

An Exceptionally Unusual Leaf Border

by David Hoexter

From time to time, I stand back and look at the display shelves which adorn our kitchen / family room and reacquaint myself with various items in our collection. It was during a recent session that I noted a medium-sized plate located high up and partially obscured (Figure 1). I purchased the plate from Richard Halliday at the 2009 TCC meeting in Bristol, England, primarily for the “unique” array of leaves which serve as the border to a charming sleeping shepherd, dog and sheep pattern. The plate is included in the TCC Database of Patterns and Sources (TCC DB), Pattern #6919, “Sleeping Shepherd”.

Judie and I have puzzled over the border at times in the years since purchase, but had not further pursued the subject. More recently, Richard informed me and provided images of another plate with a similar albeit differing leaf border. This plate is included in the TCC DB, Pattern #17938, “Mother and Babies Gathering Firewood”. And just now, I sent a note to Len Kling to see if the TCC had any additional similar examples in the DB, and he responded with yet one more, a lobed dessert dish, DB Pattern #16646, “The Watermill”. Each of the three plates is printed in a relatively light blue, and all three lack an engraved printed border. None of the three pieces bears a maker’s mark nor to our knowledge have any been attributed to a particular maker, and thus the maker(s) of all three plates is/are unknown.

“Sleeping Shepherd,” a TCC assigned name, is a 10-inch diameter plate (Figure 2). The pattern engraving is a bit lacking in detail, inducing almost a “dream-like” appearance. The plate is printed on earthenware in light blue, suggesting an intent for the English market (as opposed to US export). The shepherd is fast asleep, leaving his dog to guard his flock of sheep. The pattern and adjacent blue border are blemished or one might say “smudged” under the glaze at the



Figure 1. A view of the plate “Sleeping Shepherd” (right side of upper left shelf) on our kitchen / family room shelves. See Figure 2 for detailed view of the plate.



Figure 2. “Sleeping Shepherd” (example 1) plate.

approximate one o’clock position, suggesting a transfer error or accidental bisque firing mishap. The wide border dips into the plate’s well, and appears to me to be hand-applied as opposed to printed. The leaves are white and under the glaze, and are thus simply a crude unfinished outline. They don’t appear to me to originate from real leaves (one may disagree), rather, perhaps a piece of

paper cut-out or some sort of “resist” method was used, resulting in the leaves being undecorated and blank after the blue color was applied. I would doubt that this plate ended up for sale, although it might have been offered as a “second” or simply been taken home by a pottery worker as opposed to being wasted.

“Mother and Babies Gathering Firewood” is also a TCC assigned name, and appears on an 8.25-inch



Figure 3. “Mother and Babies Gathering Firewood” (example 2) plate.

diameter earthenware plate (Figure 3). The plate is generally similar in appearance to “Sleeping Shepherd,” although the print is sharper, the pattern and rim are each highlighted with a thin brown line, and the more definitively shaped leaves are painted brown. This plate appears more professionally produced than our first example, but this may be due simply to lack of “smudging” and to the brown leaf painting. The pattern is printed in a similar although somewhat lighter blue, and depicts a classically garbed woman gathering sticks, accompanied by two young children. One child, obviously a boy as noted in the DB entry, is helping the mother, while the other is occupied climbing a tree in the background. As noted, the leaves are painted in brown, and the outlines are similar but do not match the first example’s leaves although they are generally similar in form. The two plates are shown side-by-side in Figure 4, and the similarities and differences are readily apparent. The DB entry does not identify a maker, but states that the hand painted leaves are “a design element often attributed to Thomas Lakin.”

“The Watermill,” our third leaf border, is also a TCC assigned name (Figure 5). The pattern is shown on a 7.75-inch diameter lobed desert dish, and features a watermill on a small river or stream. The blue print pattern and surrounding background wash are similar in color to the second example, as are the brown painted leaves and thin painted lines surrounding the pattern and rim. Judging from the light reflection in



Figure 5. “The Watermill” (example 3) dessert dish.



Figure 4. “Sleeping Shepherd” on right, “Mother and Babies Gathering Firewood” on left.

the image, I would say that the brown is painted under the glaze. The leaves’ shapes differ somewhat from Example 2 but appear to be from the same hand. The DB identifies the body type as earthenware. There is a reverse impressed mark, appearing to me as the number “2,” which does not help identify the maker. Thus, again, the maker is unknown, but the transfer and overall appearance are very close to that of the second example, and with little doubt in my mind, can be attributed to the same (albeit unknown) maker. The two examples are shown together in Figure 6.

We thus have three extremely unusual transfer-printed pieces with blank or painted leaves serving as a border. As far as we have been able to determine, none of these patterns has been documented with an actual transferware border. Two of the patterns (Examples 2 and 3) appear

definitely to have originated with the same, unknown, maker. Example 1 appears likely to not have been finished (the leaves were not filled in), perhaps due to the one o’clock “smudge” previously described, thus lacking infill of the leaves and lines surrounding the pattern and rim. However, it also appears likely to have originated from the same maker. The DB-suggested maker, noted above as possibly Thomas Lakin remains, however, unknown until a marked piece surfaces. Clearly there is more to learn about these most unusual borders and accompanying patterns, and I invite readers to suggest origins, makers, and thoughts on their origin. And please, contact me if you happen to own or have records of a similar example: davidhoexter@icloud.com. There must be more out there!



Figure 6. “The Watermill” on right, “Mother and Babies Gathering Firewood” on left.