

## FLOWERDEW HUNDRED PLANTATION AND THE 2013 GRAND NATIONAL RELIC SHOOTOUT

By Charles T. Hodges, Consulting Archaeologist to the William and Mary Center For Archaeological Research, Williamsburg, Virginia.

On 1 and 2 March 2013 over 200 metal-detector-wielding members of a relic collectors club descended on the historic Flowerdew Plantation and removed 8,961 metal artifacts dating to between ca. 1590 and 1865. While large, organized groups of relic hunters are not new to Virginia or the United States, their presence seems to be increasing with the aid of modern digital communications. Moreover they handle ever-more sophisticated metal detector technology, and many are actively promoting this would-be romantic hobby on the Web. Accordingly, their growing capacity to permanently compromise nonrenewable archaeological resources is difficult to overestimate. In this instance, the damage occurred on a very well-known archaeological resource along the south bank of the James River about halfway between Richmond and Jamestown, in Prince George County, Virginia. Flowerdew Plantation was listed on the Virginia Landmark Register in May 1975, and was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in August 1975. The full story of the Flowerdew event is presented here as a cautionary case study.

The scale of the recent damage at Flowerdew is only magnified by the long history of archaeological research, preservation, public education, and outreach conducted at the site. First surveyed in 1949, at the base of Windmill Point, Dr. Gilmore Holland and Dr. Benjamin McCary located contact-period Native American sites with very early English occupations directly over them in identical spatial and artifact-density patterns. Following this early work, the College of William and Mary conducted intensive field research from 1971 to 1979 under Dr. Norman Barka and Dr. Theodore Reinhart. This included creating the college's first Archaeology Field School in 1978. The work rapidly attracted national attention, and was featured in *Time* magazine in 1972 and *National Geographic* in 1976. Most of this work was financially supported by the wealthy landowner David A. Harrison III. Among the finds was a fortified area associated with a ca. 1619–1645 settlement building cluster, and the early English manor house—the first known “big house” in rural Virginia and the grandfather of all subsequent Virginia plantation houses. This semipermanent building on an interrupted (by half timbers) siltstone foundation was created by the initial tobacco boom, and the latest evidence suggests its construction was begun by the early colonial governor Sir George Yeardley, who gave America its first representative assembly rights in 1619. In 1979, in a lawsuit of national significance, landowner David Harrison sued the college for its artifacts and research; he won his case, as he had financed the fieldwork on his private property. In 1980 the core collections became the basis of an archaeology museum and public education program, largely masterminded by Harrison and Dr. James Deetz.

Deetz worked at Flowerdew from 1981 to 1995 in association with the University of California at Berkeley and the University of Virginia. Additional funding came from NEH Grants, University Research Expedition Programs, and anthropology field schools. Again, core operating finance—particularly for the museum—came from the landowner. Across both the William and Mary and Deetz-led programs, a remarkable number of archaeologists got their real start at Flowerdew. Deetz was already famous for his innovative museum interpretation work at “Plimouth Plantation” near Boston, Massachusetts. Flowerdew's archaeological record provided a unique opportunity for Deetz's holistic theoretical approach to historic archaeology, as witnessed by his 1993 book, *Flowerdew Hundred—The Archaeology of a Virginia Plantation 1619-1864*. In 1983, the present author, assisted by Taft Kiser, created an active public archaeology program at the site by creating a “virtually wide-open to the public” early-17th-century excavation, where visitors by design could see the actual ancient soil stains and the artifacts in situ and follow the careful excavations through time at the “Bread Oven Site” (44PG82). The program was so successful that we had difficulty getting visitors to leave the archaeology site, and press releases led to coverage on the front page of the *New York Times*! Flowerdew had a profound influence on the current Jamestown Rediscovery program, as noted by Dr. William Kelso.

In 2010 and 2011, an early English fort and its moat and ditch-set palisades were being rescued from the jaws of the James River with state salvage funds and through the College of William and Mary

Center for Archaeological Research; the fieldwork was headed by Joe Jones and directed by the present author and William Moore. The tail end of this rescue excavation straddled the Harrison family ownership of Flowerdew and that of the present Justice family, and provided an opportunity to teach the new Farm Manager, Mr. Mike Spear, about two critically important archaeology sites at Flowerdew (44PG64 and 44PG65); this included an open-ended offer to teach staff about other parts of the site that required preservation awareness. Mike Barber, the Virginia State Archaeologist, and Carol Bowman, the Executive Director of the Prince George Regional Heritage Center, made similar offers to the new owners.

After Dr. Deetz left in 1995, David Harrison and his family maintained the museum until 2007. Before his death in 2002, Harrison had the foresight to fund a full-time curator based at the University of Virginia, Karen Shriver, to maintain the artifact collections and research archives for the use of future researchers and exhibits, which continue to serve Virginia archaeology to this day. Immediately prior to the property sale, the family felt a protective archaeological easement would potentially hurt the property sale potential, so no legal easements were in place during the property transfer. However, the two most important early English and late Native American sites were preserved under a mowed lawn which was not under cultivation. Moreover, David Harrison had previously protected the English fort from the James River with a clay dyke and built up a new packed-clay overburden superimposed over the original remains and initial protective backfill. Over the course of the Harrisons' ownership of Flowerdew, few – if any – families have done more for American archaeology.

Given the importance of the site, both in terms of the archaeological record and the history of North American historical archaeology, the recent metal-detecting activity at the beginning of March 2013 was therefore particularly unfortunate. The "Grand National Relic Shootout" (GNRS) was a contest organized by a website group called the Treasure Depot (<<http://www.thetreasuredepot.com/huntinfo.html>>), run by Larry Cissna. This contest pitted teams against another to see which could find the most artifacts in the shortest period of time using specific brands of metal detector. Some metal detector manufacturers were at the site to offer spare parts, onsite repairs, or instrument tuning while advertising their wares to prospective buyers. Any metal artifact predating 1865 counted as one point, leading to a total multiple team final count of 8,961 points scored (in turn enabling a rapid estimate of the number of artifacts recovered). It took four archaeologists from four separate organizations – Mike Barber, Taft Kiser, Mary Ellen Hodges, and the present author – to engage with the secret event. This finally occurred on 24 April 2013, when we eventually located the right search keywords from an article on a Shootout find that made an Ohio newspaper. From there YouTube videos posted by Treasure Depot members quickly surfaced and unique Flowerdew scenery was instantly recognized (see, for example, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ePLfFLMKeHg>). The specific location was obscured in the Ohio article, videos, and on the Treasure Depot website, other than "Virginia near Richmond" or at a "historic plantation in Virginia." It is matter of concern that the Shootout was allegedly facilitated by the present Flowerdew farm manager, who was thanked for his hospitality in at least two GNRS forum posts, and who was allegedly photographed at the Shootout barnyard orientation on the first day of the event. However, the manager may not have been aware that the event was allegedly misrepresented to his employers; a Justice family spokesperson has explicitly stated that West Virginia-based landowner James C. Justice II – who was certainly not present at the event – was told he was leasing the property to a large organized duck hunt. This inevitably raises serious concerns about how the event was represented to the site owners, and whether the site manager knew about this chain of events.

What data did the GNRS remove from Flowerdew? It is estimated that 75% of all artifacts collected were Federal regular army and militia military equipment, including artillery shells and cannon balls, sabots, minie balls, belt buckles, buttons, and horse and mule tackle. This was likely material evidence of General Grant's 1864 Overland Campaign, during which Grant used the James River crossing to outflank and surprise General Lee via a pontoon bridge at Weyanoke and a ferry at Willcox Landing. In contrast to the bridge crossing, the Willcox Landing ferry crossing largely involved infantry, but also involved a higher overall number of troops than the pontoon bridge crossing. Important data on the variations in the Federal equipment used by the two different groups

involved in the Flowerdew crossings has therefore been lost, and information on associated camp sites and on the Confederate presence before the crossing has also likely been lost or at least badly compromised.

Numerous early colonial sites were also impacted. Among the early finds was a ca. 1590 military rapier or left-hand dagger and rare coin weights, all comparable to recent Jamestown finds. Film footage – there were at least six YouTube videos posted when the present author last checked – indicates activity in an area where Native American, English, and possibly African American burials are known to be located. The collectors also found a large concentration of large and small round shot and lead scrap in what they termed the “blunderbuss field”; these were potentially fired from swivel-mounted small cannon (murderers) and snaphaunce muskets documented at 44PG65, or perhaps other contemporary firearms. This Flowerdew site was Virginia’s most important artillery fort of the terminal Virginia Company and early Royal Colonial period (ca. 1621–1632), and was initially constructed by Sir George Yeardley.

Depending on the spatial relationship of some of the “blunderbuss field” artifacts recovered, it is also possible that the collectors found the remains of paired opposing skirmish lines where volley fire was laid on. This is possibly related to an incident involving Revolutionary War militia and Benedict Arnold and/or Lt. Col Simcoe and the Queens Rangers in 1781. We know the British shelled Flowerdew, but the British forces also made an amphibious landing while on their way to spike cannon at Hood’s Fort. One collector found a rare 18th-century English naval button, but the precise recovery location is unknown. Fort Hood is on a high bluff just south of Flowerdew proper and was later known as Fort Powhatan. According to Carol Bowman of Prince George County, this site has already been the site of activity by metal detector groups twice in the very recent past. This loss of important military information contrasts greatly with the excellent data recovered by archaeologists and metal detectors working in close collaboration at other sites, notably the Little Bighorn Battlefield National Monument in Montana (<<http://www.nps.gov/mwac/libi/methods.html>>).

At present, a dialogue is occurring between the Virginia Department of Historic Resources through Kathleen Kilpatrick (SHPO) and Mike Barber (Virginia State Archaeologist) and the landowners – who, again, have stressed that they thought they were leasing use of the site to an organized duck hunt. Certainly videos show that the Shootout collectors were wearing camouflage hunting outfits. There is an active internal formal investigation within the Justice family organization into how the event occurred without the knowledge of higher-ranking members of the staff system, and family lawyers are looking carefully at the contract. Landowner James C. Justice II and his management team were honestly shocked by what had happened. The present author talked to some of these people directly over the phone, and their horror and amazement at the events was palpable and genuine. Since the GNRS, the Justice family organization has repeatedly stressed that metal detecting is illegal at Flowerdew. If misrepresentation of lease-related activity can be demonstrated, litigation against Cissna’s group may be possible via a breach of the terms of the original hunting-related lease.

In terms of immediate practical action, the present author hopes to be able to send U.S. Topo Quad sheets and a color aerial photograph of the Flowerdew tract to the 2013 Shootout mailing list and ask folks kindly if they can remember where they found specific objects. Despite the issues with the GNRS at Flowerdew, I strongly emphasize that I do not think a blanket polarizing condemnation of the detector community is productive. As noted earlier in this piece, there are excellent examples of archaeologist-metal detector collaboration – and some of the people involved in the GNRS may simply not appreciate the importance of in situ archaeological resources. Perhaps I am naïve, but I think it is the latter who might come forward and help with damage control at Flowerdew.

The danger to archaeological resources at other sites, however, remains. The Travel Channel has recently featured GNRS organizer Larry Cissna in the the new TV series *Dig Wars*, which draws on the GNRS competitive format. In one already-broadcast contest located at a Virginia plantation (with owner permission) just downriver from Flowerdew, the two-person competing teams end the show by going to a professional artifact and coin appraiser to see who has discovered the most valuable objects, and thereby determine the “winners.” More information on both the Flowerdew activity and

*Dig Wars* can be found in Taft Kiser's excellent *New York Times* opinion piece of 3 August 2013 (<http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/03/opinion/open-season-on-history.html>).

I would like to conclude by sharing some personal thoughts about the importance of educating people about archaeology. In 1971, Leverette "Lefty" Gregory was a laboratory mechanic for the William and Mary Anthropology Department. He lacked anthropology degrees, so at the time the department would not hire him as an archaeologist. In that same year he found a 1590 peascond armor breast plate in a ca. 1622 fortification ditch he recognized as part of a major early fortification at the base of Windmill Point at Flowerdew (44PG65). Rather than remove this find himself, he contacted a conservator at William and Mary to delicately remove it. This offers an obvious contrast with Larry Cissna and his group, who nonetheless claim they are "saving history." Crucially, "Lefty" was an active volunteer with the Archaeological Society of Virginia, and had also briefly worked with Gerry Smith, a student of Dr. Geoffrey Coe. He had therefore been made directly aware of the importance of contextual archaeological data via active participation in organized archaeological programs. Raised in a travelling vaudeville family, this background likely contributed to Lefty Gregory's remarkable personal promotional skills, which in turn directly led to Flowerdew's iconic role in American archaeology; Lefty used the finds he had made at 44PG64 and 44PG65 to convince Flowerdew landowner David Harrison that he could fund the archaeology as a tax write-off!

If a site as important as Flowerdew can be the focus of an organized relic hunt, what about the less well-known sites? Major known resources must be watched vigilantly to protect them from this type of activity. Local communities must be educated and encouraged to join in the protection of archaeological resources. In the present author's opinion, a good beginning would be to make it illegal to use metal detectors without professional archaeological supervision on any Registered National Landmark. Where a demonstrable breach of relevant laws can be demonstrated, archaeologists should also consider liaising with impacted local communities to proactively pursue relevant legal action. As stated by Kathleen Kilpatrick (Virginia SHPO), unless there is a proactive reaction from the professional community and a large-scale engagement with community education programs, we can anticipate more negative impacts on archaeological resources. Isolated rural plantations and farms present additional challenges for community inspection and professional surveillance. Yet these very sites are often the best-preserved archaeologically, as these have not been subject to modern development. Protection here may have to come from a single well-informed farmer, and all too often we are not effectively reaching these people with our preservation concerns. Flowerdew offers a cautionary case study, but we have the tools to hand to minimize the possibility that similar cases could happen again.