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Staffordshire Pottery in the Carolinas Volume Published

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My interest in the search, in the Carolinas, for America's first Staffordshire-type creamware pottery, began with my dig at Bethabara, North Carolina, in 1966. Later, eight feet deep in the earth, I found the waster dump of a pottery shop once operated by Rudolph Christ from 1786 to 1788 (South 1999). There I found polychrome, tortoiseshell ware unlike the wheel-thrown pottery made by Gottfried Aust (whose waster dump I also found), from whom Rudolph learned to be a potter. The tortoiseshell ware I found was on Royal pattern plates, dramatically differing from that made there by Aust, who had called Rudolph, "a stupid ass." Ass or not, Rudolph Christ made some beautiful pottery in the Staffordshire tradition. How did he learn how to do that?

Therein lies a tale and the connection to Staffordshire potter, John Bartlam, who operated a pottery manufactory at "Cain Hoy," now Cainboy, South Carolina, from 1765 to 1770. When Bartlam's venture at Cain Hoy failed, he employed William Ellis as his foreman at a pottery-making venture he operated in Camden, South Carolina. When that also failed in 1773 (apparently Bartlam was a better potter than a manager), William Ellis was traveling toward Charleston, when he met Moravian travelers returning from there, after they had sold wagon loads of Aust's wheel-thrown pottery. They stopped and talked awhile, and after Ellis heard stories about the success of Aust's pottery shop in Salem, North Carolina, in the Carolina backcountry, he decided to accompany the Moravians. Perhaps he could teach Aust how to make the Staffordshire-type pottery and white stoneware made on molds, rather than that thrown on the wheel. However, when he arrived in Salem, he found that Aust had no interest in changing the way he had learned to make pottery decades before under Andreas Dober, in Herrnhut, Germany. Aust's apprentice, Rudolph Christ, however, was interested, and learned his lesson well. Ellis, after five months of instructing Rudolph on how to make tortoiseshell and white salt-glazed stoneware, found the strict Moravian way to narrow for his taste and moved on to Virginia.

Years later, Rudolph developed a strong desire to break away from the overbearing hold Aust had over him, and saw his ability to make Staffordshire-type pottery as an opportunity to escape, and become a potter on his own hook. He appealed to the church authorities, which controlled the Salem and Bethabara communities, to allow him to open his own pottery shop. Aust strongly objected, so Rudolph had to continue to work for the cantankerous Aust. Three years went by, and the friction with Aust increased. To get away, Rudolph again applied to be allowed to open his own shop specializing in the Staffordshire pottery.

This time the church agreed, provided he would open it in Bethabara (near where Aust had opened his shop shortly after he arrived in 1755), and finally, on February 10, 1786, Brother and Mrs. Christ moved to Bethabara. It was in the waster dump from Christ's Bethabara shop, where I found the Royal pattern tortoiseshell ware wasters, and revealed to the world the excellence of this master potter, maker of "the fine pottery," in the Staffordshire tradition.

When Aust died of a cancer on his nose, Christ became the master potter for Salem and moved back there to continue to make the Staffordshire-tradition pottery. When I dug there, I found a pit filled with his wasters. I backtracked down the trail then, from Christ's waster dump in Bethabara, to his waster dump in Old Salem, and finally, much later, to John Bartlam's Cainboy Staffordshire pottery shop where the Staffordshire in Carolina story had begun.

Brad Rauschenberg was my assistant in Bethabara, and we were both bit by the bug to learn all we could as we backtracked down that Staffordshire trail, from Christ to Ellis. The final goal, we knew, was to find the site where Staffordshire pottery first began in America, with Bartlam at Cainboy. We both looked
forward to the day when Bartlam's waster dump would also be found. After I came to South Carolina and began seeing "Carolina creamware" on archaeological sites, I recognized the Staffordshire influence and knew Bartlam was likely responsible.

Brad and I were excited when we learned that George Terry had found some of Bartlam's pottery fragments at Cainhoy, for he, too, was interested in what he had learned from documentation about Bartlam's operation there. Decades later, Brad summarized what the documents had to say in a major article (Rauschenberg 1991). The trail to Bartlam was getting shorter.

When we learned, that the site George Terry had found at Cainhoy was to be sold for development, Brad and I became concerned. Brad obtained private funding for a first expedition, at which time I was assisted by Carl Steen. Later, I received a grant from the South Carolina Department of Archives and History for a second dig, when I was assisted by Jim Legg. The Bartlam trail to Staffordshire in Carolina was getting shorter. We found many wonderful pieces of Bartlam's pottery and the report on the first dig was published (South 1993). Because of the popularity of the subject, it soon sold out.

On the second dig, we discovered a well hole in the area where Bartlam's pottery fragments had clustered. This abandoned well hole had been used as a waster dump for many wonderful pieces of Bartlam's broken pottery vessels. With this discovery, we had reached the pot of gold at the end of the quarter-century long rainbow research trail from Bethabara, to Old Salem, to Cainhoy!

Now, thanks to a donation to my Historical Archaeology Research Fund by Frank Horton, through the efforts of Brad Rauschenberg, the final report on both seasons of archaeological research at Cainhoy has been published as "John Bartlam: Staffordshire in Carolina" (South 2004). It contains 283 pages and over 60 color photographs. It is available for $40.

References Cited

Rauschenberg, Bradford L.


To Order John Bartlam: Staffordshire in Carolina:

Make Check Payable to: U.S.C. Educational Foundation, and earmark for the Historical Archaeology Research Fund (A31059)

Cost: $40.00 (Includes Postage/Handling)

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