

Beginner's Guide to Collecting Transferware

Picture this: You're drawn to a dish or a cup in an antiques shop; you pick it up and discover you're holding an English-made piece of transferware. Has this happened to you more than you'd care to admit? Chances are you're destined to collect English transferware – perhaps in pink – perhaps in one of the other great colors.

English transferware is not too hard to find, just difficult enough to make the search fun. The genre is supported by a wonderful selection of books, such as the two *English Pink* books described in this website, brimming with pictures of wares, colorful tales of the great English industry and loads of information about the pots, the pot'tries and the potters.

Basically, English transferware can be grouped into collecting categories. This aids the novice collector – and even those more advanced – in narrowing the search field to a workable system. Roughly, the categories are as follows:

1. Historical Staffordshire – 19th-century wares produced for the American market
2. "Old Blue" or Staffordshire Blue – dating from about 1790 to 1830
3. Other Colors – pink, green, light blue, purple, mulberry, and more. 1828+
4. Aesthetic Movement – roughly 1865 to 1890
5. Turn-of-the-Century Wares – from the 1890s to 1915 or so
6. Twentieth-Century Staffordshire – least-expensive and fastest-growing group
7. Wares of a Particular Potter – value dependant on age of ware
8. Wares of a Particular Firm – value dependant on age of ware

There are probably more categories and, in addition, each of these groups can be further subdivided, depending on the collector's interest. Wares of some types can be significantly less costly than others; generally speaking, the first category, Historical Transferware, and the second, "Old Blue" – which actually encompasses the first – are the most pricy. If you choose to collect the wares of a particularly early potter, they also can be expensive, depending on availability and popularity in today's market.

The *other* colors began to appear about 1828, and cost for these wares can vary greatly depending on source, availability and rarity. For example, yellow transferware is quite rare thus more costly than most; conversely, brown is plentiful and usually costs less than the other colors. Most English have always preferred blue and much of the colored ware was produced specifically for export. The oldest other-colored wares can still be expensive so it pays to shop wisely, be patient and know your stuff!

The least expensive pieces are, of course, the newest. There is, however, a growing group of 20th-century collectors in this country, especially those who collect 20th-century English Pink. Because of these folks, prices for even the newer pink transferware are skyrocketing.

Regardless which category of transferware you choose, before you make too many buying mistakes it is a good idea to purchase a very good "marks book" and learn to use it. The reference will help you identify the piece in question and determine its age. Even seasoned collectors consult a reliable text before they purchase a piece, especially when an expensive item is concerned.

These two backstamp (marks) guides are outstanding:

Encyclopaedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks

By Geoffrey A Godden, F.R.S.A.

© 1991, Barrie & Jenkins Ltd., London

*Encyclopedia of Marks: American, English and European
Earthenware, Ironstone, and Stoneware: 1780-1980*
By Arnold A & Dorothy E. Kowalsky
© 1999, Shiffer Publishing Ltd., www.schifferbooks.com .

The best references are quite large thus too cumbersome to carry when you shop and smaller guides may not be as thorough as you'd like them to be. If you find one that works for you, keep it in the car. When you encounter a question you cannot answer or a piece of transferware you cannot date, check it out first or *do not buy the item!* Chances are the dish will be there tomorrow – or even next month. Reputable dealers are usually happy to work with you.

When attempting to date a piece of transferware, the best approach is to narrow down the date field. There are several points to consider:

1. Shape (Certain shapes define a particular time, e.g. Scalloped edges usually indicate the Romantic period, roughly 1830-1850.)
2. Material (Often a mark will include the name given to the product used for the ware, e.g. Ironstone, Cremeware, Pearlware...)
3. Datestamps (Numbers and letters, impressed or printed, can indicate when the pattern was registered and/or when the piece was made.)
4. Potter (The form taken by the company name can indicate the dates of operation, e.g. Wm. Adams & Sons as opposed to Wm. Adams & Son.)

The following numbers or words may offer more clues since they are often included in a backstamp:

1. *22 carat* (after the 1930s)
2. *Bone China* (20th century. About 1915 and after)
3. *Copyright* (or ©) (1858 to the turn of the century)
4. *Copyright Reserved* (1877 onward)
5. *Detergent proof* (ca. 1944 to present)
6. *Dishwasher proof* (1955)
7. *England* (appears on marks postdating 1875, generally after 1891)
8. *Hand-painted* (after 1935)
9. *Ltd.* (1880 and after; usually signifies 20th century)
10. *Made expressly for* (1927 to the present)
11. *Made in England* (1887 and after)
12. *Ovenproof* (1930s to the present)
13. *Patent applied for* (1902 to the present)
14. *Patented* (1900 to the present)
15. *"Pattern name"* (after 1810)
16. *Permanent colours* (ca. 1960)
17. *Published by* (1830 – 1840)
18. *Registry mark, diamond-shaped, with R^d in the center* (1842-1883)
19. *"R^d" or "R^d N^e"* (from 1884 to the present day)
20. *Round or oval garter marks* (after 1840)
21. *Royal* (after 1850)
22. *Semi-vitreous (s-v)* (after 1901)
23. *Trademark* (after 1862)
24. *Underglaze* (1903 to 1945)
25. *Victorian quarter arms* (after 1837)
26. *Warranted* (1890s)

Exceptions will always abound in this hobby, just as they did when North Staffordshire was home to the enormous English transferware industry. Discovering an answer to a mystery that has plagued collectors for years is like flooding a dark cellar with sunlight; hidden treasures come forward and the prizes seem endless.

Hopefully these few tips will help you make your collecting ventures more rewarding. If, in spite of your resolve to maintain a sane and reasonable composure and not become an obsessive, incurable crazy collector, you find yourself much more involved in this avocation than you'd intended, don't fret. You are just one of us.

So welcome, fellow English transferware lover. Enjoy this hobby as much as possible. After all, isn't that what collecting is all about?

One last thing... Always remember, you can never have too many favorites!

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