

Delftware Motifs and the Dating
of the Rumney-West Tavern,
London Town, Maryland (ca. 1724)



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This study examines the decorative design motifs present on English delftware recovered during a recent excavation at the site of the Rumney-West Tavern in the colonial seaport of London Town, Maryland. The authors use a broad approach in bundling the results obtained from an entire ceramic assemblage. The results obtained here prove the utility of such analyses in establishing chronological parameters for archaeological deposits, and in establishing the general contemporaneity of the whole assemblage from the Rumney-West Tavern cellar.

Introduction

Over the last five years, Anne Arundel County's Lost Towns Project has conducted archaeological excavations at London Town, a town created by the Maryland General Assembly in 1683 and which in the eighteenth century was a thriving Maryland port for the exportation of tobacco (*Fig. 1*). This public archaeology project has recovered a number of decorated English delft vessels from one of two trash-filled cellars that appear to be associated with the Rumney-West Tavern complex. The large quantity of decorated delft vessels and fragments found in the cellar provides an excellent opportunity to carry out a comprehensive analysis of several different design motifs using comparisons with known, dated examples. This integration of an archaeologically derived set of information with traditional ceramic design analysis leads to a highly informative cumulative result that should foster further applications at other archaeological sites.¹

Anne Arundel County's Lost Towns Project consists of a team of sixteen archaeologists, historians, laboratory specialists, and architectural historians involved in intensive documentary research, archaeological fieldwork, artifact analysis and conservation. The County's Department of Planning and Code Enforcement created *The Lost Towns Project* in 1991. The project conducts this



Figure 1. London Town



Figure 2. Joshua Fry and Peter Jefferson Map of Maryland, 1751

archaeological research in cooperation with the Anne Arundel Trust for Preservation, Inc. and the London Town Foundation. The team is researching a number of early town sites in addition to London Town, notably several house sites that are part of the 1649 town of Providence, the earliest European settlement in the county.² The project is also receiving financial support from the Maryland Historical Trust to conduct the search for another early colonial town named Herrington which was thriving in the 1660s.

The Rumney-West Tavern

The archaeological site of London Town's Rumney-West tavern is located on a twenty-three acre county-owned park near present-day Annapolis. In 1683, the Maryland Assembly passed an Act to establish London Town on a hundred-acre parcel of land on the south bank of the South River, a river emptying into the Chesapeake Bay. The tavern and its cellar are situated on lot 86 of the original London Town plat map on the west side of Scott Street, a main artery leading to the South River Ferry. The town was the site of the first Anne Arundel County courthouse between 1684 and 1695, and grew into an active tobacco trading seaport and transportation node in the early eighteenth century (*Fig. 2*). Travelers journeying overland between Philadelphia and Williamsburg would have stopped in London Town, and the Rumney-West tavern would have been a convenient hostelry along this route. Eventually, the town succumbed to political and economic pressures, almost disappearing from the landscape as the Revolutionary War ended.

Archival research reveals that the tavern was constructed about 1700 by Edward Rumney, a London Town resident who in addition to running a tavern operated a ferry and worked as a boat builder. Soil stains from posts supporting this earthfast tavern indicate that the original square building probably measured 20 by 20 feet (*Fig. 3*).³ Excavations of the cellar reveal that the space, originally used for storage under the tavern floorboards, became a trash receptacle for the establishment's food service. This change in use may have had to do with the change of ownership of the tavern in 1723, from Rumney to Stephen West Sr., a successful and prominent town leader (*Fig 4*).

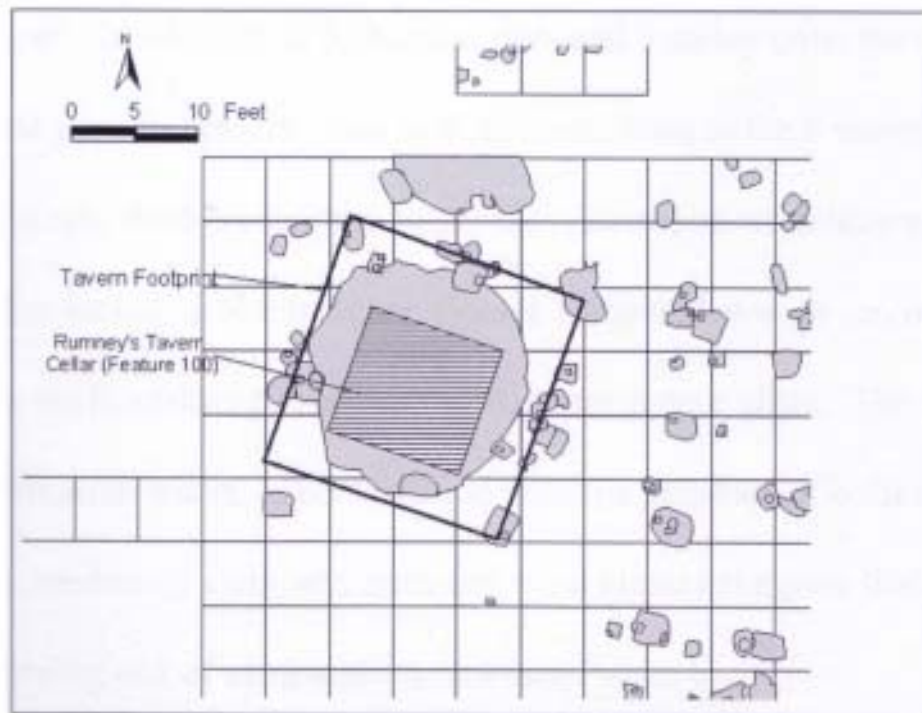


Figure 3. Rumney-West Tavern Building Footprint



Figure 4. Stephen West, Sr. (1690-1752) by Gustavus Hesselius (private collection)

The project team began excavations of the cellar in 1996, slowly removing and documenting the stratified cellar deposit in four separate quadrants. As part of this labor-intensive process, archaeologists uncovered forty-two distinct layers of silt interspersed with such items as animal and fish bones, fireplace ash, pipes, bottles, and ceramics (*Fig 5*). Water screening revealed the presence of finer materials, such as beads, pins, insect parts, fish scales, and even eggshells. An important first step in determining the context of this excavated cellar deposit involved assigning terminus post quem (TPQ) dates for the assemblage. Basically, the concept of TPQ is, “the latest made artifact in an archaeological context represents the earliest date that the context could have been depository.”⁴ A useful artifact list developed by George Miller establishes a date range estimate of 1715-40 for the Rumney-West Tavern cellar deposit. This range is based on glassware,⁵ tobacco pipe forms, white salt-glazed stoneware (post-1715), North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware (ca. 1675-1760), and English brown salt-glazed stoneware (post-1671), plus the absence of North Devon sgraffito earthenware (pre-1710) and press molded white salt-glazed stoneware (post-1740).⁶

The excavation uncovered a wide range of ceramics, including ninety-eight different vessels of fifteen ceramic types. In addition to five chamber pots and three galley pots, the assemblage contained fifty-five food-serving vessels. This is in sharp contrast to the eight vessels that could be classified as involving food preparation or storage. Examples of utilitarian wares found in the tavern cellar include a North Devon gravel-tempered storage jar, redware milk pans, and a large Staffordshire pan with a mottled manganese glaze. The relatively low percentage of utilitarian wares, in combination with the presence of coffee and tea wares, decorated plates, medicinal vials, and stemmed wine glasses suggests that the deposit represents the serving end of an upscale tavern (*Fig. 6*).

The total assemblage can be broken down into three concentrations of ceramics, including redware/buff bodied earthenware, stoneware, and delftware. Among the earthenwares are lead-glazed redware, manganese-mottled ware, yellow glazed/buff body ware, and North Devon gravel-tempered ware. A number of different stoneware forms were found, including English brown stoneware mugs, a single Westerwald gray stoneware chamber pot, and English white salt-glazed



Figure 5. Rumney-West Tavern Cellar Profile



Figure 6. Sample of Rumney-West Tavern Vessels

mugs, cups, bowls, teacups, and a coffeepot. Various delftware forms from the cellar include plain chamber pots, bowls and plates, as well as decorated plates, bowls, and teacups.

Based on a comparison of design motifs, the best attribution for the source of an overwhelming majority of this assemblage appears to be the Vauxhall (Lambeth) pottery on the Thames in London. Founded in 1683, by John de Wilde, the pottery was carried on by the Chilwell family of potters, who were active into the mid-eighteenth century. Several archaeological excavations by the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society at the site of the Vauxhall pottery in 1969/70 and 1977-81 yielded several tons of delft shards of many different forms and types of decoration.⁷ A number of vessel shards excavated from the Rumney-West Tavern display design motifs that are virtually identical to decorated shards recovered from the 1977-81 Vauxhall excavations.⁸ These decorated vessels include plates with banded borders and bowls featuring berry and hatched floral-scroll motifs.

Motif Analysis

The Lost Towns Project used a nontraditional method of analysis for dating the Rumney-West Tavern assemblage. The only researcher to have attempted a similar analysis with an assemblage of decorated delftware was Ellen Shlasko in 1989.⁹ Although her analysis was somewhat limited by the selection of broad categories of motifs, her useful study quantified a large sample of dated seventeenth- and eighteenth-century delftware vessels and formed frequency curves. Shlasko's approach is based on standard chronological seriation techniques derived from James Deetz and Edwin Dethlefsen's 1972 analysis of dated gravestones.¹⁰ Her study of broad changes in delftware decoration produced popularity curves showing the beginning and end dates of manufacture, as well as mean and median dates. Shlasko's motif analysis provided a high degree of accuracy when tested against a sample of dated vessels from museum collections. Her analysis was less conclusive when tested against an archaeological collection of decorated delft shards excavated from the house site of about 1723 of John Hick's, a planter and shipowner from St. Mary's City, Maryland. However, the fragmentary nature of the Hicks assemblage and its lack of intact depositional contexts restricted this study.

The Lost Towns Project study employs a similar but different approach to quantifying the large assemblage of decorated delftware excavated from the Rumney-West Tavern cellar. Instead of utilizing broad categories of motifs (e.g., armorial, chinoiserie, etc.), as did Shlasko, or centering on the primary motifs of a vessel (e.g., lava rock, bird on bush, or rose trellis), as would be the standard decorative arts approach, this study isolated each of the sometimes numerous small motifs present on each of the decorated vessels. A single vessel might generate as many as four to six motifs, each of which would then be analyzed as a separate entity (*Figs. 7, 8*). The individual motifs were then bundled together to produce a final chronological range and average date (*see Table, p. 24*).

A subjective aspect of this analysis was evident while assessing the individual motifs. Namely, some examples were found that were identical or nearly identical to the isolated motifs (and perhaps even by the same hand), others were classified as only similar, whereas further examples demonstrated what could only be termed a vague similarity (*Fig. 9*). Eventually it was decided that two basic categories would be utilized: the first consisting of identical or nearly identical analogies; and the second category consisting of similar analogies. Analogies that were only vaguely similar were excluded.

Specific motifs were chosen for inclusion in the final analysis based on the degree to which their results were informative. Ultimately, this study examined design motifs found on six plates and five bowls excavated from the tavern cellar, placing them in the following eight categories: Berry, Butterfly, Dotted Circle, Pendant-Scroll, Sunflower, Three-Band Border, Hatched Floral-Scroll, and Barber Pole Border. The motifs were then compared with documented seventeenth- and eighteenth-century delft vessels with similar motifs and dates incorporated into their decorations. Photographs of dated examples are found in several authoritative reference works. Primary among these was Lipski and Archer's *Dated English Delftware* (1984),¹¹ but others, including John Austin's *British Delft at Williamsburg* (1994),¹² Frank Britton's *London Delftware* (1987), and Anthony Ray's

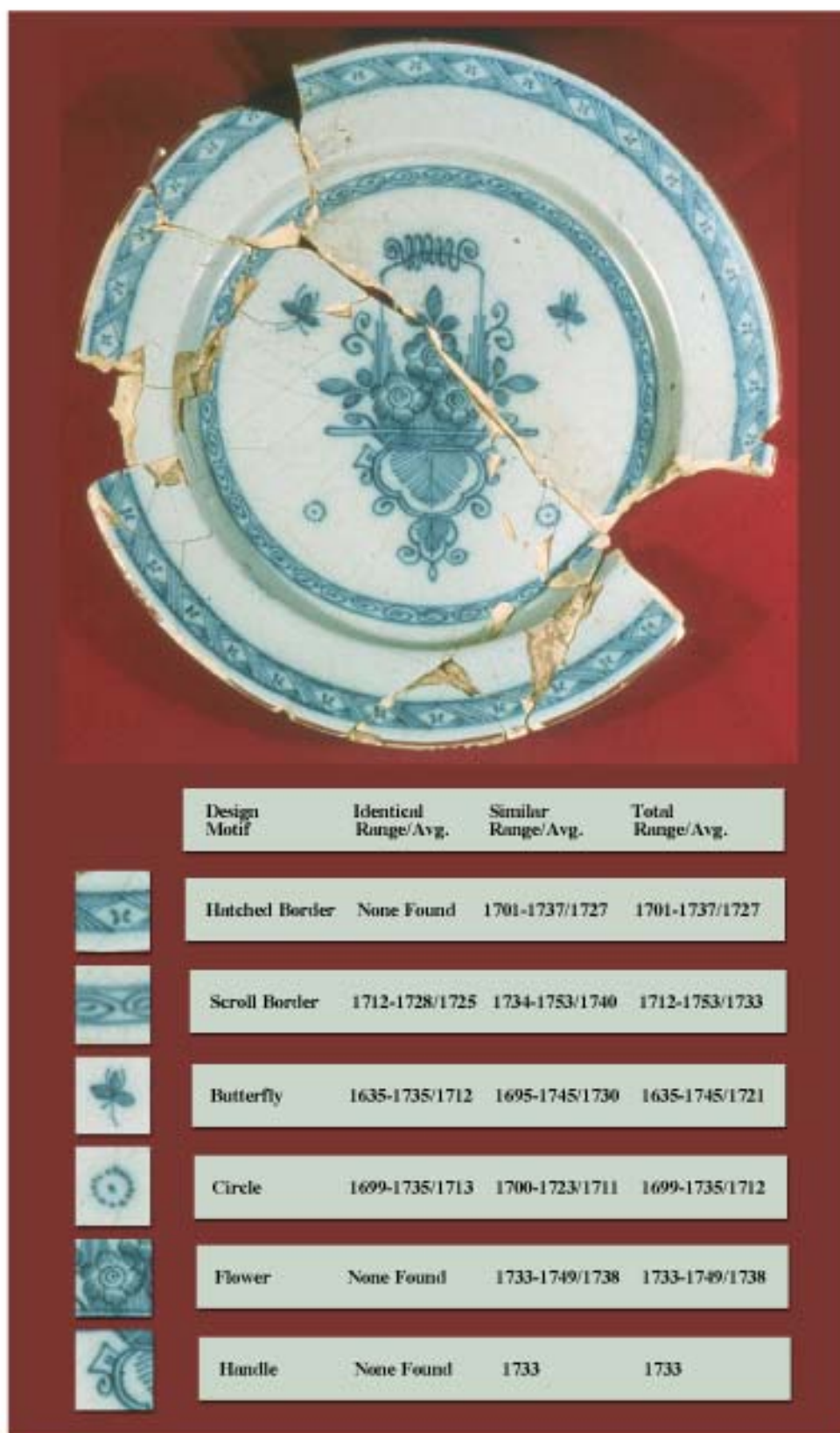


Figure 7. Motif Breakdown-Butterfly Plate



Figure 8. Motif Breakdown-Sunflower Plate



Berry Plate
Rumney-West Tavern



Lipski-Plate 330 (1724)
"Near Identical"



Lipski-Plate 44 (1738)
"Similar"



Lipski-Plate 558 (1752)
"Vaguely Similar"

Figure 9. Near Identical, Similar, and Vaguely Similar Motifs

English Delftware Pottery in the Robert Hall Warren Collection (1968),¹³ also were utilized. Finally, examples of design motifs identified in these reference works were divided into “identical/near identical” and “similar” categories for the analysis.

Berry Motif (*Fig. 10*)

One of the most impressive motifs from the cellar deposit is a berry and leaf design that appears on the outside of a punch bowl. A survey of dated examples found many other examples of this striking pattern, which is known to occur at Vauxhall.

Butterfly Motif (*Fig. 11*)

A butterfly motif appears twice on a Rumney-West Tavern plate bearing a flower-trellis design. The butterfly is a common motif that appears with floral scenes or outdoor scenes, but the wings and body of this butterfly motif are decorated with straight lines, which are rarely found on other dated examples.

Dotted-Circle Motif (*Fig. 12*)

A circle motif executed with small dots also appears twice on the same flower-trellis plate. This motif is enhanced by a single dot within the circle and is referred to as a “partridge eye,” or *oeil-de-perdrix*. Similar circle motifs featured a large single dot surrounded by smaller dots.

Pendant-Scroll Motif (*Fig. 13*)

Another bowl excavated from the tavern cellar displays an elaborate pendant-and-floral-scroll design that is repeated around the outside of the vessel. Scrolls as well as a terminal feature resembling a finial are part of this elaborate design motif.



Figure 10. Berry Motif

Near Identical Examples

<i>Lipski</i>	393-1734
312-1721	394-1734
329-1724	
330-1724	
330A-1724	
404-1736	
1079-1728	
1080-1728	

Similar Examples

<i>Lipski</i>	
405-1736	
405A-1736	
440-1738	
441-1738	



Figure 11. Butterfly Morif

Near Identical Examples

<i>Lipski</i>	
373-1733	
397-1735	
715-1635	
810-1727	
1024-1733	

Similar Examples

<i>Lipski</i>	488-1742
205-1695	827-1745
252-1708	1080-1728
279-1715	1102-1740
317-1722	1089-1733
331-1724	1103-1741
461-1740	813-1728
463-1740	<i>Austin</i>
487-1742	93-1717



Figure 12. Dotted Circle Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski

400-1735

937-1699

939-1699

940-1700

1024-1733

1072-1726

1548-1700

Britton

4.17-1699

Similar Examples

Lipski

935-1697

1065-1723

222-1700



Figure 13. Pendant-Scroll Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski

275-1715

333-1725

337-1733

397-1735

Similar Examples

Lipski

346-1727

339-1725

Austin

41-1721

Ray

44-1748

72-1728

Sunflower Motif (*Fig. 14*)

The project recovered three plates and a bowl with a half-sunflower motif from the Rumney-West Tavern cellar. This motif is very elaborate with leaves and berries surrounding the sunflower design. Similar examples feature varying degrees of foliage.

Three-Band Border Motif (*Fig. 15*)

Cellar excavations produced nine plates bearing identical three-band border decoration surrounding three different inner design motifs, including a mermaid (three examples), sunflowers (four examples), and a pagoda (two examples). This blue-banded decoration consists of a wide solid band within two thinner bands. A survey of dated examples revealed that this three-band decoration appears on many different vessel forms, including plates, bowls, and mugs.

Hatched Floral-Scroll Motif (*Fig. 16*)

Both a polychrome bowl and a blue-and-white plate were both decorated with a very distinctive floral scroll in which the flower and leaves were filled with hatching. A virtually identical specimen has been recovered from the Vauxhall potteries.

Barber Pole Border Motif (*Fig. 17*)

A single medium-size bowl contained a border motif that incorporated alternating filled and unfilled segments reminiscent of a barber's striped pole.



Figure 14. Sunflower Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski

804-1720

955-1716

957-1727

1072-1726

Austin

30-1727

Similar Examples

Lipski

1690-1716

1724-1712

1066-1724

1725-1713

1067-1724

1727-1722

1070-1725

1728-1722

1071-1725

1729-1722

1721-1710

1730-1727

1722-1711

1731-1729

1723-1712

1732-1729

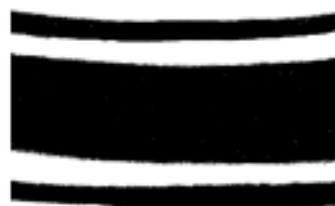


Figure 15. Three Band Border Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski

268-1712

334-1725

Austin

208-1729

Similar Examples

Lipski

261-1711

264-1712

297-1718

299-1719

358-1729

366-1731

506-1746

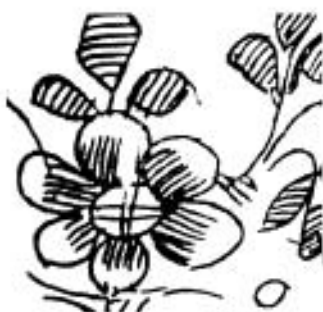


Figure 16. Hatched Floral-Scroll Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski
371-1733
1089-1733

Similar Examples

Lipski
418-1737



Figure 17-Barber Pole Band Motif

Near Identical Examples

Lipski
367-1731

Similar Examples

Lipski
458-1739
1074-1726
1093-1735

Comparisons

<u>Design Motif</u>	<u>Identical Range/Avg</u>	<u>Similar Range/Avg</u>	<u>Total Range/Avg</u>
Berry	1721-1736/1728	1736-1738/1737	1721-1738/1731
Butterfly	1635-1735/1713	1695-1745/1729	1635-1745/1725
Dotted Circle	1699-1735/1711	1697-1723/1707	1697-1735/1710
Pendant-Scroll	1715-1735/1727	1721-1748/1730	1715-1748/1729
Sunflower	1716-1727/1723	1710-1729/1720	1710-1729/1721
Three-Band Border	1712-1729/1722	1711-1746/1724	1711-1746/1723
Hatched Floral-Scroll	1733-1733/1733	1737-1737/1737	1733-1737/1734
Barber Pole Border	1731-1731/1731	1726-1739/1733	1726-1739/1733
TOTALS	1635-1736/1721	1695-1748/1726	1635-1748/1724

Results

An analysis of all of the design motifs provides an average date of 1721.4 for the thirty-seven motifs designated as “very similar” to “nearly identical.” The fifty-five motifs classified as only “similar” produced an average date of 1725.5. The total of all ninety-two motifs used in this study produced a mean date of 1723.8 (*Fig. 18*).

The average date of 1724 for the total delftware assemblage recovered from the cellar deposit at the Rumney-West Tavern has great explanatory potential, since this date can relate the principal onset of trash deposition in the cellar to a known change in ownership. According to archival records, the transfer of the property from Edward Rumney to Stephen West Sr. occurred one year prior to this date. In a 1711 land deed, Edward Rumney mortgaged his property and household goods to another London Town resident, Charles Carroll, to pay off his debts.¹⁴ A later land deed records Carroll selling the tavern property to West in 1723.¹⁵ While the archival record also shows that West may have operated another London Town ordinary at the same time Rumney operated his tavern, the location of this earlier establishment has not been documented and remains a mystery.¹⁶

Conclusions

In summation, the Lost Towns Project’s analysis of decorated delftware motifs uses a methodology that when applied to an entire archaeological assemblage provides a more refined range and average

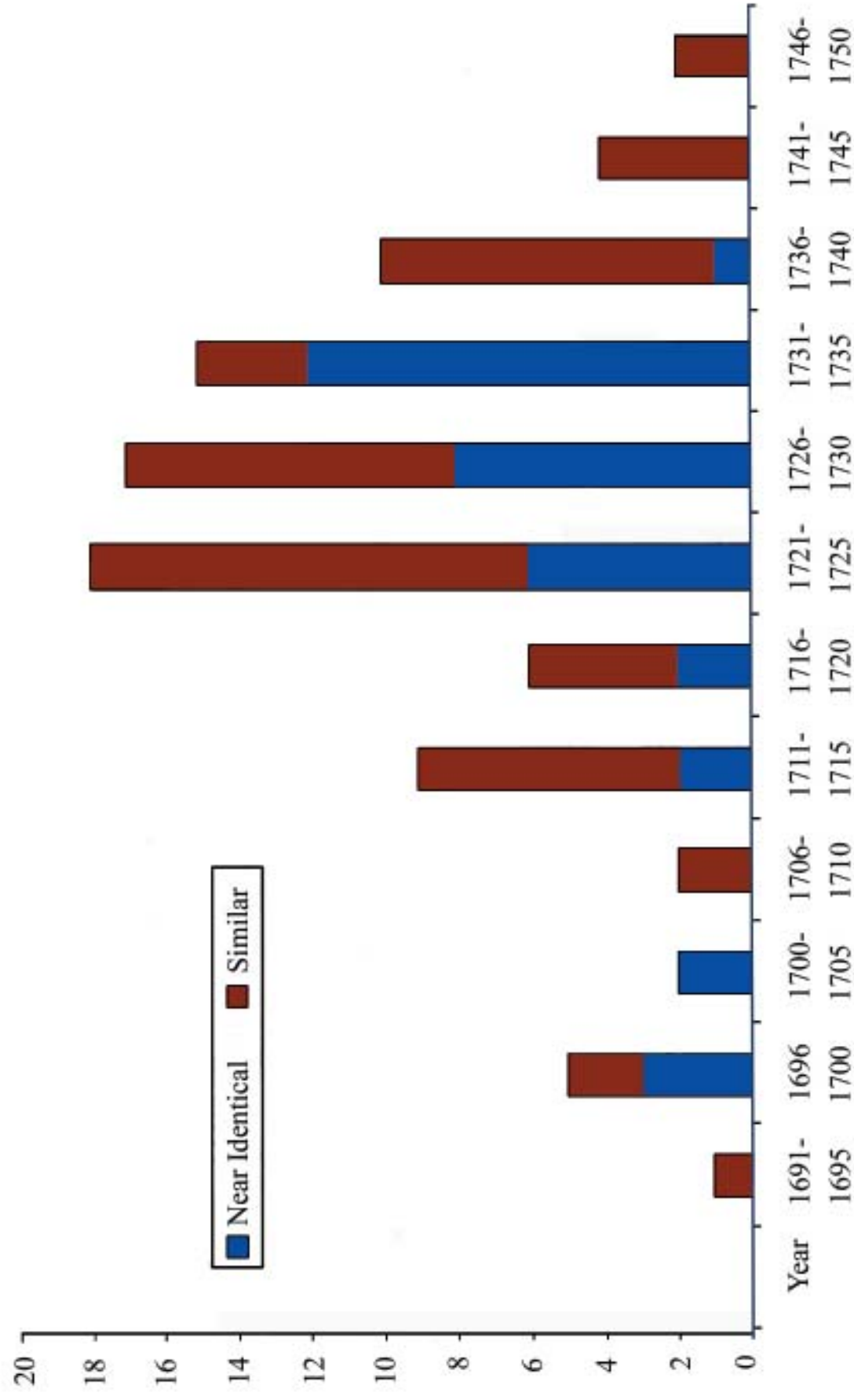


Figure 18
Graph of Dated Motifs

date than other known techniques, and this approach can be highly useful. The motifs found at the Rumney-West Tavern not only indicate the chronological placement of the deposit but strongly suggest that the time span involved in the deposit's creation was quite short. The limited time span indicated is supported by other lines of evidence, including bottle and tobacco pipe forms, faunal remains, charcoal, and pollen analyses. In combination, they lend a relatively secure date around the year 1724 - a date which documentary evidence substantially supports. It appears quite likely that the transfer of ownership between Edward Rumney and Stephen West Sr. in 1723 somehow provided the impetus for the rich trash deposit uncovered, presumably the result of a refurbishment of the tavern by its new proprietor.

Endnotes

¹ This paper is the result of a generous research grant from the American Ceramic Circle.

² Al Luckenbach, *Providence 1649: The History and Archaeology of Anne Arundel County, Maryland's first European Settlement* (Maryland State Archives and the Maryland Historical Trust, 1995).

³ Erected in postholes sunk in the ground, the temporary "earthfast" building was the predominate vernacular architecture of the seventeenth-century Chesapeake.

⁴ George L. Miller, with contributions by Patricia Samford, Ellen Shlasko, and Andrew Madsen, "Telling Time for Archaeologists," *Northeast Historical Archeology* 29 (2000): 1-22, at 1.

⁵ Al Luckenbach and Patricia N. Dance, "Drink and Be Merry: Glass Vessels from Rumney's Tavern (18AN48), London, Maryland," *Maryland Archeology* 34, no. 2 (1998).

⁶ Exported from England, North Devon gravel-tempered earthenware displays a pink body with a gray core that is heavily gravel-tempered and covered with a light brown to apple-green glaze. Ivor Noel Hume, *A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), p. 133.

⁷ Frank Britton, *London Delftware* (London: Jonathan Horne, 1987), p. 66.

⁸ Britton, *London Delftware*, pp. 68-71.

⁹ Ellen Schlasko, "Delftware Chronology: A New Approach to Dating English Tin-Glazed Ceramics," Master's thesis, College William and Mary, 1989.

¹⁰ James Deetz and Edwin S. Dethlefsen, "Death's Head, Cherub, Urn and Willow," reprinted in *Contemporary Archaeology*, ed. Mark P. Leone (Carbondale and Edwardville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), pp. 402-10.

¹¹ Louis L. Lipski and Michael Archer, *Dated English Delftware: Tin-glazed Earthenware, 1600-1800* (London: Sotheby Publications, 1984).

¹² John C. Austin, *British Delft at Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, Va.: The Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in association with Jonathan Horne Publications, 1994).

¹³ Anthony Ray, *English Delftware Pottery in the Robert Hall Warren Collection: Ashmolean Museum, Oxford* (London: Faber and Faber, 1968).

¹⁴ Anne Arundel County Deeds, 1711, Liber PK, 375, Maryland State Archives, Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis.

¹⁵ Anne Arundel County Deeds, 1723, Liber RCW2, 219, Maryland State Archives, Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis.

¹⁶ Anne Arundel County Deeds, 1723, Liber TB3, 115, Maryland State Archives, Maryland Hall of Records, Annapolis.



3-D reconstruction of the ca. 1724 Rumney-West Tavern based on the excavations of the Lost Towns Project, including decorated delft plates and punch bowls, wine bottle and glasses, coffee pot and cup, and tobacco pipes.

Lost Towns Project



of Anne Arundel County

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