

# SHARDS

A Newsletter of the China Students' Club of Boston

Volume 13, Issue 2

[www.chinastudentsclub.org](http://www.chinastudentsclub.org)

January 2010

## A Message from Our President

Dear members,

As we begin a new year we can look forward to many exciting events in the ceramic world. One of the first will be the New York Ceramics Fair ([www.caskeylees.com](http://www.caskeylees.com)) January 20-24 at The National Academy Museum in Manhattan. The Ceramics Fair is the jewel of New York's Winter Antiques Show and showcases a distinguished group of about 36 exhibitors. Lectures from Wednesday the 20<sup>th</sup> through Saturday the 23<sup>rd</sup> will feature Angela Howard, Pat Halfpenny, Ron Fuchs, Janine Skerry, Suzanne Findlen Hood, Dr. Jeffrey Tulman, Michelle Erickson, and Johanna Brown. I hope to see you there!

As always, I encourage you to let me know what your ceramic interests are so that we can plan programs and events that meet your needs as members of the China Students' Club. If you have recommendations for speakers or lecture topics, please let us know. You may contact Program Director Anne Lanning at [lanning@historic-deerfield.org](mailto:lanning@historic-deerfield.org) if you have suggestions you would like to share.

In early October our group enjoyed a wonderful trip to Portsmouth, New Hampshire. We had a good turnout but missed those who could not attend. Despite a power outage while at Strawberry Banke, we all got to see great ceramics there (thanks to those who carry flashlights!), and we also enjoyed ceramic treasures at the Warner House and the John Paul Jones House. In addition, it was a real treat to see the private collections of China Students' Club members Deb

Richards, Louise Richardson, and Hollis Brodrick. A big thank you goes out to all who helped make the day a success!

Our meeting in late October featured Dr. Arthur F. Goldberg speaking on *The Pottery of the Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave*. It was a delight to see some of the magnificent pots made by "Dave the Potter" and to learn more about his life. Thanks to Club member Gail Homer for helping to host Dr. Goldberg and his lovely wife Esther.

The China Students' Club enjoyed record attendance at our last meeting on November 30<sup>th</sup> as we all eagerly awaited Jody Wilkie's presentation on fakes versus legitimate production and reproduction in ceramics. Her experience as International Specialist Head, European Ceramics at Christie's has given her great insight on the topic. We apologize for the technical difficulty in getting Jody's images to appear, but she managed to give a very engaging and informative talk nonetheless! Numerous members commented on how much they enjoyed Jody's animated presentation.

At our next meeting on Thursday, January 28<sup>th</sup>, we can look forward to hearing C.S.C. member Nicholas Johnson present *English Art Pottery: Victorian Decoration and Beyond*. This promises to be a nicely illustrated talk and Nicholas has already checked to make sure that his disc is compatible with the equipment! I look forward to seeing you on the 28th!

Best wishes for 2010,  
Nan Wolverton, President

## Portsmouth Trip Report By David Stevens

Twenty-nine Club members met in the Strawberry Banke Museum's Tyco Visitors Center. The Museum was organized in the 1950s to save historic buildings in Puddle Dock, an area along the Piscataqua River in Portsmouth from urban-renewal demolition. It covers

9.5 acres with buildings from four centuries. Introductory comments by Tara Vose included a brief history of the Tyco Visitors Center. It was designed to have no impact on the site; the ground beneath was left undis-

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## Portsmouth Trip Report

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turbed so as to permit future archaeological excavation.

From the Visitor Center we walked to the Carter Collections Center. In a first floor room, archaeologist Sheila Charles had trays of shards on display for us. These were grouped by the sites where they were found. It was interesting to see how history can be inferred from such artifacts: there were toys from the site of an orphanage, porcelain from homes of the more comfortable families, and only earthenware from others.

Privies are a common source of material, for when no longer used for their original purpose they became a dump for household material. Privies were often placed in barns, thus barns are good places for archaeological digs. In the Center's attic, where artifacts are stored, Tara made the many shelves of ceramics related to Portsmouth available for inspection. Unfortunately there was a power failure in the neighborhood, and much viewing was limited to flashlight illumination.

Some of us then briefly toured the Goodwin Mansion, built in 1811, and moved to its current site in 1963 when it was due to be demolished. It was the home of New Hampshire Governor Ichabod and his wife Sarah Parker Rice Goodwin from 1832 to 1896. Some of the furniture is original to the house. Other members used the opportunity to visit the John Paul Jones House.

At noon we walked to Deb Richards's antique house near Strawberry Banke. We enjoyed a lunch of pumpkin soup, chili con carne, an assortment of home-made breads, and apple crisp. We ate surrounded by New England redware and pewter displayed in the context of antique furniture with fires in two hearths.

A tour of the Warner House, an important preserved house near Strawberry Banke, followed lunch. The house was built between 1716 and 1718 and is the earliest existing brick urban mansion in Portsmouth. Of special interest were the murals on the staircase wall and the smalt-decorated parlor bedchamber. The wall paintings are thought to be the oldest such murals still in place. They depict varied scenes including two portraits of Iroquois chiefs who visited Queen Anne in 1710, Abraham about to slay Isaac, and a woman spinning.

Deb showed us the parlor bedchamber. When investigating the layers of paint on the bedchamber's

walls, a conservator discovered that smalt—ground cobalt-blue glass—had been used to color the walls. While there are many instances of smalt used to cover small areas, highlighting beams, moldings, etc., here the entire surface of the walls, except the baseboards, had been decorated with smalt. This may be the only example of such extensive treatment with smalt.

After finding a current source of smalt, the curators now had to determine how it should be applied. Old writings gave instructions that were ambiguous or meant only for application to horizontal surfaces; not helpful when walls were to be done. The problem was solved by asking some local painters to help. A "Great Smalt-Out" was conducted where several ideas were tested and a satisfactory technique discovered, utilizing glitter guns, a garden sprayer, and wild turkey feathers.

On the third floor, in a room with valanced windows and thus apparently once a bedroom, was an archaeological display of shards from the site, arranged by type, e.g., ironstone, Chinese export, earthenware, salt glaze, blown glass, etc. Louise explained how items discovered on the site are compared with items listed in inventories. From this, the relative value of pieces to the families at the time can be judged. For example, Chinese Export porcelain was inventoried but earthenware was not, telling us, not surprisingly, that in this home, the porcelain was prized, while the earthenware was not.

We left the Warner House for tea at Louise Richardson's home, where her collection was made available for close inspection. The home was constructed in the 1850s for William Fernald, a clipper-ship builder. The Richardsons moved it two blocks to its present site in 1980 to save it from demolition, and have been restoring it slowly since then. This has been a challenge as the house had been broken up into small apartments to be used as commercial space. The kitchen ell was missing, doors had been cut through walls, and sections of molding were removed... It was originally a grand residence with Greek Revival interior details, a unique hand carved front door, and an impressive front hall with marbleized columns. Restoration of the formal parlor appropriate to the 1880s was just finished. Restoration of other rooms continues with careful attention to detail.

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## Portsmouth Trip Report

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For example, moldings will be replicated from originals, plastered-over vents uncovered, proper iron covers re-installed, embossed “wallpaper” applied where the original is not useable, etc.

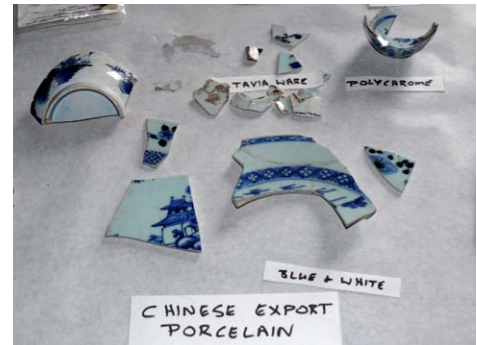
Tea was served in English porcelain dating from the late 18<sup>th</sup> through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The earlier ones included examples by Derby, New Hall, & Machin. There was pink lustreware from the 1830s and 20<sup>th</sup> century bone china by several makers.

The last stop was the 1766 home of Hollis Brodrick. While sipping wine in the tap room, we viewed tortoise ware, Chinese Export famille rose and blue and white plates and chargers, and learned of some of Hollis’s experiences in bringing the house back to life. While early tortoise ware is generally thought to be English, these

plates may well be American: Hollis has found an 18<sup>th</sup> century clipping which mentions it being produced in New York. The house is currently undergoing extensive restoration, literally from the ground up; a foundation wall collapsed when the cellar was being pumped dry.

On the second floor is a truly impressive library of reference material relevant to antiques. A Chippendale table of Bermuda cedar sits in the center of the room.

In sum, despite rain and an hour without electricity, the excursion was thoroughly enjoyable: Important historic homes were visited, ceramics, both shards and intact pieces were available for inspection, and the hosts and hostesses provided warm welcomes as well as food and beverages in their historic homes. Many of us will surely return to Strawberry Banke for even more extensive visits to the Museum.



Clockwise, from top left: Porcelain sink, probably installed in 1920s (Richardson house); stoneware bear jug, Hawes collection, 1750-90, probably Staffordshire (Carter Center); Chinese Export shards (Warner house); tortoise-shell plate, ca. 1800 (Brodrick house); painted stair risers (Deb’s house, painted by herself); banded and dipped mug, creamware, England, early 19<sup>th</sup> c. (Richardson house); white stoneware teapot, English, ca. 1800-1820 (Jones house)





## Arthur Goldberg on “The Pottery of Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave” Reviewed by Jeff Brown

The CSC convened in October at the College Club to hear a talk by Arthur F. Goldberg, M.D. and ceramics scholar, who spoke on “The Pottery of the Enslaved African-American Potter Dave,” a subject that Dr. Goldberg has been researching for some twenty years.

What makes the subject so interesting is not only the pottery produced (which is now considered folk art icons) but the story surrounding it which is a truly American tale. It tells of good and evil, slavery in the antebellum south, personal interrelationships, conflicts within communities, as well as the life of the slave-potter Dave. Dave was an enslaved potter who made alkaline-glazed stoneware vessels in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the Edgefield district of South Carolina. His large pots are all the more impressive as they are usually inscribed in script with his name, date, and a couplet or short poem or verse. This is extremely significant considering the fact that they were produced at a time when slave literacy was outlawed in South Carolina. These pieces are unique in the Ameri-

can stoneware tradition.

So far Dr. Goldberg has helped identify 169 known pieces by Dave with inscribed dates between 1829 and 1864, which helps place them at what pottery (and under what master) they were produced. On top of all the cruelty and abuse and humiliation used to enforce white supremacy over slaves, another method used for control was enforced illiteracy. Most southern states had laws forbidding the education of slaves; South Carolina’s were the harshest. Despite this, these laws were sometimes ignored—slaves were sometimes taught by religious-minded masters so they could read the Bible, some were taught as children by white children, and some learned from other literate slaves. When and how Dave learned to read and write we do not know. He was born into slavery around 1820 and was passed during his lifetime between several masters who appear to have been related. Central to Dave’s life as a potter seem to be two brothers—Dr. Abner Langham and Rev. John Langham who encouraged the development of the alka-

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A Dave jar and its inscription dated “Feb 24 1858” (contrast exaggerated)



## The Pottery of Enslaved African-American Potter, Dave

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line-glazed pottery tradition in the south. A third master, Miles Lewis, allowed Dave the fullest self expression in his work. Dave worked at the Pottersville Pottery about a mile from the Edgefield Courthouse that was established by Abner Langham about 1815. The pottery was very successful and Dave was employed there until he passed into the hands of Miles Lewis for the first time from 1840-43. He then passed to the employ of Rev. John Langham and his son Benjamin Franklin Langham from 1844-48 at the Horse Creek Pottery. During this period there are no known signed or verse-inscribed pots by Dave. What pressures prevailed upon him to stop signing his pieces—whether from the Langhams or the community at large regarding his literacy, we do not know. From 1849 until he was freed after the Civil War in 1865 Dave was potting again for Miles Lewis. Upon attaining his freedom Dave changed his name to David Drake (the surname of his original owner). He died between 1870 and 1880.

Dave's inscriptions give us a chronology not only of his life but remind us of the events unfolding at the time. Other than his Pottersville period when he wasn't allowed to sign anything, his jars illustrate that production at Edgefield continued right through the 1860s, despite a civil war raging all around.

As for the pieces themselves, Dave produced large utilitarian storage jars and single and double-handled jugs. The jars can be as large as 26" tall, are technically very difficult to throw, and are of impressive size and presence. The Langham brothers are credited with the development of alkaline-glazed stoneware in this coun-

try, a tradition that spread through the south and into Texas. It was a process unknown in Europe, but developed in China about two thousand years ago. How two brothers in rural 19<sup>th</sup> century South Carolina came upon this wood ash and lime glazing process remains a mystery. The glazing and firing techniques varied at the different potteries where Dave worked over the years, producing a rich variety of colors from yellowish-green to olive-grey to tan to brown to dark brown to black. It is a tribute to both Dave and his masters and the Edgefield community at large that Dave's literacy was accepted and his talents encouraged at a time when his flaunted literacy could have gotten him and his masters in deep trouble. It is especially interesting to note that during Dave's years with Miles Lewis his work flourished, that his couplets and verses were most prolific, and that Miles apparently fostered this. Outside of Dave's contribution to America's material culture and ceramics history, just consider what inspiration, what glimmer of hope, his work must have given his fellow slaves at the time.

### Examples of Dave's inscriptions:

The forth of July is surely come  
To blow the fife = and beat the drum  
July 4, 1859

I – made this Jar all of cross  
If you don't repent, you will be lost

- Dave

May 3, 1862

### Jody Wilkie on

## “When is Imitation no Longer the Sincerest Form of Flattery? — Fakes vs. Legitimate Production and Reproduction in the Ceramic Arts”

Reviewed by Jeff Brown

In November, the CSC tried once again to host Jody Wilkie, International Specialist Head, European Ceramics Christie's. As some of you may recall Jody came up from New York last year to address our group only to find the Back Bay engulfed in a power outage, the College Club closed and our meeting cancelled. This time Jody managed a comeback, but the power outage

seemed to have engulfed the laptop: no images could be coaxed from the machine for love or money. Jody, completely unfazed, delivered a very informative talk, completely off-the-cuff on “When is Imitation no Longer the Sincerest Form of Flattery? Fakes vs. Legitimate Production and Reproduction in the Ceramics Arts”.

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## Fakes vs. Legitimate Production and Reproduction in the Ceramic Arts

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Jody said that as a specialist at a major auction house she sees everything come across her desk from the sublime to the ridiculous. What she says to herself when identifying a piece is: “Here is what I think it is,” “Here are what the marks are telling me what it is,” “What are the materials from which it was made telling me what it is?” “What is it actually?” “Was it produced to deceive, or was it made to be simply what it is?” “Is the way we see things now, and the labels we attach to things at present, prejudicing our opinion of what that item is or was intended to be?” “Are we creating problems for pieces that don’t really have any problems?”

To illustrate her point (without illustrations) Jody used the French porcelain factory Samson as a prime example. This 19<sup>th</sup> century company produced extremely high quality knock-offs that are collected today in their own right as the examples of the beautiful ceramics that they really are. The firm had a brilliant corporate collection of antiques that they used as models, and they produced not only copies of European porcelain, but Chinese and Japanese works as well as pottery and even medieval enameling. The firm lasted well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Pieces may be marked with Samson marks as well as the marks of the object they are copying, or they could just have the original’s mark or, later on, people sometimes removed the Samson mark. So there are a lot of Samson pieces out there today which are identified as things other than Samson, but which did not start out life intended as fakes or forgeries: they are just legitimate 19<sup>th</sup> century high quality production “in the style of” something else. And Samson was not the only manufacturer out there making good copies—Minton, Cole Brookdale, and Herend are just a few others. Pieces were sometimes borrowed from famous collections to be copied. In addition to European firms, there were Japanese factories in the 20<sup>th</sup> century that were creating pieces that looked like they were made in Germany and France. In France there are a lot of porcelain manufacturers in Limoges, a town that is often confused for a factory itself. Very good porcelain comes from this area and to this day some of its best makers produce services copied from 18<sup>th</sup> century pieces.

As for marks on porcelain such as Sèvres (which is usually meticulously marked), keep in mind that some marks were primarily put on pieces in order to keep track of who worked on what. All the sculptors, gilders, painters and decorators at these factories were paid by piece work; their “tally” marks on a piece were their way of getting paid for each item they had worked on. There are times, though, as we all know, when a manufacturer does mark pieces specifically to deceive. As a case in point, one Helen Wolfson in Germany in the 1880s produced exquisite copies of 18<sup>th</sup> century Meissen and then marked them as such. She was sued and jailed for fraud. There was a plethora of small 19<sup>th</sup> century factories around Meissen and Dresden and in France who were producing good copies of early Meissen and marking them with spurious “Meissen-esque” looking crossed swords. There were German companies that produced pieces marked with a capital “N” with a crown over it—a mark usually associated with the Capodimonte factory in Italy. These acts of deception continue today. Marks are sometimes ground off in hopes the item will be seen as an earlier piece; this happens with copies produced and marketed through museum gift shops as legitimate reproductions.

And then there is a grey zone in all this to be considered as great factories like Meissen or especially Sèvres often sold off their less than perfect wares as seconds, usually with cancellation marks identifying them as such. These seconds would end up in decorating houses where the blanks could be beautifully decorated—sometimes years after the piece had been made and even gone out of style. So you may have a piece of Sèvres porcelain, but it may not be Sèvres decorated. Or earlier, plainer designs could be removed in an acid bath and the piece re-decorated with a richer more elaborate pattern. This can usually be detected as a shadow of the original design sometimes shows through the secondary paint job.

And so, despite the lack of images, Jody informed and entertained us and gave us plenty to think about and, as I have so often said in closing these articles, “Buyer Beware.”



## Upcoming Ceramics Events

### CSC Meetings

All meetings at 1 PM at the College Club, 44 Commonwealth Avenue, Boston

**1/28/2010: English Art Pottery: Victorian Decoration and Beyond;** Nicholas Johnson, CSC member

**2/25: Bits and Pieces;** Members are invited to bring an object or two for discussion

**3/25: Archaeological Discoveries at the Colony of Avalon, Newfoundland;** James Tuck, Chief Archaeologist, Colony of Avalon, Newfoundland

**4/22: A Hidden Treasure: The Reeves Collection of Chinese Export Porcelain at Washington and Lee University;** Ron Fuchs, Curator of the Reeves Collection, Washington and Lee University

**5/27: The Vivian Hawes Memorial Lecture and Annual Meeting and Tea: Ivory, Cream Colour, or Queensware? English Creamware at Historic Deerfield;** Amanda E. Lange, Curator of Historic Interiors, Historic Deerfield, CSC member.

### Auctions

#### **Asian:**

1/21-23/2010, Christie's, NY (Chinese Export)

1/23, Sotheby's, NY (Chinese Export from the Elinor Gordon collection)

3/23, Sotheby's, NY (Chinese)

3/24, Christie's, NY (Japanese & Korean)

3/25, Christie's, NY (Chinese)

#### **Other:**

3/18, Christie's, London (19<sup>th</sup> century)

4/20, Christie's, London (Royal Worcester private collection)

6/2, Christie's, London (incl. ceramics).

### Exhibitions

**Alistair Sampson Collection of English Creamware,** ongoing at the Flynt Center, Historic Deerfield

**At the Sackler Gallery, Washington, DC:**

*Contemporary Japanese Porcelain*

*Taking Shape: Ceramics in Southeast Asia*

**At the Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, DC:**

*Ancient Chinese Pottery and Bronze*

*Arts of the Islamic World (including ceramics)*

### *Korean Ceramics*

*Black & White: Chinese Ceramics from the 10<sup>th</sup>-14<sup>th</sup> Centuries*

*Vietnamese Ceramics from the Red River Delta.*

**Exuberant Grotesques: Renaissance Maiolica from the Fontana Workshop,** Frick Collection, NY, until 1/17/2010

**Imperial Privilege: Vienna Porcelain of Du Paquier, 1718–44,** Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, until 3/21/2010.

Abigail Homer reports: "The second porcelain factory in Europe to make true porcelain in the manner of the Chinese was established in Vienna in 1718. Founded by Claudius Innocentius du Paquier, the small porcelain enterprise developed a highly distinctive style that remained Baroque in inspiration throughout the short-lived history of the factory. Du Paquier produced a range of tablewares, vases and small-scale sculpture that was hugely popular with the Hapsburg court and Austrian nobility.

"This exhibition charts the history of the development of this factory. The porcelain featured is drawn from both the Met and premier private collections. You will see unique shapes and innovative decorations, including a dazzlingly all-white hard-paste porcelain elephant from the 1740s."

### Conferences and Fairs

**New York Ceramics Fair,** 1083 Fifth Avenue, New York, 1/20-24.

**Pottery with a Past: A New Look at Salt-glazed Stoneware Collections, Research, and Archaeology,** Colonial Williamsburg, 3/18-21' Colonial Williamsburg staff members and distinguished lecturers such as David Barker, David Gaimster, Jonathan Horne, and Rob Hunter explore the production and distribution of brown, gray, and white salt-glazed stoneware from Germany, Britain, and America. The program is timed to coincide with the exhibition *Pottery with a Past: Stoneware in Early America* at Colonial Williamsburg's DeWitt Wallace Decorative Arts Museum.

For more information, visit <http://www.history.org/conted>.



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Deb Richards's stoneware house canister, Japan.  
Part of a set she bought in New York 50 years ago