

'A'-marked Porcelain and Chelsea; a connection

A paper read by Errol Manners at the Courtauld Institute on 15th October 2005

The dating and origin of 'A'-marked porcelain has generated much discussion and disagreement; in this short notice I intend to discuss aspects of the dating and an observation that is consistent with and adds weight to the idea that it is the product of Thomas Frye and Edward Heylyn's patent for porcelain of December 6th, 1744.¹

It has long been noted that a number of the shapes of 'A'-marked pieces derive from Staffordshire pottery traditions, most notably the hexagonal teapots with recumbent lion finials which are a close copy of a form first used in redware by the Elers brothers in the late seventeenth century which continued in use in salt-glazed stonewares into the eighteenth century. The most popular form of cup also has some features derived from Staffordshire salt-glazed wares; the disproportionately large simple handles and the polygonal foot rings (ten-sided in A marked examples) of square section. Some of the Staffordshire salt-glaze pieces can be dated by comparing them with examples moulded with scenes commemorating Admiral Vernon's victory at Portobello in 1739. There are no features in the forms of A-marked wares that can be said to be stylistically much later than this.

We also know from the 'high style' wares that they must post-date October 1740 when the latest source engravings, including the cricket match, published by J. Cole first appeared.² Without this date one might well have guessed that they were made somewhat earlier in the century as most of the 'low style' decoration derives from types of

oriental porcelains that were imported and popular in the late 17th and the first decades of the 18th century such as *famille verte*, Kakiemon, Imari and *blanc de chine*. It has also been noted that the 'Indian flowers' on 'A'-marked wares derives from the *indianische blumen* on Meissen tea and coffee wares of the 1720s and 1730s. It seems that they were strikingly conservative in their choice of decoration.

One type of decoration that has not received much attention, perhaps because no examples are represented in the group at the Victoria and Albert Museum is the flower painting found on the three cups at Alnwick Castle³ and another of this series that was recently sold at Christie's⁴ (**1 & 5**). This distinctive style can be matched exactly with flower painting found on some of the earliest Triangle-period Chelsea of c. 1745.



1. A-Mark cup. Courtesy of Christie's (ht. 6cm)

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5. Detail of flower painting of A-marked cup, fig.1



2. Chelsea sauceboat, Triangle period. Courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum. (19.7cm long)



4. Detail of flower painting in Chelsea sauce boat, fig.2

3. Interior view of Chelsea sauce boat, Fig. 2

The closest correspondence can be made with the painting found in the interior of two silver-shaped sauceboats (**2, 3, 4**) in the Victoria and Albert Museum and by extension on numerous other pieces of the earliest period. The palette, spidery delineation of the flowers and use of insects, especially ladybirds and moths (**6 & 7**) is characteristic of this hand.

The hand of the 'A-marked flower painter' can be found on a rather large group of Chelsea pieces from the earliest years of the triangle period such as 'goat and bee' and other jugs, strawberry dishes etc. It is also probable, but less easy to be certain, that some of the Kakiemon designs found on A-marked wares and Triangle period Chelsea are by the same hand. (**8 & 9**)

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6. Butterfly on A-marked cup



8. A-marked with kakiemon decoration. Seattle Art Museum. (6.6cm)



7. Detail of butterfly on Chelsea small jug



9. Chelsea vase with kakiemon decoration. Triangle period

Whether this decoration was done in or outside the factory is impossible to say. In the first months of any porcelain factory (Chelsea could have started as early as late 1744) there would be no work for a decorator until the first white products were successfully fired, Chelsea and its customers clearly appreciated the white porcelain in its original state but they would have also wanted to explore the possibilities of enamel decoration as did every other factory. Would they have employed an enameller? Or sub-contracted the work out to another workshop? This distinctive decoration seems to be the work of one painter and it does not seem to occur on other wares such as Oriental porcelain or salt-glazed pottery as one might expect if it were the work of an established workshop and so perhaps the most

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probable, but unprovable, explanation is that an enameller was employed who had briefly worked on ‘A’-marked wares.

That this hand is not also found on the earliest Bow, and indeed few correlations in form or painting can be made between A-marked porcelain and Bow suggests an abrupt break between the two factories and so it is misleading to think of the A-marked wares, and the patent of Heylyn and Frye of 1744, as early Bow, but rather a short-lived predecessor.

That this artist worked on ‘A’ marked and early Chelsea confirms two things; firstly that ‘A’ marked porcelain dates from the mid 1740s and, secondly, that it was made in London, thus consistent with its attribution to the porcelain of the of Heylyn and Frye patent of 1744.

NOTES

¹ For a recent discussion of the group see Ross Ramsay and Anton Gabszewicz “The Chemistry of ‘A’ marked porcelain and its relation to the Heylyn and Frye Patent of 1744” *Trans ECC* Vol 18 pt 2

² R. J. Charleston and J. V. G. Mallet, ‘A problematical Group of Eighteenth-century Porcelains’, *Trans ECC* Vol. 8, part 1, p.83

³ R. J. Charleston and J. V. G. Mallet, ‘A problematical Group of Eighteenth-century Porcelains’, *Trans ECC*, Vol. 8, part 1, pl. 84c. A group of Bow porcelains came into the possession

of the Percy family of Alnwick Castle through the marriage in 1845 of the sixth Duke of Northumberland to Louisa Drummond heiress of Albury Park, Surrey, and it is possible that the ‘A’-marked pieces came from this source. Much of this Bow porcelain was sold at Sotheby’s in 1966. Information supplied by The Reverend David Thornton.

⁴ Christie’s, London, 8 December 2003, lot 7. Illustrated J. V. G. Mallet, ‘The ‘A’-Marked Porcelains Revisited’, *Trans ECC*, Vol. 15, part 2 (1994), pls, 15 & 16

