

A dated North Holland slipware bowl from Epsom

In 1978 No 6 South Street, Epsom, underwent such complete refurbishment that it was almost totally rebuilt. The building was a late Stuart structure of about 1680/90 that had been constructed on a site known as 'Shoulder of Mutton' Close at the west end of the High Street. This area is now known to have been the town centre of the later spa period for which Epsom was famed in the late 17th and early 18th centuries, the actual New Well being sited just to the rear.¹

No formal excavation was possible but during the reconstruction works the rear yard was cleared and Norman Nail recovered a number of sherds of pottery from the disturbed ground.

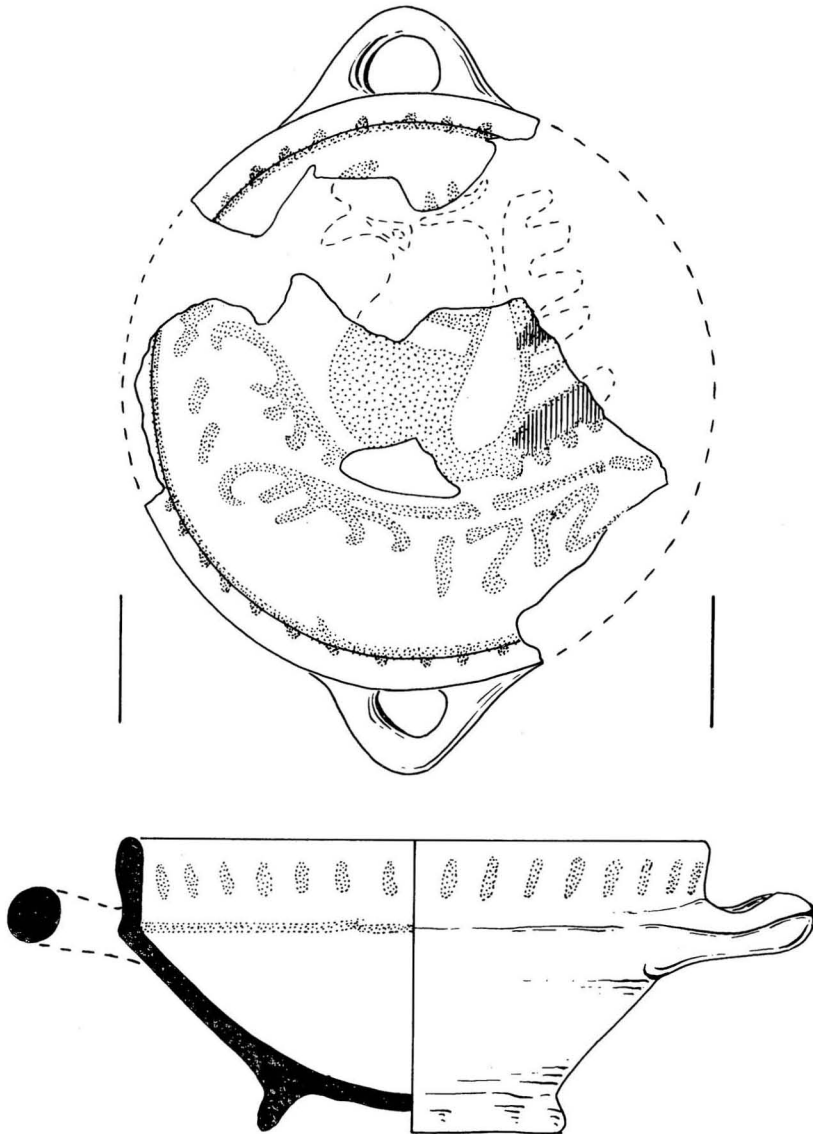


Fig 1. North Holland slipware bowl from Epsom (1:2)

Amongst them there were about seven sherds that joined together and which appeared to have come from a small pit just below the surface; no other material stratified with them, however, was recovered. The sherds form part of a small bowl (fig 1) described as follows:

Part of small, two-handled bowl in fine, sandy, even-fired red/brown fabric with a foot-ring base; a small hole, made before firing, pierces the rim by one handle. The decoration in white trailed-slip shows yellow under the glaze which covers the inner surface and extends over the vertical collar rim down to the handles on the outside. The interior shows a cockerel design with parts of the tail picked out in copper-green. By the feet of the cockerel the date '1712' survives.

The vessel is an example of North Holland slipware, a type increasingly recognised as an import to this country. The various forms, many of which bear dates, have been identified by J G Hurst and classed into six main groups dating between 1573–1711.² The 'cockerel dishes' form the latest group with dates in the later 17th century and in fact the latest dated example of North Holland slipware hitherto was a 'cockerel dish' of 1711 from London (Jewel Tower, Westminster). This new find from Epsom, therefore, extends the range, albeit only by one year, of known examples of this type of imported Dutch slipware.

Although excavated examples in this country are now more common than a few years ago, they still tend to be more prevalent in the larger towns, especially of eastern England, and such a vessel in Epsom goes some way to underline the popularity of Epsom Spa. From being in the mid-17th century a place where people stayed primarily to drink the waters, Epsom had by 1700 become one of the earliest spas with a developed entertainment side. So great was the growth of this spa industry in Epsom that in 1707 a local entrepreneur, Dr Livingstone, opened a New Well and the year 1712 must mark the peak of Epsom Spa's prosperity, although the Spa did not finally collapse until the 1740s. It is thus not surprising to find such an unusual import in the town at this period. The bowl will be deposited in Bourne Hall Museum, Ewell.

NOTES

- 1 Clark, F L, 1960 *The history of Epsom Spa*, *SyAC*, 57, 10. See also Lehmann, H L, 1985, *A description of the Epsom Well*, 1662, *SyAC*, 76, 77–9
- 2 Hurst, J G & Neal, D S, 1986 *Pottery produced and traded in North-west Europe*, *Rotterdam Papers*, 6, 163

S NELSON and N H NAIL