

A MEDIEVAL POTTERY ROOF-FINIAL FOUND AT PORTSMOUTH

By G. C. DUNNING

THE pottery roof-finial illustrated in fig. 29 and on pls. III, IV was found in 1957 at a depth of 14 feet below the yard of the Dolphin Hotel, High Street, Portsmouth. The depth is greater than may be expected for medieval occupation levels, and suggests that the finial was in the filling of a deep pit or a well. Circumstances did not permit detailed recording to be made, but in any case the finial is evidence of a building of substance on the site or in the vicinity in the late 13th century. As the first medieval roof-finial to be recorded from Portsmouth, where finds of this period are notably scarce, and as one of the finest examples of its kind, the rescuing and preservation of this finial reflect great credit on Mr. Arthur Corney. The finial was presented by Messrs. Brickwoods Ltd. to the Southsea Castle Museum.

The finial and the ridge-tile to which it is attached near one end, are both made of light red sandy ware with fine flint grits. Both the finial and the tile are glazed overall with thin, lustrous light green glaze.

The *tile* has a complete cross-section below the finial, but is present for only about half its length. It measures $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches high and is $9\frac{1}{2}$ inches wide at the base. The cresting is present on one side only of the finial, and is sharply knife-cut to form pointed peaks. The technique of the cresting provides the most reliable evidence for dating the finial, because until the late 13th century the crests on ridge-tiles were moulded by hand and then superseded by knife-cut crests.¹ On the other hand, the comparative material mentioned below and the character of the glaze on the Portsmouth finial do not justify a date for it later than about the end of the 13th century. The inside surface of the tile has parting marks made by a knife round the junction with the base of the finial, and also below the cresting, to reduce the thickness of the clay.

The *finial* is hollow throughout, and consists of a cylindrical stem or shaft surmounted by two globular parts, graduated in size. It is 16 inches in total height above the top of the ridge-tile. On each side of the stem an applied finger-pressed strip runs vertically downwards and on to the side of the tile, thus forming a decorative link between the finial and the tile.

The lower globular part of the finial is about $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter, and it has a prominent squared-off flange round the bulge. The upper globular part is 4 inches in diameter, and terminates in a flat knob moulded round the edge. Both parts are decorated with applied horns, three on each, arranged vertically above one another. The horns are curved upwards to end in a blunt point, and have a deep groove along the outer curve. In addition, the lower globular part above the flange has lightly incised girth-grooves in three bands. These grooves run in a continuous spiral round the finial; they are interrupted by the horns, and so were made before the horns were applied to the surface.

¹ E. M. Jope, 'The Development of Pottery Ridge-tiles in the Oxford Region', *Oxoniensia*, XVI (1951), 86-8.

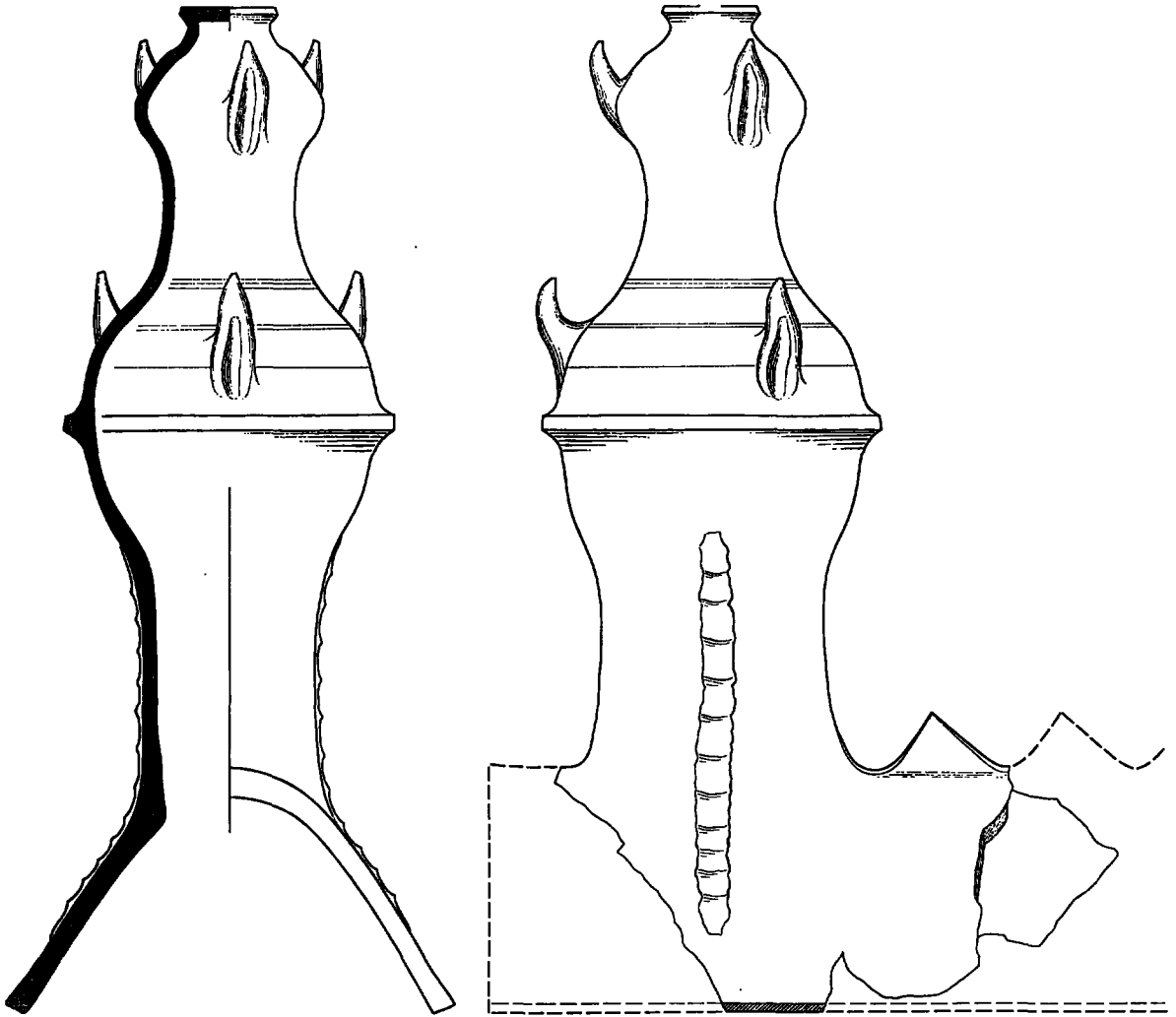


Fig. 29. Attached roof-finial, High Street, Portsmouth (scale $\frac{1}{4}$).

DISCUSSION

The Portsmouth finial belongs to a type of roof ornament well known in central southern England, the West Country, and to a lesser extent in the western Midlands and in south-east Wales, as shown on the distribution map, fig. 30. The two main features which define the type are: first, the stem or shaft of the finial was attached to the ridge-tile near one end, so that finial and tile form a structure in one piece, and secondly, the upper part of the finial is shaped as one or occasionally as two globular expansions above the stem. The first feature enables this group to be called attached finials. This serves to distinguish it from finials of similar shape but made separately from the ridge-

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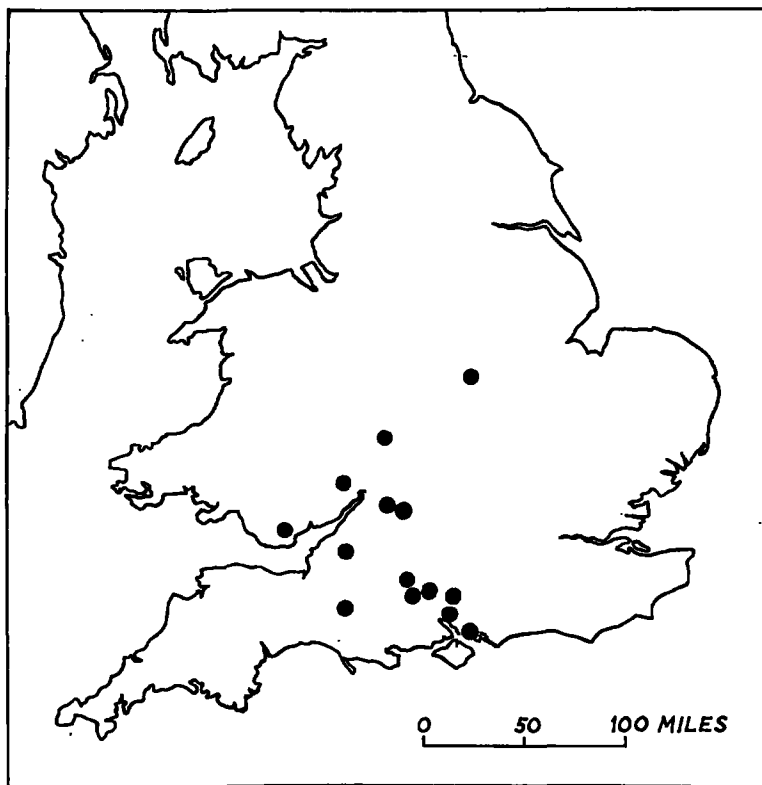


Fig. 30. Distribution map of attached globular roof-finials.

tile, a type occurring in south-east England and in East Anglia,² and from other separate finials in the Midlands which may be decorated with human faces, like the example from Nottingham,³ that are not present on the attached finials.

The finials are either plain and owe their distinctness solely to their form and proportions, or have simple decoration in the techniques, incised or applied, usual on medieval pottery. The most striking motifs are the applied curved horns arranged in sets of three on the globular part of the finial. On the Portsmouth finial the horns are duplicated on the two globular stages, and these subsidiary elements help to give the finial its slender and graceful dimension. A short account may now be given of the occurrence of this motif elsewhere.

In the Salisbury Museum are three attached finials.⁴ The first, found at Old Sarum, is missing above where the stem widens into the globular part; the stem is attached at one end of the ridge-tile with three tall knife-cut crests, which date the type to the late 13th century. The other finials were found in Salisbury, one in New Canal and the other on the site of nos. 34-36 High Street. The finial from New Canal has curved horns pointing downwards, and arranged in two zones round the upper and lower

² *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.*, LX (1967), 83, fig. 2.

³ B. Rackham, *Medieval English Pottery* (1948), pl. 14.

⁴ *Salisbury Museum 1860-1960*, 24, fig. 56.

sides of the globular part (fig. 31, no. 1); at the top is a short tapering neck which probably terminated in a knob similar in shape to the globular part. The finial found in High Street is fragmentary but similar in size and shape to the other two; at the base of the globular part were three large horns, also pointing down as on the finial from New Canal.

The finial from Old Sarum and the two found in Salisbury are so similar in design, the buff sandy ware and the mottled green glaze on the finials and ridge-tiles, that all of them were most probably made at the same pottery centre. In discussing the ridge-tiles from the late 13th-century kilns at Laverstock,⁵ only a mile south-east of Salisbury, which have tall knife-cut crests as on the example from Old Sarum, Mr. J. W. G. Musty has made the interesting observation that one of the reasons for their production was the transference of the see from Old Sarum to New Sarum, and the consequent development of Salisbury, thereby creating a demand for building materials in the new city.

A variant of the three horns and a different position for them occur on a finial found in excavations on the site of the Woolhouse, Bugle Street, Southampton (fig. 31, no. 2). It is made of grey sandy ware, with thick green glaze overall outside. Here the horns are attached radially to the dome-shaped apex of the globular part; the ends of the horns are bent over and pressed on to the moulded edge of the dome, thus forming loops. The row of large cones applied round the bulge are paralleled on a separate finial from Burntwick Island, in the estuary of the Medway, Kent, which has two concentric rows of cones on the domed top. Similar cones are sometimes placed in zones on medieval jugs in London.⁶

Another version of the horn motif on the summit of a finial is seen in fig. 31, no. 3, found in Castle Street, Cirencester. The grey ware contains small white grits, and the outside is partly covered by thin light green glaze. This finial is rather squat, almost biconical in shape, and is only about 8½ inches high above the ridge-tile. The bulge is frilled downwards by large thumb-marks, precisely as the thumb-bases of 13th-century jugs in the West Country.⁷ The upper part is decorated with stab-marks in radiating lines which pass down between the thumb-marks. The top terminates in a pair of horns, now broken off at the ends, aligned laterally, that is, at right-angles to the axis of the ridge-tile. Part of the cresting on the tile abuts against the base of the finial on one side only; it is moulded by hand into low peaks, with a deep finger-tip mark on both sides. This is the earlier form of cresting, and dates the Cirencester finial about the middle of the 13th century.

The horns on the attached finials in southern England also occur on two other types of roof fittings, the separate finials in the eastern counties, and once on the summit of a louver found at Ely.⁸ The most remarkable example of a separate finial with horns was found on the site of Mercers' Hall, Cheapside, London, and is in the Pitt-Rivers Museum at Farnham (fig. 31, no. 4). Originally it may have ornamented the roof of the hospital-church of St. Thomas of Acon, founded early in the 13th

⁵ *Archaeologia*, CII (1969), 139.

⁶ London Museum *Medieval Catalogue* (1940), 224, pl. LXIII, no. 3.

⁷ *Trans. Bristol and Gloucestershire Arch. Soc.*, LXVIII (1949), 32, fig. 4, 19-20, and LXXI (1952), 70, fig. 10, 59.

⁸ *Proc. Cambridge Antiq. Soc.*, LX (1967), 81, fig. 1.

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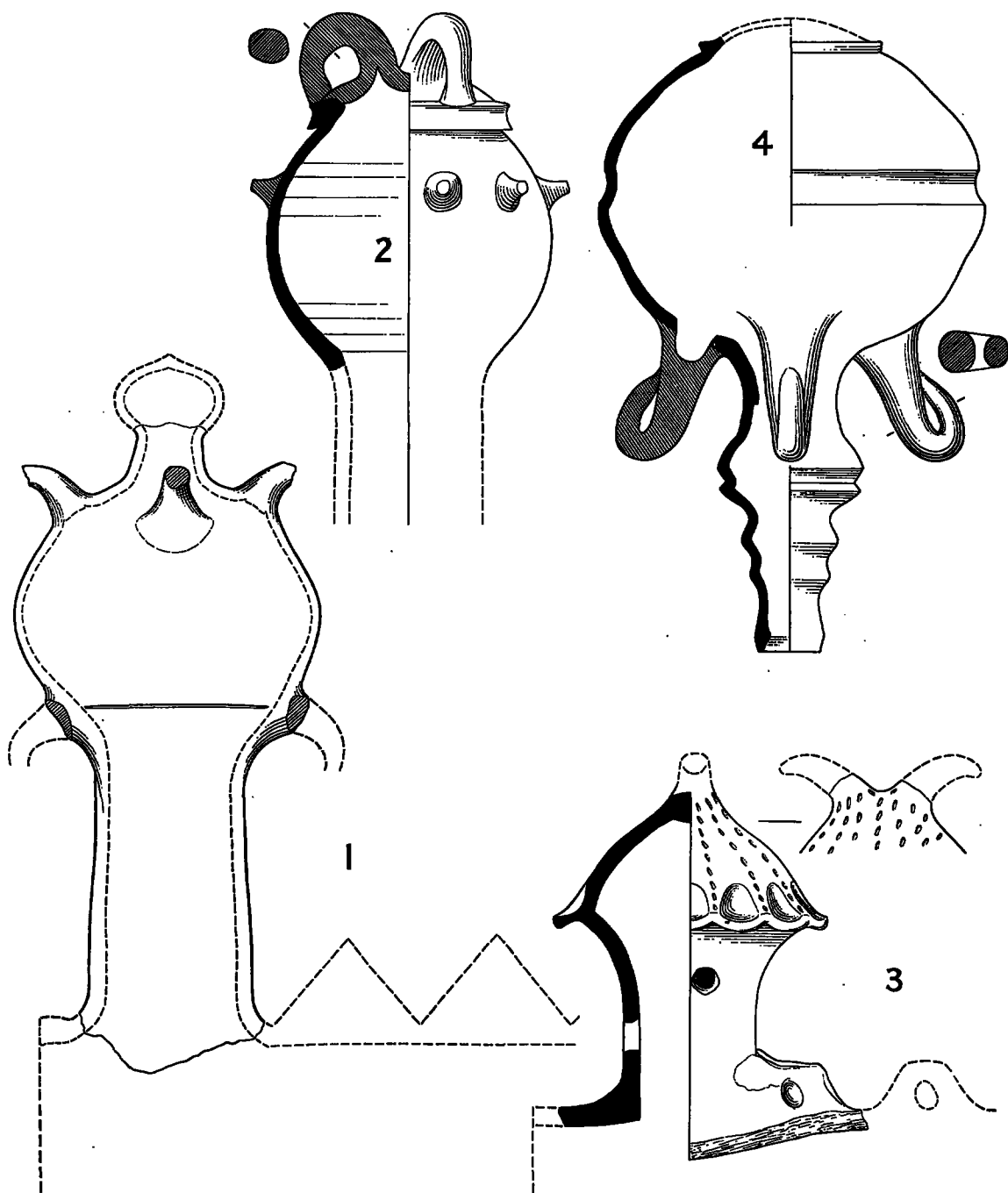


Fig. 31. Finials decorated with horns: 1-3, attached finials and 4, separate finial.
 1, New Canal, Salisbury; 2, Woolhouse, Bugle Street, Southampton;
 3, Castle Street, Cirencester; 4, Mercers' Hall, Cheapside, London (scale $\frac{1}{4}$).

century and replaced by Mercers' Hall in the mid-16th century.⁹ The finial is made of buff ware, light red on the inside surface, with dark green mottled glaze over most of the outside. The body is globular, $9\frac{1}{4}$ inches in diameter, with a broad groove or constriction round the bulge. Below it ends in a narrow open socket on which is a series of mouldings, both angular and rounded in profile, decreasing in size from above downwards. The finial is decorated with three large horns, $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches long, spaced equally round the lower side of the globular part. The horns point outwards, and the ends are bent round to form closed loops. This finial, with its contrasting changes in profile and variously shaped components, is surely one of the most fantastic objects made by a medieval potter.

The small flat knob which forms the top of the Portsmouth finial also occurs as the terminal of other finials in Hampshire. The only complete example is a large plain pear-shaped finial, $10\frac{1}{2}$ inches high above the ridge-tile, found in a timber-lined pit on the site of Messrs. Woolworth's extension, at the corner of St. George's Street and Upper Brook Street, Winchester (fig. 32). At a higher level in the pit were two slender baluster-jugs with thumb-pressed bases, a type datable to the second half of the 13th

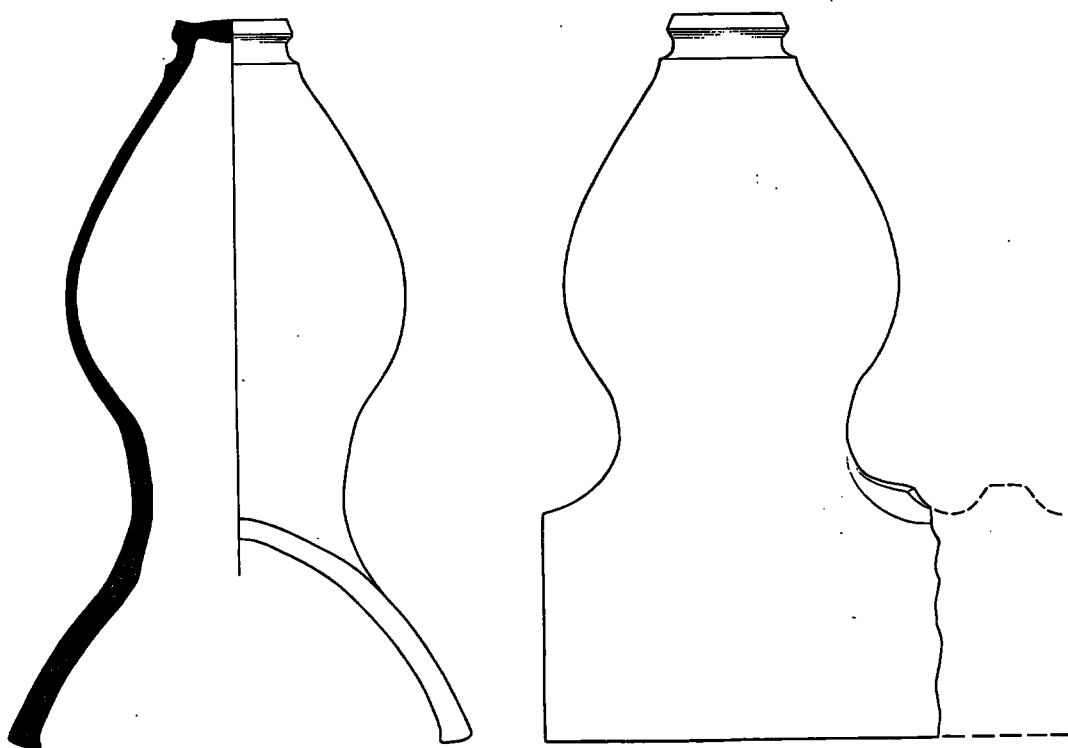


Fig. 32. Plain attached roof-finial, St. George's Street, Winchester (scale $\frac{1}{4}$).

⁹ R.C.H.M., *London, IV, The City*, 68. J. Watney, *The Hospital of St. Thomas of Acon in the Cheap, London* (1892).

century at Winchester.¹⁰ The finial is made of grey sandy ware, with bright green glaze overall and on the sides of the ridge-tile. It is attached close to one end of the tile, which has cresting moulded by hand into low peaks. On typological and stratigraphical grounds this finial is therefore dated about the middle of the 13th century.

Roof-finials of pottery are by no means an insular phenomenon, and brief mention may be made of their incidence on the Continent. Finials of most of the types in England; separate, attached, knobs of various sizes, the figures of knights on horseback, and others zoomorphic in character, are known in a broad zone from Lower Normandy to north-east France, in Belgium, and in the adjoining province of Zeeland in south-west Holland.¹¹ The finials in England are thus related to a practice widespread on the adjacent regions of the Continent. Within this broad framework a number of local styles can be distinguished, both as regards the shape of the finials and details of their decoration. The horns on the separate and attached finials in England are known only in the southern counties and in East Anglia, and abroad this motif connects the insular types with those in Pas de Calais, East Flanders and Zeeland, where small conical finials decorated with three horns, sometimes rolled into spirals, form a sub-group within the more extensive zone.

Acknowledgements

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¹⁰ Barry Cunliffe, *Winchester Excavations 1949-1960*, I (1964), 103, fig. 32, nos. 1-2 and 4-5.

¹¹ G. C. Dunning, 'Medieval Pottery Roof Venti-

lators and Finials found at Aardenburg, and post-medieval Finials at Deventer,' *Berichten van de Rijksdienst voor het Oudheidkundig Bodemonderzoek*, 18 (1968).