

Imported Pilgrim Pottery 101: Is delftware from Delft? Is China from China?

by Jane Port, Curator
Pilgrim Society & Pilgrim Hall Museum

The popularity of white ceramic wares, plain and decorated, caught fire with Europe's discovery of the white high-fired porcelain wares of China. The thin-walled but strong white wares were translucent and resonated like a bell when "pinged." The high-fired glass-like glaze was hard and did not chip like earthenware glazes.

The Chinese discovered the art of porcelain making during the Tang Dynasty (608 to 906). White ware or porcelain was comprised of two ingredients: kaolin, a white-firing, relatively non-plastic clay of which there are great deposits in China, and white China stone, petuntse, a refined non-plastic felspathic material derived from decayed granite.

By the 1300s, porcelains were decorated with bright colors and intricate patterns, with the best of the famous blue and white Ming wares made around 1425. Legend claims that Venetian traveler Marco Polo (1254-1304) gave porcelain its name when he first saw it in the court of Kublai Khan in the late 1200s. It reminded Polo of the pearly-white cowrie shell called *porcella*.



Chinese porcelain found its way to Holland via Portuguese traders in the 1500s. When the Dutch began to trade directly with the Chinese in 1604, porcelain flowed into Amsterdam. Throughout Europe, royals and merchant princes passionately collected the true porcelain. At the same time, entrepreneurial Dutch potters developed imitation China wares for the less monied by adapting the old technique of tin-glazed earthenware. Located on a waterway with fine shipping resources, Delft became Holland's dominant center for its production and export.

Tin-glazed earthenware was not invented by the Dutch. Its characteristic opaque white surface is due to the mixing of tin oxide ashes into lead glaze, a method used before 800 in the Middle East. The technique was carried to Italy and Spain through expanding trade routes in the 1200s and 1300s, and the clean white surface served as background for Italy's elaborate pictorial majolica wares and

Spain's colorful luster wares. Through the 1600s and 1700s, the use of opaque tin-glazes spread into Switzerland, France, Holland, and into England.

Pilgrim Hall Museum holds a wide variety of the handsome tin-glazed earthenware bowls, chargers, dishes, porringers, and teapots that were imported into the New world well into the 1700s. The Museum's earliest delftware date to the last half of the 1600s, indicating that the majority were purchased by second and third generation members of the Old Colony's Pilgrim families. Along with fine textiles, silver and furniture, the fashionable and decorative wares symbolized prosperity and success for these pioneering families.

Tea-drinking became fashionable around 1650-1680 in Europe, and early teapots were small because tea was expensive. The Howland family teapot is a rare survivor because, unlike Chinese teapots made of porcelain, delftware teapots often cracked when filled with boiling water. The dainty pot's design and form imitate that of blue and white Chinese porcelain.



Howland Family Teapot
Andrianus Kocks Pottery
Delft, Holland, 1686-1701
Tin-glazed earthenware
Height 6 1/4"

The Howland Teapot is on view in Pilgrim Hall Museum's Lower Hall with the Howland "blue dash" Family Bowl, the Fuller Family salt, the blue-and-white speckled Warren Family porringer, the Standish Family loved dish, and the Cooke-Thomson family bowl splashed with blue and green tulips. Of these examples, only the teapot and the lobed dish were made in Delft, Holland. The others were produced in England potteries.



Howland Family Bowl
Lambeth (London), about 1700
Tin-glazed earthenware
Diameter 9"

The purple dashes on the Howland Family Bowl's rim relate it to similarly rimmed "blue-dash" decorated wares made at the Lambeth factory in London.



Fuller Family Salt
London, 1660-1680
Tin-glazed earthenware
Height 6"

This reel-shaped form with its shallow recess and scrolls at the top and broad flaring foot replicates a silver form popular in London in the 1650s. Known then as "Curles salts," the scrolls may have been used to hold another serving plate. Among similar surviving earthenware salts, the finish on the top of the scrolls shows wear. At first imported from Europe, salt was being harvested in New England by 1696 for the table and for the region's fishing industry.



Warren Family Porringer
London, 1680-1800
Tin-glazed earthenware
Diameter 6 7/8"

An ancient form found as early as 1450 B.C. in the Mediterranean region, the utilitarian one-handed porringer can still be found in kitchens. This blue and white decoration imitated the *bleu de Nevers* tin-glazed earthenwares made in France. Cobalt was added to the tin glaze for the blue background, with white spattered on top.



Standish Family Lobed Dish
Holland, 1660-1700
Tin-glazed earthenware with
polychrome decoration
Diameter 13 1/4"

Modeled after earlier silver forms, these dishes were first turned on a potter's wheel and then pressed into a two-part mold to create a lobed rim. A ewer filled with scented water often accompanied the dishes, which were placed at the table for rinsing hands.



Cooke-Thomson Bowl
England, Lambeth or Brislington,
1675-1700
Tin-glazed earthenware
Diameter 11 3/8"

Tulips like these exuberant blue and green ones that seem to fill the bowl, or the charming trio of yellow flowers on the Standish Family Lobed Dish, were a popular design motif in England and Holland from 1650 to 1700. First exported to Europe from Turkey in the 1500s, tulips captured the imagination and desires of the Dutch, Throughout the 1600s a period of "tulipomania" ensued, and the cultivation and marketing of tulips became a craze in Holland.



Winslow Family Lobed Dish
Holland, 1660-1700
Tin-glazed earthenware with polychrome decoration
Diameter 13 5/8"

Josiah Winslow (1629-1680) may have been the first owner of this colorful dish decorated with a yellow goose and tulips.



Waterman Family Dish
Brislington, England, 1680-1700
Tin-glazed earthenware
Diameter 13 7/16"

The large blue and white Waterman family dish came to the museum in 1852. This large "delftware" dish features the light and dark blue imagery characteristic of wares made at Brislington. It is a fine example of the imitation of Chinese landscape scenes from imported porcelain. The buff-colored earthenware clay is visible in the many chipped areas on this venerable salver, now more than 300 years old.



White Family Dish
Valencia, Spain, 1650-1700
Tin-glazed earthenware with
red copper luster
Diameter 7 13/16"

This small dish with its traditional Moorish abstract motif looks very different than the tin-glazed wares from northern Europe. The burnished orange luster derives from copper added to the glaze. Because these glazes wore away easily, making the wares unidentifiable as Spanish, there may have been a larger number imported into the colonies than the surviving objects would indicate.

The craze for expensive Chinese porcelain wares was revived when China again opened its doors (closed in 1657) in 1699 and flourished in Europe throughout the 1700s. There were undoubtedly a few wealthy households in the North American colonies who boasted a few pieces of true Chinese porcelain.

Europe produced its first true porcelain in Dresden in 1707/8 when an alchemist named Johann Friedrich Bottger was ordered to uncover its secrets by Augustus the Strong, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony in the late 1760s. Thus began Europe's first porcelain works at Meissen on the Elbe River near Dresden.

Tin-glazed earthenware fell out of favor when English potteries developed creamware in the late 1700s. Creamware was not porcelain but it was thin, sturdier and of moderate cost. From about 1800 to the mid-century when China's Opium Wares (1839-1860) curtailed the flow, American ports became the largest conduits for Chinese export porcelain.

By the late 1800s, the United States government required all important to be marked with their country of origin. Although paper labels could still be found in the early 1900s, in 1894 the U.S. Stamp Act mandated the imprint of "Made In China" on all export porcelain.

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