

Discovery of the earliest dated piece of American pottery ever found elated scientists excavating sites at Carter's Grove near Colonial Williamsburg. X-ray analysis indicates that the dish was manufactured from Virginia clay. The plate, inscribed 1631, and hundreds of other objects found at Carter's Grove are shedding new light on the English settlers who endured the hardships of frontier life in the 1630's and

Search Is On To Identify Colonial Mystery People

By DONALD J. FREDERICK National Geographic News

New clues to some of America's earliest unsung heroes are surfacing in Virginia.

Just a few miles from Colonial Williamsburg on Carter's Grove Plantation, clever archeological detective work has uncovered artifacts that reveal new knowledge of the lifestyles of early settlers from England. A dish found at the site inscribed 1631 may be

the earnest dated prece of American pottery jet found. Skeletal remains also have been unearthed of the people who doggedly worked their hearts out to survive in the 1630s and 1640s after the initial glow of discovery and colonization had been extinguished.

Endured Many Hardships

"Very little is known about the people who stuck it out through disease, Indian attacks, and famine, so we're very excited about our finds," says Ivor Noel Hume, resident archeologist with Colonial Williamsburg, who is directing the work at Carter's Grove. His project is supported by the National Geographic Society.

'Up until now it's been assumed that the early English settlers had to live off the land and make do with rather primitive household effects and tools, but now we're finding they had a wide range of sophisticated things with them in the wilderness," reports Mr. Noel Hume. Silver and gold threads from clothing, Venetian glass,

a gold inlaid table knife, a piece from a suit of armor, and the slipware dish dated 1631 are among the objects uncovered by Mr. Noel Hume and his assistants.

"Many who came over here had land and servants," points out Mr. Noel Hume. "Some started out in silks and satins and ended up in canvas. The high-quality cutlery, delftware, and other sophisticated pottery we have found may indicate 'upstairs' people's possessions or maybe they were just hand-me-downs. We just don't know who these people were yet."

Buildings and Bones

There's no question that they were settlers from England, however. Last year supervising archeologist Eric Klingelhofer found evidence of nine buildings, grave sites containing the bones of 23 people, and hundreds of artifacts on an eight-acre site at Carter's Grove.

This ye r, at a second location, separated by a steep ravine from the first, the scientists have found a hearth and additional postholes indicating one or two more buildings. The new location dates from about 1630 to 1640 and is probably a little older than the other, estimated at about 1635 to 1645.

Among the hundreds of newly found artifacts are the curious 1631 slipware dish, links of chain mail, and an elbow piece from a suit of armor.

"The dated slipware dish is a stunning find," says Mr. Noel Hume. "Analysis of the clay material forming the dish indicates it was fired in a local kiln, making it the earliest dated piece of American pottery yet found."

The dish bears a distinct squarish rim cut that is similar to an undated plate found at the first site. There is no evidence that the plates come from the same kiln or were even made by the same potter.

"But one thing is certain," says Mr. Noel Hume. "Both were made locally and by a man or men who were accomplished craftsmen and had served their apprenticeship in either England or Holland."

The skill and artistry shine through in a remarkable ceramic "helm" found near the undated dish. One of the most unusual artifacts uncovered to date, the helm formed the top of a three-part still which may have been used to brew medicines.

Tile Tells Tale

Broken tiles bearing tell-tale scars from the pot that rested on them were found in the same area, indicating there was once a pottery kiln somewhere in the vicinity, where the helm was made.

"The helm was shaped with consummate skill, and the artisan who fashioned it was producing wares more sophisticated than anything yet attributed to American ceramics in the 17th century," observes Mr. Noel Hume.

So far the kiln or kilns that produced the plates and the helm have not been discovered. The scientists would also like to find traces of the town of Wolstenholme, once located in the area known as Martin's Hundred, but lost long ago in the mists of history.

The whole region around Carter's Grove was once a part of Martin's Hundred. In 1618 the original Virginia Company of London, which was responsible for founding the Jamestown Colony, granted a patent to a subsidiary company called the Martin's Hundred Society, allotting

it a large tract of land covering 31 square miles between the James and York Rivers. One of the Society's founders was Sir John Wolstenholme, and the town established in the new land grant was named for him. The town was in existence by 22, but the archeologists have found no buildings that

old. So the search goes on.

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