

EARLY RATHBONE TEAWARES? Alan Roberts

FROM: "NEW HALL AND FRIENDS" NEWSLETTER, SPRING, 2004

New Hall bute shaped cups have clear features but many friends in this shape are hard to distinguish. In searching for clear features to define bute cups by unknown makers, a group emerged which I think can be attributed to Rathbone. I will explain how these cups then led to teapot and creamer shapes.

Cups in this group have handles with two small kinks which are very narrow and pointed at their lower point of attachment. The example shown (fig. 1) has a version of the Yellow Shell pattern attributed to Rathbone by Margaret Ironside (1999). From the side, the shape of the handle looks similar to illustrations of bute shaped cups decorated in the blue transfer "Broseley" pattern. Some cups in this pattern have the SJR in a cartouche, R in a sunburst or R under a crown marks that have been attributed to Rathbone (PL 341 in Godden, 1988; Pls 293, 294 and 301 in Berthoud, 1990; Miller, 1983a and b). Cups in my group are small and finely potted, with thin walls in a bone china body which can be white with very good translucency, or rather creamy with crazed glaze and poor, brownish translucency.

Figure 1 A Bute shaped teacup (81.2mm diameter, 59mm high) in "Yellow Shell" pattern 35 with detail of handle to show narrow, pointed, lower attachment and lines of colour across kinks.



As these early nineteenth century teacups approach their 200th birthdays we would like to know the shapes of the teapots and creamers that originally went with them. Last year I found a tea set decorated with silver lustre lines and a puce batprint of a couple walking in their estate. The cups were in the Rathbone shape (Fig. 2). The oval creamer was small, had exactly the same print from the same engraving as the cup, and a forward pointing thumbrest on the handle.

Figure 2 Bute teacup (80.9mm diameter, 56.5mm high) and creamer (base 63.2mm).



The teapot from this set was in the new oval shape expected with bute shaped cups (fig. 3). It lacked a lid but had some distinctive features: a handle with forwards pointing thumbrest (similar to those of Ridgway and Hicks and Meigh), an oval domed strainer, a spout with clear corners (along the lustre line) and a raised rather than flat top surface, 5 little raised beads at the top end of the spout. There were also two bread and butter plates with curved sides, saucers with curved sides and a slop bowl with straight sided footrim. None of the pieces had any marks.

Figure 3 New Oval teapot with oval domed strainer, five beads on top end of spout, silver lustre and puce bat print decoration (Base 119.2mm x 84.2mm).



The teapot with the puce print was a match for another teapot which still had its lid and was marked pattern 14 (Fig. 4). This showed the knob shape and that the lid had two holes, one to the outside and another up into the knob (see Moulders, 2003). The handles on these two pots look a bit different but I think this is probably because they were set on the pot by a different hand, or one drooped more in the kiln!



Figure 4 New Oval teapot with oval domed strainer, five beads on top end of spout and pattern number 14 in pink on base, two holes in lid. (Base 123mm x 87mm). Oval creamer with pattern number 14 on base. The leaves above the blue flowers on this side have one dark and one light half.

Before Jean Barrett sold this teapot it was with a creamer in the same pattern and also marked with 14, this time in blue (Fig. 4). Hicks and Meigh also did this pattern but

the leaves above the blue flowers are of even colour and not shaded as in the Rathbone version.

Teapots with the same body and knob shape, one in the same pattern 14, one with floral decoration, and two in the "Yellow Shell" pattern 35 are illustrated in Miller and Berthoud (1985). Three of them have domed strainers. If these teapots are Rathbone, they show variations in both the spouts and the handles. Two more teapots with puce batprint decoration illustrate this variability further. Both have all the features of the teapots in figures 3 and 4 but the handle shape is simpler and smaller. The first example (fig. 5) has pink lustre lines and the print shows a country house, bridge, cattle and swans. The second (fig. 6) has silver lustre lines and a print with a country house, lake and fishermen.

Figure 5 New Oval teapot with oval domed strainer, five beads on top end of spout (see insert), two holes in lid (one visible), pink lustre hand painted decoration. (Base 122mm x 90.7mm).



Figure 6 New Oval teapot with oval domed strainer, five beads on top end of spout two holes in lid, silver lustre hand painted decoration. Tip of spout and rim near spout are broken. (Base 121mm x 90.9mm).



The teapot in figure 6 has the same pattern on the knob and the same batprint on the lid as the one in figure 5. It can be linked back to the Rathbone cup shape by a cup and saucer with a black batprint and silver lustre lines (fig. 7). The print on the saucer is exactly the same as the one on the teapot in figure 6.



Figure 7 Cup with Rathbone shape has silver lustre lines and batprint like teapot in figure 6 (width 80.7mm height 56.1mm). Batprint on saucer (right) is from same engraving as teapot.

This story started with what seemed to be a trivial feature of some cups (the very narrow, pointed bottom attachment of the handle). This seems to be a reliable feature of Rathbone butte shaped cups, both those I have described and later ones with a larger handle (see: <http://www.chinacupboard.co.uk/>). If we accept this, then I hope that the new oval teapots and creamer shapes I have illustrated and those shown on page 221 of Miller and Berthoud (1985) can be attributed to Rathbone. Together they illustrate how a basic teapot shape with some strong consistent features also shows variation in spouts and handles. Using pattern 14, we can also attribute another new oval creamer shape to Rathbone (Pl. 573, Berthoud, 1999).

Though we don't always agree, I would like to thank Ian Harvey for his informed and enthusiastic support in tracing early Rathbone teawares. I would love to hear from anyone who has any other examples of these teawares (either to chinacupboard@lineone.net or through the editors).

References

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