

CHELSEA PORCELAIN: SOME THOUGHTS..... BY JOHN ROBSON

I thought I would share some more thoughts on my collecting interests, this time Chelsea, in the light of the fact that the porcelain market for 18th century wares has many items available, and at affordable prices once again. As I have said before, I started to collect porcelain in the 1970's and was helped by well known dealers of the day- Simon Spero, Liane Richards of Mercury Antiques, Sheila Davies, Pamela Klaber , Elizabeth Adams and others.

At that time, the value of porcelain seemed to be on the steep increase, sales being dominated by 'Fine Antique Fairs' and a small number of auction houses.

My introduction to Chelsea porcelain was by Pamela Klaber and Elizabeth Adams ably assisted by Sheila who purchased and then reserved for me various pieces at her New Cavendish Street shop.

As we all know, the periods into which Chelsea production is divided are Triangle Period (1745-49), Raised Anchor period (1750-53), Red Anchor (1754-58) and Gold Anchor (1758-70). There are also pieces marked with the brown anchor said to be 'about the time' of Red Anchor and Gold Anchor, and some have suggested the Brown Anchor signifies a 'lesser' ware. I'll not delve into that controversial area here!

The Red Anchor wares have gorgeous decoration mainly influenced by the Meissen factory. The earlier periods are rare and consequently expensive, although a 'Goat and Bee' jug recently sold at Bonhams for £10,000 plus commission seemed quite reasonable in comparison to older price levels!

I was drawn to the fine flower painting on the Red Anchor wares and fell in love with this charming factory. In the past, Chelsea porcelain has been very much the subject to changes of fashion and taste which has, of course, affected price. Whereas previously flamboyant and richly decorated Gold Anchor wares were all the rage at the end of the 19th century, with correspondingly high prices, in recent years they have lost their attraction, it seems. There is always controversy in ceramics and its history, not least Chelsea. The authors of Ceramic Books in the 19th century speculated on fact which then became accepted as true, such as Vauxhall and Plymouth being attributed to a Longton Hall origin! Some factories, such as Vauxhall and Limehouse became forgotten until in the fourth quarter of the 20th

century when more focused research put us on a truer (?) path (see, for instance the excavations and work of Dr Bernard Watney at Longton Hall).

The Chelsea factory is suggested to have come into existence in about 1745 by Charles Gouyn or in 1742 by Thomas Briand who is attributed with having made a goat and bee jug with a date of 1743. He is also attributed with having made 'Chelsea Toys' which are small perfume bottles or needle cases.

But it is accepted now that the main force behind Chelsea was a silversmith called Nicholas Sprimont. He came to London in 1741 and he began trading as a silversmith in Hanover Square. It seems he became involved with managing Chelsea in about 1746 and by offering high wages, attracted potters from Staffordshire.

By 1753, Chelsea paste had a finer grain and become more translucent. The glaze was highly lustrous with a uniform surface, being applied by brush. The cool white of the glaze appears slightly blue against the white of the body and is seldom crazed.

The Red Anchor period (1754-58) was noted for its support by George II and his brother, the Duke of Cumberland, which enabled Chelsea to overcome some of the financial difficulties which faced English porcelain factories during their early years.

Table ware was the mainstay of production but financial problems were never the less encountered and there was a temporary cessation of potting in 1756 although decoration of existing pieces continued. . It restarted again in 1758 using a paste strengthened by the addition of bone ash to the frit brought by some of the workers who had temporarily moved to Bow.

The downturn in values of 18th century porcelain in the immediate past 5 years has given 'ordinary collectors' a chance to acquire Chelsea Red Anchor pieces at more affordable prices.

I love Chelsea porcelain and thought I would share some of my pieces with you to illustrate how wonderful they are!

- (1) This is a lovely octagonal teabowl and saucer from the Red Anchor period. The flowers are in the Meissen style, well painted and attractive. The rims are coloured in a red, not gold, which cleverly picks out some of the colours in the flowers. The underside has a typical Red Anchor painted underglaze and also has the typical three support marks from when fired in the kiln ;





- (2) Another cup and saucer, this time the tea cup with a handle. The shape is unusual and with scalloped edges and moulded squares. Beautifully painted in the Meissen Blumen style, edged in red. Note the Red Anchor and the stilt marks;





- (3) A Chelsea Ecuelle, again Red Anchor .It has twig handles, a cherry as a knop and beautiful flowers in the Meissen style;



- (4) A moulded strawberry leaf sauceboat on four feet painted with flower sprays. These are often found in pairs but that apparently does not necessarily add value. The whiter the paste the earlier they were made with the Raised Anchor period having far fewer flowers;



- (5) A 'Warren Hastings' type plate painted in coloured enamels with two sprays of flowers and leaves, and scattered flowers, the border superbly painted by Jefferyes Hammett O'Neale with three scenes in the Meissen manner, each within a scroll moulded cartouche, picked out in gilt, and alternating with diaper moulded panels. Also painted with a caterpillar, a ladybird and other insects, made circa 1755, red anchor mark;



(6) A Gold Anchor period Ecuelle with deep rich red colours, heavy gilding and floral swags Gold Anchor mark under and again note the stilt marks;



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