

A Tiny Shard, a Little Boy, and a Big Mystery

By Scott Hanson

Several years ago, my then eight-year-old neighbor, Millais (Mill) Graham, was digging in his garden and found a tiny shard of transferware (Figures 1 and 2). Transferware shards are not particularly rare in this Maine neighborhood of historic houses built between 1820 and 1850. I've built a sizable transferware collection based primarily on the patterns identified from the shards found on my property. Mill's mom, Penninah, had turned up several shards in their



Figure 1

yard previously whose patterns I helped identify. But this was the first shard found by Mill himself, and he wanted to know what the pattern was. He was waiting patiently by the big



Figure 2

maple tree that stands on our property line when I drove in the driveway later that afternoon, anxious to show me his find.

The shard showed a boy or a man bending slightly and gesticulating toward a dog. Or was it a deer? The shard retained only a portion of the animal. After studying the piece of earthenware in Mill's hand and discussing whether it was likely a dog or a deer, he asked if I could find out what the rest of the pattern looked



Figure 3



Figure 5



Figure 4



Figure 6

like? I told him I would try, but it might take some time because there was so little to go on and so many patterns that had been made. I took some photos of the shard for reference.

Mill's shard was less than an inch wide and about the same height. Unless it was from a piece made for a child, the figure and animal were likely not the primary motif of the pattern. No part of the border was present. My sense was that it might be a Romantic pattern featuring small figures in the fore- or middle ground with exotic or impressive buildings and mountains in the distance across a lake. Many of these scenes have large trees in the immediate foreground to frame the view. There are hundreds, if not thousands, of these patterns...

The two primary identifiable elements were the man or boy's costume and the dog, that might be a deer. I started with the TCC Database of Patterns and Sources, searching separately for dogs, deer, and boys within the Romantic category. After scanning through hundreds of possibilities, I found several patterns that had similar animals and figures, but not an exact match. These included "Palmyra" by William Brownfield (&Son(s), in business from 1850-1892 in Cobridge, Staffordshire, TCC pattern #11094 (Figures 3 and 4), and Thomas, John & Joseph Mayer's "Baronial Halls", TCC pattern #13651 (Figures 5 and 6). This pottery operated in Longport, Burslem, Staffordshire between 1842 and 1855. Because patterns like these often have small differences in the hand-engraved copper plates for different sized pieces, I began watching for these patterns in my daily eBay searches in case a variation appeared matching the shard.

Ebay has been my primary source for finding the patterns I collect for fifteen or more years. Over that time, I have come up with a list of saved search terms that do a pretty good job of finding what I am looking for while filtering out thousands of patterns I am not interested in. Because I collect one Romantic pattern like I suspected Mill's shard had come from, many of

that category appear in my searches. Most days, I scan through a hundred or more new listings captured by my saved searches while drinking my morning coffee.

Another pattern that features a similar animal and figure in some of its variations is T.J. & J. Mayer's "Garden Scenery" (Figures 7 and 8). I am familiar with this pattern because a close friend collects it, and I keep an eye out for pieces of it. There are fourteen scenes in the pattern/series listed in the TCC Database. None of the variations matched the shard although near matches to the animal and figure appear in several. I also looked through the dozens of pieces in my friend's collection and could not find a match there. "Garden Scenery 01" is pattern # 589 in the Database.

One day, while rearranging some of my own collection of Podmore, Walker & Co./Wedgwood & Co. "Venus" pattern, I noticed for the first time that a boy and dog were included in the grouping of people in the foreground. Could the mystery

pattern have been sitting in front of me all this time? I collect "Venus" because it was in my house in the 19th century, identified by a shard dug up in the yard (Figures 9 and 10), TCC pattern #8056. A c. 1890 photo taken in the house on the other side of mine shows a sugar bowl in the same pattern (Figure 11). Could the same pattern have been used by all three neighbors? I have more than 300 pieces of "Venus" and went through all of them looking for the boy and dog in the same poses as in Mill's shard. Once again, no exact match...

Then, a variation of "Garden Scenery" that is not in the Database appeared in my daily eBay searches! In this one, the pose of the boy and dog were very close to the shard, but the boy was in front of another figure not included in the shard (Figures 12 and 13). So close!

By this point, it was about a year since Mill had found his shard and asked for my help. I was feeling disappointed, and the dog and figure were

Continued on next page



Figure 7



Figure 9



Figure 8



Figure 10

on my mind a lot. I was tempted to settle for the explanation that it must be from “Garden Scenery” but a piece that used the same engraved copper plate just hadn’t turned up yet. It was plausible, but not a satisfying answer.

While pondering if I should tell Mill the pattern was likely “Garden Scenery” but that I hadn’t yet found the exact variation, I spotted another possibility in a local antique shop. The dog and figure matched those in the shard and there was nothing around them not seen on the shard. Although the cup printed in black was unmarked, I now had all the other elements of the pattern to look for in the Database (Figures 14-16). This time, finally, a defensible identification was

possible.

The pattern is “Veranda” by Ralph Hall & Co. (or & Son), in operation in Tunstall, Staffordshire from 1822 to 1849. The plate shown in the Database actually does not include the man and dog, but the central veranda or gazebo motif and the border are a close match for those on the cup (Figures 17 and 18). The Database listing notes, “A slightly different center view appears in Williams2008, p.336 on a 8.5 inch plate. Apparently, this was a pattern with differing centers printed on different size pieces.”

Finally, I felt confident I could tell Mill I had identified his shard! I invited him, his mom, and younger brother, Milo, to come over and see

what I’d found. I showed them video I’d shot of the transferware printing process on the last TCC tour in England and talked about variations within a pattern, using several “Venus” pieces as examples. I pulled up the various possibilities I had looked at in the Database and showed them the unlisted “Garden Scenery” plate that was almost a match (which I’d purchased). Finally, I brought out the “Veranda” cup. Mill agreed that the shard was a definite match for Veranda and that the figure was a man and the animal a dog. I gave him the cup to start his own transferware collection. Mill is now the youngest member of the Transferware Collectors Club (Figure 19).

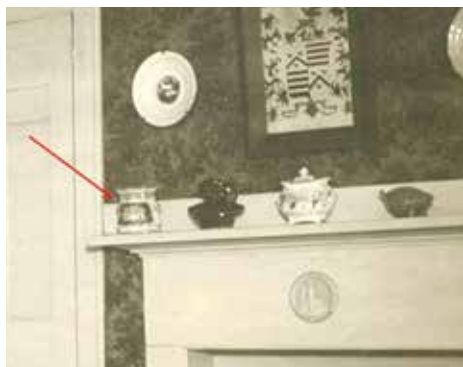


Figure 11



Figure 14



Figure 17



Figure 12



Figure 15



Figure 18



Figure 13



Figure 16



Figure 19