

A key element of the 1st Duke of Devonshire's interiors at Chatsworth is his remarkable collection of late-17th-century Delft flower vases. As **Hannah Obee** explains, their use and decoration provides a revealing insight into not only his taste but also his politics.

# BAROQUE EXUBERANCE

## DELFT FLOWER VASES AT CHATSWORTH

**T**he Devonshire Collection at Chatsworth is fortunate to include a substantial group of Dutch Delft flower holders acquired by the 4th

Earl of Devonshire (later 1st Duke) during the reign of William III and Mary II. The collection has been given new prominence by the redisplay of the State Apartment, which is described on pp. 60-67.<sup>1</sup>

The technique of dipping pottery in a white tin glaze on which to paint originated in Iraq in response to the arrival of Chinese porcelain by the 9th century. This method reached northern Europe by means of exports from Moresque Spain to Italy, from where maiolica workers migrated to Dutch cities, including Delft, by the late 16th century.<sup>2</sup> Unable to produce true porcelain until the 18th century, tin-glaze provided European states with a means of producing their own ceramics to compete with highly-desirable Oriental wares, imported in vast numbers since the previous century via new trade routes.

The design for Delft flower vases similarly evolved from Eastern prototypes. Originally made to pour liquids, globular spouted vases had become popular as flower holders in the Middle East by the 12th century.<sup>3</sup> Consequently the baluster-shaped vase with spouts was the earliest type of spouted Delft flower holder to emerge in the 1680s, eventually giving way to four- and six-sided holders. Chatsworth's baluster vase (Fig. 8) is highly derivative of Moresque ceramics particularly in terms

of its silhouette and the decorative patterns on its base.

The decoration of the pyramid vases at Chatsworth, however, suggests the Delft makers giving a nod to their origins in such motifs as the cherubim

and masks seen also on Italian maiolica, but made their own by naturalistic painting and the use of Netherlandish prints as

sources. The thorny roses on the top of one of Chatsworth's pyramid bases (Fig. 1), which cannot be seen at all once the pyramid is assembled, are northern in feel, suggesting a pride in a national product similar to that demonstrated later by the

French at the Vincennes-Sèvres factory.<sup>4</sup>

Delft painters also copied Eastern palettes and motifs, thus enhancing their product by association with, in particular, Chinese blue-and-white porcelain.

The pyramidal form itself – symbolic of monarchical glory and used by Louis XIV at Versailles – was expressed by the Dutch in a variety of guises including topiary or as a focal point in gardens, as demonstrated, for example, in a print, *The Parnassus in the Park von Sorgvliet* (Fig. 7)<sup>5</sup>. It is



The works illustrating this article are of Delft tin-glazed earthenware at Chatsworth and have been photographed by June Buck unless otherwise stated. 1 One of the pyramid bases, showing the painting of roses on its top, c. 1691-97, ht. 46 cm 2 Detail of Libertas on the base of a pyramid, one of several figures in the decoration relating to the themes of liberty, religion and justice. The bases rest on lions with globes, a reference to William III



noteworthy how the pyramid and baluster vases mirror the topiary in ‘pyramids and then round’ described by Celia Fiennes at Hampton Court.<sup>6</sup>

The subject matter of the Chatsworth pyramids fits the 1st Duke’s decorative scheme for his baroque palace, which proclaims his allegiance to William and Mary and serves as an affirmation of his Protestant faith.<sup>7</sup> The bases of a pair of pyramids resting on lions with globes (themselves a reference to William III)<sup>8</sup> are decorated with figures entitled Air, Libertas, Terra and Prudentia (Fig. 2), Aqua, Religio, Justitia and Ignis. These refer to the theological virtues (Religio, or Faith), cardinal virtues (Justice and Prudence) and elements (Earth, Fire, Water, Air). The themes of Liberty, Religion and Justice would have had particular resonance for the Protestant Devonshire, who was one of the aristocrats who invited William of Orange and his consort, Mary, to take the English throne from her Catholic father, James II, in 1688. Prudentia – the ability to discern the most politic course of action – also accords with the Cavendish family motto, ‘Cavendo Tutus’ (safety through caution).

Delft pyramids, consisting of a series of progressively smaller, individual reservoirs ascending from a base, provided a double impact as prestigious possessions in their own right and as containers for imported exotic flowers, cultivated by the fashionable elite – including the 1st Duke – in hothouses. The triumph of the design lay in their spouts. These enabled each highly-prized bloom to be appreciated individually, like a



specimen, whilst contributing to an aesthetic whole. A chairback at Croft Castle embroidered around 1700 shows how they would have looked (Fig. 3). This may explain the growing preference for square or hexagonal pyramids over the baluster shape, which would have created a denser effect, closer to that seen in a painting by Bogdani for the 1st Duke (Fig. 4). Nonetheless, it is interesting to note the variety of blooms depicted. Erroneously called tulip vases (‘Tulip-mania’ had peaked 50 years earlier), Delft flower holders were used to display a variety of species.

Queen Mary’s patronage ensured the success of Delft flower vases in England. As a young girl, she had been exposed to botany and porcelain. After her marriage in 1677, she went to live in the Dutch Republic.<sup>9</sup> There she enthusiastically embraced the fashions for gardens, flowers and ‘Porcelain Rooms’, which she brought with her on her return to England:

The Queen brought in the custom or humour... of furnishing houses with china-ware, which increased to a strange degree afterwards, piling their China upon the tops of cabinets, scrutores, and every chymney-piece, to the tops of the ceilings, and even setting up shelves for their china-ware... till it became a grievance in the expence of it and even injurious to their families and estates.<sup>10</sup>

Payments in 1699 to Mr Savage ‘for 2 pairs of Jarrs 25.0.0’ and Mrs Harrison ‘for a Scrutore & China 100.0.0’ show the Devonshires were not immune.<sup>11</sup>

The links between William and Mary and the 4th Earl (from 1694, 1st Duke) of Devonshire were strong. His position as Lord Steward of the Household and a member of the Privy Council advising Mary during William’s absence in Ireland

3 An embroidered chair back from Croft Castle, Herefordshire, c. 1700. It depicts a flower holder, showing how the spouts held the stems of individual blooms. Photo: Country Life Picture Library

4 *Still life of Flowers* by Jacob Bogdani (1658-1724), c. 1699. The painting may be one of four ‘fleurpieces’ from the 1st Duke’s Gallery. Photo © Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth

My sincere gratitude goes to my colleagues at Chatsworth: Stuart Band, Peter Day, Matthew Hirst, Diane Naylor, Charles Noble, Andrew Peppitt, Elizabeth Scott and Jane Wood. This article was inspired by the passion for Dutch Delft shown by Marion van Aken-Fehmers and Wies Erkelens, who visited Chatsworth for the 2007 Gemeentemuseum exhibition *Vases with Spouts: Three Centuries of Splendour* as part of the research project Dutch Delftware: History of a National Project.

1 For comparative examples of the vases, see Marion S. van Aken-Fehmers, et al., *Dutch Delftware History of a National Product*, vol IV, *Vases with Spouts*, The Hague, 2007.

2 Marion van Aken-Fehmers, et al., *Delfts aardewerk: Geschiedenis van een National Product*, part 1, The Hague, 1999, p. 302.

3 An Oriental version was known in the Netherlands by 1658. See Van Aken-Fehmers, et al., 2007 op. cit. p. 9.

4 A *cuvette à fleurs* in the Wallace Collection, London (C225), has a firing crack disguised by expensive gilding and repeated on the opposite lip despite the fact it would not have been visible once filled with flowers.

5 Laid out by Hans Willem Bentinck, created Earl of Portland, superintendent of royal gardens. See John Dixon Hunt, ‘The Anglo Dutch Garden’, in R.P. MacCubin and M. Hamilton-Phillips, eds, *The Anglo Dutch Garden in The Age of William III and Mary II: Power, Politics and Patronage 1688-1702*, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1989, pp. 234-43.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 241.

7 Peter Day, *De-Coding the Decorations: the Painted Politics of the 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Devonshire*. ms. typescript of a lecture held at Chatsworth as part of a series in November 2000-Spring 2001.

8 See Anthony Ray, ‘Delftware Diversions’ in *Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle*, vol II, part 2 (1982). I am grateful to Aileen Dawson for providing me with a copy.

9 Mary was tutored by Bishop Compton, owner of a renowned



5 Two single pyramids of different sizes and with different feet. Height of bases, 33 cm and 27 cm

botanical garden; Charles I (her uncle) and James II (father) both owned Oriental porcelain.

10 Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, edited by P.N. Furbank, W.R. Owens and A.J. Coulson, New Haven, 1991, p. 65.

11 Devonshire MSS., Chatsworth (DMC). Chatsworth Building Accounts 1699, pp. 165 and 167.

12 The factory used the mark AK when Adrianus Kox was proprietor, between 1687 and 1701.

13 A bill from Adrianus Kox of 1695 for 'Dutch China or ware sent to her late Maty' survives: Arthur Lane, 'Daniel Marot: Designer of Delft Vases and Gardens at Hampton Court', *The Connoisseur*, March 1949, pp. 19-24.

14 William and Mary's galleries at Honselaarsdijk and the main gallery in Mary's Water Gallery at Hampton Court contained Delft vases and urns. See Wies Erkelens, 'Art for Nature – Flower Holders with Spouts and Mary II (1662-1695) Queen of England, Scotland and Ireland, Princess of Orange', in Van Aken-Fehmers, et al., 2007, op. cit., pp. 37-39.

in 1690 brought him directly within her sphere of influence. The baluster vase and eight of the pyramids at Chatsworth have the painted mark of the Delft factory De Grieksche A,<sup>12</sup> which provided Delft to Queen Mary.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to porcelain, Mary deployed Delft in principal rooms, a fashion also evident at Chatsworth after it was rebuilt between 1687 and 1707.<sup>14</sup> The earliest known inventory (1764) lists much porcelain and shows that 'old delfth' was used to embellish empty hearths in three State Rooms: the Great Chamber (Fig. 8), Antichamber (now the State Music Room) and the State Bed Chamber (Fig. 6).<sup>15</sup> In the 'Painted Room' (the saloon in which the 1st Duke received visitors) were 'two flower potts & a pyramid of Old deelf' and in the Dressing Room between it and the State Closet, there was 'old delf in ye. Chimney'.

The Duke's new east wing was dominated on the first floor by the 80-foot long Great Gallery. Unusually, it was fitted out by craftsmen reporting directly to the Duke rather than to his architect, William Talman. Its four floral still-life paintings ('flourpieces'; Fig. 4), floral carving and urns

('flowerpotts of delfth') further celebrated the Dutch fondness for the 'cult of Flora'<sup>16</sup> suggesting that it had been little altered by 1764: 'four flourpieces 13 Gilt flowerpotts & plates & two in ye. Chimney of delfth and four flourpotts, with a pyramid of old delfth'.

No direct payments for Dutch Delft are recorded in the archives at Chatsworth. However, references in the building accounts to the transport of goods provide some clues. Between Lady Day and Midsummer 1695,<sup>17</sup> there is a payment for transporting seven cases of goods, including 'Flower potts', from London to Chatsworth.<sup>18</sup> Quantities of 'potts' (some for the garden) are often mentioned, but these may refer to the Delft urns (see Fig. 8), which were certainly made by 1694 as they show an earl's coronet; the building of the Gallery was finished that autumn. An entry in the Chatsworth building accounts shows that there was Dutch Delft at Chatsworth by Michaelmas 1695: 'For Rosen and Bees wax to mend some broken dutch ware 0. 1. 6'.<sup>19</sup>

The broken Delft could refer to any of the flower holders, which have all been damaged over time, but whereas the pyramids have been chipped and suffered loss to their protruding decoration, the chunks and handles missing from some of the urns are consistent with damage sustained during transit.

In 1697, another reference to packing cases in the receiver's accounts shows that Delft was again taken to Chatsworth:

28th September 1697 to Henry Lobb the Joyner for 2 bills of Cases for ye Japan chests, China & Dutchware,<sup>20</sup> Pictures, Tables, Stands [ ] Glasses, Carved works, Statues, Bedds, &c, sent to Chatsworth the summ of fourteen pounds fifteen shillings'.<sup>21</sup>

If the urns were at Chatsworth by 1695, it is reasonable to suppose that the Delft pyramids were the 'dutchware' transported to Chatsworth in 1697. The apogee of the State Apartment, the crimson damask bed by Lapiere (see pages 68-75), was delivered only that year.

It is possible that the Duke had acquired Delft earlier and kept it at one of his London residences until the relevant part of Chatsworth was ready to receive it.<sup>22</sup> In 1691, he had accompanied William III to the Congress at the Hague. The opportunity to advertise his fashionable taste and, in the case of the urns, the Order of the Garter that he had been awarded in 1689, may have been too much for the Earl to resist and he may have ordered the urns,



6 Flower pyramids grouped in the fireplace in the State Bedchamber, c. 1691-97, hts 110.5 cm, 106 cm, 100.5 cm

and possibly the baluster vase, during his visit. The year 1694 saw one of several large pushes to furnish Chatsworth.<sup>23</sup> This may have been linked to a proposed visit to the Duke's Derbyshire properties by the King during his October 1695 tour of the Midlands, which, however, never took place.<sup>24</sup>

The next inventory of Chatsworth, prepared in 1792, provides greater detail on the display of the Delft. Although the word is not used, the description of the grouping of 'china' in garnitures suggests how it may have been displayed in the 1st Duke's time:

State Apartments, Beginning at the South West Corner...No.2 [STATE BEDCHAMBER] Five Blue & white China Ornaments for Flowers in the Fire Place, One large two small and two smaller...No.3 [STATE MUSIC ROOM] ...In the Fire place Five Blue and White China Ornaments for flowers 3 large, two small. Three large Blue & White China Urns... No.5 [GREAT CHAMBER] ...Two large Blue

and white China Ornaments for Flowers & Two (sic) Jarrs in the Fire place.'

By this time, four 'Blue and White China Ornaments for Flowers' had been moved into the adjacent Queen of Scots Apartment and a total of nine blue-and-white china urns are listed in the State and Scots Apartments.

The next inventory,<sup>25</sup> taken at the death of the 5th Duke of Devonshire in 1811, lists the ceramics together.<sup>26</sup> 12 blue and white urns are noted, the last identifiable reference to urns in the 19th century. There are 12 'Delph Pyramids for flowers' and '2 Pyramids for flowers and small stands', possibly differentiating between the square pyramids and the baluster and hexagonal ones.<sup>27</sup> The inventory also notes '2 Blue and White stands for flowers in Chaplain's Bedroom'.

In the 1844 inventory, 14 'Pyramidal' flower holders are listed, including one with 'Snake handles'.<sup>28</sup> This contrasts with 16 in 1792. All the square pyramids in the collection are in pairs apart from two odd ones, of different sizes and with different feet (Fig. 5). These facts suggest that two pyramids have been lost since the 18th century. The next inventory, in 1859, repeats the 1844 descriptions.<sup>29</sup> The same number of vases is detailed in an inventory of 1892 by John Gregory Crace, with both heights and number of sections.<sup>30</sup>

In the first 20th-century inventory of Chatsworth (1905), the Delft is still in the State Apartment in the precise configuration of 1892.<sup>31</sup> However the urns reappear: one described as 'old Lambeth Delft' in the State Music Room and five

7 Parnassus in Park von Sorgvliet by Jan van den Aveele (c. 1650-1727), 1697. Engraving. The pyramidal form of the Delft flower vases was highly fashionable in baroque garden design. Photo: Dumbarton Oaks, Washington, DC



15 DMC, Inventory of the Furniture at Chatsworth, 1764.

16 See Erkelens in Van Aken-Fehmers et al., 2007, op. cit. p. 29.

17 26 March to 6 July.

18 DMC, Chatsworth Building Accounts 1695-1696, p. 4.

19 DMC, Chatsworth Building Accounts 1695-1696, p. 15.

20 In the 18th century 'china' referred to Oriental porcelain, hence the distinction of 'dutchware'.

21 DMC, James Whildon's Accounts, Chatsworth 1685-1699, p. 135.

22 The Duke rented Arlington House, then bought Berkeley House in 1695. He had official lodgings at Whitehall and owned 3 St James's Square.

23 DMC, Lowman to Whildon E XCVI 2, 15th May 1694: seat furniture, tables, silver table and silver chandelier, looking glass and a picture were sent from London to Chatsworth.

24 O.R.F. Davies, 'The Dukes of Devonshire, Newcastle and Rutland, 1688-1714', unpublished DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 1971, p. 57.

25 DMC, Inventory of Chatsworth 1811.

26 The only locations given for Delft are '2 Old delph Vases' in the 'Closet adjoining [the Painted Salloon]'.  
27 A stacking vessel, the baluster vase was also described as a pyramid.

28 DMC, An Inventory of Household Furniture &c. at Chatsworth in March 1844.

29 DMC, Inventory of Chatsworth 1859.

30 DMC, Inventory of the Furniture &c. at Chatsworth 1892.

31 DMC, Inventory-Catalogue of the Objects of Art & of the China & Furniture at Chatsworth 1905.

32 DMC, Inventories of 1811, 1865 and 1908. I am grateful to Elizabeth Scott for this information.

33 DMC, Notes made by Evelyn Devonshire for her daughter-in-law, Mary, begun 2 January? [sic] 1924, vol. II, p. 18.

34 E.A. Lane, Deputy Keeper in the Department of Ceramics in 1950, was asked to estimate their worth after the unexpected death of the 10th Duke.

35 Arthur Lane, op. cit. p. 21.

36 Sister of the 8th Duke. Her watercolours were bound with a copy of the 6th Duke's 1845 *Handbook to Chatsworth and Hardwick* (Devonshire Collection).



‘tall vases, plant holders, blue and white’, in the West Entrance, all painted with ‘the Cavendish crest and motto and the Ducal coronet.’ Although there is no mention of urns in 19th- and early-20th century inventories at Hardwick,<sup>32</sup> Evelyn Duchess, wife of the 9th Duke, states that some Delft was retrieved from there: ‘The big vases seem to be part of a set made for the 1st Duke. Some of these were in the housekeeper’s room [at Chatsworth] some at Hardwick’.<sup>33</sup>

The next inventory, of 1950, does not list ceramics. Fortunately, a typed list of Delft vases sent to Arthur Lane at the Victoria & Albert Museum that year confirms that there were 14 vases including a ‘Circular Tulip-Vase’.<sup>34</sup> However, the previous year Lane had stated that ‘At Chatsworth there are no fewer than fourteen pagoda-vases... a two-handled vase, and a set of eight urns with the arms of William Cavendish as First Duke of Devonshire, a title created in 1694’.<sup>35</sup>

There are flaws in this description – the arms of the urns show an earl’s coronet not a duke’s – but the overestimation of ‘pagoda vases’ could be explained by the illustration in Lane’s article of the baluster vase, which he records as approximately two feet in height. It consists of the top three sections only; the bottom section could have been taken for the base of a 14th vase. (The overall

**8** Delft baluster flower vases, pyramids and urns in the Great Chamber. Heights of urns, 48.5 cm; pyramids, 120 cm; vase 105 cm

**9** A 19th-century watercolour showing a divided baluster vase in the State Bedchamber, Photo © Devonshire Collection, Chatsworth



height of the vase is over three feet.) This separation was earlier recorded by Lady Louisa Egerton in a watercolour showing the top sections underneath the slab table in the State Bedchamber (Fig. 9).<sup>36</sup> The difference in number of urns cannot be similarly explained. Lane’s statement combined with the 9 blue and white urns listed in 1792, suggests that there were more than five originally.

After gathering the Delft together at Chatsworth in the early 20th century, Evelyn Duchess noted that the pyramids were getting chipped when the grates were cleaned. Consequently they were moved to the nearby Sketch Galleries. Today, the grates that she installed have been stored and the vases reinstated in the hearths of the Great Chamber (Fig. 8), State Drawing Room (see p. 64), State Bedchamber (Fig. 6) and State Closet (see p. 66), grouped in garnitures.

It is entirely in keeping that the 1st Duke of Devonshire acquired Delft flower vases in the 1690s for Chatsworth, where the baroque style dominated. He used the same craftsmen and painters as at Hampton Court, reflecting his rise both within the aristocracy and at Court. His Delft embodies not only the aesthetics but also the politics and fashions of the time. The 1st Duke could hardly have chosen a more fitting expression of baroque exuberance for his ‘Palace of the Peak’.