

Rabbitware

By Judie Siddall & David Hoexter

Rabbitware is a combination of transfer printing and stick sponge decoration on earthenware. It appears to have been made in England in the last third of the 19th century, with continued production into the early part of the 20th century, although it is rarely found in England.

Since much of the pottery is found in Pennsylvania, it is thought that at least some *Rabbitware* was made for the Pennsylvania Dutch market. It is well known that the Pennsylvania Dutch provided a strong market for English potters: for instance, *Gaudy Dutch* and *Sunflower Gaudy* are two examples of pottery decoration made for this market in the first third of the 19th century, while *Gaudy Welsh*, *Flow Blue* and *Stick Sponge* decorated pottery continued in popularity throughout the 19th and into the 20th centuries. However, as noted below, some of the pottery appears to have been imported by a Boston firm.



**Rabbitware
Virginia Rose
variant with rab-
bits and frogs in the cen-
ter. (Photo courtesy Judie Siddall)**

The earliest *Rabbitware* patterns have rabbits, frogs, trees and fences in various combinations along with different stick sponge designs. Sometimes the rabbits are in the center of the plate, and sometimes they run around the border. The basic patterns are transfer printed under the glaze, and are then generally painted both under and over the glaze with bright colors. Patterns are unmarked.

The popularity of these patterns continued for a long time. Eventually, the rabbits became anthropomorphized characters who played sports, such as cricket, baseball, croquet, tennis, and golf, and even drove automobiles. These later patterns have been found with English registry numbers, Rd. No. 449168 through 449173 (1905). The registry numbers are sometimes in combination with the name Smith Patterson Company Boston, a high end retailer in Boston from 1879 to 1959. It is possible that rabbits playing sports could have been a special order for this store.



**The
Bulls-
eye
Variant of
Rabbitware
with rabbits and
frogs in the border. (Photo
courtesy Judie Siddall)**

According to Robacker 1978, in the chapter titled *Transfer Ware with Spatter or Cut-Sponge Decoration*, the pottery was one of “continuing popularity for the rabbit motif, perhaps starting about the time when *Bulls-eye* was at its heyday (last third of the 19th century) and extending, with enough updating to assure a steady demand, from border treatment through center-well and vignette decoration to a culmination in the large-area rectangular treatment (rabbits playing sports) that can be pinpointed in time by its registration numbers.” This would place the beginning of the patterns around 1860 and ending at 1905, although the patterns could have been made until well into the first quarter of the 20th century.

The patterns may be among the earliest novelty patterns, similar to themed Christmas and Turkey (Thanksgiving) patterns today. Plates are the most common form found today, and are luncheon size, between 9” and 9.25”. Other items include platters, chargers, mugs and extremely rare pitchers. There are no known vegetable bowls or dinner plates or any other items from a dinner service, suggesting that the pottery was made for party sets (perhaps a golf or tennis party) or for children’s celebrations.

For more information about *Rabbitware* and to see more patterns, search for Rabbitware in the TCC Pattern & Source Print Database.

Reference

Earl F. and Ada F. Robacker, 1978, *Spatterware and Sponge, Hardy Perennials of Ceramics*, A.S. Barnes and Company, Cranbury, New Jersey.

Credit:

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Collection of extremely rare *Rabbitware* mugs. (Photo courtesy Rita King, House of the Ferret Antiques)



English Registry Number (1905) and Boston Importer mark sometimes found on the later versions of *Rabbitware*. (Photo courtesy Rita King, House of the Ferret Antiques)



Anthropomorphized rabbits playing baseball and driving a roadster from c. 1905 examples of *Rabbitware*. (Photos courtesy of Rita King, House of the Ferret Antiques)