

ASSESSING MODERN THEORIES ON SWANSEA TRANSFERWARE

BY ARLEEN AND GRAHAME TANNER

N.B:--An illustrated supplement to the written text is to be found at the end of the account.

Diverse theories exist as to whether Samuel Hollins produced Swansea Pottery blue and white transfer ware. Indeed some researchers postulate that the Samuel Hollins' Pottery produced very significant quantities of blue and white transfer ware. On the contrary our position is that Samuel Hollins did not produce any blue and white transfer printed wares. Further, the suggestion that patterns previously attributed to Swansea should now be reassigned to Samuel Hollins we see as incorrect. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate our reasons for holding this position.

REASONS FOR THE ABOVE STATEMENT

1. Many interested parties have searched for marked S. Hollins blue and white transfer ware pieces but to our knowledge only TWO pieces have been found, both small plates, identical in every way even down to the printed Mercury mark. The pattern we call 'Herdsman, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' is found on both the two Mercury-marked plates; incidentally both the pattern and mark are listed in the Swansea Pottery Bicentenary Catalogue 1968. Additionally the bowl we illustrate carries a deep 'Corn and Husk' border (sherds of the 'Corn and Husk' border were unearthed in Swansea and recorded by S. H. Williams—see '*Sherds from the Cambrian and Glamorgan Potteries at Swansea*'. *Mediaeval and Later Pottery in Wales 9.1986-87*). The border on the two plates shows hearts—a feature used as cut-outs on puzzle jugs, milseys, pierced outline shapes on drainers and also used as tally marks on Swansea pieces.

2. '*Buying in the White*'

We illustrate a later example of 'buying in the white'. This platter is impressed 'COPELAND' but Robert Copeland stated that the Copeland pottery did not use the 'Asiatic Pheasants' pattern. Indeed it is easy to see that the transfer pattern was never intended for this shape of platter. There were a number of reasons for this widespread practice. This happened if a pottery needed pieces to finish an order and had run out of their own stock so had to purchase 'in the white' from another pottery. It could occur also if agents found a pottery selling off 'in the white' stock cheaply because of a cash flow problem. When a pottery closed down there would be stock 'in the white' to be sold as well as tools, machinery etc. Examples have been documented in the F.o.B. Bulletins and elsewhere.. A twin of the 'Herdsman, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' plate impressed 'S HOLLINS' in our collection shows an area of blurring of blue into the white. Stoneware is far less porous than earthenware and it seems even after firing the glaze picked up cobalt from the print which caused the blurred small area under the glaze. The border not only contains heart shapes it also has small fans and the three Prince of Wales feathers with 'Ich Dien' beneath. This very symbol is certainly one known to represent not only the Prince of Wales but also the Nation itself. The body of the 'S.Hollins' plate is very well potted and not thickly potted yet for its size is heavier than normal pearlware earthenware examples. It is made of a stoneware type body so exactly what one would expect of S. Hollins' stoneware manufacture. All other pieces we have seen carrying the same pattern as this small plate are of normal pearlware earthenware production made at Swansea including the punchbowl we illustrate.

- 3 The pattern 'Herdsman, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' was given by Grant-Davidson and other experts to the hand of Thomas Rothwell while at Swansea, indeed Grant-Davidson worked with Stretton on Rothwell and his engravings. Some researchers, however, have suggested that the pattern in its relationship to the 'Smartly Dressed Shepherd' pattern could be the engravings of either William Smith, who engraved for Baddeley or Thomas Davis of Worcester. There is, however,

no evidence that either of these engraved the pattern. There are no archival records of any description that Rothwell was employed by S.Hollins. There are some periods when it is uncertain as to Rothwell's whereabouts; one such period being 1762-1767 but there are samples of his work still extant dating from that period. Stretton is uncertain as to whether Rothwell was still in Liverpool with Sadler and Green or in Hanley with Humphrey Palmer. Another such period is from 1774 to 1785. In 1774 we know he was residing at Church Street in Birmingham as 'Rothwell and Hicks, Engravers' and in 1785 there is a record of a Thomas Gooch of Benacre Hall in Norfolk negotiating a Counterpart Lease with Thomas Rothwell for a property in Bartholomew Street in Birmingham. The likelihood is that he resided at Birmingham during that period but there is no proof. Unless Hollins was the inventor of the transfer printing process which clearly he was not then Rothwell could not have been working for Hollins before he went to Swansea It is unlikely he worked for S.Hollins after he was in Swansea because records show Rothwell's activity was in London and then Birmingham as Stretton also points out.. Simeon Shaw in his 'History of the Staffordshire Potteries' published in 1829 is quite clear that Samuel Hollins was a "red china potter" in the agreement for the use of Champion's porcelain Patent. Shaw penned a chapter on Blue Printed Pottery and there is no mention of Samuel Hollins there at all. Both Chaffers and Shaw inform us that Samuel Hollins from 1781 was a major partner in the group who purchased Cookworthy's Patent from Champion of Bristol. He remained a full partner for decades even though other partners left or died. Indeed as late as 1810 he, with Warburton, Clowes and Daniel paid £6,000 for all the New Hall buildings at a time of economic depression. It seems obvious to us that Samuel Hollins, as well as his Red ware and Stoneware manufactory, for at least thirty years channelled his energies and finance into the New Hall manufactory not transfer ware. Incidentally there are just five examples of S. Hollins stoneware in Godden's *'British Pottery and Porcelain'* and all five are impressed S. Hollins.

- 4 To our knowledge no other pieces of S. Hollins marked blue transfer ware have come to light in the last two hundred years. It should be remembered that Hollins was very assiduous in marking his stoneware and red ware pieces and there are many examples in existence. In the highly competitive Staffordshire market it would have been useful to identify his red ware, stoneware and any other of his productions. Swansea had an advantage there because up until 1813 it had no local competitors so perhaps felt less need to identify its pieces in this way.
- 5 The impressed marks and bodies of the two plates were undoubtedly S. Hollins but the printed pattern, border and tally mark and glaze were executed at Swansea! Further if we were to find a piece impressed 'Swansea' which carried a pattern known to be Swansea we would accept it, however if the pattern was known to have been produced only by another pottery, for example Wedgwood we would have to seek wider research and investigation. If the research proved fruitless we would have to conclude that Wedgwood purchased 'in the white' from Swansea however unlikely that might be.
- 6 Clearly then, we believe that the claim that Samuel Hollins produced blue and white transfer ware is unsubstantiated being based solely on the fact that because S.Hollins is impressed on the base then the piece must be all Hollins' work. The fact that the pattern, border and tally mark were known to be Swansea was set aside. Another example of this, to our minds, mistaken belief, is seen in Welsh Ceramics in Context 1, page 57, where there is illustrated a sauce-boat and a lid-
ded tureen both pieces impressed 'ROGERS'. Both were given to Rogers despite the fact that the sauceboat carried the Bovey Tracey 'Carnation/Chrysanthemum' pattern and its own distinctive border whilst the tureen carried the Swansea 'Carnation/Chrysanthemum' pattern and the Swansea 'Fan' border normally found with the pattern. It seems to us that these two examples should have caused one to see evidence of purchasing 'in the white' In F.o.B. Occasional Paper 2 1992 a 'Rogers' impressed plate is illustrated carrying the Rogers' version of the 'Carnation/Chrysanthemum' pattern albeit it is named 'Floral' pattern. Both the Bovey Tracey and Swansea versions of the pattern are very similar but there are minor differences and the borders are entirely different. The Bovey Tracey border was unearthed on shards at the Bovey Tracey pottery site. In any case why would Rogers want to go to the expense of creating new copper plates of two other potteries' patterns and borders when it already had its own version in existence and production?

ENAMELLING AND TRANSFER PRINTING

Enamelling is over-glaze painted decoration usually executed with different coloured enamels found on porcelain and pearl-ware. Enamelling is sometimes found with over-glaze transfer printing as seen on the Swansea 'Bonaparte' jug; it is used in the main to fill in coloured enamels within the outline shapes of the transfer print. Over-glaze colour enamelling is also to be found on under-glaze printed patterns such as the 'Lady with Bird and Cage' jugs where again the colour is kept within the boundary of the transfer printed shape. Enamelling is **not** transfer printing but is used on occasions simply to enhance with colour transfer printed pieces. Rothwell is listed as an engraver, enameller, printer and artist and it is certain that he engraved many of the early patterns produced by Swansea. There is no evidence of Rothwell's producing any enamelling at Swansea indeed with the extensive engraving he did there would be no time for him to do so. Because Rothwell was not in Swansea at a certain time it does not preclude his engravings being used for some considerable time afterwards. Copper plates after all were expensive and were used to their ultimate demise, often reworked and repaired before the final demise was reached. Rothwell would also have left his designs and copper plates behind and they would have, no doubt been copied onto new copper plates by remaining engravers still employed by Swansea. Rothwell would have not taken the coppers he had produced while working for the Swansea Pottery as they were the property of the Pottery owner and not the employee.

'CHINOISERIE FERN'

The pattern on the jug dedicated to 'Margaret Cadwallader' is not the 'Curling Palm' but is, in fact, the 'Chinoiserie Fern' pattern sometimes called the 'Fern Tree' pattern. ('Curling Palm' is a pattern first encountered on a piece of Job Ridgway although the pattern was made by a number of different potteries each with its own interpretation and may very well have been used by Swansea).

'SWANS' PATTERN

It is well known that wasters can be found glazed or unglazed. To deny the fact of glazed wasters would be devastating for the attributions and work done regarding glazed wasters not only in Staffordshire but across the whole of the British Isles. In point of fact the waster shards of the 'Swans' bowl are wasters----this may be seen clearly on the reverse side of the shards that are illustrated in our first book. These shards are held in Swansea Museum and were unearthed at a dump site near to the Pottery, in the same way shards from many other potteries in Staffordshire and elsewhere have been found near pottery sites and given clear attribution to the relevant pottery research. It must be remembered also that Swansea sold pots directly to the public; this being the case it would not want to clutter its premises with wasters thus taking up space and not exactly presenting a positive sight to potential customers who would arrive at the site; far better to use a dump site near to the pottery.

That the 'Swans' shards are wasters can be seen by the thick disfiguring globules of glaze; it seems clearly then there must have been some kiln temperature error made. Bowls such as the one we illustrate would be placed upside down in the kiln for firing; this is proved by the points on the top rim of the bowl. The illustrated bowl has three single prop marks on its rim. This would mean the interior bottom of the bowl would be fairly well protected but the base and sides of the bowl would be open to glaze faults and disfigurements. It is always possible also that pots may damage or crack if the kiln temperature was incorrect or erratic. At any rate the 'Swans' shards are waster shards and since there was no other pottery in Swansea it can only be shards from the Swansea Pottery.

We have tracked seventeen examples of bowls with the 'Swans' pattern all have the identical 'Fan' borders and obviously the product of one pottery not two. The 'Swans' pattern as its symbolic image suggests comes from Swansea.

Using handle prints as a method of study and aid to attribution is well known. Although past Swansea experts did not draw attention to it in print it is certain they were well aware of encompassing it in their references to style and feel of a pot. We have used handle prints to form pottery relationships etc., and have recorded these in personal notes and study for a number of decades. We would recommend highly this form of study to all collectors of early blue and white—see also our two books and other articles we have written.

The large number of Swansea pieces including presumably the 'Duke of York', 'King and Constitution', 'La Guillotine' and many,

many more being reattributed to Hollins should be regarded with great suspicion especially as the basis for all this reattribution was one small stoneware-type transfer printed plate which had a previous 1968 attribution to Swansea as far as pattern, border and tally mark were concerned. Copper plates moving between factories could only happen if there were bankruptcy of a pottery and it were forced to sell off all its viable assets, The copper plates never moved with the engravers who made them as they were the property of the Pottery owner and not the workman. They were very expensive items and would not be given to a some time employee.

Thomas Rothwell would have been responsible for a large number of patterns, borders and handle prints used by Swansea. Remember also that Rothwell would not personally engrave every single copper plate produced at Swansea during his time there, for instance a large dinner service would require very many copper plates to accommodate the different shapes, sizes and moulds involved. This explains why we find minor differences in the execution of patterns and borders. Coppers were hand/eye creations and although the engravers had the source to follow, inevitably minor differences would ensue but, to be fair, the Rothwell's style was also followed by the other engravers at Swansea. There is evidence to support the work of apprentice engravers where the finish is not top drawer---we see this in some 'Riverside Rural Lovers' examples etc.; It was Grant -Davidson who first drew attention to the group of apprentices employed by Swansea.

ROTHWELL AND ENAMELLING

We have researched the life of Thomas Rothwell exhaustively and agree that:

“the best assessment of Rothwell's work as an engraver”

is given by Norman Stretton in his E.C.C.Paper article Vol.6 pt. 3. produced while Grant-Davidson was Honorary Curator of the Royal Institution of South Wales at Swansea. Perhaps quoting from the Stretton article might make some things clearer especially with regard to enamelling and Rothwell. “It is, however, of interest that this is the first occasion on which Rothwell is referred to as an engraver and printer in addition to being an enameller.” The point here is that Stretton recognises that printing and enamelling are two different areas/skills. Again Stretton says:

“Although it is not possible to ascribe any enamel decoration on pottery he (Rothwell) could well have been employed as a painter on locally produced delftware. Neither is it possible to identify examples of his enamel decoration on earthenware made by Palmer but four specimens of transfer printing which have Rothwell's signature on the engraving exist”

Clearly Stretton delineates between printing and enamelling. As Stretton says:

“Rothwell was also an enamel painter”

Norman Stretton has much to say regarding Rothwell's stay in Swansea. On page 152 of the same article he states:

“While at Swansea, Rothwell engraved six local views...printed on paper and on plaques of plaster of Paris. These were all drawn and engraved by Rothwell in 1792 and 1793.”

We find no proof to substantiate the theory that Rothwell left Swansea in 1791 but we agree with Stretton that Rothwell was in Swansea in 1793. His view was that Rothwell from 1794 was probably in London—a statement with which we also agree. Haynes is quoted when writing to his son-in-law April 1793.

“we have not worked in enamel since I wrote to you concerning for want of an enameller”

This statement does not preclude transfer printing being used in 1793 it means that no enamelling was done in that year. That printing was done in 1793 is proved by the bowl transfer printed with the 'Precarious Chinaman' pattern and the Swansea 'Fan' border. The inscription reads 'Tho,s Dale Lambourn 1793'. There is also the evidence of the Swansea 'comma' painter. Clearly enamelling and transfer printing are not the same.

ILLUSTRATED SECTION

This plate is impressed 'S.Hollins', the 's' from the end of Hollins has failed to impress; this and the plate used as the premise for the Samuel Hollins' transferware publication, are the only two pieces of transfer ware impressed 'S.Hollins'. The printed pattern and the printed Mercury mark are listed in the Swansea Pottery Bicentenary Exhibition Catalogue 1968

"Item 98 Punchbowl Printed on the exterior with shepherd and sheep" (*Smartly Dressed Shepherd' pattern*), "Interior with man herding cows across a stream" (*Herdsmen, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' pattern*)." Deep latticed diaper border with floral festoons. H. 4 ½ ins. D.10 ½ ins. Grant-Davidson Collection"

The bowl was printed in greenish-black.



"Item 184 Bowl printed in the interior with the same scene as item 98" (i.e. *Herdsmen, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' as seen on the impressed Hollins' plate*) "and on the



outside with three oval panels portraying a pottery" (*Two Kilns pattern*)" deeply incised ring on base. D.8 5/8 ins. H. 3 7/8ins.

Mark: two dots, printed circle and semicircle conjoined surmounted by a cross" (*we now list as a Mercury mark*). "The bowl is printed in blue".

(Our italics)

The bowl described in the Bicentenary Catalogue matches the patterns and borders shown here on a punchbowl. Clearly the interior pattern on the punchbowl is one we call 'Herdsman, Cattle, Farmhouse and Barn' identified on the impressed Hollins' plate. The illustrated punchbowl has a 'Corn and Husk'. border, shards of which were unearthed and recorded by S. H. Williams. He, Grant-Davidson and P. D. Pryce along with other of their peers believed the border to be unique to Swansea and we would concur with their opinions .



We have already mentioned how 'buying in the white' was a practice made during the very early period and into the much later periods of ceramic production. Here is one such example:-

This platter shows the well-known 'Asiatic Pheasant' pattern whilst its mark is an impressed 'COPELAND' mark. On the face of it seems straightforward—NOT SO!—Robert Copeland is certain that Copeland Pottery did not produce the 'Asiatic Pheasant' pattern at all and he would know! Notice also how the transfer print does not fit precisely the shape of the alien body platter. Clearly this is an example of purchased 'in the white'. Whoever transfer printed and glazed this piece we may never know--if it had a workman's tally mark it might be possible to research along that avenue but the pattern is common to many potteries and its identity would take forever. (N.B. The impressed 'S HOLLINS' plate has, not only a known Swansea tally mark, but also a known Swansea pattern).

'SWANS'

These two images which are taken from our first book show in photographic form (courtesy of The City and County of Swansea: Swansea Museum) show the malformation of a waster shard; the thick globules of the glaze on the base of the shards would deface the sides of the bowl or any other area affected. Here we see clearly the evidence of how disfigurement on a piece meant it could not be sold on, not even as a 'second' and would be trashed into a nearby dump to the pottery.





This punchbowl shows an exact match to the engraving on the waster shards; it also shows the prominent 'Fan' border always found with the pattern. This bowl also has an under glaze printed eight-pointed star mark, a mark found on a number of other Swansea pieces.



On the side of the bowl is a pattern similar to one found on Caughley porcelain. G. Godden refers to it as 'Willow Nankin' and we use the same title.

This little bowl carrying the 'Precarious Chinaman' pattern on its sides must be one of the earliest dated pieces of blue and white transfer ware to have been produced by Swansea. Inside the bowl is inscribed 'Tho^s, Dale Lambourn 1793'. It is highly unlikely that an inscription such as that



on this bowl would have been written much later. What would have been the point?

Of course the inscription was written; transfer printing the inscription would have either ruined a copper plate or a second copper plate would have to have been produced just for the inscription—very expensive either way.

The 'Precarious Chinaman' pattern on this bowl is a match for the one illustrated on a teapot page 180 in *The Pottery of South Wales* by W. J. Grant-Davidson. The design, thought to have been the earliest engraving attributed to Thomas Rothwell at Swansea,

was copied from a Pillement design in *The Ladies Amusement* (1762) pl. 50. Note the 'Fan' border on this bowl also matches that of the teapot. Although this bowl is unmarked the teapot had a cursive 'V' and a dot under the pot and a sharply defined 'V' and three dots in a triangle on the cover and thus proving that this little bowl is of Swansea manufacture.

Clearly we have not covered all aspects of the modern theories regarding Swansea transfer ware, there is still much to disagree with, such as the 'Unity'/pilchard pieces being of late production. We have a small 'Unity' mug that carries the under glaze three blue dots in a triangle—a mark known to have been used during the early period of production. We have also researched more information about the Unity seine fishing company but we will leave these and other observations on other matters for a later date.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BOOKS

1. GODDEN, Geoffrey, *An Illustrated Guide to British Pottery and Porcelain*. London: Herbert Jenkins, 1966.
2. GRANT-DAVIDSON, W.J., *The Pottery of South Wales: An illustrated guide*. Great Britain: Mackie, 2010.
3. GRAY, Jonathan.(ed.) *Welsh Ceramics in Context, Pt. 1*. Swansea: Royal Institution of South Wales, 2003.
4. NANCE Morton E.J. *The Pottery and Porcelain of Swansea and Nantgarw*. London: Batsford, 1942.
5. SHAW, Simeon, *A History of the Staffordshire Potteries*. Newton Abbot: David and Charles/S.R Reprints, 1970.
6. TANNER, Arleen and Grahame, *Swansea's Cambrian Pottery Transferware and other Welsh Examples*. Stowmarket: Polstead Press, 2005.
7. TANNER, Arleen and Grahame, *Swansea's Cambrian Pottery Transferware II: Patterns and Borders*. Stowmarket: Polstead Press, 2008.
8. TURNER, William, *The Ceramics of Swansea and Nantgarw: A History of the Factories*. London: Bemrose and Sons, 1897.

PUBLICATIONS

1. FRIENDS OF BLUE BULLETINS (Various).
2. GRANT-DAVIDSON, W.J., *Early Swansea Pottery*. Transactions of the English Ceramic Circle, 1972.
3. HOLDAWAY, M. Hollins *Blue Printed Earthenware*, London: Morley College Ceramic Circle, 2001,
4. PRYCE, P.D. and WILLIAMS S.H. *Swansea Blue and White Pottery*. Woodbridge: Antique Collectors Club, 1973. (1986 Reprint)..
5. STRETTON, Norman, *Thomas Rothwell, Engraver and Copperplate Printer 1740-1807*. London: Victoria and Albert Museum, 1966.
6. SWANSEA POTTERY BICENTENARY CATALOGUE 1968, Swansea: Glynn Vivian Art Gallery, 1968.
7. WILLIAMS, S.H., *Sherds from the Cambrian and Glamorgan Potteries Swansea. Mediaeval and Later Pottery in Wales 9 1986-87*.

