



**The News That Pratt
Thought Fit to Print**



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Database Discoveries – Contribution # 18

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Potters like Enoch Wood, Davenport and William Smith had been experimenting since the 1830s with the application of multi-colored transfers to dinner wares and tea wares, but it was not until about 1846 that patents were taken out on a polychrome printing process that successfully emulated the look of hand painted wares. Thomas, John and Joseph Mayer and John Ridgway & Co. were among those who made use of the polychrome process, but as time went on it became primarily synonymous with the name of Felix Pratt (F. & R. Pratt & Co). Thus, these wares are commonly know as “Prattware” (not to be confused with the high-fire colored Staffordshire ceramic figures also known as “Prattware”).

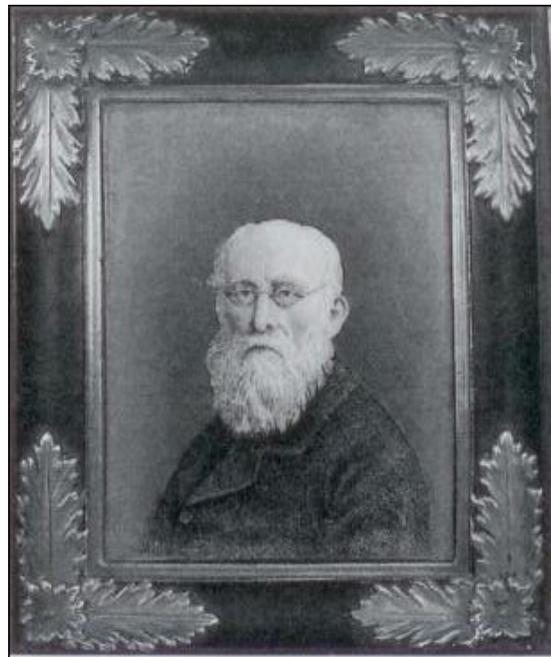


Fig. 1: Portrait of Felix Pratt on a china plaque believed to have been made in 1888 (courtesy of the website www.thepotteries.org).

The polychrome process was used on plates, tea wares, jugs and dessert services, but most memorably for the transformation of previously single color utilitarian containers into colorful jars, bottles, and, of course, pots and pot lids that drew the consumer's attention to products such as bears grease, hair pomades, and fish and meat pastes. The wide array of subject matter included depictions of events and personalities that were in the news, and thus interesting to the average person of the mid 19th century.

The Pratt and Mayer firms had the chance to show off what could be done with their new technology when the Great Exhibition of 1851, the brainchild of Prince Albert, opened in Hyde Park in London. Both companies had displays, both won medals, and both depicted the scene of their triumph. Mayer's "The Interior of the Grand International Building of 1851" (Figure 2) shows the opening ceremony presided over by Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Pratt's "The Crystal Palace" (Figure 3) shows a similar view of the interior of the vast glass exhibition hall, with representatives of all the continents pictured to show its truly international scale.



Fig. 2: "The Interior of the Grand International Building of 1851" (Thomas, John & Joseph Mayer).



Fig. 3: "The Crystal Palace" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).



The great success of the exhibition led to more than a century of exhibitions, expositions and world's fairs, including exhibitions in New York and Dublin in 1853 (each with their own versions of the Crystal Palace), and another in Paris in 1867. The Pratt company issued several views to commemorate the Centennial celebration of the United States in 1876. "Philadelphia Exhibition 1876" (Figure 4) shows Memorial Hall, the main exhibition venue.

Fig. 4: "Philadelphia Exhibition 1876" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

"State House in Philadelphia 1776" (Figure 5), an historical view, contrasts with "Interior View of Independence Hall Philadelphia" (Figure 6), a view of the Assembly Room as it appeared in the 1870s.



Fig. 5: "State House in Philadelphia 1776" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).



Fig. 6: "Interior View, Independence Hall, Philadelphia" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

After the national and state governments moved elsewhere the State House was rented out to various tenants. Thus the painter Charles Willson Peale came to have his portrait gallery of prominent Americans (shown in Figure 6) in the same room where the Declaration of Independence and Constitution had been adopted. The Liberty Bell can also be seen to the right. This room was not restored to its 18th century appearance until the 20th century.

"Paris Exhibition 1878", by Pratt (Figure 7) depicts the Trocadero Palace in Paris, but not what to posterity might have been its most interesting exhibit, the finished head of the Statue of Liberty, displayed on the grounds.



Fig. 7: "Paris Exhibition 1878 (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

The Crimean War of 1854-1855 was the catalyst for a number of designs. The union of Great Britain, France and Turkey against the inroads it was felt Russia was making into the Mediterranean via its Black Sea ports is represented by "Tria Juncta in Uno" (or "Three United as One") (Figure 8) showing Queen Victoria, Emperor Napoleon III and Sultan Abd-ul-Mejid. While not exactly an historical view, "Embarking for the East" (Figure 9), which depicts a Scottish soldier bound for the Crimea and taking tearful leave

of his family, shows the reality of the situation for many British subjects.



Fig. 8: "Tria Juncta in Uno" (Thomas, John & Joseph Mayer).



Fig. 9: "Embarking for the East" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

"The Allied Generals" (Figure 10) pictures Lord Raglan and General Canrobert, the British and French commanders-in-chief. Despite his long career, Raglan was not up to the task of commanding the army, and his lack of ability led to many missed opportunities and unnecessary suffering among his men. The main objective of the conflict was the seizure of the strategic port of Sebastopol, shown in the Mayer pot lid "Sebastopol" (Figure 11). This was achieved in 1855, ending the war. Judie Siddall's excellent "Crimean War Again", published as part of her Dishy News blog (<http://dishynews.blogspot.com/2014/03/crimean-war-again-plus-ca-change-plus.html>), examines the 19th century conflict in light of what is currently occurring between Russia and Ukraine, proving that indeed "the more things change, the more they remain the same".



Fig. 10: "The Allied Generals" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).



Fig. 11: "Sebastopol" (Thomas, John & Joseph Mayer).

Fig. 12 (below on left): "H.R.H. The Prince of Wales Visiting the Tomb of Washington" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).



Then, as now, British royalty was always of interest. Albert Edward, Prince of Wales, later King Edward VII, was sent on a goodwill tour of Canada and the United States in 1860. Queen Victoria had initially objected strongly to the idea of the tour, but her eldest son, despite his genial and sociable nature, was an annoyance to her most of the time and eventually she was content just to have him out of her sight. He enjoyed (or endured) lavish receptions in Detroit, Chicago, St. Louis and Cincinnati. He saw the Great Charles Blondin cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope, and met Emerson, Longfellow and Oliver

Wendell Holmes in Boston. As part of his three day stay at the White House with President James Buchanan he went to Mount Vernon, where he is depicted in "H.R.H. the Prince of Wales Visiting the Tomb of Washington" (Figure 12).

That same year the Prince's mother opened the first meeting of the National Rifle Association on Wimbledon Common, and is pictured, rather amusingly, firing the first shot of the competition with a Whitley rifle held in a vise and trained on the bulls eye in "Wimbledon July 2nd 1860" (Figure 13).

Fig. 13 (below on right): "Wimbledon July 2nd 1860" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

The following year the nation was plunged into mourning at the untimely death of Prince Albert, here depicted in dignified pose in "The Late Prince Consort" (Figure 14). "Albert Edward, Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra on their Marriage in 1863" (Figure 15) again pictures the eldest son of Victoria and the lovely Danish princess he married (her sister would become the mother of the last Czar of Russia, Nicholas II, and her brother the grandfather of Prince Philip, consort of the present Queen). Of course the Prince of Wales was expected to wed, and in general his marriage was a happy one, but like many rich and powerful men the idea of strict monogamy seemed foreign to his nature.





Fig. 14: "The Late Prince Consort" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

Fig. 15: "Albert Edward, Prince of Wales and Princess Alexandra on their Marriage in 1863" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

Let's look at just two of the remaining historical views on Prattware. "Wellington with Cocked Hat" (Figure 16) shows the aged hero of Waterloo and former prime minister, evidently just prior to his death in 1852 (a second version of this lid indicates his birth and death dates). "Garibaldi" (Figure 17), pictures the leader of the Italian Risorgimento, or unification, who was very popular in Britain. He is pictured pointing to the dome of St. Peter's in Rome. At the time this lid was first produced, in the 1860s, it was still Garibaldi's dream that Rome, occupied by the French, would also become part of a unified Italy. His dream was finally realized when the French forces had to withdraw in 1870 to fight in the Franco Prussian War, and the Italians took back the city.



Fig. 16: "Wellington with Cocked Hat" (Mayer).

Fig. 17: "Garibaldi" (F. & R. Pratt & Co.).

This article presents but a small portion of the many attractive Prattware / polychrome patterns to be found in the TCC Database. There are currently about 250 Prattware patterns represented - over 500 are known. If you have any of those not yet entered, we would love to hear from you. Please send images or further information to the author at otlink@aol.com.

Additional Information

Ball, A. Collecting Pot-Lids: Coloured, Black & White with Current Price Trends. MAB Publishing / Southern Collectors Publications / SPM, 1979.

Dishy News (blog), March 13, 2014 (<http://dishynews.blogspot.com/2014/03/crimean-war-again-plus-ca-change-plus.html>).

Mortimer, Keith. Pot-Lids and Other Coloured Printed Staffordshire Wares. Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club Ltd. 2003.

The Pot Lid Circle (website): <http://www.thepotlidcircle.co.uk>

Credits

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If you have a suggestion for or would like to contribute to the TCC Database Discoveries series, please contact us at webadmin@transcollectorsclub.org.



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