

# Mason's Patent Ironstone China. 200 years of history, with a study of the current market. by John Ainsley

## History

The Mason's story is one of the most fascinating narratives in the history of ceramics. It begins in the early 1780s when Miles Mason began his career as a 'Chinaman' in London. The London trade depended almost entirely on Chinese porcelain, imported by the *Honourable East India Company*. Oriental porcelain was all the rage at this time. Following an accusation by the 'Company' of 'ringing' by the Chinamen an acrimonious dispute began in the courts which was to drag on for several years. This resulted in a victory for the Chinamen which turned rather hollow when, as a reprisal, in December 1791, after more than a hundred years of trade the *East India Company* ceased their bulk imports of china leaving the London dealers completely in the lurch.

Of course the English soft-paste porcelain had never been up to the job. They could not supply a body with the durability of Chinese hard-paste nor could they fill the demand. This also explains Cookworthy's development of a hard-paste porcelain at Plymouth and its commercial development from the 1780s by Newhall. By about 1800 there were up to a dozen companies involved in the manufacture of this 'hybrid' hard-paste and Miles Mason was one of these, partnering Thomas Wolfe at Liverpool and then setting up his own Staffordshire manufactory by 1804, where he produced mainly blue and white hard-paste in the Nankin style.

The demand for Oriental cannot be overstated. In the last 20 years or so of the eighteenth century English pearlwares were dominated by pseudo Chinese designs (as were soft-paste porcelain) and this continued into the next century. Despite the quality of the pearlwares the search for durability continued for a heavier potted body which emulated the Chinese wares. It is believed that *Turner's Patent* (stone china) was the first and soon such firms as Davenport and Hicks and Meigh were involved, probably by about 1806. It is doubtful whether Spode's stone china preceded 1813 but Spode was involved in the much greater enterprise of introducing and developing a new porcelain from c1800. This was to become the most revolutionary development in the history of ceramics. Spode added 50% calcined ox bone to the standard Chinese kaolin and petuntse mix to produce the greatest phenomenon in the history of ceramics, bone china. So successful was this new body that by about 1813-15 the manufacture of the 'hybrid' hard-pastes ceased altogether.

However the stone china story was only just beginning. In July 1813 Charles James Mason introduced his *Patent Ironstone China*. Miles Mason transferred his business to his two sons a month before the patent was announced. It proved a huge marketing success with every word in the patent connotating to precisely what the market was seeking. George and Charles Mason traded as G & C Mason. From 1813-1848 the Mason Works produced a vast output. The body's own durability, and perhaps a declining interest in the Oriental style contributed to the Works' downfall and bankruptcy. During the 1850s Francis Morley purchased the Mason moulds, copper plates and designs. The name Morley was added below the standard crown and curtain marks, and in 1858 he brought Taylor Ashworth into the business before retiring in 1862. This explains how Ashworth secured the valuable Mason copper plates and trade marks. From May 1862, George L Ashworth traded under his own name and the Ashworth dynasty, in name terms lasted for 104 years until 1968 when the firm of *G. L. Ashworth and Bros. Ltd* took the title *Mason's Ironstone China Ltd*. 200 years after the original development, this famous name can still be found competing with the likes of Spode and Wedgwood in the department stores of the world.

## The Market

The upper end of the market is dominated by dinner services. Services from other manufacturers of early nineteenth century ironstone or stone china wares are also in demand. Names such as Spode, Davenport and Hicks and Meigh come to mind. Of course they could be broken up and sold as individual pieces but the arithmetic suggests that this would not be profitable. The average price per piece in the services shown seems to be about £55, with dessert services rather more. Incomplete services may get broken up and yield profit for the specialist dealer and provide the opportunity for collectors of more modest means to broaden their collection.

The larger and more spectacular pieces also attract huge interest. Take the pair of vases at **3**. Even with restoration these approached nearly £5,000 and may well sell on for more. Twenty two inches in height, these are destined for a grand position in a grand home. See also the footbath and footbath jug at **9** and **10**. Both have faults but you cannot fault the prices. Sets do appear on the market. Dreweatt Neate in Donnington sold a matching restored footbath and jug in 2003 for £2,800 hammer. Note also the classical ewer at **12**. Not everyone is aware that Mason's produced wares of this quality. See the water jugs at **20** and the vase at **24**. Note also the later service at **17**. We are told nothing of the marks but it looks like twentieth century Ashworth to me. £18 a piece is enough considering their mediocrity and lateness! Two sets of hydra jugs appear at **25** and **27** - for the buyer an instant collection at about £100 a jug. I cannot see that the market has moved either up or down in the three to four years since the sale. I must question the excessive price paid for a tureen and stand in 1999 at Rosebery's in London. (**22**) I cannot see its value then or now being any more than £400 and I expect that two bidders must have got carried away! **6** has been included as a red herring. William the earliest of the Mason Brothers was not involved in the ironstone enterprise. This service is earthenware.

Good early tureens with stands should fetch about £400 as should good pairs of dishes, particularly those with interesting shapes such as at **31** and **36**. The a/f child's toilet set (twentieth century) at **38** is well over-priced as is the Ashworth jug at **40**. If this is worth £305 then the early pot-pourri at **41** is worth twice as much. In fact the jug is way over-priced and the pot-pourri about right. Incidentally Mason pot pourri's are desirable. In 2006 an impressive example, of baluster form, twin handles and cover, gilt lion finial, 44cm high, fetched a hammer price of £2,300 at F. R. Marshall & Co at Knutsford, the estimate of £100-£180, a sleeper if ever there was! There are other bad buys on these pages. **55** can only serve a purpose if put to use in a boarding house, where it would prove to be cheaper than buying new. A similar fate may await **64** or **67** whereas **77** is just a waste of money. Never buy cheap mixed lots. The only persons breathing a sigh of relief will be the vendor and the auctioneer. And don't pay a ridiculous amount for modern vases as at **66**. There are also good buys. **53** is a sound purchase of early plates and dishes. Alternatively the two Ashworth plates at **59** are over-priced. The early sets of jugs have fetched reasonable prices. The 1830s vase at **63** is good value at £117 as is the mug with the flared foot at **68**. **73** was a snip as this is one of the rarer chinoiserie patterns. Forget the cheese wedge at **78** but check out **79**. Despite the rivets, this is a rare pattern, probably preceding 1825 and a snip at £21. I would have paid at least £50. I did manage last week to buy a perfect example in the pattern shown at **68** for a mere £24! I advise anybody planning to collect Mason's to learn the earlier marks and the superior body and stick to pre 1848 examples.



**1**  
Mason's ironstone dinner service, c1820, painted in underglaze blue, iron-red, green, pink and gilding with a central floral spray within a conforming border, stylised flowerhead edge. *Sotheby's, Billingshurst. Nov 99. HP: £5,800. ABP: £6,822.*



**2**  
Extensive 19thC Masons Ironstone service decorated with panels of Oriental figures in gardens, 119 pieces. *Ewbank Auctioneers, Send, Surrey. Oct 05. HP: £5,400. ABP: £6,351.*



**3**  
Impressive pair of early 19thC Ironstone vases and covers, possibly Mason's, ball knobs and wolf masks, 22in. (some restoration) *Gorringes, Lewes. Dec 01. HP: £4,100. ABP: £4,822.*



**4**  
Mason's Ironstone part dinner service c1840s, some damage. 70 pieces. *Hamptons, Godalming. Jul 00. HP: £2,500. ABP: £2,940.*



**5**  
Mason's Ironstone dinner service, c1840: 7 soup plates, 12 dinner plates, 24 dessert/fish plates, 12 side plates, a fruit bowl, 10 meat dishes in various sizes and a fish strainer. (77) *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Feb 05. HP: £2,400. ABP: £2,823.*



**6**  
Early 19thC Staffordshire dinner service, attributed to William Mason, 1811-24, 74 pieces, printed with a planter of flowers in blue, chips. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 06. HP: £2,200. ABP: £2,587.*



**7**  
Mid 19thC Mason's Ironstone china dinner service, printed and painted with Oriental style decoration with exotic birds amongst flowers, impressed marks. *Wintertons Ltd, Lichfield. Nov 99. HP: £1,750. ABP: £2,058.*



**8**  
Mason's ironstone part dessert service: 23 pieces, printed/painted in the famille verte palette with a central Chinese garden scene with exotic birds, printed crown and ribbon marks, c1840, 2 plates with damage. *Bearne's, Exeter. Jun 05. HP: £1,650. ABP: £1,940.*



**9**  
Mason's patent ironstone footbath, 19thC, oval form, decorated in imari palette with scrolling flowers and foliage within two lamprey head handles, blue printed mark, a/f, 37.5cm wide. *Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Dec 06. HP: £1,600. ABP: £1,882.*



**10**  
Mason's Ironstone china footbath jug, an extra dragon head moulded handle beneath the spout, decorated with a typical Japan pattern, 30.6cm high, blue printed crown & drape mark, c1820-40. (minor faults) *Drewett Neate, Newbury. Jun 02. HP: £1,300. ABP: £1,529.*



**11**  
Masons Ironstone china part dinner service by Ashworth, oblong soup tureen & cover; 13.75in wide, 2 small tureens and a meat plate. (45) *Andrew Hartley, Ilkley. Aug 00. HP: £1,250. ABP: £1,470.*



**12**  
Mason's ironstone neopolitan ewer, foliate loop handle and applied putti, painted with peabirds and foliage on a gilded blue ground with masks and foliage, unsigned, later wood base, early 19thC, 28in high. *Andrew Hartley, Ilkley. Apr 05. HP: £1,250. ABP: £1,470.*



**13**  
Early 19thC Mason's ironstone part dessert service. *Mervyn Carey, Tenterden. Dec 01. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.*



**14**  
Early 19thC Mason's ironstone dessert set, chicken skin textured rims printed and painted with Chinese export scrolls, 12 plates, two dishes and a comport. (15) *Cheffins, Cambridge. Feb 05. HP: £1,200. ABP: £1,411.*



**15**  
Mason's Ironstone dinner service. (some damage). *Louis Taylor, Stoke on Trent. Dec 02. HP: £1,150. ABP: £1,352.*



**16**  
Mason's Ironstone part dinner service, some pieces with impressed marks, c1820. (23) *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £1,050. ABP: £1,235.*



**17**  
Victorian Mason's ironstone part dinner service, twelve setting, blue painted and enamelled in chinoiserie pattern no. 9799, incl. soup tureen of canted oblong form with foliate scroll finial on domed lid and similar ladle, 12.5in wide. (54) *Hartleys, Ilkley. Aug 06. HP: £900. ABP: £1,058.*



**18**  
Early 19thC Mason's stone china dessert service in Imari colours: two small tureens on stands, 10 plated and 5 serving dishes/comports. *John Taylors, Louth. Mar 05. HP: £880. ABP: £1,035.*



**19**  
Extensive Mason's ironstone flow blue part dinner service, printed in Oriental style with flowering chrysanthemum bushes: 12 each of dinner, desert and bread plates, 2 sauce tureens, covers, stands and ladles, 3 graduated meat plates, vegetable tureen, cover & stand and an additional tureen. *Rosebery's, London. Sep 04. HP: £780. ABP: £917.*



**20**  
Pair of early 19thC Mason's Patent Ironstone water jugs with panels of Oriental vases against gilded royal blue grounds, 8in. (one spout chipped) *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 00. HP: £700. ABP: £823.*



**21**  
Mason's Ironstone part dinner service, printed marks, mid 19thC. (3 pieces damaged) (18) *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £680. ABP: £799.*



**22**  
Mason's Ironstone soup tureen. *Rosebery's, London. Nov 99. HP: £580. ABP: £682.*



**23**  
Early 19thC Mason's Ironstone china teaware with Chinese-style floral and fence decoration: twelve pieces. *Reeman Dansie, Colchester. Apr 06. HP: £560. ABP: £658.*



**24**  
Early 19thC Mason's ironstone octagonal shaped vase, 20in high. *Clevedon Salerooms, Bristol. Jun 01. HP: £420. ABP: £494.*



**25**  
Graduated 'set' of 5 Mason's Ironstone Hydra jugs, floral Imari decoration, largest 9.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 02. HP: £420. ABP: £494.*



**26**  
Mason's ironstone jug, c1840, overpainted with chinoiserie scenes, 21.5cm high, with 2 other graduated in size of a similar pattern & later date. *Rosebery's, London. Mar 02. HP: £380. ABP: £446.*



**27**  
Matched set of Mason's ironstone octagonal jugs in sizes, printed & painted with Imari pattern, printed marks in blue, smallest in black, 18cm to 9cm. *Locke & England, Leamington Spa. Feb 03. HP: £380. ABP: £446.*

## Ceramics

28



Victorian Mason's Ironstone polychrome floral meat dish, 21in. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Mar 02. HP: £380. ABP: £446.*

29



Pair of Mason's ironstone sauce tureens, each two-handled with cover, on stand, printed and enamelled with a Japan pattern, 5.5in dia. *Gorringes, Lewes. Sep 05. HP: £380. ABP: £446.*

30



Early 19thC Mason's ironstone jug and bowl gilt with butterflies on a blue ground, impressed mark, jug 22cm high. *Cheffins, Cambridge. Feb 05. HP: £360. ABP: £423.*

31



Two early 19thC Mason's Patent Ironstone dessert dishes, shell shape with moulded and gilt highlighted borders painted with an old Japan pattern, 10.5in long. *Tring Market Auctions, Herts. May 04. HP: £340. ABP: £399.*

32



Mason's patent ironstone china soup tureen, cover and stand, c1815-1825, Japan pattern, 33cm high, damages, restorations, recent rim chip. *Richard Winterton, Burton on Trent, Staffs. Apr 04. HP: £330. ABP: £388.*

33



Two Mason's blue and white oval meat plates printed with the views from the British Lakes series, Thirlmere and Windermere, printed marks, c1830, 44cm & 39cm. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



34

Mason's Ironstone part dinner service decorated in the Imari palette with panels of flowers and foliage and scrolling borders, retailed by Thomas & Higginbotham 11 & 12 Wellington Quay Dublin, 20 items, puce printed mark to bases. a/f. *Rosebery's, London. Oct 06. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*

35

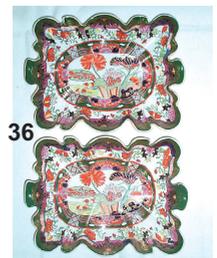


40



Victorian Mason's earthenware octagonal hydra jug printed with pagoda landscape, 11.5in. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Mar 02. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*

Mason's type ironstone vase, two handled, gilded with flowers against a deep blue ground, domed cover with kylin finial, 17.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Feb 07. HP: £300. ABP: £352.*



36

Pair of Mason's dishes. *Kivell & Sons, Bude. Dec 02. HP: £290. ABP: £341.*



37

Six Mason's ironstone hydra jugs, painted in Imari colours (tallest 6in.) and a similar, unmarked hydra jug, 5.25in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 05. HP: £290. ABP: £341.*

38



Mason's child's toilet jug, bowl, beaker (a/f) and small pot (a/f), transfer printed and painted, jug 9in high, bowl 11.5in dia. *Tring Market Auctions, Herts. Jan 03. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*

39



Mason's Ironstone 5-piece bedroom set: toilet jug, basin, chamber pot, soap dish and bowl with cover, printed and enamelled with pheasants and foliage. (jug cracked) *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 02. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*



Victorian Mason's earthenware octagonal hydra jug printed with pagoda landscape, 11.5in. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Mar 02. HP: £260. ABP: £305.*

41



Mason's Ironstone pot pourri vase and cover, impressed mark, 14cm high. *Phillips, Bath. May 00. HP: £210. ABP: £247.*



42

Mason's Ironstone china 6 place setting dinner/breakfast service (not complete) to incl: 2 tureens, 3 jugs, sauce boat, soup bowls etc, blue transfer decoration with hand-painted flowers etc. *Kent Auction Galleries, Folkestone. Jul 05. HP: £210. ABP: £247.*

43



19thC Mason's Ironstone hydra jug, 6in and a similar cream jug, 4in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Feb 01. HP: £200. ABP: £235.*

44



Set of three Mason's ironstone china jugs c1825-1840, octagonal hydra shape, snake handles, painted in the imari palette with peony, printed marks, 11cm high, and a Mason's ironstone jug of similar form, imari palette, 9cm high. (4) *Hampton & Littlewood, Exeter. Jul 04. HP: £185. ABP: £217.*

45



19thC Mason's Patent Ironstone blue and white drainer with polychrome floral decoration, 12in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 00. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*

46



Pair of Victorian Mason's style ironstone pottery octagonal vases, each with Imari style decoration, 7.25in high. *Clarke Gammon, Guildford. Apr 04. HP: £180. ABP: £211.*

47



Early 19thC Mason's ironstone flower bud vase on naturalistic base gilded with vine leaves and grapes on a Mazzarine blue ground (cracked), 11in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 00. HP: £170. ABP: £199.*

48



Selection of Mason's Ironstone 19thC and later part dinner services, to include 'Swansea' pattern and meat plates, dinner plates and dishes and covers, a/f. *Rosebery's, London. Jan 07. HP: £170. ABP: £199.*

49



Two octagonal ironstone jugs, c1840, in Mason's style, one with a stylised dragon handle, gilded and painted with insects and coloured flower sprays, other with a serpent handle, blue ground, tallest 20cm. *Sworders, Stansted Mountfitchet. Jul 05. HP: £160. ABP: £188.*

50



Two Mason's ironstone dessert dishes printed and enamelled with matching Oriental garden design, c1830, 10in and 11in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 02. HP: £150. ABP: £176.*

51



Mason's ironstone cylindrical mug, blue printed mark, 19thC, 10.5cm high. *Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. Sep 00. HP: £140. ABP: £164.*

52



Early Victorian Mason's ironstone hydra jug, octagonal, printed/enamelled with chrysanthemums and peonies, printed & impressed marks, 7.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 02. HP: £140. ABP: £164.*



**53**  
Mason's ironstone oval meat plate, matching square dish and 4 plates en suite, printed and enamelled with chrysanthemum design, impressed marks, damage throughout. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 02. HP: £130. ABP: £152.*



**54**  
Pair of 19thC Mason's Patented Ironstone china 'Maple Leaf' shaped hors d'oeuvres dishes, decorated pagodas, reverse with purple Mason's Ironstone mark, 10in. *Denhams, Warnham, West Sussex. Jan 05. HP: £130. ABP: £152.*



**55**  
Masons ironstone part dinner/tea service, 'Strathmore' pattern, includes tureens and covers, various sized plates, cups and saucers, water jug, coffee pot etc. (a lot) *Rosebery's, London. May 06. HP: £130. ABP: £152.*



**56**  
Mason's ironstone toilet jug & bowl, chinoiserie pattern, snake handled jug of faceted baluster form with shaped rim, black painted mark, 11.5in high. *Hartleys, Ilkley. Feb 07. HP: £130. ABP: £152.*



**57**  
Mason's ironstone octagonal jug with serpent handle, 4in and a smaller ditto, 2.75in *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 00. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



**58**  
Set of 4 early 19thC Mason's ironstone plates, bowl and small dish, with a floral pattern in underglaze blue/rust, gilt highlights, impressed marks, 10in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Mar 04. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



**59**  
Pair of Victorian Mason's Ironstone dessert dishes, printed and enamelled with a chinoiserie landscape, 9in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Apr 03. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



**60**  
Victorian Mason's Ironstone blue/white willow pattern hydra jug, 8ins and wash basin 12in, with a similar posy vase, 5.5in and dish, 4in. (a.f.) *Gorringes, Bexhill. Mar 02. HP: £120. ABP: £141.*



**61**  
Pair of Mason's jugs. *John Taylors, Louth. Oct 99. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



**62**  
Mason's Ironstone hydra jug of typical form, 5in, and two similar jugs. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Mar 02. HP: £110. ABP: £129.*



**63**  
19thC Mason's Ironstone vase, wide everted neck and wavy rim, printed & painted with chinoiserie patterns and vignettes, printed marks, height 7.75in. *Fellows & Sons, Hockley, Birmingham. Oct 03. HP: £100. ABP: £117.*



**64**  
Large quantity of Mason's Regency pattern china. *Black Country Auctions, Dudley. Dec 05. HP: £86. ABP: £101.*



**65**  
Victorian Mason's Ironstone vase printed and enamelled with Oriental views against blue and orange ground, 5.5in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 02. HP: £85. ABP: £99.*



**66**  
Pair of Mason's ironstone vases. *Great Western Auctions, Glasgow. Aug 06. HP: £80. ABP: £94.*



**67**  
Large selection of Mason's Regency pottery. *Black Country Auctions, Dudley. Sep 05. HP: £72. ABP: £84.*



**68**  
19thC Mason's ironstone snake handled mug with flared foot, painted with flowers in the Imari palette, 5in high. *Dee, Atkinson & Harrison, Driffield. Nov 04. HP: £70. ABP: £82.*



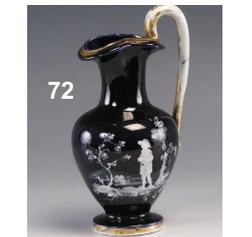
**69**  
Set of three Mason's Ironstone 'Imari' graduated jugs and another similar Ironstone jug, 22cm high. (largest) *Gorringes, Bexhill. Dec 05. HP: £70. ABP: £82.*



**70**  
Mason's ironstone china jug and basin\*, 19thC octagonal hydra form, snake handle, chinoiserie pattern of blossom & birds, printed marks, jug 9cm high. \*prob. made as a salesman's sample. *Hampton & Littlewood, Exeter. Jul 04. HP: £64. ABP: £75.*



**71**  
Mason's Ironstone octagonal bowl, printed & overpainted in the 'Bittersweet' pattern, printed marks, dia 7.5in. *Fellows & Sons, Hockley, Birmingham. Oct 03. HP: £60. ABP: £70.*



**72**  
Early 19thC Mason's Patent Ironstone jug of mazarine blue ground, overpainted in white with figure in a landscape, gilt handle & borders (gilding rubbed), impressed mark to base, 9in high. *Tring Market Auctions, Herts. May 04. HP: £60. ABP: £70.*



**73**  
Victorian Mason's ironstone water jug decorated with Oriental figures, 7in. *Gorringes, Lewes. Oct 00. HP: £55. ABP: £64.*



**74**  
Early 19thC Mason's Ironstone China tea plate, blue and gilt gadrooned border, painted with polychrome floral sprays & gilt scattered flowers, 8.25in dia. *Tring Market Auctions, Herts. Jul 04. HP: £50. ABP: £58.*



**75**  
Mason's Patent Ironstone china bowl 19thC, blue printed with a chinoiserie design of a startled bird perched in branches within a garden, enamelled in russet, blue, green and yellow with gilt highlights, blue printed mark 12in dia. *Halls Fine Art, Shrewsbury. Jul 05. HP: £45. ABP: £52.*



**76**  
Mason's Ironstone octagonal faceted jug, printed and overpainted with chinoiserie landscapes, printed marks, 7in high and with a smaller Mason's Ironstone jug, s.d., 3.25in high. *Fellows & Sons, Hockley, Birmingham. Oct 03. HP: £45. ABP: £52.*



**77**  
Mason's Mandalay ginger jar and cover; a similar square dish, various Ironstone items, various blue and white items, etc. *Gorringes, Bexhill. Jul 05. HP: £30. ABP: £35.*



**78**  
Mason's cheese wedge. *Lambert & Foster, Tenterden. Feb 04. HP: £20. ABP: £23.*



**79**  
Early 19thC ironstone large mug, Mason's style, serpent handle, moulded circular body painted and gilt in the Japan palette with chinoiserie panels and foliage, 5in high, (repaired with rivets) *Golding Young & Co, Grantham. Feb 06. HP: £18. ABP: £21.*