

## The Willow Pattern: Dunham Massey

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**Please note that this case study was first published on [blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah](http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah) in June 2014. For citation advice, visit: <http://blogs.ucl.ac.uk/eicah/usingthewebsite>.**

Unlike other 'objects studies' featured in the *East India Company At Home 1757-1857* project, this case study will focus on a specific ceramic ware pattern rather than a particular item associated with the East India Company (EIC). With particular attention to the contents of Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester, I focus here on the Willow Pattern, a type of blue and white 'Chinese style' design, which was created in 1790 at the Caughley Factory in Shropshire. The large-scale production of ceramic wares featuring the same design became possible only in the late eighteenth century after John Sadler and Guy Green patented their method of transfer printing for commercial use in 1756. Willow Pattern wares became increasingly popular in the early nineteenth century, allowing large groups of people access to this design. Despite imitating Chinese wares so that they recalled Chinese hard-stone porcelain body and cobalt blue decorations, these wares remained distinct from them, often attracting lower values and esteem. Although unfashionable now, they should not be merely dismissed as poor imitations by contemporary scholars, but rather need to be recognized for their complexities. To explore and reveal the contradictions and intricacies held within Willow Pattern wares, this case study asks two simple questions. First, what did Willow Pattern wares mean in nineteenth-century Britain? Second, did EIC families—who, as a group, enjoyed privileged access to Chinese porcelain—engage with these imitative wares and if so, how, why and what might their interactions reveal about the household objects?

As other scholars have shown, EIC officials' cultural understandings of China often developed from engagements with the materials they imported, as well as discussions of and visits to China. These encounters set them apart from other British consumers who often had no first-hand knowledge of Chinese culture. Families with connections to the EIC, I suggest, were well placed to develop particular understandings of the aesthetics that defined Chinese objects. During the early eighteenth century, export wares were privileged items that attracted high prices. Imagery, colour, materials, size and standards of execution set these wares apart from the early imitations created by porcelain and earthenware manufacturers in eighteenth-century Europe. Even in the late eighteenth century, lower-end goods such as Willow Pattern ware, with its soft-paste porcelain body,

transfer printed decoration and locally designed imagery, existed in clear contrast with ceramics produced in China. Nevertheless, despite often possessing a particular understanding of the nuances of Chinese aesthetics and Chinese objects and in spite of easy access to Asian wares, EIC families purchased Willow Pattern plates, bowls, cups and tableware. Why did they choose to do so?



Figure 1. Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.

Numerous estates with historic links to the EIC have Willow Pattern wares in their extant collections, but it was Dunham Massey in Greater Manchester that intrigued me, mainly because of the breadth of Willow Pattern wares in its current collection. My first aim was to uncover whether these same wares (or others like them) were present at Dunham Massey during the nineteenth century when Company families also lived there, and second, how these items compare to other Willow Pattern wares of the period. I have also been keen to establish the role that Willow Pattern wares might have played within the Cheshire-based family home. Were they acquired for both utilitarian and ornamental use? On what occasions did the family use them and where were they displayed? What meanings did they hold for families with global connections? Were they all of the standard design or were variations appreciated? In exploring these questions, this case study hopes to broaden the scope of the *East India Company At Home 1757-1857* project by focusing on forms of Asian-inspired but British-produced objects with which Company families engaged.

During my research first-hand observations of Dunham Massey's Willow Pattern collection, studying the estate's inventories at the John Rylands Library in Manchester and discussions with Dunham Massey House and Collections Manager Katie Taylor, have brought to light an array of pertinent material. My research, however, did not lead me to conclusive findings on all these questions. I therefore invite readers to use this case study as a springboard and a preliminary report on research in development.

My difficulty in reaching conclusive findings regarding Willow Pattern wares primarily occurred due to the frequency of omissions and absences in the written historical record. Extant objects confirm the ubiquitous presence of Willow Pattern wares and their cultural importance to nineteenth-century British society. Nevertheless their specific role within homes, and particularly within EIC related homes such as Dunham Massey, is still to be fully understood. I have examined a series of inventories of the Dunham Massey estate (1819, 1883, 1905 and 1912) that correspond to the period in which the Willow Pattern emerged on the market and gained its popularity. However, the term 'Willow Pattern' does not appear in these documents. Although it was not common practice to identify wares under names such as 'imari', 'ding', 'famille rose' or 'celadon' as would be done today, detailed descriptions of wares are included in Dunham Massey's nineteenth-century inventories. For example, the 1912 inventory lists 'a pair of very fine old powdered blue nankin jars and covers, each with four large views and several smaller compartments of figures, flowers etc. Two dog handles and two circular turned mahogany stand on feet for (40 inches)'.<sup>1</sup> None of the detailed descriptions in the inventories, however, lists Willow Pattern features. Perhaps the pattern's familiarity, accessibility, and mass production made it irrelevant for documents of this nature, which instead focused on items deemed precious and valuable. Within the course of this case study it will become evident that the Willow Pattern's apparent absence in the inventories of Dunham Massey's inventory speaks to a broader trend. Despite its conspicuous presence in nineteenth-century England, Willow Pattern made little impact on the historical record. It is rarely listed in inventories and other historical sources. At times, however, the strict omission of Willow Pattern characteristics in documentation is telling – possibly reminding us of the everyday nature of this Asian-inspired ware.

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Taylor, *Inventory of Contents with Heirlooms of Dunham Massey Hall, Cheshire* (Altrincham: n.p. 1912), p. 97.

### The Willow Pattern explained

Willow Pattern wares' popularity and ubiquity in Britain meant that in their purchase, they invited consumers to engage with a particular form of collective British identity. Technological advancements in transfer printing in England in the 1750s, made the production of these wares possible. Transfer printing allowed ceramic decoration to be completed in large-batch productions, resulting in reduced prices for consumers and the increased possibility of standardized decoration.<sup>2</sup> Within these developments, the Willow Pattern emerged as a particularly popular image, becoming immediately recognizable to contemporary audiences and consumers in the early nineteenth century. The collective 'ignorance' of Chinese motifs amongst the majority of consumers allowed for a shared appreciation for Willow Pattern's representation of 'China'. Not bound to social class, its popularity meant that the Willow Pattern became a visual signifier of 'British' belonging across the country.<sup>3</sup>



Figure 2. Willow Pattern plate, earthenware. Inventory number 929558.9.  
Dunham Massey, National Trust.

Plates such as the one illustrated above (see figure 2) were produced in bulk, by factories such as Spode, Wedgwood, Worcester, Caughley, Liverpool, Lowestoft,

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<sup>2</sup> Stacey Loughrey Sloboda, *Making China: Design, Empire, and Aesthetics in Britain, 1745-1851* (Ann Arbor: UMI Microform, 2004) p. 314.

<sup>3</sup> Kathleen Wilson, *Island Race: Englishness, Empire and Gender in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 2003) p. 3; Sloboda, *Making China*, p. 315.

Bow, New Hall, Coalport, Vauxhall and Derby. This particular plate illustrates the 'Willow III', which became known as 'Standard Willow Pattern' as a result of its pervasive presence in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century English ceramic market. The elements of the 'Standard Willow Pattern' include: an orange tree, a main tea house sided by a smaller building, a fence adorning the foreground, a willow tree, a bridge with three persons crossing it, a boat, an additional building on a separate shore and two birds occupying the central upper section of the ware. The engraving technique used on 'Standard Willow Pattern' or 'Willow III', which saw the combination of both line work and stipple punch work, further differentiated this version from previous patterns ('Willow I' and 'Willow II'). By using a steel punch, which was struck with a lightweight hammer, different tonal qualities could be achieved by hammering single dots with diversified depths into the copper plate. Variations of the design existed but 'Standard Willow Pattern' is the one most commonly represented on wares and the one still in production today. The fact that this Willow Pattern was still sold in 2012 by Argos, the largest general goods retailer in the UK, attests to its enduring appeal.



Figure 3. Willow Pattern dinner set. Earthenware, transfer-printed in underglaze blue.  
Sold at Argos in 2012. (argos.com).

The original 1790 Willow Pattern can be understood as an attempt by British manufacturers to fabricate an idyllic far-away place, loosely understood as Chinese. The tragic love narrative, now understood as an important part of the Willow Pattern, was a later innovation and acted as a crucial part of the pattern's success. As noted by Robert Copeland in an interview with Deborah Skinner in 2008, the

addition of the bridge by the Spode factory in 1810 provided the grounds on which to build the love story narrative.<sup>4</sup> The bridge, absent from the original 1790 Caughley design, came to be one of the central components of the Willow Pattern story. The story that emerged during the nineteenth century described the three men crossing the bridge as servants chasing the king's daughter, who had eloped with her lover. Objecting to his daughter's amorous choice, the king tries to stop her at all costs (access a complete version of the story through footnote 5).<sup>5</sup> In 1849 the *Family Friend* published the first article that showcased the Willow Pattern story entitled 'The Story of the Common Willow Pattern Plate'. It was this publication which contextualised the pattern for contemporary audiences, disseminated the narrative further.

As the article title suggests the pattern was deemed a 'common' item. Similarly the preamble included within the article itself worked to strongly associate the pattern with sentiments of comfort and familiarity. Written less than sixty years after its first production, the preamble to the article described it as the 'old Willow Pattern plate', marking its confirmed place within British tastes. It then went on to describe how 'By every association, in spite of its want of artistic beauty, it is dear to us. It is mingled with our earliest recollections; it is like the picture of an old friend and companion whose portrait we see everywhere, but of whose likeness we never grow weary.'<sup>6</sup> By establishing the design as a familiar visual agent, appreciated beyond its aesthetic value, the pattern became part of the reader's intimate possessions, which constituted private, valued memories. At a later stage, the article also indirectly confirmed the myths that circulated around the design: its Chinese origins. Defining the tale as one, 'which is said to be to the Chinese, what our Jack the Giant Killer or Robinson Crusoe is to us', the article attributed authenticity to the story. Utilising all the elements within Spode's 'standard' willow, 'The Story of the Common Willow Pattern Plate' helped 'Willow III' to be recognized as sentimentally British and simultaneously Chinese.

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<sup>4</sup> Deborah Skinner, 'Robert Copeland On Spode', *Spode Ceramics* (August 2008). [Accessed 5 Oct. 2012] <<http://spodeceramics.com/pottery/printed-designs/patterns/willow-02>>. Robert Copeland was an employee of Spode as of 1949 until his retirement. His father was Gresham Copeland, partner of the family-owned Spode factory.

<sup>5</sup> To read the full story visit: [http://www.thepotteries.org/patterns/willow\\_patt.html](http://www.thepotteries.org/patterns/willow_patt.html).

<sup>6</sup> Robert Copeland, *Spode's Willow Pattern* (London: Studio Vista, 1999), p. 198. See Appendix IX: J.B.L. "The Story of the Common Willow-Pattern Plate." *The Family Friend* 1 (1849), pp. 198-201



Figure 4. Two chamber pots bearing the 'Flying Pennant' pattern. Dunham Massey, National Trust. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.



Figure 5. 'Flying Pennant Pattern', Engraving from Leonard Whiter, *Spode: A History of the Family, Factory and Wares from 1733 to 1833* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970).

It is not possible to explain why 'Willow III' gained its primary position among the range of Chinese landscape patterns on offer. It is also not possible to attribute the pattern to a specific factory and identify one production line to be significantly more prolific in the production of 'Standard Willow Pattern' than others. Although Spode was one of the top ten factories manufacturing blue and white earthenware, it cannot be stated with certainty that it was the main distributor of the 'Standard Willow Pattern'. It may however be likely, that various other factories quickly

copied the ‘Standard Willow Pattern’, to which Spode claimed authorship, multiplying its impact on the market.<sup>7</sup> As noted by Elizabeth Chang, however, ‘different firms developed their own variations, and further, these variations were pillaged from firm to firm with great regularity as patterns were frequently abandoned in favour of more fortuitous combinations of the standard elements’.<sup>8</sup> Some of these variations can be seen in the Willow Patterns wares included in the Dunham Massey collection. Within the collection are wares, which closely resemble ‘Flying Penant’, ‘Rock’, ‘Parasol Figure’ and ‘Two Temples’ patterns. Two chamber pots in the collection (see figure 4) included an illustration in the bottom interior of the wares that stems from a ‘Flying Penant’ engraving (see figure 5). Corresponding borders have been used to decorate the mouth of the pots. In contrast, the wine cooler in the collection (see figure 6) features the ‘Rock’ pattern (figure 7) with a slightly altered, yet recognisable corresponding border. At the same time, nine breakfast bowls (see figure 8) include an interpretation of the ‘Parasol Figure’ pattern (figure 9).<sup>9</sup> Lastly a plate in the Dunham Massey collection (see figure 10) closely resembles the ‘Two Temples’ pattern. The fence present in the foreground characterises this design. This detail together with the holistic composition of land, water, bridge, pagoda and surrounding vegetation aligns the ware to this specific pattern.<sup>10</sup> ‘Rock I’ for example was made as a copy of the ‘Mandarin’ pattern, changing only in its border design. The border of ‘Rock I’ can furthermore be noted to exist in ‘Forest Landscape I’ and ‘Forest Landscape II’. It is important to acknowledge that the ubiquity of the pattern was created through the propagation of its variations. The demand for an exotic, imaginative landscape was so diffused that the composition of designs could be easily adapted without jeopardizing sales. The composition of the ‘Standard Willow Pattern’ became marginal to its popularity, as the public’s familiarity with the design allowed for its variations to function similarly in its place.

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<sup>7</sup> Copying often occurred in the ceramics industry through the circulation of workers, designs and expertise.

<sup>8</sup> Chang, *Britain's Chinese Eye*, p. 87.

<sup>9</sup> The ‘Parasol Figure’ border has in this case not been adopted, as the border that encloses the design on the Dunham Massey bowls is made to complement the interior’s simplicity. Two basic geometric borders frame the minimal interior illustration.

<sup>10</sup> In this case the border is consistent with the engraving identified as ‘Two Temples’.





Figure 6. Wine cooler bearing the 'Rock' pattern. Dunham Massey, National Trust. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.



Figure 7. 'Rock' pattern. Engraving from Leonard Whiter, *Spode: A History of the Family, Factory and Wares from 1733 to 1833* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970).



Figure 8. Nine breakfast bowls bearing the 'Parasol Figure' pattern. Dunham Massey, National Trust. © National Trust.



Figure 9. 'Parasol Figure' pattern. Engraving from Leonard Whiter, *Spode: A History of the Family, Factory and Wares from 1733 to 1833* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1970).



Figure 10. Plate bearing the ‘Two Temples Pattern’. Inventory number 929497. Dunham Massey, National Trust. © National Trust.

### Visit to Dunham Massey



Figure 11. Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester. Image courtesy of Francesca D’Antonio.

After completing preliminary research on Dunham Massey’s ceramic collection, I visited to the house on 10 September 2013. I must admit to a naive longing for the

historic site to facilitate the understanding of the wares' 'truthful' role, but it is clear that as the house is subject to modern alterations and reinterpretations steered by the curators in charge, a skewed narrative of past realities is inevitably given. A home is in constant flux, changing with its owners through the centuries. It is therefore essential to acknowledge the limitations of representing only one of these realities to visitors. The 'historical immersion' one experiences when visiting the National Trust estate, must be contextualised and understood with its limitations in mind. The current display of Willow Pattern items at Dunham Massey suggests modes of use as well as intended users, but the objects current locations cannot be taken as a representation of the past.

Dunham Massey holds a broad collection of Willow Pattern ware pieces. As noted in the previous section, apart from Standard Pattern wares, the collection also contains a range of variations. The Dunham Massey Willow Pattern collection includes a set of nine breakfast bowls, three chamber pots, three bowls, six saucers, one egg cup, two breakfast cups, eight plates of which one gold rimmed, one wine cooler, one butter dish, one gilt tea pot and one small bowl.

It seems likely that Dunham Massey's material history was significantly shaped by the family's involvement in foreign trade, which began with the marriage of George Booth 2nd Earl of Warrington (1675-1758) to Mary Oldbury (unknown-1740) on 9 April 1702. The marriage was spurred by George's need to clear debts from the family estate. He had inherited Dunham Massey after his father's death in 1694 and the union to Mary, whose fortune amounted to £24,000, allowed him to settle all financial obligations. Mary Oldbury established the first indirect connection between the East India Company and Dunham Massey, as her father John Oldbury was a merchant who had made a fortune in the East India trade.<sup>11</sup> In 1736, George and Mary's only daughter Mary (1704-1772) married Harry Grey 4th Earl of Stamford (1715-1768), passing the estate into the Grey family. Almost a century then passed before, with the marriage of Mary Grey (1813-1885) to James Grant Lumsden (1807-63) in 1834, the first direct link between the owners of Dunham Massey and the EIC emerged.<sup>12</sup> James Grant Lumsden was appointed as writer in the EIC, holding various administrative and judicial posts within the Bombay presidency.<sup>13</sup> His brothers Matthew, David, and James, similarly worked within the Company, creating strong connections between the owners of Dunham Massey,

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<sup>11</sup> The University of Manchester: The John Rylands University Library. 'Papers of the Lumsden Family', GB 133 EGR6.

<sup>12</sup> The University of Manchester: The John Rylands University Library. 'Papers of the Lumsden Family', GB 133 EGR6.

<sup>13</sup> The John Rylands University Library. 'Grey (Stamford) of Dunham Massey Papers', GB 133 EGR.

their relatives and the EIC. Access to foreign goods and interaction with other international professionals was an important part of the lives of these individuals, though direct personal contacts with China did not occur.

House and Collections manager Katie Taylor, confirms that Willow Pattern wares currently in the collection at Dunham Massey were all acquired by the family and present within the home in 1976, when the Earl of Stamford donated the house to the National Trust. This confirms that the later introduction of these wares by the National Trust can be ruled out. Nevertheless, their presence in the house 1976 tells us little about when they were acquired, by whom and how they were valued and how they were used within the home. To address these issues, I turned to inventories as sources, which could shed further light on the wares, which were housed in this East India Company family home.

## **Inventories**

Within the collections of The John Rylands Library at the University of Manchester I found four different inventories for the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Prior to its occupation by Mary Grey and James Grant Lumsden in 1834, the auctioneer Nathaniel Pass of Altrincham completed an inventory of the movable goods within Dunham Massey. Dated 28 July 1819, the inventory sought to value the household contents acquired by the late George Harry Grey (1737-1819), 5<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford.<sup>14</sup> Limited in descriptive detail, this inventory proved difficult to use and interpret. Over sixty years later, in 1883, the auctioneers Artingstall and Hind Ltd of Manchester compiled the second inventory. Made for probate purposes, the inventory described the property of the late George Harry Grey (1827-83), 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford.<sup>15</sup> After the turn of the twentieth century, in 1905, the trustees of the late George Harry Grey (1827-83), 7<sup>th</sup> Earl of Stamford and Warrington instructed Artingstall and Hind to complete a further inventory of the effects of Dunham Massey. Finally in 1912 a fourth inventory was completed. Compiled by Samuel Taylor, the inventory used a room-by-room survey of the house to list the effects of Penelope Grey Countess of Stamford.<sup>16</sup>

I share John Bedell's opinion that 'in order to appreciate the strength and weakness of both archeology and probate inventories, it is necessary to compare the two kinds

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<sup>14</sup> The University of Manchester: The John Rylands University Library, Dunham Massey Inventory, July 1819, GB 133 EGR/17/3

<sup>15</sup> The University of Manchester: The John Rylands University Library, Dunham Massey Inventory, March 1883, GB133 EGR7/17/5

<sup>16</sup> The John Rylands University Library. 'Household Papers', GB 133 EGR7.

of sources in the most direct way possible.<sup>17</sup> I was eager to track down the items I had seen at Dunham Massey within the inventories of 1819, 1883, 1905 and 1912 but the term 'Willow Pattern' did not appear in the documents. Numerous descriptions however could allude to Willow Pattern wares. These could suggest the existence of Willow Pattern wares within the house as early as 1883 (when Mary Lumsden Grant lived in the house) and continuing through to the twenty-first century.



Figure 12. Willow Pattern ware chamber pot. Dunham Massey, National Trust. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.

First, the inventory created on 9 March 1883 by Artignstall Hind Appraisers, notes that a 'blue and white earthen jug and bowl' is present in imperfect condition in the 'Stair foot, bedroom and dressing room' area.<sup>18</sup> As three chamber pots with blue and white Willow Patterns currently exist at the mansion, it is possible that the pot shown above was the one described in the document (see figure 12). 'Chamber ware' and 'toilet ware' are described as being of blue and white nature also in the inventories of 1905 and 1912. The inventory of 1905 cites blue and white toilet wares to be in the 'brown bedroom and dressing room, (late reading room)' while the inventory executed in 1912 notes that the closet of the 'Grey Gallery' held about forty chamber ware pieces. The diverse approach in description amongst the

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<sup>17</sup> John Bedell, 'Archaeology and Probate Inventories in the Study of Eighteenth-Century Life', *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 31.2 (2000), p. 224.

<sup>18</sup> The University of Manchester: The John Rylands University Library, Dunham Massey Inventory, March 1883, GB133 EGR7/17/5

documents mentioned above highlights two of the limitations of inventories: inconsistency and subjectivity. Various factors such as the author of the documents and the year of execution can lead to discrepancies among the documents. There were no detailed parameters surrounding this practice, leaving room for widely diverging descriptions. The decision to include or exclude items in an inventory is linked with what was deemed prestigious, valuable and noteworthy.<sup>19</sup> It is for this reason, I argue, that the term 'Willow Pattern' makes no appearance within inventories. As also noted by John Bedell in his study of probate inventories, appraisers considered earthenware items of low value even in the eighteenth century, when these were hand painted and produced in lower quantities.<sup>20</sup>

Willow Pattern wares were common, inexpensive, modern, local, products of mass production. The absence of the term 'Willow Pattern' within such inventories would suggest that it was deemed unnecessary to mention anything with little monetary value. 'Low value objects' are a category which has been recognised by Giorgio Riello as 'more or less systematically excluded from inventories.'<sup>21</sup>

Within the 1905 inventory only one further description could allude to more Willow Pattern wares within the home in the early twentieth century. Within the Tea Room, 'two blue and white circular dishes', one being of imperfect condition, are reported. It is unlikely that the wares within this inventory annotation were of Chinese origin, as these were consistently described as 'Nankin' or 'Oriental' wares within this document. These could have been, the Willow Pattern design as much as any other blue and white design but as noted Robert Copeland in an interview with Debora Skinner, Willow Pattern wares lent themselves easily to conversations, due to their narrative imagery, making it in theory an apt ornament for the 'Tea Room'.<sup>22</sup> The plates could have been used as both a direct source of conversation and as a visual signifier, which defined the room's relaxed colloquial nature. Recalling contemporary fashions for tragedies and love stories, the design may well have aided the hostess in her desire to broaden topics of conversation and engage in intimate revelations.

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<sup>19</sup> Giorgio Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen: The Material Culture of Early Modern Inventories and Their Representation of Domestic Interiors', in Paula Findlen (ed.), *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke: Routledge, 2013), pp. 12-13.

<sup>20</sup> Bedell, 'Archaeology and Probate Inventories', p. 228.

<sup>21</sup> Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen', p.12.

<sup>22</sup> Skinner, 'Robert Coperland On Spode'.



Figure 13. Willow Pattern tea service. Wedgwood Factory. Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.

Within the 1912 inventory a few additional descriptions recalling items of the Dunham Massey collection are recorded. The 'Servants Hall' housed a blue and white breakfast service, and in the Pantry, under the heading 'China and Glass', a blue and white and gold Wedgwood service. Nine breakfast bowls of this description survive at the estate (see figure 8 in 'The Willow Pattern explained' section above). There is no exact existing match for the description of a 'blue and white and gold Wedgwood service', although the blue and white Willow Pattern tea service currently at the estate archives is by Wedgwood, and could have had its golden detailing stripped as a result of use and age (see figure 13).

The inventories discussed in this paper range in specificity and style. This variability limits the quality and quantity of information that can be extrapolated from them. The inventory of 1819 is composed of vague lists, which preclude deciphering individual objects, while the inventory of 1912 presents the reader with an extensive list of items, organised by room and described with succinct information on condition. The manner of sectioning the document into rooms was adapted as early as 1883 in the case of Dunham Massey inventory history. This style of inventorying can be categorised as a 'piece-by-piece' or 'English' model.<sup>23</sup> As noted by Lena Orlin however, items could have been moved for the convenience of the appraiser, clustering them more densely in certain areas of the house and hence not

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<sup>23</sup> Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen', p. 9.



lending any insight on the objects' original location within the estate.<sup>24</sup>

Furthermore it must be taken into consideration that there was no specific requirements for the practice of appraising at this time in England, making the person in charge of its execution a major influence on its outcome. The 'skills and knowledge of the appraiser' are factors, which influence the specificity, constructiveness and accuracy of the probate inventories at hand.<sup>25</sup> These documents are therefore not to be taken as 'photographs' of past realities, but rather paintings as Riello poetically puts it. They are 'seldom uncontaminated by narrative' and as they are interpretations of reality they present 'partial representations' to the reader.<sup>26</sup>

## Conclusion



Figure 14. Detail of Willow Pattern plate. Dunham Massey, Greater Manchester. Image courtesy of Francesca D'Antonio.

This case study explored a type of ware, created in terms of material and design, as a result of Britain's trade with China through the East India Company. The research on Dunham Massey's Willow Pattern collection confirms the design's popularity amongst different social classes. Its specific role within the estate was not determined in this case study, as the records documenting the material analysed made any claims tentative. The difficult path of following these wares into the past through inventories has demonstrated the silence of these prosaic forms in the historical record. Nonetheless through its reading this case study has tried to

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<sup>24</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, 'Fictions of the early modern English probate inventory', in H.S. Turner (ed.) *The Culture of Capital: Property, Cities, and Knowledge in Early Modern England* (New York-London: Routledge, 2002), p.60.

<sup>25</sup> Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen', p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> Riello, 'Things Seen and Unseen', p.10.

reconstruct their presence in order to suggest that alongside armorial wares, export objects, and bespoke gilded furniture, East India Company families also engaged with home-grown chinoiserie.

Furthermore the idea of an English collective identity realised through the ownership of this pattern has been explored and supported. The acquisition of Willow Pattern ware was perhaps not made for its monetary value, but rather for its sentimental importance or use value. The wares played (and perhaps continue to play) a role as symbols of comfort and familiarity—symbols, that is, notwithstanding their ‘foreign’ qualities, of home. Identified as mass production goods, the wares resonated with an English culture increasingly embedded in industrialisation. Willow Pattern wares are, after all, defined by the development of technological processes such as transfer printing. The absence of the historical China known to the educated East India Company families such as the owners of Dunham Massey, was not a demerit but rather a characteristic which allowed the design to enchant consumers with its own myth. Their ubiquity made them familiar items, which put them in contrast with blue and white export wares and gave them their own ‘raison d’être’. The pattern, which included an idyllic, exotic landscape and told a captivating and tragic love story, still resounds in English homes today.

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