The Right or Wrong Fit:
Accommodating Transfer Patterns to Sizes and Shapes

By Loren L. Zeller

Finding ways to cope with the stay-at-home requirement brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic led me to set about re-photographing my collection. With time on my hands, it seemed a good reason to jump into a project that I wanted to do for some time anyway. In addition to having better images, and a good reason to dust and clean the items and the shelves on which they rested, the project gave me the opportunity to handle and examine each piece with more years of collecting and research experience. One result was that I became aware of examples, both good and bad, of how transfer-printers applied patterns to the size or shape of the piece being produced, given the patterns they had available to print. This observation then led to further research and an attempt to understand or at least speculate as to why these items were printed in a particular fashion.

Dr. Richard Halliday, in his recent Bulletin article highlighting Spode's commitment to produce, when possible, the right size pattern for each shape, stated "Often, lesser factories, when decorating a large piece, would use the biggest existing engraving available in the factory and use it to decorate this ware, even if it wasn't big enough. Then, smaller

Figure 1.

portions of the same print or even a double border would be used to fill in the remaining space." The examples selected for this article from my collection, combined with those provided by others[1], support Richard Halliday's observations, and they illustrate both inferior and superior transfer-printing skills. Some happen to be Spode wares for which existing patterns were skillfully used to accommodate larger items.

Early Examples—Making Do

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries, we find many examples in which smaller, existing patterns were used to fill spaces on larger items.

The 13" charger shown in Figure 1 printed with a line-engraved Chinoiserie pattern known as *Chinaman with Rocket* is one. It is c. 1795-1800. The pattern is a copy of a Chinese original that was produced by several potters. A teapot with this pattern marked STEVENSON was documented by Renard Broughton in the Friends of Blue Bulletin No. 106.[2] The border, known as the Bell border, is the most commonly found border with this pattern. While the charger is valued for its shape, size and early pattern, it stands as an unfortunate example of the use of an existing pattern that was haphazardly printed off center with the top portion placed below the main scene of the print, which was applied in reverse. The concave shape of the pattern itself indicates that it was originally engraved to be used on hollowware. Indeed, the pattern is commonly found on jugs as well as coffee pots and teapots. (For a similar example of this pattern, see TCC Database pattern #259.)

The tall 13" commemorative jug illustrated in Figure 2 with a eulogy to a William Moss is dated 1796. It has a properly sized border, but the printer clearly relied on a smaller pattern, originally intended for a round shape, to decorate the piece. The pattern is the *Buffalo* pattern, also known as *Boy on a Buffalo*. It was wisely positioned on the widest area of the jug. As was the case with many early hollowware pieces, attractive

Figure 2.

Figure 3.

Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

floral sprays were added to fill in the spaces remaining on the item being decorated. While this jug must have represented a challenge for the person tasked with printing it, the result is an attractive and impressive piece. (For a similar example of the *Buffalo* pattern, see TCC Database pattern #16868.)

The use of floral sprays as a filler on the mug shown here in Figures 3 and 4, however, failed to achieve the printer's and transferrer's objective. This late 18th century pattern known as *Elephant, Variation Buffalo* is usually found on hollowware pieces and tea wares. The mug serves as an example of poor placement of the main pattern, which only covers the lower half of the body. A smaller existing pattern must have been used. Contrary to the commemorative jug

shown in Figure 2 on which floral sprays were creatively arranged to fill the space, the floral additions seen here fail to compensate for the wide space between the pattern and the border. Furthermore, the sprays are too large in comparison to the pattern and they appear to be rather haphazardly placed. (For a similar example of the *Elephant, Variation Buffalo* pattern, see TCC Database pattern #706.)

Full Pattern Repetition

As in the case of Spode's large Greek pattern platter featured in Dr. Halliday's recent article, factories had to assess whether a new copper engraving designed to fit oversized pieces was justified or whether an existing engraving could be utilized. For the very large 28.25" x 20.75" platter

illustrated in Figure 5, the maker clearly determined that it warranted a new engraving. To achieve this, the engraver created a special version of the *Standard Willow* pattern by designing a very long bridge, adding a fourth figure to the customary three men crossing it, and an additional branch or two to both the willow tree and the tree to the right of it. It is interesting that the maker of this unmarked platter chose to invest in a completely new copper engraving given the uncommon size of the dish. Although the pattern was a popular one, the demand for a piece of this size must have been limited.

A different approach was taken by the J. F. Wileman factory to produce this second large 25.75" x 22" platter shown in Figure 6. It was also printed with the *Standard Willow*

Figure 7.

Figure 8.

Figure 9.

Figure 10.

Figure 11.

Figure 12.

Figure 13.

pattern. Here it appears that the factory opted for using a smaller existing engraving for the center pattern while repeating a slightly trimmed version of the outer border to fill in the additional space, resulting in an attractive overall design. This meat platter was originally accompanied by a matching large and impressive dome. (See TCC Database pattern #14772.)

One solution, in order to economize by using an existing engraving, was to simply repeat the entire pattern. This was achieved with limited success with the 18.5" x 13.75" platter attributed to the Indeo Pottery illustrated in Figure 7. Two full impressions of the pattern named *Buffalo*

and Fisherman and portions of a third on both the top and the bottom were used to complete the center design. This linear pattern was used primarily for hollowware items and has been found on jugs and teapots. (See TCC Database pattern #9343.)

Many factors such as time to market, cost to produce, selection of products to sell, or the receipt of a special order could have played a role in determining how a pottery would decorate its wares. Another could have simply been what was available on the factory floor at the time. As transfer printing improved in the 19th century, we find examples of skillful printing on larger items using smaller

existing patterns instead of engraving new copper-plates designed to fit them. While we can hypothesize about why this approach was taken, we will never know precisely what drove the decision to use smaller patterns on these larger pieces. Whatever the reason, the large 12" earthenware jug illustrated in Figures 8 and 9, decorated with one of the earliest Brameld patterns known as *Chinese Fishermen*, serves as a good example of the transferrer's ability to double up and repeat the pattern many times over the surface of the jug. So skillfully printed, at first glance, the pattern might appear to be one complex design. The jug was inscribed JOSEPH

Figure 14.

Figure 15.

Figure 16.

Figure 17.

Figure 18.

AND ELIZABETH/CLEGG/1809 in a heart-shaped cartouche under the spout, but the inscription is now worn away after years of cleaning. (See TCC Database pattern #6568 for a similar example of the pattern.)

Another example of utilizing a smaller pattern to cover a large item is this 16.25" documentary jug printed in puce with the *Chinese Pagoda* pattern seen in Figure 10. It was produced by Elkin, Knight & Bridgwood, Fenton, Staffordshire. The painted inscription "William Trimmer Staffordshire Warehouse Newbury 1830" was added along with floral motifs in blue. The pattern printed on this extraordinary jug is an excellent example of Romantic Period Chinoiserie designs in which imaginary Chinoiserie vignettes are surrounded by large scrolled floral designs. An enlarged version of the pattern is shown in Figure 11. (See TCC Database pattern #8986 for this pattern on a jug.)

The 22" hexagonal earthenware jar with lid, shown in Figure 12 is another example of the use of a complete, but smaller pattern to fully decorate the piece. It is printed in blue in the *Malayan Long House* pattern and is c. 1815-1830. The maker is unknown. Here the complete pattern is printed horizontally twice around the wider upper portion of the jar, with approximately one and a half of the pattern on the lower section. Printing on this hexagonal shape must have required considerable skill to achieve this result. (See TCC Database pattern #1532 for this pattern on a plate.)

Partial Pattern Repetition

Examples on which a portion of the full pattern was repeated in order to ensure that larger pieces were fully decorated are more common, but no less interesting. Spode's transfer-printing team was particularly skilled at doing this. One example is the large 16.5" bone china charger illustrated here in Figure 13. Figure 14 shows an enlarged view of a section of the companion drainer with the lower portion with the two figures on the bridge and the path on the right revealing how skillfully it was added. The pattern is named *Bridge II*. (See TCC Database pattern #84 for an example printed on a plate.)

The maker of the 18.25" jug seen in Figure 15 is unknown. Too large to serve as a companion to a foot bath, it may have been produced as a promotional or exhibition piece. Here, even though the pattern used by the printer was large, it was still insufficient to cover the entire body of the piece. As such, the lower portion of a second copy of the print was used to complete the jug's decoration. It is another fine example of the transferrer's skills. In fact, if one were not familiar with this *Bridgeless Chinoiserie* pattern, one might think the second fence was part of the original design. (See TCC Database pattern #13328 for a similar pattern printed on a plate by

Figure 19.

Figure 20.

an unknown maker.)

Illustrated next are two fine examples of Spode's transfer printing skills. Figure 16 presents a large 20.75" circular well and tree platter printed with the *Lucano* pattern. Also shown in Figure 17 is a 16.5" drainer. In both cases, only the lower portion of the pattern with the bridge was repeated. It was so skillfully cut and transferred that it almost appears to be a reflection, albeit not in reverse, seen in the water under the bridge. (See TCC Database pattern #7988 for an example of this pattern printed on a plate.)

Equally as impressive is the large 32" x 18.5" salmon platter illustrated in Figure 18 also produced by Spode. The pattern is one used for the Caramanian series and is titled *Triumphal Arch of Tripoli in Barbary.* As with others in this series, it was taken from a source print by Luigi Mayer. This platter is referred to by Drakard and Holdway, as "Spode's largest dish". The authors observed that "the pattern is a double impression of the pattern used for the normal 52 cm [20.27"] size."[3] Figure 19 is intended to reveal approximately how the pattern was created. Section A captures the original architectural structure derived from the source print. It is the view that appears on all the normal sized platters with this pattern. Sections B and C are the additional portions of the pattern

Figure 21.

Figure 22.

used to decorate this elongated piece. (See TCC Database pattern #1099 for an example of a single pattern printed on a smaller platter.) [4]

Examples can also be found on which smaller portions of a second printed tissue of the pattern were trimmed and added to complete the decoration of a shape for which the pattern was not originally designed. The small 12.75 x 9.6" Spode earthenware platter shown in Figure 20 is one. Figure 21 features the dinner plate for which the original pattern known as *Tall Door* was engraved. The portions of the pattern that were skillfully added are found on the right and left sides of the platter. (See TCC Database pattern #266.)

The 7.75" x 6.5" tray with handle shown in Figure 22 is an example of a pattern that was slightly enlarged by adding the lower portion from a second copy of the print. This well-known Spode pattern, documented by Robert Copeland as *Two Temples I, Variation Temple*, and known in the factory as *Temple*, was designed primarily for bone china tewares. The handled basket was also produced in bone china, but it is likely that a separate pattern was never engraved or was not available at the time this shape was made. Thus, in order to fit a larger space, it appears that the Spode worker used the very lower portion of a second print, the portion

with the decorative fence, to fill the space. (See TCC Database pattern #10141 for an example of this pattern.)

The last example I will illustrate is yet another Spode piece. The small oval platter, also bone china, shown in Figure 23 presents, perhaps, the most interesting and perplexing example of how and why the piece was decorated in such a fashion. Richard Halliday informs me that there are two known bone china examples of this small oval platter. This suggests that they may have been produced as a special order for someone who wished to add this oval shape to their tea service. That said, one must ask, why was such a complicated approach taken to fully decorate the space? In Figure 24 I have outlined the central pattern, probably the first cut of the pattern that was applied to the biscuit. All of the other pattern segments would have been cut from additional prints of the pattern. If my count is correct, there were approximately 15 additional segments cut and printed. For the additional copies, it is possible that only the desired section of the pattern was inked on the copper-plate and printed, as opposed to printing the entire pattern. It is an intriguing piece that raises more questions than there are answers. I think that, in the case of this example and the oval platter with the Tall Door pattern shown in Figure 20, it is likely that they were ordered as trays for a tea service in the same pattern.

Speaking about the dedicated, workers tasked with printing at the Spode factory, authors David Drakard and Paul Holdway wrote the following:

"The team of printer, cutter, transferrer, and assistant divided the work yet each had their own particular skill. Of the four, the greater skill lay with the printer and the transferrer as would be supposed."[5]

I suspect that the same observation would have applied to workers in most of the successful factories in the past, as well as today, where the traditional transfer-printing process might still be used. TCC members may enjoy looking through their own collections in search of similar examples. There may be more than you might think. Identifying them will be easier than determining the precise reasons for printing them that way. Meanwhile, I will keep looking.

Endnotes

1. I wish to express my appreciation to Dr. Richard Halliday, Paul Holdway and Bonhams for images they have provided.

2. Renard Broughton's article in FOB *Bulletin* 106, pp 6-7, documents a similar charger with a different border.

3. Drakard, David and Holdway, Paul, *Spode Printed Ware*, Essex, England: Longman Group Limited, 1983, page 309, plate S224.

4. Both the *Lucano* well and tree platter and the large salmon platter from the *Caramanian* series are documented in *Extraordinary British Transferware 1780-1840* by Rosemary and Richard Halliday, Atglen, PA, USA: Schiffer Publishing Ltd. 2012. See pages 30 and 53.

5. *Spode Printed Ware*, Essex, England: Longman Group Limited, 1983, page 38.

Figure 23.

Figure 24.