

An imposing Worcester Tankard



Recently I got the opportunity to buy this stunning piece of Worcester porcelain. I only buy online from dealers I know, but the detailed description and even the picture of “an approximately 6” high mug” didn’t quite prepare me for this beauty when I unwrapped it.

The tankard is dated to around 1760 and has two prints in black by Robert Hancock – “Mayday” and “Milking Scene”. It has a grooved strap handle, and is slightly flared to the base which has a flat rim and a glazed recessed centre. The base is approximately 4” diameter. I can find no mark.



The prints are particularly interesting and the detailed features of the girls in “Mayday” are superb. This print is taken from an engraving by Charles Grignion after a painting known as “The Mayday” by Francis Hayman. Hayman, together with Joshua Reynolds with whom he worked, was one of the founding members of the Society of Arts, a forerunner of the Royal

Academy. Among other works in the French rococo style he painted over fifty large canvases for the supper boxes at the Vauxhall Pleasure Gardens. The complete painting included children who worked as chimney sweeps, banging brushes and shovels as part of the celebrations, but they are not reproduced on the Hancock print.

According to the story of “The Mayday”, the milkmaids paraded their “garland” and, dressed in their best, danced in the streets for their customers who were expected to offer money to the girls. On the print the “garland” is carried by a porter and consists of a pyramid of tankards, flagons and plates - decorated with flowers.

The second print on the tankard is the “Milking Scene”. A girl is milking a large cow and chatting to her male companion who is leaning against a tree and watching her. Other animals are resting nearby. According to the Sotherby’s catalogue of the Mullins collection sale of 1977, this print is rarer in that it has a recumbent dog in the foreground besides the cows. The print in Cook’s book does not show the dog.

The print by Robert Hancock is a vignette taken from an engraving by Luke Sullivan. The complete engraving entitled “A View of Wooburn in Surrey, the Seat of Philip Southcote Esqr.” was published in 1759. Luke Sullivan, an engraver and miniaturist painter, was born about 1705 in Louth in Ireland and worked as an assistant to the artist William Hogarth.

The “Mayday” print is reportedly found only on items such as tankards and jugs and not on teawares, though the illustration in Cook’s “Life and Works of Robert Hancock” is of a teapoy or tea jar. Certainly an item of the size of my tankard shows off the details of the print to superb advantage.

It is suggested that large tankards such as this were intended for sharing drinks such as toasts and not as individual drinking vessels. This one must hold over a pint of whatever beverage was chosen for the celebratory drink.

I was delighted with my purchase from the start, but finding out more about it has been really interesting. I hope others enjoy my sharing as much as I have.

References: Cyril Cook – “Life and Works of Robert Hancock” Chapman and Hall 1948

John Sandon – “The Dictionary of Worcester Porcelain” Antique Collectors Club

The Joseph Handley Collection of 18th Century English Transfer-printed

Porcelain and Enamels 21 February 1996

Sotherby’s Catalogue of the Sir William Mullins Collection Sale 1977

The ever-useful Google and Wikipedia

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