

AUSTRALIAN MUSHROOMS ON HAND PAINTED ROYAL WORCESTER PORCELAIN

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Abstract

A short history of the Royal Worcester Porcelain Company is provided. Mushroom designs for painting on porcelain by the Australian artist Phyllis Flockton Clarke are discussed, as is the series of plates and teawares produced for the Australian market and painted with these designs.

A short history of the Royal Worcester Porcelain Company

The Worcester Porcelain factory was established on 4 June 1751 in Worcester, England by a Deed of Partnership between Dr John Wall and a group of fourteen other local businessmen. The factory was formed for the purpose of acquiring the moulds and equipment of the Bristol porcelain factory owned by Benjamin Lund and William Miller, and to manufacture porcelain using soapstone mined in Cornwall, the licence for this having also been acquired from Lund. (Barrett 1966.)

At the time when the making of porcelain first began at Worcester, there existed no English-made china that could be relied upon to stand up for long to regular usage. The pastes of Chelsea and Derby were apt to crack and the china of Bow to chip badly. All were liable to crazing of the glaze especially when it was subjected to the alternate expansion and contraction caused by contact with hot fluids. This made the advent of the soapstone porcelain of Worcester, with its ability to resist hot water without cracking and crazing, a notable technical advance (Barrett 1966). This allowed the company to meet the demand for useful china. Some of the first Worcester wares were decorated using an underglaze blue. Blue painting was used for domestic wares by nearly all the eighteenth century factories (Barrett 1966), and Worcester soon established a reputation for having the finest craftsmen in the country for blue and white wares (Wavecrest Studios 2000). The use of underglaze blue decoration not only allowed the wares to be sold at a low price, but also offered the advantage that, being protected by the glaze, the decoration was more durable and permanent than that of enamelled colours (Barrett 1966).

The Worcester factory was the first to produce porcelain decorated with transfer prints on a large scale, early transfer prints being monochromes. The origin of this process is controversial, with some writers believing that the person who first applied it to the decoration of porcelain was the great engraver Robert Hancock who joined the company from Bow in 1756. (Royal Worcester 2000.) Although a smaller part of the early production, the art of painting on the glaze in enamel colours was also mastered.

In the 1760s, large amounts of Worcester porcelain were decorated by a London porcelain painter, James Giles, in glowing enamel colours, and were then gilded. The closure of the Chelsea factory in 1768 led to the arrival at Worcester of many skilled craftspeople with new ideas and techniques. The rococo influence was sustained, and wares began increasingly to be decorated with the famous 'fish scale' pattern. Vases decorated in this way, except for blank reserves, were delivered to James Giles to complete, often with birds and flowers. (Wavecrest Studios 2000.)

In 1776 one of the founders of the company, Dr Wall, died, followed in 1783 by the managing partner William Davis. Worcester's London agent, Thomas Flight, purchased the company for the sum of £3,000 to provide occupations for his sons, Joseph and John (Barrett 1966). The Flights encouraged new ideas, particularly elegant decorations in dark blue and gold, the forerunners of the Regency style. With the transfer of ownership, the chief decorator, Robert Chamberlain Sr left the company eventually to form his own rival works. In August 1788, King George III, accompanied by Queen Charlotte and the Duke of York visited the factory, and they were so impressed that the King granted the company the prestigious 'Royal Warrant' as 'Manufacturers to their Majesties' (Barrett 1966). The word 'Royal' was inserted into the name of the company (the Royal Worcester Porcelain Company), and a showroom was opened in London, both features being retained to this day (Wavecrest Studios 2000).



By 1790, the Flight manufactory was well established and, despite technical and other difficulties, was able to compete successfully with the then flourishing Derby factory for the patronage of Royalty and of influential people in Court circles (Barrett 1966). John Flight died in 1791 at the age of 25, and in 1793 Martin Barr was made a partner, the firm becoming Flight and Barr. His son Martin Barr Jr also joined the firm. When Martin Barr Sr died in 1813, the name of the firm was changed again to Flight, Barr and Barr.

In 1814, a highly talented ceramic painter by the name of Thomas Baxter moved to Worcester, having been forced to move by ill health from the unhealthy air of London. He established a ceramic painting school and created a great many classic images for Flight, Barr and Barr, including many of the famous pieces featuring feather and shell designs. Craftsmen were encouraged to regard their work as jewellery and, by paying them by the hour instead of by the piece, it was ensured that every possible pain was taken in the search for excellence. (Wavecrest Studios 2000.)

Not surprisingly, the Flights and Barrs were responsible for the creation of some of the finest porcelain ever made in England, and it was sought by Royalty and the aristocracy all over Europe. As Henry Sandon, the former curator of the Dyson Perrins Museum at Worcester says 'Today it is avidly collected all over the world and one only has to look at the fine moulding, the superb painting and the rich deep colours to appreciate why this period of English ceramic making is universally respected' (Sandon 1973).

With the death of Joseph Flight in 1840, the Flight, Barr and Barr company was merged with its former rival, the Chamberlain porcelain works which had been started by its former employee Robert Chamberlain (Barrett 1966). This company had flourished by providing tea, dinner, and dessert services, for the nobility, gentry, and the increasingly wealthy middle classes. There was, however, little design development, and the merger was not a happy one. In 1852 the Chamberlain era was followed by that of Messrs. Kerr and Binns, and the new owners re-established the old Worcester quality with new styles, bodies, and glazes. Their new Ivory porcelain, a form of unglazed parian, attracted the attention of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, who commissioned an important royal dessert service to be painted by Thomas Bott in the newly developed Worcester Enamels. (Wavecrest Studios 2000.)

During the reign of Queen Victoria, the company achieved great success. Manufacturing was consolidated at the current factory site in 1840 and following a program of major modernisation, in 1862 the factory changed its name to The Worcester Royal Porcelain Company (Royal Worcester 2000). The Managing Director, Richard William Binns, was to lead the company until the end of the century and under his control the number of employees was increased from 80 to 800 (Royal Worcester 2000). During the second half of the nineteenth century, Royal Worcester took great steps to develop new decorative skills and techniques. Apprenticed at fourteen years old, boys were instructed in anatomy and botany and were encouraged to study old master paintings. They were taught skills such as gilding, ground laying, printing and painting before specialising in one area. For the remainder of the nineteenth century, the company expanded its reputation worldwide, with Royal Worcester being successfully displayed at major international exhibitions (Royal Worcester 2000).

Australian themes

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Federation led to an increased interest in Australian images. Australian flora and fauna motifs were popular in jewellery, wood carving, ceramics and other decorative arts. Royal Worcester produced a series of plates and tea wares around 1912–1929, featuring uniquely Australian themes of flora and fauna. Capturing the new spirit of nationalism and with an eye to capitalising on a new commercial venture, four well-known Australian retailers and jewellers commissioned a variety of local artists to provide designs with Australian themes, which they then sent to England. They were Flavelle Brothers of Sydney, Flavelle Brothers and Sankey of Brisbane, Prouds of Sydney and Thomas Webb of Melbourne, who, in conjunction with Royal Worcester in England, encouraged this new idea especially for the Australian market. The project was also encouraged by Richard Baker, the then Curator of the Technological Museum in Sydney (now the Powerhouse Museum). (Dowe 1998.)

Plate 2. Royal Worcester plate, *Psalliota* [*Agaricus* sp.] 8B by W. Hart (after P. Clarke). © Powerhouse Museum (upper left).

Plate 3. Royal Worcester plate, *Lepiota dolicaulis* [*Macrolepiota dolichaula* (Berk. & Broome) Pegler & R.W. Rayner] 8C by W. Hart (after P. Clarke). © Powerhouse Museum (lower left).

As well as a series on flowering gums, waratahs, Christmas bells, flannel flowers and fuchsia, mushrooms were also used to form delicate centre motifs. These mushrooms are the only ones to be found on hand painted Royal Worcester porcelain. Phyllis Flockton Clarke, an Australian artist, was commissioned to provide the original paintings of the mushrooms.

The artist Phyllis Flockton Clarke

Phyllis Flockton Clarke was born at Charters Towers, Queensland on 18 January 1891 and died on 13 December 1989. She married Dr David North OBE, a scientist at CSR. They had three daughters, including one set of twins. Phyllis was the niece of Margaret Flockton, a well known natural history artist at the Royal Botanic Gardens and National Herbarium in Sydney. Margaret Flockton was the middle sister of three: Dora, Margaret and Phoebe (P. McWilliam pers. comm.). Phoebe Flockton's daughter Phyllis Clarke inherited the artistic talents of her aunt Margaret.

It was while on holiday in Fiji at the age of 19 that Phyllis was told of a position at the Australian Museum in Sydney. She returned to Australia to apply for the position which she won. (J. Woodhouse pers. comm.). Phyllis was an experienced painter of mushrooms. She was commissioned many times by Sir John Burton Cleland to provide paintings of mushrooms and other fungi for him while he worked in Sydney as the Principal Government Microbiologist in the Central Bureau of Health, Bureau of Microbiology. These paintings were used in his papers with Edwin Cheel between 1914 and 1923 and in his book *Toadstools and Mushrooms and Other Larger Fungi of South Australia, Parts I & II* (1934 and 1935). Many are now housed at the Botanic Gardens and State Herbarium of South Australia. A number have been reproduced in *Larger Fungi of South Australia* (Grgurinovic 1997). Phyllis Clarke has four mushroom species named in her honour, *Lactarius clarkeae* Cleland (1927), *L. subclarkeae* Grgurinovic (1997), *Mycena clarkeana* Grgurinovic (1997, Plate 17a) and *Volvariella clarkeae* Grgurinovic (1997, Plate 23b).

The series of plates

The Museum of Worcester Porcelain has four coloured drawings of mushrooms on wax tracing paper in its archives. These are reproduced in Plates 6–9 and can be seen to have badly discoloured. They are most likely to be factory recordings, traced from Phyllis Clarke's original watercolours (W. Cook *in litt.*). The whereabouts of the original watercolours is unknown.

The Powerhouse Museum, Sydney has five plates in the mushroom series. The fanciful mushroom plates are painted to suggest a child's innocence in a woodland world—they are accurate but imaginative. Four of the plates have an acid etched Quaker grey (with self-coloured pattern) and gilt border surrounding the central, hand-painted scene and were all painted by William Hart (Plates 1–4; Plate 1 on journal's front cover; Plate 4, p. 109). The other one (Plate 5, p. 109) has a narrow gilt border embossed with grapevines and was painted by Reginald Austin. The plates with Quaker grey borders are labelled '*Cortinarius* 8A' (Plate 1), '*Psalliota* 8B' (Plate 2), '*Lepiota dolicaulis* 8C' (Plate 3) and '8D' (Plate 4). ('8D' is also a species of *Psalliota*, now known as *Agaricus*.) These four plates have the onglaze handwritten pattern number 'W9762' in grey ink.

It is likely that these mushroom plates were trial pieces and never manufactured in volume. The entries relating to all of the floral series are quite detailed and listed in the indices held at the The Museum of Worcester Porcelain. The mushroom series is not included in any of the lists. The fact that the existing plates have the series numbers written on them also suggests that they were trial pieces. (W. Cook *in litt.*)

Plate 6. Factory record, *Cortinarius* 8A. © The Museum of Worcester Porcelain, The Dyson Perrins Museum Trust (upper right).

Plate 7. Factory record, *Psalliota* [*Agaricus* sp.] 8B. © The Museum of Worcester Porcelain, The Dyson Perrins Museum Trust (lower right).


Plate 8. Factory record, *Lepiota dolicaulis* [*Macrolepiota dolichaula* (Berk. & Broome) Pegler & R.W. Rayner] 8C. © The Museum of Worcester Porcelain, The Dyson Perrins Museum Trust (upper far right).

Plate 9. Factory record, [*Agaricus* sp.] 8D. © The Museum of Worcester Porcelain, The Dyson Perrins Museum Trust (lower far right).

Fungus 35

Desst Royal Hallbody Drawing by
 119760 In Ground Miss P. H. Clarke
 Code (8A) *Gortinaricus* New Zealand

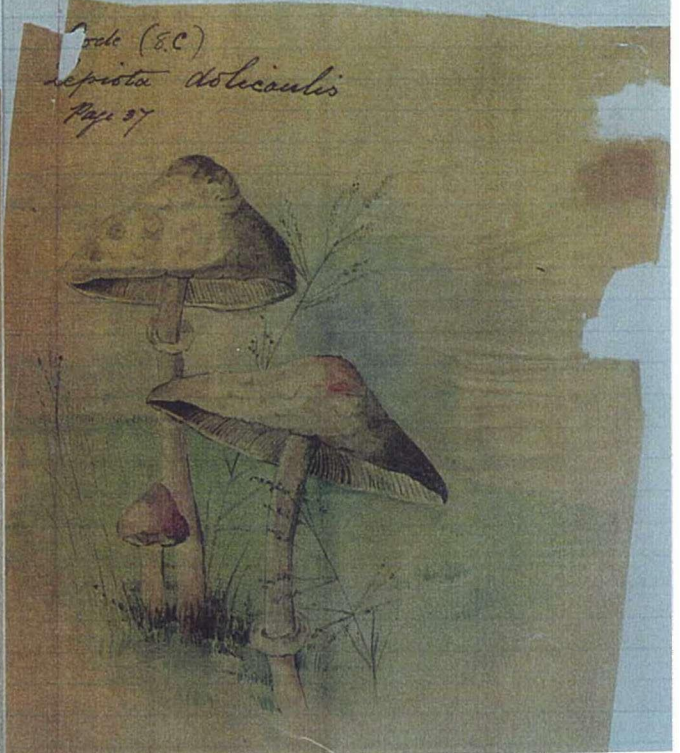
(8A) Page 35
Gortinaricus



37

Desst Royal Hallbody
 119760 In Ground Miss P. H. Clarke
 Code (8C)
Lepiota delicatula (25.11.18)


Code (8C)
Lepiota delicatula
 Page 37



36

Desst Royal Hallbody
 119760 In Ground Miss P. H. Clarke
 Code No (8B)
Psalliota

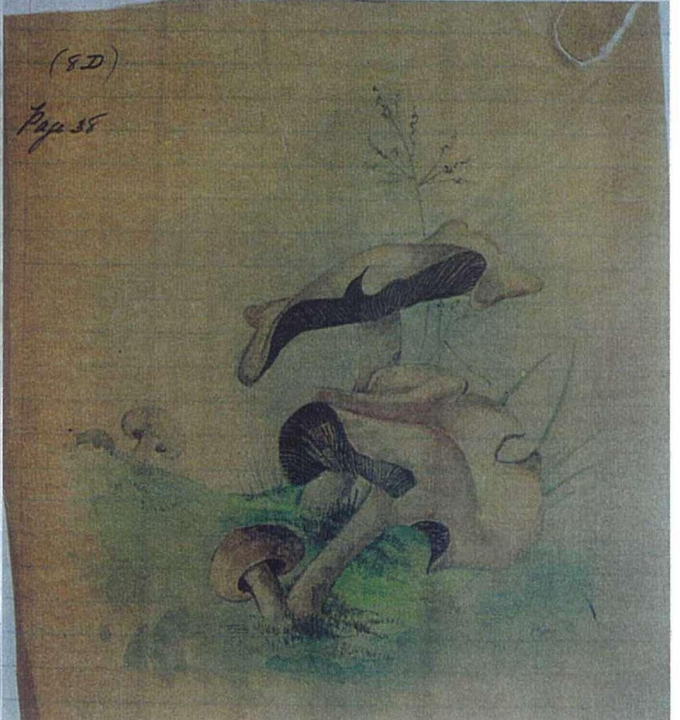
Code (8B)
Psalliota
 Page 36.



38

Desst Royal Hall
 119760 In Ground Miss P. H. Clarke
 (8D)

(8D)
 Page 38



In the Museum of Worcester Porcelain archives, the pattern number 'W9762' is recorded as a floral design with an etched Quaker grey border on a dessert service (Regal shape), painted by Albert Shuck. It appears that the fungal series was created by combining this existing border design with some new illustrations. The Export record books at Worcester include some original watercolours for the series, entitled 'Fungia Drawings' by Miss P.F. Clarke. The drawings are titled as follows: 8A *Cortinarius* New S. Wales, 8B *Psalliota*, 8C *Lepiota dolicaulis*, 8D not named. (W. Cook *in litt.*).

The painting by R. Austin (Plate 5) is derived from the same watercolour as the painting by W. Hart ('*Lepiota dolicaulis* 8C' (Plate 3)). It can be seen that each artist has retained the accuracy of the original watercolour but has given their painting on porcelain a very different artistic treatment.

From 1926 onwards a more economical and therefore cheaper series of Australian flora was produced. This was created by a printed outline in black with hand-filling details executed by junior painters and apprentices. A different border was used and pieces found with this combination are unsigned. The last date found for 'Australian Worcester' is 1929, at which time the Great Depression had a tremendous impact on decorative wares forcing the Worcester factory to closed for a short time. (Landis 1996.)

The ceramic painters William Hart and Reginald Austin

Little is known about William Hart. He painted fruit for a short time after the First World War and is known to have painted some Australian flowers after Ellis Rowan (W. Cook *in litt.*).

Reginald Harry Austin (1890–1955) was one of the principal painters at Worcester in the 1900s and 1910s and specialised in flowers, birds and fruits (Sandon 1973).

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Glossary

body: the material from which porcelain is made (Gates 2000).

bone china: true porcelain of clay, feldspathic rock modified with the addition of bone ash. Introduced by Joseph Spode in about 1794, it is almost exclusively used in England. The Worcester recipe being 50 per cent ox bone, 25 per cent china stone (feldspar) and 25 per cent china clay, in its finest form, firing at about 1250°C (Sandon 1973).

Bow: this factory was established in about 1744 and with the Chelsea works ranks as the earliest British manufacturer of transparent porcelain.

Chelsea: a factory for porcelain manufacture established in Chelsea, London in about 1743. The work of the Chelsea factory was extensively influenced by Meissen until about 1756, the styles of Sèvres superseding it.

Derby: William Duesbury commenced the manufacture of porcelain at Derby, in about 1750. The original factory closed in 1848 (a small works continued in the same tradition under the name Stevenson & Hancock) and a new factory was formed in 1878. (Birks 2000.)

enamels: paints that are applied over the glaze are commonly called enamels. Most of them are made from metallic oxides, such as iron, copper, and manganese. Enamel colors require additional firings to make them permanent.

ground laying: a coat of ground laying oil is evenly applied, then carefully 'bossed' with a fine silk pad packed with cotton wool to remove brush marks. The ceramic powdered colour is applied using a cotton wool pad and worked into the ground laying oil. This highly skilled operation, at its best, can produce beautifully smooth and even ground colours. (Sandon 1973.)

onglaze: colours put on after the glaze has been fired. They have to be fired into the glaze at lower temperatures than the glaze is fired at. No glaze is put on the top of onglaze colours, as the temperature needed for firing the glaze would burn away the enamels. The colours change in the firing, often quite considerably, and great

knowledge and skill is needed to learn and use these changes successfully. Most paintings require two or more onglaze firings to build up the final colours necessary. (Sandon 1973.)

parian: named after the island of Paros, also called statuary porcelain, as the body imitated Greek marble statues so well. An unusually high amount of feldspar, about 70 per cent, forms the body, plus nearly 30 per cent china clay and a small amount of cullet (scrap glass). The body did not need glazing but it could be. Parian was always slip-cast as it was not a very plastic body. It was used mainly for ornamental wares but also for many useful wares at Worcester. It was fired at 1200–1250°C. (Sandon 1973.)

porcelain: a hard, translucent and generally white ceramic substance. There are three main kinds of porcelain: hard-paste or true porcelain; soft-paste or artificial porcelain; and, bone china. The differences between the types of porcelain are based on the material from which they are made and temperatures used for firing. Methods of decoration include glazing, painting and transfer printing. The process of shaping varies and includes wheel throwing, moulding and modelling.

soapstone porcelain: soapstone or steatite was first used as an ingredient of the English softpaste porcelain paste at a Bristol factory, and was adopted as the basis of early Worcester porcelain.

transfer printing: in this process a design is engraved on a copper plate, inked with ceramic color, and transferred to tissue paper. While the color is still wet, the tissue paper is pressed against a porcelain object, leaving the design on its surface.

underglaze: painted or printed decorations applied to ceramics before they have been glazed; these colours develop at about the same temperature as that needed to vitrify a glaze. The colour possibilities are limited with cobalt blue, which is exceptionally tolerant of high temperatures, being the commonest underglaze.

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