

The History of Pearlware

by John Ainsley

In the last edition I covered the creamware market. Following on from this successful venture Josiah Wedgwood introduced a whiter version of the standard creamware or Queensware body in 1779. On the 19th June of that year he wrote to his partner Bentley in London. "I thank Her Majesty for the honour she has done to the Pearl White and I hope it will have due influence upon all her loyal subjects". Readers should note that we always use the term 'body' in respect of earthenware and 'paste' when we refer to porcelain. Wedgwood was actually seeking a change from the creamware which all potters of the period had copied. The new pearlware was to dominate the market for at least the next sixty years. In its eighteenth century phase, and as 'blue and white' in chinoiserie patterns it went a great deal towards replacing the imports from China, so much in demand and which was beginning to dry up. The 'china' was auctioned on the keyside after the ships had docked. As early as about 1790 the East India Company, after a long running dispute with the dealers, or so called 'Chinamen', whom they accused of 'ringing', stopped the imports of china, which they had used as ballast to offset the light weight of their precious cargoes of tea. At a times of huge demand for china, pearlware went a great way towards plugging the gap and was soon to be manufactured by all of the potters of the day. Like creamware, and even with one's eyes shut, the fineness and light density earthenware body may still easily be recognised. It was intended to simulate the finest porcelain and it succeeded. Only in its lack of translucency can it be seen as an earthenware. All of the potters of the day used a blue glaze, and where it gathers or pools, as on the inside of footrims, its presence is a good recognition pointer to those unfamiliar with its fineness and lightness. After 1800 or so the printed chinoiserie patterns begin to disappear and there develops a truly English style, and English views and even scenes from Empire were to dominate the printed decoration for the next forty years and beyond. Indeed the patterns were to continue throughout the nineteenth and well into the twentieth century, and even today modern Spode continues to re-use patterns designed two hundred years ago. During pearlware's first fifty years or so there are no markings to indicate the body type. In my opinion the 1830s mark the last serious decade of the manufacture of a light density earthenware. Little is written if anything about its demise which I can suggest came about because the supplies of the fine Cornish clays used in its manufacture, were exhausted. Ironically after about 1840 the term 'Pearl' can often be found impressed into the body and from about c1868 the impressed initial 'P' occurs, again intending to indicate that the body was the famous pearlware. However even by c1840 the body was deteriorating in quality and gaining in weight and after the middle of the nineteenth century it is my belief that true pearlware, which could emulate the finest pastes used to manufacture porcelain, had virtually disappeared. In the second half of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth century the masquerade is over and whether pieces carry the mark 'pearl' or indeed only a 'P' they no longer represent true pearlware having degenerated to a heavier and coarser earthenware.

To support this analysis I have downloaded about eighty examples of pearlware dating from the last two decades of the eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries from our online database of auctions results at www.antiques-info.co.uk. I have not as usual, restricted examples from the market to the last year or two, but rather included examples sold from about circa 2000 to date, so that readers can get a good idea of prices over the last dozen or so years. My search criteria were only 'Ceramics' and then 'pearlware', hence many examples in our database of genuine pearlware not described as such will be stored in the database and might appear within other search criteria within the ceramics category. For example many cataloguers may not have recognised the type or may have described items under some other generic terminology which describes the type of decoration rather than the type of body. For example during the pearlware period there was also manufactured the famous and often more valuable Pratt Ware which in essence is always a pearlware body. Frequently also manufacturers names are used as the descriptive term which again might disguise the fact that the body is pearlware. Another example of generic terminology being used to describe decoration or decorative type, rather than a body or paste type is majolica, which refers rather to the glazes and their colours, rather than the body or paste, indeed I have seen earthenwares and porcelains from across Europe described as 'majolica'.

In this study I have concentrated on the history of pearlware, and attempted some explanations to its body type and glaze. With eighty examples to browse or even study I will leave the reader to analyse the market, which at the better end as illustrated here from £4,000 to about £350 has changed little in the last ten or so years.



1
Pearlware tankard, late 18th/19thC, base inscribed Swansea, 5.75in high. *Andrew Hartley, Ilkley. Dec 02. HP: £3,400. ABP: £4,075.*



2
19thC pearlware plaque with transfer print of the boxers Tom Spring & Jack Landan, 16in wide. *Brightwells, Leominster. Oct 11. HP: £2,300. ABP: £2,756.*



3
Pair of John Walton pearlware models of a lion and unicorn, 17cm high, mark impressed on a scroll, c1820. *Mellors & Kirk, Nottingham. Apr 03. HP: £2,200. ABP: £2,636.*



4
Rare pearlware Nelson commemorative mug. *Mellors & Kirk, Nottingham. Feb 03. HP: £2,100. ABP: £2,517.*



5
Spode pearlware complete oval breakfast set printed in blue with the 'Greek' pattern, workman's marks, early 19thC. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Mar 00. HP: £2,000. ABP: £2,397.*



6
Late 18thC Enoch Wood Pearlware figure of a lion, one paw raised off ball, glazed in browns on green, cream/brown moulded base, 7.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. May 09. HP: £2,000. ABP: £2,397.*



7
Pearlware figure group, early 19thC, Hurdy Gurdy man with a dancing bear, monkey jockey on a dog, companion bocyte on a scroll moulded naturalistic shaped oblong base, 5.75in high, 6.75in long. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £1,800. ABP: £2,157.*



8
Ralph Wood pearlware figure of Benjamin Franklin, c1790, 33cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Mar 00. HP: £1,400. ABP: £1,678.*



9
Polychrome Pearlware arbour group, early 19thC, 'Pers-waition' (sic), couple in Regency dress on a bench before bocyte beside potted plant, a dog, parasol, top hat at their feet, scroll moulded base, titled, 8in high, 7in wide. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £1,400. ABP: £1,678.*



10
Unusual pearlware Toby jug c1780-90, decorated in blue and green enamels, long clay pipe resting against stool, a barrel lying down between his feet, some damage to hat, 25cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £1,400. ABP: £1,678.*



11 Set of three Pearlware triple flower vases, each painted with a simple flower spray within a 'C' scroll cartouche on a shaped oval base, 21cm high. Phillips, Bath. May 00. HP: £1,250. ABP: £1,498.



16 Staffordshire pearlware group of Romulus and Remus, first half 19thC, 23cm. (damage and restoration). Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Jun 00. HP: £900. ABP: £1,078.



21 Spode Pearlware blue/white part dessert set transfer printed with 'Greek' pattern: 3 side plates with arcaded and basketweave borders, a pair of oval chestnut baskets and stands and a pair of oval dishes with shaped borders, some damage. Tring Market Auctions, Tring. May 04. HP: £700. ABP: £839.



25 Pearlware model of a red squirrel, 1st half 19thC, after Derby, eating a nut which it clutches in its forepaws, low grassy base, 8cm. Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £650. ABP: £779.



30 Pair of 18thC Ralph Wood (?) pearlware groups of children with a dog and lamb, on rectangular bases, 6.25in. Gorrings, Lewes. Jul 00. HP: £500. ABP: £599.



12 19thC Staffordshire pearlware Wesleyan Chapel money box. (old repairs) Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Feb 06. HP: £1,250. ABP: £1,498.



17 Early 19thC Enoch Wood pearlware group of the Virgin and Child, enamel painted decoration with marbled effect base, 13.5in high. Gorrings, Lewes. Apr 02. HP: £850. ABP: £1,018.



22 Staffordshire pearlware figure of Nelson, early 19thC, standing before a cannon, his costume painted in colours, pink lustre splash base, 31cm high. Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £680. ABP: £815.



26 Set of six Wedgwood pearlware plates, blue printed with different botanical specimens, 'Wedgwood' impressed, 19thC, 24.5cm. Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £620. ABP: £743.



31 18thC pearlware plate, shaped edge, underglaze blue and ochre swag border, 14in, hairline crack and rim chip. Tring Market Auctions, Tring. Oct 03. HP: £500. ABP: £599.



13 Pearlware dessert service, possibly Davenport, c1825: 8 plates, 8 dishes, 4 baskets and stands, 2 ladles and a comport decorated with fruiting vine, some damage. (27) Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 05. HP: £1,150. ABP: £1,378.



18 Wood-type pearlware lion, front left paw raised upon a ball, on long marbled plinth, c1800, 11in long. Gorrings, Lewes. Apr 07. HP: £850. ABP: £1,018.

The prices quoted are actual Hammer Prices (HP) followed by the Approximate Buyer's Price (ABP) which includes an average buyer's premium of 16.55% VAT.



27 Walton Pearlware model, early 19thC, pair of running hounds beside bocage, on a shredded clay encrusted shaped oval base, impressed, 5in high. Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £600. ABP: £719.



32 Staffordshire pearlware bust of John Wesley, c1790. Brettell, Newport, Shrops. Sep 04. HP: £500. ABP: £599.



14 Early 19thC Pearlware figure of a horse, 15cm high, (poss. St Anthony's Pottery of Newcastle) Cheffins, Cambridge. Apr 03. HP: £1,100. ABP: £1,318.



19 Staffordshire pearlware blue/white two handled chestnut basket on stand, c1820, grazing rabbits pattern, 11.5in long. Wintertons Ltd, Lichfield. Nov 02. HP: £800. ABP: £958.



23 Rare documentary Borrowstounness pearlware bowl, printed in blue with Chinese borders, ovals of birds and figures around the inscription John & Helen Fisher, Borrowstounness 1811 in Pratt palette, exterior with chinoiseries, cracks, staining chips, 28.3cm. Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 11. HP: £680. ABP: £815.



28 Documentary pearlware punch bowl, late 18thC, painted in underglaze blue with 'fill the Bowl/again With/Rum punch/Com gentlemen n/1792' (sic) within stylised foliate borders, the exterior with four landscape vignettes enclosing birds, 8in dia. Hartleys, Ilkley. Apr 12. HP: £580. ABP: £695.



33 Pearlware mug, cylindrical form with faux bamboo handle, printed in underglaze blue with 'Greenwich Hospital', titled, 4.25in high, with a large pearlware mug printed in underglaze blue with a continuous flower pattern, 5.5in high. (2) Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 10. HP: £500. ABP: £599.



15 Pearlware cow and calf creamer/cover, c1800, beast standing on plinth base, calf recumbent at her feet, blue/ochre sponged detail, green and brown lined base (at fault), 11.5cm high. Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Jun 09. HP: £1,050. ABP: £1,258.



20 Two pearlware Toby jugs c1820, both seated and resting a jug on their left knee, one jug disappointingly empty, each with a clay pipe resting by his side, one with a barrel between his feet, small damages and restorations, 26cm max. (2) Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £700. ABP: £839.



24 Pearlware jug, ovoid body printed and painted with various cartoon people in conversation with balloon captions, neck inscribed, 'Bonapart Dethron'd. April 1st 1814', 13.5cm high, hair crack to spout. Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £650. ABP: £779.



29 Early 19thC pearlware cow creamer with spotted decoration, on a shaped base with cover (a.f.), 13cm high. Charterhouse Auctioneers, Sherborne. Jun 11. HP: £550. ABP: £659.



34 18th/early 19thC Staffs Pearlware figure of a lion, moulded oblong base, 5.75in overall x 5.75in high. Cooper Barrington, Froncsyllte. Apr 12. HP: £500. ABP: £599.

Pearlware



35
Unusual pearlware Toby jug with 'Askew' face c1800, crudely moulded and painted with an ochre frock coat, blue breeches and brown hat, blue jug resting on his knee, chamfered base enamelled green, 20cm, Paper label for the Margaret Cadman collection. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £480. ABP: £575.*



36
Five small Staffordshire pearlware figures, 19thC, two of children reading, one of Falstaff seated on a grassy stump, one of Winter, wearing a furry hat and a long cloak, the last of a lion resting a forepaw on a blue ball, some restoration, 14.5cm max. (5) *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £450. ABP: £539.*



37
Roger's pearlware chamfered rectangular blue and white meat plate, impressed mark, c1820, 53.7cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £440. ABP: £527.*



38
Late 18thC pearlware bear, sponged enamelling in brown and ochre, on green hollow base, 3in high. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 07. HP: £440. ABP: £527.*



39
Late 18thC pearlware mug, cylindrical shape painted with farm implements (4.5in), and two smaller pearlware mugs painted with stylised floral borders, 3.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 07. HP: £440. ABP: £527.*



40
Pearlware blue/white printed mug, possibly Swansea, a scene showing a guillotine and bearing the inscription 'View of la guillotine or the modern beheading machine at Paris, by which Louis XVI, late King of France, suffered (sic) on the scaffold, Jan 21st, 1793', within foliate sprays, interior and handle printed with a stylised floral design, crack, 8.5cm. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Apr 10. HP: £440. ABP: £527.*



41
Pearlware puzzle jug, inscribed 'H.J.', early 19thC, 8.25in high. *Andrew Hartley, Ilkley. Oct 01. HP: £420. ABP: £503.*



42
Rare pair of 'Queen Caroline' pearlware nursery plates, 1821, each relief-moulded with a titled portrait bust of Queen Caroline wearing green jacket and pink lustre hat with green plume, borders with crowns, flowers and Prince of Wales feathers in coloured enamels, 8.25in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 04. HP: £420. ABP: £503.*



43
Pearlware bear baiting group, man in eastern costume with a bear on a rope standing before a bocage, scroll base, 22cm high. *Rosebery's, London. Sep 04. HP: £420. ABP: £503.*



44
English pearlware tea canister, c1790-1800, moulded/decorated in Pratt-type colours with theatrical figures, 5in, and a pearlware press moulded flask, with leaf portraits of Flora, transfer printed in blue with flowers, 5.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 11. HP: £420. ABP: £503.*



45
Rare Staffordshire pearlware group c1800, chicken with brightly-coloured plumage being savaged by fox beneath flowering bocage, some restoration, 15.5cm high. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £420. ABP: £503.*



46
Pair of unusual 19thC pearlware plates, decorated in underglaze blue with a central ship design within a border of shells and foliage, 10in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 03. HP: £410. ABP: £491.*



47
Pearlware puzzle jug, with pierced rim and scroll flow handle, painted with flowers, late 18th/19thC, 6.5in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Jun 07. HP: £400. ABP: £479.*



48
Group of Wedgwood & Co. pearlware dinner wares, conchological interest, each printed in brown and hand-coloured with various shells/seaweeds: tureen/cover 41cm, scallop-shaped dessert dish 21cm, 3 soup plates, 2 dinner plates & rectangular meat dish, various borders and marks, some un-marked, & tea bowl and two saucers. (12) *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 11. HP: £400. ABP: £479.*



49
Pearlware figure group, early 19thC, 'Dandies', a couple in fashionable dress, dog at their feet, standing before bocage, scroll moulded base, 8in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £400. ABP: £479.*



50
Early 19thC pearlware jug, relief moulded and painted with portrait busts of Shakespeare the Poet, The Miser and The Spendthrift, c1820, 9.25in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 03. HP: £380. ABP: £455.*



51
Leeds pearlware figure of Neptune, crowned figure in loose-fitting robe, standing beside dolphin, on square base, impressed mark, 7.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Nov 05. HP: £380. ABP: £455.*



52
A pearlware Toby jug, first half 19thC, typically moulded in frock coat and breeches, the foaming jug on his knee unusually modelled as a grotesque bird-type creature with large beak, the handle with a scroll terminal, some retouching or restoration to his hat, 25.5cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £380. ABP: £455.*



53
Pair of documentary pearlware jugs, named/dated 'Jane Emma Rendle Rowett 1827', polychrome enamel loose bouquets and border, 4.75in high, J.E.R. Rowett, possibly Cornish. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Mar 10. HP: £370. ABP: £443.*



54
Early 19thC pearlware jug with religiously inspired texts, inscribed John Stephens, born April 3rd 1825, 9in high. *Amersham Auction Rooms, Bucks. May 01. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



55
Victorian pearlware child's/dolls part dinner service, decorated with Indian? ruins: 3 large meat plates, 8 dinner plates, tureens etc, various damages. (a lot) *Rosebery's, London. Sep 04. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



56
Set of three pearlware meat dishes, blue printed with scrolling foliage/flower heads, on a vermiculated ground, a leaf border; early 19thC, 19in wide. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Apr 07. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



57
Pearlware char dish, poss. Bristol, sides painted with fish, 19.5cm. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Apr 10. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



58
Teapots: pearlware teapot with ribbed body applied in brown with relief of the Birth of Venus and inscriber EG Davis, 1805, spout and lid chips, matching sucrier/cover, and 3 other teapots/covers, some marked, damage and restoration. (10) *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 11. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



59
Borrowstounness pearlware bowl, printed in brown with figure and bird scenes and centred on The World in Planisphere, poor condition, 28.5cm. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 11. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



60
Ralph Wood pearlware figure group, late 18thC, 'Rural Pastime', couple seated on rockwork beside bocage, titled square base, impressed, 7.75in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*

Images are in descending hammer price order. The price range is indicated at the start of each section.



61
Pearlware figure group, early 19thC, Sailor's Farewell, peasant wearing a green jacket and puce trousers, a bundle and stick at his feet, standing beside his seated female companion holding a spotty kerchief in her left hand, both before bocage, on a naturalistically moulded shaped base, 7.5in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 11. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



62
George III pearlware commemorative jug, c1790-1810, moulded/decorated in Pratt-type colours with portraits of Admiral Rodney, George III and Queen Charlotte, 5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 11. HP: £360. ABP: £431.*



63
Pair of Ralph Salt pearlware models of gardeners, c1820, tiled bases, flowering bocage, Walton group titled 'Tenderness', and a Tithes Pig group, damages, 17cm max. (4) *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £350. ABP: £419.*



64
Pearlware figure group, c1800, (of Walton type) St George & the Dragon, 25cm high. (damages) *Richard Winterton, Burton on Trent, Staffs. Jan 02. HP: £350. ABP: £419.*



65
Pearlware moneybox early 19thC, Portobello type, as a house flanked by two figures, two faces peering through upstairs windows, back of roof with a coin slot, a chip to the slot, 12.5cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £350. ABP: £419.*



66
Pearlware blue/white teapot/cover, dated 1783, globular form, loop handle, painted in blue with an Oriental fenced landscape, reverse inscribed Hannah Beard, Stockport, 1783, 6.5in high. *Wintertons Ltd, Lichfield. Nov 01. HP: £340. ABP: £407.*



67
Early 19thC pearlware plate, moulded scalloped rim, painted with berries within radiating scrolls and pendant foliage, enriched in gilt, 8in dia. *Golding Young & Co, Grantham. Feb 06. HP: £325. ABP: £389.*



68
William IV commemorative coronation mug, externally printed in black, portraits of King William and Queen Adelaide flanking a Royal crest within a foliate wreath, internally printed around the rim with floral garlands and titles, beaded rims, moulded foot rim, pearlware glazed, 10cm high. *Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £320. ABP: £383.*



69
Two early 19thC pearlware sucriers, a teapot and covers, possibly Yorkshire, each of the sugars of lozenge section and their covers with swan knobs, willow pattern one 14.5cm wide and other 14cm wide, teapot of commode shape printed with willow pattern, 13cm high. (R) (6) *Cheffins, Cambridge. Apr 05. HP: £320. ABP: £383.*



70
Wedgwood & Co. pearlware part dinner service, each piece painted in sage-green, blue and ochre with bands: vegetable tureen and cover, another base, 9 soup plates, 4 pudding bowls, 3 plates & a damaged cover; most impressed Wedgwood & Co, several with damage. (20) *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 11. HP: £320. ABP: £383.*



71
Roger's pearlware soup tureen, cover and ladle, early 19thC, rounded oblong form printed in underglaze blue with the 'Zebra' pattern, with recumbent lion finial. lion mask lug handles, impressed mark, 14.5in wide overall. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Jun 11. HP: £320. ABP: £383.*



72
Pearlware puzzle jug, c1820s, of baluster form with angular handle and three spouts, all over printed in underglaze blue with small flowerheads, unmarked, 6.25in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Jun 12. HP: £320. ABP: £383.*



73
Early 19thC Staffordshire pearlware pottery bull baiting group bull beating, 'Now Captain Lad' on base, black/white dog on his shoulder accompanied by man with yellow jacket with black hat. *Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Feb 08. HP: £310. ABP: £371.*



74
Pearlware figure, early 19thC, shepherd wearing a pink mottled jacket and green breeches, a sheep over his shoulders, standing against a bocage, on a shaped base with shredded clay grass, 8.25in high, a similar figure, 8in high. (2) *Hartleys, Ilkley. Sep 09. HP: £310. ABP: £371.*



75
Pearlware Lord Rodney mug, early 19thC, 10cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Nov 03. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



76
Pair of pearlware reclining figures of Anthony and Cleopatra, manner of Wood & Caldwell, c1800-10, rectangular plinths, 12.75in and 12.25in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 11. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



77
Staffordshire pearlware bocage figure, early 19thC, lady playing a mandolin, dog at her side, scroll base, 17cm high. *Rosebery's, London. Mar 05. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



78
Pearlware 'Nelson' jug, early 19thC, printed in underglaze blue with half length portrait of Nelson, study of 'Victory' and Nelson's Orders, below trophies of war, 5.75in, with Leeds pottery jug, moulded/overpainted in brown/yellow/blue/green with portraits of Nelson and Berry, impressed, 7in high. (2) *Hartleys, Ilkley. Mar 10. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



79
18thC Pearlware plaque of the Judgment of Paris, attributed to Ralph Wood, ex D.M. Wood collection, 8.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 10. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



80
Pair of Wedgwood pearlware candlesticks mid 19thC, tall fluted column on a square base, details highlighted in blue, impressed Wedgwood and P marks, tops with brass mounts, 31.2cm. (2) *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Apr 13. HP: £300. ABP: £359.*



81
English pearlware loving cup, scroll handles and pedestal foot, inscribed 'The Farmers Arms', blue printed with tools and stiff leaf banding, early 19thC, 5in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Feb 08. HP: £290. ABP: £347.*