

Medieval Finds at Stanton (1)



A small lead flask was found recently to the north west of All Saints Parish Church in Stanton. It measures 41mm x 29mm and has two small handles, one on either side at the top (one of which has been pushed in towards the body of the flask). The flask has been identified as a Pilgrim's Ampulla: a miniature flask worn around the neck designed to hold Holy Water or Oil.

In medieval England the church encouraged people to make pilgrimages to special holy places called shrines. It was believed that if you prayed at these shrines you might be forgiven for your sins and have more chance of going to Heaven. Others went to shrines hoping to be cured of an illness or disability.

Pilgrims could buy badges and ampullae at shrines as proof of their pilgrimage. The earliest, simple, forms of ampullae date to the late 12th century. By the 15th century designs were considerably more intricate with the flask shape being spread out to form a scallop shell or a wheel with spokes. They were made of poor quality pewter or lead and were cast in stone moulds.

The ampulla found at Stanton has no distinguishing marks, so it isn't possible to associate it with a specific shrine. Also, it is difficult to date accurately, but from the simplicity of its design it is likely to be from the 13th century.

Ampullae are quite unusual finds: only 554 ampullae have been found in the UK since 1998, including 20 in Nottinghamshire, 25 in and just 2 in Derbyshire.

Medieval Finds at Stanton (2)



In 2009 a complete cast lead spindle whorl was found in a newly ploughed field close to the centre of Stanton old village. The whorl is biconical with a hole through the centre where it would have been slipped onto a spindle. It weighs 38g and has a diameter of 27mm.

The sides of the whorl are decorated with letters and symbols. They are very worn, but have been deciphered as the inscription

"IESVS" (Latin for "Jesus"). After the final 'S' and before the starting 'I' there is the symbol of a skull. The underside of the whorl has the letters "MARIA" (Latin for "Mary"). Between the last letter 'A' and the first letter 'M' is another skull symbol.

It is believed that the presence of the two skulls represented "memento mori" symbolism ('remember that you must die'). which came into common usage in the middle of the Medieval period.

You can envisage the difficulty of carving the mould for this spindle whorl when you see that some of the letters have been accidentally carved back to front and some are inverted.

This lead spindle whorl is believed to be unique and has been donated to the Brewhouse Yard Museum in Nottingham.

Domed lead spindle whorls

Historically used in the art of textile production, specifically 'spinning'; spindle whorls are found from the Roman to the post medieval period.

Before the use of spinning wheels, spinning was carried out with a spindle and a whorl. The spindle, or rod, usually had a swelling on which the whorl was fitted. A wisp of prepared wool was twisted around the spindle, which was then spun and allowed to drop. The whorl, acting like a flywheel adds momentum to the spindle. By doing this the fibres were extended and twisted into a yarn.