

A Worcester jug with two workmen's marks: a consideration by John Robson

The Dictionary of Worcester Porcelain, by John Sandon provides some interesting information which leads to my conclusions about my Worcester Jug (see pictures).

My jug has 'cabbage leaf' moulding strongly suggesting that these were not thrown on the potter's wheel but created from moulds. These were commonly known as 'Dutch Jugs.'

Apparently, the shape derives from silver shapes as, of course, so much of 18th Century porcelain did, particularly sauce boats.





Décor and Moulding detail

The earliest Worcester examples of this type of jug have a plain leaf moulded loop handle but we are informed by John Sandon that these are rare and the standard scroll ring handle had been introduced by 1757 (an example of one is illustrated by him at his page 88).

He also informs us that during the 1750s, most Dutch jugs (as these were called) were made without lips but the moulded mask lip was also in production at the same time as the plain versions.

Apparently (also referring to John Sandon's book), large numbers of Worcester cabbage leaf jugs were made continuously until about 1785 in a great variety of styles, both in blue and white and polychrome.

The importation of tea, mainly by the East India Company, created considerable interest in teawares and caused social changes in the consumption of tea in England. The earliest method of drinking tea was by the use of Chinese teawares and from the 16th Century vast quantities of blue and white were imported, known as 'Nankin Ware.' The porcelain, as we know, had to withstand high temperature 'shock' on pouring and this caused significant problems initially for English porcelain manufacturers.

The Europeans sought to make their own teawares and we know of the success of Meissen and other factories in the 1700s.

According to John Sandon, Worcester concentrated on polychrome wares so that the output of blue and white in the 1750s was surprisingly small and could not compete with the Chinese.

Also, Worcester was unable to obtain enough painters to meet the demand for their blue and white porcelain so that underglaze transfer printing was introduced in about 1757. The factory so increased its production of transfer printed wares that there was a strike by the blue painters in 1770 and some left to go other factories, such as Plymouth. William Cookworthy is known to have travelled to Worcester, for instance, to recruit some of these painters but that is another story.

The blue is derived from a stone which when crushed and processed, makes 'cobalt blue.' The Chinese used cobalt to paint their blue and white wares but cobalt was also discovered by Nicholas Crip in Scotland and William Cookworthy in Cornwall.

It took considerable experimentation to 'get the blue right' in that earlier wares, such as in Plymouth, had a very dark deep blue. When one considers Vauxhall porcelain, much of the cobalt blue is dark and at Plymouth, there were firing problems causing it to turn out very dark, black even.

The earlier Worcester wares were hand painted in their decoration and it would be easier to control the brightness of the blue if done by hand. I suggest that the early English wares, such as some Lund's Bristol and Isleworth had lighter blue.

Workmen's marks, as they are called, are to be found on Worcester porcelain between 1753 and 1760, as described by Simon Spero in his book 'Lund's Bristol and early Worcester Porcelain.' There are many such marks and it is not known why they were applied - painter's mark or workmen's marks - and it is probably now impossible to attribute any one mark to any one person.

But I do believe that it is now accepted that these marks were only used at Worcester in the period suggested by Simon Spero, being 1753 to 1760.

I now refer to my jug, see photos:

During lockdown in 2020, I started to follow auctions of fine English Porcelain, principally Plymouth and Bristol.

But my favourite two factories did not oust consideration of anything else that caught my eye.

So true of this Worcester Dutch jug.

First of all, I was attracted to the shape and particularly the handle. This shape of handle seems to indicate an early piece of Worcester (see above).

Then I saw that the pattern was hand painted in a lighter shade of blue and not transfer printed. The flowers are nicely painted and there are several flying insects, rarely seen on printed versions.

There are two workmen's marks, unusually painted under the handle.

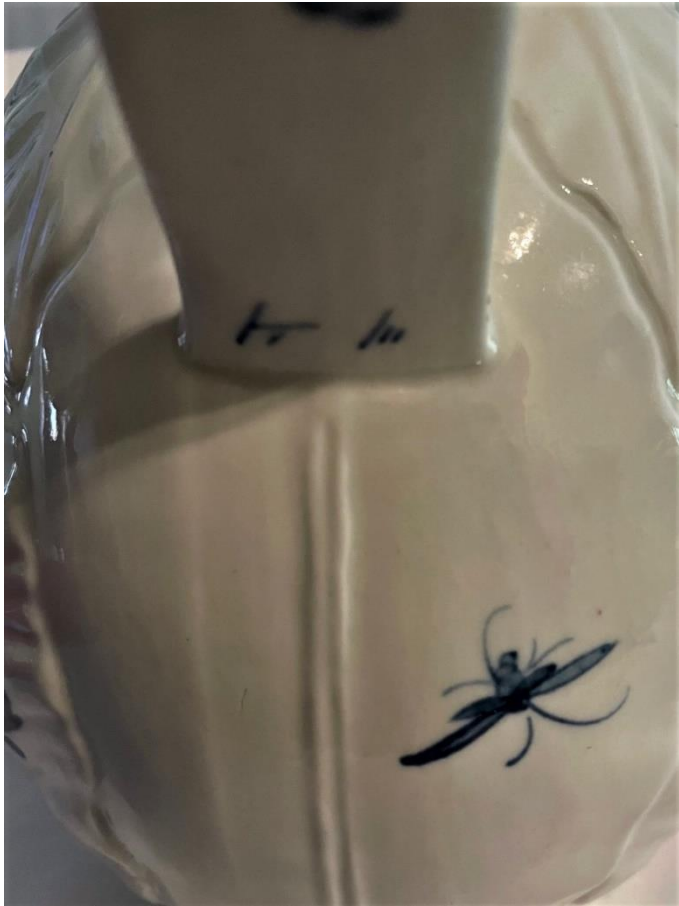
I was very happy to acquire it at a modest price and thrilled when I received it.

The quality of this Worcester piece is very high and the feel of it shows the high quality of the glaze.

I believe this to have been made in the 1750s, between 1753 and 1760. The handle is the earlier shape and it is hand painted in a lighter shade of blue. A rarer piece I suggest.



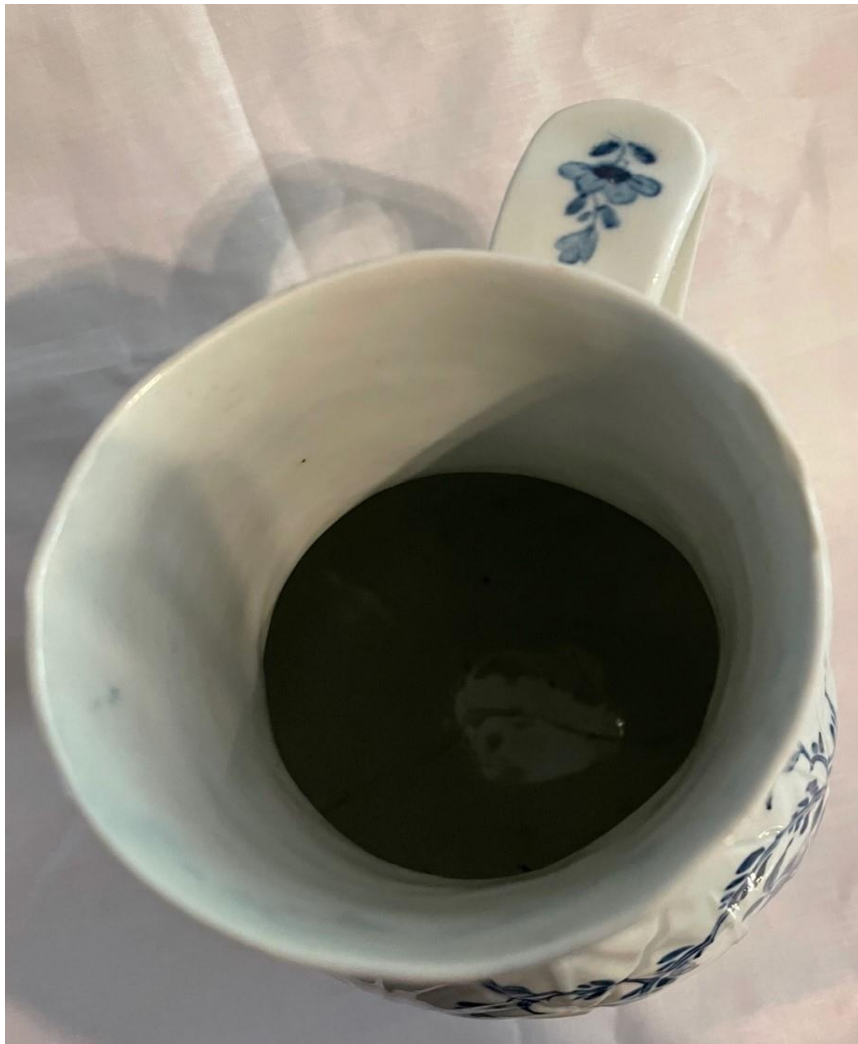
Handle detail



Painter's or Workman's marks

Unmarked base





Top view

One day, I'll bring it to an LCC meeting so that one can physically look at it which is the only way of assessing a piece rather than from pictures!

It may be that you do not agree with my analysis and conclusions but then that is the fun of collecting...to discuss and share thoughts to learn more!