stronger correlation between mobility and communal objects. We might expect the use of communal, static items to relate to the sharing and display of foodstuffs (e.g. the communal salt cellar, salt itself moving on a spoon or in the hand) while mobile, communal items can be understood in the context of sharing and community building (e.g. handwashing and drinking). Within the elite context we might expect an emphasis on mobile items, brought to the table by servants, whereas in the rural household we might imagine the 'theatre' of dining being performed differently, with items being placed on the table before the meal. Eating together was an important symbol of the solidity of a marriage (French 2014, 47) and while women would have likely performed the role of server at mealtimes where servants were not present, they were also participants in what were smaller and more intimate meals than those in high status households.

Over time, some changes in the performance of dining can be seen (Figure 4.8). Most clear is the declining importance of 'mobile, communal' items as a proportion of tableware from the mid-fifteenth century, primarily due to the declining importance of communal handwashing. In the 1380s and 1390s, most lists include only 'communal mobile' items, primarily in the form of a basin and ewer. At the end of the fourteenth century, investment in the table appears to have primarily been through the acquisition of communal items associated with the display of foodstuffs and communal rituals. In

¹⁸⁶ E953; E126; E1575.

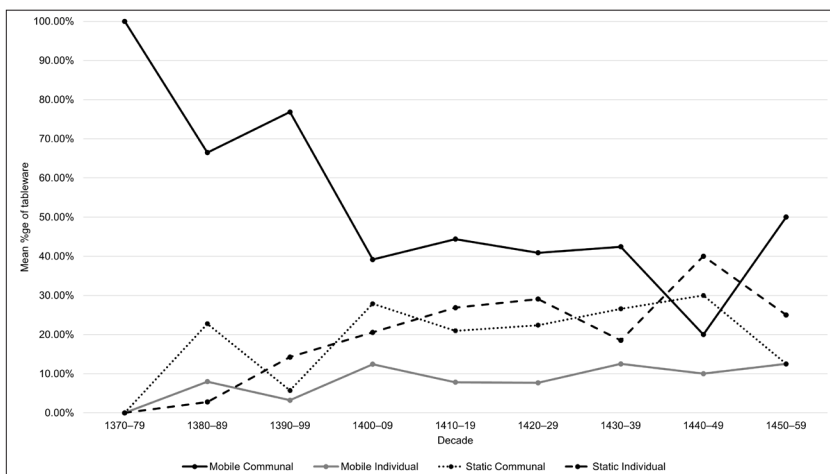


Figure 4.8: Composition of tableware assemblages in the escheators' records by decade. The graph shows the average proportion of tableware in each category among the lists from each decade.

contrast, the occurrence of 'static communal' items increased over time, reflecting the appearance of vessels such as salt cellars or platters used for displaying food on the table. By the mid-fifteenth century, while 'mobile communal' items are still present, we see the occurrence of lists which only include 'static individual' items and generally lists are more mixed in their composition. Static individual items remain a fairly stable occurrence in lists over time, reflecting the need for an individual dish or bowl. Although mobile individual items (principally napkins) only account for a small proportion of tableware across our period, the rise in the quantity of static individual items likely reflects the increasing complexity of meals. The introduction of vessels such as saucers alongside dishes or trenchers is a result of this phenomenon. This corresponds with a general trend towards greater investment in individual items over time, which continues with the high number of dishes in the coroners' lists. The acquisition of sets of dishes for personal consumption is perhaps indicative of a move towards more solid foodstuffs characteristic of the later medieval 'dietary optimum' suggested by Dyer (1983). A shift away from items associated with performative rituals might be associated with the retreat of dining to more intimate and personal spaces such as the parlour or chamber (see Hamling and Richardson 2017, 132).

Conclusion

A significant subset of the households investigated made some investment in tableware, commonly acquiring items for handwashing and items of plate including salt cellars and silver spoons. Increasing complexity in the meals

consumed by households is visible in relation both to serving and cooking vessels. As might be expected, the majority of households with only pots and pans have no tableware or only a single category of objects. Similarly, those households with the most complex kitchen equipment have the most diverse tableware in both datasets, suggesting a general pattern whereby complexity in cooking and dining went together. The longer-term trends in the character of tableware assemblages echo those observed by previous research using other sources (e.g. Weinstein 2011; Wilmott 2005; Woolgar 2016), but the escheators' records do suggest pewterware may have been more common in rural households than is usually thought. Dishes were rather practical items, and it is telling that these occur more commonly in isolation than other items of tableware, emphasising the importance of practicalities. These items, in contrast to silverware, were fairly cheap, often being valued at only a few pence, meaning that individual vessels (although not necessarily larger sets) were within the means of many rural households. In contrast, drinking vessels are rare, although the escheators' and coroners' records appear to show some shift in attitudes to drinking or to its social significance, with the items such as mazers, associated with communal drinking, occurring in the escheators' records but not the coroners'. A further development is the decline in ewers and basins for handwashing and items for communal drinking. This change is mirrored in the increasing importance of items for individual consumption, which may relate to the movement of dining towards parlours and chambers, where display was less important and a greater emphasis could be placed on personal consumption.