

# Mystery objects



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## Linen smoother

**Linen smoother** — this glass linen smoother is based on a C12th–C14th example found in Exeter. Wear patterns on examples found during archaeological digs show that both sides of the smoothers were used. They were probably used cold, with the material to be smoothed and polished being damp. They were probably mostly used on collars and cuffs.

Other names for linen smoothers include 'slick stone', 'slickers', 'sleekstones', 'slickenstones' and 'calendar'.



### How do we know about linen smoothers?

Many examples have been found during archaeological excavations, and significant numbers of C12th–C14th smoothers were found in an industrial area of Winchester; all of which showed more significant wear than smoothing linen could create, which suggests that these were also used as part of another medieval industry requiring a smoothing action.



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## Brass engraved padlock

**Brass engraved padlock** — this small two part padlock would have been used by a high status person to keep a small box or chest locked. It is likely that this type of brass padlock would have been used by a rich person as brass was not a cheap metal, and the addition of engraving would have added to the cost of the object. Poorer people would have been much more likely to have used iron padlocks, which would have been much less expensive to buy.



### How do we know about padlocks?

Many examples have been found during archaeological excavations.



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## Horn blunts

**Horn blunts** — horn arrow blunts. These were fitted to arrows when an archer was hunting small game animals and birds. If an ordinary arrow hit a bird it would be too damaged to be cooked. But if it was hit by a blunt arrow it would be stunned, fall to the ground, and if it was not already dead the archer could kill it himself, carefully.



### How do we know about arrow blunts?

Illustrations in medieval manuscripts, including the Luttrell Psalter.

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## Brass mounted fire steel

**Brass mounted fire steel** — firesteels were originally used with flint stones, but any hard, non-porous rock that has a sharp edge, or even petrified wood, can be used to create sparks. The spark comes from chipping small pieces of steel off the striker; finely divided metals ignite immediately in air, with steel burning at yellow-white heat.

To light a fire you need some prepared tinder for the spark to ignite. This can be almost any natural vegetable fibre, such as linen, hemp, or dried grasses, weeds or leaves. A mixture of two different materials usually kindles more easily than one. It is best shredded fine and well mixed, and you need a good handful. Once your spark has started to burn the tinder, blowing gently will cause the ember to turn into a flame. Medieval people carried tinder with them when they travelled.



### How do we know about firesteels?

Descriptions and illustrations in medieval manuscripts, and objects found during archaeological digs.

This particular firesteel is an interpretation based on an early medieval example with decorative elements copied from C13th and C14th examples.

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## Shepherd's stick sundial (pillar dial, cylindric dial)

### Shepherd's stick sundial (pillar dial, cylindric dial)

— this is one of the earliest forms of portable sundials, and date back to at least Roman times. Medieval versions were originally made of wood, ivory or bone. The letters around the base represent the months of the year. The metal cap at the top rotates, and to tell the time set the stick up you rotate this until the 'finger' is directly above the month of the year, then lift the finger until it is horizontal. Suspend the dial and turn it until the finger faces the sun, and the shadow falls vertically. Plot the length of the shadow between the hour lines and trace it back to where the hours are marked. As this dial works by plotting the rise and fall of the sun, each hour line represents with the morning or the afternoon. The morning hours are to the left.



### How do we know about shepherds stick sundials?

Descriptions and illustrations in medieval manuscripts, and objects found during archaeological digs.

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## Candle holder

**Candle holder** — candles were used for lighting in medieval times, but also as part of religious worship, particularly in the Roman Catholic church. This candle holder has a latin inscription which translates as "God bless those present and those that made me". It is made from pewter, so would have been used by richer people rather than poor people who would have mainly used iron candle holders.



### How do we know about candle holders?

Descriptions and illustrations in medieval manuscripts, and objects found during archaeological digs.