

Mother Lode Treasure

Margie Williams

(With digging expertise and photographic assistance from husband Kent)

Amid the clutter of transferware books and papers, near shelves and cabinets filled with beautiful English pink transferware, sit two large boxes. These rather out-of-place soda boxes contain precious pieces of the English ware were brought to our northern California home from an unlikely source – right out of the treasure digs of our antique bottle digger friends. As the fortunate members of both the TCC and the 49er Historical Bottle Association, Kent and I find ourselves in the unique position of assisting diggers in dating their sites with transferware shards. Unique, you might say? Although we know that eventually these pieces should belong to the Gold Rush Museum at Coloma, we consider the present situation quite delightful!

The talent of finding and digging a privy is the mark of a successful bottle digger. With experience – and long metal probes – a good excavator can locate an outhouse in a matter of minutes in the back yard of a long-gone Victorian farmhouse. There he finds the remains of boots, misshapen mining implements, buttons, even an occasional ceramic doll head. (Daddy simply refused to rescue dolly from her awful potty-training fate...) The reward is bottles of all sorts and the shards of transferware – the latter incidental to the digger but certainly not to us.

The first piece to find its way directly from the digging hole into our possession was a mulberry sugar box, 6.5 inches tall and 6 inches wide, with a missing finial. Taken from a 1993 bottle dig near Nevada City, the heavily flown mulberry sugar is in “Peruvian” by John Wedg Wood, Brownhills &



Four of the many active bottle-diggers from the Forty-Niner Historical Bottle Association at a club-sponsored dig east of San Andreas take turns shoveling the soil. The rule of the dig: Share the work and share the treasure. (Left to right: Tony Charlton, Rick Ricketts, Mike McKillop, Tom Moniz)

Hadderidge, Burslem (1841-1857). The pattern was registered in 1849.

Two years after Kent and I acquired the mulberry sugar box, the widow of a well-known food-bottle collector in Sacramento gave us a 5.5 inch pink pitcher her late husband had dug. The location of the dig was disclosed only as Old Sacramento, which conjures up all manner of intriguing images to a bottle collector. This gentle man and active bottle digger is known to have dug under the Sacramento home of author Mark Twain. Who knows; this little jug may well have come from that adventure. The pattern on the pitcher is “Peruvian Hunters” by Goodwins & Ellis, Flint Street, Lane End, Longton (circa 1840).

As if to again nudge the curiosity of this couple of transferware fans, in the spring of 1998, three flow-blue shards, bearing no identifying marks, appeared at our door. At the very next bottle-club meeting, we asked the active diggers from our bottle club, the



In a 2004 historical-bottle dig in Georgetown, California, this 9.5 inch broken, muddied Staffordshire spaniel, without his mate, was found guarding a broken 9.5 inch blue “Windsor” plate by Mellor Venables & Company, Burslem (1834-1851), and five pieces of a mulberry “Rhone Scenery” dinner plate by T.J. & J. Mayer, Burslem and Longport (1842-1855).

Forty-niner HBA, to bring the transferware shards they find in their escapades to us in Newcastle for examination. In addition, if there was a choice, to bring us the pieces with “talkin’ on ‘em.”

Kent and I slowly became aware that pottery and stoneware shards were not only an excellent method of dating the bottle sites, but also a clue to a culture so fearlessly protected by the gold rush women. We began actively looking eagerly toward the diggings in and near other towns in the foothills. One of these settlements was Georgetown.

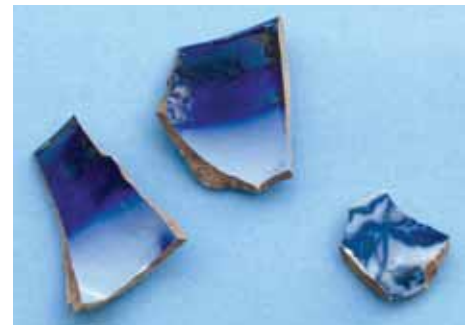
Bottle digging is still frequently done in the Georgetown area and many transferware pieces come from there. From a dig in the spring of 2004 came three large pieces of an incomplete 13.5 by 10.5 inch blue platter, circa 1843-1855, in the “Florentine” pattern by T. J. & J. Mayer. Although Petra Williams tells us this same pattern was “issued later by Liddle Elliot & Son,” we can confirm this platter was made by the Mayers. They potted at Furlong Works and Middle Works in Burslem and Dale Hall Pottery in Longport from 1842 until 1855. From the same privy dig, we found a footed, covered vegetable, without a lid, and a cup in the same pattern and color, both broken, of course.

Another dig, later that same week, yielded a broken 9.5 inch blue plate in the “Windsor” pattern, by Mellor Venables & Company, Hole House, Nile Street, Burslem (1834-1851). The British Registry Mark (BRM) on this piece reads August, 1849. Two more specimens were taken from the same digging hole: first, a mulberry plate in the “Rhone Scenery” pattern by T. J. & J. Mayer; and second, guarding this shamble of dirty remains, a broken 9.5 inch left-facing Staffordshire spaniel minus his mate.

Obviously, adults were not the only residents of the gold-seeking settlements. Small folks also inhabited the villages that dotted the gold-laden foothills. From a



This 5.5 inch pink jug was dug in Old Sacramento, probably about 1970, in the “Peruvian Hunters” pattern by Goodwins & Ellis, Flint Street, Lane End, Longton (c. 1840).



These three flow-blue shards, all from the Greenwood area, seem to have been given to us just to keep us interested. The tactic worked!



From the Georgetown area in the spring of 2004 came a “Florentine” bonanza, three large pieces of an incomplete 10 ½ by 13 ½ inch blue platter, c. 1843-1855, portions of a footed compote and a cup, all in blue “Florentine” by T. J. & J. Mayer, Furlong Works and Middle Works, Burslem, and Dale Hall Pottery, Longport (1842-1855).



A broken 9 ½ inch broken blue plate in the “Windsor” pattern, by Mellor Venables & Co., Hole House, Nile Street, Burslem (1834-1851). The British Registry Mark on this piece reads August, 1849.

spring 1998 dig in Greenwood, five miles from Georgetown, diggers found a piece appearing to be from a child’s tureen and a child’s cup, both in the blue “Willow” pattern. These shards nudge our questioning minds. Why was a child here? Was she learning to set a proper table? Although a child’s tea party with her dolls is difficult to imagine in this intriguing, rough-and-tumble part of the



A mulberry plate in “Rhone Scenery” by T. J. & J. Mayer dug at Yankee Jim’s and part of an undecorated Baltic-shaped sweet in an unknown pattern by George Frederick Bowers & Co., with the impressed British Registry Mark indicating October 25, 1857. The Bowers piece was dug two years later in Dutch Flat.

1849 world, these shards do evoke a pleasant image as they prove family life endured.

In the fall of 2004, two additional bits of mulberry “Rhone Scenery” transferware – this time part of a cup – came from a bottle dig in another long-gone settlement, Yankee Jim’s. Pieces from Yankee Jims are always intriguing since we can only estimate the town’s location on maps. Only diggers seem to know its exact coordinates and they’re not telling.

In late June, 2005, came the most curious transferware pieces of all. After a hike into the Sierra wilds, diggers found the vestiges of “You Bet” and dug in what they thought must have been the dump for a barber shop. The two oddly shaped “shaving mugs” they brought us are both about 2.5 inches tall and 2.5 inches in diameter; one is blue and one is black. The pattern appears to have a harvest theme but there are no backstamps on either one to give us a name. The pieces are probably not shaving mugs as the diggers thought; they contain no indication of shaving-soap residue and are the exact size of children’s mugs.

After the snow had melted in the early spring of 2006, when the rains ceased and the ground was once again soft, another troupe of diggers journeyed to the gold-rush town of Dutch Flat. What they brought back, to verify the date of their dig, was a later piece □ part of an undecorated Baltic-shaped sweet in an unknown pattern by George Frederick Bowers & Company. The impressed British Registry Mark indicates October 25, 1857.

Joining our growing flock of California gold rush transferware, in March 2006, was an intact 9.25 inch plate. From a dig in Old Town Marysville, the light blue plate found there is in the “Cararra” pattern by John Holland, Clayhills Pottery, Tunstall (1852-1853). Again, we see transferware as part of everyday living in the growing cities

and towns of the gold country. Apparently, transferware from bottle-digging ventures has been a part of our lives for some time, although Kent and I were simply unaware. For at least a dozen years a piece has hung on our kitchen wall, decorating the pink walls with its flow-blue friends. Just this month, we remembered that the “Non Pareil” pickle dish came from one of Kent’s digs many years ago. The east- and west-bound sections of US Interstate 80 now enclose this tiny area that once was a gold-rush settlement.



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Once more, English transferware captivates our attention, in a manner we would never have suspected... and, again, we realize we will never know the entire story these treasures keep secret. Thankfully, the mystery always awaits us.

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Addendum:

Some exciting news! I’m a member of the Arnold Bennett Society and read about a project, called “Made in England” being undertaken by mosaic-artist Emma Biggs. She’s doing three pieces, one for the Potteries Museum (unfortunately for me, now finished and installed), one that will go somewhere in London, and one to go to China. She was looking



These two mugs, in the identical pattern – one blue and one black, were thought by the bottle digger to be shaving mugs but, the author postulates, look a bit more like child’s mugs. Although the pattern and maker are unknown, they appear to be c. 1850 to 1860.



Nineteenth-century pickle dishes came in unusual shapes that, today, are somewhat rare and usually quite expensive. This particular flow-blue pickle, in the “Non Pareil” pattern (Middleport Pottery), has actually served as a spoon-rest in the author’s kitchen, but now decorates the pink walls with other flow-blue friends.



“Cararra” ~ 9 ¼ inch plate in blue by John Holland, Clayhills Pottery, Tunstall (1852-1853)

for shards of pottery with marks that indicate that they were made in England.

My first thought was, of course, the transferware bits from the California gold-country bottle digs, and the two boxes of shards in our garage. What a wonderful home for them!

I emailed her immediately but had so much grief from one email address that I had no success getting to her. After an intense effort involving many people, she emailed me, said she'd love the shards, even those that are unmarked, for her two as-yet-not-completed pieces. (She's apparent-



ly still doing fund-raising for them.) This morning, we packaged the shards and sent them on their way to her in England! What a great, happy ending!

Taken from a bottle dig near Nevada City, California, in 1993, this heavily flown mulberry sugar box, 6 inches wide and 6 ½ inches tall, with a missing finial is in "Peruvian" by John Wedge Wood, Brownhills & Hadderidge, Burslem (1841-1857). The pattern was registered in 1849.

Post-Script

Salvaged between 1998 and 2003, other English transferware shards from Greenwood, the town that history forgot, include:

A light blue shard, probably from a plate bottom, with the BRM indicating August 5, 1849. This piece is "Windsor" by Mellor, Venables & Company, Hole House, Nile Street, Burslem (1834-1851).

Three large platter shards in light blue, in a pattern similar to "Windsor" but marked J. W. Pankhurst & Company, Charles Street & Old Hall Street, Hanley (1850-1882)

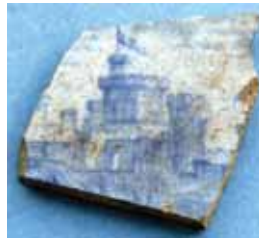
A piece from the side of a black cup in the Damascus pattern by William Adams & Sons, Greengates and Greenfield Potteries, Tunstall (1829-1863)

Two undecorated shards from a small plate bottom with the black mark of E. & C. Challinor, Fenton Stone Works, Lane Delph, Fenton (1862-1891)

No pattern is disclosed on this undecorated piece, with a black mark, probably from the bottom of a plate. The mark is Arthur J. Wilkinson, Central Pottery, Stafford Street (1885-1898), Churchyard Works (1887-) and Royal Staffordshire Pottery (1898-1965+), Burslem.

A little black shard, probably from a small plate, by Thomas Goodfellow, Phoenix Works, High Street, Tunstall (1828-1859/60) – pattern unknown.

This large piece in black appears to be from a platter and is marked with the English Coat of Arms by W. H. Grindley & Company, Newfield Pottery, Tunstall (1880-1891).



A light blue shard, probably from a plate bottom, with the BRM indicating August 5, 1849. This piece is also in the "Windsor" pattern by Mellor, Venables & Company, Hole House, Nile Street, Burslem (1834-1851).



Two undecorated shards from a small plate bottom with the black mark of E. & C. Challinor, Fenton Stone Works, Lane Delph, Fenton (1862-1891)



Both sides of a piece from the side of a black cup in the Damascus pattern by William Adams & Sons, Greengates and Greenfield Potteries, Tunstall (1829-1863)



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