

Edward and George Phillips' Pottery at Longport

By Louise Richardson



Blue bowl - 12.5 inch diameter bowl, Park Scenery, George Phillips.

Ceramics marked with the Phillips name are frequently found in estate auctions, antiques shops, and historical societies in New England. While transfer printed wares predominate, the firm produced a range of earthenwares, including flow blue, creamware, edged ware, painted pearlware, plain white ironstone, and luster. Printed pieces were often marked with a transfer containing the name of the pattern and the firm's name. On other pieces, one of two impressed marks was used. Unlike several other potters whose wares are common in North America, the Phillips brothers produced few of the dark blue scenes now prized by collectors, and little has been written about their trade.

The pottery was founded by two brothers, Edward and George Phillips, in 1822. Their father was a merchant in Newcastle under Lyme, and no one in the family seems to

have had a pottery background. Edward, however, married Benedicta Wedgwood, who had become a ward of Josiah Wedgwood after the death of her father, Thomas, of the Overhouse Works. The brothers leased the New Bridge pottery in Longport, also known as the Bottom Bridge Works, from Joseph Brindley. The pottery had an excellent location on the Trent and Mersey Canal and had been vacant since 1817, when the previous tenants, Lindop and Taylor, went out of business. The Rogers and Davenport firms, known for extensive North American trade, were neighbors.

Many of the buildings on the New Bridge site survived well into the 20th century, and the master potter's house, occupied by George Phillips and his family until 1841, is now the Duke of Bridgewater Inn. The factory buildings which fronted on the road and the remaining bottle ovens were demolished in the mid twentieth

century. Some of the buildings along the canal continued in use until 2000, when the property was acquired by Steelite, and they were razed. Jonathan Goodwin, Assistant Field Archaeologist for the City of Stoke-on-Trent, excavated some of the area at that time and found shards from the period when George Phillips was operating the pottery.

The early transfer printed wares were often poorly executed, in a muddy blue. The most common of these are dinner wares printed with *Pastoral Scene*. The only historical American pattern attributed to Phillips, *Franklin's Tomb* on tea ware, has many of the same characteristics. An untitled tea ware pattern from this period features a girl holding a rake and two boys showing her a bird in a cage. All three of these patterns share one unusual feature: they were produced in two different blues, one the dark shade used by many potters for American scenes, and the other a medium blue.

While the marked tea wares are so scarce that it is difficult to detect improvement, some of the *Pastoral Scene* pieces are better executed. This may be due to different workmen or may reflect the increased proficiency of the pottery's management. Three slightly different printed marks were used at this time. All incorporate the firm's name, E & G Phillips (no punctuation marks) and the location, Longport. Most, but not all, *Pastoral Scene* pieces include the pattern name. A rampant lion and a Staffordshire knot were added to some marks, and this may be one of the earliest uses of the knot by a Staffordshire pot-



Tea cup and saucer, blue sprigs, George Phillips.

tery. Some *Pastoral Scene* plates have an impressed mark as well, with PHILLIPS above and LONGPORT below a knot. A second impressed mark, PHILLIPS in a straight line over LONGPORT, appears occasionally on other ware.

Edged ware manufactured by Phillips may have either of the impressed marks. Both blue and green are found, with blue much more common. At least three different molded edges were made, two a simple feather edge variant and one a strong design with several elements highlighted by a blue band. Quality varies, but the third design is technically very good. Some plain creamware and painted pearlware also display impressed marks. A creamware large nappie or bowl, with a beaded edge, in the collection of Historic Deerfield Museum, is impressed with the Staffordshire knot mark, and a pearlware wash bowl painted with floral sprigs has the plain impressed mark. Unmarked painted pearlware pieces undoubtedly exist and would be impossible to distinguish from the work of other potters of the period. Jonathan Goodwin excavated examples of painted pearlware, some with the blue house, fence and tree pattern and some floral decorated tea wares. Banded and dipped shards were also excavated, although no marked pieces are known.

The most commonly found Phillips earthenwares in



Breakfast cup and saucer, Canova, George Phillips.

the United States are romantic scenes printed in a variety of colors on dinner ware. James Edwards, who had been a thrower and plant manager for Rogers, joined the Phillips staff, and may have been responsible for the dramatic improvement in quality shown in these later pieces. The ware is light and well potted, with a clear glaze, and the transfers extremely well executed and applied. Unlike many of the contemporary patterns produced by other firms, the Phillips examples have a different scene on each piece. The printed marks usually contain the name of the pattern accompanied by E. & G. PHILLIPS or E. & G. P. Of these, one of the most beautiful is *Grecian Scenery*, which seems to date from the late 1820's. Usually found in a soft, medium blue, the transfer is finely detailed, with a flower and fruit arrangement in the left foreground, and varying landscapes in the background. Related patterns, *Africana*, *Cambrian*, and *Commerce*, all have landscapes which change with each piece and are printed in green, brown, red, purple, and black, as well as blue.

Two other patterns produced before 1834 and readily available in New England are *Ancona* and *Polish Views*, with less complex shapes and border patterns than the previous group. *Ancona*, in several colors, has a border of roses, urns, and scrolls. Each piece of a dinner service displays a center scene with a large urn in the right foreground and a far eastern landscape with figures in the background. The most intriguing pattern marketed by



Three marks used by Phillips.

the Phillips brothers is *Polish Views*. Each scene in the series has a different title, such as *The Enquiry*, *A Tear for Poland*, *The Messenger*, *Brother's Departure*, *Wearied Poles*, *Wounded Pole*, and *Patriots Departure*. The wording suggests that this series commemorates a particular event in Polish history, and given the production date, the most likely candidate is the Polish insurrection of 1830. Poland underwent three partitions in 1772, 1793, and 1795, dividing the territory among Prussia, Austria, and Russia. Napoleon liberated some of that area and created the Duchy of Warsaw in 1807, but the Treaty of Vienna in 1815 gave it back to Russia. On November 29, 1830, a military insurrection began in Warsaw. Although it rapidly escalated into a major revolt supported by a large part of the population, a combination of incompetence, internal bickering, and lack of direction led to defeat. Russia, upon regaining control, forced ten thousand political leaders and soldiers to emigrate to other countries, among them England and the United States. The Phillips brothers must have considered the international interest in this conflict sufficient to inspire a pattern with intense but limited appeal, similar to the designs based on Lafayette's triumphal visit to America in 1824.

Unlike dinner wares from this period, marked E&G Phillips, toilet and tea wares are rare. The ewer from a ewer and basin set, printed in blue *Grecian Scenery*, proves that toilet wares were made, and a previously unrecorded pattern, *Festoon*, on a saucer, suggests the use of that design on tea sets. Tea wares from Staffordshire potteries were often unmarked, and many remain to be attributed.

Tragedy struck the firm in 1831 when Edward was killed in a carriage accident, just before a planned trip to the United States. His widow sold her interest in the



Three children with bird in cage, Edward & George Phillips.

pottery to the surviving brother, George, in 1834, and the marks changed to G. PHILLIPS. George continued some of the patterns, which probably included *Wild Rose* and the standard *Willow*. Shards of both were found on the site, and *Willow* pieces with the impressed Phillips Staffordshire knot mark and others with a printed mark, G. Phillips, LONGPORT, are known.

Maintaining the quality of earlier wares, George introduced two new patterns, *Verona* and *Park Scenery*, which, considering their survival today, must have been enormously popular. Like *Grecian Scenery*, *Verona* is beautiful in blue, but was also printed in pink, black, and purple on dinner, tea, and probably toilet ware. Shards from a dinner service were excavated at the Warner House Museum in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and a plate is in the collection of the Moffatt Ladd House in Portsmouth. The border has four cartouches on a cross hatched ground, with identical Middle Eastern buildings in each cartouche. The center scenes, however, are different on each piece, with a common feature of two women in the foreground, backed by buildings with domes and minarets. *Park Scenery*, common in blue, green, or brown, pictures deer and cattle in a park setting, with a border of rosebuds. A partial dinner service in blue is in the collection of Olde York Historical Society, York, Maine, the Hollis NH Historical Society owns a platter, and shards have been excavated in Deerfield, MA.

A third pattern, *Canova*, was used on both tea and dinner wares. Produced in quantity by potters other than Phillips, principally Thomas Mayer, it may have been initiated by George Phillips and continued after his death. All of the center scenes have a large urn in the left foreground with a man and woman in front of a columned building. It was printed in several colors, and, rare for Phillips, in two colors on one piece, a technique used by other Staffordshire potters.

Later earthenware patterns were simplified, probably as a cost cutting measure to remain competitive. Plate rims were plain circles, and the center scenes were smaller and less elaborate. *Ceylonese* has peacocks and a large urn with molded figures in the foreground. A distinc-

tive feature of the *Parisian* pattern is the broad-brimmed, plumed hats worn by the man and woman. A Newburyport, Massachusetts retailer, N. G. Bassett, imported dinner wares in this design with his name printed on the back with the G. PHILLIPS mark, and shards from a *Parisian* plate were found at the Deer Street excavation site in Portsmouth.

In 1845 and 1846, George Phillips registered nine designs for ironstone shapes and printed patterns with the British Patent Office, an impressive number for any contemporary manufacturer. Although production ceased at his death in 1847, enormous quantities of Phillips ironstone exist from those few years, and a few of the registered designs were reissued by other firms.

The most striking pattern, *Lobelia*, with large flow blue flowers, had both the design and shape registered by George Phillips, and pieces display two registry marks, one printed for the pattern and one impressed for the shape. It is common on dinner wares, less so on tea ware. Another flow blue pattern, printed on dinner, tea, and toilet ware, is *Bejapore*, a variant of an Indian place name. Its border of flowers and leaves surrounds a fanciful central scene of turreted buildings with lacy trim.

Several ironstone patterns were printed in a pale blue or brown, and, rarely, in red. Like *Bejapore*, they display scenes with no relationship to actual places. *Corinth*

and *Marino* both have very simple borders. Although the printed marks differ, each contains the registry mark and G. PHILLIPS, LONGPORT. Tea wares in these two patterns have the same shape as *Bejapore*. Shards of another registered ironstone pattern, *Friburg*, marked with both impressed and printed registry marks, were excavated at the Warner House Museum. The fragments, from a large lid, are a perfect fit for a vegetable dish base in that pattern, found in a Maine auction. The pattern was also used on a pair of *Friburg* bowl and pitcher sets in the Portsmouth Historical Society collection. Phillips made

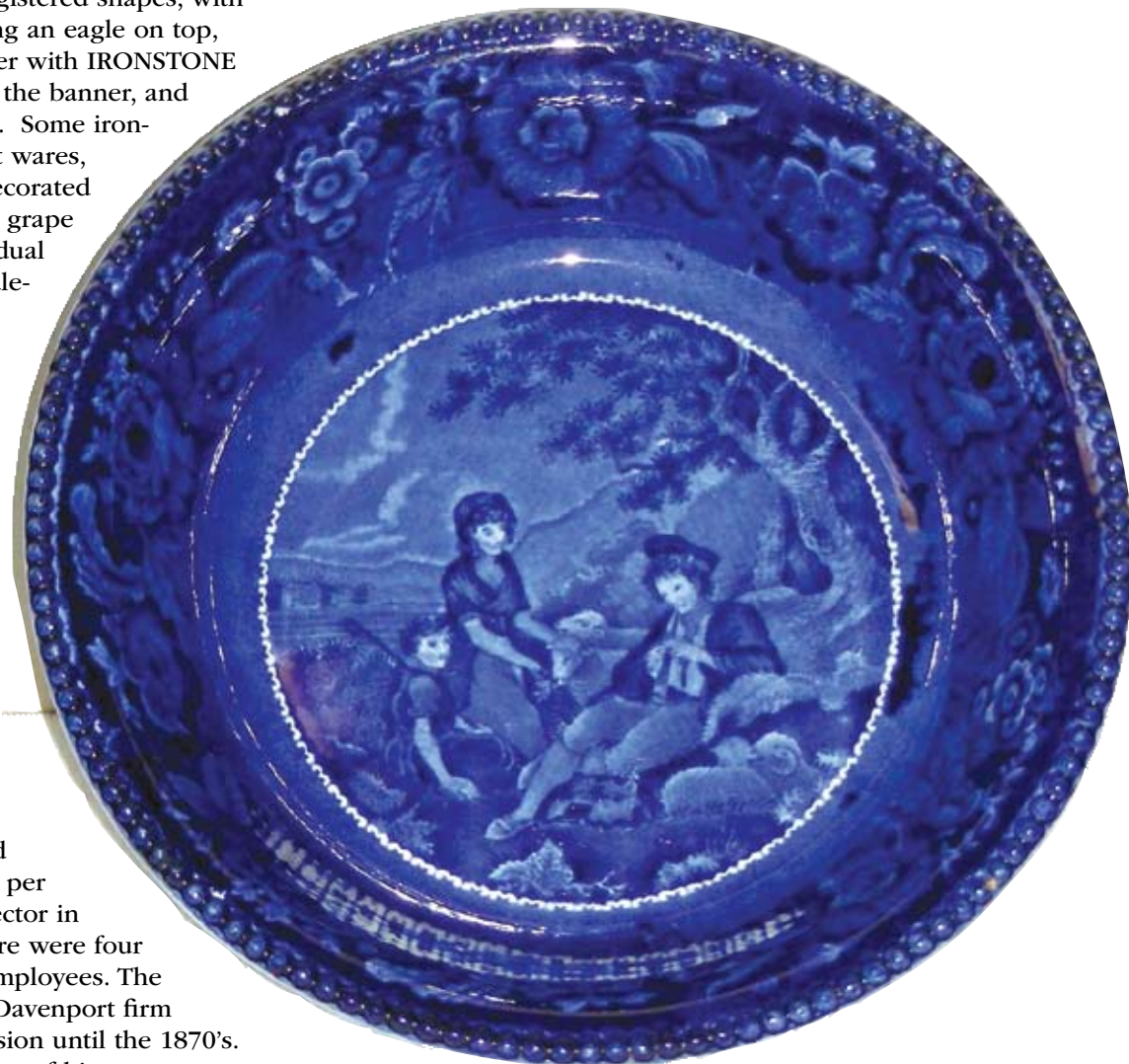


Plate, Commerce, Edward & George Phillips.

plain white ironstone in registered shapes, with a black transfer mark having an eagle on top, then PEARL above a banner with IRONSTONE CHINA, G.PHILLIPS below the banner, and LONGPORT on the bottom. Some ironstone dinner, tea, and toilet wares, with the same mark, are decorated with applied sprigs of blue grape vines. Tea sets have individual cake plates as well as handle-less cups and saucers. A luster decorated painted floral plate, possibly from a tea set, has the Phillips mark.

In 1848 all the furnishings, equipment, and stock in the pottery were auctioned. The factory by that time had three biscuit and five glost ovens, four large hardening kilns, a lustre kiln, and a sliphouse which could process twenty-two tons of clay daily. Production capacity was ten to twelve glost ovens (where the lead glaze was applied) of ware per week. A government inspector in 1841 had reported that there were four hundred to five hundred employees. The works became part of the Davenport firm and remained in its possession until the 1870's. George Phillips, unlike many of his contemporaries, made a success of the pottery business and died a wealthy man. Edward's widow lived in a fashionable area, and George moved from his house at the pottery into the manor house Port Vale, which had been the residence of Enoch Wood, Sr. His holdings included the pottery, land, cottages, his former residence, as well as fifty shares in the Pottery and Newcastle Water Works. He produced an enormous amount of earthenware and ironstone, innovative but not pretentious, with great appeal in the American market. If it were not for his early death, and subsequent end of the business, the Phillips name might be recognized today as one of the prominent Staffordshire potteries.

My thanks to Rodney Hampson for his research on the history of the Phillips family and the New Bridge Works, and to Jonathan Goodwin for sharing the archaeological material.



Pastoral Scenery beaded edge bowl with both the Phillips impressed and printed marks (below).

