

Dr. Wall and the First Worcester Factory

1751 - 1783.



Before the 18th century, porcelain was only made in the Far East. European potters had been fascinated by this mysterious material for hundreds of years and in Britain several manufacturers discovered the secrets of porcelain production.

The exact sequence of events, which led to the opening of a porcelain manufactory in Worcester is difficult to unravel. It seems that around 1750 Dr. John Wall (1708 – 1776) and the apothecary William Davis conducted some experiments at Davis's shop in Broad street, Worcester and discovered a method of making a porcelain type material. They then persuaded a group of 13 local businessmen to back their discovery with investment in a new factory at Warmstry House. A lease for the grand house on the banks of the River Severn was taken out on

16th May 1751 and on the 4th June, the 15 partners signed a deed to officially establish the 'Worcester Tonquin Manufacture'. The secret of porcelain production was to be the property of the subscribers and each agreed to a penalty of £4000 should they disclose knowledge of the secret to anyone.

Early production does not appear to have been successful and in 1752 the rival business of Benjamin Lund in Bristol was purchased, bringing vital technical expertise to Worcester. A licence to mine soapstone in Cornwall was also secured.



In the early years virtually everything produced was functional. By 1755 Worcester was making the best English blue and white porcelain tea wares that money could buy, as well as more expensive coloured enamel sets. Porcelain was sold to the trade through a warehouse opened in Aldersgate Street, London in 1754 and also through Samuel Bradley's shop in Worcester High Street. Worcester's main advantage over its rivals was that the Worcester soapstone porcelain did not crack when boiling water was poured into it.

(Many other British porcelains did crack!)

During the 1750s everything Oriental was at the height of fashion. This was part of the new frivolous and eccentric style known as the Rococo, which combined Oriental designs with

French opulence. Oriental style designs were used to decorate moulded shapes, which were copied from English and French silver. Complex surface modelling, which helped to disguise any flaws in the early porcelain, was probably learned from the Staffordshire salt glaze potters.

One of the Worcester partners, Josiah Holdship claimed to be the first to introduce printing on porcelain from engraved copper plates. He and his brother Richard, were probably responsible for developing the process in the early 1750s. Robert Hancock, the most important of the copper plate engravers moved to Worcester in 1756. His initials, R.H. can be found on some early black & white printed porcelain.



Meissen porcelain was greatly admired in England in the 1750's, but its import was restricted, therefore the English manufacturers imitated the German wares. Flowers, in a flowing German style, copied from prints and engravings, were a popular subject for the Worcester painters.

French influence can also be seen in the development of Worcester's famous Scale blue porcelain in the 1760's. Underglaze blue backgrounds with a high standard of gilding and enamelling commanded a very high price with the best customers. Few artists are known to us by name, but for some of these prestigious pieces Dr. Wall employed a portrait painter, John Donaldson (1739 – 1801) and a highly regarded painter of miniatures, Jefferyes Hamett O'Neale (1734 –1801). Other painters we tend to refer to by their nicknames, for example the 'Spotted Fruit Painter' as we do not know who they were.

Other strong background colours were also used including yellow, pea green and sky blue.



A range of wares with intricate relief decoration, hand made flowers and modelled shells were made at Worcester in the late 1760's. These are probably the work of John Toulouse who moved to Worcester from the Chelsea factory when it closed in 1768. The relief initials IT or TO appear on some examples. Although porcelain figures were very popular at this time, few were made by the Worcester factory.

The Worcester factory also produced richly decorated designs they called 'Japan' patterns. Few were copied exactly from Japanese originals, instead patterns were adapted and enriched to appeal to English customers.

Between 1767 and 1771 Dr.Wall had a formal agreement with the independent London decorator, James Giles and large quantities of Worcester Porcelain were decorated in Giles' London Studio. (*for more go to - James Giles London Studio*)

Increased tea consumption in the 1760s created a huge demand for tea wares, bringing prosperity to the Worcester factory. This was not to last as competitors in Staffordshire began to produce inexpensive wares in large quantities. In 1774 Dr.John Wall retired and by 1775 Thomas Turner had left Worcester, taking many skilled workers with him. He set up a rival factory at Caughley in Shropshire, where he mass produced blue & white table wares in a very similar style to Worcester.

In 1774 William Davis took control of the Worcester factory (*for more see William Davis*)

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The Worcester Porcelain Museum

Severn Street, Worcester WR1 2ND

Telephone +44 (0)1905 21247

e-mail: info.admin@Worcesterporcelainmuseum.org

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