



Inappropriate Patterns for Children
Database Discoveries – Contribution # 8
Transferware Collectors Club

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Children haven't changed in the past two hundred years, but the concept of childhood and what is appropriate for children has changed. Nineteenth century British children's mugs and plates were created as inexpensive gifts or rewards to teach religion and the alphabet as well as to delight with pictures of animals and children's activities. However, some of the patterns found on this pottery are frightening! Below are patterns that fit the inappropriate or frightening category.

The first pattern, Seal Hunt (Figures 1A & 1B), which was made by Thomas Elsmore & Son (1872-1887), illustrates seal hunting. The molded alphabet border does aid in learning the alphabet, but the hunters who are clubbing the seals would be deemed inappropriate and frightening today.

The next pattern (Figures 2A & 2B) "The Romish Bishop Bonner", which was made by Powell & Bishop (1876-1878), is an odd choice for a child even though it was intended to teach a religious history lesson. Perhaps this pattern was a reward for doing well in Sunday School. Substitute the word Catholic for Romish, as the history lesson is about Bishop Edmund Bonner (ca. 1500 to 1569) who served during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary I, known as Bloody Mary. Actually, Bonner was known as Bloody Bonner. He was able to survive quite awhile during the enormous upheaval of the English Reformation, as he changed his ideas about religion (Catholic, Protestant, Catholic) to that of the reigning monarch. During the time of Queen Mary, who reinstated Roman Catholicism, he burned many Protestants, including Thomas Tomkins. The description of Tomkins martyrdom is quite gruesome, but, as stated on the plate, he withstood it well. The entire text reads: "The Romish Bishop Bonner/ Burning Tomkins hands before his Martyrdom/He was burned in Smithfield Market March 16th 1555./ He suffered with admirable patience and constancy." Bonner was imprisoned for refusing to take the Oath of Supremacy at the beginning of the reign of Elizabeth I (another Protestant). He died in prison in 1569. This is an excellent history lesson but a rather morbid topic for children. Note the source print for the pattern (Figure 2C), which is a woodcut from John Foxe's Book of Martyrs, c. 1570.

Of the many nursery rhymes and stories depicted on children's pottery, "The Death Of Cock Robin" fits the inappropriate category. One side of the mug (Figure 3A) shows the sparrow standing on an arrow and the other side (Figure 3B) shows poor upside down cock robin with an arrow through his breast. The middle of the mug (Figure 3C) displays the first verse of the rhyme, "Who killed Cock Robin?/I said the Sparrow:/With My bow and arrow/I killed Cock Robin./All the birds of the air/Fell a sighing and sobbing./When they heard the sad fate/Of poor Cock Robin."

Although not frightening, the pattern on (Figure 4A & 4B) is inappropriate humor. The title, "Flow Thou Regal Purple Stream" refers to the bloody nose of the boy who is second on the left. One wonders why this particular scene was considered as a pattern for a child's plate. Were the boys heroes for fighting? Was a bloody nose a badge of honor for a young boy? Fighting and bloody noses (from fighting) are certainly frowned upon in the 21st century!

“Early Sorrow” (Figures 5A & 5B) is a sad reminder of the familiarity that the 19th century child had with death. When mothers died regularly in childbirth and siblings succumbed often to disease, one does wonder why a child needed to be reminded of the prevalence of death. However, the death of a pet, in this case a pet bird, is the same today as it was in the 19th century; an inoculation against a greater loss. Still, this pattern would not be saleable today.

The gift for a good and well-loved child in Figure 6 is a mug with the inscription, “Present For My Dear Boy”. The choice of a fox running off with a goose clamped between his teeth is something not conducive to milk drinking.

Although the poem titled “My Grandmother” found in Figures 7A and 7B, has good intentions, it has the unfortunate mention and illustration of a dead dog! The poem, which was written by William Upton, was copied from a picture sheet for children published by William Darton, Jr. in London in 1813. The poem reads: “Who took me in a coach to ride,/Because I griev’d when Puggy died:/And bought me Sugarplums beside/My Grandmother”. The grandmother is doing her best to cheer up her granddaughter, but I doubt the pattern would be given to a granddaughter today.

As mentioned, children’s patterns were often meant to teach the alphabet. The plate in Figures 8A and 8B shows a large and attractive letter “D”. However, instead of illustrating the letter with a cute dog or dear dolly, it is companioned with a drunkard and the rhyme “D Was a Drunk-ard (notice how even the word is falling down)/And had a red face”.

Figures 9A and 9B illustrate a scene from the very popular anti-slavery book “Uncle Tom’s Cabin” by Harriet Beecher Stowe, which was published in 1852. Many scenes from the book were used on children’s plates, but none are as violent as the pattern seen here: “Pay Away Till He Give Up: Give It Him: Give it Him! Uncle Tom Whipped To Death.” The pattern is frightening and a bit sordid.

These are just a few of the inappropriate patterns that I have found during my residence as co-editor with Connie Rogers of the Children’s Subjects category of the TCC Pattern and Source Print Database. I hope you will send along a few of your inappropriate patterns for children for inclusion in the database. The database is a fine repository for these patterns, but perhaps not the hands of your little ones.

Figures on following pages



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Figure 1A



Figure 1B



Figure 2A



Figure 2B

The burning of Thomas Tomkins hand by Bishop Boner, who not long after burnt also his body.



Figure 2C



Figure 3A



Figure 3B

WHO killed Cock Robin?
I said the Sparrow:
With my bow and arrow
I killed Cock Robin.
All the birds of the air
Fell a sighing and sobbing,
When they heard the sad fate
Of poor COCK ROBIN.

Figure 3C



Figure 4A



Figure 4B



Figure 5A



Figure 5B



Figure 6



Figure 7A



Figure 7B



Figure 8A



Figure 8B



Figure 9A

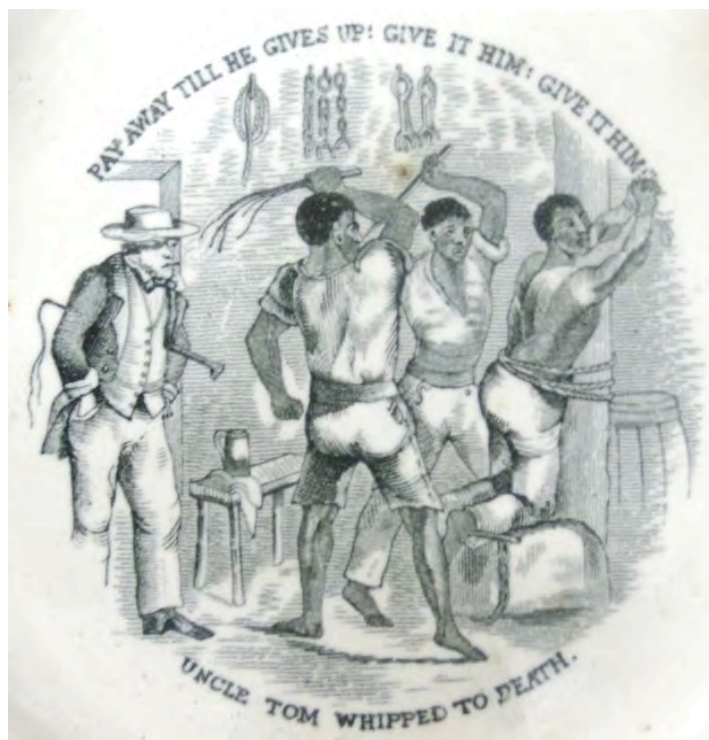


Figure 9B