

British Transferware in Indonesia 1800-1915

by Jaap Otte

The export of British ceramics to Asia in the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century has so far received relatively little attention in publications about ceramics. This is not surprising, because until the 1990s, there wasn't much known in the West about the millions of British ceramics made for export to Asia. The many plates made for export at the Bell Pottery in Scotland that Edwin Robertson brought back from Indonesia to Great Britain in the 1980s, with dozens of then unknown exotic transferware patterns, caused somewhat of a stir in the Anglo-Saxon ceramics world. The Victoria & Albert Museum and the National Museum of Scotland acquired some of the plates, while most of the collection was auctioned at Christie's in 2007.

The Indonesian archipelago consists of more than 13,000 islands and stretches about 5,120 kilometers (3,181 miles) from east to west. The islands came increasingly under Dutch control starting with settlements in Batavia, today's Jakarta, and Amboina under the mighty Dutch East India Company in the 17th



Fig. 1. Dessert dish with Buffalo pattern, unknown maker, c. 1780-1820, L 8" (201 mm), W 7.5" (190 mm).

century, leading to the establishment of the colony of the Dutch East Indies in 1800. This lasted until modern Indonesia declared independence in 1948. The Dutch East India Company shipped vast quantities of Chinese porcelain to Europe between 1600 and 1800, but very few ceramics went from Europe to Asia during this time.

During the Industrial Revolution from about 1760 until the early 19th century, potters in Staffordshire,

England started using new manufacturing technologies and processes to make ceramics. Scientific experiments with recipes for clay and glazes, as well as improvements in the ovens at the potteries, lead to more refined and durable ceramics. Furthermore, the invention of the transfer-printing technique in England during the 18th century, which made it possible to print a design taken from a copper-plate on the ceramic body, allowed for the decoration of ceramics with complicated but standardized designs by relatively untrained workers, replacing the more expensive, highly skilled painters from an earlier age. While the transfer-printing technique lead to faster production of decorated ceramics, most of the steps in the production process were still predominantly done by hand, like the throwing of the pots, but the employment of a much larger workforce that was organized in specialized departments, combined with the aforementioned technical improvements, allowed for a large increase in production of superior ceramics at a substantially lower cost.

During the 19th century, and especially after 1850, global trade expanded rapidly, assisted by steam-powered ships and the development of the electric telegraph in the mid-19th century. For trade between Europe and Asia specifically, the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869 was of huge consequence because it significantly cut the distance a ship would typically need to sail, for example from London to Mumbai by 7,000 km (4,350 miles). In the wake of these large improvements in transportation, as well as the saturation of the home markets for British mass-produced ceramics, manufacturers in Britain, as well as continental Europe, started to explore new markets for their wares in other parts of the world, including South-East Asia. European trading

companies operating independently from the ceramic manufacturers ensured that the ceramics ended up in the former Dutch East India with the mostly European wholesalers. Distributors there, often of Chinese descent, ensured further distribution to the Indonesian population. This brought the British potteries in direct competition with pottery centers in Asia, predominantly China and Japan, that had catered to those markets for centuries. In general, before the 19th century, European wares could not compete with the Chinese and other Asian pottery centers.

During the first half of the 19th century British manufacturers made some inroads into the market for ceramics used for dining by the local population in South-East Asia, but this

was likely a tiny fraction of the overall ceramics trade in South-East Asia at that time. An early, unusual, example, from the late 18th or early 19th century, is an unmarked leaf-shaped dish from a dessert service with the “Buffalo” pattern, an early blue and white transfer printed chinoiserie pattern (several makers are identified in the TCC pattern database) (Fig. 1). The shape of this type of dish, as well as the decoration, follows earlier examples in Chinese porcelain, but what makes this dish special is its use by the local population in Indonesia as a scoop to serve rice during large banquets.

More typically during the first half of the 19th century, British manufacturers mostly sent dinner plates and bowls to Asia. These were used to



Fig. 2. Plate with Pomerania pattern, John Ridgway, c. 1835, Diam. 10.5" (267 mm).



Fig. 3. Rice dish with unknown pattern, possibly Verreville Pottery, c. 1840-1850, Diam. 14.5" (370 mm).



Fig. 4. Plate with Vase and Flowers pattern, Copeland & Garrett, 1833-1847, Diam. 10" (254 mm).



Fig. 5. Divided dish with Brunswick Star pattern, unknown maker, c. 1840-1850, unknown dimensions, private collection.



Fig. 6. Deep plate with Dagger Border pattern, William Adams, c. 1830-1850, Diam. 10.5" (265 mm).



Fig. 7. Rice dish with Syrian pattern, R.A. Kidston & Co., Verreville Pottery, c. 1845, Diam. 14.5" (367 mm).

serve side dishes, not for individual consumption of food. The decorations were thoroughly European, for example transfer-prints depicting romantic ruins and pastoral scenes, floral arrangements, chinoiserie, orientalist themes, and geometric patterns. The only concession towards demand in South-East Asia was that, in addition to standard plates and bowls, the potteries made relatively low, round serving dishes or shallow basins, some of them very large. These were not available in the home markets, where typical European dinner services included oval platters, not round ones. The shape of these round dishes more or less copies that of the customary porcelain dishes that were in use in Asia during that time. It is undeniable that these striking, often colorful, Europe-

an-style decorations would have stood out among the mostly blue and white of the common Chinese porcelain and were a successful innovation.

A dinner plate with John Ridgway's "Pomerania" pattern depicting the city of Andernach in the Rhine valley in Germany ("Pomerania" #01, TCC Pattern: 1516), and printed in light green, c. 1835, is a good early example of a pattern with European scenery in Indonesia (Fig. 2). The plate was acquired on Sumatra. A plate with the same pattern, in blue, was excavated at *Istana Kampong Glam*, a Malay palace in Singapore, which makes it very likely that these plates were part of a shipment of merchandise that was sold to the local population, and not a personal possession that came to the region with a European

merchant or official or was acquired for their use. Another example, a large rice dish, shows an unidentified transfer print of a bucolic scene with two cows along a river and can be dated between 1840 and 1850 (Fig. 3). The print that was used for the center seems to have been cut down to fit the round shape, most likely from a print that was meant for a large oval platter. A possible maker is the Verreville Pottery in Glasgow, of which rice dishes like these have been found in Indonesia (see Fig. 3).

Other early examples of transferware in Indonesia were made by Copeland, which had what must have been a sizeable export to Indonesia for several decades. The earliest examples date from the Copeland and Garrett partnership, such as a



Fig. 8. Deep plate with Bosphorus pattern, J. Hawley & Co., c. 1850-1860, Diam. 10" (252 mm).



Fig. 9. Rice dish with Siam pattern, Mann & Co., 1858-1860, Diam. 10.5" (265 mm).



Fig. 10. Deep plate with Lasso pattern, William Adams & Sons, c. 1840-1860, Diam. 10" (267 mm).



Fig. 11. Rice dish with Longevity pattern, Copeland, c. 1850-1860, Diam. 12.75" (323 mm).



Fig. 12. Plate with Four Caliphs pattern, Copeland, c. 1853-1860, Diam. 10.25" (262 mm).



Fig. 13. Plate with Malay pattern, W. Adams & Sons, 1861-1869, Diam. 9.25" (236 mm).



Fig. 14. Wall around the grave of Sunan Bonang in Tuban on Java with plates with the Four Caliphs pattern inserted in walls.



Fig. 15. Rice dish with Delhi pattern, Charles Collinson & Co., 1851-1873, Diam. 12" (305 mm).

plate with a chinoiserie pattern called Vase and Flowers (TCC Pattern: 2700) introduced c. 1835 (Fig. 4). An interesting application of a floral pattern is "Brunswick Star", maker unknown (TCC Pattern: 1915), on a large divided dish from Indonesia (Fig. 5). This dish, which resembles a sweetmeat dish, is an effort to cater to the demand for divided dishes that was mostly met with porcelain from China and later Japan. "Dagger Border" made by William Adams in Tunstall (not in the TCC database) is a good example of another early chinoiserie pattern that found favor in Indonesia (Fig. 6). A plate with the same pattern – in brown – was found at the

archaeological site in Singapore mentioned before. Thomas Dimmock's version of the pattern, named "Pekin" and printed in blue, has also been found in Indonesia.

The importance of these and other patterns that can also be found in the European and US markets are not the patterns themselves, which are after all relatively common, but the provenance of the pieces.

There are also several good examples of transferware with orientalist themes that seem to have been designed for the European market with their romantic depictions of the exotic east, but which nevertheless can be found

on ceramics in use by the local population of Indonesia and in other parts of South East Asia. The scenes range from what looks like Ottoman Turkey or the Levant, with a large mosque and minarets, and people dressed in Turkish clothes at leisure smoking elongated pipes and playing an *oud*, a lute-like instrument, in the foreground, to a tiger hunt on elephant back presumably taking place in Thailand, as the pattern name "Siam" seems to indicate. The pattern name of the dish with the Ottoman scene is "Syrian" (not in the TCC database) from R.A. Kidston & Co. of the Verreville Pottery in Glasgow, c. 1845 (Fig. 7). The plate with the



Fig. 16. Left: Plate with Sexagon pattern, Foley Potteries, 1871-1880, Diam. 9.25" (235 mm). Right: Sexagon mark.



Fig. 17. Deep plate with Alpine pattern, Frederick Jones, 1865-1886, Diam. 9.75" (250 mm).

“Bosphorus” pattern featuring a villa and minarets in the background (not in the TCC database) was made by J. Hawley & Co and is different from better known romantic patterns with this name (Fig. 8). The dish with the “Siam” pattern was made by Mann & Co. in Hanley, in business under that name between 1858 and 1860 (Fig. 9). “Syrian”, “Bosphorus” and “Siam” may in fact be early export patterns.

The popularity of these European-style patterns endured in the second half of the 19th century. A good example is “Lasso” from W. Adams & Sons (TCC pattern number 17373), which was later also made by a few other Staffordshire potteries as well as Petrus Regout in Maastricht, and which is quite common in Indonesia (Fig 10). Also, well-known patterns such as Willow, Wild Rose, Asiatic Pheasants, Oriental and Damascus found their way to Indonesia in large numbers during this time.

Throughout the 19th century there always remained a market for these European-style decorations, but the second half of the 19th century is really the period of the special export patterns for the various Asian markets, including Indonesia. Among the earliest are traditional decorations of the type that could be found on

Chinese porcelain that was in use in South East Asia during much of the 19th century and of which during the last few decades hundreds of thousands of pieces have been found in shipwrecks like the *Tek Sing* and the *Desaru*. Copeland’s and Mann & Co.’s copy of a decoration featuring a prominent Chinese *shou* character which stands for longevity dates from c. 1850-1860 (not in TCC database, proposed pattern name “Longevity”) (Fig. 11). The introduction of this pattern may not be a coincidence, as during those years the export of Chinese porcelain to other parts of Asia had come to an almost complete standstill because of the destruction of many of the porcelain kilns in China during the Taiping Rebellion from 1850 to 1864, a period of civil war on mainland China. Hence, the efforts of some British potteries to make inroads in that market made good sense.

Also from this same period dates the introduction of what are likely the most striking British patterns ever made for the Indonesian market, namely those where the main decoration is the elegance of the Arabic script. Copeland was the first one to introduce such a pattern, in 1853, with the names of the first four

caliphs in Islam, and written in the Arabic language (not in TCC database, proposed pattern name “Four Caliphs”) (Fig. 12). William Adams & Sons and the pottery of (John) Hawley & Co. at the Foley Pottery in Foley followed suite, but their plates were made at the request of the merchant firm of Anderson Tolson & Co. in Batavia, now Jakarta. Some of the plates made at William Adams have the pattern name “Malay” (not in TCC database) (Fig. 13). Anderson Tolson & Co was part of a larger firm with branches in London, Liverpool and Cape Town. The texts on the plates advertise the firm of Anderson Tolson and the virtues of the plates on the rim and have a poem or saying in the center, all written in *Jawi*, Malay written in Arabic script. Multiple versions are known. An example of the text on the rim reads: “The owner is named Anderson Hunt / In England he has a prosperous trade / His partner is Anderson Tolson / Who is famous in Batavia”.

Due to the sacred nature of Arabic script in Indonesia, plates like these were inserted in the walls of the tombs of three local Islamic saints on the island of Java and are still highly sought after in Indonesia today (Fig. 14). This is somewhat



Fig. 18. Plate with Makassar pattern, Bell Pottery, 1890/1900, Diam. 10" (267 mm).



Fig. 19. Deep plate with Sarawak pattern, Bell Pottery, 1905, Diam. 10" (253 mm).

ironic, because only a minority of the texts are religious, with the majority proclaiming various sayings, love poems, as well as advertising for the retailer who had ordered the plates.

A rice dish which probably dates from the 1860s has a pattern which resembles a tartan pattern combined with floral sprigs, but which because of the pattern name “Delhi”, and the shape of the dish, was made for the Asian market with certainty (not in TCC database) (Fig. 15). The geometric and floral pattern would have appealed to an Islamic clientele. The dish was made at the pottery of Charles Collinson & Co., in Burslem, Staffordshire, which was in business from 1851 to 1873. This shows that also for some smaller Staffordshire firms the Asian market was important enough that it was worth creating special patterns.

During the 1870s, a new group of patterns for the South East Asian market was introduced by the British potteries. These are the first export patterns that seek to adapt to the taste of the local Malay population. One of the earliest patterns in this mold is “Sexagon”, which the

Foley Potteries of J.F. Wileman in Staffordshire registered with the British Patent Office in 1871 (not in TCC database) (Fig. 16). The plate is printed in two colors, and includes a mark for the merchant firm of C. Houghton & Co. in *Jawi*. Houghton & Co. had offices in London, Batavia and Surabaya, and traded primarily in wool and cotton cloth. Maybe it is no coincidence that “Sexagon” seems to be derived from printed cloth.

It is well known that the potteries copied each other’s patterns. A very popular export pattern with the continental potteries in Holland, Germany and France was the strictly geometrical “Alpine”, which may have been introduced by Petrus Regout, Maastricht, in 1863. It was subsequently used at a number of manufacturers, one of them the pottery of Frederick Jones in Longton, Staffordshire, between 1865 and 1886 (not in TCC database) (Fig. 17). From a large rice dish from Indonesia, D.16”, we know that also J.F. Wileman at the Foley Potteries used this pattern, but interestingly, Wileman gave it the pattern name “Cherokee” (not in TCC database).

Not surprisingly because of its abstract design, “Alpine” can be found in large parts of the Islamic world, from Ottoman Turkey to Indonesia, and was particularly popular in the Middle East.

The high mark in these export patterns was reached towards the end of the 19th century, c. 1880-1900, both in the large number of new patterns that were introduced in rapid succession and in the high quality of the designs. While many British pottery manufacturers had patterns designed for the Asian market, three manufacturers stand out. At the top is the Bell Pottery in Glasgow, followed by the Britannia Pottery of Robert Cochran & Co., also in Glasgow, and William Adams in Tunstall, which, as mentioned previously, had been exporting ceramics to South East Asia since at least the 1830s.

It has been remarked previously that while the quality of the Bell Pottery’s overall production declined during this time period, reflecting the decline in the fortunes of the business, the remarkable line of 25 new transfer printed patterns introduced between 1887 and 1892



Fig. 20. Deep plate with Penang pattern, Britannia Pottery, c. 1880-1890, Diam. 9.5" (241 mm).



Fig. 21. Plate with Hong Botan patter, William V and Thomas Adams, 1882-1900, Diam. 7.75" (197 mm).

are some of the best the pottery ever produced. They combine arts and crafts aesthetics with South-East Asian design elements in a highly innovative and attractive way. One such pattern is “Makassar”, (TCC pattern number 3249) featuring a peacock, leopard and two dragons (Fig. 18). Bell’s pattern names are almost all in Malay, with names such as “Ikan China”, “Keeling Hong”, “Kwantung” and “Kapal Basar”, and in some cases written in *Jawi*. These turned out to be hugely popular and are still common in Indonesia today. The patterns were almost exclusively used to decorate plates; no bowls or rice dishes are known. Most of these Bell patterns can be found in the TTC database. One of the last patterns Bell introduced for South East Asia was “Sarawak” in 1905, a very rare pattern (not in the TCC database) (Fig. 19).

The Britannia Pottery introduced its own, less extensive, line of patterns for the Indonesian market, different in style from Bell’s designs. “Penang” (not in TCC database) refers to an

island that was once part of the British Straits Settlements, and is now part of Malaysia. The pattern seems to depict an archaic Chinese bronze lidded vessel with a lion as a handle (Fig. 20). The quality of their designs as well as the earthenware body was generally not as high as the wares from the Bell Pottery.

The pottery of William V and Thomas Adams in Tunstall had the largest variety of patterns for South East Asia of any of the Staffordshire potteries, with pattern names that are often in Malay, such as “Hong Botan”, “Kim Ki Soah”, and “San Soey Toh”. “Hong Botan” (TCC pattern number 6377) was introduced in 1882. “Hong” refers to a mythological bird, part phoenix, part peacock, while “Botan” refers to the floral part of the pattern (Fig. 21).

Both Bell and Adams made plates printed in two colors, a feature that turned out to be very popular with the local population. For that reason, it is somewhat surprising that the Britannia’s patterns are almost always

executed in a single color, mostly a dark blue or red.

Due to the outbreak of World War I, transportation from Europe to Asia came almost to a standstill, with the result that British potteries were no longer able to export their wares to Indonesia and other parts of Asia. The modern ceramics industry in Japan which was growing fast during these years took over the market. After the end of the war, exports resumed, but British and other European potteries were unable to reclaim the lost markets and continued to lose market share over the next decades.

Through this introduction to British transferware in Indonesia we have seen how this market in a few decades changed from an incidental opportunity to sell pottery with standard patterns, to a very lucrative and huge market that warranted dozens of special export patterns. ♦

Unless stated otherwise, images are of the collection of the author

TCC
20th
Anniversary

2019 TCC ANNUAL MEETING

Birmingham, Alabama

October 17-20

Registration is now open, visit the TCC website for more details!



Copies of Past *Bulletins*

Copies of all previous *TCC Bulletins* are now available to members through the Website (www.transcollectorsclub.org) on the *Bulletin* Archives page.

TCC Bulletin Submissions

Submissions to the *Bulletin* are always welcome; there is no specific deadline. Please send items to bulletineditor@transcollectorsclub.org or by regular mail to TCC Bulletin, 18 Main Street, Middleton, Market Harborough, LE16 8YU, UK. And PLEASE make sure that any photographs or images submitted are high resolution and the text of the article is in editable Word format (not “read-only” format, please). Thank you!!