

Pekin Japan – a Pattern with a Long Run

By Connie Rogers

In our work in the TCC Database, we find that some patterns are short-lived. Others were popular enough that when the pottery that produced them went out of business, another pottery bought the copper plates and continued the pattern for many years under different marks – and occasionally a new name. In the case of *Pekin Japan*, the pattern and its name were found in a pattern book, dated c. 1825-30 from the C. J. Mason & Co. In *Mason Porcelain & Ironstone 1796-1853*, the authors, Reginald Haggard & Elizabeth Adams, illustrate a page from the pattern book in Plate 101, and a 10 inch plate with *Pekin Japan*, c. 1825-30 in Plate 102. The pattern was first produced by the Masons in an underglaze blue transfer print as seen here in **Figure 1** with its mark (1a). Not soon after, the underglaze transfer was dressed up in many different color combinations with enamel colors over the glaze. The pattern was continued by G. L. Ashworth after the firm received the copper plates in the early 1860s, and that company continued to produce *Pekin Japan* into the 20th century.

It is perhaps best to start by giving more information on how the patterns of the Mason firm were passed down. An auction was held in April 1848, offering for sale the 17 engraved rollers and immense stock of copper plate engravings of Mason patterns. The majority of these former Mason molds, designs and copper plates were purchased by Francis Morley, an experienced potter, first in partnership with Ridgway, Morley, Wear & Co. Morley traded under his own name from 1845-58 and then became partners with G. L. Ashworth, 1858-60. Francis Morley then retired, passing on to Ashworth the archive including valuable copper plates and trade marks from the Mason firm. George L. Ashworth used the Mason printed trade mark on Ironstone ware, causing some confusion in attribution of patterns; however, his wide range of earthenware products were marked with his name. The suc-

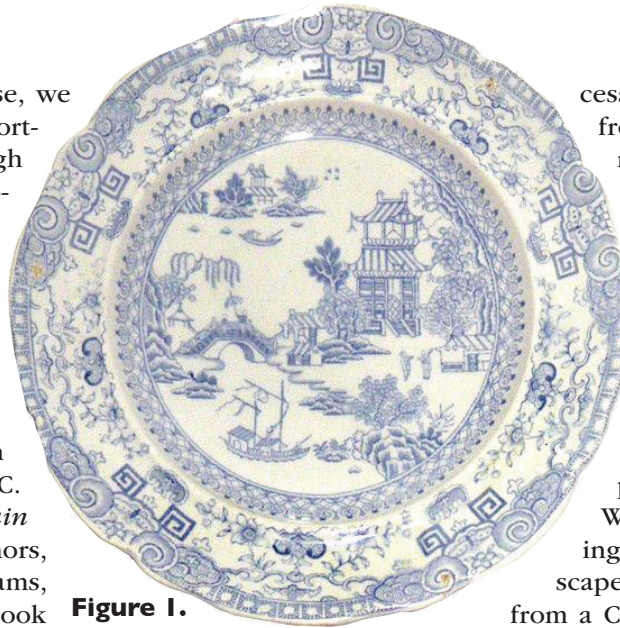


Figure 1.



Figure 2.



cessful Ashworth firm continued from 1860-1968 when it was re-named 'Mason's Ironstone China Ltd.' This paper will discuss and illustrate some of the *Pekin Japan* pattern variations of the two firms that helped to keep it popular for nearly a century.

Now, the name: *Pekin Japan*. Where did that come from? *Pekin* surely relates to the city of Peking in China. Japan is a totally different country. Was this Mason's way of choosing a name for an Oriental landscape that was not directly copied from a Chinese Export pattern? By 1825-30 when this pattern came out, there were thousands of pieces of Chinese Export porcelain in Britain, and many of the patterns were known in general as "Chinese landscapes" – a term used by Robert Copeland. However, this Chinese landscape is different from the plain blue-printed transferware patterns usually associated with the early copies of Chinese Export. In the *Pekin Japan* pattern most of the examples produced were enhanced with enamel painting over the glaze. Perhaps the *Japan* part of the name came from the decorating technique of using overglaze iron-red and green enamels and gilding over an underglaze pattern in blue. The result is a rich overall effect known as *Imari* – the name of the port in Japan from which the decorated porcelains were believed to have been shipped.

Elaborately decorated Japanese porcelains were shipped to Chinese trading ports and exported to Europe along with Chinese porcelain. Chinese potters made close imitations of the Imari-style. By the mid-18th century, the designs were also copied by the English porcelain manufacturers. In England, the colorful red, blue, green and gold designs are also called Japan patterns. Godden tells us in his *Oriental Export Market Porcelain and*

its influence on European wares that the Derby porcelains have featured the Japan patterns for nearly two hundred years. The Masons decided to use the same decorating techniques on their ironstone body, thereby making the ware less expensive than porcelain. The growing middle class clamored for these Imari wares.

Was it the name then that promoted the popularity of the *Pekin Japan* pattern? Considering that I collected a number of pieces over the course of 15-20 years – without knowing the name – I’m convinced that the name has nothing to do with its popularity. My interest was in the fact that I, and many other members of the International Willow Collectors (IWC), consider *Pekin Japan* to be a “willow” variant. Look at the pattern as produced in the 1840s by C. J. Mason in **Figure 2**, with mark (2a). You will see a typically decorated version of *Pekin Japan* with underglaze transfer-printed pattern in black, and over the glaze colors of rust and pale orange. You will see the Teahouse (or temple) on the right side as you face the pattern. Connecting the mainland on the right and a smaller piece of land on the left is a one-arch bridge with two figures on it. A willow tree hangs over the left side of the bridge, and there is a small boat just below the island in the upper left of the pattern. We are describing motifs related to the “Two Temples II” variation “Broseley” version of the Willow Pattern as well as *Pekin Japan*. Miles Mason produced this “Broseley” pattern on tea wares on porcelain from c. 1800-1805. On teapots the pattern has the temple (on right-hand side of the pattern) closest to the handle on both sides. That means the pattern is produced in reverse on one side of these teapots. See **Figure 3** for a look at the Broseley pattern in reverse. That is the version that *Pekin Japan* closely resembles. It looks familiar enough to have appeal to “Willow” pattern collectors.

Other combinations of color are used to enhance the *Pekin Japan*. The Mason’s Collectors Club has put out two *Compendia* of patterns produced by Masons. *Pekin Japan* is found in the *Compendia* of patterns dating from 1830 to 1848. It is located amongst the Landscape and Building patterns, and given their code number OB108. Six different uses of color are shown, each

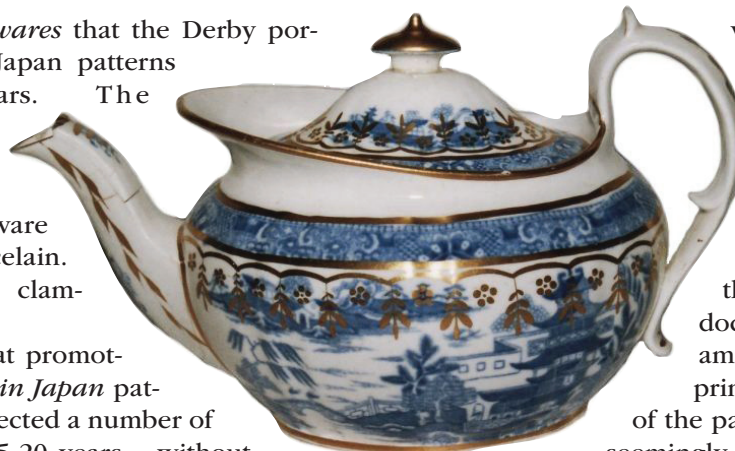


Figure 3.

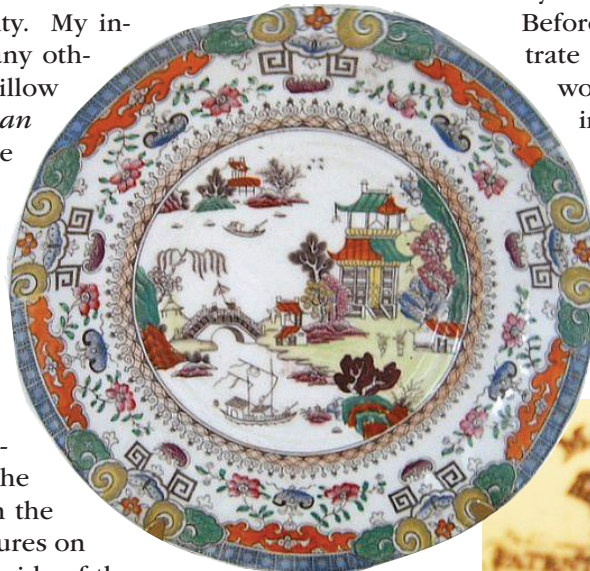


Figure 4.

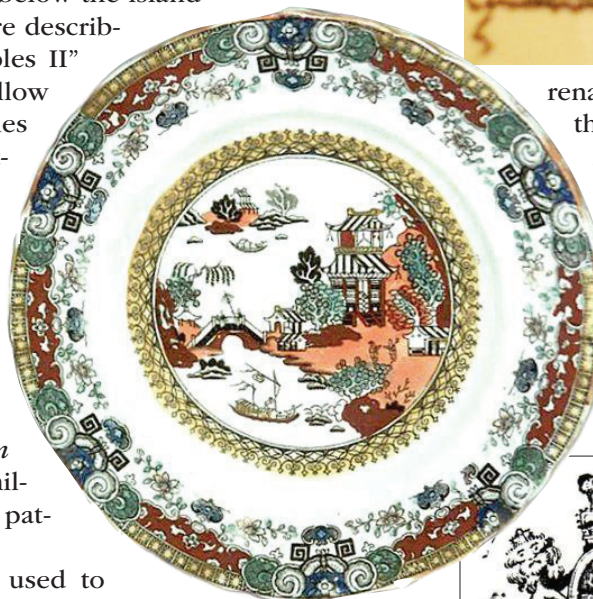


Figure 5.

with a different letter added to the code number. Our **Figure 2** above is OB108d. There are many other color combinations used that are not found in the *Compendia*. For instance, **Figure 4** and its mark (4a) is one of the most colorful made. It is documented in the database. I am beginning to think that the primary reason for the popularity of the pattern through the years is the seemingly limitless color enhancements used by both Masons and its successors.

Before going on to discuss and illustrate later versions of *Pekin Japan*, I would like to talk about the amazing discovery of the partial pattern book of C. J. Mason. My reference is the book by Reginald Haggard & Elizabeth Adams mentioned above. The authors tell us that for many years it had been thought that all the original Mason pattern books

were lost. However, an extensive and very dusty search among papers in the printing department of ‘Mason’s Ironstone China Ltd.’ (Ashworth

renamed, March 1968) has shown that among what had been dismissed as ‘rubbish’ were fragments of C. J. Mason pattern books -- after all these years! Most of them dated from about 1840, although some apparently were of an earlier date. Evidently, the pattern books had been part of the records obtained from C. J.

Mason by Francis Morley in 1848 and passed down through the Ashworth family. In perusing the pattern book pages, it became clear that the range of Mason’s Iron-



stone and other patterns was by no means limited to literal copies of Japanese Imari designs, Chinese export porcelains and 'chinoiserie' of his own invention. Analysis of the pattern books shows designs in a variety of popular contemporary styles and patterns, not only for Ironstone China, but for granite ware, earthenware and china. What a fortunate find in the second third of the 20th century, to enable Mason's enthusiasts and researchers to study and document these lovely patterns! It seems that the Ashworth firm was not aware of the pattern books in the archive they inherited. Otherwise, they could have put the names on many of the Mason patterns they produced. It was not the general practice to put pattern names on wares during the production period of the various Mason firms, but it was common practice by the 1860s.

Some of the examples of *Pekin Japan* have not only a mark, but a pattern number written by hand over the glaze. Because the pattern number changed with each new color version, there are many already noted in the Mason's Collector's Club *Compendia* of patterns. The list of pattern numbers continues to grow. **Figure 5** shows the pattern as introduced by Morley & Ashworth, c. 1858-60, and the mark is (5a). This version of *Pekin Japan* is pattern no. 4/155 and so listed in the TCC database. Fractional pattern numbers were used by the Morley & Ashworth partnership; however, they were carried on as long as that pattern was in production. The printed form of the mark, including the words "Ironstone China" was used by the G. L. Ashworth firm after 1860. Although the motifs of the pattern are the same as seen in the earlier versions, there is more white space between the outer border and framing border.

Another version of *Pekin Japan* pattern that was introduced by Morley & Ashworth has an entirely different border. It is seen in **Figure 6** and mark (6a). In addition to the Royal Arms mark also seen in **Figure 5**, there is an impressed mark that reads "ASHWORTH REAL IRONSTONE CHINA". For

that reason, we know that pattern number 4/234 (painted in red) was continued to be produced by G. L. Ashworth after 1860. The underglaze transfer print of the pattern is black, and the overglaze colors are dark blue and two shades of orange. The two colors are used to enhance the flowers in the alternating floral sprays in the border. This plate was purchased in Australia. It is not known if different

variations of *Pekin Japan* were exported to different parts of the world.

A nine inch plate by Ashworth, **Figure 7**, has the same color palette as

the 1840s plate produced by C. J. Mason seen in **Figure 2** above. However, this plate bears Godden Mark #145, dated in the 1890s.

Our final offering also has the same center pattern we have seen in all of the examples of *Pekin Japan*; however, the border is even more far removed from the original Mason border. **Figure 8** with mark (8a) shows a pattern with a lot of green and some yellow. The bands of green in the border have alternating reserves of birds and flower heads. This same variant can be found with a blue border background, and the flower heads are colored red. The pattern number for this variant begins with a C but has 3 illegible numbers. We know that the C series pattern numbers for Ashworth begin at 1900. That is a good date to wrap up this overview of a pattern with a long run. It has been in production off and on from 1825-30. That is 175 years and counting. Please search *Pekin Japan* in the database for further information.



Figure 6.



Figure 7.



Figure 8.

