

ENGLISH PORCELAIN

F.B., Wallasey. It is quite understandable that the novice should feel bewildered when surrounded by the varied treasures of an antique dealer's display. The remedy is to determine the aim of your collection, and whether you decide on tea-pots, Toby jugs or salt-glaze, always look first for the pieces which come within your collecting range.

J.W., Bromley. The numbers in colour and sometimes the name—as "Amhurst, Japan"—denote the pattern on the cup and saucer or plate. In the case of Derby, there is sometimes a number in gold as well as that in colour. This is the number of the gilder responsible. The pattern number alone affords no clue to the manufactory.

H.S., Newcastle. Yes, there have been imitations of Astbury figures; in fact, few English figures have escaped the attentions of the forger, from the greater porcelain models to the humbler images of Staffordshire. If you have not a genuine specimen for comparison, I recommend that you study carefully the contents of museum cases—there is a fine collection of Astbury in the Stoke Museum—before making a purchase. If buying from a reputable dealer, however, you may rely on his judgment, and secure yourself by obtaining a detailed receipt.

Burroughs, Plymouth. If unable to obtain an expert opinion on your purchase, try the British Museum or the Victoria and Albert Museum. Before the War they were very willing to examine and pronounce on any object sent carefully packed and with the cost of return postage enclosed. It must be clearly understood, however, that no monetary value would be stated and the name of the museum must not be quoted in any reference or transaction. The museum authorities are anxious and willing to help the collector but are not to be used to assist a sale. Under war conditions and with depleted staffs it is possible this privilege has been withdrawn, so I advise a preliminary letter of enquiry with stamped and addressed envelope for reply.

Hankinson, Brighton. The last Liverpool pottery—Herculaneum—closed in 1841, but it is not possible to state when pottery-making began there. Fragments of blue decorated delft were found by the writer in a dried stream bed, and records show that this stream had been filled in and the land offered for building lots in 1700; but no doubt a coarse pottery was made on the banks of the Mersey many years earlier.

Tudor, Manchester. The best packing for pottery and porcelain is the simplest—paper. It has been proved repeatedly to be more satisfactory than wood fibre, straw, etc. Do not, however, overlook, as many do, the necessity for a good "cushion" underneath the article as well as on top, and never pack in a box which is only just large enough. Better a box much too big, so that there is room for packing all round the article or articles, and space for packing between each separate piece.

DELFT

C.S., Cheshire. Delft is an earthenware belonging to the majolica family. The paste is cream-white and brittle; and the glaze, which has tin as one of its ingredients, is white. As paste and glaze do not mix particularly well, the glaze often cracks into a network of lines called "crackle."

Although Delft was chiefly made at Delft in Holland, it was produced in so many other towns that the name became generic. The factories were curiously and fancifully called The Peacock, The Golden Boat, The Rose, The White Star, The Two Savage Men, The Three Porcelain Ash Bins, and so on.

The earliest form of Delft, which was made in blue and white, includes gourd-shaped vases, bowls, teapots, plates, tiles and many other objects decorated with flowers, Chinese ladies, Chinese borders and patterns, guilder roses, pinks, tulips, ships, bear hunts and portraits of distinguished men, particularly William III and Admiral van Tromp.

Later, the Dutch potters evolved their beautiful Polychrome Delft, and in learning to fire these colours they developed a new technique. These colours, in some cases glowing and brilliant, in others soft and delicate, are yellow, orange, green, blue, purple, reddish brown, brown and black.

Later still, Delft was made in black ornamented with Chinese pagodas and trees in yellow and green, suggesting lacquer.

STAFFORDSHIRE DISH

S.W., Worcester. Can you tell me the age of a blue Staffordshire dish marked "A. Stevenson, Warranted Staffordshire," and has a ship in a circle which is impressed in the dish?

A. Stevenson, Cobridge, marked his wares in this manner from 1802.

IDENTIFYING OLD LACE

I have inherited a large quantity of old lace. How can I distinguish the valuable hand-made specimens from the more recent but undoubtedly old machine-made pieces?

Lace was always made by hand until 1820 when the first lace-making machine was invented. Pattern is seldom of any help in detecting whether lace is real (hand-made) or imitation (machine-made). It is not difficult to detect imitation laces. The looped stitch is never found, and although it has been possible for half a century to produce a twisted stitch by machinery, the process is very expensive, hence the bulk of imitation laces have threads only woven together. The toile is woven from an inferior thread (usually a mixture of cotton and flax) and is often slightly ridged or ribbed, and always very even. The edge is lacking in finish and firmness, and the texture either has a disagreeable flimsiness or is too stiff with starch. In imitation laces the nets and repeats are too punctiliously exact. Handwork shows individuality of touch. Take a piece of hand-made net between finger and thumb and slightly roll it. The net will gather into a soft little roll with almost the touch of floss silk. The imitation is perceptibly hard, stiff and wiry when twisted in this way.

PEWTER

H.J., Bucks. A formula for cleaning pewter is to pour hot lye of wood ashes upon the pewter, throw on some fine sand and rub with a hard woollen rag until all dirt has dissolved. Next, rinse in clean water and place on a table with a clean linen cover, on which it is left to dry without being touched, otherwise spots will appear. A high polish can be secured by afterwards polishing with a paste of whitening and brandy, rubbing until the mass becomes dry.

H.R., Tunbridge Wells. Could you tell me the age of a pewter plate marked with a wreath, a dove with a branch, a bee and the initials W.M.? Also the age of a pewter mug marked W. C. Swift and what appears to be a stock with a rose and thistle above the name.

The initials W.M. stand for William Mullen, who made and marked his pewter in this way about 1780. The mug is the work of William Cornelius Swift, who worked in London in 1817.

FRANKENTHAL CHINA

A. McK., Southampton. Frankenthal in Bavaria probably ranks next to Dresden in German ceramics. Its success dates from 1755, when Paul Antoine Hannony had to leave the potteries of Strasbourg (as that town became French) and went immediately to Frankenthal to work under the Elector of Bavaria. The pottery at once began to attract attention. Frankenthal's best products are coloured figurines, many of which were modelled after Watteau, Lancret, Pater and others of this graceful school, which explains their charm.

ETCHINGS BY H. F. MILLET

H.C., Putney. How many etchings did Jean François Millet leave us? Are they worth collecting?

Millet's fame as an etcher rests upon about twenty plates, some being copies of his famous paintings. Opinions vary regarding these works, some critics contending that as works of art they surpass his canvases. If we select the examples which were carefully finished, it is difficult to form too high an opinion of their value. But many suffered in the printing, an operation which on occasions he attempted to perform himself, and others are merely sketchy plates. In studying Millet's plates we find in their composition a depth and dignity seldom surpassed in rustic art. The same splendid line is there which is found in his pen drawings. It has a simplifying tendency, a characteristic produced from his habit of drawing from memory when minute detail would pass unnoticed.

The first plate in order of merit is usually judged to be "La Cardeuse," but it is rather a first among equals, for "Le Depart pour le Travail," "Les Glaneuses," "Les Bêcheurs," and "Le Paysan Reentrant due Fumière" all testify to the great skill of the artist. Definitely they are worth collecting. Some are almost unique.