

UNDERGLAZE PRINTED TRANSFERWARE POT LIDS

David Hoexter and Bruce Ring, December, 2002

INTRODUCTION

Ceramic containers with matching lids were first introduced in the early nineteenth century for the distribution of small quantity items such as pomade, toothpaste, ointments, medications, and edible pastes. They were widely used during and following the reign of Queen Victoria. "Pot lids" are a fascinating sidelight to the general arena of printed transferware study and collecting, presenting an endless array of culture, aesthetics, history, and, last but not perhaps not least, investment opportunities.

The containers were generally transfer printed in black, although red, blue and other colors were occasionally utilized. They were produced primarily in England, as well as France and possibly elsewhere. Due to their relative inexpensiveness, they were often discarded after use. They were commonly exported (with product), and examples continue to be found in old disposal sites, privies, and similar locations of easy discard. Lids and bases which formerly contained English products have been literally unearthed in many parts of the world, principally by dealers and collectors of antique bottles utilizing the time-tested method of a shovel and a strong back.

Much of the information in this article is based on two excellent references, Ronald Dale's "The Price Guide to Black and White Pot-Lids" and Barbara and Sonny Jackson's "American Pot Lids".

DESCRIPTION

Dale (1977) estimates that as many as 4,000 different lids were produced in England over a roughly 100 year period, commencing with the reign of Queen Victoria and continuing into the early 20th century.

Transfer printed pot lids were manufactured of earthenware, in much the same way as the transferware dinner, tea and other wares of the period. The pot lids discussed in this article are transfer printed under the glaze, generally in black on a white background, but occasionally in blue, green, red or brown. During the 1840's, however, F & R. Pratt and T. J. & J. Mayer introduced lids printed in blue against a colored background. Subsequently, Pratt developed a method of multi-colored printing. These lids, which portrayed pictorial scenes, came to be known as "Prattware". Pratt lids feature varied topics, and are popular among collectors. However, they do not feature text, and are not the subject of this article.



A1 - A sampling of various rare and unusual pot lids

A2 - Rare American purple print

Pot lids vary in size, from less than 40 mm. (1-1/2 inches) to greater than 90 mm. (3-1/2 inches) in diameter. The lids were generally round through the 1860s. Rectangular lids were popular in the late 1870s and the 1880s. Square lids became popular in the 1890s.

The lid and the pot were generally held together by a printed paper band around the circumference of the pot. Some pots also had paper labels on the underside of the pot that contained directions for the use of the product contained in the pot. Examples of pots in this pristine state with the contents unused are extremely rare, but do occasionally become available.

MANUFACTURE

It is not known when the first transfer printed pot lids were introduced. Underglaze blue transfer printing on pottery was widely employed from 1800 to 1830, and onwards. However, there have been no identified underglaze printed lids from this period. Two pot lids shown in Dale (1977) date from approximately 1840, and thus the first transfer printed lids most likely were manufactured during the 1830s. The two 1840 lids both contained bear's grease pomade, and were printed in blue, reflecting the most commonly utilized transfer color of the period. Subsequent lids were printed in green. Black-printed lids were introduced in approximately 1860.

Many of the lids which were not of the Prattware style appear to have been white, with no printing. Paper labels apparently were cheaper to produce than transfer prints.

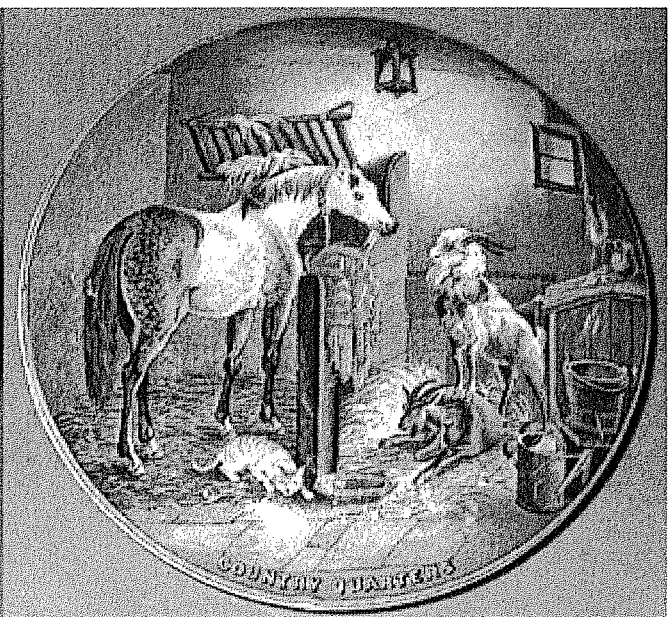
The earliest lids were hand formed with tools. Prior to 1860, the lids were flat. Subsequently, the lids were produced from plaster molds, and domed tops could be formed. Most lids from this time forth were produced in black.

Monochrome pot lids were rare during the period 1840 through 1870. Most monochrome lids were produced between 1880 and 1910, and were in widespread use at that time. Subsequently, manufacturers produced metal, paper, and cardboard containers, and the use of ceramic pot lids declined.

Little is known of specific lid manufacturers. Both of our primary sources (Dale, 1977 and Jackson, 1987), refer specifically only to Pratt and Mayer, makers of "Prattware" lids. Many of the makers may have been the same as those who produced the dinnerware, tea sets and other Staffordshire pottery of the period.



A3 - Fortnum & Mason's Mushroom Savoury



A4 - "Country Quarters" Pratt printed pot lid

CONTENTS AND USE

Bear's Grease Pomade

The first printed pot lids contained bear's grease pomade. They are among the most prized by collectors. The use in England of bear's grease as a pomade dates from the seventeenth century. However, its use increased dramatically in 1845, when a tax was imposed on the hair powder then used by men. With the availability of pot lids, the easy distribution of bear's grease pomade was possible. Pot lids containing pomades manufactured from reindeer, buffalo, and even (possibly) lion fats, as well as from beef marrow, were also produced.

According to Dale (1977):

The finding of an early bear's grease pot-lid by a digger is enough to cause a feverish jubilation which, I would venture to say, cannot be equaled by any other experience that life can offer. To actually dig such a rarity out of the ground is enough to cause even the most imperturbable collector to whoop with joy. The sight of an unknown bear's grease lid in someone else's collection has been known to cause nervous twitches, and incites a covetousness which is almost immoral.

Toothpaste

The most popular commodity sold in pot lids was toothpaste. Dale (1977) describes 998 varieties of toothpaste, of the total of 2347 lids included in his book. Areca Nut and Cherry Toothpastes were the most popular. It is interesting to note that cherry was limited to color, resulting from the addition of carmine to the areca nut flavored paste, and not to taste.

Cold Cream

Cold cream pot lids are the most common following toothpaste. The use of cold cream dates to at least the second century AD. The first formula published in England appeared in 1618. Cold cream pot lids often feature floral patterns, and can be quite charming. They first appeared in the 1870s; the product was produced by individual chemists, and their names were printed on the lids. Wholesalers began mass producing cold cream in the 1880s. The pots became more generic, with *cold cream* printed on the lid. Paper labels identified the private pharmacist who resold the pots and their contents.



A5 - Mrs. Hale's Celebrated Heal-All Ointment



A6 - Bright red transfer, Australian Market

One chemist that distributed a large volume of cold cream was Boots Cash Chemists. This is the same firm that is found throughout England even to this day.

Medicinal Ointments

Numerous medicinal ointments and “cure-alls” were distributed in pot lids. Many of these products were exported to Australia, perhaps due to a shortage of doctors in the remote colony. The claims advertised on these lids are fascinating, reflecting an era of elixirs and cure-alls. One product (illustrated by Dale, 1977), Castell’s Eucalyptus Healing Ointment, was first produced in Australia in 1887, and provided:

“An immediate cure for Cuts, Wounds, Chaps & Bruises, a never failing Remedy for Erysipeias inflamed Eyes & all External Inflammations, Inflamed Breasts & Sore Nipples, Chafing of Infants, Chilblaines, Bunions, etc.”

Edible Pastes

Numerous lids contained edible pastes, the most popular being bloater and anchovy pastes. These were widely exported throughout Britain, and to Canada, South Africa and Australia. These lids first appeared in the late 1860s, but were most widely employed between 1890 and 1910.

Shaving Cream, Lip and Eye Salves

Other, less common products included shaving cream, and lip and eye salves. Both lip and eye salve lids are commonly small, and perhaps not as appealing to the collector. However, some of the lip and eye salve lids are nevertheless rare and thus much sought after. Conversely, shaving cream lids are commonly much larger, and often show a French influence, as the British followed the French with many fashions connected with hair.

AMERICAN POT LIDS

The use of pot lids by American suppliers followed that of the English. The American lids were manufactured by English potteries, and were generally monochrome transferred. Most American lids feature original art work. A few, however, appear to have been near copies of popular English lids, in order to capitalize on the success of the English product. Whereas the English lids number in the thousands, less than one hundred American companies



A7 - Ed Pinaud bear's grease pomade lid

A8 - Blue printed “Veritable Grease D’Ours” body of pot with wrap around design.

produced only a few hundred products sold in pot lids. Transfer printed lids were used for a shorter period of time in the States; their use was largely discontinued by 1890. As a result, American pot lids are not readily available, and are thus much sought after.

Pot lids have been found throughout the United States. Today, many American pot lids are found on the West Coast. Jackson and Jackson (1987) attribute this occurrence to the more recent prevalence of redevelopment projects in the West, as opposed to the “older” East.

EXAMPLES

We have included examples of some of the pot lids and features discussed in this article. Specific descriptions are included with each photograph. Of particular note is the group photograph of various unusual and rare pot lids; an example of a pot lid’s appearance when it was originally sold, with the paper lid wrapped around the base; and two relatively rare pomade lids, with a bear and cow on the lids. Specific descriptions accompany each photo.

VALUE

The value of pot lids, like other ceramics, depends on various factors. Important factors include subject matter, condition, quality of the transfer, and, perhaps most important, rarity. Prime examples of the relationship of subject matter to value are the bear’s grease pot lids. As indicated by the above quote by Dale, these are among the most prized of all pot lids. Both because they are uncommon and among the earliest produced. Prices realized in the 1990 auction of the Ben Z. Swanson collection of almost 1,400 pot lids, for the bear’s grease lids ranged from \$70 to \$2,800, with the majority priced in the range of \$200 to \$400. In contrast to the average value of bear’s grease lids are the more common endless variety of toothpaste pot lids whose average value is under \$200, with many under \$100.

The lid (top) is most commonly available. Although inclusion of the base may increase the value of the piece, it is often missing or mismatched to the top, and thus plays a secondary role to determination of the value. The bases commonly were not printed. However, some of the lids included printed bases, and these, in some cases, add to the value of the pot lid.



A9 - “Moelle de Boeuf” pomade, blue print

A10 - Black printed, original paper band around base.

COLLECTING

Pot lids are found at the usual antique sources, including shops and general interest antique, and, particularly, bottle shows. There are a number Internet Web sites that list information and lids offered and for sale (see below). Unlike most transferware, pot lids were often discarded after their contents were used, commonly at disposal sites or outhouses. Thus, they are found in excavations by those looking for old bottles, and at construction sites.

MORE INFORMATION

This article is intended only as a brief introduction to the collecting of pot lids. Much additional information is contained in the following publications.

Dale, Ronald, 1977, "The Price Guide to Black and White Pot-Lids", The Antique Collectors' Club, Suffolk, England. Includes information on 2,347 lids, of which 1,901 are illustrated. Descriptions and prices, annually revised. Out of print, but available from used book dealers.

Jackson, Barbara and Sonny, 1987, "American Pot Lids", Cerrito Printing, El Cerrito, California. Distributed by Barbara and Sonny Jackson, 2585 Kenney Drive, San Pablo, CA 94806. Pot lids from 42 American manufacturers or distributors are presented. Numerous illustrations and photographs, arranged by producer. Available from "Antique Bottle and Glass Collector" (see below).

Fletcher, Edward, 1975, "Collecting Pot Lids," Pitman Publishing, London, England. Includes an extensive discussion of hunting, cleaning and restoration of pot lids.

Harmer Rooke Galleries, 1990, "The Ben Z. Swanson, Jr. Collection of Antique Pot Lids," New York, New York. This auction catalogue is generally recognized as the premier reference book on transfer printed pot lids, including approximately 1400 photographic examples.

"Antique Bottle and Glass Collector", a monthly publication, occasionally features articles and information on pot lids, as well as an extensive classified advertisement section. They can be contacted at (215) 679-5849. The publisher is Jim Hagenbuch.

Information on pot lids can also be found on the Internet. Some examples of pot lids can be seen at:

<http://www.bolwin1.demon.co.uk/potlid.htm>

which is a Web site of a collector in Nottingham, England. Another site features examples of various lids:

<http://www.bradshaw83.freemove.co.uk/pot%20lids.htm>

More useful information is available at:

http://www.netcentral.co.uk/steveb/features/ball_collection.htm

And finally, a different, somewhat whimsical application of pot lids can be viewed at the following:

<http://www.sallymankus.com/Potlids/potlids.html>

Pot lid collections occasionally are offered at auction. One auction house which often features pot lids is BBR Auctions, 5 Ironworks Row, Elsecar Project, Wath Road, Elsecar, Barnsley, S. Yorkshire, S74 8HJ, England.

They can be contacted at 0226 745156. BBR offers three reserved and three unreserved auctions each year.

There are various groups devoted to the collection of pot lids. One such group is the Pot Lid Collectors Society, K.V. Mortimer, Chairman, c/o B.P. Collins Solicitors, Collins House, 32-38 Station Road, Gerrards Cross, Bucks SL9 8EL, England. They can be contacted at 01487 773194.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Many thanks to Judie Siddall, who edited the photographs and reviewed the article, and to Charlotte Ring, who also reviewed the article.

PHOTO DESCRIPTIONS

- A1 - A sampling of various rare and unusual pot lids, including several American market and three bear grease lids.
- A2 - Rare American purple print lid and base, for Jules Havel, Philadelphia.
- A3 - Example of a pot containing a food paste (Fortnum & Masons Mushroom Savoury) in brown print.
- A4 - Example of a Pratt printed pot lid "Country Quarters"; product would have been described on a paper label wrapped around the circumference of the base.
- A5 - Mrs. Hale's "Celebrated Heal-All Ointment", black print.
- A6 - Trouchet's "Corn Cure", for the Australian market, in an appealing full-bodied bright red transfer print.
- A7 - Pinaud blue-printed bear's grease pomade lid.
- A8 - Pinaud blue-printed bear's grease pomade body.
- A9 - L.T. Piver "Moelle de Boeuf" pomade, blue print (Piver distributed from both Paris and London).
- A10 - Black printed Jewsbury & Brown toothpaste, with original packaging paper band around circumference of base.

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