

40 YEARS LIVING WITH DR WALL

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Figure 1. The central quatrefoil lobed vase circa 1753 painted with European flowers in the manner of Meissen c.1758-60

IT WAS IN 1948 WHEN I WAS WORKING WITH W.B.Honey on the English Ceramic Circle's exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum that I first became involved with the illustrious Dr Wall and the early products of the Worcester factory. Prior to that my interest in English ceramics had been confined to pottery, most particularly to delftware and decorated creamware. The 1948 exhibition introduced me to many of the leading private collectors of the immediate post-war era and three years later I was invited by H.R. Marshall to assist him with the exhibition he was planning to celebrate the bicentenary of the Worcester factory. Thus began my long association with Worcester. The exhibition was held in the elegant 18th Century house, No. 30 Curzon Street, then the London showrooms of the porcelain company and comprised almost the entire very large collection amassed by H.R. Marshall and a consider-

able part of the equally fine collection assembled by Mr C.W. Dyson Perrins, Chairman of the Worcester factory. Between these two great collectors few gaps remained to be filled except for examples of engraving by Robert Hancock which were lent by Cyril Cook, author of "The Life and Work of Robert Hancock", and one unique mug printed with a portrait of the King of Prussia with the addition of a cock perched on a hand, from the Hughes collection.

Looking back now it is extraordinary how little attention was paid to the beautiful and highly interesting blue and white wares. Marshall regarded them as "poor man's Worcester" and generally speaking they were not considered worthy of collecting. How



Figure 2. (right) Bell shaped cup painted with fruit c.1765-68 (centre) Plate with cornucopia shaped claret border, the Hope Edwardes pattern, c.1775-80 (left) Mug, apple green ground with panels of birds, c.1768

times have changed!

Altogether the 1951 exhibition included nearly a thousand examples of first period Worcester, most of the pieces having been packed away for safety during the war years. My first job was to wash each one, a mammoth task but one which provided me with the perfect opportunity to handle and learn.

When I was invited to give this lecture I decided I would concentrate on two vexed questions which have surrounded first period Worcester for a number of years. They concern "later decoration" and "redirection", two distinctly different things. "Later decoration" is a misleading term far too often used but which fails to address the all important question - 'how late?' five years, ten years or late in the 19th Century. The answers are crucial. Firstly it must be appreciated that a large firing of porcelain was not necessarily decorated immediately but a part could have been stored in the white to be painted as and when required. The exception is of course underglaze blue decoration which formed such a very large part of the early output and which by its very nature had to be contemporary. So in order to date a piece reasonably accurately it is essential to know how the Worcester shapes evolved.

In dating first period Worcester it is the colour of

the paste and glaze and the shape rather than patterns which are the best guides with handles and finials especially helpful. Some shapes were relatively short lived whilst others with modifications continued in production for a number of years. From circa 1755 for approximately fifteen years the two basic shapes for tea wares were either the perfectly plain body or the Warmstry flute and moulded designs with 'pleat' and feather moulding. In the case of blue and white from 1755-60 these wares would have had workman's marks. From circa 1760-1770 the Warmstry flute was widely used for coloured wares when if it had a mark it would have been the fretted square or seal mark. From around 1770 the barbed flutes gave way to reeding or convex fluting which remained a basic design until the end of the Dr Wall period.

Flower finials, which give a good indication of date, were introduced in the mid 1750's. One of the earliest was shaped rather like a rounded crocus or snowdrop often with a single florette inside the



Figure 3. Two apple green mugs c.1765-68, the panels painted with birds c.1775-80



Figure 4. Tea cup and saucer, Warmstry fluted shape with square marks, c. 1765-70. The claret and turquoise decoration and the gilding c. 1775-80.

almost closed flower. This was relatively short lived and replaced by a shaggier, irregular flower which on more important pieces was larger and particularly well modelled with several rows of petals. Finally, from 1770 to the end of the Dr Wall period the flower became heavier and more rounded rather like a buttercup with the applied leaves at the base of the flower much thicker, resembling pastry cut-outs! Handles which are also very good clues to dating are too numerous to discuss in this short paper but the hexagonal creamboats of the early years had either angular or sometimes quite elaborate moulded scroll handles. After circa 1760, coinciding with a creamier, more translucent paste, the scroll handle became flattened in section. Mugs in the late 1750's frequently had plain loop handles with a distinctive fine ridge which in the 1760's was flattened out or grooved, useful to bear in mind when endeavouring to date apple green mugs which, when painted with panels of birds, were frequently decorated ten years later, certainly during the last quarter of the 18th Century.

Having made these points I will now turn to the earliest pieces which I consider could qualify to be termed "later decorated" although in such early instances only a few years elapsed between actual manufacture and the decorating. Nevertheless they

are important illustrations of what was to become a factory policy. The first is a slender quatrefoil lobed vase with two handles at the neck (Fig. 1) centre - circa 1753, which you would expect to find painted with either a "Long Eliza" or in Japanese Kakiemon style with an early rendering of the "Sir Joshua Reynolds" or "Bird on the Rock" pattern. The second is a typical "Wigornia" type moulded cornucopia wall vase circa 1755, in all other instances in my experience, painted in underglaze blue. But both these pieces are painted in colours with bouquets and sprays of European flowers in the manner of Meissen which appear on a wide range of wares from circa 1758 for the next five years or so. They include those elegant teapots with a slender faceted spout and almost flat cover, peculiar to Worcester of the 1760 period, vases of either baluster or ovoid shape, the first with a high domed cover and the second almost flat, and all with the "snowdrop" flower finial so typical of this period. None of these shapes were introduced prior to 1758 and so I would regard these examples as early evidence of "later decoration" be they only a few years later.

The next decade 1760-70 sees the introduction of

most of the coloured grounds many of which were executed in the London atelier of James Giles, some, especially the earlier attempts, charmingly naive and showing an irregularity in the application of the ground colour resembling butter spread on bread! Of the factory equivalents green has become highly controversial but I hope I may be able to dispel at least some of these doubts. Two green bordered patterns have never been questioned, these are the Marchioness of Huntly with swags of European flowers pendant from the irregular green borders and another factory pattern which has a central cluster of fruit (Fig.2 right). But panels of birds reserved on the green ground are a different story! The mug (Fig. 2 left) is entirely contemporary with typical bird painting of the late 60's. However, the two mugs (Fig. 3) were made in the mid to late 60's but the style of bird painting corresponds exactly to that found on blue ground wares of ten years or more later! Comparing other features of the decoration both the green and the blue have a tree with spiky branches and a broad canopy of foliage. In the distance there are more trees painted in a distinctive shade of pale sea-green - the sky is often tinted but sometimes it is rather too colourful! The blue ground wares, with this type of decoration, including the Marchioness of Ely pattern have never been

questioned. However, I am not unmindful of the fact that the doubts surrounding some apple green ground arose because the painting in the panels does on occasions overlap the gilding. It has always been accepted that gilding was the last sequence in the decorating process and therefore required the lowest firing temperature. Not having worked in the pottery industry I cannot say more but I am assured by some who have that this sequence is not necessarily the case. I can only add that judging by the overall quality and the very considerable amount of green ground Worcester to have survived it would seem highly unlikely that so much of it would have found a market in the late 19th century.

The plate in the centre of Fig. 2 with its claret cornucopia shaped border is often referred to incorrectly as the "Hope Edwardes Service". Pattern, yes, but the service comprises dessert ware only which was decorated in the London atelier of James Giles who also repeated the pattern with a turquoise border again only on dessert ware. Both these patterns are often found on tea ware when the border colour is more dense and the palette is



Figure 5. Mug c.1765-70 painted with Teniers style figures within a pink scale border, second half of the 19th century.

stronger with the style of fruit painting more closely relating to the Duke of Gloucester service, circa 1775-80. I would therefore suggest that after the bankruptcy of Giles in 1775 the Worcester factory continued to produce some of his successful decorative patterns. However, a number of pieces in both the claret and the turquoise designs do show positive signs of redecoration. The pattern of wavy gilt conjoined panels known as "Queen's" pattern can often be clearly seen in outline, the gilding having been removed with acid. this pattern was produced in some quantity by Giles around 1770 and may be recognised by his typical gilt barring on handles. I would therefore suggest that when the London atelier finally failed in 1775 such pieces of Queens ware were left unsold in Giles's workshop found their way back to the Worcester factory where they could have been redecorated with some of Giles's more saleable patterns. Here it should be noted that the Worcester Porcelain Company was very probably Giles's major creditor. Whilst I can now accept that certain ware was "later decorated" in the Worcester Factory still within the 18th century I do not find the "redeco-rated" pieces of Queen's ware so acceptable. This is one of several anomalies which for the time being remains unanswered.

Another pattern that has for a very long time been attributed to Giles has radiating narrow alternating

panels of claret and turquoise and festoons of gilt flowers (Fig. 4) found only on Warmstry fluted tea ware. The fact that this type of fluting belongs to the 1760's and this very sophisticated classical decoration to the mid to late 1770's is, I believe, further evidence of later decoration. I am sure I am not alone in finding the Giles attribution to this pattern very suspect. It is just unfortunate that it continues in some quarters to be illustrated as Giles. One further pointer away from Giles is the gilding on teapots and milk jugs, which is not his style but more closely resembles that found on the "later decorated" Hope Edwardes pattern previously mentioned. Further still, a year or two ago when I was carrying out a valuation of a very large collection of Worcester in the U.S.A. I came across something most interesting.

The saucers in this pattern, also the saucer dishes, had a spray of gilt flowers in the centre. Upon closer inspection I noticed the gilding was covering a spray of green foliage! Then looking at the covers on the upright pieces I saw that the finials were painted in the typical light green and yellow of Giles! Here again I would say is further evidence of wares being returned to Worcester after the bankruptcy of the London atelier.

There is one most dubious form of redecoration which, if not recognised, can be extremely costly. It concerns a small amount of tea ware and a few mugs which over the years have been attributed to James Giles. It relates to pink scale borders enclosing Teniers style figure painting (Fig. 5) a combination never used by Giles. Unfortunately major works have continued to illustrate such pieces and attribute them to the London atelier and only in more recent publications have doubts been raised. I am guilty of having included in our 1977 exhibition "James Giles China Painter" the mug illustrated in Fig. 5 which was loaned to us by the Dyson Perrins Museum Worcester. Unfortunately the catalogue had already gone to press and we were past the point of no return when upon reexamining the mug more closely I realised to my horror that there were clear traces of a transfer printed pattern under the Teniers figure painting! Despite this very obvious proof of redecoration it has taken a long time to get the message across. Quite apart from this mug the quality of the painting on all these pieces and the palette bears no relationship to Giles. It should be compared to the superb sucrier Fig. 6 where it doesn't take a very experienced eye to see the differences in colouring. Note particularly on the pink scale pieces a dark chocolate brown instead of Giles's clear red-browns, a very flat green and a curious shade of light blue, not encountered in 18th century painting. At

Figure 6. The superb Giles decorated Worcester sucrier c.





Figure 7. Circular scallop edged dish c. 1770 the claret ground, painting and gilding, second half of the 19th century.

last I think it is now agreed this type of decoration was applied some hundred years later. Because this pink scale pattern is so obviously wrong we must not allow ourselves to be blinded to the many other pink scale bordered patterns which cannot be faulted. The colour of the pink varies considerably, sometimes a bright stick of rock pink usually combined with large, pronounced scales as illustrated on the basket in the colour frontispiece to Gerald Coke's book "In search of James Giles", but it can be a more purple-pink shade and even purple, see a saucer dish in the same book, Col. pl. XXIII, where the scaling is much smaller. There is however one other pattern in this group which should be treated with extreme caution. So far I have only encountered it on tea ware and then only on cups and saucers and a saucer

dish on the reeded or convex fluted body which followed the Warmsty flute post 1770. Again, the fact that it rarely turns up suggests it was a single service. It is recognisable by a very strange palette which totally lacks the freshness of Giles and is muted and flat. But the design of curving floral swags in the manner of Meissen both with and without a pink scale border is a pattern much favoured by Giles when the flower painting is particularly beautiful. At present I cannot say with certainty when this poorly coloured version was produced but I am more than a little inclined to put it in the same category as pink scale and Teniers figures!

Although Dr Wall died in 1776 his period is generally accepted as ending in 1783 with the demise of William Davis one of the original partners in the Worcester Porcelain Company. The final decade of the first period from 1770 saw a marked decline in the artistic quality of the decoration but one group



Figure 8. Tea bowl and saucer, c. 1770-75, the decoration mid/late 19th century

of patterns I have always admired are in the best tradition of Worcester. These are the hop trellis" designs inspired by Sèvres and executed in extremely attractive colour combinations, also well suited to the functional shapes and convex fluting of this final period which included an especially good barrel shaped teapot with a flat cover and a pear shaped milk jug with a lightly domed cover. In another group are the many wares decorated with Lord Henry Thynne type patterns consisting of a landscape within a panel enclosed by brightly coloured fruit. But alongside these last worthy Dr Wall patterns are some very uninspired wares with a variety of simple border designs including a black and turquoise cable,

"pearling" in the same colouring and turquoise and gilt or green banding. The cable border is sometimes found with crimson trellis and swags of tiny flowers instead of hops and the turquoise and gilt banding is occasionally found enclosing clusters of fruit painted in soft shades of pink and mauve instead of the bright yellows, reds and purples associated with the typical Lord Henry Thynne patterns. It is not currently possible to say when these various additions were made but sufficient be it that they have to be treated as suspect! We should not lose sight of the fact that during the last quarter of the 18th Century the Worcester factory was up against intense competition from Wedgwood with his fine durable creamware body and new classical border patterns which must have caused many problems for the design shop at Worcester.

Before ending I have to draw attention to just one or two patterns which were very definitely products of the mid to late 19th Century. These include pieces of first period Worcester covered with a heavy, opaque claret ground colour and reserved panels of either birds, flowers, or European figures (Fig. 7) none of which match up to comparable 18th Century painting. The gilding too is much more ornate and on some leaf dishes it has lifted badly. Another to be avoided is the Queen's pattern where the gilt conjoined panels have been filled with bright light blue, bright pink, and gilt diaper patterning and swags of coloured flowers (Fig.8).

Finally I must mention the unreliability of "blacking" on foot-rims and bases for long regarded as certain evidence of redecoration. I have to say that I have examined many pieces which were obviously redecorated or later decorated but which bore no signs of "blacking". This is something I cannot explain and I can only add that we still have much to learn on this subject.

However, my own feeling is that provided the decoration was applied within the 18th Century it should not be judged too harshly. The important thing is that it should be recognised for what it is not confused with those pieces that were decorated a hundred years later. I am not going to say that the study of early Worcester porcelain is quickly mastered. It is only through living with Dr Wall for a number of years that you can begin to recognise the differences in painting skill., and the subtle variations in palette changes. It is therefore right that we should acknowledge the debt of gratitude we owe to H.R. Marshall and others who have given their porcelain collections to museums where they may be studied and enjoyed.