

Obituaries

RICHARD KILBURN 1937–1999



The death of Richard Kilburn on August 3rd 1999 represents a great loss to the world of scholarship.

As a young man, Richard obtained his first position with the shipping firm of Dodwell and had four months' preparatory training in London before leaving for Hong Kong. Fortunately he found lodgings with Gilbert Bradley, an important member of The English Ceramic Circle, who had a fine collection of Chelsea, Worcester and Derby porcelain. This was Richard's first taste of ceramics and he was very impressed. Hong Kong allowed him to expand this new interest, opening the door to a new world of collecting — Chinese blue and white porcelain.

The next 25 years of Richard's life were spent in the Far East, visiting Japan, Korea and Thailand on business. He became an enquiring collector and an active member of the Oriental Ceramic Society of Hong Kong. Always curious, his collecting went beyond an aesthetic appreciation; Richard also sought out the origins and social history of his collection by looking, buying and learning in the back

streets and markets as well as by visiting museums. On home leave he would visit Bluetts and Marchants who always helped young collectors, and they introduced him to private collections. By narrowing his field of study to 17th-century Transitional wares he was able to help produce the Oriental Society of Hong Kong's *Catalogue of Transitional Wares and their Forerunners* in 1981, writing the introduction to this important first analytical study of the subject.

Richard's work later took him to Burma where the old port of Ayuthia was being dredged. Every weekend he would visit the quayside and search the piles of artefacts, picking out and buying sherds of 14th- to 18th-century blue and white ceramics. These were Chinese export ceramics, including some coarsewares, but it was the styles of painting, the various marks, the motifs and the potting methods which intrigued him. These sherds, numbering 450, have now been placed in The Percival David Foundation, London University, as a study collection.

In 1988 Richard collaborated with Colin Sheaf in writing *The Hatcher Porcelain Cargoes*, marking an important step in the understanding and firmer dating of these underwater finds.

Once retired from business, Richard began to widen his horizons to include English and European ceramics. This led him to research the East India Company's trading archives, delving into port books, wills and inventories of great and humble families and of merchants themselves. He delighted in finding previously undiscovered information, in revealing ownership and acquisition. This resulted in Richard studying the way in which wares imported through London reached the provinces through a network of merchants; the research also included glass, tin-glazed ware and stoneware.

Richard was always generous with the fruits of his research, sharing not only with the Orientalists but also with Post-Medievalists and land and underwater archaeologists. He always found time to advise students and anyone who asked for his help, all the while writing articles and giving unforgettable lectures. He knew there was still a lot to be done and that his time was limited; he drove himself hard until his strength failed. His researches will not be lost: Colin Sheaf is finishing the book Richard was working on at his death and Cyril Beecher is busy sorting out the notes which will eventually become The Kilburn Archive.

Richard had a talent for stimulating and encouraging others to make new discoveries, a talent for searching and questioning. He pointed a way for all of us to follow, leaving a lasting legacy of the joy of discovering and sharing new information. His death is a great loss to everyone who knew this good and gentle man, both as a dear friend and as an enquiring scholar.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Beryl A. Joyce

DR BERNARD M. WATNEY
1922–1998

It is with sadness that we learned of the death, on 28th September 1998, of Dr Bernard Watney, at the age of 76. Dr Watney had a long and distinguished career in medicine and he was extremely active in his private life. He was an avid collector in many fields — corkscrews, beer bottles, wine labels, to name but a few — and an expert in most.

To the ceramics and archaeological communities, however, Dr Watney is best known for his special interest in English 18th-century porcelains. He was one of the great collectors in this field, and he became a leading authority and a prolific writer on the subject. Bernard Watney brought the best kind of connoisseurship to bear in his approach to the study of porcelains. His great passion for the material was tempered by a genuine wish to get at the facts behind their manufacture and to reveal to the world the history and development of the factories and their wares. In this he was assisted by a remarkable capacity for recognising similarities between wares, and a memory for the most minute details of vessels' forms and decoration. This, coupled with thorough research into the subject, enabled him to bring products together into factory groups. These groups are well-known and remain valid today, long after archaeological discoveries — such as at Vauxhall and Liverpool — provided definitive evidence for the products of the early factories. Watney's vast knowledge has brought the subject forward to a new era, one in which archaeologists and collectors can work together to produce major results.

Perhaps Watney's best known work has been the study of Longton Hall, which involved the identification of the factory and small-scale excavations in 1955. This work produced numerous porcelain sherds and related kiln material. His book *Longton Hall Porcelain* followed very shortly afterwards in 1957 and was unusual at this time for its inclusion of the results of the excavation. The book remains a standard work of reference and has not been superseded, despite more recent excavations on the site in 1970–71 and a wealth of new finds. It was fitting that Watney should be invited to write up the porcelain sherds from this later work and his excellent report was published in *Post-Medieval Archaeology* in 1993.

Watney's next major book was *English Blue and White Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century* (1963, revised 1973), but more recently he was immersed in bringing to light Joseph Wilson's porcelain factory at Limehouse, London. Considerable research went into the identification of this site, and when development threatened to destroy the site, Watney was a powerful advocate for an archaeological intervention in advance of this work. Excavations were carried out by the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology in 1990 and important material remains confirmed porcelain production on the site during the 1740s. Several hundred porcelain sherds were uncovered which conformed exactly to Watney's William Reid (Liverpool) group of porcelains. The group held together in the light of the Limehouse discoveries and the re-assigning of the group to Wilson was a simple matter. Once again Watney's uncanny abilities in this area were highlighted. The great interest in this project led to the speedy publication of the book *Limehouse Ware Revealed*, to which Watney was a major contributor, discussing the history of the factory, the wares and parallels for them. The latest situation regarding the attribution of the Liverpool groups of porcelain was clarified in Watney's last book *Liverpool Porcelain of the Eighteenth Century*, published in 1997.

Bernard Watney has many papers to his credit. He was a frequent contributor to magazines and journals until his death, and was always exploring new avenues. One of his major contributions has been his presidency of the English Ceramic Circle, from 1974 until his death. As President he was able to ensure that the group maintained high academic standards and continued to be regarded as the world's foremost ceramic study group. He was always encouraging to new collectors and archaeologists alike and was ever-generous with information, happy to share the knowledge accumulated over a lifetime. He was an inspiration to many and is sorely missed.

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- 1957, *Longton Hall Porcelain*, London: Faber & Faber.
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