

A FAVOURITE PIECE

by Dick Henrywood

My wife and I were enjoying a late-autumn visit to East Anglia and spent one particularly pleasurable day visiting friends from my time working at the Antique Collectors' Club. Towards the end of the day, we were relaxing in a little country cottage and had just been served with a particularly delicious slice of home-made apple cake. It was then that your Editor struck and persuaded me that an article on my favourite piece would be fun. Little did I realise that this would be one of my most challenging assignments.

As the agreed publication date loomed, my thoughts struggled to identify any single suitable item, purely because there are so many. Should it be my railway nameplate 'Dick No.55' from a National Coal Board Hudswell Clarke diesel shunter? Or possibly the rare Goss Braunton lighthouse? Or that wonderful tapestry carpet we struggled to get back from America in our hand luggage? What about the little Brannam pin dish commemorating Jeremy Thorpe's 1964 election victory? Or one of my concertinas? Or even the fascinating Libby's Evaporated Milk tin piercer? No, it was to be none of these. It had to be a special piece of blue and white transferware.

I can't remember exactly when I bought the 'British Views' series centrepiece. I had collected the series for some time, and had always been frustrated that most of the views were unidentified. I've never been a great enthusiast for alerting dealers to my wants, for fear that they would end up competing to buy something for me, running the price up, effectively me competing against myself! But somehow my interest had got around, and one day a dealer friend from deepest Devon said she had found a special pot for me. We lived in Somerset at the time, so it wasn't too far to go.

It was an enjoyable trip through the Devonshire country lanes, and on arrival my eye was immediately drawn to the 'pot'. It was the centrepiece from a supper set, normally surrounded by four segment-shaped supper dishes with covers. There were no dishes in sight, nor did any subsequently emerge, but the pot stood proudly alone anyway. Fortunately, or perhaps that should read unfortunately, the price was exceeded only by my desire to own it, so it wasn't too long before we

set off home with a large package safely stowed on the back seat.

I had seen a matching segment supper dish before, so I knew a set must have existed, but I have never seen any other pieces since. This vase-shaped centrepiece is quite unusual. The dog and rowing boat in the foreground had been noted before, on a large platter with a view identifiable as Comb Bank in Kent in the background. The dog and boat are from a painting by Philip Reinagle, reproduced as an engraving by John Scott, versions of which appeared in William Taplin's *The Sportsman's Cabinet* (1804) and John Scott's *The Sportsman's Repository* (1820).

The background on the centrepiece features a different house, Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire. This may be based on a print in John Preston Neale's *Views of the Seats of Noblemen and Gentlemen in England, Wales, Scotland, and Ireland* (1818-29) but it is rarely easy to be sure where any specific detail originated.

Series of views, with a different central scene on each shape, were quite common in the 1820s and 1830s, particularly for dinner services. Each scene would be printed within a common border. Sometimes the views were individually titled, but in this case a general title 'British Views' appears as a mark. I have records of 23 different views, although only seven of them are so far identified. Most pieces are standard dinner wares – plates, platters and tureens – but I do have some unusual items, including an egg stand and a butter boat. I would always be interested to hear of any others.

I love my centrepiece. It exhibits all the hallmarks of fine blue and white transferware, and is a rare and decorative item. As with many finds, it has a story behind it. Forget the money, the human side of collecting can make it all worthwhile.

In conclusion, I must add two interesting footnotes. The first is that the dealer in question lost interest in blue and white and went off to deal in teddy bears. The second is that I can thoroughly recommend the apple cake!



A 'British Views' centrepiece printed with a view of Kedleston Hall in Derbyshire.

Dick Henrywood is a writer, lecturer and co-author of *The Dictionary of Blue & White Printed Pottery*.

