

BLUE AND WHITE: UNUSUAL SHAPES

by Dick Henrywood

While I don't claim to have any expertise at all in oak or country furniture I must confess to feeling just a little bit smug in being able to open an article on blue and white transferware with two pieces of furniture!

My first piece is a mahogany commode chair of very simple form, dating from the mid-19th century (figure 1). It is only on lifting the hinged seat that its function becomes apparent, being fitted with a flushing mechanism and a blue and white printed lavatory pan sheathed

in a copper bucket. The pattern on the pot is very typical of the period around 1850, but similar examples can be found from earlier decades.

While commode chairs themselves are rarely found, the interior buckets complete with their blue and white pans do turn up occasionally. Two further examples are shown here: one dating from the mid- to late 1820s supplied by Stephen Hawkins of Fleet Street (figure 3) fitted with a liner by Enoch Wood & Sons from their

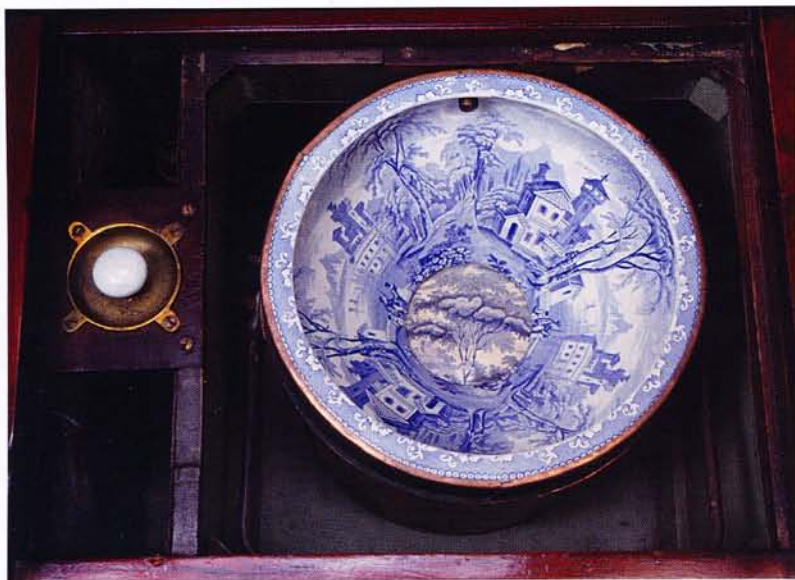


Figure 1. Mahogany commode armchair (right), c.1840-50, with (above) interior detail showing flushing mechanism and blue and white pan.



Figure 3. Portable water closet made by Enoch Wood & Sons for Stephen Hawkins of Fleet Street.

Left. Figure 2. Portable water closet made for Robert Wiss of Charing Cross.



Figure 4. Cheese cradle by Enoch Wood & Sons of Burslem.

Grapevine Border series with a view of Mount Bellew in Galway (not visible here); the other by Robert Wiss of Charing Cross (figure 2) with a somewhat later more romantic pattern. Hawkins was only in business until 1829 and it would appear that he was succeeded in Fleet Street by Wiss, who almost immediately moved to Charing Cross where he remained until 1858. Another

maker of patented portable water closets at this period was Henry Marriott who acquired his liners from Davenport. Similar pieces can be found in fitted leather cases rather than copper buckets.

Remaining on the subject of toilet wares, my second piece of furniture, again in mahogany, is a bidet, complete with stand and cover (figure 5). Unlike the



Figure 5. Foliage Border series bidet in mahogany stand with fitted cover.



Figure 6. Spittoon mug by Andrew Stevenson of Cobridge.



Figure 7. Vomit pot by an unknown maker, c.1840.

commode chair, these bidet stands are not uncommon, although the pottery liners are often missing. Most surviving liners are made of plain white or cream pot and blue-printed examples command a significant premium. The liner shown in this example is printed in dark blue with a view clearly identifiable as Fonthill Abbey, the grand Wiltshire house built by Thomas Wyatt for William Beckford. The maker of this liner has not been identified but similar bidet liners were made by Spode, Andrew Stevenson, Enoch Wood & Sons, Zachariah Boyle and almost certainly one or two others.

I think few connoisseurs would dispute that oak furniture and blue and white printed pottery almost

seem to be a match made in heaven. There can be few sights more impressive than a golden oak dresser, gleaming with a couple of centuries of patina, laden with blue and white plates and platters. The main dresser surface would normally have been used for tureens, vegetable dishes, sauceboats and other serving pieces, but I thought it might be fun to look at some more unusual shapes.

My first piece is a rather fine cheese cradle (figure 4). These impressive cradles would be used to serve a complete circular cheese standing on its edge and, if the number that survive is any guide, they were not made in very large numbers. The example shown here is by



Figure 8. Two views of a 'Dresden Opaque China' smoker's companion set.

Enoch Wood & Sons and is from the firm's extensive Grapevine Border series, this example printed with a view of Powderham Castle in Devon. Cheese cradles were made by other potters, including Spode and Ralph & James Clews, but they are comparatively rare.

While a cheese cradle may well be considered a suitable serving piece to sit on a dresser, my next item is somewhat less savoury – a spittoon mug (figure 6). Again, these are quite unusual pieces made by only a few potters. This one is by Andrew Stevenson decorated with a view of Euston Hall in Suffolk from his Rose Border series. Some readers may doubt that this piece is actually a spittoon, thinking it to be a shaving mug, but exactly the same vessel was made by Spode, described as a 'low, round spitting box'. Other forms of spittoon were made, including the more obvious vase shape fitted with a very wide out-flaring rim.

Another unsavoury item appears at first sight to be a chamber pot (figure 7). These small pots are often described as children's chamber pots but there is a body of opinion which considers that such items should have flat rims (for comfort) and these with rounded rims are actually vomit pots, kept in small cupboards in sideboards for the use of men who had over-imbibed – after the ladies had departed, of course! This unmarked example is rather mundane with a pattern of flowers, foliate scrolls and scenic reserves, very romantic in style, but more attractive pieces can be found. Makers include Davenport, Meir and Ridgway amongst others.

Now it could be, of course, that a gentleman might spend an evening at home alone, rather than out socialising, so the next item could prove useful (figure 8). It is generally known as a 'smoker's companion' although other terms are used. It comprises a main tobacco jar, internal combined tamper weight and snuff box with cover, combined candlestick with domed cover, and conical candlesnuffer. The various pieces can be assembled as a tower, and are made with rims designed so that they all fit together safely. It may well be that the set shown here is incomplete since a rim around the base suggests the absence of another piece, which would be a spittoon tray. The presentation inscription on this piece



Figure 9. Spode pot-pourri vase decorated with a Caramanian pattern.

reads 'William / Smith / Lyham' and similar if more detailed inscriptions can often be used to trace the original owner. This example is undated but it would probably have been made in the 1830s and possibly in the north-east rather than Staffordshire. These companion sets vary quite considerably in their design, some are much simplified while others include a goblet beneath the candlestick, or sometimes a dish for an ashtray.

With all this smoking around, our next item may help to sweeten the atmosphere. It is a pot-pourri vase and cover (figure 9), made by Spode with one of the firm's desirable Caramanian patterns. These scenes were copied from coloured engravings in Luigi Mayer's *Views in the Ottoman Empire, chiefly in Caramania*, published as part of a three-volume set in 1803. The scene on this pot-pourri vase depicts a 'Colossal Sarcophagus near Castle Rosso' which also appears on a soup tureen. The scene on the cover cannot be discerned clearly here but it shows 'Sarcophagi and Sepulchres at the Head of the Harbour of Cacamo', commonly seen on the dinner plate.

Another somewhat similar and also rare shape from



Figure 10. Spode drug jar with borders from the Union Wreath pattern.



Figure 11. Spode medicine spoon with the Two Figures pattern.



Figure 13. Double oil/vinegar bottle, maker unknown, c.1840.

Left. Figure 12. Eyebath with a Smoke Ring border, maker unknown, c.1825.

Spode is a drug jar (figure 10), this example inscribed 'Cerata: Saponis' between bands of the border from Spode's Union Wreath pattern. This is just one from a set of jars and bottles believed to have been made for a London shop and it sold for £3,100 (plus premium) back in 2004.

Staying on the medical theme, we have two much smaller items in the form of a medicine spoon (figure 11) and an eyebath (figure 12). The medicine spoon is by Spode, although unmarked, and is decorated with a small detail and the border from a relatively common chinoiserie design known as the Two Figures pattern. It would be of earlier date than the drug jar, probably around 1800. The maker of the eyebath is unknown but it is decorated with a border known as the Smoke Ring border, found on at least three different blue-printed patterns of the 1820s, one depicting a game of Blind Man's Buff and another with a view of Luscombe in Devon (see below). Eyebaths do not turn up frequently and are eagerly sought by collectors. Most seem to be decorated with chinoiserie designs such as the standard Willow and Broseley patterns, and more interesting examples such as the one shown here fetch significantly higher prices.

Mention of the Smoke Ring border leads me neatly to a fine cow creamer (figure 14). These rather quirky items were intended for serving cream or milk which would be contained in the body of the cow while the looped tail formed a handle and the mouth acted as the spout. They are filled through a hole on the cow's back which should be fitted with a small cover, but these are usually missing, as in this case. Cow creamers are often decorated, rather incongruously, with the standard blue and white Willow pattern but this example features a much more desirable country house view of Luscombe in Devon. The maker is not known.

Another serving item, although notably different, is a very rare twin oil and vinegar bottle (figure 13). In all my years of collecting, cataloguing and researching blue and

white printed wares I have only ever seen two of these. This one is printed with an Indian hunting scene with an elephant and tigers, somewhat similar to subjects in Spode's collectable Indian Sporting series, but it is a later product, dating from around 1840, and very much in the romantic style popular at that time. A series of similar patterns was produced on dinner wares by William Hackwood of Hanley during the same period, but his patterns appear with a different border design. Note how the main design on this rare bottle is printed over a vase moulded on the surface.

For my final unusual pieces I turn to man's best friend. It is said that dogs have owners while cats have staff, but at least dogs could be furnished with their very own blue and white serving dishes. Dog bowls are both uncommon and popular which leads inevitably to fairly high prices at auction. Two examples are shown here: one possibly by J. & W. Handley of Burslem (figure 15), decorated with a view of the Ponte Molle over the Tiber in Rome; the other by Carey & Sons of Lane End (figure 16), decorated with their pattern, Ancient Rome. Both of these patterns are fairly often found on dinner wares but dog bowls are much less common. Examples by Spode are probably seen most often but they were also made by Minton and William Ridgway, and probably one or two other potters.

This article is a personal selection showing rare and unusual pieces of blue and white pottery; it is certainly not comprehensive. The transferware potters concentrated on utilitarian wares, particularly dinner and dessert services, tea services and toilet wares, but the range of shapes is huge. The determined collector might care to hunt for other unusual pieces, including a pilgrim

Below left. Figure 15. Dog dish with the Ponte Molle pattern, possibly by J. & W. Handley of Burslem.

Below right. Figure 16. Dog dish with the Ancient Rome pattern by Carey & Sons of Lane End.



Figure 14. Cow creamer printed with a view of Luscombe in Devon, maker unknown, c.1830.

flask, spirit barrel, water cistern, syrup jar, butter boat, bedpan, asparagus servers, bird feeder, inkwell, egg scrambler and posset pot. And if you are determined to add furniture to the list, what about a garden seat, or even a blue and white table (yes, it does exist). You just never know what might turn up next!

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

