

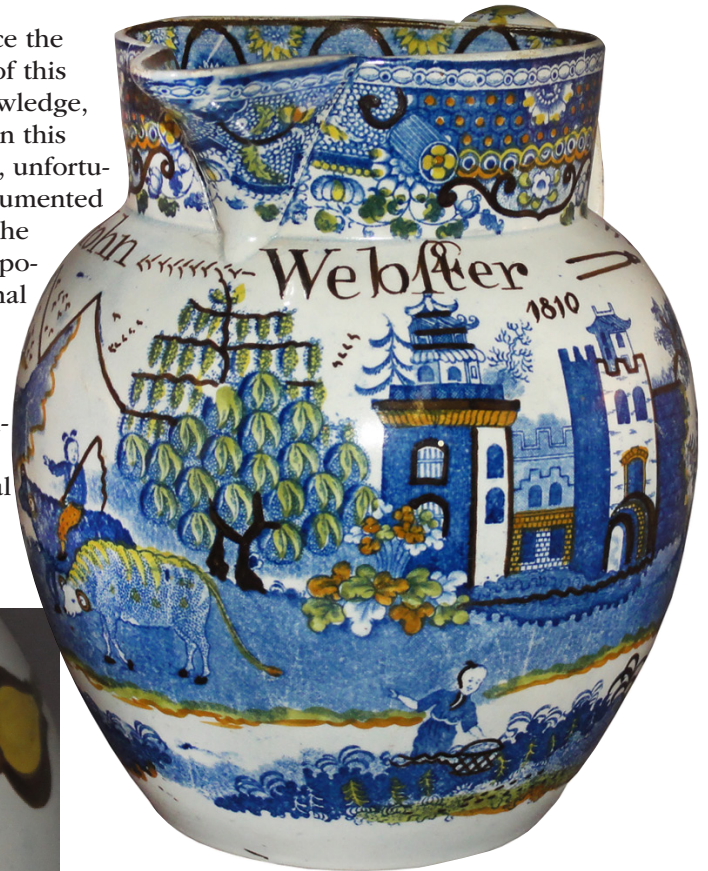
# On the Trail of Two Rams

by Loren Zeller

The recent acquisition of an example of the “Boy on a Ram” transfer-printed pattern on a seven inch commemorative jug dated 1810 prompted me to further examine this unusual design motif on early printed wares. (Fig. 1)

First, a few notes about the jug. The jug either commemorates an important life event or the death of John Webster in 1810. It is inscribed with the name and date in brown, and the central pattern and border patterns are all colored in *under the glaze*. Added to the jug are the images of several different blacksmith’s tools (Fig. 2), which would suggest

the jug helps us to place the pattern in the context of this timeframe. To my knowledge, no other dated pieces in this pattern are known and, unfortunately, none of the documented examples is marked. The style of buildings incorporated in the design signal a transitional period in Chinoiserie themes in which we find more stylized versions of Chinese buildings and the influence of Continental architecture, such as turreted buildings and castle ruins.



**Fig. 1: Boy on a Ram Commemorative Jug**



**Fig. 2**

the business in which Mr. Webster was engaged, whether he himself was a blacksmith or he was engaged in the manufactory of said tools. These tools are also hand painted under the glaze in brown and a yellow-gold color. As it is more likely that such a jug would have been commissioned for a person of considerable stature, it may be that Mr. Webster was related to or the owner of a manufactory of these tools. While this pattern would have appeared in the first decade of the nineteenth century and may have been popular well into the second,

## Buffalo or Ram?

First, to the question of what the two large horned animals (Fig. 3) represent in the “Boy on a Ram” pattern:<sup>1</sup> Several references pertaining to early nineteenth century transfer-printed patterns in which two large horned rams appear as a design element have been published over



**Fig. 3**

the years in the *Friends of Blue Bulletin*.<sup>2</sup> On occasion, the animals in question were incorrectly described as “buffalo.” At least two reasons come to mind as to why, in the past,

1. Pattern names referenced in this article are those first given in earlier published research or in the Transferware Collectors Club *Pattern and Source Print Database*.

2. Articles on this subject can be found in the following FOB Bulletins: #73 p. 6, #75 p. 7, #98 p. 9, #100 p. 5, #115 pp. 4-5, #118 p. 9, #122 p. 4, #124 p. 10.



**Fig. 4**

these animals have been referred to as “buffalo”: The first is that the figure mounted on one of the animals is reminiscent of the ubiquitous “Buffalo” or “Boy on a Buffalo” pattern in which a man or boy is seen riding the beast. One of many interpretations of this design element on printed wares is shown here (Fig. 4). The “Buffalo” pattern was one of the earliest patterns transfer-printed on pearlware and was in full production during the last decade of the eighteenth cen-



**Fig. 5**

ture. It was based on one or more Chinese porcelain patterns similar to the example shown on this large oval platter (Fig. 5). The water buffalo is usually mounted by a small male fig-

ure, presumed to be a boy, thus the commonly attributed name “Boy on a Buffalo.” The boy is seen pointing behind him indicating something of interest to the adult figure that stands in front of him. A comprehensive review of this pattern and its origins can be found in Robert Copeland’s *Spode’s Willow Pattern and Other Designs after the Chinese*.<sup>3</sup>

The second reason that the ram figure may have been mistakenly

viewed as a water buffalo is due to its size. The engraver chose to make the figures quite large (Fig. 6) with tails longer than the cropped tail commonly found on both male and female sheep today (Fig. 7). There are two distinct characteristics exhibited in the ram figures that help us to interpret what the engraver intended them to be: 1. the shape of the horns, and 2. the color and texture of the animal’s coat. The buffalo’s horns typically grow pointing slightly upward and behind the animal’s head while the ram’s horns tend to curl around and move downward along side the head. The texture of the animal’s coat, more apparent on the ram positioned in front, is a second indicator that the animals are rams.

But why does the ram, not considered a beast of

burden, appear mounted? A plausible answer could be the influence of the earlier popular “Boy on a Buffalo” pattern. While the “Boy on a Ram” pattern may not have been designed after a Chinese Export Porcelain original (I have found no evidence to support this), the use of the ram figures are certainly grounded in Chinese culture: The ram (sheep) is the eighth of the twelve creatures associated with the twelve-year cycle in the Chinese zodiac, related to the Chinese calendar. Certainly, the ram would have been a highly recognizable symbol of nineteenth century English life and, in medieval English heraldry; the ram was a symbol of authority and leadership. A bearer of a Ram on an escutcheon was expected to possess power and nobility.



**Fig. 6**



**Fig. 7**

3. London: Studio Vista, 1980, 1990, 1999.

Trevor Kentish's fine article titled "*The Hornblower Patterns*" published in the Friends of Blue *Bulletin* No. 115, pages 4-5, made a significant contribution to categorizing three distinct types of patterns in which the hornblower figure served as a principal design element. To support his findings, Trevor analyzed the various examples fellow FOB members had previously recorded and determined that these patterns should be considered as three distinct designs with the common element being the hornblower figure. While the first pattern discussed, given the name "Hunting with Cheetahs" does not appear to include the horned ram figures, the other two, "Ethiopian Hornblower" and "French Hornblower" do. Indeed, more than one example of the latter has been featured in FOB bulletins in which we find the presence of the ram figures, and they will be noted herein.

When referring to the pattern "Two Large Rams" featured in their book *Swansea's Cambrian Pottery Transferware II, Patterns and Borders*, the Tanners state that "it is possible that these two horned rams are a feature in a series of Chinoiserie scenes". They point not only to examples of the "French Hornblower" pattern but to another pattern commonly referred to as "Striped Parasol."<sup>4</sup> It was the Tanner's observation that caused me to take a closer look at all the pattern elements and not just the predominant feature for which our collector colleagues often assign a name.

Author's note: I wish to express my appreciation to Trevor Kentish, Arleen and Grahame Tanner, and Colin Parkes for generously sharing images of items in their collections printed with the patterns that will be discussed here.



**Fig. 8: Full view of "Ethiopian Hornblower"**



**Fig. 9: Jug, "Ethiopian Hornblower" Kentish Collection**



**Fig. 10: Mug, "Ethiopian Hornblower" Kentish Collection**

## Ram Tracks

All of the patterns in which the two rams and rider are found appear to have been printed on hollowware and, regrettably, none of the examples discussed is marked. A closer examination of the patterns documented in the FOB bulletins named "Striped Parasol," "French Hornblower," and "Two Large Rams/Variation Buffalo" reveals that the two large ram figures, one with a rider, *appear in all of them*. In each case, a rider is mounted on one of the animals. Even the "Ethiopian Hornblower" pattern contains a small reclining animal with curved horns resembling a ram. While present in these patterns, the

rams were seldom considered the defining characteristic or predominant feature of the pattern, as the given pattern names suggest.

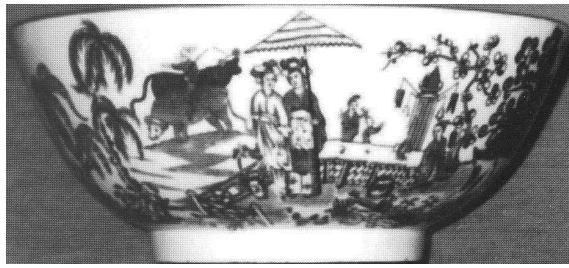
## Ethiopian Hornblower

According to Trevor Kentish, what distinguishes this pattern from others that contain the hornblower figure is the tree with unusual "catkin-style" foliage and a different inner border (Figs. 8-10). I initially thought that this pattern version did not include the ram figure; however, a closer examination of the pattern reveals a small reclining ram to the left of the wrap-around pattern positioned below the figure with parasol as shown.

4. See "Two Large Rams" pp. 99-100.

## Striped Parasol

In “Striped Parasol,”<sup>5</sup> a pattern named for the predominant design element consisting of two female figures, one holding a parasol with horizontal lines or stripes, two rams appear to the left of the female figures (Fig. 11). The rams face opposite directions and the rider is mounted on the one in front. However, the ram motif in this example appears to be used as “filler” in the pattern that wraps around a large punchbowl. Other examples of the “Striped Parasol” pattern, as seen in this saucer, do not include the two rams (Fig. 12).



**Fig. 11: Bowl, “Striped Parasol”**



**Fig. 12: Saucer, “Striped Parasol” Tanner Collection**

## French Hornblower

In the “French Hornblower”<sup>6</sup> the rams with a mounted figure now appear in the center of the pattern with the hornblower positioned either at the left or the right of the design as seen in this example of a small wash bowl (Fig. 13, pattern is reversed) and in the panoramic view of the same pattern printed on a 7.5” jug. Again, the rams face in opposite directions and the rider is mounted on



**Fig. 13: Wash Bowl, “French Hornblower”**

the animal in front.

In all of the examples of “French Hornblower” known to me, the central pattern and outer border are the same (Fig. 14-17).

Placing the patterns in a specific pattern category presents somewhat of a challenge. While the hornblower’s appearance is notably African, many of the other predominant features are after the Chinese style.<sup>7</sup>



**Fig. 14: “French Hornblower” on 7.5” Jug.**



**Fig. 14: Full View, “French Hornblower” on 7.5” Jug. Author’s Collection**

**Figs. 15-17: Three Mugs, “French Hornblower” Pattern, (mug on the right uses the border on the mug’s interior usually reserved for the exterior)**



<sup>5</sup> “Striped Parasol” pattern printed on a bowl from Roger Kemp FOB *Bulletin* 121, p 4.

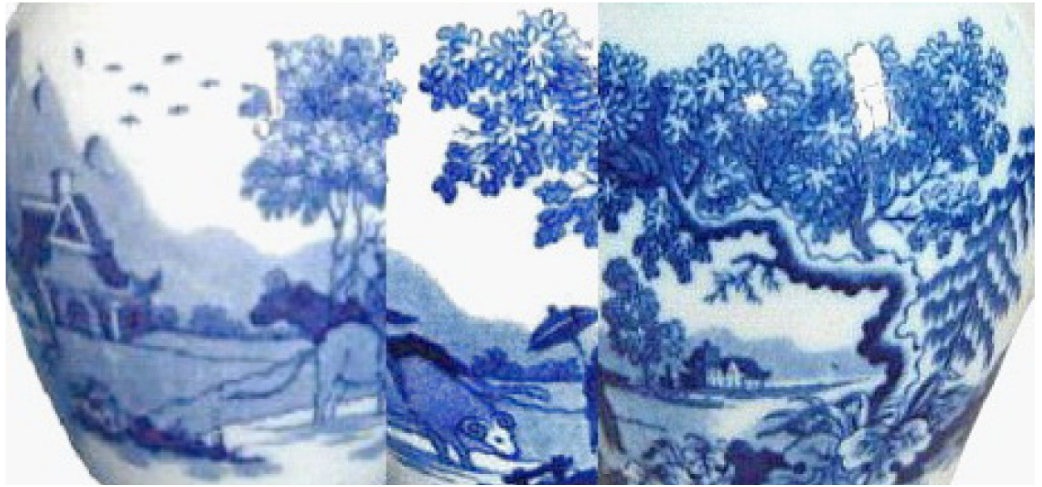
<sup>6</sup> Shown are a small wash bowl, see “And Another (Hornblower)” FOB *Bulletin* 98, p. 9, and a panoramic view of the same pattern on an 7.5 inch jug, TCC Pattern Database and author’s collection.

<sup>7</sup> While I am not aware of a source for the hornblower figure, it is likely that the engraver used one for inspiration in creating this figure.

## Two Large Rams

In the “Two Large Rams” pattern (Figs. 18-19), a name given by the Tanners,<sup>8</sup> *the hornblower is no longer present*. Here, the two animals and the single mounted figure become the predominant feature. As in the case with the “French Hornblower,” they are centrally placed in the pattern and, again, face opposite directions. The hornblower is replaced by a “shadowy” figure holding a parasol looking in the same direction to which the rider points. This figure with a parasol is also present in the “Ethiopian Hornblower” pattern, and we find that it becomes a staple design element here and in all of the variations of the “Boy on a Ram” pattern to be considered next.

As with other Chinoiserie patterns, the “Two Large Rams” pat-



**Fig. 19: Full View, “Two Large Rams”**

tern was also produced on brown ware items printed overglaze in yellow, as shown in the example below (Fig. 20).<sup>9</sup> Many of the design elements of the “Two Large Rams” pattern are repeated from the “French Hornblower” pattern. They include the palm trees to the left, the stylized Chinese buildings partially surrounded by a fence, the mountain peaks in the background, a large overhanging deciduous tree to the right and, under it, an additional group of buildings of a more Continental appearance.

It should be noted that the outer borders of the jug and the wash bowl printed in the “French Hornblower” pattern and the jug in the “Two Large Rams” pattern, employ quite similar designs. These border designs consist of botanical elements taken from the central pattern and reserves containing landscape scenes also reminiscent of the buildings in the pattern. The similarities between these two patterns suggest the possibility that they may have been made by the same factory.



**Fig. 18: Jug, “Two Large Rams”  
Tanner Collection**



**Fig. 20**

<sup>8</sup> Arleen and Grahame Tanner, *Swansea's Cambrian Pottery Transferware II*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>9</sup> From *A Directory of British Teapots*. Berthoud, Michael and Maskell, Richard. Bridgnorth, Shropshire: Micawber Publications, 2006, page 171, plate 1025.

## Boy on a Ram



**Fig. 21: “Boy on a Ram” Full Pattern View, 7 inch jug.**

As in the previous pattern, the two rams and the mounted figure also take center stage; however, both animals *now face the same direction* (Figs. 22-25). In the patterns just discussed, the parasol figure looks toward the same direction to which the rider is pointing. Here, the latter, whose features are also clearly delineated, is looking directly at the rider. In “Boy on a Ram,” the rider is now mounted on the animal in back and he points to the figure with the parasol while looking behind him. In this pattern, another figure has been added below the central scene. This figure stands along side what appears



**Fig. 22: Punchbowl, “Boy on a Ram” Parkes Collection**



**Fig. 23: 12.5” Punch Pot, “Boy on a Ram.” Author’s collection.**

to be a river or lake and holds a basket. Facial and body features of all of the figures represented in the “Boy on a Ram” pattern are more defined than is the case in the other patterns discussed. They all have topknots and closely resemble the figures represented in the “Boy on a Buffalo” pattern popular a decade earlier. However, the setting in which they are placed, and certainly the date on the commemorative jug, attest to an early nineteenth century period.



**Fig. 24: Mug, “Boy on a Ram”  
Tanner Collection**



**Fig. 25: Child’s Teapot, “Boy  
on a Ram”  
Author’s Collection**

While both the mountain peaks in the background (now two instead of three in the previous pattern) and the palm trees remain, the other design elements are changed: Nut or fruit bearing trees are placed in the center of the pattern and to the right is a grouping of large turreted, castle-like buildings. The architectural style of these buildings places this pattern in a later transitional style commonly found in Chinoiserie patterns of the early nineteenth century.

### **Where Has the Trail of Rams Led Us?**

What can we learn from this pursuit of the two rams? Given the considerable variation of shapes and border patterns found, it is likely that they were made by more than one manufacturer. Unfortunately, because none of the examples analyzed here is marked, attribution to a maker becomes difficult.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps the more intriguing question is, do we witness the deliberate evolution

of an earlier design concept in these varied patterns or simply the repurposing by various potteries of design motifs deemed capable of attracting new customers? While I suspect that it was the latter, an evolution of sorts would appear to be logical, whether through copy and interpretation by different engravers or through the passing of time. When we examine other Chinoiserie patterns made by multiple potteries, we can observe a similar evolution of design motifs but, for the most part, they are found in the more common landscape patterns; pagodas, summer houses, arched bridges, boats, willow trees, to name a few. Certainly, the discovery of the dated “Boy on a Ram” jug, does corroborate the assumptions based on style that the patterns discussed belong to the transitional Chinoiserie period of British printed pottery.

In most landscape patterns in which figures are found, the engraver attempts to tell a story. These patterns are no exception. As in the

original Chinese Export designs from which the “Buffalo” pattern was created, the key story elements are one or more animals placed in an outdoor setting. One beast carries a rider and this figure almost always points in one or another direction and appears to be speaking to figures standing in front of him. Why is the rider pointing, and to what? It is this gesture that tickles the imagination of those who hold the plate and contemplate the scene before them. Such scenes must have been designed to generate interesting conversation for family members and guests as they came together for a meal or tea time. And, as in the case of the Standard Willow pattern with its great story potential, these patterns were surely designed to stimulate more interest resulting in greater demand and profits for their makers.

All of the patterns discussed can be found in the Transferware Collectors Club *Pattern and Source Print Database*.

10 Trevor Kentish noted in his article in FOB 115, pp. 4-5, a possible attribution to Dudson was suggested in *True Blue*, but that he was advised that “the Dudson shards [were] too small to give any corroborative evidence.”