

Moravian 'Lovefeast' Cup

Attribution 'Fulneck Jubilee Commemoration April 19th 1855'

An Occasional Paper by Michelle Gibbons – March 2024



How a humble pearlware cup represents the complicated past of one of the earliest Protestant denominations in Christianity to have settled in England. The lovefeast cup shown above measures 10 cm in height. It was commissioned to mark the Jubilee of the Moravian settlement in Fulneck, near Pudsey, Yorkshire - 19th of April 1855.

The name of this village shares its title with a settlement in the eastern side of the Czech Republic - [Fulnek, Moravia, Silesia](#). The Fulneck village near Pudsey was established in 1743 by exiles from the Counter-Reformation in Bohemia and elsewhere in the Habsburg empire. They were members of the Moravian Church, one of the earliest Protestant Churches and the oldest Protestant denomination in Bohemia which had its roots in the Hussite movement of the 15th century.



Top row & bottom left images of the cup (private collection), bottom right matching saucer in the collection of the Fulneck Church

In her blog for the British Museum, Janet Ashton wrote 'By 1600, a majority of the inhabitants of the provinces of Moravia and Bohemia (the present-day Czech Republic) were under the influence of Hussite churches or schools, and might be said to have become Protestant. The churches established printing presses, and held services in Czech and German in preference to Latin. For a long time, the imperial court tolerated this, and was even sympathetic, but the arrival of the Jesuits and election of the vengefully Catholic Ferdinand II as King of Bohemia and Holy Roman Emperor changed things.

The events that followed are some of the most evocative in Czech history.

The Second Defenestration of Prague, when representatives of the Protestant estates threw the Emperor's envoys from the window of the Bohemian

Chancellery, sparked the Thirty Years War. Its first battle was the disastrous White Mountain, which wiped out the Protestant nobility and would become a powerful symbol of the Habsburgs' destruction of the nation and suppression of the Czech language. The survivors of White Mountain went into hiding in caves and crevices around the borders. The [Moravian Brethren](#) – originally of Bohemian origin – took their name from the fact that they continued to live in hiding in Moravia worshipping illegally for almost a century. Many other groups went abroad, firstly to other states in the Holy Roman Empire where the Counter-Reformation was less entrenched, and then later overseas, to Britain, France, the Netherlands or North America. In due course, the Moravians followed, moving first to Herrnhut in Saxony, where they were protected by [Nikolaus von Zinzendorf](#), and then to England. This is the origin of the Fulneck Moravian Settlement.'

The Moravian Church celebrated the centenary of this settlement, among other Jubilee celebratory commissions, with this humble cup. A matching Jubilee cup and saucer are still used by the [Fulneck Church](#). A cantata was also composed by [Edward Sewell](#) to mark the occasion. This commemorative drinking vessel is known to the Moravian Church as a 'lovefeast' cup. As the early Christians met and broke bread together recognising their association, so too the members of the Moravian Church meet to celebrate special occasions by sharing a simple meal - a 'lovefeast'. Similarities can be made with the ceramic two-handled cups used by the Methodists in their services. These are known by the more familiar term 'loving' cups. Limited research has confirmed that [John Wesley](#) borrowed this devotional act from the Moravians introducing it to Methodism.

In researching this cup, archival information was sought from Rev. Hilary Smith, Archivist to the Fulneck Moravian Museum. Rev. Smith confirmed *'Lovefeasts have been part of Moravian customs since the renewal of the church in Germany in 1724. They can be informal amongst groups sharing a special occasion, or they can be a forerunner to the monthly communion service, which is how they are used still in some congregations today. Initially they did not use tea as it was a very expensive commodity in the 18th century. I don't know when tea replaced either wine or beer (as water wasn't safe to drink without boiling), but obviously it was either introduced or being used by the mid 19th century.'*

Rev. Smith further expands, *'In the church [Fulneck] we have one cup and saucer from the Jubilee celebration which is exactly the same as yours', 'it is a bowl without a handle, and there is no inscription under either the cup or saucer. All other congregations where in Yorkshire and other places where I have been where lovefeasts have been or are held used to use similar willow pattern type cups and saucers of a similar type but with handles. I think, however, that Fulneck is the only congregation which uses this type of cup and saucer today. I think it was in the 1990s when most changed to a style of white china teacups and saucers with just a blue lamb and flag motif on the cup. I cannot remember just whether it was for a special occasion or not, but I think it was one congregation*

which was making a change and offered it as a deal to other congregations as the more ordered meant a cheaper price.'

'I have researched as many documents as I can from the archive relating to the 1850s and I can find no reference at all to the special cups and saucers. There is an overview of the day in the diary and mention of the forthcoming event in the elders' conference minutes. These latter reveal that a Jubilee committee was appointed in January 1855 to oversee the planning of the event, so it could have formed part of their remit. However, their documents must not have been placed in the archive after the event. The cups and saucers may well have been ordered via the shop, but unfortunately the shop cash books and ledgers in the archive cease around the 1820s.'

For now, the factory commissioned with the manufacturer of the cups remains a mystery. Further research is required to determine this. It has been suggested that [Lewis Woolf & Sons](#) who operated at Ferrybridge, Yorkshire from 1851 to 1877 may have been the factory. They were located 22 miles from Fulneck.

Additional secondary information; [Henry Benjamin Latrobe](#) (May 1, 1764 – September 3, 1820) was born into the Moravian settlement in Fulneck. Henry Latrobe is considered 'America's First Architect'. His legacy includes the Capitol building in Washington DC and the first Catholic Cathedral in America - the Baltimore Basilica. Henry's father [Benjamin Latrobe](#) was a highly respected Moravian minister, an article from the 71st edition of the La Troupe Journal further confirms the *'from 1750 until 1768 [Benjamin] held a series of positions mainly at Fulneck. By the time of his death in 1786 he had become the much loved and widely respected leader of Moravians in Britain.'* *'Anna Margareta Antes, his wife, would have been weighed carefully by the Elders. Choice of partner was of crucial importance for ministers of the Church whose wives, like Anna, usually were working partners with their husbands. She came from a distinguished family: the establishment of the Moravian Church in North America owes much to her influential father in Pennsylvania; and she, herself, seems to have been an able person. This arranged marriage took place in Germany.'*

Summary of Sources & Further Reading

British Library: European Studies Blog

Bohemian Leeds: the Fulneck Moravian Settlement

Janet Ashton, WEL Cataloguing Team Manager

<https://blogs.bl.uk/european/2015/03/bohemian-leeds-the-fulneck-moravian-settlement.html>

British Library Collections include:

Various locally-produced histories of the Settlement, as well as a copy of The Brotherly Agreement and Declaration concerning the Rules and Orders of the Brethren's Congregation at Fulneck, published in 1777 and a cantata composed by [Edward Sewell](#) to celebrate its centenary (Cantata, composed in commemoration of the Fulneck Centenary Jubilee, April 19th 1855. London, 1855

The Fulneck Moravian Church & UK Moravianism

http://www.fulneck.org.uk/?page_id=20

<https://www.moravianhistory.org/>

Love Feast Cup

<https://www.wesleysoxford.org.uk/places/ceramics/alisons-seventh-post-love-feast-cup>

Building America: The Life of Benjamin Henry Latrobe

Jean H. Baker

<https://www.amazon.co.uk/Building-America-Benjamin-Henry-Latrobe/dp/0190696451>

Rev. Benjamin Latrobe

La Troupe Journal

No. 71 Autumn 2003

http://ourforebears.gnc.net/ps03/ps03_306.htm

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Rev. Hillary Smith, Archivist, Fulneck Moravian Museum

John Beetwell, London Ceramic Circle - for suggesting this cup form an Occasional Paper for the LCC