

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

Another factory which is well worth studying and collecting is Bow. In the images below, I show representative pictures of pieces from my collection which show the diversity and charm of wares produced. I know that many of our members are far more familiar with Bow than me but I hope to prompt thought and renew visits to well-thumbed books to re-acquaint ourselves with and reconnect to this factory.

The Bow factory (c.1744 to c.1775) throws up some historical question marks and produced little porcelain, it seems, until about 1751. Its origins are intermingled with the Limehouse factory and experimentation of American clay (unaker) brought over to England by Andre Duche. There has been much discussion about these, as yet not resolved, and somewhere 'in the mix' is featured William Cookworthy who was the first to produce hard paste porcelain from English ingredients. It all makes for interesting reading, though giving much 'food for thought!' This is only a very brief introduction to Bow porcelain and, of course, in the normal way one will research into the many books for the fascinating story of this factory.

Bow was founded by Thomas Frye in about 1744 financed by Alderman Arnold, and jointly with Edward Heylin. The factory was on the Middlesex side of Bow Bridge, Stepney and it is now known that on the other side was the Limehouse factory.

Thomas Frye was an accomplished artist and accomplished enamel painter. He left the factory, however, in 1759 due to ill health and thereafter Bow lost its artistic guiding hand, especially in the creation of figures.

Bow produced much polychrome decorated ware as well as a considerable amount of blue and white. The potting seems to have produced wares which are heavy, particularly in the period 1749 to 1754.

In the period 1755 to 1756, the production of flatware was a great speciality producing decoration in the '*famille rose*' style in polychrome as well as what were intended to be more utilitarian wares such as cups and saucers, pickle leaf dishes, sauceboats and knife and fork handles.

The mainstay of production throughout the twenty five year life of the factory was domestic wares and these today are still readily obtainable.

Powder blue wares were relatively common and I point here to another controversy: are some such plates in fact Isleworth? Another area to research! From about 1764, the quality of the potting of the porcelain deteriorated until about the 1770s some wares are hard to recognise as porcelain.

Some pictures follow of some of my Bow pieces to give a flavour of the wares this important factory produced. For me, Bow porcelain has a charm all of its own and most of the wares lack the richness and quality of, say, Chelsea and Worcester, but are nevertheless charming!

In the pre-1763 period, a popular form of decoration was the imitation of 'Fukien Blanc de Chine'. These are usually in the white and not painted but have instead decoration applied in relief, usually sprigs of prunus blossom. Sometimes the blossom is found in different shapes, such as akin to a shamrock. At Bow, most of the shapes were European and often of contemporary silver form, especially in sauceboats. In general the grey-white wares are earlier than the creamy, probably due to differences in firing in the kiln.

This Blanc de Chine coffee cup and saucer are probably 1752 to 1754. They are quite commonly found-



The white sauceboat is probably about 1755; earlier ones had 'lion feet'



Sauceboats were quite a speciality of the Bow factory and here is one in blue and white and claw feet but not formed as a lion's head, making them about 1755. Most of the early designs are in Chinese style, many of them (like this one) being blurred as if out of focus.



Here is a powder blue plate and it is this type which has caused controversy as to whether Isleworth! I think this one is Bow. Note the reverse foliage painting and the shape of the footrim.



This is a plain edge plate which has been given the name ‘Golfer and Caddy’



Here is a. Bow flower pot with ceramic flowers (which are prone to damage!)....



This is a charming octagonal Bow plate which has been moulded, probably about 1765. Note the reverse with the painted foliage and the slightly ground foot which shows the brown paste.



Here we see a wonderful Bow polychrome mug painted in *famille rose* style. It is in typical bell shape and the colours are thickly applied and very bright in tone. Although not shown here, it has a characteristic heart-shaped terminal at the base of the handle.



Lastly, I had to share a picture of this wonderful Levantine lady sweet meat dish which shows the fabulous quality of the painting with lovely flowers. Her yellow robes and white head dress show great charm. She was probably made in about 1755 and can be found quite frequently.



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