



A Meissen rectangular canister, 1745, 10cm, decorated in purple with travellers in a landscape and merchants on a quayside, with gilt scrollwork. £2,585. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



Russian silver mounted tea canister with cut glass body, silver neck and stopper and domed lid, 1908-1917 St Petersburg. £588. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



A Meissen Hausmaler porcelain tea canister, c1725-1730, decorated c1740 in the workshop of J. F. Metzsch, Bayreuth, hexagonal baluster shape in chinoiserie style. £3,290. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.

Tea Containers.

Introduction with market survey

by Zita Thornton



A Famille Rose armorial teaset which includes a tea canister; (second from the left) Qianlong. Each piece brightly and finely enamelled and gilt with a large coat of arms of the Popham family within a Meissen style gilt scrollwork border. £2,800-£3,500. Courtesy of Bonhams.

Ever since tea was introduced into the homes of Britain in the mid seventeenth century, there have been a variety of containers to keep this precious commodity safe and dry. The first of these was a small, silver canister which wouldn't look out of place amid the perfume bottles on an aristocratic lady's dressing table, from where the tea was dispensed each morning. These first tea canisters are extremely rare. The earliest known example dating from 1677 is on display at the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam. When tea drinking moved into the drawing room of the newly affluent middle classes in the early eighteenth century, silver tea canisters reflected the shape of fashionable Oriental porcelain jars. Oval or rectangular, they had a sliding base for refilling the tea leaves, and a rounded cap which could be used to transfer the contents to a tea pot. Matching pairs of canisters were available to hold the two types of tea, the dried black tea and the fresher green tea. Some canisters were labelled with their initial letters 'G' and 'B' to avoid confusion.

Like the tea itself, the first ceramic canister reached Britain by way of Holland. Made from the tin glazed earthenware of Dutch Delft in the 1680s, they were square or rectangular in shape. However, once tea was imported directly from Canton, orders for Chinese porcelain tea canisters were made too. These often formed part of a larger tea service. The same shape as Delft canisters, they were decorated in blue and white or in the Imari style. Chinese porcelain canisters remained popular until the end of the eighteenth century. The pedestal baluster

shape decorated in famille rose enamels and European subjects was introduced in the 1720s. Family crests were a popular status symbol even though there might be a wait of two or three years from the order being placed to the goods arriving in England.

In the 1770s Chinese canisters, like European examples, copied a rectangular style with arched shoulders, first introduced by Meissen. Tea canisters were made at Meissen from the company's beginning in 1740. At first, Meissen copied the shape of the original hexagonal silver tea canister for their porcelain versions, but later a variety of shapes were made. It wasn't long before other European porcelain companies were making tea canisters too. From the 1750s many different shapes and decoration, including novelty designs such as head and shoulder busts, were widely available. Chinoiserie subjects gave way to flowers, landscapes and topical scenes.

The word caddy entered the vocabulary in the mid eighteenth century, when tea was imported from Malaya and Java in miniature chests holding a 'kati' of tea (about 1.333lbs). These caddies had a single compartment to hold that exact amount of tea. They were rectangular, oval, hexagonal or polygonal and were veneered in a variety of timbers. Fruit shapes were popular in turned wood, often the same variety as the fruit it depicted. Mahogany was used a lot in the mid century, giving way to lighter wood such as sycamore and satinwood by the end, along with tortoiseshell and ivory veneers. When the tax on tea was reduced in 1784 it was drunk in greater quantities. Larger tea caddies, often with two compartments and sometimes a glass bowl for sugar, took their place in the drawing room. When it stood on legs and contained four canisters and two bowls, with perhaps a caddy spoon to transfer the tea and a mote spoon to removing any floating leaves, it was called a teapoy.

Now part of the furniture, caddies were designed by all the main cabinet makers such as Chippendale, Hepplewhite, Adam and Sheraton. Neo-classical forms and motifs with marquetry and cross banding developed into the Regency style after 1810. A sarcophagus or rectangular shape had veneers of exotic woods and inlays of mother of pearl, silver, pewter and brass. Papier mâché, first introduced around 1790, became most popular during the Victorian era. The fashion for Oriental goods saw chinoiserie aptly applied to tea caddies including japanning,

and sycamore boxes with painted or penwork Oriental scenes. Tea canisters made from painted metal in the style known as Toleware often come onto the market, but these canisters were never made to be used in the home. They were found in stores to house a range of exotic teas from which individual purchases were dispensed in small quantities to be put into the family's caddy. They were cylindrical or octagonal, sometimes with a pagoda top. The Oriental look was further enhanced with japanned, Oriental scenes or pictures of tea merchants. They are also found in numbered sets or labelled with their contents.

Market information

Tea canisters and caddies appeal to collectors of wood, silver, porcelain, folk art or tea paraphernalia. You can find them in those specialist sales as well as in general antique shops. June and Tony Stone have a good stock of eighteenth and nineteenth century tea caddies. You can visit their shop at 5 Burlington Arcade, Bond Street, London W1 OPD. Tel: 02074 939495 or www.boxes.co.uk On the Internet www.teaantiques.com offers a wide range of tea containers of all kinds with excellent pictures from every angle and plenty of detail.

Guide prices

Teaantiques.com Chinese baluster porcelain vase shape canister decorated famille rose Chinese scene £105. Wedgwood pearlware canister 1785, £742. Britannia standard silver canister 1902 reproduced in rectangular Queen Anne style of 1705, £522. Caughley barrel canister decorated polychrome flowers 1790, £654. Staffordshire Prattware rectangular canister with moulded figures 1790, £494.

Sotheby's Meissen c1725 hexagonal baluster canister decorated c1740 in Chinoiserie style £3,290. Russian silver mounted cut glass rectangular, St Petersburg 1908-1917, £588. George III cylindrical silver canister with neoclassical medallions 1777, £2,702. Meissen 1740 rectangular canister with scenes of tea merchants £2,585. Worcester ovoid canister transfer printed hand coloured £352. Mother of pearl veneered marquetry tea caddy 1830, £916. Novelty tea caddy in the shape of a sideboard 1840, £529. Fruitwood caddy in the form of a pear late 18th-early 19th century £2,629. Small tortoiseshell veneered caddy on ivory ball feet, first half of 19th century £896.

For further information you can refer to *Stones pocket guide to tea caddies* by Noel Riley £12.95 from June and Tony Stone.



Small tortoiseshell veneered tea caddy from the first half of the 19thC with a two division lidded interior with ivory bands, and ivory feet. £896. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



George III silver tea caddy, John Troby, London 1808, with later added foliate chasing decoration. £235. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



Mother of pearl veneered marquetry tea caddy, 15cm wide. £916. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



A fruitwood caddy in the shape of a pear with a hinged top with stalk handle, late 18th/early 19thC. £2,629. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



George III silver tea caddy, Andrew Fogelberg, London 1777, cylindrical shape with neo-classical medallions, putti and wheat representing earth and putti with perfume burner representing fire, beaded borders and acorn finial. £2,702. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.



A Worcester ovoid tea canister c1765, transfer printed in black and hand coloured with figures and ruins, 13.5cm high. £352. Courtesy of Sotheby's, London.