

SHARDS

A Newsletter of the

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John R. Philbrick on Westerwald Stoneware in America

Report by Jeff Brown

The China Students' Club of Boston hit the ground running with a great season-opening lecture on Westerwald stoneware. The talk was given by John Philbrick who, along with his wife Maria Plummer, studies and deals in not only Westerwald but other early American decorative arts. They acquired a small group of Westerwald pieces from a collector about twenty years ago and, outside of seeing it in museums such as Williamsburg, they never had had pieces of their own to study up close. These brilliantly glazed and sometimes garishly decorated pieces prompted all sorts of questions: How did these foreign-looking vessels fit into the material culture of early New England? How did Westerwald relate to other objects familiar to the early settlers such as tin-glazed earthenware or slip-glazed pottery? How did it even come to these shores and was it a tradable commodity?

Westerwald stoneware is named for a district south of Westphalia in the ancient duchy of Nassau in Germany. The region is ideally suited to pottery production with large amounts of clay and the timber necessary to fire the kilns. Potteries have existed in the region since as early as 1402, most pieces being made for local consumption. At the end of the 16th century potters arrived in the area as war refugees with the skill to turn production to a large scale. Guilds established as early as 1591 were consolidated into one regional guild by 1643. By the second quarter of the 17th century the Westerwald potters were producing wares distinctive to the region—primarily ovoid vessels with molded decoration, sprunts, rosettes and stamped devices which were arranged in rows or connected by stems and vines or scattered over the surface. Cobalt blue and manganese purple colored these molded and tooled designs, although in some cases the vessels were left uncolored. In

the 17th and early 18th centuries the necks and bases were decorated with horizontal bands or cordons which were later replaced by closely incised ribs splashed with manganese. Handles were applied with a looped terminus in the 17th century, but gave way to handles with a distinctive tail shape in the 18th century. By the 18th century the early applied molded decoration gave way to debased impressed designs colored predominantly in cobalt blue. The stoneware is also characterized by medallions with coats of arms and religious scenes and, as production reached an international market, images of foreign monarchs such as William and Mary. Heraldic devices remained popular throughout the 18th century, especially on wares made for the English market. As the volume of production increased, ciphers replaced portraits. The largest proportion of shards reveal tavern and sanitary wares bearing the cipher of the Hanoverian Georges I and II.

The process of producing this salt-glazed stoneware was fully developed in the Rhineland by the early 16th century. Clay was either dug from the surface or mined at sub-surface levels. Clay was left to sit throughout the winter, then compressed, soaked in troughs of water, and kneaded like bread dough to remove air and large particles. During kneading, fine sand was added to help in drying and reducing the clay shrinkage. The clay was sliced to remove more air and impurities and then the entire process was repeated to attain the right texture and plasticity. The pieces were formed on a wheel, the ornamentation and handles added later when the clay was leather hard. Molds created an efficient form of decoration, being reusable over long periods of time. Freely hand painted or scratched designs could be added, as well as stamped or impressed patterns. The co-

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Westerwald Stoneware in America

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balt blue decoration was introduced in the 16th century, the manganese by the middle of the 17th. These were the only two colors that could withstand the high firing temperatures of 1200 degrees. After the pieces were fired for forty hours, salt was shoveled into the kiln—as much as 300 lbs.—and it would immediately vaporize into sodium oxide and hydrogen chloride and fall onto all the surfaces, creating the glass-like glaze. The vast amounts of salt required were probably imported from coastal Holland or the Baltic. After the kilns were salted, they were allowed to cool very slowly—about 4-5 days—and this cooling process created the distinctive grey bodies of Westerwald. It took an average of five weeks to fill a kiln, about a week to stack the wares (a very specialized job) and a week to fire it.

John believes that initially Westerwald was brought here as personal belongings or as part of the inventory needed to establish settlements. The stuff appears at virtually every settlement from Maine to Florida as well as in many Native American burial sites. Thanks to the Dutch expertise in trade, pieces have shown up as far afield as Zaire. The English Embargo Act of 1672 did not include Westerwald as that was deemed so indispensable an item that it was imported into England and her colonies into the 1780s. Westerwald wares were unsuitable for cooking; therefore, storage and drinking vessels for domestic, sanitary, and tavern use predominated.

By the mid-18th century competition from England's finer wares drove Westerwald to concentrate even more heavily on utilitarian wares. Chamber pots were brought into this country in huge num-

bers, yet, oddly enough, virtually none survive today. Westerwald continued on into the 1850s, but the Revolution, changes in fashion, and the development of the American pottery industry brought an end to Westerwald's dominance of the market.



Westerwald jug and cover, dated 1688
Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, Durham, UK



Westerwald tea or coffee pot with cover, dated 1755
Bowes Museum, Barnard Castle, Durham, UK

2003 Vivian Hawes Memorial Lectures at Sturbridge Village

Report by Jeff Brown

We thank Anne Lanning for the pictures accompanying this article, including the additional ones on the back page.

Spirits were not dampened on a raw Saturday afternoon as members of the CSC were warmly welcomed by friends at Old Sturbridge Village for a group of three talks as part of this year's Vivian

Hawes Memorial Lecture.

After a pleasant lunch, the program began with a very interesting lecture/demonstration by Don Carpentier, Practical Potter and Director of Eastfield Village in Nassau, NY. Don spoke to the group on "Dipt and Engine-Turned Earthenwares, 1780-1840."

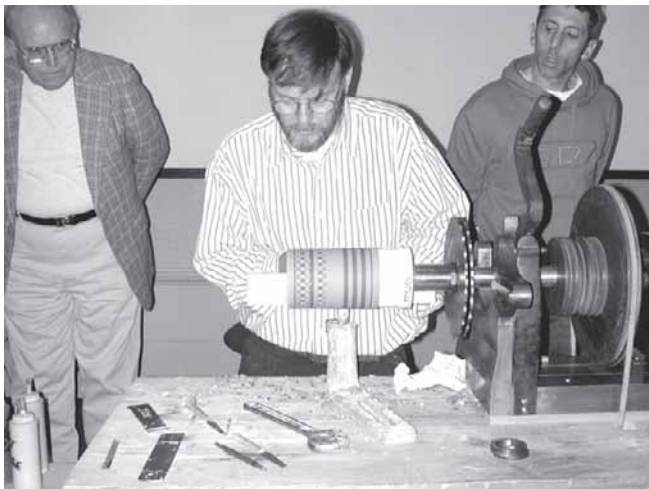
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2003 Vivian Hawes Memorial Lectures at Sturbridge Village

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His demonstrations have always captivated anyone who saw them, but he deserves special thanks for lugging a complete “Rose and Crown” lathe out to Sturbridge to present this demonstration. We have all marveled at the complex and dazzling decoration on these early wares, but few of us could ever figure out how it was accomplished. Don has spent years researching early industrial skills and techniques. He has collected a wide range of period tools and has gone to the considerable expense (\$45,000 worth) of having a copy built of Wedgwood’s original lathe that was specifically designed in the 18th century to turn ceramics. He pointed out that this was cutting edge (no pun intended) technology at the time and that this expensive machine would not be found at every pottery. Some potteries had less expensive, less complicated lathes, limiting their range of designs. Still other potters simply took the exquisitely turned objects from their more affluent competitors and made a mold of the piece. Leather-hard objects were turned on the lathe, and various designs and patterns could be cut into the piece with a variety of tools, such as knives and roulette wheels. The cut-out area could be flooded with slip and trimmed down after the slip had dried—creating an inlaid, two-tone pattern. Keep in mind that we saw all this done on Don’s electric lathe, but the original one was driven



Don Carpentier at his lathe
CSCers Tracy Wiggins and David Kantrowitz
look on

by an apprentice at a foot treadle, who had to know when and how to vary the speed. As to the actual mechanics of the lathe, it simply cannot be described here in words. Fellow member Tracy Wiggins summed it up best when he remarked, “I’ve been reading about this turning process for years and never quite understood how the machine worked until I actually saw it.” A picture is always worth a thousand words! Don also had on display a fantastic array of finished pieces from his pottery, all for sale and much admired by those in attendance for their workmanship and accuracy in re-creating the originals.

Next up, Nan Wolverton, an Independent Scholar and Museum Specialist, was kind enough to show the group a selection of objects that Old Sturbridge Village was able to acquire from the Hawes collection, part of Vivian’s bequest to the museum. Pieces selected to augment or complement Sturbridge’s collection as a rural 19th century New England village included:

- A green-glazed cake plate with a yellow cross decoration, potted with a deep well to sit as a cover to a slop bowl from a tea set. Chosen to complement a locally made redware one with a black cross—was the potter looking at these imported wares for inspiration?

- A basalt engine-turned teapot with a silver make-do spout. Unusual in that most make-do pieces use tin replacements. Sturbridge has a collection of make-do pieces,

- Feather-edged wares so ubiquitous in New England homes at

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Steve Apica, Don’s associate



2003 Vivian Hawes Memorial Lectures at Sturbridge Village

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that time (1780-1840): one Dawson plate, one with an American eagle.

- A classic cauliflower teapot the likes of which Sturbridge didn't have.
- A Herculanaeum supper set.
- A pair of Swansea soup plates—Sturbridge had no examples from this Welsh factory.
- A nice grouping of Wedgwood: a jelly mold and lemon strainer; especially attractive forms.
- Some stoneware pieces—two jugs from Charlestown, a pottery in operation from 1812-1827, and a Whatley jar, circa 1833-49—all appropriate to the Sturbridge period.
- A couple of redware pieces to complement Sturbridge's great redware collection.

Nan also took a few moments to remark on how these pieces were actually created—a part of their history that we so often forget when admiring, studying and acquiring these lovely things. The sad facts are that a great many children and adolescents spent their youth and wasted their health in deplorable conditions creating these utilitarian objects that we now so admire as decorative “art.”

The afternoon concluded with a slide presentation by CSC member, Scholar, and Author Jonathan



Nan Wolverton with some of Sturbridge's picks from the Hawes collection

Rickard who spoke to the group on the wide variety of commemoratives in the English pottery tradition. For all intents and purposes the idea of commemoratives on British ceramics began in the late 17th century with the great slip decorated redwares of Thomas Toft and a little later with London stonewares commemorating such social activities as the hunt or the “midnight modern conversation” (i.e. a drinking party). There were commemoratives for great naval and military victories, and to show political allegiances to a party or royal family. Pieces were made with children in mind to be given in reward for merit or as learning tools. There are a few rare survivors such as communion cups imprinted with Biblical quotations for religious services and a small group of “bell ringers,” jugs made to commemorate and serve those in the congregation who rang the church bells. There are also rare commemoratives celebrating the potter who created them or even the source material from which they were made—such as a piece mentioning the Cornish mountain from which the cobalt was mined. On a more practical note, there are pieces imprinted with the imperial weight and measure seal guaranteeing an object's capacity, and sometimes with the hotel or pub's name as well. And finally there is another kind of commemorative—that of ownership—and Jonathan illustrated several pieces that bore no image, date or mark, but simply had a note or inscription of some kind detailing the piece's history.



Jonathan Rickard



Bet McLeod on Horace Walpole's Ceramics at Strawberry Hill

Report by Jeff Brown

November's meeting at the Women's Educational and Industrial Union saw a better than average turn-out, and as much as we attribute that to the exceptional speaker and topic, people did mention that the earlier meeting time of 11:00 was very convenient for them.

But as to the speaker and topic, they were exceptional. Bet McLeod, Assistant Curator of Decorative Arts, Art of Europe, at Boston's Museum of Fine Arts spoke on the subject of "Horace Walpole's Ceramics at Strawberry Hill."

Horace was the youngest son of Britain's first Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, and having lived from 1717 to 1797 he witnessed almost the entire span of the 18th century with all its changes in fashions, styles, and trends in the decorative arts. He was a lifelong MP (but never once sat in Parliament!), an art historian and critic, a gardener, an author of one of the first gothic novels, and a writer of letters. But he is probably best known as the owner and builder of Strawberry Hill, a Gothic Revival "villa" he created in the suburbs of London. The renowned collections Horace gathered there were eventually dispersed, but the structure still exists, part of a Catholic seminary. It has very recently been named a World Heritage Site and with this new status a movement is afoot to restore the property. This has also created an increased interest in identifying pieces that once belonged to the house, as the restored building could be used as a museum for the objects that were originally in Horace's collection.

The detective work to identify original pieces is greatly facilitated by several things, one being Horace's copious and descriptive letters about the house and his acquisitions. These are amplified by a description of Strawberry Hill published by Walpole in 1784 that includes illustrations of many of the rooms. These are the first known illustrations of an English domestic interior (prior ones had been only of royal residences). Another great source for authenticating original pieces from the collection was the auction that took place in 1842 to disperse the collection. This was the first "on site" auction of a

single owner's collection and was quite a social event, causing a great stir in the press and attracting thousands to the previews. As a result we have the auction catalog with its descriptions and engravings and the auction results. England being England, of course, many of the items purchased in 1842 are still in the same families, so that a direct line can be traced back to Walpole's ownership. Bet McLeod was quick to point out that a Walpole provenance can add "several zeroes" to the price of an object.

Although Bet spoke mainly of the ceramics at Strawberry Hill, it's important to remember that the collection was extensive and that Walpole was also amassing paintings, miniatures, furniture, and exotic oriental objects. Based on his writings, though, it is evident that ceramics played a very important part in his collecting. The majority of this collection was housed in his "China Room" which displayed porcelain, earthenware, glass, and enamel on copper from all ages and countries. It is important to note the word "collection," as he was specifically interested in having pieces that represented a certain period or country or a high level of craftsmanship, a certain factory, or a new manufacturing technique. He made very specific distinctions between quality and rarity and in his correspondence he reveals a thorough working knowledge of what went into creating a fine ceramic object.

The largest proportion of ceramic objects in the collection is oriental in origin, some of them functional pieces, others purely decorative, and still others examples of the purely exotic. Porcelain outside the China Room was used decoratively throughout the house, sometimes coordinating with the color scheme of a room. Biscuit figures of English, French, and German origin were used as table sculpture throughout the rooms, not just as dining table conceits as was popular at the time. Other outstanding examples in the collection were a set of twelve Dutch Delft plates representing the Zodiac, painted by Sir James Thornhill, one of the great history painters of the time. Walpole was not only attracted to the fine

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Bet McLeod on Horace Walpole's Ceramics at Strawberry Hill

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design and subject matter, but by the plates' provenance as they were once owned by Thornhill's son-in-law William Hogarth. It is ironic that we today are searching for a Strawberry Hill/Walpole provenance when in the 18th century Walpole himself was looking to previous ownership as an important factor in the value of an object. Other objects with historical connections are dated pieces of English delft bearing the images of Charles II and his Queen Catherine of Braganza. There are pieces that are examples of developing technologies such as "Mr. Place's Cup," a rare prototype (circa 1700) of early English porcelain, and a wide range of Chelsea products illustrating the scope of the factory's development during the 18th century. In another vein, he had a large collection of Italian majolica wares, some of the really outstanding pieces given French gilt-bronze mounts. This allowed him to make a historical piece

contemporary and compatible with the decor of the room it was to decorate. Last but not least, he had a large group of fine Sèvres porcelain contemporary to his ownership of the house. Mostly decorative in purpose, the period illustrations in the guidebook have been helpful in showing the placement of these magnificent pieces throughout the rooms. One of the most amazing pieces was a fine porcelain plaque made into a tabletop. Thanks to the room illustrations, we can place the table and see that a Moorfield carpet was woven based on the design of the porcelain.

So, Sèvres, Delft, Chinese, Majolica, and much more were all pursued, amassed and meticulously described by Horace Walpole, one of the most ambitious and astute collectors of the 18th century. All this was to be scattered, as Horace also so astutely observed, but hopefully someday some of these treasures will return to his beloved Strawberry Hill.



Strawberry Hill

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Upcoming Ceramics Events

CSC Meetings:

1/29: Robert D. Mowry on 'Korean Ceramics: The Great Tradition,' 1 PM, Seccomb Hall, 356 Boylston Street, Boston

2/22: Bits and Pieces, 2 PM, Dedham Historical Society, 612 High Street, Dedham

3/25: Linda Roth on 'Detecting the Hand of the Artist: Sèvres Painters on Porcelain,' 1 PM, Seccomb Hall

4/22: Andrew L. Maske on 'The Amazing Japanese Ceramics,' 1 PM, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem

5/27: Jessica Lanier on 'Elias Hasket Derby and the Post-Revolutionary Ceramics Trade in Salem, 1785-1799,' plus Annual Meeting and Tea, 1 PM, Seccomb Hall.

Auctions:

British & continental ceramics:

1/20-21, Christie's NY: European ceramics, majolica, Palissy ware

2/26, Christie's London

3/18, Christie's London

4/8, Christie's London: British ceramics & Staffordshire figures

5/20, 19th century ceramics

7/15, Sotheby's London

Chinese:

1/20-21, Christie's NY: export, including Benjamin Edwards II collection, part III

3/1-3, Christie's Melbourne: Binh Thuan cargo

3/23, Sotheby's NY

3/24, Christie's NY

3/25, Sotheby's London

6/9, Sotheby's London

European ceramics and Dutch Delftware:

5/5, Christie's Amsterdam

Japanese:

3/23, Christie's NY (+Korean)

3/25, Sotheby's London

4/15, Christie's London

6/9, Sotheby's London

Miscellaneous ceramics:

1/18, Christie's London: Ardmore ceramic art

1/24, Skinner, Boston

3/4, Christie's London: Collection of Mme. X, incl.

porcelain

3/17, Sotheby's London

3/31, Christie's London: Poole pottery museum & archive

5/19, Christie's Amsterdam: Asian ceramics & works of art.

Tours:

Discover Newfoundland with the Strawberry Banke Museum, 7/29 – 8/3/04.

Strawberry Banke Museum invites you to join archaeologist Martha Pinello and curator Carolyn Roy as they explore the rich history, archaeological heritage, and natural beauty of Newfoundland. From a unique opportunity to examine the archaeological treasures of Lord Baltimore's first North American colony, to the 1610 settlement of John Guy, to the ancient fishing villages, hiking trails, and sightings of icebergs and whales along the Avalon Peninsula, the trip offers a unique travel experience. Newfoundland's early history closely parallels that of coastal New England, and its intact archaeological sites help to interpret 17th century life in communities like Strawberry Banke.

The Delta St. John's, a four-star hotel with magnificent views of the harbor, will be our home base. Highlights of the trip will be a special exhibition of Newfoundland furniture, exploration of two major archaeological sites, wildlife tours, breakfast at a breathtaking lighthouse where the sun shines first on North America, and many opportunities to experience the spectacular scenery and abundant wildlife of the area. For those with a passion for archaeology and early ceramics, the staff at Memorial University have planned a workshop to examine and discuss artifacts not usually on display. The Newfoundland Archives, an important research facility, will also be open to our group.

For further information and to register, please contact Carolyn Roy at 603-422-7526, croy@strawberrybanke.org, or by mail at Strawberry Banke Museum, PO Box 300, Portsmouth, NH 03802.



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Turning close-up



Engine-turned decoration on pearlware mugs



Slip-decorated wares made by Don
Carpentier and Steve Apisa