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Color printed and multi-color printed earthenware

Introducing fancy colors
Blue was the most popular of the underglaze printing colors in the late 18th century although brown and black were also available. These few colors were the only ones developed that could withstand the heat of the glaze firing and it was only the introduction of new metals and new color making processes that allowed this range of underglaze printing colors to develop.



Robert Copeland, from his extensive knowledge of printing and of the history of Spode, tells us that by 1822 Spode were producing green underglaze printed pottery. This was the first of what were known as 'fancy colors'. John Riley, a partner with his brother in John & Richard Riley's pottery in Burslem, kept a recipe and [illegible] 1823.[i] It includes recipes for green, lilac and various shades of brown all of [illegible]fore their business closed in 1828.



Pink prints must date from at least as early as 1830, as by early 1831 they had been shipped to Baltimore for sale and the merchant Matthew Smith was complaining about the prices he was charged by Mayer, when his neighbor was supplied cheaper by Stevenson"[ii]. In early 1833 Enoch

Wood & Sons were invoicing for goods supplied, and therefore probably made in 1832, which included printed wares in pink, purple, black, blue and brown. It seems likely that by the early 1830s a full range of ‘fancy colors’ was available.

Underglaze printing in multiple colors



The earliest attempts to combine colors in a pleasing design, came in the 1790s when Ralph Wedgwood of the Hill Works in Burslem produced some exceptional patterns in brown and a greenish blue. It was 20 or 30 years later before potters revived bi-color printing, using colors to achieve a variety of effects. In the simplest process, a single copper would provide a black print of a complete plate and a purple print of a complete plate and the center portions would be switched by the transferrer producing plates with contrasting centers and borders. Other potters used a more complex approach overlaying the colors to create a more subtle design.



In the mid-1830s potters made strides towards multi-color printing in two ways. First using one copper engraving they rubbed blue, green and black printing oil into different parts of the design. The subsequent print offered a more colorful image but did not reflect full color printing. Davenport was perhaps the greatest exponent of this kind of printing in Staffordshire.

Tuction of a process that

required separate engravings for each of the colors to be used. These were applied one on top of the other building up the final color of the pattern. Excavated evidence shows that Enoch Wood and Sons were producing multi-plate color printing by 1834-35. The prints were not yet full color, that is they were not replicating nature or copying complex pictures, but they were providing good multi-color romantic landscape designs.



The final development in multi-plate, multi-color printing came in the 1840s and by 1850 a number of Staffordshire potters were producing wares good enough to be exhibited in the Great Exhibition of 1851. The heyday for these multi-color printed wares was 1850-60. After this date there new developments for color decoration focused on lithographic processes which offered an alternate form of printing in the 20th century.

For processes of multiple color printing see

Single-Plate Multicolor Printing by Hot Press
Multiple-Plate Multicolor Printing by Hot Press

[i] Pomfret, Roger. 1988. 'John & Richard Riley China & Earthenware Manufacturers'. *Journal of Ceramic History Vol.13*, Stoke-on-Trent: City Museum & Art Gallery.
[ii] Pomfret Roger. 2010. 'Letter Books of Matthew Smith 1806-32' *Northern Ceramic Society Journal Vol.26* p 106.