

Medieval and Post-Medieval Lamps

(a summary by Roman Glassmakers)

Lamps with a wide, flaring bowl and a pointed base, are present in 12th century France. They first appear in England in the 13th century, and are distributed throughout the country, including medieval glasshouse sites in the Weald. In medieval manuscripts, they are depicted suspended above altars, hanging by three chains secured to a harness around the underside of the bowl; material evidence for this is rare in England.

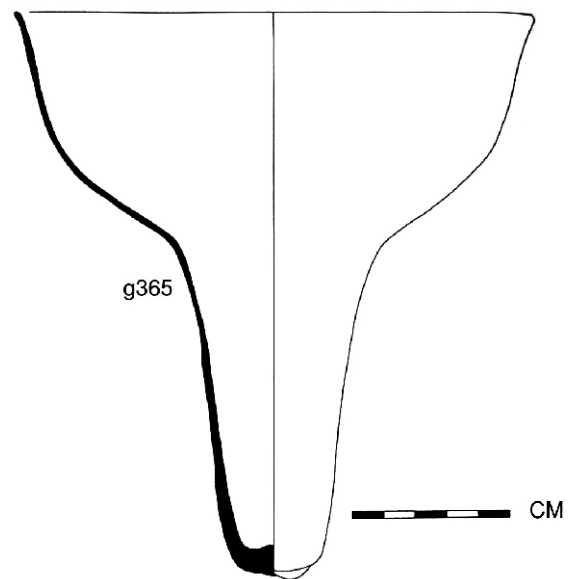
The lamps may have been filled with oil floated on the top of water, which would have filled most of the bowl, or perhaps completely filled with oil. Domestic lamps may have used animal fats. The wick, made of natural fibres such as flax, hemp, wool or cotton, may have been held in place by the long base of the lamp.

Almost half of the finds from England are from monasteries. Light had a particular importance in religious life, and lamps were placed, for instance, at focal points such as above altars, or the tombs of martyrs. Benedictine monks were required to have a light in their dormitories throughout the night.

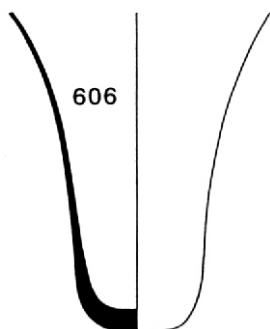
Many lamps are also found in domestic circumstances such as town and manor houses, but seldom at the sites of castles. It is possible that their occupants preferred other, more opulent forms of lighting (Tyson 2000).



Fig 27 13th century hanging lamp from Westgate, Winchester (Winchester Museums Service collection), g365



Tyson 2000 Fig 28 Lamps



Haslam 1993 The Glass from Norwich:

606: Lower part of hanging lamp (pontil on underside); pale blue-green glass, pitted surface weathering. 15th century type.

Tyson g365/ Fig. 27 (Winchester):

Almost complete hanging lamp of rejoined fragments. Originally green glass, now covered by opaque brown weathering. Long hollow stem with rounded base flares out to body and slightly everted rim. Prominent pontil mark on underside of base. 13th century.

These lamps, always made in greenish glass, survive well into the first half of the 16th century and are distributed throughout England. Although mainly associated with ecclesiastical buildings, they are also found in domestic contexts. They appear to have been suspended by three chains attached to a metal band, but the long base could have been set into any suitable hole (Willmott 2002).

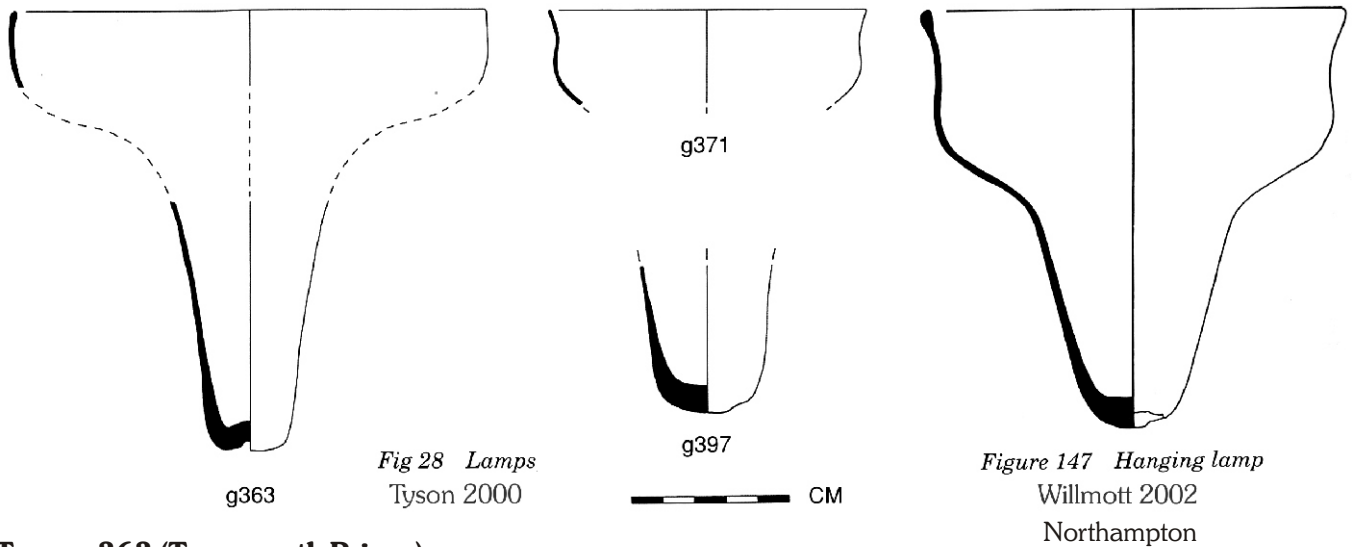


Fig 28 Lamps
Tyson 2000

Figure 147 Hanging lamp
Willmott 2002
Northampton

Tyson g363 (Tynemouth Priory):

Fragments of the vertical rim, hollow stem and base of a hanging lamp of green glass. ?13th century.

Tyson g371 (Drury Hill, Nottingham):

Rim fragment of hanging lamp bowl with indentation below slightly everted rim. Pale green glass with opaque beige surface weathering. Late 13th - 14th century.

Tyson g397 (Long Wyre Street, Colchester):

Lower part of the hollow stem and rounded base of hanging lamp. Green glass with brown pitted weathering on surface. Pontil mark on underside. c.1375-1425.

Charleston 1984 (Exeter) G.28: Base of a lamp of green glass with heavy brown encrusted weathering. English. 14th or 15th century.

Charleston 1984 (Exeter) G.29: Base of a lamp, originally of green glass, now brown. Probably English. c.1250-1350.



Selected References:

Tyson, Rachel (2000) 'Medieval glass vessels found in England c AD 1200-1500' Council for British Archaeology: CBA Research Report 121 pp.141-148 (figs. 27,28). Type E1: g363-g475

Willmott, Hugh (2002) 'Early post-medieval vessel glass in England c. 1500-1670' Council for British Archaeology: CBA Research Report 132 p.104. Type 35.1

Charleston, R. J. (1981) '16th to 17th century English Glass' in Bulletin de l'Association Internationale pour l'Histoire du Verre 1977-1980: Liege

Charleston, R. J. (1984) 'The Glass', in Allan, J. 'Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Exeter, 1971-80' Exeter Arch. Report 3, pp.258-278. Exeter: Exeter City Council

Haslam, J. (1993) 'Glass Vessels' in Margeson, S. (ed) (1993) 'Norwich Households - Medieval and Post-Medieval Finds from Norwich Survey Excavations 1971-78' East Anglian Archaeology Monograph No. 58 (Norwich Survey) pp.97-117 (pp.104-105 (fig. 70, nos. 653-658))