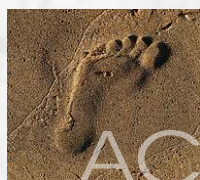


63 COWICK STREET, ST THOMAS, EXETER, DEVON: DRAFT PUBLICATION FOR THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE DEVON ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Prepared by:
Simon Hughes and John Allan

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AC archaeology

A PLATE WITH THE COAT OF ARMS OF THE COMPANY OF WEAVERS, TUCKERS AND SHEARMEN FROM 63 COWICK STREET, EXETER

By SIMON HUGHES and JOHN ALLAN

Archaeological monitoring and recording during groundworks at 63 Cowick Street, St Thomas, Exeter, Devon exposed a series of post-medieval features comprising rubbish pits, a cess pit, a well and a boundary wall; activity relating to the rear of former street frontage properties, of which one was the site of the Old Vicarage. A rare late 17th century delftware plate decorated with the coat of arms of the Exeter Incorporation of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen was recovered from one of the rubbish pits.

INTRODUCTION

Archaeological monitoring and recording carried out during construction groundworks as a condition of planning permission for a mixed residential and commercial development at 63 Cowick Street, St Thomas, Exeter, Devon (SX 9104 9170) was undertaken by AC archaeology between December 2017 and July 2018. The site is located towards the southwest end of Cowick Street and at the junction with Old Vicarage Road (Fig. 1). Prior to re-development a hand car wash business was operating on the site of a former petrol filling station.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND AND RESULTS OF THE ARCHAEOLOGICAL MONITORING

During the medieval and early post-medieval periods, the site lay outside of the focus of settlement along Cowick Street, which at that time appears to have extended between the Exe Bridge and the St Thomas parish church. The groundworks at 63 Cowick Street did however expose some limited evidence for medieval occupation in the form of a buried cultivation soil and a possible pit containing pottery dating from between the 10th and 15th centuries.

The Ordnance Survey surveyor's plan of 1801 and Hayman's Map of Exeter dated 1806 (Jenkins 1806) are the earliest detailed maps that extend this far into the city's suburbs and surrounding estates. On these, much of Cowick Street to the southwest of the church is depicted as having a low-density of buildings, while probable market gardens are shown as extending parallel on either side of the road. The maps depict some, now Grade-II listed, 18th century cottages to the west and the current vicarage to the east, annotated 'Parsonage House' on the 1806 map, which was built between 1801 and 1805. In addition to these, a building is also shown approximately on the current site.

By 1839, the St Thomas parish tithe map depicts this section of Cowick Street as having been largely infilled by this date, with terraced buildings lining most of the road frontage. On this, the site is shown as occupied by four properties, with ranges, outbuildings and garden plots extending to the rear. One of these properties is listed in the accompanying 1838 tithe apportionment as '*parish property*'. This building is subsequently annotated on the Ordnance Survey First-Edition map of 1888, as '*The Old Vicarage*' and therefore a likely predecessor to the current Vicarage to the northeast. By the 1936 edition, a property next door to the Old Vicarage is shown as having made way for the construction of Old Vicarage Road, which links to terraced streets to the rear. This development may also have coincided with the construction of a small petrol station on the site of the Old Vicarage, which by the 1960s and with the entire current site, was cleared for a larger petrol filling station, Speedway Garage, with associated forecourt and kiosk.

Although much of the street frontage had been disturbed as a result of former fuel tanks, evidence for the occupation of the site during the post-medieval period comprised rubbish pits, a cess pit and a well; all features relating to the rear of the former properties (the detailed report may be found elsewhere; Hughes 2018). While many of the features were of 19th century date, activity contemporary with the use of the property as the presumed vicarage was principally limited to two mid-18th century rubbish pits. These pits yielded an assemblage of domestic finds including 17th to 18th century pottery, vessel glass, clay tobacco pipe, animal bone and marine shells.

Most interesting within the assemblage was a late 17th century delftware plate decorated with the coat of arms of the Exeter Incorporation of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen; a guild of trades whose headquarters was housed in Tuckers Hall located on Fore Street, Exeter. This find is of importance, since delftware commissioned specifically for the Devon market is extremely rare. It is presently the only known example from an excavation in Devon. A single comparative example of a commissioned plate, which has survived above ground, is held by the Royal Albert Memorial

Museum, Exeter. This comprises a plate of Dutch delftware (probably made in Delft itself), decorated with floral decoration and bearing the date 10 April 1698. It also shows the arms of John Burrell, the apothecary who rose to be Mayor of Exeter in that year (for his mayoralty: Rowe and Cochlin 1964; for his profession: Newton 1984, 15). This was probably used in the context of his ceremonial duties at the Guildhall, the Mayoralty House, or his own home.

The recovery of such a plate with potential ceremonial associations from what would have been the rear of the contemporary vicarage, provides an interesting potential link between the parish and the guild of trades. The nature of this link, however, remains uncertain, since no known St Thomas parish church association or specific family connections between contemporary vicars could be established.

DISCUSSION

Eight sherds forming about 70% of the delftware plate were recovered (Figs 2 and 3). They have a typical pale yellow-cream delftware fabric without obvious inclusions and a thick white tin glaze on the front and back. The back is plain, apart from a scar near the rim resulting from a pin used to support the plate during firing; the front is painted in monochrome blue with a coat of arms in a cartouche. The profile of the plate is a common one in the last two decades of the 17th century (Archer and Morgan 1977, 127, form D; Archer 2013, 403, form G), except that it has an upturned bead on the rim. A date in the last quarter of the 17th century may be proposed; the form was popular in the 1680s (*ibid.*). In common with most of these armorial dishes, it is probable that the plate was made in one of the London factories.

The coat of arms shows the tools of the three trades: in the upper register a weaver's reed or sley between two burling irons (pairs of tweezers); in the lower section a tucker's teasel frame (a hand-held frame packed with teasel heads, used to raise the nap) above a shearman's pair of shears, flanked by two shuttles. The tools represented here were discussed by Eleanor Carus-Wilson, who illustrated teasel frames from Devon and France, and showed that the shears at the foot of the design were not simply sheep shears but the much larger and more valuable flat-ended shears used in the final stages of cloth-finishing (Carus-Wilson 1957, 110–16).

These arms were granted to the Company of Weavers, Tuckers (or Fullers) and Shearmen of Exeter by letters patent in 1564 (Youings 1968, 24, where it is noted that they had in fact been used before that date). The grant, which survives in the company records now held at the Devon Heritage

Centre, includes a detailed colour depiction of the crest (ECM 58/7/1/1; Fig. 3b). The arms also appear (slightly modified and with modern colour) in the early 17th-century panelling which lines the walls of the company's hall in Fore Street, and among the arms of the guilds at Exeter Guildhall (Figs 3c-d).

A wide range of English delftware vessels were decorated with the arms of companies; they included cups, wine bottles, bowls, jugs, goblets, ointment pots, pill slabs and dishes (e.g., Sotheby's 1981, 64; Britton 1987, 114, 125, 134; Dawson 2010, 108–15, 124–7, 130–1, 146–7, 155; Archer 2013, 94–5, 170). Most were commissioned by the companies of the City of London – the coopers, drapers, apothecaries and pewterers, for example.

The purpose of these vessels is not entirely clear. It seems reasonable to presume that they were commissioned specifically by members of the companies represented – perhaps for ceremonial occasions at their guild halls – and this conclusion is strengthened by the identification of the initials on some examples with leading members of the companies depicted (Archer 2013, 95, 170). It is likely, then, that this plate was commissioned for use in the company's premises at Tuckers' Hall, Fore Street, or in the household of a leading member of the company. However, some finds do not appear to be explicable in this way; for example, fragments of the pill slabs showing the arms of the London Apothecaries have been excavated in Virginia and Pennsylvania, North America, where they cannot have represented a member of the company; in that instance they may have served more generally as shop signs (Lange 2001, 125).

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Fig 1: The location of site is shown to the west of the current vicarage and parish church, with at the west end of Cowick Street a group of 18th century cottages.

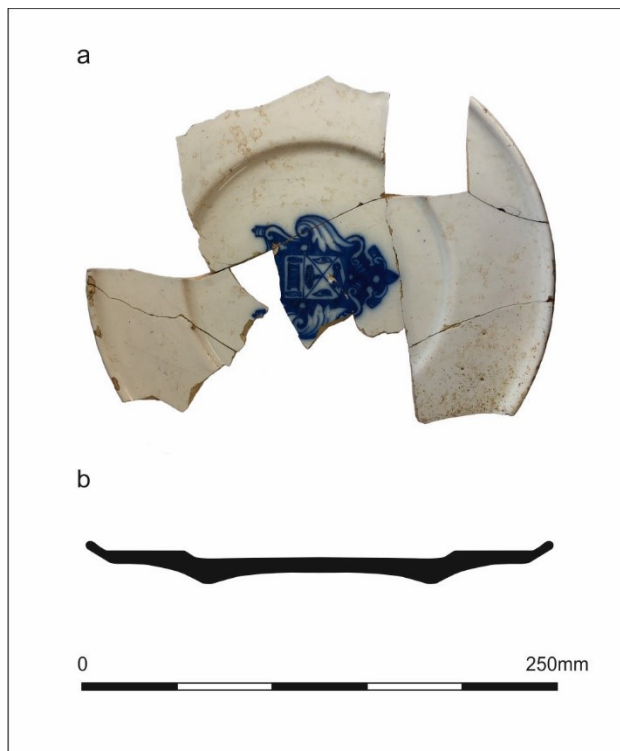


Fig 2: (a) Top view and (b) section of the delftware plate. Scale 1:4.

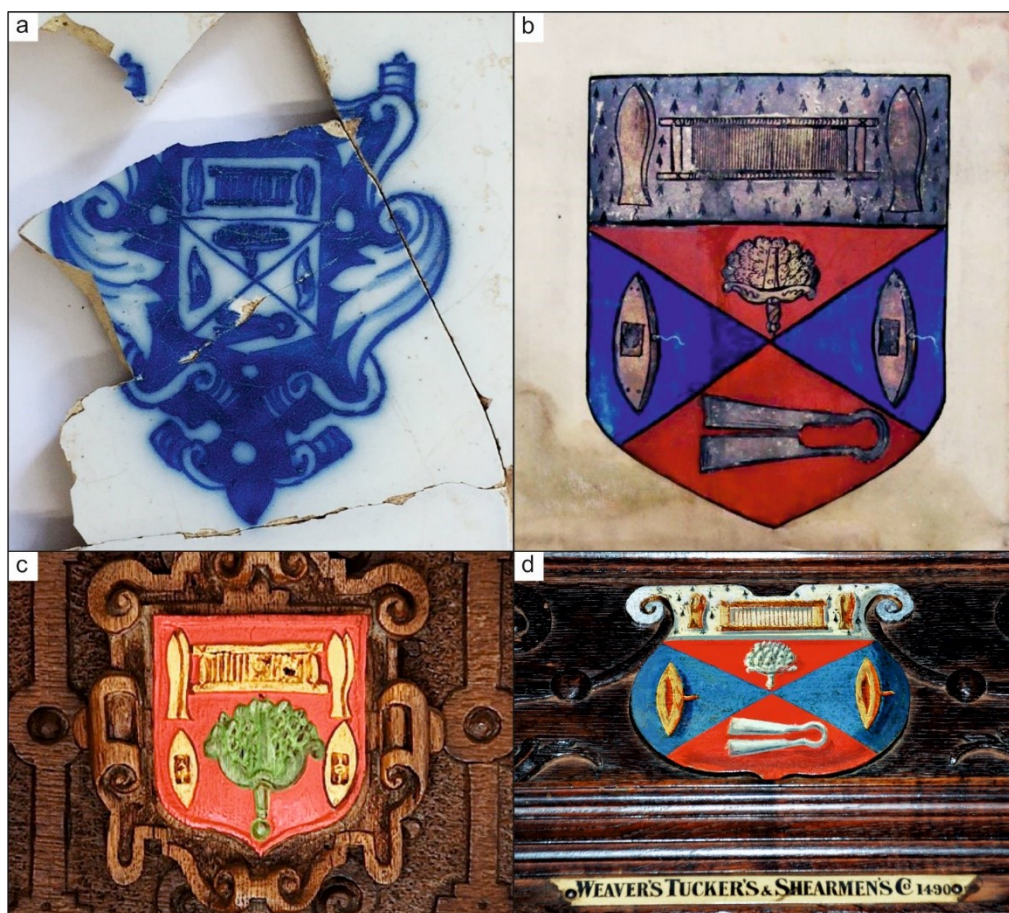


Fig 3: (a) Detail showing the coat of arms; (b) The arms of the Incorporation of Weavers, Tuckers and Shearmen as depicted on the grant to the company of 1564 (*courtesy of the Incorporation of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen*); (c) As shown in the early 17th-century panelling of the company hall in Fore Street; (d) As shown at Exeter Guildhall.

Devon Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Unit 4, Halthaies Workshops
Bradninch
Nr Exeter
Devon
EX5 4LQ

Telephone: 01392 882410

Wiltshire Office

AC archaeology Ltd
Manor Farm Stables
Chicklade
Hindon
Nr Salisbury
Wiltshire
SP3 5SU

Telephone: 01747 820581
Fax: 01747 820440

www.acarchaeology.co.uk