



### A Teacup with a Secret

The skill and invention of British potters, from the mediaeval makers of cooking pots to the porcelain seals of Charles Gouyn, are an amazing range. Historic ceramics show most aspects of human life occurring over time, and can shed light on ideas and activities.

In a spirit of interest but very limited understanding, I bought this cup and saucer because it seemed to illustrate a specific message that I couldn't clearly explain.

First I should describe it. It is well-potted, with the back of the saucer gently moulded in concentric panels, and the handle very lightly ribbed. The shape is good. The decoration is black printing, with enamelled black detailing on handle and rim. There is a gold line at the rim and a fine gold motif in the bottom.

The printing is of part of the last verse of the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to Timothy, the Bishop of Ephesus, and is a blessing "The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy Spirit" 2 Timothy 4 Chap'r 22v. Feb'r - 20. 1827". This is printed three times on both cup and saucer, in bold copperplate, making a harmonious pattern.

Many years ago I attended a school called St. Timothy's which, at the time had a formative and worthwhile effect on me. I have since had an affectionate feeling for that saint, which probably encouraged my interest in the cup and saucer.

However, attempts to discover anything at all about it have come to nothing. Its secret is intact. I started with the thought that it is very likely from a Nonconformist group, as they were appreciative of Saints, and valued them;

though less likely to worship them than the 19<sup>th</sup> Century Church of England, and less likely to illustrate the Saint. A great deal of Methodist china shows John Wesley, often with added virtuous sayings, and there are complete occasional pieces with moral or religious sentiments, (Thou God seeest me); but biblical verses are very rare. Wesleyan china, is not unusual, and tends to be affordable and evangelistic, made of Pearlware or Earthenware for regular use to bring the news of good works into the lives of everyday folks.

This cup and saucer is more expensive, more specific; and what was it for? Is the date an anniversary? A commemoration, a gift? Printing implies that there was at least one tea set even though the same print could be used many times. Was there more than one?

The date does not seem to have any noticeable significance and is thus probably a very personal example of dated teaware. A thorough browse of Google has drawn a blank.



Is creamware of this quality a little surprising for 1827, or even later if an anniversary is being recorded? Although there is a Swansea porcelain cup of similar shape dated c.1822, (586), and Swansea, of course, made lovely creamware and painted lettering on jugs, plates, and tea caddies, I don't know when that finished. The footrim of this cup is rounded; and the shape and handle are not impossible for the 1830's.

There is also to be considered the strength of Wesleyan Methodists in Wales, which could point to that as a source, though in fact they were widely spread, including to the colony of Georgia before the Revolution. Knowledge of some eminent Nonconformists might lead to clues. Beyond these tenuous hints, I am no wiser than I was, and hope that maybe someone may be better informed than I am.



This view of the underside of the saucer, although unmarked, may help in attributing a manufacturer.

Compendium of British Cups - Michael Berthoud Micawber Publications 1990

Creamware & Pearlware – Stoke on Trent City Museum and Art Gallery  
Catalogue 1986 NCS Fifth Exhibition

Creamware & Pearlware Re-Examined – ed. Tom Walford & Roger Massey  
English Ceramic Circle 4/5 June, 2005

Creamware and Other English Pottery at Temple Newsam House, Leeds  
Peter Walton, 1976

The Leeds Pottery 1770-1881 – John Griffin The Leeds Art Collection Fund 2005

The Cambrian Pottery – Jonathan Gray 2012

Welsh Ceramics in Context – ed. Jonathan Gray. The Royal Institution of South  
Wales, 2003 and 2005

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