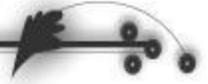


# White Ironstone - Kew Project



By Cindy Neff

The White Ironstone China Association (WICA) invited its sister collectors' clubs to the Saturday portion of their 2011 convention for Jane Diemer's presentation on the KEW PROJECT.

In a massive undertaking, WICA hired professional historical researcher Rosalie Spire, England, and charged her with locating original registrations of white ironstone using a list of Patent Registry numbers of known ironstone shapes and objects. Her investigation focused on the Public Records Office of England's National Archives, commonly called "Kew" because of its close proximity to Kew, Royal Botanic Gardens. The National Archives website declares, "As the government's national archive for England, Wales and the United Kingdom, we hold over 1,000 years of the nation's records for everyone to discover and use."

Ms. Spire made many trips from her home to Kew and handled ledgers and large albums nearly 200 years old in her search for known potters and their body shape designs. Gaining access to the original books, Ms. Spire photographed the actual pages, although she was allowed no extra light sources and could not use any method to smooth or hold flat the sheets of paper. The result of her work is a treasure trove of photographed pages showing line drawings of individual pieces, descriptions, dates of registry and registration numbers.

Two types of records were kept at the registration office during the time white ironstone was produced (1840-1880). The ledgers were used by clerks to record the date, patent number of the item, a parcel number which indicated the total number of entities being registered by the owner that particular day, the name of the design-holder, and the address of the business which would produce the articles. The large albums resembled scrapbooks with sketchings, engravings and even early photographs of the items being registered.

After each trip, Ms. Spire updated WICA representatives on her fascinating finds and received a new list of potters, designs and registry numbers to track down. Back she went and started the hunt all over again. During her research, she found line drawings that indicated certain body shapes had handles, finials and even spouts that

ended up being potted differently from the shape on the original registered drawing. While no definitive answer was found for these abnormalities, the educated guess is that the changes were due to the functionality of the item or the practicality of potting the original depiction.

A modeler made the creative life of a pottery easier. Mostly men, they ran businesses of their own crafting new designs for ironstone and other china. Once the designs were complete, they offered them for sale. Modeler Ralph Scragg is well known among white ironstone collectors for creating the Grape Octagon shape. He licensed this pattern to many potters and pieces can be found in white ironstone, flow blue brushstroke, mulberry sponge ware, mulberry polychrome, gaudy wares and copper lustre (1).  
*(See photos on page 2)*

The authenticity of some common terms collectors utilize were challenged by Ms. Spire's research. For instance, an open pedestaled bowl that we might call "compote" (later term) or "comport" (earlier term) or even "fruit bowl" or "centerpiece," Mellor Venables Co. and others registered as "salad bowl" (2) and (3). Phillips designated his pitchers and bowls as "jug sets," no longer a universal expression. Davenport rejected our titles of "bath set" or "chamber set" for "Toilet Service." One particular Davenport registration paper showed three line drawings, a pitcher and a bowl referred to as "toilet service" and a small pitcher labeled "jug" (4). Finally, Ms. Spire discovered that the word "tureen" was never used in the original registries, but rather "casserole."

Why did potters bear the expense and the roughness of travel to register their body shapes and patterns? It bought them three years of production without direct competition for that particular shape. During the three years no other potter could "borrow" that exact design. If the profile sold well, their monopoly was secure. Well, almost. Several times it was noted that potters took a popular design and added or subtracted small features, registered their "new" design, and jumped into the profit stream.

The full extent of Ms. Spire's white ironstone research, including some 1200 photographs of patterns, body shapes and registry information is compiled on a DVD called "[Kew Project: A digital resource of Patent Registrations for Ironstone China from the National Registry Offices, at Kew, England](#)" (5). Contact the White Ironstone China Association at [www.whiteironstonechina.com](http://www.whiteironstonechina.com) to purchase a copy.

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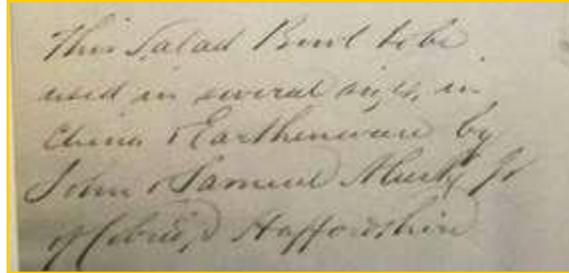


(1)

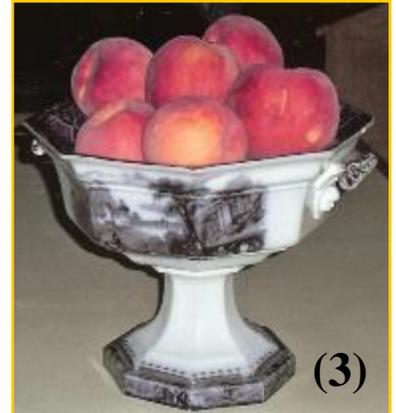
COTTON PLANT (J.Furnival) mulberry polychrome pitcher in Grape Octagon. (BBN file photo)



(2)



Original written portion of registry for the Gothic Shape - This Salad Bowl to be used in several sizes, in China Earthenware by John Samuel Hurley Jr. of Cobridge Staffordshire



(3)

VINCENNES (J & G Alcock) Full Panel Gothic salad bowl Dave & Mari Crumb



The Adriatic Shape registration from August 27, 1855 reads:

A new Design for an Ornamental shape for Jugs and Toilet Ware in Class 4 belonging to Silas Badger Taylor of London, Samuel Cooper Pears and Abraham Barrow Junr of Fenton trading under the style or firm of Barrow of Fenton



(4)

AMOY (Davenport) What we call a pitcher and bowl officially registered as "Toilet Service."

Fluted Hills Ewer James Edwards #3346



(5)

One of the slides from the WICA DVD "Kew Project: A digital resource of Patent Registrations for Ironstone China from the National Registry Offices, at Kew, England."