

MORE SUFFOLK WITCH-BOTTLES

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Further finds in Suffolk of 'bellarmine' bottles evidently used as witch-bottles have so altered the general picture of distribution, with an emphasis on this county, that the moment seems opportune to present a revised list and to describe the newly-discovered examples in detail.

An account of our knowledge of this practice up to the time of writing was given by Ralph Merrifield in 1954.¹ In it he lists eleven bottles, five from London, one from King's Lynn, two from Norwich, one from Crowland in Lincolnshire, one of unknown provenance, and only one Suffolk example—from Stradbroke.

Since that time two bellarmines, but only one certainly used as a witch-bottle, have been recorded from Coddendam.² A specimen of great interest was recovered in 1958 during the preparation of the site of the Civic College at Ipswich, and one from Woodbridge, an account of which was published at the same time.³ Within the last few years, bottles have been found at Eyke,⁴ Wetheringsett,⁴ Ipswich (probably removed from Stoke during building operations), Stowmarket and Woodbridge (a second example). Enquiries concerning a bottle found during alterations to Dover House, Ixworth, about fifteen years ago, proved it to be a witch-bottle. In the meantime, a bellarmine from Gravesend has been sent to Mr. Merrifield for examination. Thus, of twenty-one bottles known to have been employed for this purpose, ten came from Suffolk. There are of course references to the practice in other parts of the country, and quotations from contemporary writers are given by Merrifield, and need not be repeated here. He does, however, consider that the use of the witch-bottle was first introduced into East Anglia, whence it spread to other regions. He also calls attention to the variation in mode of use in London, where the bottle was deposited away from the house of the victim, and in East Anglia, where it was usually buried under hearth or threshold, suggesting that the London finds generally represent a

¹ 'The Use of Bellarmines as Witch-Bottles', *Guildhall Miscellany*, No. 3, February, 1954.

² N. Smedley, *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxvi (1954), pp. 229-30, Pl. XXIX.

³ R. Merrifield and N. Smedley, 'Two Witch-Bottles from Suffolk', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxviii, Part 1 (1958), pp. 97-100, Plate XVI.

⁴ 'Archaeology in Suffolk, 1962', *Proc. Suff. Inst. Arch.*, vol. xxix, Part 2 (1962), pp. 169 and 174.

PLATE XVI



a Wetheringsett



Inches

b Eyke



c Ipswich

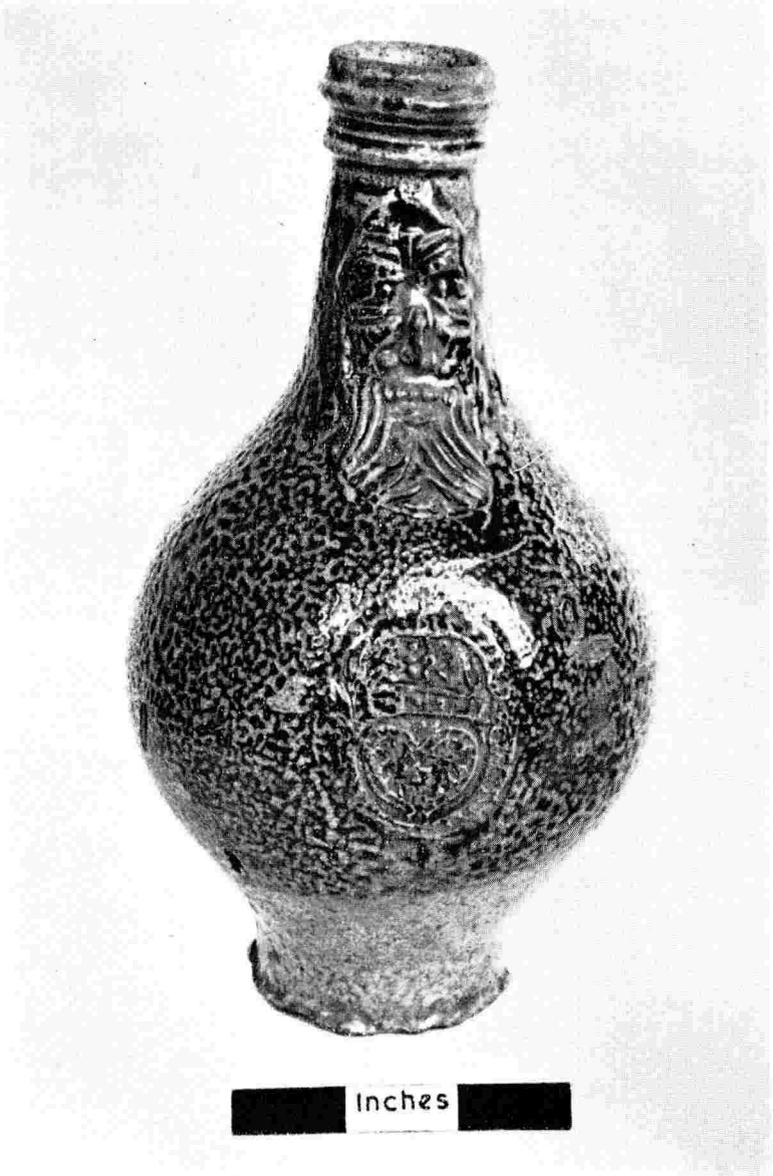
PLATE XVII



a Ixworth

b Stowmarket

PLATE XVIII



Woodbridge

PLATE XIX



Stradbroke (3)

means of protection 'against a specific act of witchcraft', whereas in East Anglia it seems to have been used as a prophylactic.

Nevertheless, the most striking account of the actual use of such a bottle, and the earliest, concerns Suffolk. It is given in full by Merrifield, but is here repeated for the edification of those who have not had an opportunity of reading his excellent paper.

It concerns the sojourn of the Reverend William Brearley, sometime Fellow of Christ's College, Cambridge, and later apparently Vicar of Burwell. Perhaps it was here that, in 1644, he was deprived of his living under the Commonwealth, and it may be as a result of this that he took lodgings in a Suffolk village. The story of the episode, quoted by Merrifield, is taken from Joseph Glanvil's account written in 1681.⁵ Brearley's landlady had been in poor health for some time:—

For an old Man that travelled up and down the Country, and had some acquaintance at that house, calling in and asking the Man of the house how he did and his Wife; He told him that himself was well, but his Wife had been a long time in a languishing condition, and that she was haunted with a thing in the shape of a Bird that would flurr near to her face, and that she could not enjoy her natural rest well. The old Man bid him and his Wife be of good courage. It was but a dead Spright, he said, and he would put him in a course to rid his Wife of this languishment and trouble. He therefore advised him to take a Bottle, and put his Wife's Urine into it, together with Pins and Needles and Nails, and Cork them up, and set the Bottle to the Fire, but be sure the Cork be fast in it, that it fly not out. The Man followed the Prescription and set the Bottle to the fire well corkt, which, when it had felt a while the heat of the Fire, began to move and joggle a little, but he for sureness took the Fire shovel and held it hard upon the Cork. And as he thought, he felt something one while on this side, another while on that, shove the Fire shovel off, which he still quickly put on again, but at last at one shoving the Cork bounced out, and the Urine, Pins, Nails and Needles all flew up, and gave a report like a Pistol, and his Wife continued in the same trouble and languishment still.

Not long after, the Old Man came to the house again, and inquired of the Man of the house how his Wife did. Who answered, as ill as ever, if not worse. He asked him if he had followed his direction. Yes, says he, and told him

⁵ Joseph Glanvil, *Sadducismus Triumphatus, or, full and plain Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions*, London, 1681, pp. 205-208.

the event as is abovesaid. Ha, quoth he, it seems it was too nimble for you. But now I will put you in a way that will make the business sure. Take your Wife's Urine as before, and cork it in a Bottle with Nails, Pins and Needles, and bury it in the Earth; and that will do the feat. The Man did accordingly. And his Wife began to mend sensibly, and in a competent time was finely well recovered. But there came a Woman from a town some miles off to their house, with a lamentable outcry, that they had killed her Husband. . . . But at last they understood by her that her Husband was a Wizard and had bewitched this Man's Wife, and that this counter-practice prescribed by the Old Man, which saved the Man's Wife from languishment, was the death of that Wizard that had bewitched her. This story did Mr. Brearley hear from the Man and Womans own mouth who were concerned, and at whose House he for a time Boarded, nor is there any doubt thereof.

It now remains only to describe the Suffolk bottles not previously recorded, and to give a brief account of some recent experiments bearing on the contents. Grid references are given where known.

Dr. F. R. Paulsen has co-operated by subjecting a number of the bottles to tests for the presence of urine, an essential ingredient. Results are given under each item in the list, and a summary of his work at the end of the paper.

Eyke (TM/31725180) (Plate XVI*b*). This bottle was found in 1962 underneath a hearth during the demolition of Church Cottages, Eyke, and presented to the Ipswich Museum by Mr. V. C. Fenton (962-87).

The exact height cannot be ascertained, as the neck is broken, but must have been approximately 8 inches to 8½ inches. Diameter: 5 inches. Base: 2¼ inches.

The glaze is dark brown, mottled: the base is wire-marked, probably indicating a Rhenish origin. Mask: Type VIII,⁶ which with the rather squat form should indicate a date in the second half of the seventeenth century. Medallion: A rosette.

The contents had not been retained, but the position in which it was found, and the analysis carried out by Dr. Paulsen, conclusively establishing that it had contained urine, leave no doubt that it had been used for counter-witchcraft purposes.

⁶ M. R. Holmes, 'The So-called "Bellarmine" Mask on Imported Rhenish Stoneware', *Antiquaries Journal*, vol. xxxi (1950), pp. 173-179.

Wetheringssett (TM/12686687) (Plate XVIa). During the removal of a fire-place in Bridge Cottage, a bottle was found lying on its side underneath the hearth.

Height: 9 inches. Diameter: $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Base: $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Glaze: Rich brown, almost uniform. No conspicuous wire-marking, pointing to a possible English origin. Mask: Type IX. Medallion: Lion rampant, left. No contents noted, but urine reaction positive.

The bottle was retained by the finder, Mr. E. R. Scott.

Ipswich (Plate XVIc). A bottle found on a tip near St. Helen's Hospital, Foxhall Road, may have been moved from Stoke, as material from the demolition of houses there was being dumped on this site. It was presented to the Ipswich Museum by the finder, Mr. A. S. Johnson (964-5).

Height: Estimated 9 inches (base missing). Diameter: $4\frac{9}{10}$ inches. Glaze: Mottled light brown. Mask: Type IX. Medallion: Lion rampant, left.

The finder unfortunately threw away the contents, including a number of nails, not realising their significance, but one iron object, probably the tine of a rake, was jammed inside the vessel. Urine reaction positive.

Stowmarket (TM/04905873) (Plate XVIIb). A bottle found during alterations to an old house in Church Street was inverted under the floor near the hearth. It remains in the possession of the finder.

Height: 9 inches. Diameter: 5 inches. Base: $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches. Glaze: Light brown, very slightly mottled, almost uniform. Wire-marked base. Mask: Type IX, rather a variant of that illustrated by Holmes, but comparable with those thus classified by Merri-field from King's Lynn and Norwich.⁷ Medallion: Rosette of lozenge-shaped rays, alternating wide (with dots) and narrow.

Contents: About 50 nails, mostly square-headed cut-nails, some three dozen round-headed brass pins, all deliberately bent, a tine of a rake and masses of fused and rusted metal.

Urine reaction positive.

Ixworth (TL/93147025) (Plate XVIIa). During restoration of Dover House, a bottle was found just outside the south door. It is in the possession of Mr. George Reeve, the owner of the house.

Height: $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Diameter: $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Base: $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Glaze: Light brown, only lightly mottled, similar to the Stow-

⁷ *Guildhall Miscellany*, Plate III a and b.

market example. Wire-marked base. Mask: Type VIII. Medallion: Rosette of alternate corn-ears and lozenges.

Contents: 5 or 6 large nails. Urine reaction positive.

Woodbridge (TM/27004915) (Plate XVIII). A second example from Woodbridge was found by Mr. G. Thompson during the demolition of three cottages in Theatre Street in front of the Angel Inn. It was lying on its side under a thick floor covered by a layer of sand.

Height: $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches. Diameter: 5 inches. Base: $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Glaze: Coarsely mottled. Wire-marked base. Mask: Type IX. Medallion: Crown with rose over heart with cross. Urine reaction positive.

The bottle was not stoppered and the contents were thrown away by the finder, who could not describe them in detail.

Stradbroke (Plate XIX). The bottle briefly noted by Merrifield was obtained by Dr. J. A. Ball of Stradbroke in 1944 and presented to the Ipswich Museum (1944-51). Dr. Ball was present when the bottle was recovered, inverted, from beneath the hearth-stone of a cottage.

Height: 8 inches. Diameter: 5 inches. Base: $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches. Glaze: Grey, mottled. Wire-marked base. Mask: Type IX. Medallion: Rose.

The contents were reported to include thorns. Urine reaction positive.

Of the bottles previously found, only the example from the Civic College site, Ipswich, had been tested for urine, giving a positive result.

APPENDIX

Dr. F. R. Paulsen of the School of Science, Ipswich Civic College, carried out tests on all the bottles recorded above, and in addition that from Red Maltings, Woodbridge.

Tests were made both for carbonate and phosphate, the presence of phosphate being a conclusive test; the carbonate could have come from other sources such as a chalk or limestone soil, but in the circumstances is likely to indicate the presence of urine.

The results from the individual bottles were as follows:—