



ARMORIAL TABLEWARES

In the 19th-century, several of London's trade guilds commissioned services decorated with their coats of arms. This article examines the official tableware of six such guilds. By R. K. HENRYWOOD.

The London trade guilds or livery companies date back to mediaeval times. Of great importance in social, religious and commercial life, they were responsible for the regulation of crafts within the city, and no man could ply his trade without membership of an appropriate guild. This was the case even if no guild was relevant; the potter Josiah Spode, for example, became a freeman of the Spectacle Makers in order to open his London warehouse.

The companies operated from halls in the

City, including some magnificent buildings of great historic interest. Among their meetings were regular dinners or "feasts" whence a need for suitable tablewares developed. The earliest known piece from a special order is a mid-17th-century London tin-glazed plate made for the Salters' Company, on view in the City Museum at Stoke-on-Trent. During the 19th-century, several of the companies commissioned services decorated with their coats of arms, some of finely decorated porcelain but mostly of more utilitarian earthenware. While compiling *The Dictionary of Blue and White Printed Pottery* (Antique Collectors' Club, 1982 and 1989). I discovered several examples, and others have subsequently come to light. They can be fascinating, since surviving records often enable us to trace individual orders, including the manufacturer or retailer involved, and sometimes even the size of the service and its

Above, fig. 1. The Salters' Company, plate made by Hicks, Meigh & Johnson, 1827.

Opposite page, above, fig. 2. The Girdlers' Company, plate by an unknown maker, c.1830.

Below right, fig. 3. The Ironmongers' Company, plate made by Minton, 1865.

Below left, fig. 4. The Drapers' Company, plate made by John & Richard Riley, 1813 or 1823.

cost. Examples from six such services are shown here, and others are known.

The Drapers' Company

The Draper's Company, third in ascendancy among the twelve great livery companies, was incorporated in 1438 although it dates back to at least 1364. In 1439 they received the earliest recorded grant of arms to a livery company. Originally catering for traders and retailers of cloth, they later admitted general merchants also. Their motto is "Unto God Only Be Honour and Glory".

Blue-printed wares with the Company's arms were made by John & Richard Riley of Burslem, using a border from one of their floral patterns. The plate shown here (figure 4) was first recorded in 1874 and two apparently relevant items were traced in the Company's records. The Court of Assistants' minutes of July 1813 recorded "that a New Table Sett of Tureens, Dishes, & plates of Blue & White Staffordshire Ware estimated to cost about £120 be provided for use at Hall feasts." The accounts for December 1813 noted "Paid Huson & Son for a Table of Blue & White Staffordshire Ware . . . £200 12s 0d" James Huson & Son were not potters, but a firm of china retailers at 120 Great Portland Street.

More recently Roger Pomfret has traced a service of 1,590 pieces made by Riley for the Drapers' Company of Coventry ("John & Richard Riley, China & Earthenware Manufacturers", *Journal of Ceramic History*, Volume 13, 1988). He illustrates three pieces together with Riley's original invoice of September 1823 for £84 12s 6d The invoice refers specifically to the wares being "printed, Drapers Arms and mosaic border." We have no proof that the London service was of this pattern, although the Coventry Drapers could have been emulating their London counterparts.

At least one other service was made for the Company, this time with the border from Spode's Greek pattern. One unmarked plate has been noted and surviving records in the Spode Museum list orders in 1895, 1923 and 1928. A similar armorial design inscribed "Bancroft School" was made in 1909.

The Skinners' Company

The Skinners' Company, sixth in precedence, was one of the first to be incorporated, in 1327. The Company was responsible for dealers in furs, an important trade, and later catered also for craftsmen who dressed skins. Their arms were granted in 1550 and their mottoes are "In Christo Fratres" and "To God Only Be All Glory".

A blue-printed serving dish with the Company's arms within the border from Spode's Geranium pattern is illustrated by Leonard Whiter in *Spode* (Barrie & Jenkins, 1970). This item is marked with the initials "T.G." and the legend "Master 1821, 22". Wares were supplied throughout the 19th-century and records at the Spode Museum include orders from 1842 and 1849, and also 1924. Several examples survive, including some made by Copeland & Garrett, and others made by Copeland as late as 1930 (figure 6). Some were printed in pink rather than blue and similar wares made at Worcester have also been reported.

The Girdlers' Company

The Girdlers' Company, first incorporated in 1438, dates back to at least 1326. Their trade was the manufacture of garters and girdles, and belts for daggers, swords and purses. Their arms were granted in 1454 and their motto is "Give Thanks to God".



A plate printed in blue with the Company's arms is shown here (figure 2), and one other is known. The Company appears to have no record of the order for these wares, which they believe to have been made in the Victorian era, although they probably date from about 1830. Most of the service was destroyed in the war and they have only one or two pieces left.

The Company was originally founded as a fraternity devoted to St. Lawrence. During the persecution by Valerian in about A.D.258, being called on to hand over treasures of the church, St. Lawrence produced the poor and the sick. Following persistent non-cooperation, he was condemned to be broiled on a gridiron. He is depicted holding a gridiron in the crest, and gridirons, also appear on the shield as symbols of his martyrdom. The meteorites which often appear about the time of his festival on 10th August are popularly known as the tears of St. Lawrence.

The Ironmongers' Company

The Ironmongers' Company, tenth in precedence, was incorporated in 1463 although it dates back to at least 1300. Their arms were first granted in 1455 and include salamanders – lizards with the capacity to withstand great heat. They use two mottoes, "God Is Our Strength" and Assher Dure", old French for "Acier Dur" or "Hard Steel".

A service with the Company's arms and the English motto was made by Minton utilising the border from their "Chinese Marine" pattern. The plate shown here (figure 3) has an impressed makers' mark and a date mark for 1865. It is not known when the Company ordered its first armorial wares and there is no mention in their records of any purchase between 1830 and 1850, although the design has been in use for at least 150 years. Other similar examples with the French motto were made by Minton, and also by Copeland as late as 1955. Records at the Spode Museum refer to wares with the English motto, invoiced during 1842.

For some time the Company has ordered wares marked with the name of the Warden in whose year of office they were purchased and Minton plates are known with the names "BIRKETT" and "GARDINER". Members of the Birkett family were Masters in 1871, 1892, 1911 and 1946, and Gardiner was a Master in 1905.

Armorial wares are also known with the border from the common "Asiatic Pheasants" pattern. These are marked with initials H. & A., relating to Hammersley & Asbury of Longton (1872-1875) or Hulse & Adderley, also of Longton (1869-75).

The Armourers' & Brasiers' Company

The Armourers' & Brasiers' Company was formed in 1708 by the union of the two individual companies, both of which existed in the 14th-century. Arms were granted to the Armourers in 1556 but those for the united company are used by tradition only. They include two mottoes, "Make All Sure" and "We Are One".

One dinner plate printed in brown with the Company's arms and the latter motto has been discovered (figure 5). It is from a dinner and dessert service consisting of 570 pieces which was purchased from Burnell & Co. of Coleman Street in September 1832 at a cost of £34 11s 6d. Thomas Burnell was a china dealer, first listed in a London Directory for 1823. The Coleman Street address appears to date from 1826, and he traded there and at two other addresses until about 1851. The Company still possesses three plates.



Fig. 5. The Armourers' and Brasiers' Company, plate by an unknown maker, 1832.



Fig. 6. The Skinners' Company, replacement plate made by Copeland, 1930.

The Salters' Company

The Salters' Company, ninth in precedence, was incorporated in 1558 although their history dates back to at least 1394. While they originally catered for producers and traders in sea salt, and preservers of food, they later admitted also dealers in mineral salts and vegetable dyes. Their arms were first granted in 1530 and their motto is "Sal Sapit Omnia".

The stone china plate illustrated here (figure 1) is from a service bought when the Company's Hall was rebuilt in 1827. It was supplied by John Du Croz, who was a china dealer at 7 Skinner Street, Snow Hill, from about 1811 to 1837. The wares bear a royal arms mark used by Hicks, Meigh & Johnson of Shelton, together with the Du Croz name and address. Similar examples, also printed in blue but enriched with pink, green and yellow enamels and added gilding, are thought to be from a desert service contemporary with the ordinary blue and white dinner wares.

Although no examples are known, orders for wares with the Company's arms also appear in records at the Spode Museum. One invoice dates from 1844 and there were at least two later orders.

The Mercers' Company

The Mercers' Company, first in precedence, was incorporated in 1393 but can be traced

back to at least 1190. Mercers were traders in good-quality merchandise, particularly fine fabrics and personal apparel such as hats. Their arms, although not formally granted until 1911, date from 1568, and their motto is "Honor Deo".

A Copeland plate, not shown here has been noted with the Company's crest and motto within the border from Spode's "Tumbledown Dick" pattern. The two-colour design is printed in blue and the factory's charmingly descriptive "pigmuck green". According to the Acts of Court for 23 May 1862, the Company's dinner wares were considered inadequate and the House Warden was authorised to spend up to £350 on new china. The minutes do not record the actual cost of the supplier, but similar pieces by Copeland remain at Mercers' Hall. The old china must also have been from the Spode factory since surviving records refer to one invoice in 1842 and four further orders between 1845 and 1848.

The Goldsmiths' Company

The Goldsmiths' Company, fifth in precedence, is one of the oldest of the guilds, incorporated in 1394 and dating back to at least 1180. Their arms are ancient and were never granted formally, although the crest and supporters were granted in 1571. Their motto is "Justitia Virtutum Regina".

Two plates made by Copeland, not shown here, have been noted, printed with the Company's arms in green. Similar wares must have been produced earlier, since a reference dating from the 1830s or early 1840s appears in records at the Spode Museum.

The Fishmongers' Company

The Fishmongers' Company, fourth in precedence, was first chartered as early as 1363. Their arms were first granted in 1512 and their motto is "All Worship Be To God Only".

Although no examples are known to me, records at the Spode Museum refer several times to armorial wares made for the Company, some as early as the 1830s or 1840s, and one as late as 1931. Some may well have survived.

The Cordwainers' Company

The Cordwainers' Company was incorporated in 1439 and dates back to at least 1271. Cordwainers were makers of boots and shoes, their name being derived from the finest goatskin from Cordova. Their arms were granted in 1579 and their motto is "Corio et Arte".

Once again, no examples are known, but records at the Spode Museum refer to armorial wares made for the Company in the 1840s. They show the coat-of-arms with no motto, and if any wares do survive they may not have been identified ▲

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