

2007

John Bartlam's Porcelain at Cain Hoy: A Closer Look

Lisa Hudgins

University of South Carolina - Columbia, hudgins@mailbox.sc.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/sciaa_staffpub



Part of the [Anthropology Commons](#)

Publication Info

Published in *Ceramics in America 2007*, ed. Robert Hunter, 2007, pages 203-208.

<http://www.chipstone.org/>

© 2007 by the Chipstone Foundation

This Book Chapter is brought to you by the South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty & Staff Publications by an authorized administrator of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact digres@mailbox.sc.edu.

same ingredients as the paste. The results are reported in South, *John Bartlam: Staffordshire in Carolina*, pp. 77–88.

18. Rauschenberg, "John Bartlam, Who Established 'new Pottworks in South Carolina,'" p. 35.

19. Stanley South, *The Search for John Bartlam at Cain Hoy: American's First Creamware Potter*, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Research Manuscript Series 219 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993), p. 35.

20. *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, March 13, 1770.

21. *South Carolina Gazette*, October 4, 1770.

22. *Ibid.*, October 11, 1770.

Lisa R. Hudgins

John Bartlam's Porcelain at Cain Hoy: A Closer Look

In the mid-1760s a pottery manufactory was established nine miles north of Charleston, South Carolina, in the town of Cain Hoy (now Cainhoy). Archival evidence points to this site as the ceramic works of John Bartlam, a Staffordshire potter of twelve years who traveled to Charleston in 1763 with his family.¹ Nearly 230 years later, a team of historians and archaeologists, led by Stanley South of the South Carolina Institute for Archaeology and Anthropology, undertook excavations at Cain Hoy in the hope of finding evidence of John Bartlam there. During two critical field seasons in 1992 and 1993, South located more than twenty thousand artifacts relating to both the import and the manufacturing of refined earthenwares.

The analysis of ceramic artifacts from the 1992 field season listed roughly forty pottery types at Cain Hoy that could have been attributed to John Bartlam.² Several of the wares thought to be made by Bartlam so closely mirrored the imported wares that a distinction could scarcely be made. Excavations conducted in 1993 on the same location in Cain Hoy provided clearer evidence of Bartlam's success as a potter, but the number of wares firmly attributable to the potter was still unknown. The second archaeological season revealed nearly 17,000 ceramic sherds, including a number of types not previously found on eighteenth-century sites near Charleston.

The artifacts found during the second Cain Hoy excavation provided a larger sample, allowing a better definition of the parameters that could be used to identify Bartlam's production on the site. Subsequent analysis of Charleston's ceramics market, a review of refined earthenware production techniques, and historical and art historical information were all used to help distinguish the wares made locally by Bartlam from those that were imported from England and Continental Europe. Found in both excavation seasons were fragments of high-fired, blue-and-white decorated porcelainlike ceramics (fig. 1). The results of the research concerning Bartlam's "china" is summarized here.³

In the decades before the American Revolution, imported ceramics, especially British pottery, enjoyed a brisk market in the American colonies. Charleston residents were part of a broader commercial network that influenced the style, quantity, and cost of British goods imported into South Carolina's low country. Slow sales of rice and indigo could delay the arrival of the latest ceramics styles from Europe; by the same token, the return of a family member from England could infuse the port town with the most fashionable items. Strong social and political ties with England also helped to create an environment that was as much British as it was

Figure 1 Teabowl fragments, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



American, allowing—sometimes requiring—the upper class to keep up with the latest fashions as part of their status.⁴ Visitors reported that Charleston was the most elegant of the major cities in the colonies. The upper class dined graciously and their houses were fashionably decorated.

The ceramics used in Charleston were essentially the same as other cities, though distribution may have tended slightly toward the higher end of the economic spectrum. Charleston's economic system produced a class of consumer who could afford the imported Chinese porcelain, creamware, or salt-glazed stoneware that found its way into the city's harbors. While a direct correlation between imported ceramic types and Charleston's exports might not be achievable because of the paucity of detailed shipping records, it is evident from the other historical and archaeological data that business and familial connections, along with the dynamics of the Charleston and British export markets, produced a complex market of ceramics that enabled Charlestonians to furnish their tables with all manner of ceramics. It is into this economic balance that John Bartlam presented his wares.

In the bull market for imported goods, Bartlam may easily have envisioned a profitable venture in ceramics manufacturing in the South Carolina low country. Encouraged by reports of good clay and a solid customer base, Bartlam sailed to Charleston in 1763 with the purpose of establishing a pot works.⁵ In September 1765 an advertisement in the *South Carolina Gazette* announced the establishment of his manufactory near Charleston:

We are informed, that a gentlemen, lately from England, who has lately set up a pottery about 9 miles from this, has met with so good Clay for his purpose, that he scarce doubts of his ware's exceeding that of Delft: He proposes to make every kind of earthenware that is usually imported from England, and as it will be sold cheaper, he cannot fail to meet with encouragement.⁶

John Bartlam had been working in the Staffordshire potteries for roughly twelve years before immigrating to Charleston.⁷ His pottery manufactory was located in St. Thomas Parish at a settlement known in the eighteenth century as “Cain Hoy,” on the north bank of the Wando River, nine miles north of Charleston. The Cain Hoy district had a reputation for good clay sources, and had a well-established brick-making industry.⁸ At least five brickyards were in existence by the 1760s. The availability of local resources, the easy access to a navigable river, and a ready supply of bricks needed for the pottery ovens made Cain Hoy and its surroundings an excellent choice for the pot works.

As evidenced by advertisements in the *South Carolina Gazette*, John Bartlam began marketing his wares two years after his initial voyage to Carolina.⁹ At that same time, according to a letter from Josiah Wedgwood to Sir William Meredith of Liverpool, Bartlam was also soliciting help from workers in England who wished to go to Carolina.¹⁰ By 1769 he was able to mortgage five hundred dozen pieces of earthenware and was advertising for more help at his Cain Hoy pottery manufactory.¹¹ Archival evidence points to a potter who was enjoying at least moderate success and whose presence was known in the Charleston marketplace.

Archaeological data provide a similar view to Bartlam’s success as a potter. The Cain Hoy assemblage revealed a potter who was making a wide range of ceramic types, including those that might appeal to a wealthy plantation class. South employed at least three types of evidence in identifying possible Bartlam wares: the existence of bisque sherds; the presence of kiln waster materials; and the discovery of unique pottery types on the site, possibly made from local materials.

Relying on these criteria, South attributed to John Bartlam a group of blue-and-white high-fired vessels similar in hardness and whiteness to those being made in porcelain manufactories in England. The identifiable forms included teabowls, saucers, and punch bowls (figs. 2, 3).

Between 1993 and 2001, extensive documentary research was completed on the eighteenth-century Charleston ceramics trade. In 2002 a new analysis of Bartlam wares was conducted.¹² Reported here were several high-fired, thin-walled vessels with porcelainlike clay bodies. Also known as

Figure 2 Saucer fragment, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



Figure 3 Bowl fragments, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



“Bartlam’s China ware,” these beautifully crafted wares have a thin, deftly turned white clay body hand-painted with designs in cobalt blue. The archaeological specimens of this ware have a brownish patina similar in nature to archaeological examples (ca. 1760) recovered at porcelain manufacturing sites in Lowestoft. These wares exhibit the same brown patina after excavation which, when removed, reveal the same porous surface and white body found in Cain Hoy samples.¹³

In addition to his knowledge of the properties of making a porcelain body, Bartlam needed the artistic talents of a skilled decorator. The china wares had a unique decoration in blue underglaze designs that were hand painted, sometimes crudely. One of the repeated designs, affectionately dubbed “Bartlam on the Wando,” was used on many of the chinaware teacups. In the traditional Chinese style, it depicts a large house and a sailing ship along a coastal landscape. The pattern is identical across all of the examples, suggesting the decorating of sets of these tea wares. Floral motifs as well as typical Chinese landscape designs were found on the wares (figs. 4, 5). One design, occurring in the center of several teabowls, is particularly fascinating, as it not only replicates the familiar “island” motif of Chinese porcelain but also sports a tiny palmetto tree, native to the South Carolina low country (figs. 6, 7). This pattern has not been found in other collections of English or Chinese porcelain.

Figure 4 Saucer fragments, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy,

South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



Figure 5 Bowl fragments, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



Figure 6 Teabowl fragment, John Bartlam, Cain Hoy, South Carolina, 1765–1770. Soft-paste porcelain. (Courtesy, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology; photo, Gavin Ashworth.)



Figure 7 Detail from the teabowl fragment illustrated in fig. 6.

While the full range of John Bartlam's work might not yet be revealed, the "china" wares found at Cain Hoy are clearly important American products. John Bartlam was capable of producing fine ceramics; his wares demonstrate a skill rivaled only in his native Staffordshire and, as well, prove that his soft-paste porcelain predates that of the American China Manufactory in Philadelphia. With any luck, the information presented here will enable more of Bartlam's "china" to be sought out across archaeological sites in the Carolinas with a keener eye and a greater appreciation.

1. Bradford L. Rauschenberg, "John Bartlam, Who Established 'new Pottworks in South Carolina' and Became the First Successful Creamware Potter in America," *Journal of Early Southern Decorative Arts* 17, no. 2 (1991): 1–66.
2. Stanley South, *The Search for John Bartlam at Cain Hoy: American's First Creamware Potter*, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Research Manuscript Series 219 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 1993), p. 35.
3. Excerpted from Lisa R. Hudgins, "Ceramics Artifacts at Cain Hoy: Taking a Second Look," in Stanley A. South, *John Bartlam: Staffordshire in Carolina*, South Carolina Institute of Archaeology and Anthropology Research Manuscript Series 231 (Columbia: University of South Carolina, 2004), pp. 209–32.
4. Louis B. Wright, *The Cultural Life of the American Colonies, 1607–1763* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 19.
5. Rauschenberg, "John Bartlam, Who Established 'new Pottworks in South Carolina,'" p. 3.
6. *South Carolina Gazette*, September 28, 1765.
7. Rauschenberg, "John Bartlam, Who Established 'new Pottworks in South Carolina,'" pp. 2–11; *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, May 16, 1769.
8. Margaret Babcock Meriwether, *Notes on Ceramics Interests in South Carolina* (South Carolina Library, ca. 1959); Lucy B. Wayne, "Burning Bricks: A Study of a Lowcountry Industry" (Ph.D. diss., Department of History, University of Florida, Gainesville, 1992).
9. *South Carolina Gazette*, September 28, 1765.
10. Ann Finer and George Savage, eds. *The Selected Letters of Josiah Wedgwood* (London: Cory, Adams & Mackay, 1965), pp. 28–29.
11. South Carolina Archives, Mortgages, April 26, 1768, 3A, p. 343; *South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, June 6, 1769.
12. See Hudgins, "Ceramics Artifacts at Cain Hoy."
13. Geoffrey A. Godden, *The Illustrated Guide to Lowestoft Porcelain* (New York: Praeger, 1969).