

# THE FULHAM POTTERY

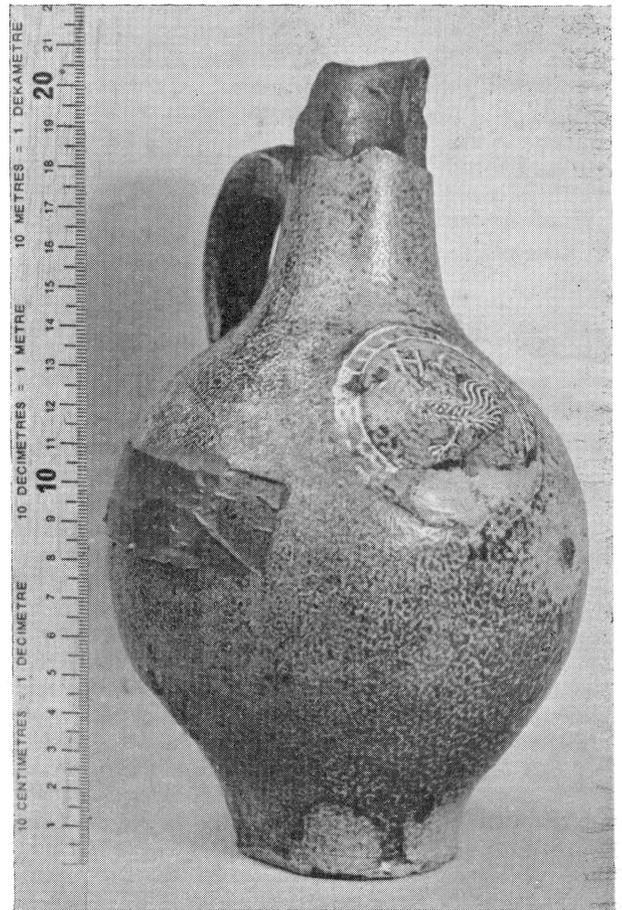
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DENNIS HASELGROVE

THE PROPOSAL, announced last autumn, to develop the Fulham Pottery site aroused much interest and concern because of the Pottery's original link with John Dwight and its continuous activity for almost 300 years. Dwight established his pottery in about 1672, and owned and operated it until his death in 1703. He was not only the founder of the English stoneware tradition, which was maintained by his family and successors at Fulham and elsewhere, but also came near to success in the making of porcelain. Thus the site, believed now to be the oldest surviving English pottery, though production finally ceased about 15 years ago, must be regarded as one of major national importance.

Preservation of the Pottery buildings has been urged. This would retain the plan of a not untypical 19th century pottery, which in its heyday employed as many as 200 people, but unfortunately, due to subsequent use of most of the premises for other purposes, little now survives of the Pottery equipment. Indeed, as they now stand, the buildings have little interest and are in poor condition. Pending a decision by the authorities concerned, which is still awaited at the time of writing, it was concluded that a survey and the work of making a photographic record and inventory should proceed urgently. Although the premises continue in active use for the sale of potters' clay and other requisites, the co-operation of the owners, the Fulham Pottery and Cheavin Filter Company, and the recent establishment by Fulham History Society and Hammersmith Local History Group of an archaeological section, made it possible to begin work almost immediately. Areas had also to be cleared so that excavation could start early in April. The purpose of this note is to record briefly the work already done and now in progress, and in doing so, to acknowledge the hard and competent work of a steadily increasing number of members of the archaeological section.

From the survey, and the recollections of people who have been associated with the Pottery, information has been gained about activities in the present century. Stoneware production, formerly on a very large scale, finally ceased about 1929, but examples have been found of many types of stoneware products; few bear a Fulham mark, and since a retail business was continued, part of the surviving stock was pro-

bably made elsewhere. Particularly interesting are examples of domestic drinking-water filters made in stoneware, some of them decorated; these have been a major part of the Pottery's business since it was taken over by the Cheavin family in 1889, and the latest types continue to be exported all over the world, though for many years only assembly has been carried out at Fulham. The final phase of pottery production was between 1935 and 1955, when differ-



A bellarmine c. 1700 bearing the medallion of the Cock Inn at Temple Bar.

(Photo: Eric Gowland)

ent styles of exotic flower vases and statuettes were made under the influence of Constance Spry and other artists. Examples of these and many of the actual moulds also survive. For this phase of activity, two rectangular coal-fired kilns were built, about 1939 and 1946, and were probably the last kilns of their kind in London. Their ground plan has been recovered in the initial excavations, and photographs also exist. Another relic is a room equipped as a potter's workshop with a wheel of a type made about 50 years ago. This was used by visiting artists, but had apparently been unused since about 1960, with vessels still on the shelves awaiting firing, presumably in the electric kilns which had then been installed.

Information about earlier phases of the Pottery's activity has had to be gleaned from rather meagre visual and documentary evidence, and it is hoped to add to it considerably by excavation. The present buildings seem all to date from various periods in the 19th century. Some of them formerly housed circular bottle-type kilns, of which before World War I there were at least 9, and at times possibly 10 or 11, in use. Of these only one still survives, gutted and much repaired and stripped of a more recent interior kiln which it formerly housed. Originally it appears to have been a salt glaze kiln of the 18th or early 19th century, built earlier than the building in which it is housed; it has been noted that the upper part of the brickwork bears two sets of carved initials with the dates 1843 and 1894. It is proposed to preserve it in the new development. The only other surviving structural feature of particular note is a wall some 6ft. high, now fully exposed, which is made entirely of firebrick and other kiln material and from the rough form of its construction seems likely to date from about the early 19th century.

The present area of the Pottery is about  $\frac{1}{3}$  acre, and so far only a limited part has been available for excavations. The present site, moreover, covers only about half of the area likely to have been owned by Dwight in the 17th century. His house, which he was occupying in 1674, adjoined the Pottery and faced the village street, now the High Street; it, or its successor, remained in the ownership of Dwight's family until it and the Pottery were sold in the 1860s. John Rocque's map, which was surveyed in 1741-45 and is the earliest large-scale map of the area, shows the house and a double range of buildings enclosing a yard on the present site adjoining Burlington Road, much as at present. But the yard was then narrower, and its entrance from what is now the New King's Road was further to the south, since there has been progressive encroachment on the Pottery site to ease what was formerly a right-angled turn into Burlington Road. On the other hand, the Pottery seems at

no time to have extended north of the present boundary. Between the house and the present Pottery site there was a garden or other open space, now largely occupied by a very large building which was built in 1864-65 to house four new kilns by C. I. C. Bailey, who had taken over the Pottery from the executors of the last owner descended from Dwight. This building is now in use mainly as a motor workshop. The private house, then known as Linden House, was sold in the 1880s.

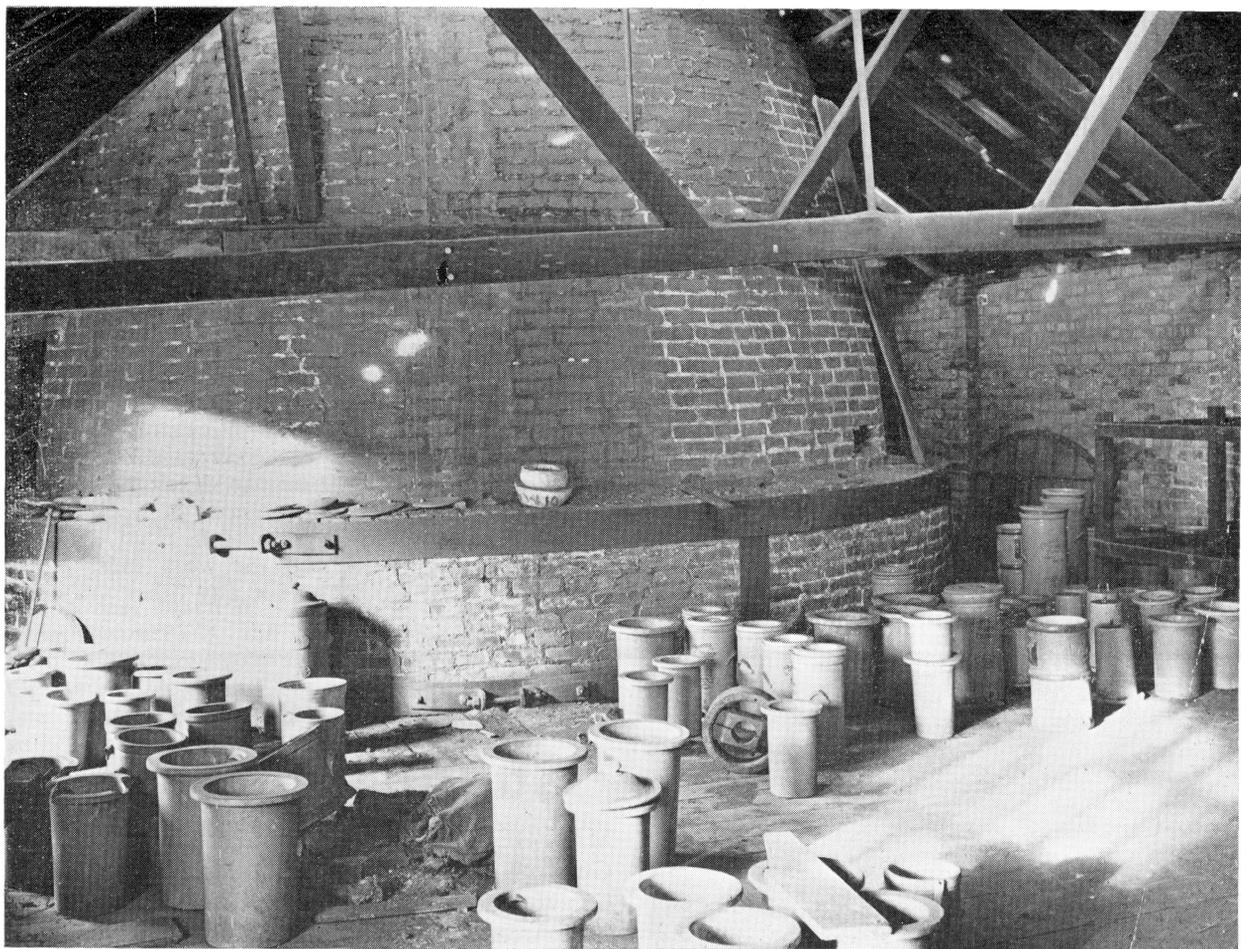
There are accounts of notable discoveries previously made on the Pottery site. During the rebuilding work in 1864-65 a collection of bellarmines and alepots of Dwight's time was found in what was described to Lady Charlotte Schreiber as "a closed chamber arched . . ." Since the new building work was on the west side of the yard the discovery was probably there. Lady Charlotte goes on to refer to the finding of "several metal stamps for the applied decoration" in a small earthen pot, which were placed in the British Museum, and she herself discovered in a cupboard two of Dwight's personal notebooks, which contained some of his recipes and details of sums of money which from time to time he hid for safety.<sup>1</sup> Notable portrait busts, statuettes and other pieces were kept by Dwight's family, and are now in the national museums, and there was also a family tradition that Dwight had finally buried his designs and tools in the Pottery. More recently, in 1948, a practically intact bellarmine of about 1700 bearing a medallion of the Cock Inn at Temple Bar was found in digging a drainage trench in the yard. This was apparently not far from the only well known to exist on the site; a single well which supplied both the house and the Pottery is referred to in a survey and description of the premises which was made in 1865.<sup>2</sup> Pottery sherds are also said to have been noted when mains were being laid outside the premises in New King's Road. Thus the whole of the site, including the parts not affected by the proposed development or at present in accessible, may offer the possibility of highly important finds.

Although the areas so far available for excavation are restricted, permission was fortunately given to excavate two areas which it was considered particularly important to investigate and which should be significant in relation to the earliest building layout. These are the rear (north end) of the yard and the interior of the north end of the Burlington Road range of buildings. Both have involved the breaking of modern concrete, and in the Burlington Road building the trenches have necessarily to be small; these were initially 6ft. by 4ft., sited in relation to a grid of 8ft. squares which has been established for the whole of the site.

At the rear of the yard initial work was limited

1. Lady Charlotte Schreiber *Note Book*, January, 1870.

2. Ms. in London Borough of Hammersmith Libraries, Archives Collection.



The lower part of the only surviving circular bottle-type kiln. In the foreground are various water filters.

(Photo: Eric Gowland)

to uncovering the foundations of the two modern kilns already referred to and parts of another, which is probably one of two built about 1880 and in use until the 1920s. However, there are already indications of the existence of other kilns. The intention in this area, because of the urgency, it to trench mechanically across the whole site from east to west to provide a basis for more detailed excavation.

In the Burlington Road building, where 8 cuttings were made initially, the first results have been extremely encouraging. Part of a brick floor and doorway of an early building preceding the present one have been uncovered, together with a complex of postholes in the sandy subsoil and a large quantity of salt glaze stoneware and kiln furniture deposited in the foundation trench of the associated wall of the building. Although there has been disturbance, material in the lower levels, here and in the adjacent trench, is of the period of Dwight's own activity and includes large sections of a number of stoneware

bottles, examples of medallions, including two bearing the "C.R." monogram, small pieces of thin porcellanous ware in bright colours, deposits of ball clay and the bowl of a late 17th century tobacco pipe. A later deposit in the same area was of a large number of intact and broken stoneware ink bottles with the "Bailey, Fulham" mark which places them in the period 1864-89.

Immediately south of this area a large deposit has been revealed of clean and densely compacted sand lying above the undisturbed natural sand of the district and containing only a few pieces of tile, some possibly of 18th century date. A provisional view is that this may have been fill imported to provide a foundation after, perhaps, removal of a kiln, but this is speculative. In adjacent trenches further south the foundations of a circular kiln have been uncovered in a position where the existence of a kiln has not been documented, together with the first indications of the foundations of another kiln known to have

existed. The dating evidence is at present inconclusive, but quantities of early 19th century stoneware sherds are everywhere evident.

Further work in the Burlington Road range will involve investigation of the sites of the two kilns which are known to have flanked the surviving example until the 1930s. As soon as conditions permit the excavations will also be extended to other areas of the Pottery. The final stage will be observation during the demolition of buildings and making of new foundations. Meanwhile, the above initial impressions, based on work up to the third week of April, are necessarily tentative, and further progress must be awaited.

In conclusion, it should be pointed out that the project and its circumstances raised a number of problems basic to present day thinking about priorities. In the first place there have been the considerations for and against the permanent preservation of the surviving buildings, apart from the remaining kiln. Secondly, it had to be decided how far effort should be devoted to recording the surviving buildings and to research into the Pottery's

activities in more recent times, compared with problems which are already of great historical and artistic interest. The decision, rightly or wrongly, has been that the 300 years of existence of the Fulham Pottery and its fortunes are significant as a whole, and that all phases of the Pottery's history, from the achievements of its distinguished founder to its activities and final demise as a working pottery during the present century, have an equal claim to rescue from oblivion. This decision led, in turn, to a decision on the objectives and method of excavation. The history of the Pottery might well suggest that priority should be given to urgent search for and recovery of "Museum" pieces, of which admittedly there are all too few of certain Fulham provenance. However, the most important opportunity and priority on a site such as this is to gain knowledge, which is largely lacking, on the developments and changes in techniques and methods of work during all phases of the Pottery's existence from Dwight's time onwards. To this end the work must be as meticulous as it would be for any other archaeological site.



## New Director at Guildhall Museum

MAX HEBDITCH, at 33, is the new Director of the Guildhall Museum. He was a contemporary of Barry Cunliffe and Martin Biddle at Cambridge, where he read Archaeology and Anthropology. He spent three and a half years as Field Officer at Leicester Museum, an experience which will undoubtedly stand him in good stead as he grapples with the problems of rescue work in the City.

In 1965 he took up the post of Assistant Curator in Archaeology at Bristol Museum and four years later he became Curator in Agricultural and Social History. Having been Secretary of the Bristol Archaeological Research Group, he is able to appreciate fully the assistance which amateurs are able to give.

Max Hebditch is daunted neither by the untidy sprawl of the museum's current accommodation nor by the prospect in three and a half years time of a gradual disappearance of exhibits as the new Museum of London takes shape. He feels that the Guildhall Museum can provide a valuable contribution to the City by making people aware of their past environment. As a means of arousing further interest he hopes shortly to be able to clear a space in the museum where temporary exhibitions can be held.