

## A ROYAL WORCESTER MONOGRAMMED PLATE



Description: ‘A Royal Worcester ivory-ground monogrammed plate, painted and gilt with an owl perched on a branch beside the gilt monogram EEP, and beneath a gilt moon and clouds, the border with white ‘jewels’ reserved on a gilt band’.

This plate was originally offered as lot no.412 in Christie’s South Kensington sale **Important Glass and 19th Century Ceramics** (sale no.5631) on 7 July 2005 with the description given above. It was one of three lots of Royal Worcester plates with a provenance quoted as ‘By descent from Edward Pearson, Managing Director of the Worcester Porcelain Factory, to the present owner’, but more of that later.

Marks and date: printed puce mark, date code X [?] for 1884, with gilt initials HS and painter’s CB in black. It also has a gilt foot rim.

Size: 23cms (9 ins.)



All three lots were unsold in the July sale, but re-appeared in the same rooms in a sale of **British and Continental Ceramics** (sale no. 5634) on 29 September, the present plate being lot no.161. It was by far the most interesting of the plates offered and I purchased it, cataloguing it for my own collection in a slightly expanded form based on the original catalogue entry. Some time later I had another closer look at the plate and thought it strange that I could find no reference to Edward Pearson as Managing Director in Henry Sandon's excellent book **Royal Worcester Porcelain from 1862 to the Present Day** (London, Barrie & Jenkins, 3rd ed., 1978). It was then I realised that the monogram should be read as EPE, the middle letter being the surname. This is a regular feature of Victorian monograms and the 'E' is also larger than the other letters. A quick look at the index to Henry Sandon's book provided the answer - the letters stood for Edward Probert Evans, a highly important figure in the history of the factory.

Evans entered upon his duties as Secretary to the Worcester Company in 1867 and, after some years, was promoted to the position of Manager, while still continuing to act as Secretary. The year 1887 saw him complete 20 years of service and the workers determined to present him with a testimonial in the form of a silver tea and coffee service and an illuminated address, to which the Directors added a suite of fine porcelain cups and saucers. There is an extensive account of the presentation, which took place in the Public Hall, Worcester, on 26 April 1887 in an appendix to R.W.Binns' **Worcester China. A Record of the work of Forty-five Years, 1852-1897** (London,

Bernard Quaritch, 1897, pp.128-133), taken from a local newspaper. Binns himself was one of the speakers on this occasion, speaking highly of his Manager, and Evans, 'who was received with long continued cheering', also spoke noting that 'Until a few days ago he thought it was not possible that any combination should be formed in the Works without his knowledge', prompting laughter from his audience.

Going back to the monogrammed plate, one wonders if this was also a less formal gift. Evidence of the initials on the base suggests that it was painted by Charley Baldwyn, with the gilding by Henry Sheppard. Although the date letter can be read as 'X' for 1884 it is not a good impression and it may well be a 'Y' for 1887.

With regard to the decoration it is very much in the then highly fashionable Japanesque style of which the Worcester artists were masters. Many of you will remember the English Ceramic Circle's excellent seminar in celebration of 400 years of Japanese porcelain which was held at London University's School of Oriental and African Studies on 26 November 2016, at which our President, John Sandon, delivered a paper on "R W Binns' Japanese Collection and Royal Worcester's Japanesque", printed later in **Influences and inspirations: 400 years of Japanese porcelain** (Patrick Hagglund ed., Gomer Press for the English Ceramic Circle, 2018), at pp.67-86. This extensively illustrated essay includes a vase painted by Charley Baldwyn with a similar owl on a branch in a moonlight scene (plate 37 on p.85). The author notes the influence of Japanese wood blocks on this form of decoration, 'most successful when painted directly onto a simulated ivory background' (p.83).

All in all a most interesting plate which was displayed at our exhibition to accompany the 2014 Seminar.

Jim Sewell  
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