Add to My Gallery | Create an Album
View PDF

Early Underglaze Blue Printing on Earthenware

In his 'History of the Staffoirdshire Potteries' Simeon Shaw[1] provides us with the only detailed and also near contemporary account we have of the introduction and development of the technique of underglaze blue printing on earthenware. After mentioning Harry Baker printing on glue bats for *'Mr Baddeley of Shelton about 1777'*, an on-glaze procedure, he continues immediately with what must be a description of the early underglaze technique, employing a dry process.

'The next stage in its improvement was employing paper and transferring it to the Pottery; but in this the printer proceeded very differently from the present method. The paper was different in texture and quality and was applied in a dry state. The Plates were so extremely strong that no delicate shades were preserved. The specimens have scarcely any thing deserving the name of a ***fine part****'*

The rectangular platter (1), is impressed *IH* and displays the characteristics of Shaw's description of very early production; a line engraved pattern of poor definition printed in an intense deep blue. Similar characteristics are shown by a *SPODE* impressed oval pierced stand (2) printed in the pattern named by Robert Copeland as 'Two Figures 1', and classified by him as ' very early'.

Shaw continues;
The method of damping paper adopted by Copper-plate printers, suggested another improvement; and various essays were made by different persons with different degrees of success. Mr John Baddeley, of Shelton, some time employed Mr. Thomas Radford to print Tea Services by an improved method of transferring the impression to the bisquet ware; which was attempted to be kept secret, but was soon developed; and the glaze prevented the beautiful appearance which attached to the Black printed. This caused J. Greatbatch to improve the Pottery and the Glaze; and for Mr. R. Baddeley he formed an excellent body, with a glaze, containing some growan stone in both, with a little cobalt in the fritt which formed the glaze.

The elder Mr Turner first employed a Blue Printer, who used wet Paper……The Pattern Mr Turner used was the ***willow****, designed by him from two oriental Plates, still preserved, and exhibited to the Author by Mr W. Turner.'*

The platter (3) is impressed *Turner* and closely matches Shaw's description; the pattern is more clearly defined than the previously illustrated examples, suggesting the employment of an improved process involving wet paper.

Shaw continues his account with the following paragraph;
'Several other Manufacturers now commenced manufacturing Blue Printed Pottery. The late Mr. Jas. Gerrard with Mr Jas. Keeling of New Street, Hanley, introduced some improvements in the process. About 1783, James Richards, John Ainsworth, and Thos. Lucas, an engraver, left the service of Mr Turner, at Caughley, and engaged with the Staffordshire Manufacturers; Richards and Lucas with the first Mr Spode and Ainsworth with the first Mr Yates, of Shelton. These two printers first introduced the composition called ***Oils****, and the method of washing the paper off the bisque pottery, and hardening on the colours previous to the immersion in the fluid glaze.'*

Although the clear tenor of Shaw's account is that the technique of hot-press blue printing on earthenware was developed in Staffordshire in the first few years of the 1780s, he does not make it clear which, if any, of the potters he mentions was first in the field. Ralph Baddeley of Shelton is referred to as only one of several pioneers in developing the process. Another source, Enoch Wood, was more specific regarding Baddeley's contribution. In the 1835 list of items of English earthenware from the Enoch Wood Collection which were to be sent to the Royal Museum at Dresden pursuant to an exchange arrangement.[2], item 174 is described thus;

'Bowl early Specimen of Blue Printed ware, made by R. Baddeley at Shelton, who first began to make this kind of earthenware…'

Enoch Wood's attribution of Ralph Baddeley as the primogenitor ought to carry weight as it is very nearly first hand evidence; Enoch was born in 1759 and commenced business as a master potter in Burslem in 1783, the very year mentioned by Shaw as the date of the incursions from Caughley. Unfortunately Enoch's assertion cannot be tested as none of Ralph Baddeley's blue printing was marked or has otherwise been identified; that is equally the case with the output of the elder John Yates, stated by Shaw as another pioneer of blue printed development.

The examples by IH and Spode (1 & 2) suggest stylistically that they are amongst the earliest in point of time. Whilst Spode is generally known as a pioneer and sometimes quoted as being the first manufacturer to develop the process commercially, Shaw makes no mention of the prolific potter whose wares bear the mark *IH*, many of which, in addition to the one illustrated here, have the characteristics of early production. The traditional attribution of this mark to Joshua Heath has been discredited;[3] the factory in question is now thought to be that of John Harrison of Stoke, a potter who is listed in Bailey's Directories of 1781 and 1783 but oddly enough, not in the 1784 edition, although the factory survived until the early 19th century.

The Bailey Directory of 1784 lists in detail the output of many individual factories, and includes several references to manufacturers of blue painted wares but nowhere mentions a producer of blue **printed** ware. One might deduce from this fact that any production before 1785 or thereabouts was of limited nature. The earliest dated blue printed example known is the teapot (4) which bears the date 1787.

[1]Shaw, Simeon, 'History of the Staffordshire Potteries'. Privately published 1829.pp.213-4
[2] The list is detailed in Appendix 2 of the article 'The Lost Collection of Enoch Wood' by Miranda Goodby. Journal of the Northern Ceramic Society Vol. 9 1992 at page 144.
[3] See 'Attribution of the 'IH' Mark' by Roger Pomfret, Transferware Collectors Club Bulletin Summer 2008 Vol.IX No.3 pp 4-5, for the detailed reasons.

*1a. Platter impressed **IH***

1b. detail of 1a.

*2a. Two figures pattern impressed **SPODE***

2b. detail of 2a.

3a. 'Willow' pattern impressed ***Turner***

3

4a

4b. reverse of 4a