

West Country Households 1500-1700

Conference of the Society for Post-Medieval Archaeology,
Friday 14 – Monday 17 September 2007

Draft programme @ 17. 8. 2007; see SPMA website for updates



Venues: Exeter & Taunton

Supporting organisations: The Medieval Pottery Research Group, Devon County Council, Somerset County Museums, Exeter Archaeology, Exeter City Museums, Plymouth City Museums, the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon, the Devon Buildings Group

Conference organisers: John Allan, Nat Alcock & David Dawson

Accommodation: Residential: places reserved @ Holland Hall, University of Exeter @ £29.50 per head per night, bookings to be made by each individual – see separate form on SPMA website.

Registration: Exeter Guildhall, 5.30–6.30pm, Friday 14th; County Hall, Exeter, from 8.30–9.30 am and 1.30–2pm, Sat 15th.

Conference theme: During the last 30 years South-West England has been the focus of some of the most interesting work studying the early modern house and household in Britain. It is an area with a remarkable wealth of vernacular buildings which have been the subject of much recent study. The area has also seen some of the most productive excavations of early modern household goods in Britain. Specialists in the region are working on its furniture history, inventories, food history, household accounts, & internal decoration. The purpose of the meeting will be to bring together researchers studying the early modern house from these different perspectives, and to see whether common ground emerges from their different approaches.

The first part of the conference will be based in Exeter, the South-West's largest urban centre throughout the 16th and 17th centuries. The city's documentation of this period is perhaps the most intensively studied of any provincial town in Britain. Exeter has also been the centre of much recent archaeological work.

The second session will take place in Taunton, Somerset, the home of a fine collection of household goods of this period, including the recently-acquired Butler

Collection of early modern cast metal vessels (cauldrons, skillets, etc), which is the most important in its field in Britain, and an excellent assemblage of post-medieval pottery, including the important Kenneth Barton Collection of everyday ceramics.

On the Monday of the conference delegates will have the opportunity to view the nationally important assemblages of early modern artefacts from Exeter, with a large selection of the famous Plymouth collection of imported ceramics, local pottery from the North Devon kilns, etc. It should be emphasised that much of this material has not previously been displayed, and that it is unlikely that the opportunity to view it will be repeated in the foreseeable future.

Firm commitments in the programme below are marked thus*

FRIDAY 14 SEPTEMBER

2.00–5.30pm Town walk: *Introduction to the Post-Medieval Archaeology of Exeter.** The tour will include visits to the interiors of 16–17C buildings, & show some of the major projects in early modern archaeology carried out in the last 30 years in the city. It will end at the Quayside, visiting the Custom House with its dazzling plasterwork ceilings of 1680 & the Quay House. Led by John Allan*, Stuart Blaylock*, Richard Parker*, Andrew Pye,* Peter Weddell *et al.* **Meet @ the West Front, Exeter Cathedral.**

6.30 Mayoral Reception and finger buffet at Exeter Guildhall.* Viewing of the L17C notebook* of the N Devon plasterer John Abbott with John Draisey*, Devon County Archivist, in the Mayor's Parlour.

From 8.00: Booking of the Cromwell Room, the White Hart, South Street (plasterwork ceilings of c. 1660)*

10.00–11.15 Bus/taxi shuttle from Coombe Street, beside the White Hart, South Street, to Holland Hall

SATURDAY 15 SEPTEMBER

9.00 Buses collect from Holland Hall, deliver to County Hall, Exeter, where there is ample free parking.

Session 1: The development of the house and its decoration, 1500–1700. Venue: The Council Chamber, County Hall, Topsham Rd, Exeter. Chair: John Allan

9.30 *Introduction.* John Allan*

9.40 **Keynote address:** Dr Nat Alcock* (Emeritus Reader, University of Warwick: doyen of W. Country building studies) *The Development of the Vernacular House in South-West England, 1500–1700*

10.40 Richard Parker* (architectural historian, Exeter Archaeology). *The Transformation of the Building Stock of Exeter, 1500–1700.*

11.15 Coffee

11.45 James Ayres* (author) *The Internal Decoration of West Country Houses, 1500–1700*

12.20 *Case study: John Schofield* The Making and Remaking of Godolphin, 1500–1634: Projecting the Image of a Multi-period Cornish House.*

1.00–2.15 **Lunchtime reception** hosted by Cllr Christopher Haywood, Vice-Chairman of Devon County Council and the staff of the Devon Historic Environment Service.

Book Launch: *West Country Farms: House-and-Estate Surveys, 1598-1764*, by Nat Alcock & Cary Carson (Oxbow Books)

Bookshop* by Stephens Books, with material from Devon & Cornwall Record Society *et al*; **they will also post books to any address (we understand including international) at modest cost upon request.**

Session 2: Theme: Change in the Household

2.15 **Keynote address:** Prof. Mark Overton* (Professor of Economic & Social History, University of Exeter, co-author of *Production and Consumption in English Households, 1600–1750*) *Cornish Households 1600–1750: the Evidence of Probate Inventories*

3.00 Victor Chinnery* (President, Regional Furniture History Society) *Furniture in South-West England and the Exeter Orphans' Court Inventories, 1530–1660*

3.30 Polly and Michael Legg* (Vice-President, Regional Furniture History Society) *Rural Furniture in the West Country, c. 1630–1730*

4.00 Tea

4.30 Peter Brears* (leading specialist in Britain on the history of early modern food) *Changes in the Preparation and Consumption of Food in Britain, 1550–1660.*

5.00 Dr Todd Gray* (former research fellow, Dept of History, University of Exeter) *Food and Drink in West Country Households: The Evidence of Household Accounts, 1550–1660*

5.30 Brief visit to Bellair, small villa of c. 1700–10 forming part of County Hall. Fine staircase & plasterwork.

Optional evening visit: The 17th-century houses of Topsham.* The old port, which lies on the banks of the Exe Estuary, is rich in 17C and E18C houses, including the famous 'Dutch' houses of the Strand. Some access to interiors will be arranged. Fine plasterwork. Numerous pubs ('The Topsham Ten').

6.00 Coaches leave County Hall for Topsham Quay

From 7.00 Buffet supper in the Malthouse, The Bridge Inn, Topsham* (10 minutes walk from the centre of Topsham; 'nationally important' malting kiln (according to Amber Patrick). Those wishing to eat the buffet should use the booking form to pay in advance. Local salmon will be eaten if one can be caught.

10.30 Coach returns from The Bridge & Topsham Quay to Exeter University

SUNDAY 16 SEPTEMBER

Session 3: Metalware and ceramics in the Early Modern Household. Venue: Somerset County Museum, Taunton. Lectures in the main hall. Chair: Dr Geoff Egan*, President, SPMA.

9.00 Coach collects from Holland Hall, delivers to Somerset County Museum, Taunton.

- 10.00 Ken Barton* will introduce the Barton Collection of Everyday European Ceramics, recently donated to SCM.
- 10.15 Dr Stuart Blaylock* (Exeter Archaeology) *The Archaeology of the West Country Bronze Foundries*.
- 10.45 Dr Chris Green* (formerly University of London) *Cast Metal Cooking Pots in Britain, 1500–1720*.
- 11.15 Duncan Brown*. *Metalwork and Ceramics: Form and Function*.
- 11.40 Viewing session of the Butler Collection of cast metal vessels (skillets, cauldrons, etc.) led by Roderick* and Valentine Butler*, who formed the collection and undertook much of the research relating to it.
- 12.30–2.15 Lunchtime reception hosted by Steve Minnitt, Head of Somerset County Museums, with opportunity to view the Barton and Butler collections, introduced and led by David Dawson and Steve Minnitt.*

Session 4: The study of the material culture of West Country Households in Britain and North America. Venue: *The Somerset College, Taunton*

- 2.30 Keynote address:** Prof. Mary Beaudry* (Dept of Archaeology, Boston University, USA) *Materializing Households: Approaches to Interpreting Homes and Home Life, 1550–1700*
- 3.15 Prof. Peter Pope* (Memorial University of St John's Newfoundland) *Seventeenth-Century West Country on Newfoundland's English Shore*.
- 4.00 Sara McMahan* (Roehampton University) *Change and Continuity in the Material Culture of West Country Migrants to the New World in the Seventeenth Century*
- 4.30 Dr Oliver Kent* (University of the West of England) *Pots, Pictures and Texts: Understanding Pots in Use*

Evening trip [depending on weather]: The Turf, Exminster? (The pub lies on the banks of the Exe Estuary @ the entrance to the Exeter canal. Barbeque?

MONDAY 17 SEPTEMBER

Session 5: Exhibition of artefacts with handling and informal discussion ('the Jumble Sale') at The Corn Exchange (formerly known as St George's Hall), Fore Street, Exeter,

- 9.00 Coach/coaches collects from Holland Hall, loads luggage of those leaving Exeter St David's rail station @ end of afternoon, delivers people to St George's Hall, Fore Street, Exeter.
- 9.30 Handling session hosted by Tom Cadbury, Curator of Antiquities, Exeter City Museums, * to include:
1. Sequence of the principal Exeter groups of 1500-1700, presented by John Allan*
 2. Display of the major series of imports from Plymouth including, Italian, Portuguese and Spanish maiolica (for which the Plymouth collection is by far the largest in Britain), *Kinrande* porcelain, French imports; Kitto Institute well

group (see Hurst festschrift), organised by Fiona Pitt* of Plymouth City Museums.

3. Selection of finds from other major sites in south-west England, e.g. Totnes, Berry Pomeroy Castle, Dartington Hall.

4. Selection of North Devon sgraffito and other wares shown by Ruth Spires* and Alison Mills* of the Museum of Barnstaple and North Devon

5. Collection of metalwork finds from metal detectorists and others, organised by Danielle Wootton*, Devon Finds Liaison Officer of the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

6. New groups of kiln wasters from Plympton, south Devon, including sugar-refining wares, exhibited by Shirley Ryan* of the Plymouth Archaeological Society

7. Selection of finds from Cornwall shown by Jane Marley* of the Royal Institute of Cornwall, Truro.

12.30. Lunch: delegates to forage near RAMM, e.g. in Gandy St/Tesco/M&S.

Session 6: Optional visits to vernacular buildings in rural Devon. Since numbers will be restricted, these will require advanced booking; only 50 places can be offered. We have arranged to visit houses in Honiton*, Broad Clyst, Zeal Monachorum* and Bradninch.* Details to be supplied @ the conference.

2.00 Coach leaves South Street (close to St George's Hall).

5.30 Return to St David's Station

For further details, including illustrations of some of the highlights of the tours and artefact displays, see the SPMA website: www.spma.org.uk. Travel advice, with booking forms for conference registration, and for accommodation at Exeter University, will also be found there.