

English Shell Edged Earthenware: Alias Leeds Ware, Alias Feather Edge

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Blue and green shell edged cream and pearl wares were one of the standard products of the Staffordshire potteries. Shortly after their introduction in the mid-1770s they became a common item of production for almost all of the potters in Staffordshire as well as the outlying potteries. For the consumer, these wares were the cheapest tableware available with color decoration. This paper traces their evolution, prices through time and provides some insight as to who was using them in the American market.

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Blue and green shell edged plates and platters were once the most common tableware used in American households. Shell edge was the Corelle ware of the nineteenth century. Because they were the cheapest tableware available with color decoration, shell edged wares were not esteemed worthy of saving or passing on to the grandchildren. Thus, what was once one of the most common tablewares during the first half of the nineteenth century is relatively rare on today's antique market. Collector interest in shell edge has been minimal which is understandable, after all, a shelf full of shell edged plates just looks like a collection of frames with the subjects missing. However, when these plates are found with centers decorated in Chinese style patterns or painted with American eagles (*Figure 1*) the interest in them soars.

This reconstruction of the history of shell edge is meant to provide an insight into the role that these wares played for the American consumer from the late eighteenth-century through most of the nineteenth-century. In addition we will be providing a context for shell edge in terms of the other wares with which it was competing along with a basic chronology of the evolution of shell edge patterns and a history of its cost to consumers.

Origins of Shell Edge

Shells have long been an inspiration for decorative motifs. They were an important element in the rococo style that was very popular from circa 1740 to circa 1770. The essence of rococo has been described as "... disorderly orderliness in the use of unsymmetrical forms".¹ France was the center for rococo style which employed systematic asymmetry with undulating wave-like motifs which often included shell elements in their design. French silversmiths, furniture makers, architects and potters employed the rococo style in decorating their wares.² The elaborately decorated products of these artisans, such as French silver and porcelain were expensive and their distribution was limited to the wealthy. On these products, the shell edging was only a minor element of the decoration. A

Catalogue of the Campbell Museum collection of soup tureens illustrates several faience tureens from France and Sweden dating from the 1750s to 1760s which employ shell edging as part of their decoration.³ Shell edging was also used on Chelsea porcelain from the 1750s as part of its rococo style decoration.⁴ In addition, shell edging also occurs as part of the motif on Sevres, and Dresden porcelains. *Figure 2* illustrates a Worcester dish in the rococo style which has a gilded shell edging.

When shell edging began to appear on Staffordshire earthenware in the mid-1770s, it was but a faint echo of the rococo French wares from which it evolved. By the time shell edge was being produced on China glaze and pearlware in the early 1780s, the edging was the decoration rather than an element of a larger design. The earliest shell edging in Staffordshire was on creamware. An absence of shell edged white salt-glazed stoneware suggests that shell edging was introduced after creamware had taken away much of the market for salt-glazed tableware. Records from the Wedgwood Archives at Keele University and Barlaston support a mid-1770s date for the introduction of shell edge on creamware.

Meteyard's *Life of Wedgwood* contains a listing of patterns from some 1774 invoices which included "Blue shell edge" cups and saucers. However, on the same page listing the 1774 blue shell edge, she states that "Shell edge bordering made its first appearance during the summer of 1776".⁵ Meteyard's *Wedgwood Handbook* contains a list of patterns popular in 1774 which includes both blue and green shell edge.⁶ Wedgwood began sending pattern boxes containing seven plates with different patterns to those selling his wares. The assortment of plates listed in the 1775 pattern boxes included a green feather edge plate and one with a purple shell edge.⁷ A purple enameled shell edged plate is illustrated in *Figure 3*. Shell edge is pattern number 83 in the Wedgwood factory book of enameled patterns that was begun in 1774.⁸ Interestingly, the 1774 printed Wedgwood pattern book does not illustrate any shell edged pieces.⁹

The feather edge listed in the 1775 pattern box is an older pattern than shell edge. Today, many collectors refer to shell edged plates as feather edge. A typical feather edge rim sherd is illustrated in *Figure 4*. While we do not have information on when the other Staffordshire potters began producing shell edged wares, the lack of the pattern on white salt-glazed stoneware suggests that the mid-1770s date for the introduction of shell edge by Wedgwood is probably the beginning of its production.

Wedgwood most likely picked up the shell edge motif from its use on rococo decorated French or English porcelain. However, there are a couple of other possible sources for the design which should be considered. One is that Wedgwood was interested in shells and his shell collection could have easily provided inspiration for the shell edged motif on his creamware. This argument can be discounted because according to Meteyard:

During 1778 and afterwards, Wedgwood made conchology his study and formed an admirable collection of shells. From this date may be traced his adaption of these exquisite natural forms of his art. The flatter or valve-like shells were copied for plates.¹⁰

Clearly the collecting of shells began after he had introduced his shell edged wares. That is not to say that shells could not have been a source for the shell edge pattern, however, without a documentation from Wedgwood's papers, the inspiration for the shell edged patterns will always be open to debate.

Another possibility for the origins of shell edge presents itself in the form of drawings of a shell edged plate and soup tureen sent with an order to Wedgwood from an Italian merchant. These vessels (illustrated in *Figure 5*) are very much in the rococo style. These drawings are labeled "Pearl White Ware" in Meteyard's *Life of Wedgwood*.¹¹ Given that Wedgwood did not develop his "Pearl White" ware until 1779, the order for these vessels must date after 1780 and thus it is not possible for them to have been the origins of Wedgwood's shell edge.

Unfortunately, we have not been able to locate the original order with the drawings illustrated in Meteyard. However, while looking for them, Martin Phillips, the Local History Librarian at Keele University found an order with drawings from the Italian merchant Jerome Ippoliti from September of 1782 which illustrated another rococo style of shell edge.¹² *Figure 6* illustrates two plates with the same border drawn in the Ippoliti order, one in creamware, and one in pearlware or China glaze. These plates combine elements of a rococo rim, draping in a classical style, and commonly have centers decorated in a Chinoiserie style. They leave one to wonder who was their father? Then, it must be kept in mind that there were very few people in Staffordshire with a formal education, so the borrowing of patterns from a variety of sources could easily result in such a mix of styles. Clearly, these plates were born in Staffordshire.

Again, it would be tempting to assume that the drawing from Jerone Ippoliti was the inspiration for this variant of shell edge. However, along with the shell edge drawing were sketches for barley corn, gadroon, and feather edge which were ordered in either "white stone ware" or Queens ware. This suggests that Ippoliti was not commissioning new patterns but rather making sure that his order was understood in terms of the pattern he wanted.

Rococo shell edged plates with three sets of draping at the rim such as shown in *Figure 6* were produced by a number of potters. David Barker's excavations of a William Greatbach waster tip produced sherds of this rim type, some of which were made in creamware with enameled decoration. Greatbach went bankrupt in 1782 which places these vessels between 1775 and 1782.¹³ Another probable maker of this variant of shell edge was Neale and Palmer. Sherds of this rim pattern were collected near their factory site when a ring road was being built around Hanley in 1986. Given the proclivity of the Staffordshire potters to copy one another, this type of shell edge could have been produced as early as the mid-1770s to as late as the 1790s. It occurs in creamware, usually with enameled rims or bat printed center decoration. However, the most commonly found examples have underglaze blue edged with centers painted in Chinoiserie patterns on pearlware or China glaze. We have yet to see this pattern in underglaze green which suggests they were out of production by the 1790s. This type of shell edge is rather uncommon in American archaeological assemblages.

The vast majority of rococo style shell edge did not have drapery as part of its edging. They had a simple irregular scalloped rim which varied from potter to potter in the style of the scalloping. Rococo edged appears to have two main variants, one has just the repeating edging around the rim or sub rim of the vessel. Both styles came in blue or green edging under the glaze. Rococo edged vessels with and without the bud are illustrated in *Figures 1, 3, 5 and 17*. These types appear to be contemporary in their production and popularity. Later the potters refer to the type with whirls as "Bird's Eye" edge.

Shell edge quickly became a standard item of production in the Potteries. The best proof of this is the 1783 Staffordshire potters' price fixing agreement which lists twelve forms of tableware, ranging from soup tureens to table plates, available in "edged with blue".¹⁴ Tea wares in the 1783 price fixing agreement were only available in blue painted patterns. In 1783, Hartley, Greens and Company in Leeds issued their first catalogue which illustrated a wide variety of shell edge.¹⁵ It is this catalogue that has led to shell edged being called "Leeds Ware" by antique dealers and collectors, however one should keep in mind that in the Leeds Catalogue, it was called shell edge.

Clearly by the early 1780s, shell edge was being produced on creamware in places other than Staffordshire. In both the Staffordshire potters' 1783 price fixing list and the Leeds 1783 catalogue shell edge was only listed as tableware. By this point in time, shell edge had become firmly identified as a tableware. There are some early creamware shell edged tea wares such as the Wedgwood cup and saucer with gilding illustrated in *Figure 7*, however they are rare compared to the amount of shell edged tablewares. The potters price fixing lists from 1787, 1796, 1808, 1814, 1825, 1846, 1853, and 1859 only list shell edged wares as tablewares.

Popularity of Shell Edge

Three types of tablewares dominated the market from the 1780s to the 1850s. They were plain creamware, shell edge and transfer printed. From the 1780s to the end of the War of 1812, plain creamware, which was called "CC" ware by the potters and merchants, was the most common type followed by shell edged wares. Printed tablewares were not very common before 1815. From after the War of 1812 until sometime in the early 1830s, shell edge was the most common type of tableware with printed wares increasing in popularity as the prices of ceramics were falling. By sometime in the 1830s printed wares became the most common wares and after that shell edge was the second most common tableware until around the Civil War when white granite or ironstone took over and shell edge became rather uncommon in household assemblages.

The increasing popularity of shell edge can be seen in two ways. One is an expanding range of tableware available in shell edge in the potters' price agreements.¹⁶

PRICE LIST	SHELL EDGE
1783	12 types of vessels
1814	18 types of vessels
1846	31 types of vessels

The second way to see the increase in popularity of shell edge is through invoices for ceramics that were purchased by American consumers. Over 300 invoices for ceramics sold to country stores have been assembled to establish the market basket of what ceramics were commonly available to the American consumer for the period 1780 to 1880.¹⁷ From these invoices the purchases from twelve different years have been analyzed. These invoices clearly show the waxing and waning of the popularity of shell edged wares with the consumer. *Table 1* illustrates the distributional curve of shell edge from 1783 to 1858.¹⁸ Shell edge went from just under six percent of the wares in 1783 to close to a quarter of the vessels in the 1820s and back down to less than twelve percent by the 1850s.

TABLE 1

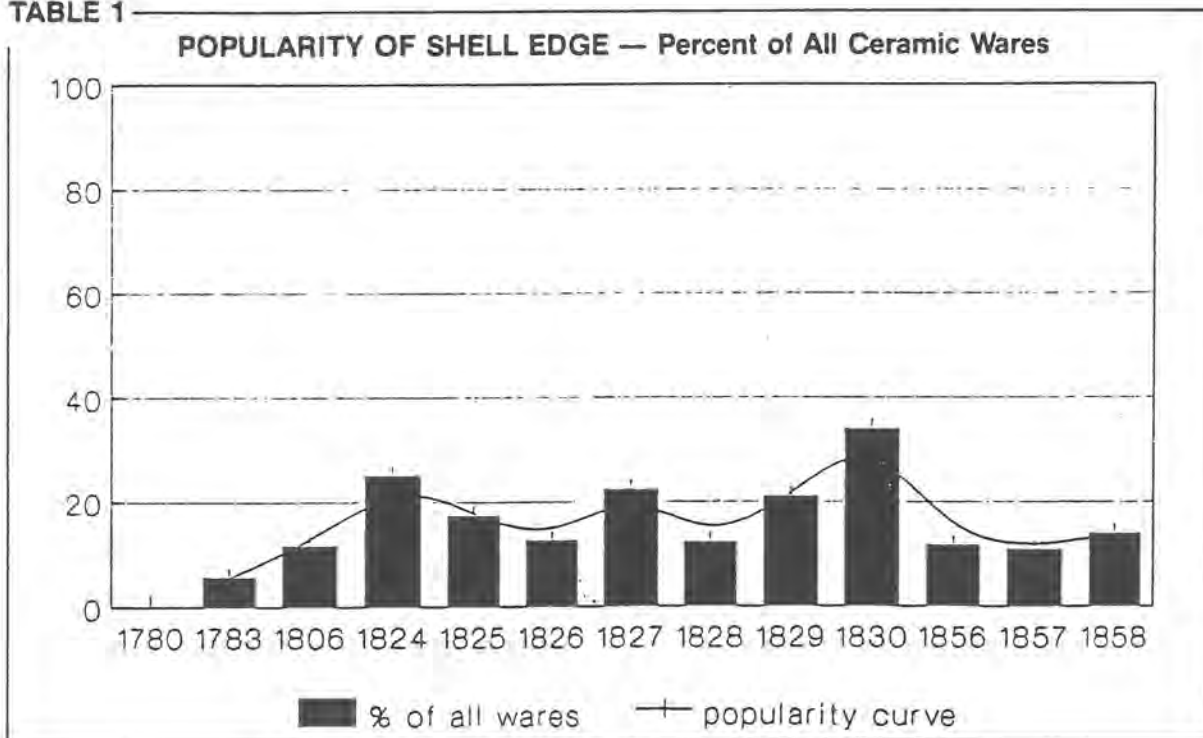
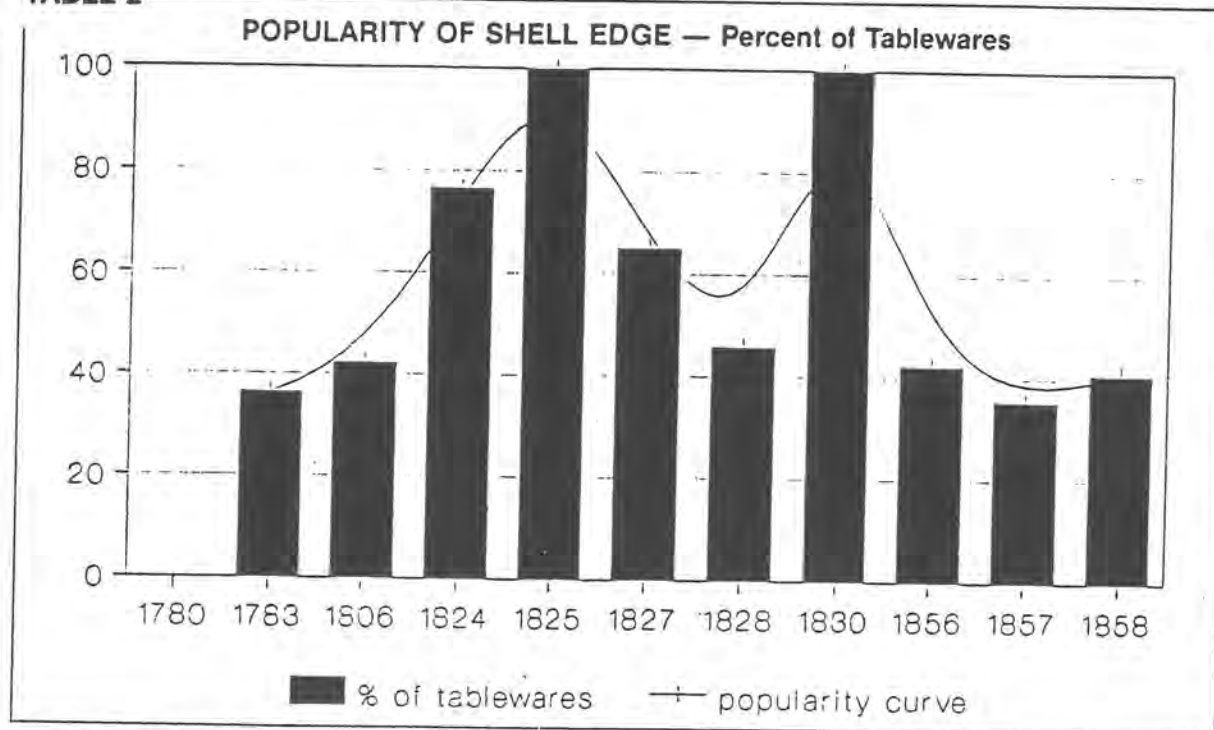
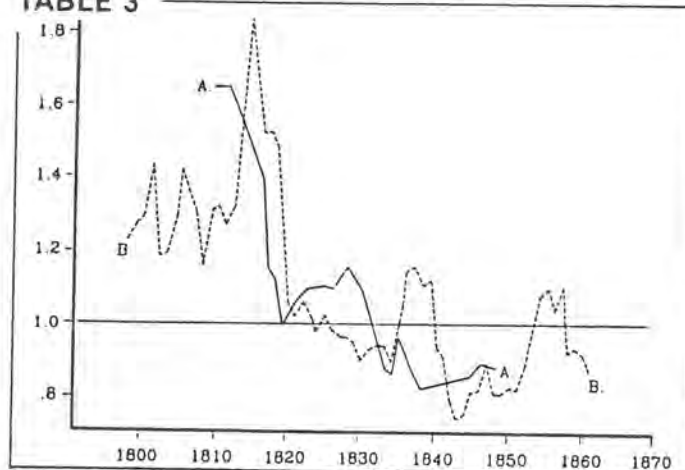


TABLE 2



These figures understate the role of shell edge because they include tea, table, toilet and kitchen ware. *Table 2* presents the percentage of tablewares that were shell edged from 1783 to 1858. Here the reader can see that shell edge went from just over a third of the tableware in 1783 to well over half of the tablewares in the 1820s and declined to just over forty percent in the late 1850s. Preliminary glances at invoices from the 1870s that shell edge made up considerably less than ten percent of tableware by that period.

TABLE 3



A comparison of the Staffordshire ceramic wholesale prices ("A") with the New York All Commodities Index of Wholesale Prices ("B"), both of which are indexed to the period 1824 to 1842. Reprinted from "Changing Consumption Patterns: English Ceramics and the American Market from 1770 to 1840," by George L. Miller, Ann Smart Martin, and Nancy S. Dickinson, in *Everyday Life in the Early Republic* edited by Catherine E. Hutchins, W.W. Norton Press, New York, being published in 1991.

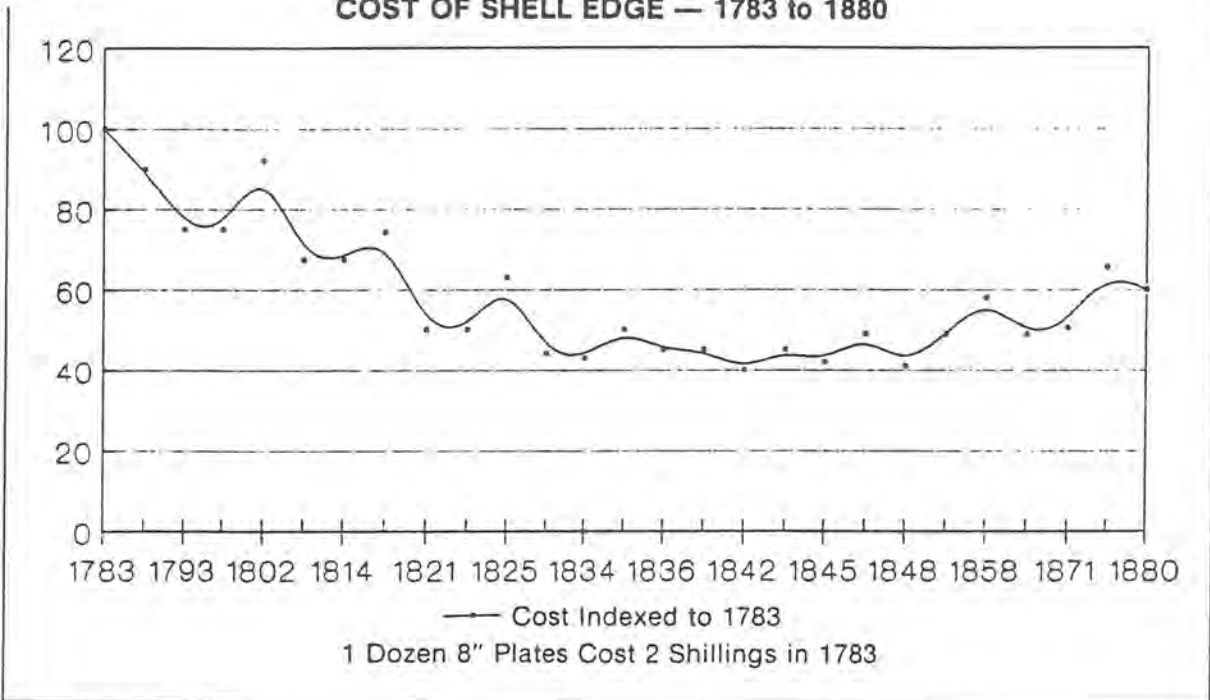
Shell Edge Prices

The changes in consumption patterns are related to falling prices for English Ceramics. *Table 3* shows the combined prices of 48 dozen vessels, one-third CC, shell edged, and printed wares, compared to the New York All Commodities Index of Wholesale Prices for 25 different years between 1809 and 1848. Between 1809 and 1816 there was a considerable fall in ceramic prices. This curve is misleading because it combines the prices of CC, edged and printed wares. The price of printed wares was actually falling faster than the price of other wares. *Table 4* plots the prices of a dozen

shell edged twifflers (eight inch plates) from 1783 to 1880. These plates started out at two shillings a dozen in 1783 and fell to less than a shilling a dozen by the 1820s. There was a slight rise in prices by the 1870s, but the price was still less than sixty percent of what it was in 1783.¹⁹

TABLE 4

COST OF SHELL EDGE — 1783 to 1880



Another way to gauge the falling of prices is to look at the number of shell edged and transfer printed plates one could purchase for the price of a dozen CC plates. *Table 5* presents this information.²⁰ Shell edge and printed plates have been indexed to the price of plain creamware. CC index values for shell edged wares have been generated for 23 different years between 1787 to 1880. In 1787, shell edged plates were sixty-seven percent more expensive than plain CC plates. From 1859 on shell edged plates were only around ten percent more expensive than plain CC plates.²¹

TABLE 5

year	CC	shell edged	transfer printed
1787	12 plates	= 7.19 plates	no information
1796	12 plates	= 9.00 plates	= 2.77 plates
1814	12 plates	= 9.00 plates	= 3.60 plates
1833	12 plates	= 9.00 plates	= 4.50 plates
1846	12 plates	= 10.50 plates	= 5.69 plates

Part of the downward pressure on shell edge was created by falling prices for transfer printed wares. In 1793, printed plates were four-hundred percent more expensive than CC plates. By 1855, they were only fifty percent more expensive than plain CC plates. Shell edge was being squeezed between CC ware on the bottom and printed wares whose prices were falling faster than CC or shell edged wares. After the 1860s, consumption of shell edge was minimal, and it is rarely found on archaeological sites after 1870.

Shell Edge and Its Alias Names

One thing to keep in mind is that shell edge was the cheapest available tableware with color decoration from the 1780s through the nineteenth century. It is interesting to observe the changes in the way shell edge was referred in advertisements as its price and ability to convey status declined.

First let us consider its name. Many of you probably know shell edge by some of the names it has acquired from collectors and antique dealers. Perhaps the most common of these are the terms "Leeds ware" and "feather edge". Feather edge was a distinctive pattern which generally occurred on plain creamware and occasionally on white salt-glazed stoneware. *Figure 4* illustrates a typical feather edged creamware rim sherd. We have not seen feather edge with blue or green edges. The term has been adopted to shell edge because it describes the way a lot of shell edge looks. Leeds ware, as mentioned above, is a term that probably came about because of the amount of shell edge illustrated in the 1783 Leeds Catalogue where it was clearly called shell edge. Now that we have discussed some of the alias names, let's look at what the potters and merchants called shell edge.

The term "shell edge" is in itself a troublesome one. It was the name used for this ware in the following sources:

The Wedgwood factory pattern book started in 1774

The Leeds pattern book printed from 1783 to 1814

The Castleford Pottery pattern book printed in 1796

However, the most common name used to refer to these wares is simply "edged" sometimes modified with "blue" or "green". Edged is the term that was used in the Staffordshire potters' price fixing lists from 1783, 1787, 1796, 1808, 1814, 1816, 1825, 1833, 1846, 1853, and 1859. In addition it is, by far, the most common term used in invoices and account books from 1790 on through the nineteenth century. In the 1820s, a new variant called "embossed edge" was developed which used molded patterns that had little or no connection to the shell motif from which they evolved. Embossed edge will be discussed later.

In short, shell edged is a term which was used more in the eighteenth century when these wares were introduced. As they became common and cheap, the term used for them was shortened to "edged", in much the same way that creamware was reduced to CC ware by the late 18th century.

Who Produced Shell Edge

Shell edged wares were rarely marked, particularly for the period before the War of 1812. Even after that period marking remained rare because shell edge was a low-cost ware that the potters were producing as cheaply as possible. A fair guess would be that less than one in fifty shell edged vessels were marked. We have recorded over 300 marked pieces of shell edge from over fifty different potters. All of the major Staffordshire potters are represented as well as the outlying potteries such as Leeds, Castleford, Northumberland, Bristol, and Devon. The Fife Pottery and other Scottish potteries made shell edge, but we have not seen any marked pieces of their wares.

Given that there were over 100 potters operating in Staffordshire throughout the nineteenth century, it is clear that many of the potters that produced these wares have not been recorded. In addition to the English and Scottish potters that produced these wares, American potters produced some shell edged early in the nineteenth century around the time of the Embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812. The National Park Service has excavated a green shell edged redware plate in Philadelphia which probably was from the period when America was cut off from England during the Embargo or the War of 1812. In the 1920s there was a shell edge revival by some of the East Liverpool, Ohio potteries such as the plate illustrated in *Figure 8*. It would be difficult to mistake the American shell edged wares for the earlier English pieces.

Shell edge was probably produced by all of the major potters and many small ones in operation from the 1780s to the 1860s. After that date, shell edge production was falling off and fewer potters produced it. However, W.T. Adams and Company had an extensive number of shell edged vessels in their price lists as late as 1870.²² It was the process of competition between the potters that caused shell edge to evolve into a cheaper and simpler ware during the nineteenth century.

Marketing of Shell Edge

The simple shell edged ware which Wedgwood and other potters began producing in the mid-1770s was not a breakthrough product such as creamware or jasper. For example, we do not find any of Josiah's letters to his partner Thomas Bentley discussing how to market shell edge by associating it with royal patronage. When it was introduced, its price probably was in the range of the other enamel patterns of the period. It was a respectable product that appears to have been used by people of the middling class. As its price came down its consumption spread to the lower classes. By the 1840s it was commonly found in slave and tenant farmer household assemblages.²³

One way to observe the changing ability of shell edge to convey social status is through the ways they were presented in advertisements to the public. Consider these descriptions of shell edged from 1784 to 1861:

1784 Norwich, England —

... large quantity of foreign and Salopian China, some Blue and Green-Edged Table Services of two Sorts, ...²⁴

1788 Philadelphia —

... Wedgwood's [sic] best blue and green edge dining table sets ...²⁵

1791 New York —

... An assortment of green & blue edged ware in sets or separate ...²⁶

1796 New York —

... green edged table service complete, suitable for genteel, private families ...²⁷

1796 New York —

... complete dining table sets of brown, wine, blue, green edged ware ...²⁸

These advertisements list shell edged as sets of table service and as suitable for genteel families. Shell edge obviously had a fair level of social prestige during the late eighteenth century. This prestige probably lasted until the War of 1812 after which there was a major price drop and transfer printed wares began to take the place of the then old fashioned shell edge. Consider these excerpts from two later advertisements:

1828 Washington, D.C. —

... China Dinner, Tea, and Dessert Sets; ... Blue printed Dinner Sets; Edged and Cream Coloured Ware, & C.²⁹

1861 Portage County, Ohio —

... China, Glass and Queensware. China, Gilt Band, Stone China, Blue Edge, Liverpool, ...³⁰

In these advertisements, edged is not listed in sets and it follows the more prestigious wares of the day. Actually, advertisements listing edged wares are uncommon after the 1820s because they had become standard stock items in general stores which eliminated the need to promote them.

The presence of shell edged conveyed different messages to consumers at different periods as its price was declining. A series of three early nineteenth century prints in the Colonial Williamsburg Collections make this point rather nicely. The first one, *Figure 9*, is titled "Penury" or poverty and shows a table setting with cracked plain creamware. *Figure 10* is labeled "Frugality" and shows a table setting with a shell edged plate, showing that shell edged was a cheap ware fit for working people. The third print, labeled "Choice" appears to include Chinese porcelain and printed wares, *Figure 11*. From these prints we can gain an insight as to how the early nineteenth century consumer viewed these wares in terms of their social class associations.

In summary, shell edge came into production along with a wide range of enameled creamware patterns in the mid-1770s. It became primarily a tableware that had a fair amount of social status for the rest of the eighteenth century and was in use by middling to upper class families. As ceramic prices dropped following the War of 1812, transfer printed wares began to take the place of shell edge and the range of people using shell edge expanded to include the lowest classes of society including tenant farmers and slaves. Shell edge was the cheapest type of tableware with decoration throughout the nineteenth century.

A Chronology of Shell Edge Styles

The Rococo Style with Overglaze Decoration

Rococo style shell edge appears first on creamware which was either left plain, gilded or painted with enamel colors such as purple as seen in *Figures 3 and 7*. Creamware shell edge with enamel colors or plain undecorated have been recorded for Neale and Company, Wedgwood, and Leeds. Marked pieces from this period except for Wedgwood are rather rare. They appear to date from circa 1774 to possibly as late as 1790.

There is another group of creamware vessels which do not have molded shell edge rims, but have been enameled with shell edging such as the saucer in *Figure 12* which has a bat print by Thomas Rothwell that was used by Neale & Company. Again, tea ware was not commonly produced in shell edge, and here the potter has converted a plain creamware saucer to a shell edged one by enameling the rim. *Figure 13* illustrates a Herculaneum plate in the Royal pattern, but it has been given an enameled blue shell edge and a classical center. Shell edged creamware is rarely found in American archaeological contexts.

On-glaze enameling of shell edged continued on into the production of China glaze and/or pearlware. China glazed wares appear to have begun production around 1775 and these wares were highly associated with Chinese style patterns.³¹ Almost all of the China glaze wares that were decorated in a Chinese style were painted in underglaze blue. This may be one of the significant differences between Wedgwood and the other potters. Wedgwood's "pearl white" does not seem to have been decorated with Chinese patterns and he seems to have continued to use enamel patterns longer than the other potters. Wedgwood supplied the Officers' Mess of the Royal Fusiliers with blue shell edged tablewares in 1791 when they were being posted to the city of Quebec. A letter to Wedgwood written by Captain Shuttleworth reads:

*We arrived here about three weeks ago; and I have since examined the earthenware ... it all came perfectly safe and very much approved off [sic]; what is owing to I do not know; but the Blue edge does not stan heat so well as what I should have expected.*³²

Sherds to a couple of pearlware shell edged plates with overglaze decoration were excavated from Fort Beausejour, in New Brunswick which was occupied from the Revolutionary War until 1793.³³ Overglaze shell edged pearlware plates have also been excavated in Colonial Williamsburg. Overglazed shell edged pearlware or China glaze, however, is rare in North American archaeological sites. Given its rarity, one would guess that the shell edged listed in the 1783 Staffordshire potters' price fixing list was underglaze decorated. Overglaze decorated shell edged pearlware or China glaze appears to date between 1775 and 1790.

Underglaze Decorated Shell Edged Wares

Well over 300 marked pieces of blue and green shell edge vessels have been recorded as part of this project. Production of underglaze decorated shell edge in Staffordshire appears to begin with China glazed wares in the late 1770s and continues on whiteware through the nineteenth century

and possibly into the early twentieth century. These vessels predominately have impressed marks with some printed marks in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Blue edge was the dominant color and remained in production through the whole period. Invoices in the pre-1840 period commonly list orders for shell edge to be filled with one-third or one-fourth green shell edge and the rest in blue. Green shell edged was in production as early as blue on creamware, however the early China glaze vessels are almost all decorated in blue, and we have not seen any green shell edge on pieces decorated in a Chinese style. Green shell edge, for the most part went out of production by the 1840s. One occasionally sees underglaze brown, yellow, or red shell edged, but these are rare. Some red shell edge has been found in Texas where more brightly decorated wares seem to have been appreciated. Even back then, Texas was the place where too much was never enough.

Rococo Style

Rococo style shell edged vessels have an irregular scalloped rim which has a disorderly orderliness about it. See *Figures 1, 3 and 17* for illustrations of some typical rococo style rims. Some of the potters producing these wares include: Wedgwood, Turner, Herculaneum, Spode, Astbury, Heath, Leeds, and Rogers. The majority of rococo style shell edged vessels have undecorated centers. Most of these wares were made between 1780 and 1810 when they began to be replaced by shell edge with even scalloped rims. Two rococo subtypes exist, one with small buds or whirls spaced around the plate rims and those without buds. Both types of rococo shell edged seem to date from the same time period.

Even-Scalloped Shell Edge

The irregular scalloped rim of the rococo shell edge appears to have evolved into an even-scalloped style of shell edge. Production of these wares began around 1800 and they were the dominant type until the 1840s. These are three subtypes of the even-scalloped shell edge. One type has impressed straight lines, as seen in *Figures 1 and 17*. Only seven marked pieces of this type have been recorded. They date from around 1805 to circa 1830. The other two types had the curved lines with or without the bud such as existed with the rococo shell edge. *Figure 17* illustrates even-scalloped shell edged plates with the bud. The type with the bud was one of the longest lasting types of shell edge and was probably made by practically all of the Staffordshire potters from 1800 to around 1840.

Embossed Edged Wares

Embossed edged wares evolved from shell edge, but very few of the patterns had any resemblance to a shell edge. Shell edge prices fell following the end of the War of 1812. In an attempt to bring the price up, the potters began producing a variation on shell edged which they called "embossed edge" shortly after 1820. Evidence for the introduction date of these wares comes from a letter written October 22nd, 1822 from the Baltimore importer Matthew Smith to his Liverpool agent. In that letter Smith states:

I hardly think there will be much demand of edg [edged] embs [embossed] ware, at an advance over the price of the plain — I feel obliged however your sending me a sample — and now order a little more —³⁴

Smith's assessment proved correct. In the account book of George M. Coates, a Philadelphia earthenware dealer, embossed edged was slightly higher than regular shell edge until 1827 after which they were the same price.³⁵ Embossed edged wares came in a wide variety of patterns which often included flowers, garlands, fish scales, wheat and grapes. Their production ranged from the early 1820s up into the early 1840s. These wares seemed to be marked more often than other types of shell edge.

During the summer of 1986, the senior author spent three months in Staffordshire as part of a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities for a project titled "English Ceramics in America, 1760-1860: Marketing, Prices and Availability".³⁶ While there, I was lucky enough to stumble on one of the Ralph and James Clews sites in Cobridge which had been exposed by bulldozing. The area was littered with bisque fired waster sherds.

One area of the site produced a large sample of embossed shell edge. *Figure 14* illustrates three types of Clews embossed shell edge recovered from that area. From them it is possible to work out a relative chronology of their introduction by Clews. The sherd on the far left is made up of a cluster of wheat sheaths, grapes and blades of grass. Because six of the eight sherds of this pattern were from worn molds, and they were the least common type present, it appears this was the earliest of the three patterns. The middle sherd of *Figure 14* is of a type that sometimes occurred with a picture of Lafayette in the center to celebrate his return visit to the United States in 1824. A plate of this type of embossed edged with Lafayette is illustrated in *Figure 15*. It has garlands which seem appropriate for such a plate. The pattern on the right in *Figure 14* is a simple series of fern boughs coming off a rope-like border. Slightly over half of these sherds were from crisp new molds suggesting that this was the latest pattern. If Clews introduced their first embossed edged pattern between 1820 and 1822, its production may well have continued past the production of subsequent patterns. The second pattern may have been introduced for the Lafayette visit in 1824. This type has shown up on a number of archaeological sites including the Franklin Glass Works in Portage County, Ohio which was occupied from 1824 to 1832. The pattern with the embossed fern boughs may have been introduced a couple of years later after the garland pattern. Fortunately, David Barker has been able to conduct excavations at this site, so we can expect to hear more about it in the future.

Unscaloped Shell Edged with Impressed Patterns

Shell edged prices continued to fall with the prices of other ceramics. One way in which the potters seemed to compensate for this was to simplify their patterns by eliminating the scalloping and using shallow repetitive motifs as seen in *Figure 17*. These wares became common in the 1840s and 1860s with some types lasting into the 1870s. One possible reason for eliminating the scalloping may have been the mechanical jigger for throwing plates which began to be widely used by the 1860s. By this time, shell edge had become a very minor item of production, and there were very few varieties of patterns in production. Unscaloped shell edged was almost limited to plates and platters which were thick and blue edged.

Unscaloped and Unmolded Shell Edge

At the end of its production, shell edge became a simple painted pattern on plain unscaloped and unmolded plates. Examples of this occur as early as the 1850s on plates produced by Cotton and Barlow, but the bulk of them seem to occur in the period from around 1870 to 1890. Some of these occur with printed marks, and some have been recorded with England as part of their mark suggesting that they date after the 1891 McKinley Tariff, such as the plate in *Figure 16*. By this time, blue is the only color in use and their production was dropping off to nothing.

Conclusion

Shell edge was one of the long term bread-and-butter products of the Staffordshire potters from around 1775 into the end of the nineteenth century. Early on it became associated with tableware and was available in sets for "genteel families". As its price declined, shell edge became the cheapest tableware available with color decoration and its consumption expanded to the point where it was the most common tableware in use by the 1820s. By that date, it had lost its utility as a vehicle for conveying social status and was showing up in tenant farmer and slave households. As the prices for English ceramics were dropping, shell edge was simplified, and the range of vessel forms became restricted to plates and platters with blue edges. Shell edged was squeezed from the market by falling prices for transfer printed wares which made it easier for the consumer to select printed wares and later white granite wares. After shell edge prices were lowered to within ten percent of the cost of plain CC wares, their prices could not be lowered any more. With saturated markets and changes in taste, shell edge production and consumption declined almost to nothing by after the 1860s.

* * * ACKNOWLEDGMENTS * * *

Because the great majority of shell edged wares were not marked by their makers, this paper has depended on friends and colleagues who have passed on information on marked pieces. Over seventy people have provided information to the senior author for this paper, and it obviously will not be possible to acknowledge them all at this time. This research began with the recovery of a Cotton and Barlow marked shell edged plate from the Brigham Young privy in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1967. However, the first block of research time was provided by the St. Mary's City Commission which resulted in a paper on shell edged being presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology meetings in 1973. Later, Parks Canada provided another block of time to work on the shell edge project which enabled a basic chronology to be pulled together. A preliminary manuscript on shell edged was completed at Parks Canada in 1983, however so much new information had been assembled since then, that it was decided to start anew and begin working on shell edge as a joint project.

During 1979 and 1989 the senior author had fellowships to Winterthur Museum in Winterthur, Delaware which enabled me to record the largest collection of marked shell vessels in the country and to assemble the information on consumption levels. Most of the information on prices and marketing in this study was collected as part of the *English Ceramics in America, 1769-1860: Marketing Prices and Availability Project* which was funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (Grant RO-21158-86). This grant enabled the senior author to spend three months in Staffordshire during the summer of 1986 working in the Wedgwood, Spode, Minton and other archives. The authors are planning on working towards a monograph on shell edge and would appreciate having any information on marked shell edged vessels.

While it is not possible to thank everyone who has contributed information to this study, the following people deserve special thanks: Arlene Palmer Schwind, Susan Myers, Reggie Blaszyk, J. Jefferson Miller II, Amanda Lange, Garry W. Stone, Dennis Basler, Lynne Sussman, Louise Lapine, Arnold R. Pilling, Gordon L. Grosscup, Richard McKinstry, Neville Thompson, Dorothy Griffiths, Catherine Sullivan, Stanley Vanderland, Robert Copeland, Gaye Blake Roberts, Martin Phillips, Pat Halfpenny, David Barker, David Furniss, Elizabeth Collard, Pamela Cressey, Coleman S. Dimiter, Margaret L. Fields, Ivor Noel Hume, Tamera Mams, Williams Pittman, Georgeanna H. Greer, Silas Hurry, Tom Kenyon, Lynne Lewis, Diana Edwards, Barbara G. Teller, J. Mark Wittkofski, Charlotte Wilcoxon, Jonathan Rickard, Ann Smart Martin, Nancy S. Dickinson, and Lisa Hunter.

* * * * *

FOOTNOTES

¹F. W. Garner, *English Delft Ware*. (D. Van Nostrand, 1948), p. 18.

²Rene Huyghe, editor, *Larousse Encyclopedia of Renaissance and Baroque Art*. (Paul Hamlin, London, 1964), pp. 350-351.

³John C. Austin, *The Campbell Museum Collection: The Ceramics*. (The Campbell Museum, Camden, New Jersey, 1969), numbers 58, 59, 60, 68, and 69.

⁴*Ibid*, number 48.

⁵Eliza Meteyard, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*. Volume Two (Hurst and Blackett, Publisher, London, 1866), p. 345.

⁶Eliza Meteyard, *The Wedgwood Handbook*. Reprint of 1875 edition (Timothy Trace, New York, 1963), p. 330.

⁷*Ibid*, p. 330.

⁸Wolf Mankowitz, *Wedgwood*. (Spring Books, London, 1966), pp. 69-82.

⁹The Wedgwood 1774 pattern book has been reproduced in Kathy Niblett's article "A Useful Partner - Thomas Wedgwood 1734-1788." *Northern Ceramic Society Journal*. Volume 5 (1984), see pages 9-17.

¹⁰Meteyard, *op. cit.*, *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, Volume 2, pp. 346-347.

¹¹*Ibid*, pp. 482-483.

¹²Order form Jerome Ippoliti to Josiah Wedgwood dated September 29th, 1782. Wedgwood Archives, Keele University, Keele, Staffordshire, Catalogue number 6261-8.

¹³David Barker, "William Greatbach - New Light on 18th Century Ceramics". *Thirty Third Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*. pp. 11-19, see p. 12.

¹⁴The 1783 Staffordshire potters' price fixing agreement has been reprinted in the *Journal of Ceramic History*, Number 8, 1975 in an article by Arnold R. Mountford titled "Documents relating to English Ceramics of the 18th and 19th Centuries." See p. 9.

¹⁵Plates from the 1783 Leeds catalogue are incorporated in a later edition printed on paper with an 1814 water mark which has been reproduced in Donald Towner's *The Leeds Pottery*. (Taplinger Publishing Co., Inc., New York, 1965).

¹⁶The 1814 Staffordshire potters' price fixing list has been reprinted in "George M. Coates, Pottery Merchant of Philadelphia, 1817-1831" by George L. Miller, *Winterthur Portfolio*. Volume 19, Number 1, Spring 1984. See pp. 42-43.

¹⁷These invoices were gathered during research funded by a National Endowment for the Humanities research grant for a project titled "English Ceramics in America, 1760-1860: Prices, Marketing and Availability" NEH Grant RO-21158-86 and during a DuPont Fellowship to Winterthur Museum in the fall of 1989.

¹⁸The data in *Table 1* was taken from "The Market Basket of Ceramics Available in Country Stores from 1780 to 1880" by George L. Miller. Paper presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology meeting in Tuscon, Arizona, January 1990. The data from the years 1783 and 1806 is from two invoices to two importers. Data for the years 1824 to 1830 was from the wares purchased by a country merchant in New Jersey. The data from 1856 to 1858 was from a store in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹Prices used to generate these index values were taken from Staffordshire potters' invoices of wares imported into the American market.

²⁰The 1787, 1796, 1814, 1833 and 1846 prices are from Staffordshire potters' price fixing agreements.

²¹George L. Miller, "A Revised Set of CC Index Values for Classification and Economic Scaling of English Ceramics from 1787 to 1880". Forthcoming in *Historical Archaeology*, 1991.

²²A page of the 1870 price list listing CC, Edged, Painted and Willow has been reprinted in David A. Furniss' *An Account of William Adams*. (n.d. Leeds, England), see p. 13.

²³George L. Miller, "A Tenant Farmer's Tableware. Nineteenth-Century Ceramics from Tabb's Purchase". *Maryland Historical Magazine*. Volume 9, Number 2 (1974), pp. 197-210. William H. Adams and Sarah Jane Boling, "Status and Ceramics from Planters and Slaves on three Georgia Coastal Plantations". *Historical Archaeology*. Volume 23, Number 1 (1989), pp. 69-96.

²⁴Advertisement from *Norwich Mercury*, England July 10th, 1784, taken from Bevis Hillier's *Master Potters of the Industrial Revolution: The Turners of Lane End*. (Cory, Adams & MacKay, London, 1965), p. 29.

²⁵Advertisement collected by Arlene Palmer Schwind from the *Philadelphia Herald*. (February 7th, 1788).

²⁶Advertisement in the *New York Daily Advertiser*. (January 1st, 1791). In Rita S. Gottesman's *The Arts and Crafts in New York 1777-1779; Advertisements and News Items from New York Newspapers*. (New York Historical Society, New York, 1954), p. 100.

²⁷*Ibid.*

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹Advertisement from September 20th, 1828 collected by Karen D. Boring, "A Survey of Ceramic Advertisements in *The National Daily Intelligencer 1827-1837*". *Manuscript in possession of the author.*

³⁰Advertisement from *The Portage County Democrat*. (March 27th, 1861, Ravenna, Ohio).

³¹George L. Miller, "Origins of Josiah Wedgwood's 'Pearlware' ". *Thirty-Fourth Annual Wedgwood International Seminar*. (1989), pp. 167-184.

³²Elizabeth Collard, *Nineteenth-Century Pottery and Porcelain in Canada*. (McGill University Press, Montreal, 1967), p. 107.

³³Sherd 2E23J3.109 in Parks Canada's collections in Ottawa, Ontario.

³⁴Matthew Smith Letterbook, 1822-1830, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore.

³⁵George M. Coates Account Book, Downs Manuscript Collection, Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

³⁶National Endowment for the Humanities Grant number RO-21158-86. George L. Miller, Project Director, Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

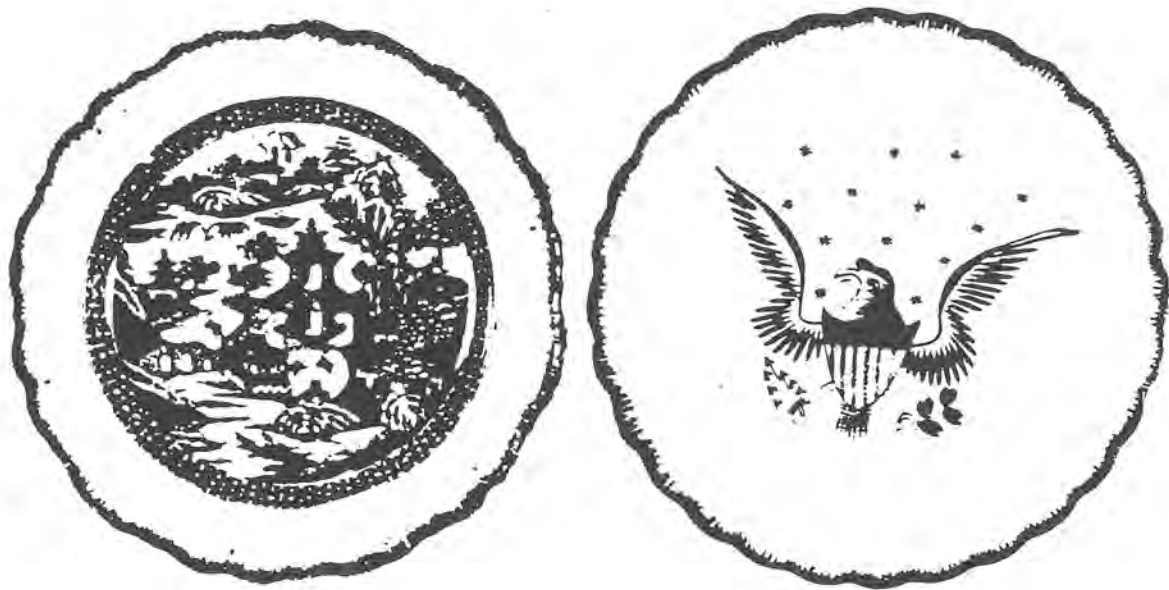


Figure 1. (Left) A pearlware twiffler plate with a rococo shell edged rim and transfer printed center. 8 inches in diameter. Both the rim and the center are under-glaze decorated in an olive-brown color. The plate is marked with an impressed "IH" which according to Godden, is a mark probably used by Joshua Heath from ca. 1780 to 1800. This twiffler is a very early example of brown printing under-the-glaze and probably dates from ca. 1790 to 1800. (Right) A pearlware twiffler with an even scalloped shell edged rim with impressed straight lines. 8¼ inches in diameter. Underglaze painted, blue rim, eagle in brown, blue, mustard yellow and olive green. Probably dates from ca. 1815 to ca. 1825. All vessels illustrated belong to the authors' collections unless otherwise noted.

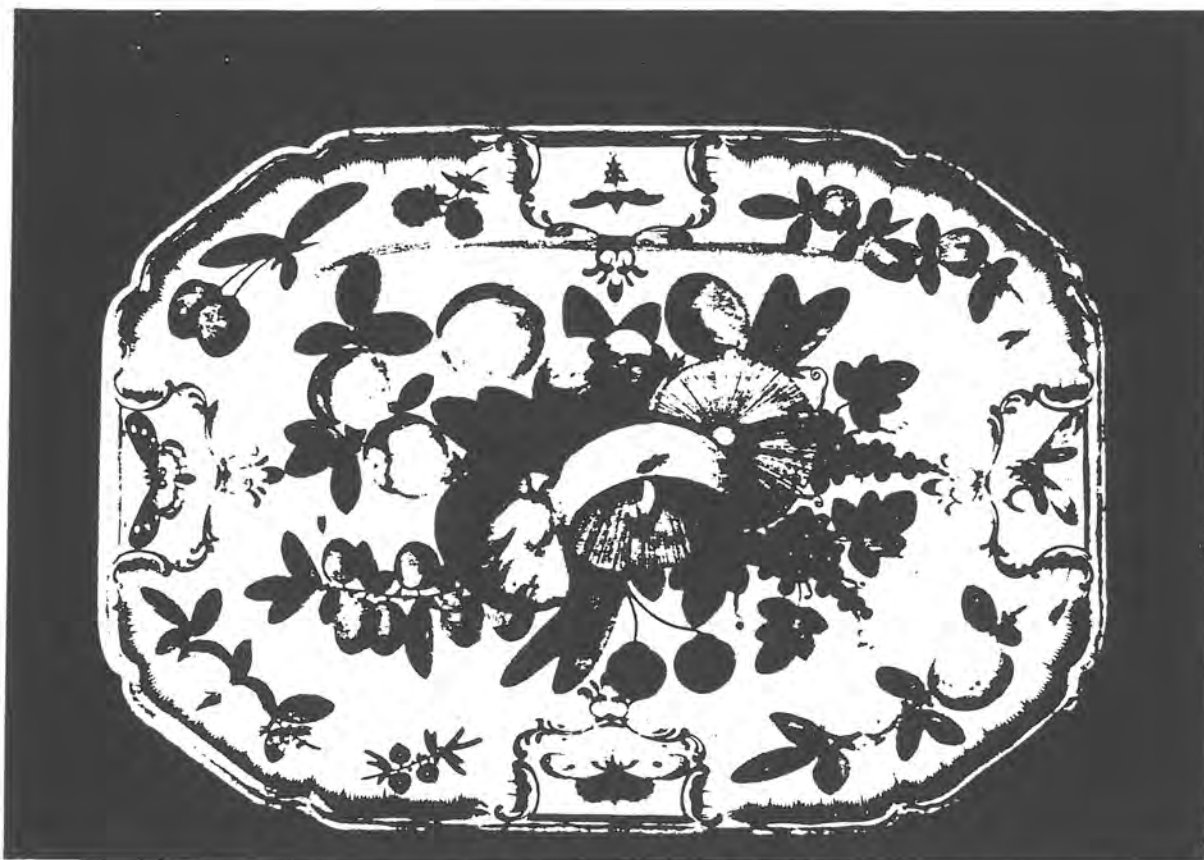


Figure 2. Worcester soft-paste porcelain dish with polychrome enameling and shell-edge gilded decoration. From the "Duke of Gloucester" Service. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length. Ca. 1775 to 1780. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

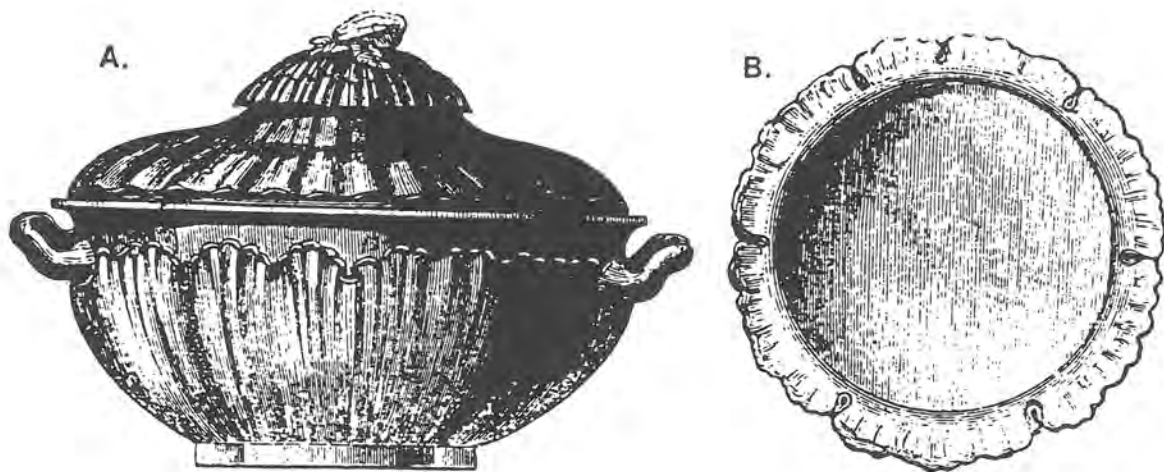


Figure 5. Drawing of a soup tureen and plate from an Italian order to Josiah Wedgwood. These illustrations are from Eliza Meteyard's *The Life of Josiah Wedgwood*, Volume Two, pages 482 and 483. Because these were ordered in "pearl white" they must date after Wedgwood's development of this ware in 1779.

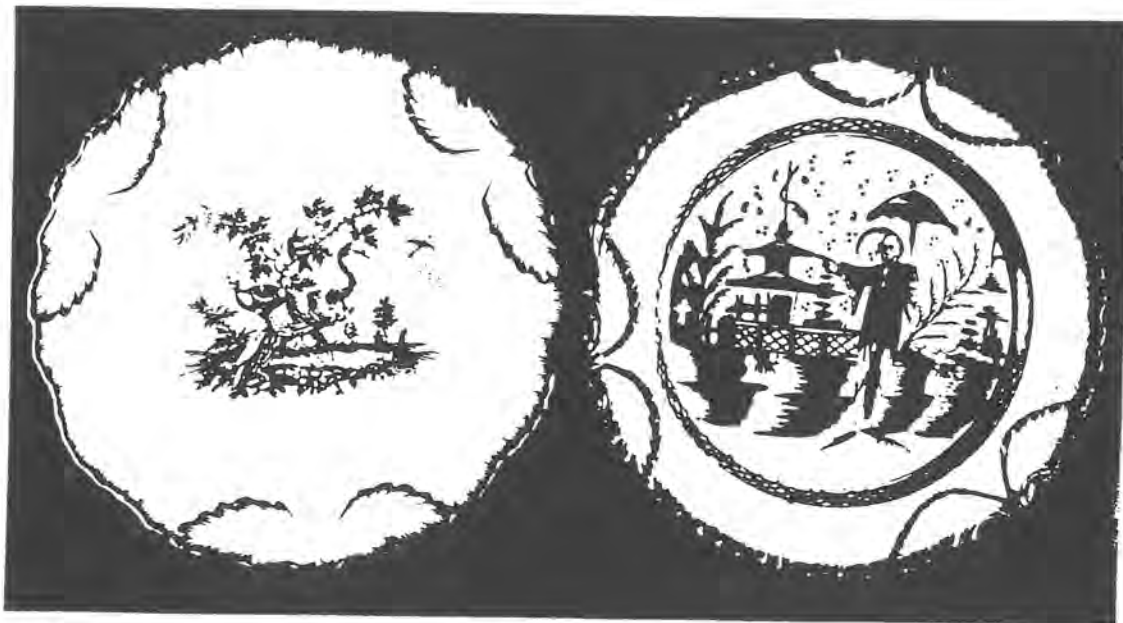


Figure 6. (Left) A creamware plate with shell edging molded in a rococo style with classical bunting, 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ inches in diameter. The rim is enameled black as is the bat printed center. Possibly Neale and Palmer. Probably made in between ca. 1778 and 1785. (Right) A pearlware or China glazed plate with the same rococo style rim with classical bunting, 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. The Center and rim are painted in blue under-the-glaze. Ca. 1778 to ca. 1790.



Figure 7. A creamware handled cup and saucer with shell edge molding and gilded decoration. Height of cup $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches; diameter of saucer $4\frac{2}{3}$ inches. Impressed mark "wedgwood". Ca. 1775 to 1780. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

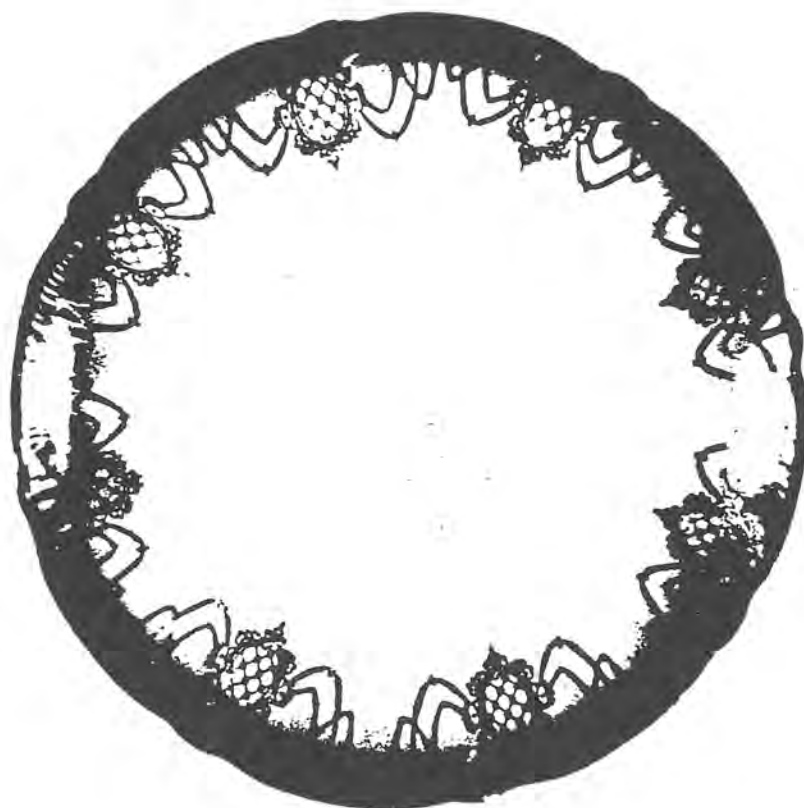


Figure 8. A whiteware plate with shell edging covered by a flowing blue under the glaze and "bright gold" or "liquid gold" gilding which was applied with a rubber stamp. $7\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter. Most likely made in East Liverpool, Ohio in the 1920s.



Figure 9. An early 19th-century acquaint with hand coloring, titled "Penury" which depicts a meager meal of dried fish and turnips served on a broken, undecorated creamware plate. Colonia! Williamsburg Foundation.

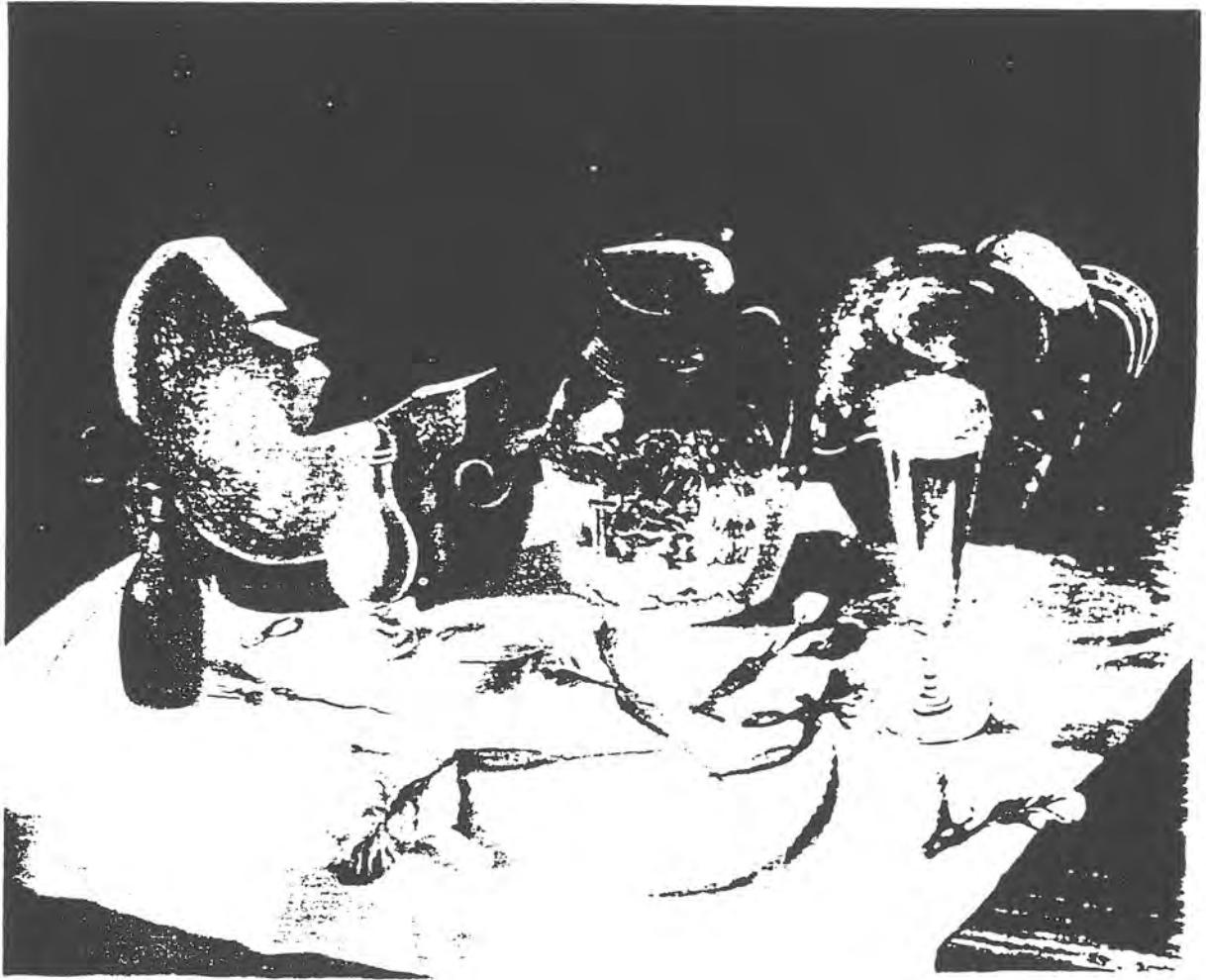


Figure 10. An early 19th-century aquatint with hand coloring, titled "Frugality" which depicts a humble meal of bread, cheese and greens served on an even-scalloped blue-shell edged plate with impressed straight lines at the rim. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation



Figure 11. An early 19th-century aquatint with hand coloring, titled "Choice". This table setting appears to have the preparations for a hot rum drink using a silver luster jug, Chinese porcelain plate and what appears to be a transfer printed bowl. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

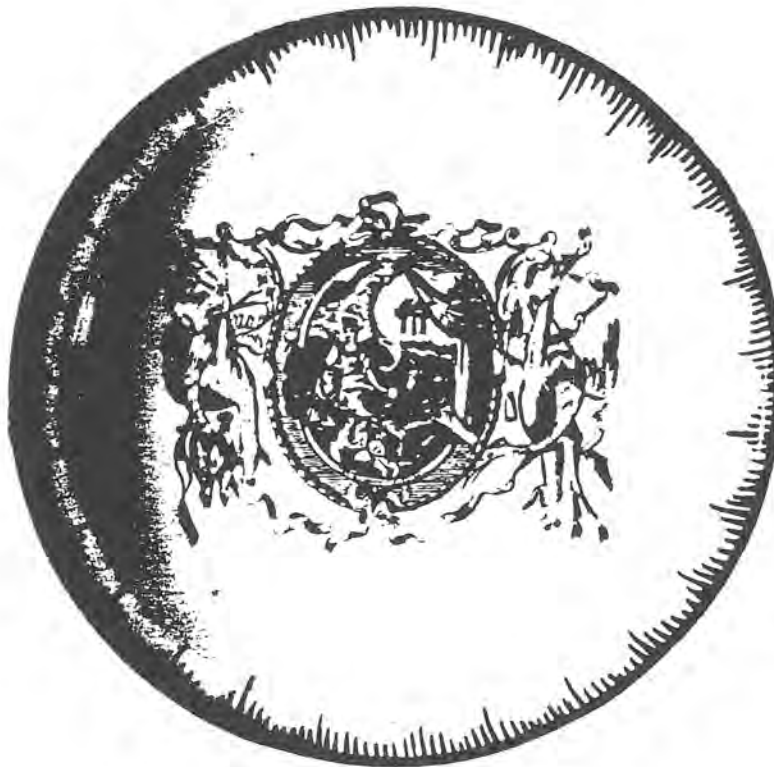


Figure 12. A creamware saucer which has been turned into a piece of shell edge with enameled edging. 5 inches in diameter. The center bat print by Thomas Rothwell titled "Let Wisdom Unite Us". The Smithsonian has a creamware shell edged platter with this print that is marked Neale & Co. The piece probably dates between ca. 1778 and 1785.

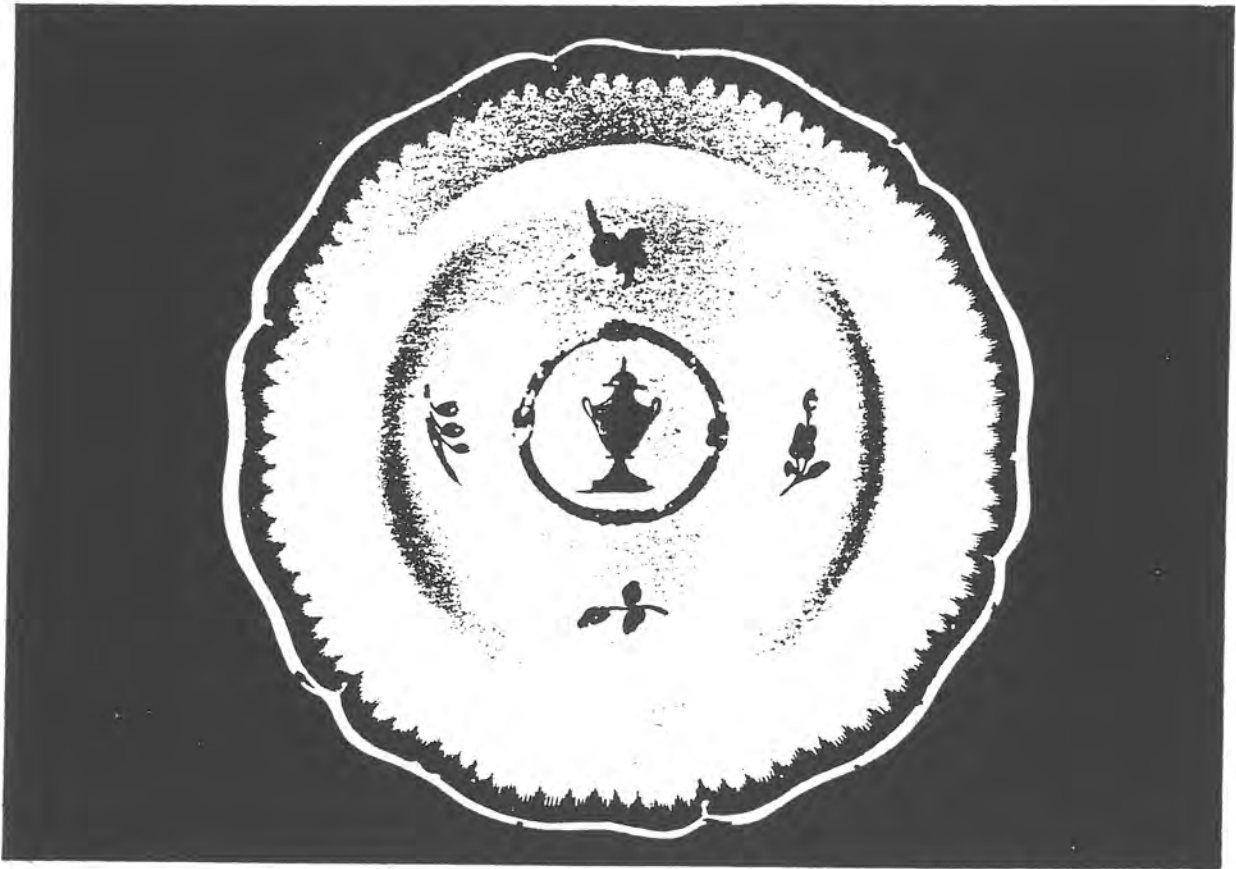


Figure 13. A creamware plate in the Royal pattern which has enameled blue shell edging along with an enameled center painted in a classical style. 10 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter. Marked Herculaneum. Dates between 1793 and ca. 1810.



Figure 14. Bisque fired waster sherds of embossed edge ware from the Ralph and James Clews' Bleak Hill works in Cobridge, Staffordshire. The pattern on the left was probably introduced shortly after 1820 and may have remained in production until ca. 1830. The center pattern is sometimes associated with plates Clews produced with the figure of Lafayette to celebrate his 1824 return visit to the United States. This garland pattern probably continued in production until Clews went bankrupt in 1834. The sherd on the right appears to have been the last embossed pattern introduced by Clews and may have been in production from ca. 1826 to 1834. All three of these types are known in blue and green edged pearlware. Other potters appeared to have copied at least the center pattern, and possibly all three have been copied by other potter or may have been borrowed by Clews from other potters.



Figure 15. A Ralph and James Clews pearlware embossed edge plate produced to celebrate Lafayette's 1824 return visit to the United States. $8\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter. This pattern remained in production for several years after Lafayette's visit. However, the vast majority of plates with this rim pattern had plain undecorated centers.

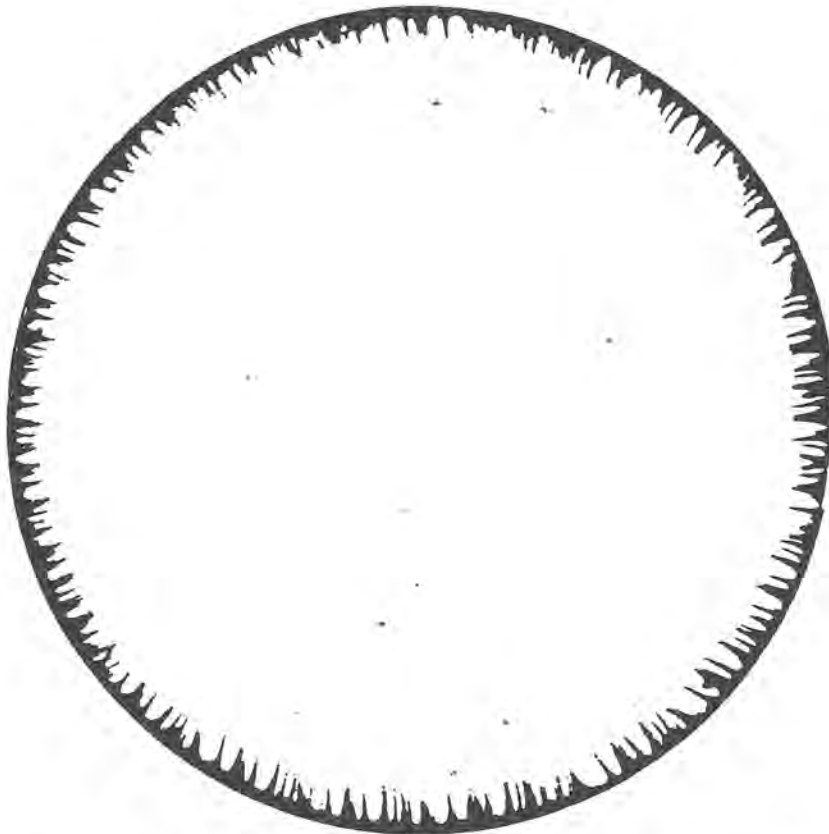


Figure 16. A John Meir & Sons blue shell edged plate with an unscaloped and unmolded rim. 9 $\frac{1}{8}$ inches in diameter. It has a printed lion and unicorn mark that includes "England". According to Geoffrey Godden, Meir & Sons added "England" to their mark around 1890. This plate would have been produced between 1890 and 1897 when the firm went out of business. This is a late example of unmolded and unscaloped shell edge. The McKinley Tariff of 1891 required the country of origin to be included on wares imported into America. The fact that shell edged plates with the countries of origin on them are rare is another indication of the declining production of these wares by the 1890s. Unscaloped and unmolded shell edged wares generally date from the 1870s to the 1890s.

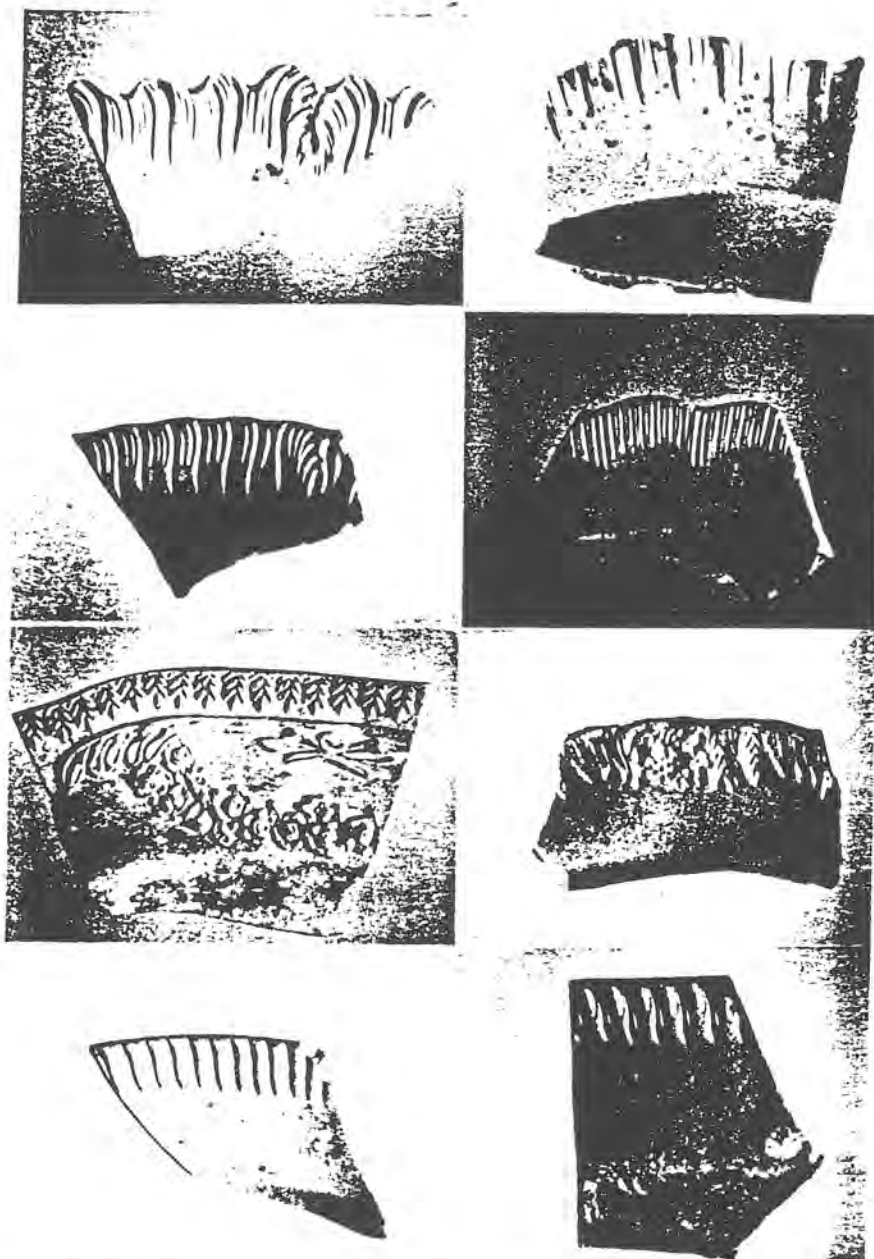


Figure 17. Bisque fired shell edge waster sherds from the Staffordshire towns of Hanley, Cobridge, and Burslem. These sherds would have been edged in blue or green and most of them would have been pearl or white wares. Top row: two examples of rococo shell edging. Second row: (left) an even scalloped shell edged sherd with the impressed bud motif, (right) an even scalloped shell edged sherd with impressed straight lines. Third row: two embossed shell edged sherds from the Clews works, see captions for Figure 14. Bottom row: two unscalloped shell edged sherds with simple shallow repetitive molding.