

The Hanging Garden of Beddington

CLIVE ORTON

CAREW MANOR at Beddington, Surrey, is a former country house which was converted into an orphanage in 1865 and is now used as a special school by the London Borough of Sutton. The building contains a hall with a hammer beam roof of c 1500 which was described in a recent issue¹.

In 1983 contractors acting for the London Borough of Sutton demolished part of the former orphanage laundry, which was located on the north side of the house (TQ 2960 6534). The building's foundations had been subsiding, and as it was intended to reconstruct it, a deep trench was dug along the line of the walls to find a secure footing. The work was watched by members of the Carew Manor Group.

The trench reached a depth of about 2m (6½ft). The lowest layer was of green silty sand containing many fine roots. It is probably natural, being the base of the Thanet Sand. It was overlaid by oily smelly flint gravel which was in turn covered by dark smelly silt. These were interpreted as the bed of a former watercourse which probably ran north-south up to the north side of the house. The watercourse was subsequently drained and a brick culvert 0.47m (18½in) wide and about 0.40-0.42m (16in) high internally was laid along its bed. The culvert was covered by several layers of earth, followed by layers

of earth and demolition debris. There were very few stratified finds, but as none from the watercourse silt or the lower layers of the earth fill are later than the first half of the 18th century, the watercourse was probably filled in around this date.

The sherd described below was found by workmen, so its exact location in the stratification is uncertain. It certainly came from the lower parts of the trench, probably from the silt or gravel of the watercourse.

Description

The sherd comes from the rim and wall of a large wheel-thrown vessel, about 11in (280mm) in diameter (Fig. 1). The fabric is fairly hard and pinkish-yellow in colour, with moderate inclusions of medium sand and occasional pieces of flint, red iron ore and yellow grog or badly wedged clay. The fracture has a laminar appearance. The exterior has a white tin glaze which has flaked badly, especially on the lower part of the body. The upper surface of the rim, and the interior, do not retain any glaze, but may originally have been glazed. A rectangular flat handle or lug projects from the side of the vessel, about 2in (50mm) below the rim. Also at this height a broad cordon runs around the body. The handle is pierced by a vertical hole about ¾in (20mm) out from the body.

The exterior is decorated in blue, yellow and green, which have smudged and run in places. The upper zone, defined by pairs of horizontal blue lines

1. B. Weston, D. Cluett and J. Phillips, 'Carew Manor, Beddington: new light on the house and its garden', *London Archaeol* 4, no. 9 (1982) 227-33.

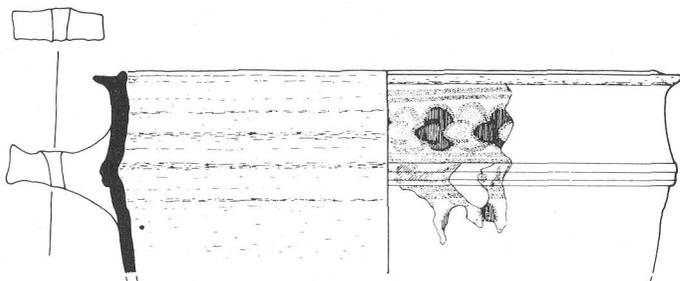
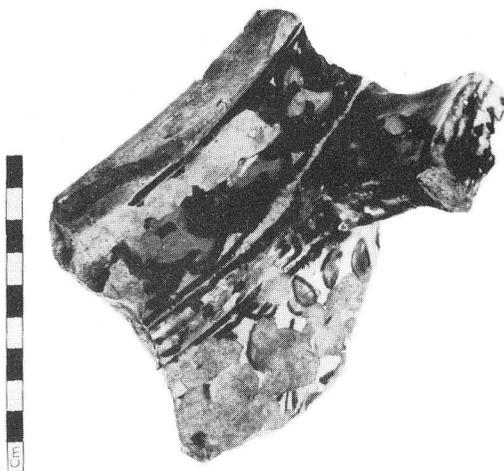


Fig. 1: the sherd from Carew Manor, Beddington. Scale of the drawing is ¼.
(Photo: Institute of Archaeology)



below the rim and above the cordon, has an overlapping pattern of alternate blue and yellow shapes (three-petalled flowers?), outlined in blue. The lower zone, defined at its upper edge by another pair of blue lines (the lower edge of the zone is missing) has apparently a pattern of yellow and green shapes (leaves? petals?) outlined in blue, but too much glaze has flaked off for a large-scale design to be apparent. the cordon has spots of blue and green decoration, while the handle is entirely blue except for the end, which had a row of blue dots between two pairs of blue lines.

No parallel for the form, and no exact parallel for the decoration, have yet been located in the archaeological literature. In general terms, however, the style of decoration and the colours used can be matched on tinglazed ware from the Low Countries, dated c 1550-1620. For example, the possible flowers in the upper zone are similar to those on South Netherlands majolica of this date², while the technique of outlining coloured shapes (leaves and petals) in blue is well known on the 'tulip chargers' of the first half of the 17th century³.

Examination of the form gives some clues to the vessel's function. The hole in the handle indicates that the vessel was used in a suspended position, and points to the need for multiple handles, three being the most likely number. The most common 'suspended' vessels in the 16th century are the 'cauldron' cooking pots, of Dutch origin but produced in the London area from the late 15th century onwards⁴. However, it is extremely unlikely that this vessel was used for cooking, because (i) it shows no signs of burning, (ii) tin-glazed ware is inherently unsuitable for this purpose, and no cooking pots in this ware have been identified. The lack of glaze on the interior suggests that either it was never glazed, and therefore not meant to be seen, or all the glaze had flaked off this surface. Either way, it seems likely that the interior was permanently covered. The use of this vessel as a permanently full, suspended container can best be explained by describing it as a hanging plant pot or 'flower basket'. A reconstruction is shown as Fig. 2. If the description of the decoration is correct, it would be appropriate for this function, although of course it also occurs on other forms.

Many 17th century pottery forms can be paralleled in paintings of the Dutch *genre* school. An extensive but not exhaustive search of the works of these

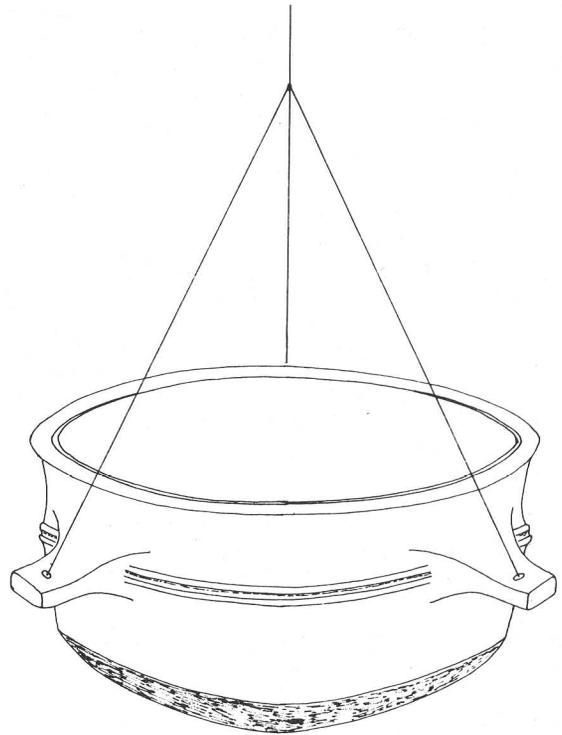


Fig. 2: reconstruction of the vessel as a hanging bowl.

artists, at the Witt Library of the Courtauld Institute, has failed to reveal any illustration of this form of vessel. Since both garden furniture – flower pots and jardinières – and hanging objects – lanterns, candelabra, birdcages, frying pans, griddles, etc. – are illustrated, the lack of hanging bowls probably reflects the rarity of this form rather than artistic convention.

The dating of the vessel places it in the occupancy of Sir Francis Carew (1530-1611)⁵, who is known to have been an innovative gardener⁶, and who employed French gardeners⁷. It is very tempting to see a decorative hanging bowl as one element of his detailed planning of the house.

Acknowledgements

The sherd is now in possession of the Libraries and Arts Services of the London Borough of Sutton.

2. D. Korf, *Nederlandse majolica*, 1981, fig. 94, no.5.

3. *ibid.*, 231-7.

4. C. R. Orton, 'The excavation of a late medieval/transitional pottery kiln at Cheam, Surrey' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 73 (1982) 49-92; S. Nelson, 'A Group of Pottery Waster Material from Kingston', *London Archaeol* 4, no. 4 (1981) 96-102.

5. R. Michell, *The Carews of Beddington*, 1981.

6. *loc. cit.* fn. 1, 232.

7. Document in the Surrey Record Office; N. Burnett, *pers. comm.*

Books

Living with the Past, by David Baker (1983). 174pp, 76pl & figs., bibliog., index. £12.50 (hardback) or £8.95 (paperback) including postage from David Baker, 3 Oldway, Bletsoe, Bedford MK44 1QG.

WHEN THE COLLINS Archaeology series collapsed with only six of the projected 24 volumes published, several promising titles disappeared. Thanks to the determination of the author, who has acted as his own publisher, this one has emerged from limbo and I hope that others may be encouraged to do the same. But admiration or sympathy does not sell books, and the reader will want to know whether this do-it-yourself publication is worth buying.

First, I must say that the standard of presentation and production is no way inferior to that of a commercial publisher: it does not look like a 'home-made' book.

The title, *Living with the Past*, carries overtones of living with in-laws – a reluctant necessity, perhaps a burden, and definitely a mixed blessing – and raises the question 'do we need it?' ('it' being the historic environment, the book's subtitle). The author starts logically by examining what is meant by the historic environment (both rural and urban), sketches the development of ideas about it, since history is to some extent in the eye of the beholder. He points out that it is not a static idea: the frontier of the past is moving all the time, and even 1940s defences are now historic monuments.

The pivot of the book is perhaps Chapter 5 *Use and Misuse*: if the historic environment is useful (in the widest possible sense) we should be prepared to defend it against the various pressures outlined in the next two chapters, if not, we can let it decay without regret. In twenty pages we are taken through socio-psychological adjustment, education and academic research, tourism, job creation, treasure hunting and the lunatic fringe, and we are left to make up our minds on the case.

Later chapters deal with the complicated questions of the legal and organisational frameworks within which the historic environment can be pre-

served, recorded or destroyed. The final chapter discusses the priorities and choices that must be made in the preservation of the historic environment, given that total preservation is neither practically nor politically possible.

To cover such a wide field in a relatively short book is a considerable achievement, made possible by a 'tight' style and the ability not to waste words. Fast readers may find they have missed important points, and will have to back-track to retain the thread of the argument. The concentrated thought is lightened by the author's sense of humour: I shall beware of the 'curse of the sticky stones' in future (p.102). If you want to think seriously about what we are doing, or should be doing, in archaeological/historical research or conservation, then buy this book and read it. Slowly.

CLIVE ORTON

Hunting the Past, by L. B. Halstead. *Hamish Hamilton*. 208pp, many pl. and figs, bibliog., index. £10.95.

HUNTING THE PAST combines the results of investigations in geology, geomorphology and archaeology, and also explains how investigations in the field are carried out. The historical origins of geology and palaeontology are explained.

The book is divided into six chapters, each broadly based about a theme, and with each sub-divided into well illustrated 2-4 page sections. The scope of the book, in relation to the material of the past, is thus very large.

The first chapter *Reading the Past* takes the reader through the formation, destruction and redeposition of rocks and sediments by means of chemical and mechanical forces of erosion. The second chapter deals directly with the formation of fossils and fossil assemblages, with a valuable emphasis on the importance of the latter, a point with which archaeologists would agree. Man enters the scene in this chapter, in the section 'caves', but as a minor component of cave faunas. Most of the assemblages described are of 'natural' (i.e. non-human) origin.

(continued from page 415)

I am grateful to the Carew Manor Group for allowing me to draw and photograph the sherd, and for information about the circumstances of its finding. Mr Peter Albutt and the team from H. Turn-

bull & Co. have been extremely helpful to the Group, who would like to thank them for their continuing interest, and especially to Mr Reg Girdlestone who found the sherd. Dr. G. J. Dawson and colleagues in the Medieval Pottery Research Group gave valuable advice on its identification.