



Transferware Darning Eggs
Database Discoveries – Contribution # 2
Transferware Collectors Club

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A request from Tony Calvin of Cumbria, England about a possible attribution of a jug to the (John) Wilkinson Pottery of Whitehaven, West Cumberland (1820-1867), led to the serendipitous discovery of the uses of the rare egg-shaped transfer printed objects that I have been fascinated by for years. Tony and I shared information about the jug, and thus I learned about the Wilkinson Pottery and its production of transferware eggs.

I had previously entered eggs into the Database (DB) without knowing much about them. Indeed, it turns out that my initial egg entries were not made by Wilkinson. I did know that they were intended for children, as the patterns matched those found on children's plates and mugs. For example, see **Figures 1 and 2 (egg) and 3 (plate)** ("Visit to the Zebra"). The 2.5 inch egg has part of the "Visit to the Zebra" pattern on one side and "A Present For A Good Girl" on the other side. The plate includes the entire pattern. I assumed the eggs were gifts for good behavior, christening gifts or souvenirs, but without any useful purpose. Tony relieved me of my ignorance by telling me that the eggs were actually darning eggs. At least the hollow 4.25 or 4.5 inch eggs made by John Wilkinson were intended for this purpose.

In case you have forgotten, a darning egg is an egg-shaped ovoid of stone, wood or pottery that is inserted in the toe or heel of a sock to hold it in the proper shape for a repair. Tony added that the Wilkinson eggs are hollow so that a string or ribbon can be inserted. See **Figures 4 and 5**. He informed me that as an egg shape rolls easily and as the floors in a 19th century cottage were usually stone, it made good sense to hang the egg up by the string or ribbon.

The pattern on the egg in **Figure 5** is "The Organ Grinder". The source print for this pattern (**Figure 6**) is from "The Mother's Picture Alphabet", which was published in London in 1862. This not only helps date the Wilkinson eggs to the end of Wilkinson's production, but shows that the eggs were intended for children. All of the patterns on the Wilkinson eggs found in the DB are copied from "The Mother's Picture Alphabet".

If your interest is piqued by darning eggs and/or the Wilkinson Pottery, an excellent resource is "West Cumberland Potteries", Volume II, by Florence Sibson. Sibson has seven exuberantly illustrated pages devoted to the Wilkinson darning eggs. The book is included in the Transferware Bibliography, which can be accessed through the TCC website.

Not all transferware eggs were intended as darning eggs (and not all of the eggs were made by Wilkinson). Sibson has a chapter on Whitehaven Pottery bell/curtain pulls, which commonly feature floral patterns. They are a bit bigger, 5 inches, and the patterns are more in keeping with

what one would expect in a Victorian bedroom. Some lovely ceramic bell/curtain eggs are illustrated by Sibson. Unfortunately, we have no photos of these patterns in the DB.

To find the eggs search the words “darning eggs” in the DB General Search. This search will also show the plates and mugs that used the same source prints. Please let us know if you have any patterned eggs that are not in the DB (or any source prints that we could add). We are always looking for more!



Figures on following pages



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Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 5



Figure 6