

ALTHOUGH I have collected blue and white pottery for more than 20 years, I find that it never loses its appeal.

In the hurly burly of the modern world, I still get considerable pleasure from picking up a favourite piece and taking time to muse on its origins.

Who made it, who has owned it, and where and how did it come into my possession? It might be a mug or a jug, a real rarity such as a butter boat or asparagus server, or simply a humble plate. But it is the large meat dishes that dominate my collection. We have little real use for them nowadays, but I can recall several Christmases when I have rescued the lady of the household by making one available to serve the turkey.

In the 19th century, dinner services were decorative, with printed patterns particularly popular. The potters had developed techniques for printing on earthenware in about 1780 and it was not long before the process became universal. The earliest patterns were all based on Chinese originals, a fashion which developed into the common Willow Pattern, which has been produced in huge quantities ever since. From about 1810, the potters began to use other designs, and for a period of about 30 years or so, most dinner wares were printed in blue with pictures and scenes, and today they have become highly collectable.

IN those days a typical dinner service would consist of about 200 pieces, with 48 dinner plates, 24 soup plates, 24 dessert plates, and a wide selection of tureens, comports, dishes and many other smaller items such as pickle dishes, drainers, ladles, and even knife rests. Often, each item would be printed with a different central picture, although the surrounding border would be retained for all pieces in the service. Today they are eagerly sought by collectors,

but without doubt some of the most impressive are the large meat dishes, also known as platters or chargers.

Each dinner service would include a set of dishes, usually two of each size, the smallest typically nine inches long and the largest about 21 inches, with virtually every size in between in 2-inch increments. Some of the middle-sized dishes were fitted with matching flat drainers, whereas the larger sizes were sometimes moulded with channels and a deep gravy well. These are called well-and-tree dishes. They are all particularly decorative since the pictures are shown to great effect on the large flat surfaces. Professional decorators have long sought out antiques for their visual merit, and blue and white printed pottery seemed to lead the way. This fashion has led to dramatic increases in the value of these dishes.

ABOUT 20 years ago, the larger sizes were not popular, and they could be picked up for a song. Today the situation has changed dramatically. A good scene will easily fetch £300 or more, and some of the most sought after patterns have sold at auction for well in excess of £2,000. A recent example is a dish showing the Durham Ox which was sold for £2,420 by Phillips at Bath earlier this year. Not all the designs are so valuable, and some of the simpler floral patterns are just as decorative but much more reasonably priced, from about £80 or so, depending on the design, the maker, and the quality of the dish.

One of the great fascinations of these printed patterns is the source of the designs. The engravers who made the copper printing plates can best be described as

Right: two fine dishes by unknown makers. The top one is amongst the most sought after patterns, showing the Durham Ox attended by his keeper John Day c.1820. The lower dish, made only a few years later, shows a view of the Ponte Molle, a bridge near Rome.

SCENE *at the* TABLE

Useful as well as beautiful, blue and white meat dishes of the 19th century portrayed scenes copied from prints and engravings

By Dick Henrywood



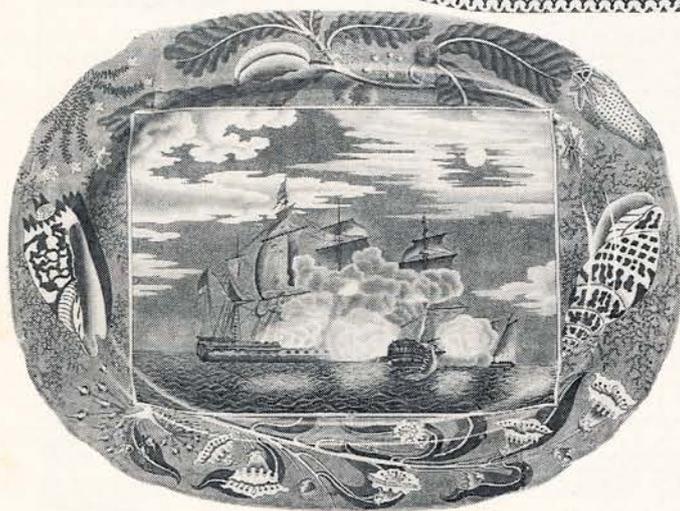
COLLECTABLES



Photographs by Phillips of Bath and the author

Above: a view of the 'Cathedral Church of Glasgow' dating from the 1820s. This is one of a series of scenes of cathedrals, abbeys, priories and castles by an unknown maker.

Left: two particularly collectable dishes. The top one shows a night sea battle, which took place in January 1795, between two ships the *Blanche* and *La Pique*. The lower well-and-tree dish shows a view entitled 'Bristol Hot Wells', one of a series of local views made by the Bristol pottery firm of Pountney & Allies c.1830.



artisans and not artists. They were, however, skilled at copying, and virtually all the scenes that they produced were pirated from prints published in books of the day. There was no effective Copyright Act until 1842 and today's collectors hunt for prints to match the designs on their dishes. For instance, the portrait of the Durham Ox is from an 1802 engraving by J Whessel after a painting by T Boulbee. Even the Ponte Molle view after Claude

Lorraine would have been copied from a print.

Many of these large dishes are quite literally 'as pretty as a picture' and I know of many collectors who hang their prized examples on the wall in place of paintings or prints. Blue and white has also become very popular for decoration in halls and kitchens, particularly on antique dressers. I have one acquaintance who has a 1920s house with a plate rail around the large hallway which is now adorned with some of the most impressive dishes I have seen.

These unwieldy large dishes have survived in surprising numbers and good examples continue to come on to the market. Also the remnants of large dinner services often survive unappreciated, pushed away at the back of some old cupboard or stored in the attic. Why not have a hunt and see what you can dig out?

