



A Scottish Mystery

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Database Discoveries – Contribution # 16

Transferware Collectors Club

November, 2014

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A simple question from a friend, a retired historian, has set off a chain of research and highlighted a mystery. My friend saw on eBay a 2-7/8" plate titled "Indian Chiefs" (Figure 1) and asked me if I knew of a source print for it. It was made by John Thomson at the Annfield Pottery in Scotland, which was active 1826 to 1883. I told him that the pattern was in the TCC database without a source print, but his curiosity as a historian drove him to do some research on his own. To my surprise, he found not a print, but another source for the pattern. The pattern seems to be derived from the coat of arms of the Bank of Montreal, shown here on one of the bank's newer buildings (Figure 2). It could also have appeared in a print. An internet search produces several variations on the coat of arms, none exactly like that on the plate.



Fig. 1: "Indian Chief", 2-7/8 inch plate.



Fig. 2: Bank of Montreal coat of arms, building frieze.

The TCC database also shows five other Annfield Pottery patterns on 2 7/8" plates with the same embossed "daisy" border. Two have California themes: "Away to California" (also produced in brown) and "California Diggings" (also produced in pink) (Figures 3 and 4).



Fig. 3: "Away to California", plate, 2-7/8 inches. Fig. 4: "California Diggings", plate, 2-7/8 inches.

Two more patterns are totally unrelated, except that they show Scottish scenes: "Highland Dance" and "Royal Exchange" (Figures 5 and 6). The Royal Exchange pictured on the plate is in Glasgow, not to be confused with a similar Royal Exchange in London.



Fig. 5: "Highland Dance", plate. Fig. 6: "Royal Exchange", plate.

The most recent pattern in the database came from a Scottish collector, who suggested "Ready for the Journey" as a TCC assigned name (Figure 7). It was obviously created by snipping a piece of transfer from a larger pattern, the identity of which is unknown at this point.



Fig. 7: “Ready for the Journey”, plate.

All of these plates are marked with one or the other of two John Thomson marks. “California Diggings” bears the “granite” mark (Figure 8), and all the others bear the “shield” mark (Figure 9).



Fig. 8: Annfield Pottery / John Thomson “granite” mark, “California Diggings” plate.



Fig. 9: Annfield Pottery / John Thomson “shield” mark (additional plates).

Dating of all the patterns is problematical. The two California patterns are related to the gold rush, which started in 1849. The others don’t suggest any particular date. The big mystery is their purpose. Why were they made? An article titled “Children’s Plates” by Kay Dickson in the *Scottish Pottery Historical Review*, #22 (2002), page 35, proposes that they were “used as drip-trays for the cup when the liquid had been poured into the saucer (when tea was drunk from the saucer)”. She apparently had in mind what we call “cup plates”, but they are larger, generally around four inches in diameter, and they match the cups and saucers with which they are linked.

In the case of Annfield Pottery, no cups or saucers in the same shape or patterns are known. Since Dickson's proposal appears in an article on children's plates, there is also the implication that they may have been intended for children. However, the patterns don't seem to portray the usual subject matter of interest to children. Adding to the mystery is the fact that several different colors are represented, and the series, other than containing two patterns related to California and two related to Scotland, has no apparent theme.

Credits: content reviewed by Connie Rogers and document edited by David Hoexter.



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