

'Latten' Candlesticks in the Leicestershire Museums' Collection

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INTRODUCTION

As part of a study of the alloy compositions of copper-alloy objects of the medieval and post-medieval periods, a group of candlesticks and candlestick fragments has been examined and sampled for metal analysis. All but one of the objects were found in Leicester, the exception being from Kirby Muxloe Castle 6km to the west of central Leicester, but usually without sufficient archaeological information to facilitate dating. It was felt that a knowledge of the alloy composition used, in conjunction with data from similar objects in other collections, might assist in the dating of the candlesticks.

Although only one of the objects is whole and entirely free of damage, it has been possible to deduce the original form and mode of use for all the other objects. They range from essentially simple socket candlesticks to a more elaborate branched type with two sockets, but, with one exception, all the sockets have certain common features; these are simple hollow cylinders with turned circumferential grooves or beads by way of decoration. More detailed descriptions are given below, together with such information as is available on their discovery. The exception is from Kirby Muxloe Castle. Analysis was thought to be additionally important in this case since two fragments, sharing the same museum number, had become separated in store and might reasonably be confirmed as being parts of a single object if the parts were shown to have closely similar compositions.

ANALYSIS

The objects were sampled by filing or drilling as seemed most appropriate. About 10mg was removed from each and analysed using X-ray fluorescence spectrometry; details of the analytical technique have been given elsewhere.¹ Where objects were made up of more than one part, each was sampled separately. The results are given in the accompanying table.

		Copper	Zinc	Tin	Lead	Nickel	Iron	Antimony	Arsenic	Silver
C49 (112.1927)	base	84.8	3.85	4.95	4.26	0.42	0.64	0.31	0.65	0.11
	stem	85.4	3.72	5.23	3.73	0.27	0.54	0.27	0.67	0.15
C81 (3352.1887)		84.6	4.42	3.67	5.40	0.22	0.62	0.48	0.58	0.08
C63 (239.1951)	boss	78.9	11.4	4.43	4.05	0.04	0.43	0.42	0.25	0.06
	socket 1	79.5	12.1	3.66	3.44	0.04	0.51	0.42	0.30	0.08
	socket 2	80.5	12.2	3.00	3.23	0.02	0.55	0.28	0.17	0.05
C82 (3352.1887)		86.4	7.14	3.63	1.72	0.09	0.41	0.21	0.34	0.11
C83 (7.1907)	socket	74.8	13.7	4.76	6.09	0.05	0.37	0.18	0.07	0.07
	spike	98.3	0.12	0.21	0.12	0.04	1.00	0.23	nd	0.04
C50 (18 IL 1953)	base	77.8	8.48	4.03	7.50	0.26	0.47	0.94	0.45	0.07
	disc	78.7	7.33	3.91	7.90	0.27	0.48	0.83	0.48	0.05
	stem	79.7	6.28	2.67	9.61	0.09	0.43	0.72	0.41	0.08

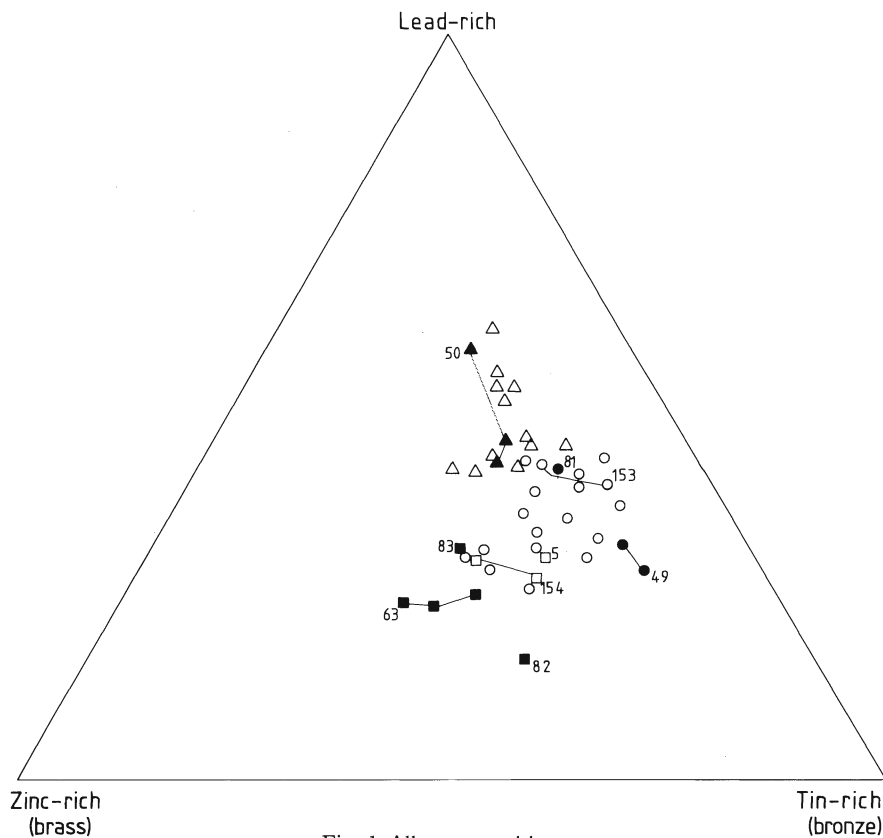


Fig. 1 Alloy compositions

A method of data presentation is used here which allows graphical comparisons to be made of complex alloy compositions. Copper alloys with similar ratios of the three main alloying additions, zinc, tin and lead, suitably weighted, appear together on the triangular diagram (Fig. 1), in which the data on the Leicestershire candlesticks are shown along with data from other relevant objects. The remaining elements nickel, iron, antimony, arsenic and silver, present as impurities rather than deliberate additions, are thought to reflect the sources of the raw materials, in particular the copper, but the amount of data is too small for detailed discussion of this aspect.

DISCUSSION

It is clear from Figure 1 that all the alloy compositions lie towards the centre of the triangular plot, reflecting the relatively high tin and low zinc contents of the alloys used by English craftsmen. The term 'latten' is used to describe the alloys since they are neither brasses (copper-zinc alloys) nor bronzes (copper-tin alloys). There is historical evidence² for the application of the term latten to complex copper-zinc-tin-lead alloys in the medieval period. By contrast Flemish candlesticks of the 15th-16th centuries have been shown³ to have been made from leaded brasses which lie along the left hand side of the triangle, reflecting higher zinc and lead and lower tin contents than the present alloys. The compositional differences of the two groups are explained in terms of the relative availability of zinc (via calamine) and tin in England and Flanders respectively at the time of manufacture.

THE CANDLESTICKS

In the following catalogue and discussion the first number in each instance has been assigned as a laboratory reference number by one of the authors (R.B.); the second, in parentheses, is the relevant museum accession number.

C49 (112' 1927) Plate 1.

(Found under the Huntingdon Tower, High Street, Leicester. Huntingdon Tower formed part of Lord's Place, named after Henry, 3rd Earl of Huntingdon, who purchased it in 1569.⁴)

Billson⁵ records that its former name was Reynold's House, having been bought by Nicholas Reynold in 1540, but its date of construction appears to be unrecorded. The Tower was demolished in 1902, and this is likely to have been the occasion when the candlestick was discovered; if not, it provides a *terminus ante quem*. The date of discovery is not, however, recorded in the accession record, which attributes this item to the Fernie collection bequeathed to the museum in 1927. There is, however, no mention of the candlestick in the original Fernie documentation; it appears to be the only local item in a collection purchased from dealers outside Leicestershire and a recent study of the collection has suggested 'there is no evidence to suggest that Mrs Fernie had much interest in antiquity until 1912'.⁶ Its provenance must therefore remain in doubt and, even if correct, does not necessarily provide a dated context since it is not clear that 'under' necessarily indicates a date prior to the construction of the Tower, whenever that was.

This candlestick is typical of the 15th century form. It was cast in two parts and assembled by rivetting a projection of the lower end of the stem which passed through a hole in the shallow cylindrical base. An example in a better state of preservation, C153 (19.151) in the National Museum of Wales (Plate 2), is reputed to have come from Kenfig Castle, Glamorgan.

C81 (3352' 1887) Plate 3.

(Found in Highcross Street, Leicester, nine feet deep, when excavating cellarge for a warehouse in 1877.)

This and C82 (see below) have the same accession number and come from different candlesticks, but the original accession record refers to a 'bronze article', purchased with other material from the collection of the late J.E. Weatherhead, a former curator of the museum, in 1887. Possibly the original accession record is incorrect and there were two items, or they were thought of as two parts of the same article, but it seems more likely that one of these sockets forms part of the next group of accession numbers (3353-3375), also from the Weatherhead collection and found in 1877, but discovered in getting out cellarge for the Royal Arcade, at a depth of 9-10 feet, between High Street and Silver Street. This latter material was exhibited by Weatherhead on 30 September 1878 and 31 May 1879,⁷ but the two sockets are not mentioned. Whatever their exact provenance, it seems certain that they are stray finds from within the area of medieval Leicester. This is believed to be a socket broken from a candlestick of the same form as C49. The composition of the two alloys, are similar, lying, with others of this form indicated by circles, slightly off-centre of the triangle towards the lead-tin line.

C63 (239' 1951) Plate 4.

(Leicester Abbey)

The accession record gives no details of acquisition, but other material from the Abbey accessed at this time can be shown to have been found during the unpublished excavations of the 1920s. The Abbey was dissolved 1538-9, which may provide a *terminus ante quem* for the candlestick. However, an Elizabethan mansion was built incorporating the Abbey gatehouse,⁸ so a post-dissolution date is equally possible.

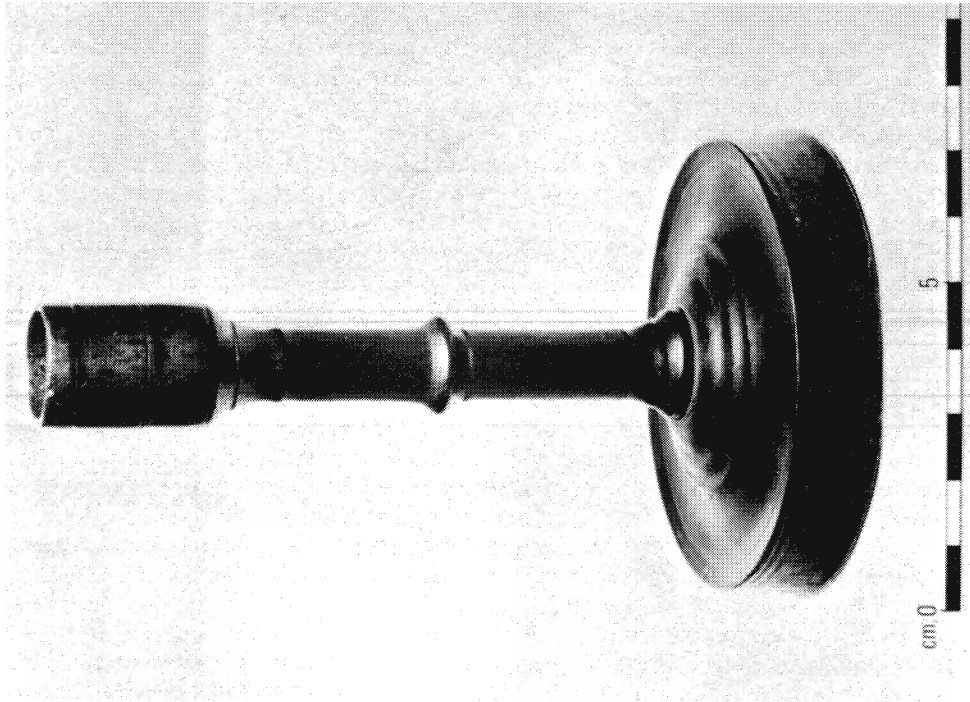


Plate 2 THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WALES
Kenfig Castle Candlestick

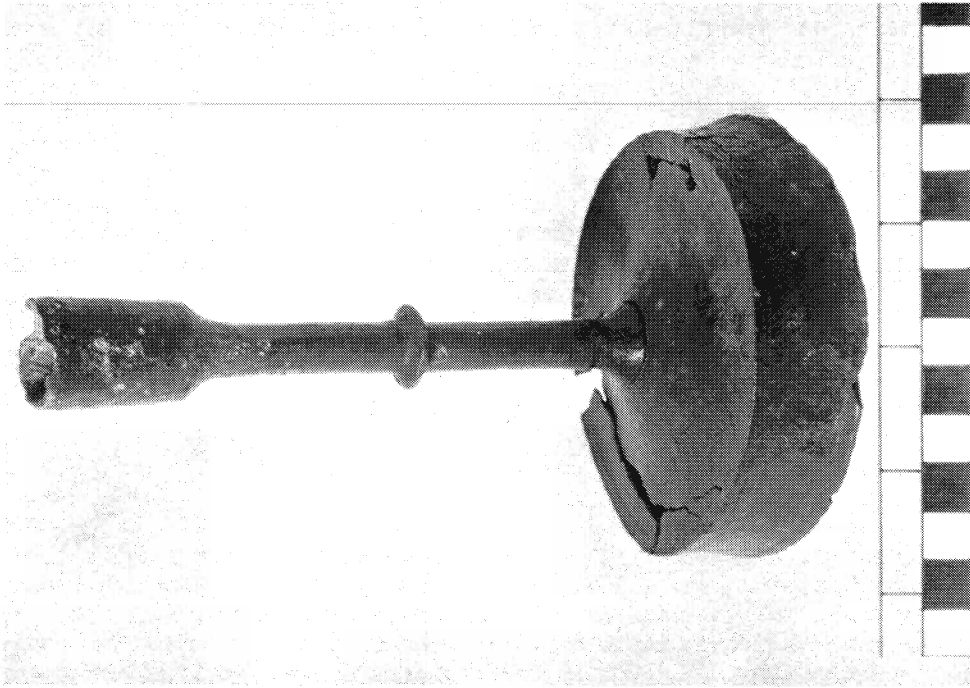


Plate 1 LEICESTERSHIRE MUSEUMS
Huntingdon Tower Candlestick

In this item, two sockets are supported on branches emanating from a central boss with a hole. This was clearly intended to be located on a shoulder formed on a slender stem attached to a base. Branched candlesticks are well-known from Flanders, illustrated by Verster,⁹ Curle¹⁰ and Dexel,¹¹ but a closer analogue is found in a candlestick C154 (08 71) in the National Museum of Wales which has a Cardiff provenance (Plate 5). This is complete and the stem is mounted on a discoid base similar to that of C49. Thus these double-socket branched candlesticks should be seen as being related to, and probably a derivative of, the basic single-socket candlestick (as C49).

C82 (3352' 1887) Plate 6.

For a discussion of its provenance see C81 (above).

This socket has not been broken, as has C81, but merely loosened and separated from a support. The turned shoulder and rivet correspond with details of the sockets of C63, and so C82 was probably once part of a branched candlestick of the same type as C63.

The alloy composition of the parts of C63 are very close to each other, indicating that the separately made parts have remained together since manufacture. Their compositions are similar to those of the parts of the branched candlestick C154 in the National Museum of Wales and to a single socket like C82 in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry, C5(54/104/1). The alloy used for C82 is an outlying member of this compositional group, indicated by squares in Figure 1, which is displaced towards the zinc-rich corner of the triangle relative to the group formed from candlesticks such as C49, indicated by circles. C83 (7' 1907) Plate 7.

(Found about 300 yards from Fosse Road, King Richard's Road, Leicester and presented to the museum in 1907. King Richard's Road leads out from the West Bridge, past the site of the Augustinian Friary, meeting Fosse Road some 700 yards away. The findspot is therefore well outside the walled area of medieval Leicester).

The elongated cylindrical socket attached to a copper spike makes this an unusual candleholder for which no parallel is known to the writers. The parts appear always to have been jointed, but the possibility of a modification cannot be entirely ruled out. The candleholder was clearly intended for use in places where the spike could be suitably lodged, such as in a crack in stone or wood.

The alloy used for the socket is similar to that of the branched candlestick C154 at the National Museum of Wales.

C50 (18 IL 1953) Plate 8.

(From Kirby Muxloe Castle in front of the gatehouse in the moat in 1913)

The castle was built in 1480-4 for William, Lord Hastings, but a 14th century manor house previously existed on the site.¹² In 1913 the moat was cleared and the remains of a wooden bridge discovered.¹³ Although it is stated that 'very little was found during the clearing, beyond a few stones from the parapets'¹⁴ a number of finds, including the candlestick, were made and transferred to the museum on loan in 1953. It seems likely that they represent rubbish thrown into the moat after the construction of the Castle, thus providing a *terminus post quem* of 1480-4 for this candlestick.

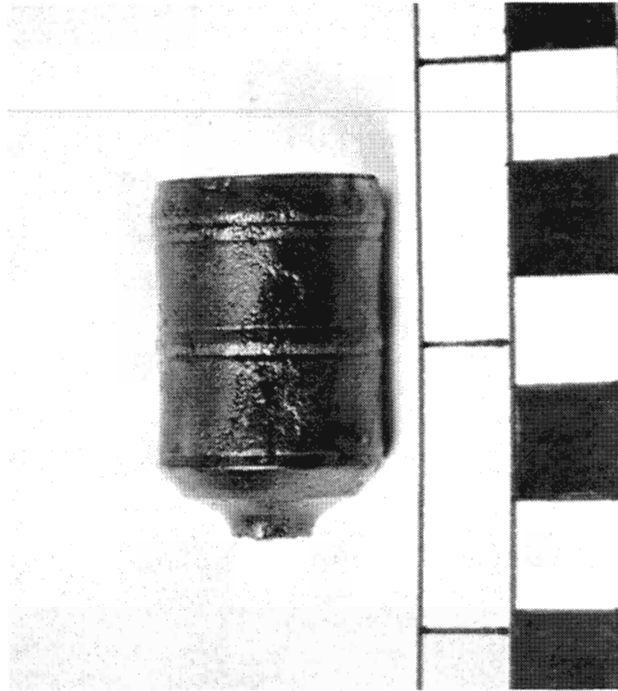
The compositions of the alloys of the supposed base and the ragged-edged disc attached to the stem are so similar as to make it clear that the candlestick can be reconstructed by locating the disc in the corresponding hole in the base. The short stem, differently shaped socket and base differentiate this candlestick from the more frequent type of which C49 is an example.

It is suggested that C50 is a representative of a group derived from the English 15th century type via certain intermediate forms. These feature a deeper base with spreading lower part, the appearance of a rim on the base developing into a fin-like drip tray and a



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Plate 4.
Leicester Abbey Candlestick



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Plate 3
Highcross Street Candlestick



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Plate 6
Medieval Leicester Candlestick

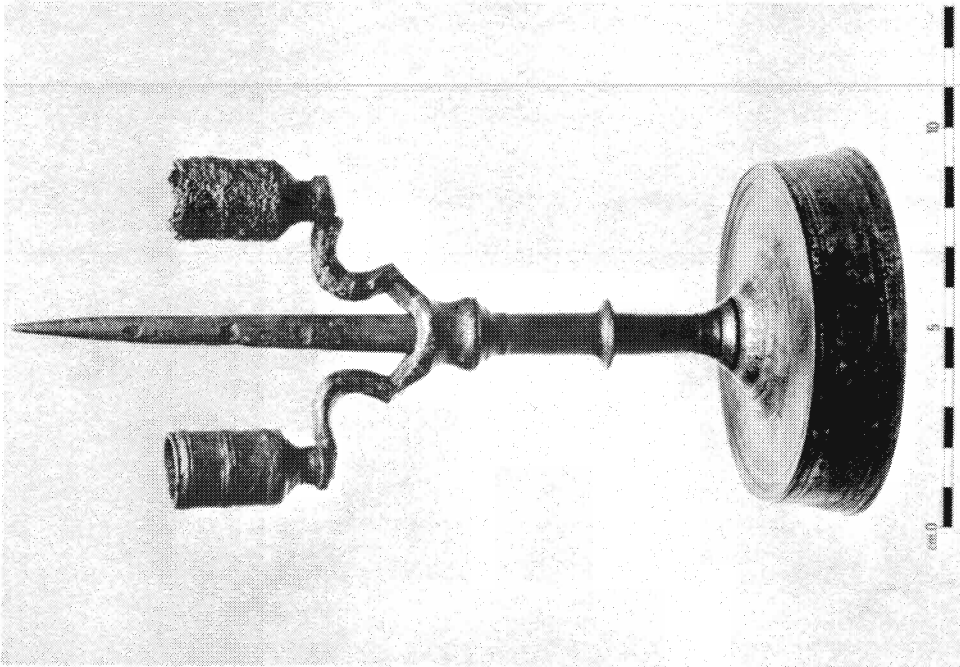


Plate 5
THE NATIONAL MUSEUM OF WALES
Cardiff candlestick



Plate 7
King Richard's Road Candlestick

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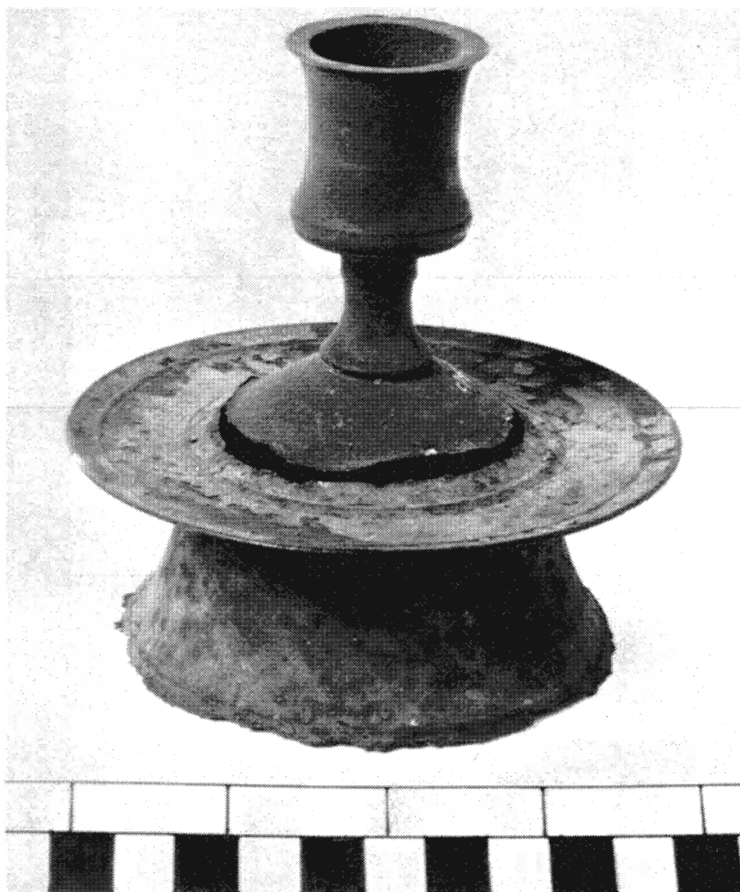


Plate 8
Kirby Muxloe Castle Candlestick

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rising dome or cone supporting the stem. This sequence may be illustrated by the transitional example in the Ashmolean Museum C178 (1921-269) illustrated by Haedeke¹⁵ which has an Oxford provenance, leading to ones like those in the Victoria and Albert Museum, C54 (M21-1964), illustrated by Michaelis¹⁶ and British Museum, C167 (54(8-18)1), also illustrated by Michaelis.¹⁷ All these have been sampled by analysis and shown to have compositions, indicated by triangles, in the same part of Figure 1 as C50.

The stem of the Ashmolean Museum candlestick is of the same type as C49 but those of the others are much more elaborate and made in three parts. C50 is believed to be a less elaborate contemporary of the Victoria and Albert Museum and British Museum candlesticks with a much shorter, simpler stem but similarly shaped socket. The socket and stem of C50 show a close resemblance to the top quarter of the British Museum candlestick C167, though without the latter's decorative engraving. The inscription on the base of this candlestick has led to its being ascribed to the 16th century, a period to which the others of this group probably also belong. This is consistent with the little archaeological evidence available on the Kirby Muxloe candlestick.

CONCLUSION

It therefore appears that a basic 15th century candlestick form is represented at Leicester by C49, that C81 is a socket from a similar candlestick, C63 and C82 are parts of branched socket candlesticks probably of a slightly later date, and that C83 is an unusual variant, being provided with a spike. C50, the result of a reconstruction, is seen as a simpler contemporary of more elaborate 16th century candlesticks. All are believed to be of English manufacture.

Analysis has facilitated the consideration of these objects since comparisons of alloy compositions have established or reinforced groupings and trends, all additional to stylistic judgement of the objects.

Notes

- 1 R. Brownword and E.E.H. Pitt, 'Alloy compositions of some cast "latten" objects of the 15th-16th centuries' *Historical Metallurgy*, 17 (1), 1983, pp.44-48
- 2 Quoted in H.K. Cameron, 'Technical aspects of mediaeval monumental brasses' *Archaeological Journal*, 131, (1974) p228
- 3 R. Brownword and E.E.H. Pitt, *op. cit.*
- 4 *Victoria History of the County of Leicester* (1958), vol.IV, p361
- 5 C.J. Billson, *Medieval Leicester* (1920), p209
- 6 S.E. Bird, *The Fernie Collection* (unpublished dissertation, University of Leicester 1978), p2
- 7 *Trans. Leics. Arch. and Hist. Soc.*, V (1882) pp.169 and 197
- 8 A. Hamilton Thompson, *The Abbey of St. Mary of the Meadows, Leicester* (1949), pp.88-90, 232
- 9 A.J.G. Verster, *Bronz in den tijd* (1976) Amsterdam, fig.28
- 10 A.O. Curle, 'Domestic candlesticks from the 14th to the end of the 18th century', *Proc. Antiquarian Soc. of Scotland* (1926) p187, fig.1-8
- 11 W. Dexel, *Das Hausgerät Mitteleuropas*, (1973) Braunschweig, fig.299
- 12 Charles Peers, *Kirby Muxloe Castle* (1957)
- 13 S.E. Rigold, 'Structural aspects of medieval timber bridges', *Medieval Archaeology*, XIX (1975), pp.48-91
- 14 Peers, *op. cit.*, p9
- 15 H.U. Haedeke, *Metalwork* (1970), fig.96
- 16 Ronald F. Michaelis, *Old Domestic Base-Metal Candlesticks* (1978), fig.34
- 17 Michaelis, *op. cit.*, fig.36.