

## Research Notes:

# An Eighteenth-Century Spanish Jar from the Queen Charlotte Islands

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Archaeological remains of Spanish settlers and explorers in the Northern Pacific along the British Columbia coast are rare, and until recently underwater remains have been completely unknown. Thus the discovery of a large fragment of an eighteenth century Spanish jar off the southeast coast of Langara Island at the north end of the Queen Charlotte Islands (fig. 1) is an interesting contribution to our knowledge of this relatively little known area of Spanish maritime activity (on which see Cook 1973). The object must also be counted among the earliest known European artefacts from British Columbia, antedating the recent discoveries of fur trading posts in the northwestern part of the province (Burley and Hamilton 1990-1).

Fishermen seining for salmon in the summer of 1987 hauled up the jar (figs. 2 and 3) approximately two hundred metres off shore in about eight to ten fathoms (fifteen to eighteen metres) of water; in spite of the relative isolation of the site (five hours by sea from the village of Masset) it is frequently visited both by commercial fishermen and by sports fishermen from nearby floating lodges, but no other such finds have ever been reported. Unfortunately the upper and most diagnostic part of the vessel was broken off, perhaps centuries ago, and a final assessment of its identity is problematic. A preliminary investigation of the site by a small team from the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia (UASBC) was carried out in late September 1990; although no further remains were discovered it was only possible because of adverse weather conditions to survey a part of the area that was the source of the jar. The bottom area suitable for seining is relatively limited, as over much of the sea bed there are large boulders (probably glacially deposited in the last Ice Age) up to a metre in height. There is, however, a broad sandy stretch that possibly yielded the object. It may have been an accident of wave or current that exposed the toe or the broken upper end of the jar sufficiently to catch in the net as it dragged across the ocean floor.

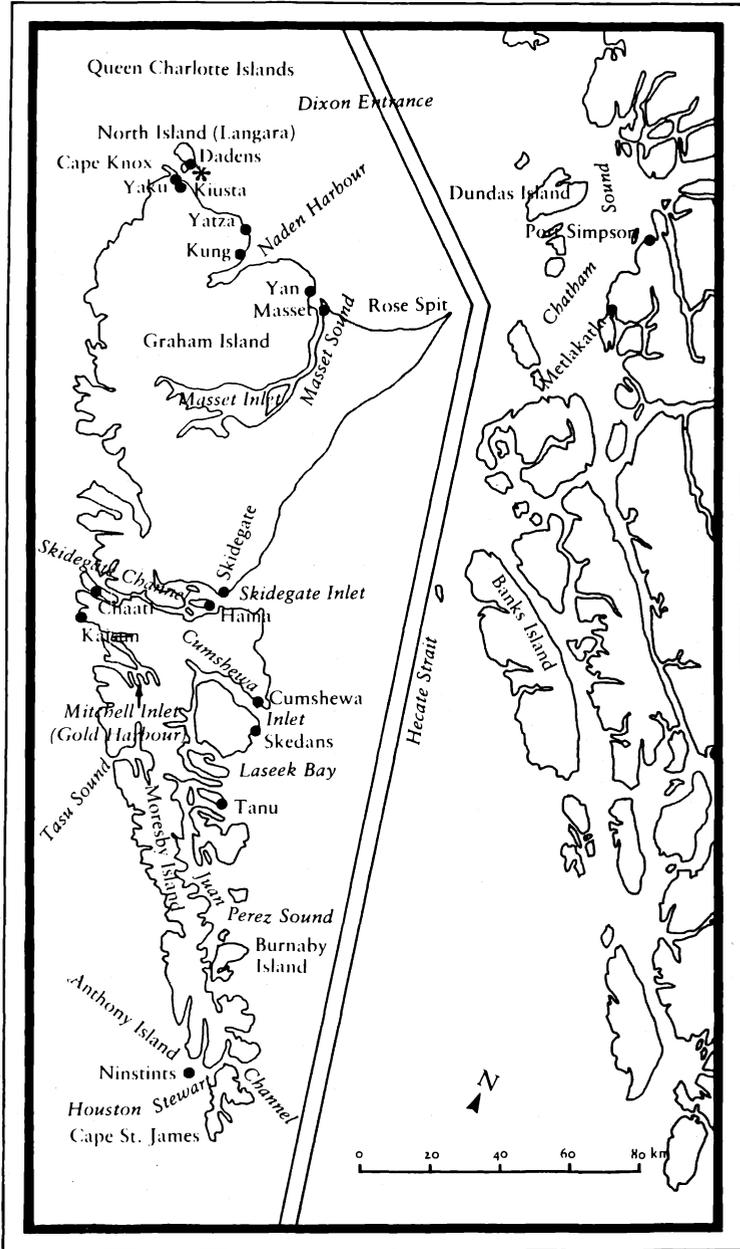


FIGURE 1  
Map of Queen Charlotte Islands with findspot

Some comparative material is available, and thermoluminescence and neutron activation studies of the piece have added to our knowledge of it. The clay is coarse-grained and poorly levigated, full of medium to large particles, shiny black grits, and gold mica flakes (biotite); it has been hard-fired with a slight sandwich effect (grey band in core) due to incomplete oxidization. The colour is predominantly brick red (Munsell Colour Chart 10R5/8). The surface of the vessel seems merely to have been wet smoothed before firing. All in all, the quality is very low. There was no sign of slip, paint, or glaze on the fragment originally sent for analysis to Vancouver to the Underwater Archaeological Society of British Columbia or on the jar itself; examination of the jar in the village of Masset on Graham Island revealed a small amount of pitch at the bottom. The jar is also remarkably asymmetrical and seems to have been built up from separate sections that were thrown on the potter's wheel and then put together.

For the Spanish in the New World the clay olive jar or *jarra de aceite* was a container as universal as the amphora was to Greco-Roman antiquity. Its development from the sixteenth to as late as the mid nineteenth centuries has been traced in a pioneering article by Goggins (1960), and in recent contributions by Deagan (1987) and James (1988), but new information is constantly coming to light about this neglected topic and Spanish colonial pottery in general (see, for example, the articles in Farnsworth and Williams 1992). Such containers were used not only for olive oil and wine but also for olives, figs, pickled fish, honey, soap, tar, etc. (Fairbanks 1972). At first manufactured in the area around Seville, they were also being produced in Mexico and other colonies by the late eighteenth century. Like Greek and Roman amphorai, they came in a variety of shapes and sizes that changed over the centuries.

Our specimen most closely resembles Shape A of Goggin's late type (last quarter of the eighteenth century into the nineteenth) with its slight concavity below a swelling shoulder (Goggins 1960: p. 28, fig. 9 — our fig. 4). There are, however, two unusual features: its size and its base. Normally Shape A jars are about 50-60 cm. in height and 25-30 cm. in width, but our incomplete vessel is 75 cm. in height and about 40 cm. wide at its maximum diameter; its wall is 20-25 mm. thick. Bases of olive jars are usually flat, rounded or ovoid whereas ours ends in a distinct "nipple." It should be emphasized that new work continues to bring other types to light, and the paucity of studies means that we should not be surprised when anomalies appear. Indeed, an adobe site at San Diego in California has recently produced the best piece of comparanda yet available, reused

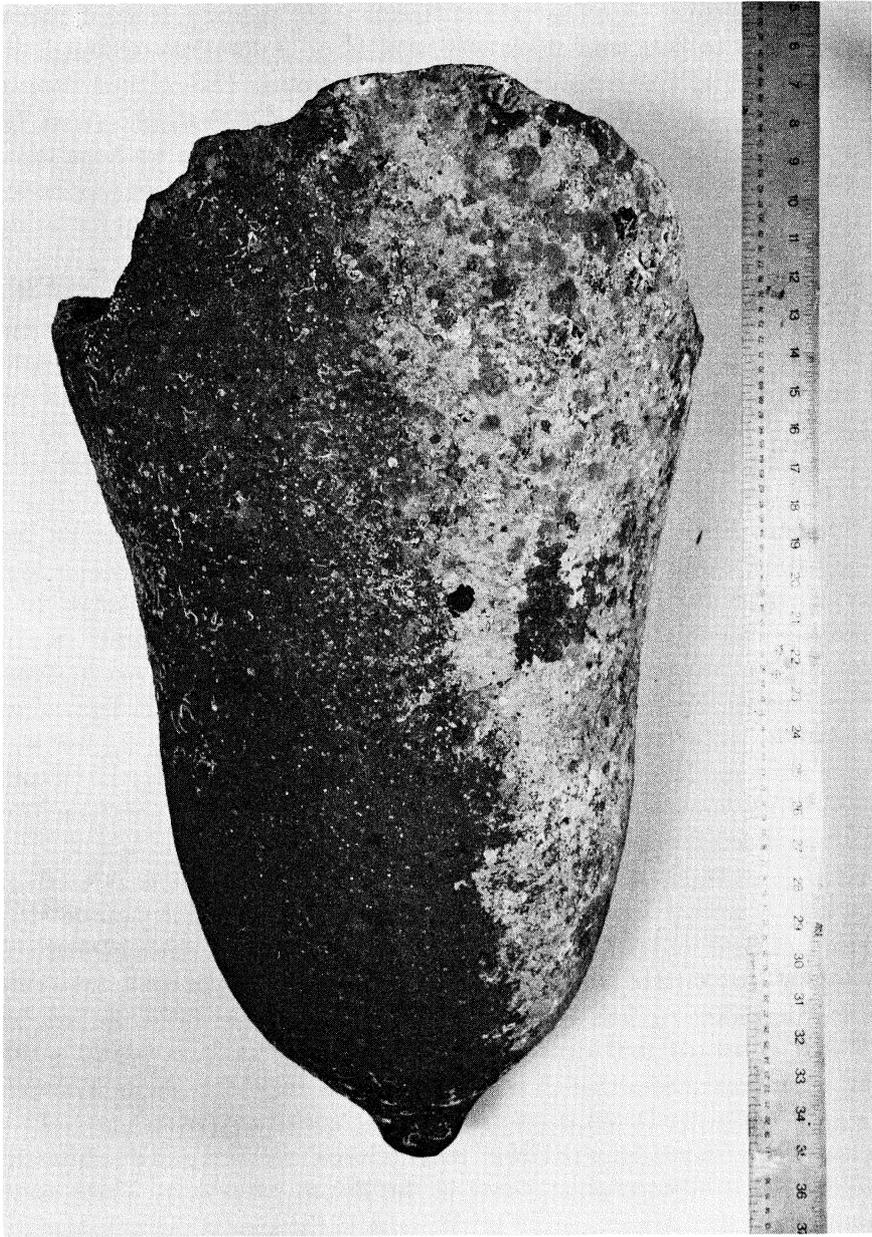


FIGURE 2  
Photograph of Jar

in a kitchen of ca. 1840 (fig. 5 from Hector 1986: p. 100): it has the same nipple at the base and thick wall and large proportions although its diameter of 37 cm. is somewhat smaller than ours. The original date of this piece is unknown and may be considerably earlier than its context. Its provenance is equally a mystery at the moment, although we hope to be able to analyze the fabric in the near future. As with ancient amphorai, such a protuberance at the base of a large vessel would be useful for lifting and moving it.

Another suggested comparison is with a Spanish sugar mould of the sixteenth century typical of those found, for example, at the early settlement of Sevilla La Nueva on Jamaica (Smith et al. 1982: fig. 22). At first sight there is some similarity (especially in height), but the base form of the Queen Charlotte Islands jar is different and the date is much later. There is also no reason that a sugar mould (unless used for something else) should be found in North Pacific waters.

Recent thermoluminescence dating by one of us (DH) yielded an age (of manufacture) of 235 years ago  $\pm$  17 years (i.e., a range of A.D. 1790-1720 at two standard deviations). The uncertainty includes a larger than normal uncertainty for the gamma dose from the environment; this in turn arises because we do not know the composition of the ocean floor, nor whether the sixty-gram fragment dated was buried on the surface or above the surface of the sea bed. Nor do we know how long the pot was manufactured before it was brought to the find spot. This TL date fits in well with what we know of the early Spanish penetration of the area. The first recorded European contact in this locality took place in July of 1774 when Juan Perez on *Santiago* sighted land but was unable to put ashore because of adverse weather. Some local Haida Indians paddled out to him, however, and traded furs and other products for metal, trinkets, and old clothing (for some of this material see Kendrick and Inglis 1991; this catalogue includes our jar, no. 65). They probably came from the nearby Haida settlement at Dadens on the south shore of Langara Island, a site as yet unexcavated although house depressions are visible there. Thirteen years later George Dixon, captain of *Queen Charlotte*, gave the name of his vessel to the islands, bartered iron "toes" (chisels) for furs, and also brought back a local tobacco plant (now in the British Museum). There were numerous other American and British ships in the area at the time trading for sea otter pelts; as they stopped for provisioning at Spanish colonies in South America and California en route it is also possible that the jar came from one of them. An American trader, *Resolution*, was captured by the natives with the loss of all but one of its crew. In 1792 the Spanish returned

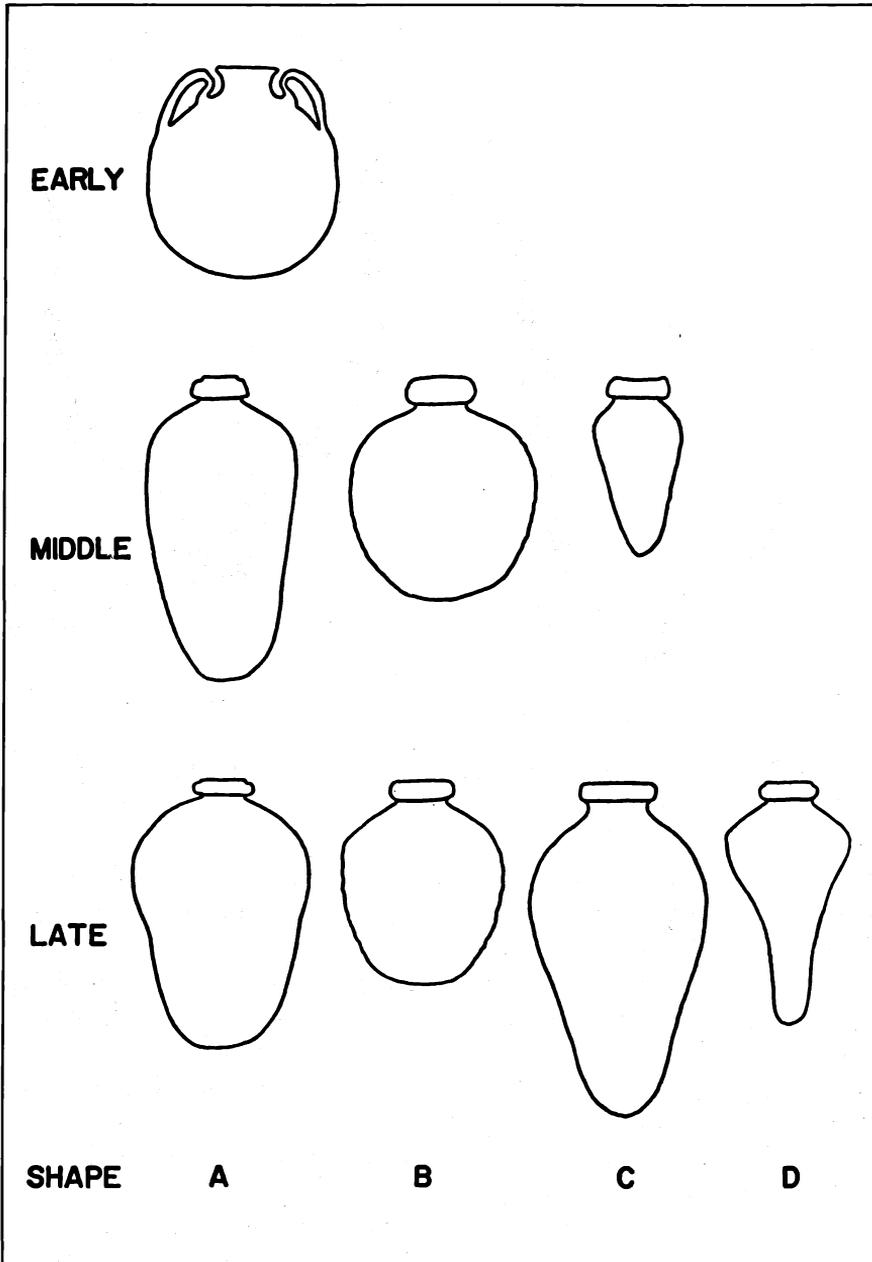


FIGURE 4  
Types of Spanish Olive Jars (from Goggin, 1960)

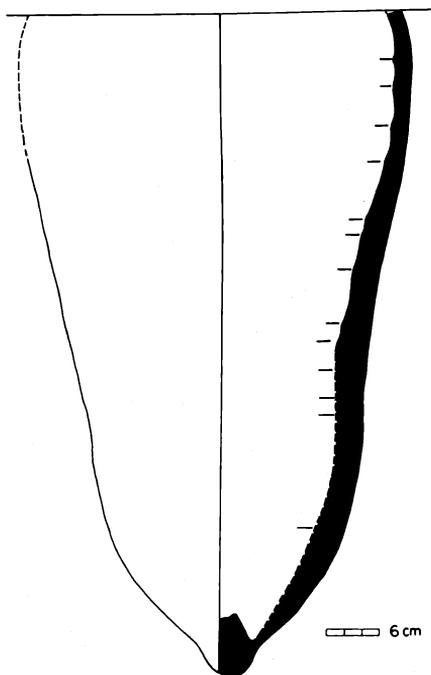


FIGURE 3  
Profile drawing of Jar

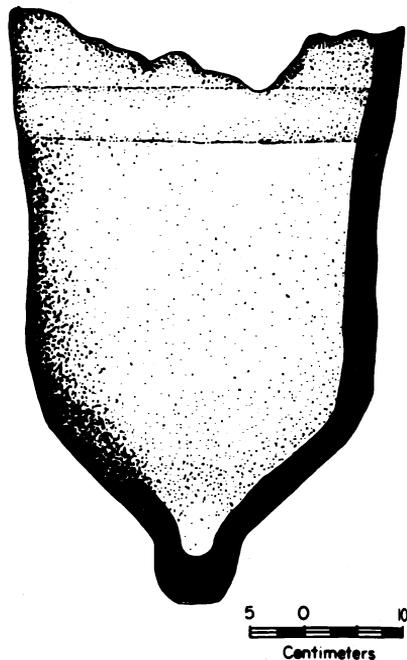


FIGURE 5  
Spanish Olive Jar  
from San Diego excavation

under Jacinto Camaaño and erected a wooden cross more than six metres high at the present site of Bruin Bay (a frequent overnight anchorage for fishing boats) at the north end of Graham Island across from Langara Island and close to the find spot of the jar; European artefacts have reportedly been found at the nearby Haida settlement of Kiusta just west of Bruin Bay (Gessler 1978, 13). The number of known opportunities for the Spanish to have deposited the jar are limited, however; after the more or less amicable settlement of the "Nootka Incident" of 1790 that almost saw war between Great Britain and Spain, Spanish activity in the area continued for only another five years.

Neutron activation analysis was performed by one of us (WN) on a portion of the pot using the technique described by Krywonos et al. (1982); the results are shown in table 1. The Ca values are unusually low and one must question whether or not some Ca could have been leached out. The composition has been compared with databases of much earlier Roman

storage jars from Spain at Southampton University and the Smithsonian Institution — they are the only bodies of data on coarse ware pottery from Spain available — but no match has been found; as clay beds can vary enormously in composition from place to place even within relatively limited areas an identification of the source is probably many years away. By publishing these data, however, we hope that others will eventually be able to identify the place of production of the pot. Some limited NAA work was done about a decade ago on Spanish period ceramics from the settlement at Nootka/Yuquot (Weigand et al., 1981: 171-77), for example, but it remains until now unique in British Columbia.

One can imagine a variety of circumstances under which the jar arrived at its place of discovery and in the absence of further evidence we can only speculate. It is unlikely that an unknown Spanish wreck awaits discovery in the area but currents often clear and rebury portions of the sea bed to some depth and only careful and complete autopsy on a number of occasions can determine what actually lies there. More probable is that the piece was discarded when empty or broken while a Spanish ship (perhaps Perez or, more likely, Camaaño) was anchored at or passing by this spot. Such jars, however, appear in other non-Spanish contexts on the Atlantic side from Louisbourg, the great French fortress in Nova Scotia (Fairbanks 1975), on south along the American coast to the Caribbean, and it is not impossible that a non-Spanish vessel left it. It is of course also possible that somehow it might have found its way into Haida hands and to have been jettisoned by them, but there is little known about Native settlements in the Queen Charlottes at this time and there is little evidence elsewhere in

TABLE 1

*Element Concentrations from Neutron Activation Analysis*

%Na	2.54	Ce	65.4	Dy	2.69
Sc	18.7	Sm	8.18	Ti	2712
Cr	146	Eu	2.06	Mn	937
%Fe	5.46	Yb	0.658	V	133
Co	21.6	Lu	0.467	%Al	8.94
Rb	105	Hf	8.24	%Ca	2.68
Cs	25.6	Th	12.1		
La	29.4	U	3.58		

The values are in  $\mu\text{g/g}$  except for Na, Fe, Al and Ca which are in %. The values in brackets are one standard deviation for each, expressed in %.

the province for use of European ceramics this early by indigenous peoples. Excavations some years ago at the Spanish and Native settlement at Nootka/Yuquot on the west coast of Vancouver Island produced some fragments of olive jars from the brief Spanish occupation (Dewhirst 1978: fig. 18; Lueger 1981: p. 116, fig. 3 a-c), but it does not seem that use continued after 1795. We hope that a larger scale investigation with more divers and side scan sonar may in the future settle this question, since the jar by itself tells a very limited story.

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## Research Notes:

# More Letters of Edmund Verney

ALLAN PRITCHARD

Readers of the article, "Letters of a Victorian Naval Officer: Edmund Verney in British Columbia, 1862-65" (*BC Studies*, No. 86, Summer 1990) may be interested to know that recent cataloguing of the great archive at Claydon House in Buckinghamshire has brought to light additional letters written by Edmund Hope Verney during his period in B.C. as commander of the gunboat HMS *Grappler* to his father in England, Sir Harry Verney. The letters for the year 1863, which had become separated from the others and at the time I wrote the article were thought to be no longer in existence, have now been found, and with them is a letter of September 1864 partly about the Chilcotin uprising. This discovery is a result of the work of Mrs. Susan Ranson, the archivist at Claydon House.

The events recorded by Verney in these newly discovered 1863 letters include the *Grappler's* participation during the spring in the search for the Lemalchi Indians believed responsible for a series of murders in the Gulf Islands. Verney was not present at the bombardment by HMS *Forward* of the Lemalchi village on Kuper Island, and states that he is "thankful that the responsibility of firing the first shot has not fallen to me" (26 April), but he subsequently gives a vivid account of the finding of the body of one of the murdered men, William Brady, amid idyllic surroundings at Bedwell Harbour on Pender Island (3 May), and he provides a detailed and moving report of the surrender by the Cowichan Indians of two of the wanted men (5 May). He attributes the peaceableness of the surrender to the influence of Bishop Demers, and expresses a more favourable view of Roman Catholic influence on the Cowichans than he had in a letter of September 1862 quoted in the earlier article.

The principal event of the later part of 1863 recorded in the letters is a northern voyage in October-November to Metlakatla, which includes an extensive and highly favourable account of the missionary work of William Duncan. This voyage in very imperfectly charted waters at a bad time of year proved hazardous, and Verney gives a dramatic narrative of an occasion on which the *Grappler* was very nearly lost: on the return through

Milbanke Sound the ship struck a rock and remained stranded there for almost eight hours in an increasingly dangerous situation before floating free on the rising tide, with its bottom damaged (15 November).

The 1863 letters frequently record minor episodes just as interesting as the major events of the year, for example this on 17 January:

we anchored in Esquimalt Harbour on Thursday afternoon: in the evening, minute-guns were heard, and supposing them to proceed from a vessel in distress, I was ordered to get up steam, and two boats were sent out from the *Topaze*; I went out to the entrance of Victoria Harbour but could see nothing particular and returned: we afterwards found that the guns were part of a joyous demonstration made by the coloured population on account of the American emancipation proclamation.

Like the previously known letters of other years, those of 1863 are valuable for what they record of many aspects of the colonies of Vancouver Island and British Columbia as well as for naval matters. Verney displays a constant appreciation of the coastal scenery and provides many detailed descriptions of settings and scenes. For example, on 15 January he writes that the English Camp on San Juan Island is "one of the most lovely views in this part of the world," and describes not only its situation "in a deep bay" "completely landlocked and sheltered," surrounded by dense forests; and then "the white and yellow houses for the troops" built around three sides of a square facing the water, with the tall flag pole displaying the Union Jack; but he also includes such details as the red coats of the sentries, the pet dogs sleeping in front of the officers' quarters, the sound of bugles calling the men to dinner, the striking of the hours "on a suspended crow-bar which emits a very soft and musical sound," and the curling puff of white steam occasionally let out by the *Grappler* lying at anchor. A similar sensitivity to auditory as well as visual elements appears in his description of a cold winter scene at Esquimalt Harbour on 8 February:

tonight is most lovely: not a breath of wind stirs the frozen air, and the stars flash like diamonds set in jet; the atmosphere is so clear that every sound is heard with wonderful distinctness, as the tramp of the sentry aboard *Topaze*, or every half-hour, as the bell strikes, his cheering cry of "all's well."

In addition to describing the snow-laden trees and rock surrounding the harbour, he includes in his evocation of the scene "the steady red light of Figgard Island Lighthouse, and low ceaseless moan of the swells heaving and sullenly breaking on the rocks at its base."

As in his earlier B.C. letters, Verney continues to write in 1863 much about climate and seasonal change. On 8 April he tells his father that

although he knows he “raved” about the beauty of the wild flowers of southern Vancouver Island last spring, he cannot refrain from doing so again, and he declares on 27 April: “I cannot believe that any part of the world can show a greater variety and number of wild flowers than this.” During the northern voyage in the autumn he writes enthusiastically of the magnificent scenery of the Inland Passage; and on 14 October he suggests that Captain Vancouver would not have found the scenery around Bella Coola so desolate and inhospitable as he did if he had been there in duck-hunting season.

In his 1863 letters as in those of 1862 Verney provides candid and often critical comments on the establishment of colonial officials on Vancouver Island, as well as on his own superior officers. The letters indicate, however, that his relations with Governor Douglas during this year were cordial, and he records long conversations with Douglas in August and December. Among recent arrivals to the colony, he continues to display special interest in the welfare and marriages of the “female emigrants” brought on the “brideships” *Tynemouth* and *Robert Lowe*.

The 1863 letters also provide additional evidence of Verney’s special interest in the progress of the agricultural settlement at Comox, which had been founded by a voyage of the *Grappler* in October 1862. He writes on 1 May about Comox (which he had begun by spelling ‘Comucks’ and now spells ‘Comux’ or ‘Comax’):

I spent the afternoon in visiting the settlers who had much advanced since I was last there: land was being ploughed up; trees felled, and gardens cultivated, and I had a glass of rich and delicious new milk.

On another visit to Comox two weeks later he again canoed up the river and visited the settlers in their houses; he read divine service for them on Sunday; and he even brought “juvenile works in verse and prose for distribution among the youthful population of the Comax settlement” (15, 18 May).

A number of points that had not been previously clear emerge from the 1863 letters. They show, for example, that the cottage Verney rented in Esquimalt in 1862 and facetiously named “The Palace” was not, as I had assumed, the same as the cottage named “The Small Bower” in later letters, but “The Small Bower” was a cottage at the head of Constance Cove first acquired by Verney in the spring and summer of 1863, while the *Grappler* was laid up having its boilers replaced. The 1863 letters show that Verney immediately developed a great interest in improving the property and in gardening and raising fowls there.

More important than this, the 1863 letters explain what had seemed a puzzling fact, that for no apparent reason a great concentration of names connected with Verney and his family occurs on coastal charts in the Wells Passage area. The 1863 letters show that in just this area the *Grappler* made a rendezvous with the *Beaver* early in October, when the latter under the command of Verney's old shipmate, Daniel Pender, was engaged in survey work. The 1863 letters show that Verney placed names on the coast's inhabitants as well as upon its geographical features. On an occasion when Duncan's Indian converts at Metlakatla were given European names on baptism (2 November), Verney contributed such names as Edmund Verney, Frederic Calvert, commemorating the fact that his branch of the Verney family had in earlier generations been Calverts, and Richard Moody, as a mark of his esteem for the colonel of the Royal Engineers at New Westminster.

The 1863 letters provide additional information about Verney's activities in collecting Indian artefacts to be sent to Claydon House. Attached to a letter of 20 February is a list of such articles shipped to England on the Hudson's Bay Company ship *Princess Royal*. An entry in this list sheds some light on the trading methods through which Verney acquired artefacts:

One charm, composed to the unbelieving eye only of red cord and weasel skins, but which is really very valuable, and cost a nearly new uniform frock-coat. No bullet can harm the wearer: any one doubting its efficacy is recommended to try it.

The list includes "Two large carvings from the mouth of the Courtenay River in the Comox district," which Verney suggests will "do for garden gate-posts"; he refers to them again in the previously unknown letter of September 1864, suggesting that they be either used as garden gate posts or given to a museum. Fortunately they were preserved in the private museum at Claydon House: these are no doubt the Salish house posts from Comox village now displayed at the Museum of Mankind in London.

In far more ways than can be briefly indicated, the newly discovered 1863 letters add to the value and interest of Verney's unique personal record of naval activities and colonial life in British Columbia. This record is now known to extend without any substantial breaks for the whole period from Verney's arrival on Vancouver Island in May 1862 to his departure for England in June 1865. I am again indebted to Sir Ralph Verney and the Claydon House Trust for permission to quote from the letters here.