

TO THEIR DESTINED MARKET: SALT-GLAZED STONEWARE AT COLONIAL WILLIAMSBURG

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Collecting to accurately furnish a period room can be challenging, but achieving that goal for more than two hundred such spaces is a truly daunting task. Since 1926, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in Williamsburg, Virginia, has been striving to recreate the colonial capitol of Britain's largest and most prosperous American settlement. Today, Colonial Williamsburg is the largest living history museum in the United States, comprised of 173 acres featuring 88 restored original structures. An additional 500 buildings, including houses, shops, and public edifices, have also been reconstructed on the basis of extensive archaeological, architectural, and documentary evidence. To furnish these spaces and for exhibition in the Museums of Colonial Williamsburg, a fine and decorative arts collection comprised of more than 60,000 works has been acquired by curators over the last eighty years.

Documents such as period newspaper advertisements, merchants' accounts, personal letters, wills, estate inventories, and probate records have proven to be invaluable resources in the pursuit of historical authenticity. The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation also draws upon archaeology to inform our understanding of the past. Thanks to the longest-standing historical archaeology program in America, Colonial Williamsburg is home to 500,000 whole or reconstructed artifacts and 50 million fragments excavated from Williamsburg and the surrounding region.

Salt-glazed stoneware can be documented in America from the time of first English settlement onward. Inspired by the shards excavated from numerous early sites, Colonial Williamsburg's staff has assembled a comprehensive collection of German, English, and American wares that includes examples related to archaeological evidence as well as objects of significance, beauty, and rarity in their own right. This essay provides a brief overview of just a few of the stoneware objects in the Colonial Williamsburg collections, many of which will be featured in the book entitled *Salt-*

glazed Stoneware in Early America, to be published in May 2009. The publication and an accompanying exhibition, generously funded by the Richard C. von Hess Foundation, present the first inquiry into the broad range of imported and domestically made stoneware used in America from 1607 to 1800.

The earliest stoneware brought to America originated in the ceramic-making centers of the Rhineland. Robustly-potted brown wares from Frechen dominate the earliest period of settlement, with bottles ornamented with bearded masks being by far the most prevalent form. Pieces of these so-called *Bartmann*, Bellarmine, or Graybeard bottles have been recovered from innumerable 17th century sites. Important early examples include a dated 1593 fragment with the initials "RRK" and a double headed eagle that was dredged from the Chesapeake Bay off the coast of Kent Island, Maryland.¹ Shards from a smaller bottle bearing the date 1599 were excavated from Fort St. George, also known as Popham Colony. The latter settlement, established as part of the Virginia Company, was located at the mouth of what is now known as the Kennebec River in Maine; it was occupied only from the summer of 1607 to autumn, 1608.²

An intact example of a large and ornate vessel is now in the Colonial Williamsburg collections (*figure 1*). This massive *Bartmann* bottle stands 13¾ inches (34.9 cm) high. Its quartered coat of arms, dated 1607, is flanked by two medallions depicting the heads of Roman emperors encircled by inscriptions. Like the aforementioned 1593 shard, the applied relief decoration on this vessel is carefully embellished with splashes of cobalt. An even more elaborate variation of this bottle is in the collections of the British Museum.³ *Bartmann* bottles were made in many sizes, with capacities ranging from one pint to a gallon or

Figure 1. *Bartmann* bottle, Frechen, dated 1607. Height: 13¾ inches (34.9 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1954–866.





Figure 2. Mug with seal of Jan op de Kamp, Frechen, circa 1660. Height: 4 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches (10.1 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 2002–2.

more; they were used for the storage, service, and, no doubt among the smaller range, drinking of beverages. Exceptionally large and richly ornamented vessels may also have served as symbols of wealth and status in 17th century America, as they are most frequently found archaeologically in association with high-status households and individuals.

Bottles dominate the brown German stonewares used in America, but other forms were also present. For example,

slender, long-necked drinking jugs are among the remains excavated from several 17th century sites in Virginia. Less commonly, squat, wide-mouthed globular mugs have been recovered from early settlements. One example of just such a vessel was of particular interest to Colonial Williamsburg because of its distinctive seal (figure 2). It is embellished with an applied badge bearing the initials “IODK” for Jan op de Kamp, a Dutch merchant heavily involved with a cabal of dealers who controlled the trade of German stoneware, wine, and other commodities between the Netherlands and England in the mid 1660s. A 1664 dated variant of op de Kamp’s seal was excavated from the 17th century



Figure 3. Monteith, Critch, Derbyshire, dated 1704. Diameter: 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (27.9 cm). Coffee pot, probably Fulham, circa 1710. Height: 7 $\frac{7}{16}$ inches (17.7 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1959–27 and 1998–167.

Chesapeake site in what is now Virginia Beach, Virginia, documenting the presence of such wares in early America.⁴

By the last quarter of the 17th century, the importation of German brown stoneware into England and her American colonies was declining. Many factors contributed to this shift, including the rise of England’s dominance of the trans-Atlantic trade and the development of her own stoneware industry. John Dwight of Fulham is widely recognized today as the first such manufacturer to successfully produce stoneware in large quantities over a sustained period of time beginning circa 1675. The publication in 1999 of the extensive range of wares excavated from his

pottery site has made it increasingly possible to identify extant items to Dwight’s factory.⁵ Even more recent archaeological explorations have documented the presence of a range of products from the Fulham site in late 17th and early 18th century America, including an iron-dipped, white stoneware coffee pot. The Fulham, for instance, are among the richest assemblages of ceramics excavated from the Rumney/West London Town, Maryland.⁶ In shape and detail, the Rumney/West tavern coffee pot greatly resembles the rare lighthouse-shaped example now in the collection of Colonial Williamsburg (figure 3, right). Dating to the late 17th century, the Williamsburg coffee pot features a gracefully enhanced upper half with a rich ferruginous glaze. Only a handful of early ceramic coffee pots in this distinctive form are known today, although metal ex-



Figure 4. Bottle, London, dated 1755. Height: 8 $\frac{3}{4}$ inches (20.3 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1976–128. Gift in memory of Joseph Porter Moore by his wife, Adelia Peebles Moore.

tapered conical design persisted for a far longer time and so are more common survivals.⁷

A lustrous brown punch bowl (figure 3, left) is another great rarity, being the only known English stoneware monteith. Incised with the name “Gulielmus Flint De Crich” and the date 1704 between floral sprays, it is a substantial 11 $\frac{3}{8}$ inches (27.9 cm) in diameter. The bowl takes a form most frequently found in silver of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Like its metal counterparts, the monteith could be used for serving the newly fashionable mixed beverage called punch. Alternatively, it might be filled with cool water to rinse the bowls of wine glasses hanging suspended by their feet in the notches of the rim. In addition to being a scarce form, this bowl is among the earliest of the dated stoneware produced by the potters of Crich, Derbyshire.⁸

Merchants’ advertisements as well as archaeological finds

underscore the popularity in early America of a wide range of brown stonewares from such production centers as London, Nottingham, and Derbyshire. While stoneware monteith punch bowls are certainly not documented in the colonies, scores of more typical forms are present, including both bellied and straight-sided mugs, jugs, loving cups, colanders, and teawares.

Among the most ubiquitous vessels present in colonial America were the innumerable storage jars and bottles that filled the kitchens and cellars of both public and private houses. But even these prosaic forms occasionally raise tantalizing questions about the past. Such is the case with a stoneware ale bottle bearing the applied names of “G:Burwell” and “Edwd:Atthaws” along with the date 1755 (figure 4). Fragments of additional bottles thusly marked have been excavated from Carter’s Grove, a large plantation located on the northern bank of the James River in Virginia. Carter Burwell, grandson of Robert “King” Carter, one of the wealthiest men in the colonies, completed construction in 1755 of his mansion house at Carter’s Grove. It is widely agreed that the “G” on Colonial Williamsburg’s bottle was erroneously used in lieu of a “C” for Burwell’s given name. The spelling of Edward Athawes’ name was also corrupted; he was a merchant/factor for many prominent Virginia planters and the bottles may have been a gift to one of his clients.⁹ Finally, Athawes witnessed the will of potter William Sanders of Mortlake, now part of Greater London, suggesting that the Sanders pottery might have been the source of the Burwell bottles.¹⁰

Gray and blue German stoneware from the potteries of Höhr, Grenzhausen, and Grenzau in the Westerwald was present in America in great abundance. Archaeological investigations from Maine to Virginia confirm that even during the first decades of the 17th century, such wares were among the treasured possessions of the wealthy elite. Documented forms include baluster-shaped jugs with religious or political narrative patterns, lion-mask jugs, and ball-belly pitchers with various armorial designs.¹¹ With the rise in the last quarter of the century of England’s dominance over trans-Atlantic trade with her colonies, the nature of the Westerwald stoneware coming to America changed dramatically. German wares made specifically for England rapidly became the prevailing forms. Mugs, jugs, and tankards embellished with the images or monograms of English monarchs proliferated. While such items are generally thought of as tavern wares in Britain,¹² they are among the most



Figure 5. Tankard, mug, and jug, Westerwald, late 17th to early 18th century. Height of jug: 10 inches (25.4 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1977–89, 1952–189, and 1963–57.

common finds on American 18th century sites of both a public and domestic nature.

Because of the tremendous popularity of Westerwald stoneware in America, Colonial Williamsburg has assembled the largest collection in the nation (and among the largest outside of Germany) of such vessels made for the English/British market (figure 5). Tankards, mugs, and jugs dominate while chamber pots, although common in the 18th century, are now rare survivals and so are present in markedly lesser quantities. The earliest wares made in Germany specifically for export to England and her colonies date to the reigns of William and Mary; they are distinctive

in their frequent use of portraiture rather than heraldry. A penchant also reflected on decorative designs of the period. The reign of Queen Anne, although brief, was less marked by the presence of both archaeological and historical evidence. The succession of three consecutive monarchs from George to the British throne, it comes as no surprise that the quantity of vessels emblazoned with royal monograms “GR” found in the excavations of American sites is vast. Surprisingly, there is little repetition of decorative designs found on these wares and even more ubiquitous checkerboard motifs and floral patterns there is considerable variation. Still, the monogram “GR” is notoriously difficult to identify, more so given that such vessels, often called Dutch wares, were advertised for sale in Am-



Figure 6. Tea canister, cream pot, cup and saucer, and teapot, Staffordshire, mid 18th century. Height of cream pot: 4 inches (10.1 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1951–475, 1973–332, 1973–308, and 1953–288.

pers as late as 1796.¹³

Far more than any other class of stoneware, the refined white wares from England revolutionized American social customs by bringing the accoutrements needed for tea drinking and formal dining within the means of a broader segment of the population. Far less costly than porcelain and more durable than delft, white salt-glazed stoneware was both a fashionable and practical choice throughout much of the 18th century. The archaeological explorations at the Rumney/West Tavern in London Town, Maryland, yielded not only the aforementioned fragments of a coffee pot, but also white mugs and a teacup and saucer from circa 1710–1720, all attributable to the pottery established by Dwight at Fulham.¹⁴ Similarly, a previously unpublished iron-dipped white stoneware teapot, most likely made by John Dwight about 1700, was excavated at the Geddy House site in Williamsburg, Virginia. While the latter vessel is currently the earliest stoneware teapot known in America, it was not long the sole example of the form. An almost-intact pot, made in London or Staffordshire during the first quarter of

the 18th century, was recovered from the property owned by John Page, a wealthy planter and councilor in Williamsburg.¹⁵

An assembled group of simple teawares now in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg are noteworthy precisely because of their lack of adornment (figure 6). By most collectors' standards, such unremarkable wares would not be very desirable, but it is precisely because of their plainness that Colonial Williamsburg curators treasure these pieces. Although slip-cast and molded white salt-glazed wares were present in large quantities in early America, ordinary thrown white Staffordshire stoneware of this type was also common, as evidenced by the number of such vessel fragments found at archaeological sites along the length of the eastern seaboard. Relatively inexpensive and readily available by the mid century, tea equipage of this undecorated sort no doubt received frequent use and, when broken, was more readily disposed of than its elaborately ornamented counterparts. In short, such simple wares lack what has been called "keep me" value.

Although unassuming in appearance to the untutored eye, the teawares in Figure 6 present quite a challenge from a modern-day collecting perspective. Plain white salt-glazed cream pots can still be found in the marketplace, but the



Figure 7. Transfer-printed plate, Staffordshire (plate) and Battersea or Liverpool (printing), circa 1755. Diameter: 9 1/16 inches (22.8 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1960–415.

undecorated teapot is less readily available. The teacup and saucer are especially unusual because of the cup's handle. Tea bowls without handles were popular from the 1730s onward, but teacups with handles did not come into regular use until several decades later. The simple cylindrical shape of the tea canister is also rather undistinguished, but its inscription "Green Tea/1759" makes it much more desirable from an acquisitions standpoint.

Press-molded plates graced the tables of Americans of both the middling and better sort from the 1740s until the end of the 18th century. The all-too-rare period descriptions and more abundant archaeological evidence confirm the availability of a wide array of patterns, ranging from plain, unadorned rims to gadroon, reel, and feathered edges.

More complex borders of various floral, geometric, and scroll motifs were also popular; even political sentiments. The support of Britain's alliance with Prussia had to be considered in the colonies. Barley or seed patterns and variants of the diaper designs were especially favored. In 1783, George Washington received from his English agent a set of tableware of white salt-glaze; comprised of more than 100 pieces, it included both teawares and, in the basket-tote pattern, dinner and soup plates as well as dishes, butter tubs, mustard pots, and patty pans. Acquisitions for white stoneware continued to be placed by George Washington for tablewares and food storage, including washbasins, bottles, and chamber pots.¹⁶

While white salt-glazed stoneware clearly represented a wide range of goods for sale in America, numerous newspaper advertisements from the third quarter of the 18th century also corroborate the availability of "flowered" or "decorated" options. Frustratingly for the museum curators,



Figure 8. Scratch blue mug with American eagle badge, Burslem, Staffordshire, circa 1790. Height: 5 7/8 inches (12.7 cm). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation 1964–7.

trail of historical accuracy, more detailed descriptions indicating specific motifs or even colors other than blue are virtually unknown. Thus, we turn again to the evidence offered by archaeology. Shards recovered from sites ranging from New England to the southern colonies confirm that polychrome decoration was most prevalent on teawares and that the most popular design was a loosely executed variant of the King's Rose pattern. Sadly, the charming landscape and garden scenes and the images of ladies at tea or gentlemen fishing so prized by collectors and curators alike remain undocumented. But we cannot entirely discount the possibility of such wares, for perhaps the most exciting aspect of historical archaeological investigation is its ability to occasionally pull a rabbit out of the hat and confirm the presence of something entirely unexpected.

For instance, fragments of a stoneware plate transfer-printed in red with a scene from Aesop's fable of "The Dog in the Manger" have been unearthed in Williamsburg. Transfer-printing on salt-glazed stoneware was popular for only a brief period of time; such wares are usually dated to the decade between 1755 and 1765. Because of the brevity of their production and resulting rarity, examples are highly sought after. The shards found in Williamsburg were recov-

ered from the Ravenscroft site which, perhaps coincidentally, was occupied in succession by two printers, William Hunter (who died in 1761) and Joseph Royle (who died in 1766).¹⁷ Both of these men were prosperous at the time of their deaths and their probate inventories list such expensive and high status items as silver and Chinese porcelain in addition to more generic references to white salt-glaze ceramics. There is no hint in the written documentation of such a novelty as transfer-printed stoneware, but its presence on their house lot is undeniable. Thus archaeology holds the enticing promise of treasures yet undiscovered, awaiting only future excavation.

Because of this evidence for transfer-printed stoneware in early America, Colonial Williamsburg's curators have assiduously collected these wares for the last half-century. The Foundation's current holdings are comprised of more than a dozen examples and include a broad range of depictions from Aesop's Fables to pastoral scenes, the Royal Arms, and an armorial design printed backwards from a bookplate. Among the rarities in Colonial Williamsburg's collection is a plate printed in not one, but three, colors (figure 7). The central scene in puce depicts "The Dog, the Sheep, the Kite, and the Wolf" from Aesop's fables; it is encircled by floral sprays printed in gray and red. An example with the same central design and slightly different flower sprigs, also in three colors, was formerly in the Cook collection.¹⁸

A variant of white salt-glazed stoneware rather pejoratively dubbed "debased scratch blue" by Ivor Noël Hume and his late wife Audrey was produced in England from about 1765 to the end of the century.¹⁹ No doubt made to compete with German Westerwald gray and blue products, the English wares feature a finer, whiter body than their inspirations but were made in similar functional forms such as mugs, jugs, and chamber pots. Debased scratch blue wares can be readily recognized by their loosely executed incised foliate sprays hazily colored in a flowing blue; many examples sport applied badges bearing a crowned "GR" or a profile portrait of King George III flanked by his initials. It is virtually impossible to distinguish between these English products and their German counterparts in colonial newspaper advertisements. Nonetheless, the abundance of shards of debased scratch blue found at later 18th century sites testifies to the widespread ownership of these wares in America.

One very small subset stands out among the debased

scratch blue stoneware. Three mugs are known that bear an applied badge of an American eagle based loosely on the Great Seal of the United States rather than an image or monogram of the British monarch (figure 8). Two of these mugs in different sizes are in the collections of Colonial Williamsburg; the third example is part of the Lloyd Hawes Collection at the National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.²⁰ Confirmation that these American-market goods were made in Burslem, Staffordshire, was made in 2006 with the discovery of shards bearing the American eagle medallion, as well as more typical examples with portraits of King George.²¹ As of the time of this writing, no shards of eagle badges are known to have been found in an American context.

The longevity of salt-glazed stoneware's popularity and its importance in early America cannot be overstated. Tinged earthenware was fashionable for much of that period, but the frailty of its thick white glaze made it unsuitable for use with hot beverages or for long-term food storage. Similarly, the lead glaze on coarse earthenware was prone to breaking down when exposed to highly acidic or saline foods and beverages. Refined earthenwares such as creamware and pearlware swept to the height of fashion for use at table, but not until the second half of the 18th century. Porcelain, both Chinese and English, was present in early America, but its high cost restricted the ownership of such choice items to more prosperous householders. Only stoneware was present in its many and varied guises from the period of first settlement to the dawn of the 19th century and, indeed, beyond, filling the cupboards and furnishing the tables of a broad segment of the populace. Whether in the form of a utilitarian bottle or of a fancifully-decorated dinner plate, it is both a joy and a challenge to collect these wares for Colonial Williamsburg.

Notes

- 1 Fred Hopkins, "Opportunity, Accomplishment, and Betrayal: The Saga of William Claiborne's 17th-Century Settlement in the Upper Chesapeake," *Underwater Archaeology Proceedings from the Society for Historical Archaeology Conference*, John D. Broadwater, ed., (Richmond, Virginia: 1991), pp. 2–3 and Joseph M. McNamara, "Submerged Terrestrial Sites and the Application of Clam Dredges in the Search for William Claiborne's 17th-Century Settlement in the Upper Chesapeake," *Underwater Archaeology Proceedings*, p. 12.
- 2 For summaries of Fort St. George and its excavation, see Myron Beckenstein, "Maine's Lost Colony: Archaeologists Uncover an Early American Settlement that History Forgot," *Smithsonian*, XXXIV, no. 11 (February 2004), pp. 18–19 and

Lance Tapley, "Discovering an Archaeological American Archaeology, IV, no. 4 (Winter 2000–12–19. Information on the ongoing progress archaeology can be found at www.pophamco

- 3 David Gaimster, *German Stoneware, 1200–1900 and Cultural History* (London, 1997), p. 216.
- 4 J. van Loo, "Pieter van den Ancker en Jan op handelen in Frechense kruiken omstreeks van de 17de eeuw," *Antiek*, XXI, no. 1 (June/July 1977), pp. 27–29. I would like to thank Ineke Schaller for this article. Also see Gaimster, *German Stoneware*, and John G. Hurst, David S. Neal, and H. J. E. Rodney Hampson, *White Salt-glazed Stoneware from the Isles* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng., 2005), pp. 19–21.
- 5 Chris Green, *John Dwight's Fulham Pottery: Excavations 1971–79*, English Heritage Archaeological Report 1999 (London, 1999).
- 6 Al Luckenbach, "Ceramics from the Edward Rumney/Stephen West Tavern, London Town, Circa 1725," *Ceramics in America*, Robert H. Rouse, ed. (Milwaukee, 2002), pp. 142–143. See also Diana Rodney Hampson, *White Salt-glazed Stoneware from the Isles* (Woodbridge, Suffolk, Eng., 2005), pp. 19–21.
- 7 Jonathan Horne, *John Dwight "the Master Potter" 1672–1703 and His Contemporaries*, exhibition catalogue (London, 1992), n. p.
- 8 Adrian Oswald, R. J. C. Hildyard, and R. G. Hildyard, *Brown Stoneware: 1670–1900* (London, 1982), p. 257.
- 9 Bradford L. Rauschenberg, "G:Burwell/Edwards: London Stone Bottles in Virginia," *Journal of Decorative Arts*, I, no. 2 (November 1975), pp. 10–11.
- 10 Robin Hildyard, *Browne Mugs: English Brown Stoneware* (London, 1985), p. 44.
- 11 Gaimster, *German Stoneware*, pp. 98–105.
- 12 Gaimster, *German Stoneware*, pp. 104, 252.
- 13 *City Gazette*, Charleston, South Carolina, September 1796.
- 14 Edwards and Hampson, *White Salt-Glazed Stoneware*, pp. 165, 167, 170, 176.
- 15 Both of these teapots will be illustrated and discussed in length in the publication *Salt-Glazed Stoneware in America* by Janine E. Skerry and Suzanne Finley, forthcoming, 2009.
- 16 Susan Gray Detweiler, *George Washington's Clay Pottery* (New York, 1982), pp. 21–23, 30.
- 17 See Ivor Noël Hume, *Pottery and Porcelain in Colonial Williamsburg's Archaeological Collections*, Colonial Williamsburg Archaeological Series No. 2 (Williamsburg, 1969), p. 17.
- 18 Cyril Cook, "Old English Salt-glazed Plates with Decorations," *The Connoisseur* (June 1958), p. 10.
- 19 Ivor Noël Hume, *If These Pots Could Talk: Collected British Household Pottery* (Milwaukee, 2001), p. 10.
- 20 See Knowles Boney, "A Study of a Group of English Salt-glazed Ware," *Antiques* (September 1965), p. 100.
- 21 Don Carpentier, "Another Man's Treasure," *Ceramics Fair Exhibition Catalog* (January 2007), p. 10.