

An early Meissen jug and its provenance

Our ceramic objects are precious to us in the aesthetic sense, but also by evoking their place in the culture and society for which they were produced. These factors enrich our appreciation of the items we encounter in collections including in our own. Added to these factors are the identities of the previous owners – a piece's provenance. The jug singled out in this paper has a story to tell with regard to its manufacture, its decoration, and a particular previous owner in its long history. (1)



1. Meissen hot-water or milk jug, Dutch-decorated in on-glaze enamels, hard paste porcelain, c.1730. Ht. 11.5 cm. Four views displaying salient details of decoration and design. Private collection.

The subject jug was probably used to serve hot water or milk as part of a coffee set, and most likely had a lid or cover, much like a similarly designed and Dutch-decorated coffee pot¹ in the Arnhold Collection in New York. (2)



2. Meissen coffee pot with cover, Dutch decorated, c.1720-35. Ht.(with cover) 18 cm. No marks. ©Arnhold Collection (1994.307).

The Meissen jug, as for the coffee pot, was decorated in Holland by a *Hausmaler*, a term used in both Germany and Austria from the 17th to the 18th centuries for an independent decorator outside of the Meissen factory. This form of decoration, before c.1750, was usually of high quality, often higher than the work done by the manufactory. The porcelain wares were supplied to the *Hausmaler* in the white, save for the under-glaze cross-swords mark, for subsequent decoration in over-glaze enamels. The painted decoration on the subject jug is in the chinoiserie manner in vivid enamel colours approximating famille rose, but using bold blues and greens particularly, indicative of Dutch polychrome decoration at the time.

The form of both the jug and the coffee pot is drawn from silverware shapes of the first half of the 18th century. A particular detail of quality in the jug's design is the heart-shaped spout, which probably facilitated smooth pouring of the liquid contents. (1 – bottom-right image)



3. Base of the Meissen jug in (1) above.

The jug is marked on the base with the typical crossed-swords in under-glaze blue of Meissen, rather roughly done as is common on early wares. (3) Also to be found on the base is an old paper collector's label of its former owner, 'WAE', Wilfrid Ariel Evill.

Wilfrid Ariel Evill (1890-1963) (4) was a London solicitor whose clients ranged from trades unions to leading artists and art figures. He began collecting in the 1920s, and his taste spanned art, furniture, ceramics and much else besides.²



4. Stanley Spencer, *Portrait of Wilfrid Ariel Evill*, pencil drawing, April 1942.

Evill formed a friendship with Stanley Spencer, the painter, which developed on to his legal work for Spencer in the 1930s, before he was famous, and when Evill began to accept Spencer's paintings in lieu of payment for his legal services, owing to the near bankruptcy of the painter. Steadily, Evill built up a collection of some of the artist's most important works. Evill eventually owned the largest collection of Spencer's narrative works in private hands. His collections included works by Henry Moore, Edward Burra, Lucian Freud, Graham Sutherland, and many others – all British 20th-century artists.

On his death, he bequeathed several of Spencer's best works to the Fitzwilliam Museum, along with five important early Meissen vases.³ His remaining collections, after his bequests, he left to his ward, Honor Frost,⁴ a pioneering marine archaeologist, along with his home on his death in 1963. He is now hardly known outside of a very narrow circle.

After Honor Frost's death, the Evill/Frost Collection was sold through Sotheby's London on the 15-16 June 2011, being billed in the press as 'the greatest collection of 20th-century British art ever to come to the market', and amassed a final total of

over £42 million. The subject jug was not part of that sale, but is a most unusual example of its kind.

In conclusion, the purpose of this short paper is three-fold:

- To examine an unusually decorated early Meissen porcelain jug.
- To highlight the importance of provenance.
- To bring an outstanding collector back into focus in the case of Wilfrid Ariel Evill.

The ghosts of the past linger with all antique objects, if only we give them the opportunity to reveal themselves. These ghosts include, in the case of the subject jug, the potter in the Meissen factory who made it, the Dutch painter who decorated it, the wealthy man or woman in the 18th century who used it in their refreshment customs, and the subsequent owners of the piece over the 290 or so years of its existence. Included in the last category was an outstanding collector linked by his distinctive paper label that continues to adhere to the jug's foot.

Patrick Hagglund, March 2021

Notes

¹ Cassidy-Geiger, Maureen, *The Arnhold Collection of Meissen porcelain 1710-50* (London: D Giles Ltd, 2008), Cat.301, p.607.

² Sotheby's, New Bond Street, London, The Evill/Frost Collection Part Three, 16 June 2011, pp 12-13.

³ 'Acquisitions of Works of Art by Museums and Galleries', *The Burlington Magazine*, Vol.107, No.748 (Jul.1965), p.393.

⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, see:

<https://www.oxforddnb.com/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-102743;jsessionid=97F6D58CBC9713D21AF4C9974E35F934>.