Personal Objects

This chapter examines the evidence for a diverse range of objects which might be broadly considered as personal items. These include knives, items associated with religious devotion, arms and armour and smaller personal items such as purses and toilet sets.

The bare necessities: the ubiquity of knives

Iron knives are exceptionally common archaeological finds. In the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries at least they would likely have been a multipurpose personal possession. Specialist table knives, with broader blades, became increasingly common over the study period. Their introduction coincides with the introduction of rivetted scale tang knives from the early fifteenth century, which gradually become more common than whittle tang knives (Cowgill, de Neergaard and Griffiths 1987, 51; Goodall 2011, 109). Goodall (2011) divides knives into these two main types, each with its own typological subdivisions (Figure 7.1). Here, due to the sample size and inconsistency in reporting, it is only possible to talk about knife types in broad terms. A further introduction, in the sixteenth century, was the bolster, an expansion between the blade and tang, of which there is a single example in our sample (Goodall 2011, 109). Of the 297 knife blades in the sample, 153 cannot be assigned to a particular type due to corrosion or the loss of the tang. Overall, there are around three times as many whittle tang knives as scale tang knives (Table 7.1). Of the scale tang knives, only nine come from contexts which can be closely dated: seven come from sixteenth-century contexts and two from probable fifteenth-century contexts, supporting the general chronological development suggested by the London evidence (Cowgill, de Neergaard and Griffiths 1987). In contrast, the whittle tang knives are largely from deposits of fourteenth- to fifteenth-century date. The scale tang knives include a small example interpreted as a table knife

Table 7.1: Knife types occurring in the archaeological dataset.

Knife type	No. Objects
Blade	153
Whittle tang	103
Scale tang	38
Bolster	1
Draw knife	1
Unknown	1

from City Road, Islington (Middlesex; MOLAS 1998a) and an example from Mileham (Norfolk), which is decorated with a chevron motif (Cope-Faulkener 2004). Of particular note are a group of sixteenth-century knives from Foxcotte (Hampshire) which include a possible table knife and butcher's knife (Russel 1985). The introduction of specialist knives is visible in the coroners' records, which feature only six lists that mention knives. These are described with terms suggestive of specific functions: four are termed 'cutting' or 'chopping' knives and appear to specifically be kitchen knives rather than personal multi-purpose tools.

In a small number of cases, knife handles survive. These are typically of bone (12 examples) and some, such as those from Cowlam (Yorkshire; Brewster and Hayfield 1988) and The Spinney, Sherburn-in-Elmet (Yorkshire; Antoni 2004) have incised decoration. An example of probable sixteenth-century date from Wharram Percy (Yorkshire) is decorated to have the appearance of an owl (Harding *et al.* 2010). A handle from Sherburn (Yorkshire) appears to have been polished and stained black to imitate jet (Brewster and Hayfield 1994). Examples from Wolborough Street, Newton Abbot (Devon; Weddell 1985), Yarm (Yorkshire; Evans and Heslop 1985) and Wymondham (Norfolk; Crawley 2012), have wooden handles. This contrasts the evidence from London, where wooden handles are by far the most common type (Cowgill, de Neergaard and Griffiths 1987, 24–5), and it is unclear whether their comparative absence from the sample is due to preservation conditions (meaning that wood is underrepresented outside of London) or a genuine and meaningful difference.

In contrast to the archaeological sample, knives feature exceptionally rarely in the escheators' and coroners' records. There are 12 knives in the escheators' lists, as well as two sheaths. Two knives, both of which belong to chaplains, were adorned with silver.[304] Curiously, neither is appraised individually. A further knife is described using the abbreviation *arn'* (i.e. *arnesiat'*, literally 'harnessed', or decorated), and is valued at 12d.[305] The monetary worth of ordinary knives is

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[304] E1468; E1349.
[305] E1575.
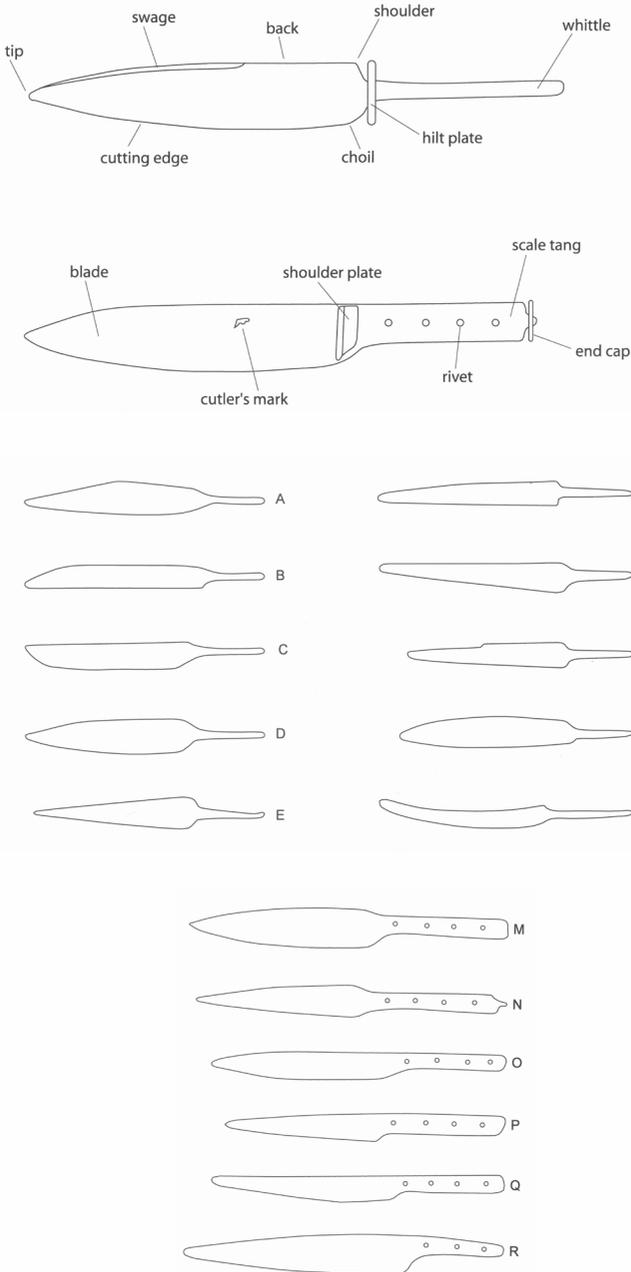
Figure 7.1: Examples of medieval knife types. A–J: Whittle tang type. M-R: Scale tang type (Goodall 2011, figures 8.1, 8.2 & 8.3. © Society for Medieval Archaeology and Ian H. Goodall, Reproduced by Permission Society for Medieval Archaeology).

perhaps revealed in the record for 20 'small knives of Axstedware' which appear in the list of the Devon merchant John Hawkyn, valued together at 20d.[306] These were probably knives produced at Thaxted (Essex) which had 79 cutlers in its 1381 poll tax return, and where an excavated workshop provides evidence of the manufacture of bone handles (Andrews 1989). Valuable detail is provided by the escheators' records in relation to sheaths, or scabbards. These provided a further means for visible display through dress, as they were worn on the belt. One of these items belonged in 1415 to John Ferrour, a husbandman of Sevenhampton (Wiltshire), and is described as a 'silver chape to put a dagger in'. While 'chape' can mean either a mount on the sheath or the sheath itself, this formulation probably indicates a sheath with a silver mount. The chape is listed together with two broken silver spoons valued at 4s, but is not itself valued.[307] The other sheath occurs in the list of Patrick Goldsmyth of Evesham (Worcestershire, 1418). It is simply listed as a 'shethe', and is listed along with a baselard, or dagger (rather than a knife), in association with a silver adorned belt, appraised together at 13s 4d.[308] It is unclear if these are his possessions, or objects that he was working on given his likely profession as a goldsmith.

Scabbard chapes also occur in the archaeological dataset. One, from Wharram Percy, is decorated with an openwork design. Additionally, there are 10 leather sheaths or scabbards in the archaeological sample, eight of which are from Carlisle (Cumbria) and decorated with simple tooling. The remaining two are both elaborately decorated. An example from City Road, Islington is stamped and features engraved foliate decoration. It is probably of fourteenth-century date. The other, again likely fourteenth-century, is from Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed (Northumberland), and is made of a piece of folded leather, stitched down one side and stamped with lozenges, a fleur-de-lys motif and stitched running foliage (Heawood and Howard-Davis 2004).

A final important item associated with knives are honestones, or whetstones, used to sharpen blades. There are 138 whetstones in the archaeological sample (Table 7.2). The majority are in sandstone (usually of local origin) or mica schist, typically Norwegian Ragstone, although mica schist whetstones from Bunnings' Park (Cornwall) may have been locally sourced (Austin *et al.* 1989). Analysis of the distribution of these whetstones shows that imported schist whetstones are most common in the eastern half of England, while locally sourced stones are more common in the west (Figure 7.2; a pattern considered in further detail in Chapter 9). At some sites, most notably Lydd Quarry (Kent; Barber and Priestly-Bell 2008), a range of whetstones were recovered. Here imported and locally sourced sandstone whetstones, presumably acquired through local markets, were used alongside beach pebbles. Given that here suitable stone was clearly available both locally and freely, we can see a clear choice

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[306] E218.

[307] E237.

[308] E339.

Table 7.2: Whetstones occurring in the archaeological dataset.

Material	No. Objects
Dolerite	1
Jet	1
Limestone	4
Metamorphic, non local	1
Phylite	1
Phyllite	1
Quartzite	1
Sandstone	35
Schist	46
Slate	2
Unknown	45

on the part of a household at Lydd to acquire a commoditised imported stone, perhaps due to its superior material properties or even as an item of display, as these stones often have suspension loops allowing them to be worn on the person. This is, perhaps, quite a different act of consumption to an urban household acquiring the same object without such ready access to stones which could be foraged from the surrounding landscape.

Knives, like belt buckles, were ubiquitous items which would have been found in most, if not all medieval homes. A central theme throughout this study is that sometimes it is the ubiquity of items, particularly those of low monetary value such as knives, which has led to their exclusion from the escheators' and coroners' records. Here archaeology provides a unique insight into these items and their associated objects, and the ways in which changing manufacturing and use practices led to the development of the knife from a simple multipurpose object to having more specialised functions in the early modern period. Furthermore, evidence of the use of imported whetstones provides some insight into the consumer mentality of medieval households, as they were able to access, and possibly deliberately sought out, particular objects, even when alternatives were locally, and freely, available.

Protecting the home: religion and ritual

Buried within an occupation layer of a thirteenth/fourteenth-century longhouse at Island Farm, Ottery St Mary (Devon) was a Bronze Age palstave (Mudd, Cobain and Haines 2018). It might be coincidence that this prehistoric
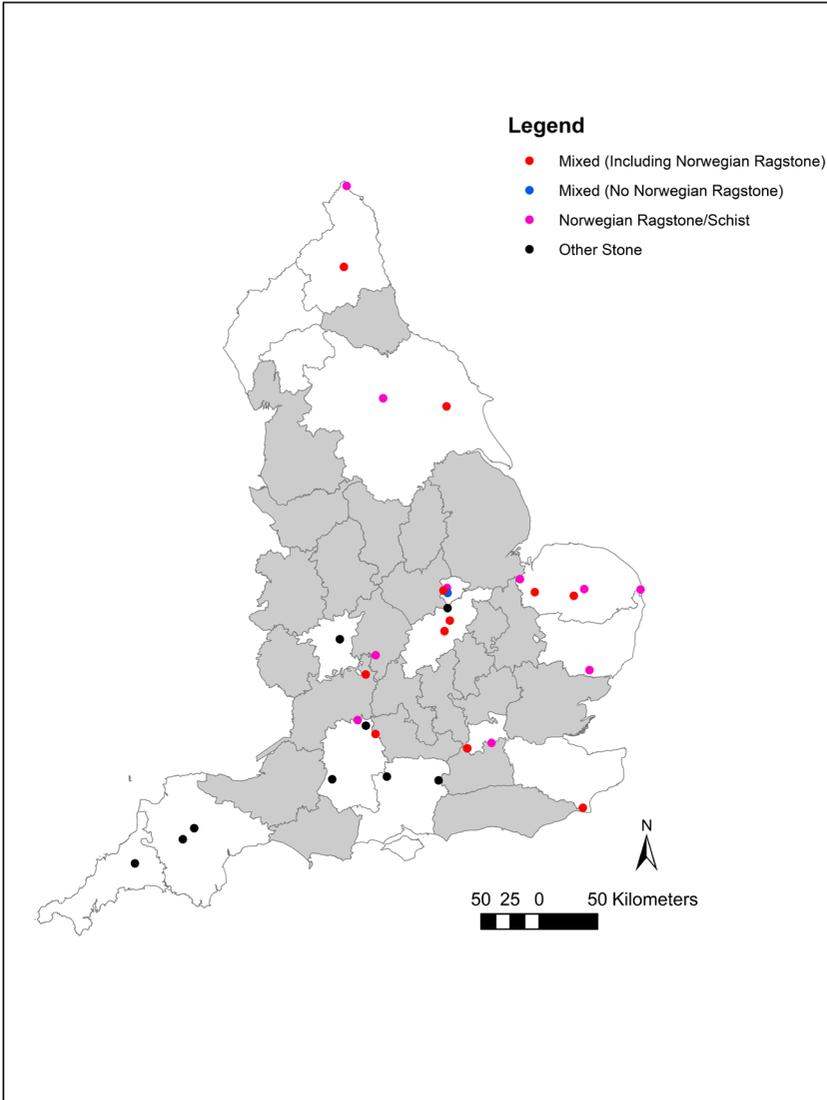
Figure 7.2: Distribution of whetstones from archaeological contexts.

weapon was buried within the floor, but it is also possible that it was a placed deposit, perhaps intended to protect the house or its occupants. Also from Devon, at Hutholes on Dartmoor, a buried shard of Roman glass, deposited in an internal doorway, might be afforded the same explanation (Beresford 1979, 150). The burial of artefacts for protection has been long recognised in pre-historic contexts and both Hall (2011) and Gilchrist (2012, 232–33) discuss

how this act might be understood both as a magical practice and a practical one; these deposits had a specific function in blessing or protecting the home. A further example from our dataset is the plough coulter deposited within a drain at Almansheles, Northumberland. Standley (2020) situates this act of deposition within a broader context to argue that it represents a communal emotional investment related to anxiety over the continued fertility of the land. Such items are hidden and, inevitably therefore, would not have been identified or noted by the appraisers producing the coroners' and escheators' records. In her analysis of London households, French (2021, 191–5) observes a marked increase in the acquisition of objects explicitly associated with domestic devotion after the Black Death. This is not particularly visible in the escheators', coroners' or archaeological records, but explicitly religious items do occur in small quantities. However, these objects need to be considered within the wider context of those items of dress and tableware with religious or liturgical associations discussed in previous chapters, as well, perhaps, as the presence of textiles carrying religious iconography.

Prayer beads (*precamen, precarius, bedes*) occur in five escheators' lists, one of which contains multiple sets (Table 7.3). These beads occur in jet and amber.[309] The list containing multiple sets is that of the merchant John Hawkyn, dating to 1422, which contains a mix of personal possessions and stock, and this is also likely the case for Patrick Goldsmyth.[310] Two pairs (likely a set) of jet beads are valued together at 2d, another pair of jet beads at 6d and three pairs of amber beads at 6d. Prayer beads belonging to John Northern of Glandford (Norfolk) in 1435 are appraised with a silver chain, presumably along which the beads were strung, to a total value of 13s 4d.[311] In addition to his beads, Thomas Cranforth had rings and a silver crucifix, all valued together at 26s 8d in 1448. Religious reform may account for the absence of prayer beads from the coroners' records. One reason for the general rarity of prayer beads in the escheators' material could be that they were considered inalienable possessions, exempt from seizure. A parallel for this can be found in rosaries being considered inalienable paraphernalia in the context of testamentary practice (Beattie 2019, 47). Sear and Sneath (2020, 187) and French (2021, 200) highlight the increasing popularity of rosary beads in the mid-fifteenth century, the period in which escheators' records become less detailed. Beads in glass, shale and amber from archaeological contexts may have been rosaries (summarised in Table 7.3). Gilchrist (2012, 157) highlights how the use of these beads was a tactile engagement with specific materials, which may have been understood as having apotropaic qualities through repeated handling in private prayer, which formed a part of daily household rituals. It is in relation to such

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[309] Among the higher status lists collected, but excluded from the study, there are also examples in coral and one instance of beads with a silver Agnus Dei.

[310] E518.

[311] E407; E339.

Table 7.3: Occurrence of beads in the escheators' and archaeological datasets

Escheators'						
List No.	Year	Name	Location	Object	Quantity	Value (d)
149	1448	Thomas Cranforth	Tickhill, Yorkshire	Prayer beads	1 pair	–
339	1418	Patrick Goldsmyth	Evesham, Worcestershire	Jet prayer bead	1 pair	6
407	1437	John Northern	Glandford, Norfolk	Prayer beads	1 pair	–
518	1422	John Hawkyn	Barnstaple, Devon	Amber beads	3 pairs	6
				Jet beads	2 pairs	2
715	1421	Thomas Hert	Folkestone, Kent	Jet prayer bead	1 pair	3
Archaeological Evidence						
Site		Material	Description		Quantity	Reference
Maulds Meaburn, Cumbria		Amber	Irregular, slightly angular, amber bead		1	Gerry Martin Associates 2014
Churchgate Way, Terrington St Clement, Norfolk		Stone			1	NAU 2008
Heydon, Nofolk		Glass	White		1	Hickling 2010
Ludgershall High Sreet, Wiltshire		Glass	Perforated blue glass, 14mm diameter		1	Wessex Archaeology 2002
Otterpool Campsite, Lympne, Kent		Glass			1	Canterbury Archaeological Trust 2012
Denge West, Kent		Shale			1	Barber and Priestly Bell 2008
Cutty Sark Station, Greenwich, Kent		Glass	Blue		1	Pre-Construct Archaeology 2001

tactile, material engagement that other objects, such as the silver spoons and items of plate discussed earlier, might be understood in the context of personal devotion and belief.

Pilgrimage souvenirs are rare in the archaeological sample, when one considers the significant quantities of these recovered from urban contexts in places such as London and Salisbury (Spencer 1990; 2010). The 400-plus pilgrim badges recorded by the PAS show widespread deposition in rural areas,

with a largely easterly distribution, a pattern also seen in the distribution of ampullae (Anderson 2010). However, around a quarter of these badges have been recovered in the London area, primarily from metal detecting on the Thames foreshore. These are commonly interpreted as having been deposited into the river as a final ritual act on return to the city, yet this perspective is contested, with an alternative explanation being that these were cheap and disposable objects, meaningful within the context of pilgrimage but losing their significance thereafter, becoming incorporated into dumps of domestic rubbish (see Garcia 2003; Lee 2014). Anderson (2010) proposes that in rural contexts the deposition of ampullae on fields, perhaps still containing holy water, can be seen as an act of 'blessing the fields' to secure a good harvest. Such an interpretation might be advanced for the ampulla recovered at Throckmorton Airfield (Worcestershire) from an area of ridge and furrow (Griffin, Griffin and Jackson 2005), and perhaps also for a pilgrim badge recovered from a furrow at Benefield (Northamptonshire; Walker 2011). The final pilgrim badge in the sample, probably of fifteenth-century date and from the shrine of Thomas Becket, was residual in a later context at Spital Street, Dartford, Kent, a town situated on the pilgrimage route between London and Canterbury (TVAS 2014). Following Anderson, the limited evidence from excavations suggests perhaps that these souvenirs developed a variety of meanings, with deposition in fields being an act which would be more significant to rural, than urban, communities for example.

There are two occurrences of crucifixes in the escheators' records. Thomas Cranforth, a vestment maker of Tickhill (Yorkshire) had a silver crucifix, valued with his prayer beads at 26s 8d in 1448, and William Hornby of Droitwich, Worcestershire, had a silver gilt cross worth 4s in 1422.[312] It is possible that Cranforth's goods are stock-in-trade. A single cross also occurs in the coroners' records, a gilded silver example belonging to the yeoman Leonard Mallhome of St Giles in the Field (Middlesex,) valued at 4s in 1541.[313] An archaeological parallel, in lead alloy, comes from Grange Farm, Gillingham (Kent; Seddon 2007).

Finally, religious books occur in 21 escheators' lists (some of which contain multiple books), of which 15 relate to clergy (chaplain, parson, rector, vicar), and four relate to 'clerks' (Table 7.4). This follows the general trend in book ownership identified by Lane Ford (1999) and Sear and Sneath (2020, 151) who demonstrate that books were principally owned by the clergy and university-educated professionals such as doctors and lawyers. Although ownership of religious books increased among London households through the fifteenth century, they still only occur in a small proportion of the wills analysed by French (2021, 201). Therefore, their rarity in non-metropolitan households is to be expected. By the early fifteenth century, there was a common fraternity of those engaged in the manufacture and sale of books in London, and by 1500 there were over 250 Londoners making their living from the book

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[312] E149; E851.
[313] C30.

Table 7.4: Occurrence of books in the escheator's records. *Indicates goods that are likely to have been stolen.

List No.	Year	Name	Location	Occupation	Object	Original Text	Value (d)	No. Objects
84	1428	Hugh Pye	Bradenham, Norfolk	Chaplain	Portable breviary	portiforium portat'	120	1
					Book of sermons	liber de sermonibus	20	1
104	1428	William White	Norfolk	Chaplain	Old/worn book called 'the Bible'	liber debil' vocat' le Bibill	240	1
112	1428	Reginald Lange	Pillaton, Devon	Clerk	Book called 'portos' [portable breviary]	liber vocat' portos	240	1
					Portable breviaries	portos	880	2
215	1419	Hugh Cetur	Woodchurch, Kent	Clerk	Portable breviaries	portos	160	–
					Psalter	sauter	120	1
					Missal	missale	1600	1
255	1390	Giles atte Welle	Donwnham Market, Norfolk	Chaplain	Missal	missalis	1200	1
					Portable breviary	portiferium	240	1
299	1413	Simon Hull	Blatherwick, Northamptonshire	Chaplain	Portable breviary	portoferium	160	1
587	1417	John Ely	Ripon, Yorkshire	Chaplain	Portable breviary	portos		1
					Missal	missalis		1
629	1424	Alexander Johnson*	Bradfield Combust, Suffolk	–	Missal	missale	320	1
					Antiphoner	antiphoner	800	1
725	1413	Henry Blak	Suffolk	Chaplain	Portable breviary	portiforium portat'	240	1
1120	1458	Thomas Fuller*	Lymington, Hampshire	Yeoman	Portable breviary	portiferium	480	1

(Continued)

Table 7.4: Continued.

List No.	Year	Name	Location	Occupation	Object	Original Text	Value (d)	No. Objects
1129	1441	John Ham	Antingham, Norfolk	Parson	Portable breviary	porteforium	240	1
1193	1439	Henry Hole	Old Newton, Suffolk	Vicar	Portable breviary	portiferium	320	1
					Missal	missal'		1
1197	1439	Richard Horeston	Northfield, Worcestershire	Rector of the church of Northfield	Book called 'Portoos' [portable breviary]	liber voc' portoos	1200	1
1349	1407	Thomas Kyrkeby	Norfolk/Suffolk	Chaplain	Book	liber		1
1358	1407	William Dalton	Fyfield? Hampshire/ Wiltshire	Parson	Portable breviary	porteforeum	360	1
1435	1402	Phillip Canaan	Brook, Kent	Rector	Diverse books	divers' libri	1200	
					Books	iiii. libri	160	4
1468	1410	Roger Bettys	Dunwich, Suffolk	Chaplain	Portable breviary and other books	portiforium portat' & al' libri	480	
					Missal	liber vocat' myssal'	1200	1
1503	1430	John Waryn	Cardinham, Cornwall	Clerk	Book called a 'Grandvolom'	liber vocat' Grandvolom	1200	1
					Psalter	psalterium	480	1
1534	1433	Thomas Crishale	Middlesex	Vicar	Book called 'portos' [portable breviary]	liber vocat' portos	120	1
1548	1445	Isaak Grene	Great Walsingham, Norfolk	Clerk	Prayer, or prayer book	orison'	20	1
1578	1404	John Capell'	Corhampton, Hampshire	Chaplain?	Matins books, pair	par matutinarum	12	1

industry (Christianson 1999, 129). Even so, books remained expensive, despite the advent of printing from c.1475 (Christianson 1999, 133). This made books more widely available to the gentry and urban merchant class, but ownership remained limited. Patronage and social networks likely played an important role in the provisioning of the lesser clergy, such as those book owners within the escheators' and coroners' lists, with religious texts (Lane Ford 1999, 212). While the need for books among the clergy and professionals is fairly obvious, the motivations for those with non-clerical occupations in acquiring books is unclear. There are just two apparently non-clerical lists featuring books among the escheators' records. The first relates to the yeoman Thomas Fuller of Lymington (Hampshire), who has an unusual list containing elaborate drinking vessels, his breviary and cash, but no domestic goods.[314] The other is that of Alexander Johnson, who had a missal and an antiphoner, plus a couple of other valuable items recorded as coming into the possession of Thomas Leche, parson of Bradfield Combust, following Jonson's flight for felony.[315] The circumstantial details and the character of the items in these lists raises the suspicion that these were stolen, and while there is no explicit evidence to indicate this, such a conclusion would support the idea that in the rural and small-town social milieu studied here, books were valuable items almost exclusively associated with the clergy.

Details are not given for all the books listed among the escheators' records, but those which are given a description are all religious in character. They comprise breviaries (at least 17), missals (six), an 'orison' (perhaps a small prayer book, to judge by its value), a book of sermons, a Bible, two psalters, an antiphoner and a pair of matins books (with nets for storage). This religious focus corresponds with the evidence of book ownership from London wills (French 2021, 201). These were valuable items. The missals belonging to Hugh Cetur and Giles atte Welle were valued at 10 marks and 100s. respectively, for example.[316] Two of the priestly book owners – William White and Hugh Pye – forfeited for heresy. Given the well-known association of these two with lollardy (Aston 1984, 71–100) it is interesting that White is the only man in Table 7.4 said to have forfeited a Bible, while Pye's is the only book of sermons. Lane Ford (1999, 212) draws attention to the fact that the clergy's books represented significant investment, proposing that in many cases they are likely to have been gifts of patronage. Several other books are listed without detail, but all belong to clergy so are likely to be religious in nature. The absence of explicitly religious books from the coroners' records is presumably due to the lower proportion of lists relating to clergy, although John James had books of various type and his profession as a clergyman suggests that these are likely to have been religious in character.[317]

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[314] E1120.

[315] E629. Part of Jonson's list is illegible and it is possible it features an additional book.

[316] E215, E255.

[317] C382.

Archaeological evidence for book ownership consists of fastenings and furnishings from books. Small quantities of such objects come from excavations in the larger towns, but are most common from religious houses where books were used and repaired, and manuscripts produced (Howsam 2016). There are 13 examples of book fittings in the archaeological dataset. These come from a limited range of sites, being associated with the vicarage at Wharram Percy (a further two were found in the church; Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010), a moated site at Sherburn (Brewster and Hayfield 1994) and an apparently wealthy farmstead at Capel-St-Mary (Suffolk; Tabor 2010). Other examples, for example from Cockermouth (Cumbria; Leech and Gregory 2012) and Crowle (Worcestershire; Reynish 2013), are more ambiguous in regard to date or site type. Overall, this data supports the interpretation that book ownership was limited to the clergy and gentry in our period, with no clear archaeological evidence of book ownership among non-elite rural households. Tantalising glimpses of rural book ownership are provided by PAS finds of book fittings, which are similar in character to excavated examples, but difficult to interpret due to a lack of direct association with a household (Howsam 2016, 19). The most compelling interpretation of these is that they are related to the destruction of books following the dissolution, rather than providing evidence of rural book ownership (Howsam 2016, 404–5). Overall, the evidence presented here accords with the established view that book ownership was limited to the clergy, university-educated professionals and the gentry and urban merchants who fall outside of our datasets.

Religion was a core element of medieval life; it infiltrated the domestic sphere in a variety of ways. Yet our archaeological and historical records are both surprisingly silent on this subject. Archaeological evidence, however, allows us to consider some of the ways in which people interacted with religious objects such as pilgrimage souvenirs and engaged in ritual acts such as the concealment of objects within the home. It is, perhaps, in recognising the potency of materials intertwined in personal, domestic acts of devotion that archaeological analysis is most powerful, creating a framework through which it is possible to see devotional practices elsewhere in the home, for example at the table as discussed in Chapter 4. It was perhaps the ubiquity of religious items, as well as their inalienable qualities, which meant that only in exceptional circumstances were they seized and noted by the escheator or coroner.

Arms and armour

Arms and armour are a small but important part of the dataset. The beginning of our period marks the start of the transition from chain-mail armour to plate (see Richardson 2011), and the end sees the increasing adoption of firearms. The Assize of Arms was issued by Henry II in 1181 and this, as well as Edward I's Statute of Winchester (1285) imposed an obligation on the population to

retain and be prepared to use arms. As warfare with Scotland and France intensified during the fourteenth century, provision was made to array armed men and maintain coastal defences via commissions that invoked the Statute of Winchester and other traditional arrangements (Hewitt 1966, 1–27). An ordinance of 1363 was the first of several requiring men to practise archery (Gunn 2010). Men were recruited for military campaigns at musters, with communities expected to meet the costs of equipping men or paying a fee to exempt the community from its obligation. While households may have acquired arms to meet these obligations, others may have been engaged in aristocratic retinues, potentially being provisioned with arms or cash with which to acquire them (Prestwich 2006, 77–9).

Arms were not only acquired to fulfil legal obligations. They could be obtained as items of display; Leech (2000, 7–8) and French (2021, 83) discuss the importance of armour as an item of display in later medieval and early modern urban halls in relation to the role of citizens in the militia and as symbols of masculinity and citizenship. In London, French (2021, 83) demonstrates that the display of weapons and armour became less common by the sixteenth century, with households instead stowing these items in out-of-the-way places. Weapons could also be the equipment of professional soldiers. From the reign of Edward I, feudal military obligation was increasingly abandoned in favour of paid troops (Prestwich 2006, 78), meaning that it was possible for men effectively to become, either permanently or temporarily, professional soldiers. Changes in weaponry required new legislation to limit its use. By the end of our period, legislation was passed to restrict access to arms: in 1541 an act was passed to limit ownership of pistols and crossbows, and in 1548 gun owners were required to register with their local justice (Schwoerer 2000, 34–5).

One reason for the fairly modest quantities of arms and armour occurring in the escheators' and coroners' records may be that the seizure of these items would inhibit the felon or members of their household from performing military service. Indeed, from the fourteenth century felons were often recruited into military service (Prestwich 2006, 79). Therefore, before considering the specific items of arms and armour occurring in these records, it is necessary to better understand the circumstances of seizure. It is noteworthy that a particularly high proportion (around a third) of those escheators' lists containing weapons relate to crimes which carried capital punishments; nine such lists relate to murderers, nine to those convicted of treachery or treason, one to a convicted lollard and five to individuals who were hanged for other or unspecified felonies, in addition to a single suicide. In such cases, the individual concerned would clearly have had no need for weapons and, indeed, they may have been used in committing the crime. Overall it is highly likely that arms and armour are underrepresented within the dataset.

A valuable insight into the kinds of armour that might have been available through the market can be gained from an escheators' list which falls outside of the main sample analysed here, as it relates to a resident of a large town. In

1403 Richard Fourbour, a furbisher (or armourer) of Winchester (Hampshire), was arrested and his stock seized.[318] This included three hauberks (long coats of mail), five basinets (small headpieces) with ventails (neck armour), a further 15 ventails, four pairs of paunces (plates to protect the abdomen), two pairs of braces of mail, two pairs of leg harness, a breast plate, seven pallets (skull-caps, usually of leather), two pairs of vambraces (to protect the arms), two pairs of rerebraces (to protect the upper arm), 13 pairs of plate gloves, 41 swords, five baselards (daggers), 12 baselard blades and three lance heads. A further unusual case (not in the analysed sample due to its 'elite' status) is the list of the armiger (esquire) John Walydve of Swindon (Wiltshire). He had an iron or mail helmet ('hatte de wyre'), three poleaxes, a crossbow with fittings and a baselard, all presumably for his own military use.[319] These lists are exceptional; in the analysed sample, armour occurs in only 12 escheators' lists (Table 7.5), with multiple items of armour occurring in three of these. In 1417 the murderer William Bouerset of Ormside (Westmorland), had a hauberk (appraised at 13s 4d), a sallet (a headpiece), a gardbrace and a pair of vambraces (both to protect the arms) (appraised together at 12s 4d), representing a suit of armour to protect the upper body.[320] In 1381 the traitor John Steuenache of Mersham (Kent) had a more limited set of items: a hauberk with a (probable) helmet (valued together at 10s), and plate gloves (16d).[321] The final list is that of Thomas Tylthe of Cranbrook (Kent), dating to 1426, who had a breastplate (20s), a hauberk (15s) and pairs of vambraces (6s 8d), rerebraces (6s 8d) and plate gloves (5s).[322] Where single items occur it is hauberks which are most common (four), followed by costlets (body armour, two), with single examples of breastplates, a brigandine (body armour) and neck guards, all suggesting that, in the first instance, the priority was to acquire items for protecting the upper body. The expense of these items perhaps explains why most individuals who possessed armour only had one or two pieces. These items may have been used in combat, but also have functioned as display pieces. Discussing probate inventory evidence from Yorkshire, Dyer (2013, 22, 26) highlights the occurrence of weaponry within the hall, which was likely hung on the wall. He suggests that this is a visual indication of a peasant's ability to defend themselves and serve the state, rather than relating to an explicit military role. Armour is very rare in the coroners' records, occurring in only four lists (Table 7.5). In 1545 Robert Foster of Winskill (Yorkshire), had a 'tunic of defence, called a jack' worth 5s.[323] A more extensive inventory of armour was held by William Sparke, a yeoman of Loddon (Norfolk), who had a corslet, splints, a sallet and gauntlets, appraised

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[318] E1442. Perhaps surprisingly, Fourbour's merchandise is said to be at Penton Mewsey, which is also where he was arrested on suspicion of theft.
[319] E1551.
[320] E515.
[321] E672.
[322] E820.
[323] C56.

Table 7.5: Combinations of arms and armour occurring in the escheators' and coroners' records.

Armour	Arrows	Bow	Dagger	Shield	Spear	Sword	Bill	Gun	Misc. Weapons	No. Escheators' Lists	No. Coroners' Lists
X	X	X								1	
X			X							1	
X										8	4
X		X								1	
X	X	X		X		X				1	
	X	X	X	X		X				1	
	X	X								7	2
	X		X							1	
	X					X				1	
	X	X	X							3	
	X	X				X				4	1
	X			X						2	2
	X									1	
	X	X	X			X					2
		X								5	2
		X	X							1	
		X	X			X				1	1

(Continued)

Table 7.5: Continued.

	Armour	Arrows	Bow	Dagger	Shield	Spear	Sword	Bill	Gun	Misc. Weapons	No. Escheators' Lists	No. Coroners' Lists
				X							15	2
					X	X					1	
					X		X				6	1
						X					1	
							X				13	2
			X					X				
			X					X				
										X	1	
							X	X				3
									X			1
				X			X		X			2
Escheators'												
Total Items	26	194	44	29	10	2	28	0	0	1		
Total Lists	12	21	24	23	10	2	27	0	0	1		
Coroners'												
Total Items	6	23	52	7	1	0	10	5	3	0		
Total Lists	4	7	10	8	1	0	10	5	3	0		

together at 6s 8d in 1519.[324] Finally, Thomas Chylrey of Marlborough (Wiltshire), had 'a pair of almain rivets', a type of flexible plate armour worth 16d, which was kept, presumably on display, in his hall.[325] Archaeological examples of armour are equally rare, being limited to pieces of chain mail recovered at 11–23 City Road, Islington (MOLAS 1998a) and 50 Finsbury Square, Islington (MOLAS 1999).

Weaponry is more common than armour in the escheators' records (Table 7.5). The most common weapons are bows and arrows, although it must be noted that in some cases these may have been used for hunting rather than combat. Through our period archers increasingly dominated England's military, with them often being drawn from the middling ranks of society (Bell *et al.* 2013, 143–7). Bows occur in 24 escheators' lists, in the majority of cases with arrows, making these the most common types of weapons. Although they are often valued with other items, some indication of their value can be ascertained. Thomas Pulton of Titchfield (Hampshire), had two bows and 24 arrows in 1404, valued at 3s 4d.[326] Hugh Cetur had two bows and 11 arrows worth 20d in 1414.[327] A final example is the list of John Henefeld of Black Notley (Essex), who had a bow and a sheaf of arrows worth 4s.[328] These differences in value perhaps indicate that it was arrows, rather than bows, which were the more expensive items. This is supported by the list of John Flemyng of Kent or Middlesex, dating to 1403, which unusually, values these items separately: a bow at 8d and a sheaf of arrows at 18d.[329] Where occupation is stated, a variety of people possessed these items, including servants, clerks and a smith. Where occupation is not listed but there are sufficient items present to suggest a relatively complete list, bows and arrows are most typically associated with those whose possessions suggest a degree of affluence. Examples are John Meselyn of Kent or Middlesex, who had various soft furnishings, John de Polton of Tilshead (Wiltshire), who had substantial agricultural holdings, and William Mandevile of Colnbrook (Middlesex), who possessed a range of agricultural tools, furnishings and tableware.[330] While there is nothing to suggest that these individuals performed military service, they fit the profile of military archers who were often rural freemen or yeomen (Bell *et al.* 2013, 145).

Archery was a common pastime in medieval society, and although developing skill in archery was encouraged in the context of defence, it was also a form of sport among rural communities (Bradbury 1985, 160). However, although archery was encouraged, the events of the Peasants' Revolt and stories of outlaw

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[324] C133.
[325] C171.
[326] E25.
[327] E215.
[328] E287.
[329] E1600.
[330] E8; E157; E712.

bands, best exemplified by the legend of Robin Hood, provide ample evidence of the risks associated with encouraging the development of the skill (Bradbury 1985, 170–1). In spite of these risks, Gunn (2010) presents evidence for the continuation of archery practice through the sixteenth century in the form of the maintenance of communal archery butts and coroners' inquests relating to accidental deaths associated with archery, although, as indicated by contemporary observers, the number of people engaged in archery probably gradually declined for a variety of reasons, including longer working hours and the rise of the handgun. Even so, under Henry VII and Henry VIII, householders were obliged to maintain bows for themselves as well as any children and servants (Gunn 2010, 53). The prevalence of archery throughout our period and the requirements for ubiquitous proficiency and bow ownership explains why arrowheads are the most common type of weaponry recovered archaeologically. These occur in a variety of forms, some with specific functions (Figure 7.3). Of the 28 identifiable arrowheads in the archaeological sample 16 are of broadhead form (Figure 7.3A), that is, with a barb and best suited for hunting. These were principally recovered from rural settlements, the exception being an urban example from Redcastle Furze, Thetford (Norfolk; Andrews 1995). It is possible that these arrowheads were used in poaching or legitimate hunting. The remaining arrowheads are of spearpoint (Figure 7.3B) or bullet head form (Figure 7.3C). Spearpoint arrowheads were common, multipurpose arrowheads, while bullet heads were intended to pierce armour (Borg 1991). Only two of the arrowheads are certainly of bullet head type, one from The Forty, Cricklade (Wiltshire; Wessex Archaeology 2007) and one from Mannington, Wiltshire. Arrowheads from Upton (Worcestershire; Rahtz 1969) and Foxcotte (Russel 1985) are certainly of spearpoint form. While there are examples from Cricklade (Wessex Archaeology 2007), Thetford (Andrews 1995) and Doncaster (Yorkshire; McComish *et al.* 2010), the remainder are from rural sites and presumably represent weaponry or arrows used for sport; the lack of clearly bullet head arrowheads may suggest that these were reserved specifically for military activity. An additional common arrowhead form – the forked arrowhead, used for hunting wildfowl – is absent from the archaeological sample (Figure 7.3D). A further find from an urban context is a yew long bow from Main Street, Cockermouth (Leech and Gregory 2012). The occurrence of these finds at a range of sites supports the impression from the escheators' and coroners' records and other historical research of the widespread use and ownership of archery equipment. While the escheators' records reveal ownership of bows and arrows, the archaeological evidence allows us to understand better why these were obtained. It suggests that sport, rather than defence, was the primary motivation, or that hunting arrowheads were more widely available than those for battle.

The second most common weapon type in the archival evidence is the dagger, 13 of which in the escheators' records are termed baselards and valued

Figure 7.3: Examples of medieval arrowhead forms. A: Broadhead form. B: Spearhead form. C: Bullet head form. D: Forked head. CC Share Alike licence: Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society (WILT-732305); Birmingham Museums Trust (WMID-164B47); Hampshire Cultural Trust (HAMP-39EFDA); Bristol City Council (GLOS-3515D4).

between 12d and 10s. Four of these baselards were adorned with silver, two belonging to Richard Horeston, rector of Northfield (Worcestershire) in 1439, the others dating to the first decade of the fifteenth century.[331] Of the 23 lists including daggers, five relate to murders and four relate to individuals accused

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[331] E1197; E1308; E1309.

of treason or treachery, implying that these weapons may have played a role in the indictment of the individual concerned. Swords occur in 27 lists and are valued modestly, between 12d and 10s, with the majority below 40d. There are very few lists where more than one weapon occurs. In one list, that of Thomas Pulton of Titchfield (Hampshire), a sword and shield (appraised together at around 3s) and two bows are present.[332] Weapons are only present in one of the lists containing multiple pieces of armour, that of Thomas Tylthe, who had a bow.[333] Hand weapons are rare in the archaeological sample. Examples include a copper alloy pommel from Spital Street, Dartford (TVAS 2014), an iron pyramidal-shaped pommel from Weaverthorpe (Yorkshire; Finney and Hunter 2006) and a cast iron dagger hilt from Old Buckenham (Norfolk; NPS Archaeology 2015). Iron spikes or spears may have been a part of weapons, with examples coming from Wharram Percy (Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010), Huish (Wiltshire; Thompson 1972), Staines (Middlesex; Jones 2010) and Wimbotsham (Norfolk; Shelley 2003).

Weaponry occurs in 28 coroners' lists. As with the escheators' lists, bows and arrows, daggers and swords are the most common types, with a small number of guns also being present (Table 7.5). Statutes of the first half of the sixteenth century restricted gun ownership to those with an income of over £100 as a measure to prevent their use for poaching and to quell potential rebellion (Gunn 2010, 78), so those owned by the servant William Taylor, the fuller Laurence Tichen and the yeoman Simon Grynden are likely to have been owned illegally.[334] In most cases, single items of weaponry are present. Interestingly, the four lists containing armour do not include weapons.

There is no consistent pattern among the lists containing a single item of weaponry. Where profession is listed, those with single weapons include yeomen, a mariner and a fuller, and others with weapons include a chandler (who had a sheath of arrows),[335] a labourer who had an iron bill and another who had a dagger,[336] a servant who had a gun and clergyman who had a stone-bow (a kind of crossbow used for shooting stones; worth 10s, considerably more than a long bow).[337] Where rooms are given, weapons were to be found in the hall, parlour, a loft and a chamber.

The evidence for arms and armour is problematic to interpret. It does not appear to have been routinely seized and, with the exception of arrowheads, is not regularly recovered archaeologically as items are likely to have been curated or recycled. However, the partial evidence does reveal that weapons were owned across society and highlights the importance of archery across our period. Some items of weaponry and armour represent a substantial investment, and

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[332] E25; valuation of sword and shield partly illegible.
[333] E820.
[334] C299; C318; C335.
[335] C208.
[336] C230; C537.
[337] C382.

likely had a function in display as well as being used offensively. The adorning of items in silver perhaps demonstrates the importance of weapons such as daggers as fashionable items of dress, allied to the other martial influences on dress discussed in Chapter 6.

Other personal objects

A final group of objects comprises other small items including those associated with personal grooming, and purses. Of these, purses are the most common items. Purses occur in five escheators' lists, in two cases recorded alongside cash. These include the clerk, Hugh Cetur of Woodchurch (Kent), whose remarkably detailed list includes a purse containing 18½d, and the vicar Thomas Crishale of Barton Bendish (Norfolk; but relating to goods and chattels in Middlesex), who had 'money in his purse, 2s 2d', though the purse itself is not separately listed or valued.[338] The ownership status of other purses is more dubious. The six purses belonging to the merchant John Hawkyn who had six, were presumably stock, while that belonging to the hanged arsonist Richard Buryman, whose goods are limited to a silver cup, and a purse containing cash, might reasonably assumed to be stolen.[339] The goods belonging to John Hornebrok of Plympton (Devon) are limited to a brass pot, money in a purse and the adorned belt, to which it was presumably attached.[340] Purses are also the most common personal item in the coroners' records (11 lists), and they belonged to men and women of various professions and typically contained cash. The records give some information about how purses were worn and what they contained. In 1567 Robert Crowne of North Elmham (Kent) had 'his purse and girdle and money in it, 3s'.[341] Similarly, the purse belonging to the labourer Anthony Curlynge of St Lawrence (Kent) is also listed with his girdle and 'wearing apparel'.[342] The purse belonging to the labourer John Wyvenden of Hawkhurst (Kent) in 1576 contained his money (7s 4d) and a silver ring.[343] As with the escheators' records, the true ownership of some purses might be doubted. In 1516 when the labourer John Henne of Milton-next-Gravesend (Kent) murdered Robert Makerell, he had a leather purse, cash and a dagger which could, conceivably, have been stolen from his victim.[344]

More details on purses are provided by the archaeological evidence, which takes the form of leather fragments and metal purse frames (Figure 7.4). The simplest purses are two drawstring examples from Carlisle, one made from calfskin and the other from sheepskin (Newman 2011). From the same site

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[338] E215; E1534.
[339] E518; E577.
[340] E1175.
[341] C194.
[342] C389.
[343] C230.
[344] C537.

Figure 7.4: Purse frame from Duke Street, Haughley, Suffolk. Image: Cotswold Archaeology.

are decorative leather purse panels: one is of lobed form and made of sheepskin, and the other leather panel is decorated with a scalloped motif. These would have formed a part of composite purses with a metal frame. Copper alloy and iron purse bars and frames are present within the dataset. An example from Haughley (Suffolk; Figure 7.4), probably of early sixteenth-century date, is made of two copper alloy rods, flattened and perforated, with another perforated rod allowing for the attachment of a suspension loop (Goffin 2009). A copper alloy purse bar from Marygate, Berwick-upon-Tweed is corroded (Suddaby 2007), but a final example of a copper alloy purse frame from Lydd Quarry (Kent) is decorated with niello lines and incised zigzag patterning (Barber and Priestly-Bell 2008). There are also three iron examples: a large swivel bar from High Street, Uxbridge (Middlesex; MOLAS 2000a) and a circular suspension loop from West Cotton (Northamptonshire; Hylton 2010) as well as a fifteenth-century purse frame from Southwick (Northamptonshire; Johnston,

Bellamy and Foster 2001). An iron pin from Thuxton (Norfolk), is probably also from a purse frame (Goodall 2011, 360).

Purses would have been worn on the person, typically suspended from the belt, and could be made of elaborately decorated leather or bright fabrics, which, along with decorated frames such as that from Lydd Quarry, created a further vehicle for personal display (Egan and Pritchard 2002, 342). Occasional survivals of textile elements, as well as metal badges depicting purse frames and artistic depictions attest to the display potential of these items when worn from the belt (Willemsen 2022). This is nicely illustrated in the archiepiscopal register of the Archbishop of Canterbury dating to 1390, where a Kentish peasant is depicted wearing a frame purse suspended from a belt adorned with circular mounts. The drawing clearly carries a strong element of implied criticism of such ostentatious display on behalf of the lower orders (Figure 6.1A; Du Boulay 1966, 189). A copper alloy purse mount of fifteenth–sixteenth century date from Oyster Street, Portsmouth (Hampshire) is adorned with punched decoration (Fox and Barton 1986, 61). Purse frames, like other objects of dress, could carry religious inscriptions, imbuing them with a further personal and spiritual significance, which might also be made evident in the embellishment of leather or textile coverings (Standley 2015, 63–4). Indeed, purses commonly feature in depictions of religious scenes in European art as a symbol of charity (Willemsen 2022, 117). Purse frames are generally rare finds from excavations, even within large urban settings; only two are reported on from Winchester (Hinton 1990c) and one from the London waterfront (Egan and Pritchard 2002, 356), for example. Iron purse frames are known from King's Lynn and London. However, artistic depictions show that purses were a feature of rural dress (Standley 2015, 18), and over 2,000 purse fragments have been reported to the PAS. Of these, 605 are adorned with niello in a similar manner to the excavated example from Lydd Quarry and 118 carry inscriptions, most commonly variations on Ave Maria. Smaller quantities exhibit evidence of gilding (26) or silvering/tinning (43 examples). Although purses are generally of fairly plain materials, they might be considered an important component of the performance of the social self as discussed in Chapter 6 in relation to dress. They allowed for the cultivation of an impression of modesty and honour through appearing to avoid excess (Davis 2012, 45), but also, like other areas of dress, became a potential means of displaying wealth, piety or individuality. Purses emerged as a response to the increasing circulation and use of coinage, not just as a receptacle but as a means of embodying it without frivolously converting it into jewellery or clothing, or risking the judgement brought about by subverting sumptuary legislation. In this regard they can, perhaps, be considered alongside chests as objects associated in the fifteenth century with the increasing ambiguity around one's place in the social order brought about by commercial growth.

Personal toilet items include combs, small implements and glass urinals. Wooden and bone or antler combs for grooming were excavated at City Road, Islington (MOLAS 1998a), Exmouth (Devon; Weddell 1980), Thetford

(Andrews 1995), West Cotton (Hylton 2010) and Wharram Percy (Harding, Marlow-Mann and Wrathmell 2010). These artefacts are likely to be considerably underrepresented archaeologically, particularly due to the decay of wooden objects. Other objects include an unidentified cosmetic item from Spital Street, Dartford (TVAS 2014), copper alloy ear scoops from Faversham (Kent; Reid 2009) and Cley-Next-the-Sea (Norfolk; Birks 2003) and tweezers from Shipdham (Norfolk; NAU 2008) and West Cotton (Hylton 2010). There is a single copper alloy mirror case in the group, from Throckmorton Airfield (Griffin, Griffin and Jackson 2005). Mirrors are typically understood as female accessories, and were often given as courtship gifts (Standley 2008; 2013, 36–38) but also had a role as devotional items associated with pilgrimage, whereby 'mirror magic' could be used to capture the reflection of a relic (Hall 2011, 92). The final items are glass urinals (medical items used for assessing the colour of urine), both from sites on the edge of London (Cooke and Philpotts 2002; MOLAS 1997). These items barely appear in the written lists. There are two razors among the escheators' records, and John James had two pewter chamber pots worth 16d.[345]

Other personal items listed in the escheators' lists mostly consist of undefined 'valuables' of silver or gold. However, there is a single instance of a musical instrument, a gittern, a strung instrument, belonging to John Stakepoll of Middlesex, valued with a cither, also a stringed instrument, at 16d.[346] Elements of musical instruments have also been identified in the archaeological data, consisting of bone flutes or pipes from Cedars Park, Stowmarket (Suffolk; Woolhouse 2016), West Cotton (Northamptonshire), and Redcastle Furze, Thetford, (Andrews 1995). Other examples are a Jew's harp from Bishopstone (Wiltshire; King and Bethell 2013) and a tuning peg from Staines (Jones 2010). A further unusual musical item from the coroners' records is a blowing horn, belonging to Leonard Mallhome, valued at 3s 4d in 1541.[347] This item could potentially be a pilgrimage souvenir, as such items were used in pilgrimage processions (Hall 2011, 92). Other items associated with leisure consist of die from Greenwich (Cooke and Philpotts 2002) and Carbrooke (Norfolk; Hutcheson and Noble 2006), gaming boards and pieces from West Cotton (Hylton 2010) and probable nine men's morris boards from West Whelpington (Northumberland; Evans and Jarrett 1987, M1/F4) and Treworld (Cornwall; Dudley and Minter 1966). Gaming pieces have also been recovered from Rowhope Burn (Northumberland) (soapstone) and Fordingbridge (Hampshire) (bone) (Dixon 2014; Harding and Light 2003).

Finally, among the coroners' records there are five items associated with storage. Henry Cooper had a knapsack or bag (*mantica*), as did William Bacheler,

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[345] C382.

[346] E688.

[347] C30.

but neither are assigned an individual value.[348] There are also three examples of trusses (wrapped packages of goods).

Many such small items associated with personal grooming and leisure may have been considered too small or mundane to be valued by the escheator or coroner. Gaming pieces and boards, as well as bone flutes, might, in some cases, be considered improvised artefacts with no specific monetary worth. They are important, however, for reminding us that there was space and time for leisure, and that even the poorest home could be filled with music or the loud conversation accompanying a game.

Conclusion

This chapter has summarised the evidence for a variety of different types of objects, each of which provide different insights into the value systems, consumption habits and pastimes of rural medieval households. Knives are ubiquitous archaeologically but largely absent from both the escheators' and coroners' records, but the list of John Hawkyn hints at the low monetary worth of these items. The development of more specialist knives at the end of our period is evident both archaeologically and in the coroners' records, while the evidence for the use of imported whetstones provides evidence of consumer choice and the links between rural households and international trade networks which are rarely visible through other materials. Devotional items are, perhaps, surprisingly rare in both the escheators' and coroners' records, given the centrality of devotion to medieval life. Items such as prayer beads must have been more common than they appear, and it is possible that these were considered inalienable possessions. The archaeological evidence of placed deposits hints at the ways in which devotional practice could incorporate objects which would not be immediately obvious or were not suited to seizure, such as fragments of Roman glass, and the evidence for tableware and bedding provides a further means for thinking about how devotional activity saturated domestic life. Weaponry and armour were expensive items, but were owned across the social spectrum. It is notable that few individuals in the sample possessed anything approaching a full suit of armour, suggesting the piecemeal acquisition of these expensive items. Analysis of the circumstances of seizure points to a tension between punitive seizure and the necessity of households meeting their obligations for military readiness, and it is clear from all three datasets that archery was an activity widely undertake across the social spectrum. Smaller objects point to care taken in fashioning and cultivating an image through the use of purses and grooming, while also illuminating the leisure activities of rural households.

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[348] C447; C446.