

Chapter 2

Porcelain Manufacture in South Wales in the 19th Century

Abstract The start of porcelain manufacture in South Wales in the early 19th Century, from an already existing ceramics industry in Swansea headed by Lewis Weston Dillwyn to the fledging and novel start-up in Nantgarw by William Billingsley and Samuel Walker. Billingsley's ambition to create the finest porcelain as a vehicle for his esteemed ceramic painting initiated his set-up at Nantgarw: initial success and demand for this new ceramic product was plagued by unacceptably high kiln wastage and the venture failed economically. This prompted his move to Swansea along with the expert kiln master, Samuel Walker, who engaged in experimental recipes for porcelain paste bodies and glazes with Dillwyn to create the famous duck-egg Swansea translucent body which was so admired in Regency society. The departure of Billingsley and Walker from Swansea to re-fire the kilns at Nantgarw, this time with secure financial backing, started the second phase of porcelain production there, only to fail again because an insatiable demand from the London retailers, their ateliers and purchasers still could not be met because of kiln wastage upon firing.

Keywords Lewis Dillwyn • William Billingsley • Samuel Walker • Duck-egg porcelain • Kiln wastage • London decoration • China retailers and agents

Pottery manufacture in Swansea started in July, 1764, when a local industrialist, William Coles of Cadoxton-juxta-Neath, near the town of Neath, took a lease on the site of the old copper works at the Hafod for the production of stoneware. In this venture he was encouraged by the Burgesses of the Borough and Corporation of Swansea, who were making a conscious effort to remove the perceived social stigma and physical nuisance of smoke, grime and stench from copper smelting, which for many years had given Swansea a prime international trading position in the metal worked from its ores and afforded the town the title of "*Copperopolis*". Thereby, they hoped to encourage a nevertheless industrialised Swansea as a fashionable and attractive seaside resort for visitors. The first copper works in Swansea opened in 1717 in the Tawe Valley, where the smoke and noxious fumes

from the smelting operations destroyed all vegetation on the downwind eastern side of the valley. This was quickly followed by a second copper smelting works established on the site of what transpired later to be the Cambrian Pottery, situated much closer to the town in the Hafod—later acquired and enlarged to be the largest of its era by the Cornishman John Vivian to smelt his copper ore brought from Cornwall into the local docks (B. Morris, *Welsh Ceramics in Context I*, 2003). Vivian would be a major supporter of the Swansea porcelain manufactory in the early 18th Century and he commissioned from there a plate showing his Marino residence painted by Thomas Baxter, in addition to the large *Marino Ballroom* service and several other highly important Swansea services. The surge in demand for copper can be attributed to the requirement of the Royal Navy for copper sheathing for their men-of-war to combat the destruction of ship's wooden hulls by barnacles and teredo worm.

Coles was trying to emulate the success and reputation of Josiah Wedgwood in Stoke-on-Trent, whose earthenware production had started in the previous decade and quickly led the field with his esteemed creamware. Coles made a successful start to ceramics manufacture at Swansea and he targeted useful domestic earthenware products. In 1786, Coles' son John carried on with the flourishing business set up by his father and entered partnership with George Haynes, a gifted manager and administrator, under whose proprietorship in the closing years of the 18th century the Swansea creamware was said to rival that of the esteemed Queen's creamware made by Josiah Wedgwood in Etruria, Staffordshire. The famous "*Frog*" service in creamware produced by Josiah Wedgwood between 1773 and 1774 for the Empress Catherine II (The Great) of Russia, whom he referred to as "My great Patroness in the North", and illustrating several Welsh scenes, was imitated by the Cambrian Pottery in Swansea with a very similar ivy leaf border in 1805 for a large dinner service for George Haynes and was decorated with similar scenes by William Weston Young (Blake Roberts, *Welsh Ceramics in Context II*, 2005, pp. 87–88; A. Renton, *ibid*, 2005, p. 129). Since the first publication devoted to Swansea and Nantgarw porcelains and earthenwares by Turner (W. Turner, *The Ceramics of Swansea and Nantgarw*, 1897), there has been some conjecture and debate about the actual date of the start-up of pottery manufacture in Swansea and Turner cited a believed date of "*about 1750*" from discussions with the then living relatives of Lewis Weston Dillwyn, a later owner of the Swansea china factory in the early 19th century.

In 1801, a prosperous Quaker, William Dillwyn, bought the lease of the Swansea Pottery, which had adopted the name of the Cambrian Pottery under George Haynes since 1790, and he placed his 23 years old son in charge, Lewis Weston Dillwyn. The arrangement whereby the Dillwyns retained control of the Pottery whilst retaining the local business acumen and skill of George Haynes as manager worked very well and Lewis Dillwyn acquired much knowledge about the ceramics industry. Between 1802 and 1810, the Cambrian Pottery traded under the name "Haynes, Dillwyn and Co." and the business expanded to nine kilns for earthenware production despite a rather unfavourable economic climate operating at that time. In 1810 Lewis Weston Dillwyn became the sole proprietor of

the Cambrian Pottery, with the rather elderly Haynes retiring in favour of another Quaker family, Timothy and John Bevington, who joined Dillwyn upon Haynes' departure and then entered formal partnership with Dillwyn in December 1811. From this time until Michaelmas 1817, the time when British ceramics factories established their annual contracts, the Cambrian Pottery traded under the name "Dillwyn and Co.". At this point the chronology becomes rather murky as Grant Davidson suggests that Haynes may have dabbled with the idea of producing experimental porcelain prior to Dillwyn's arrival, around 1796, but that nothing significant was actually produced before 1802. It is clear that the true era of porcelain production at Swansea probably began with the association between Dillwyn and the Bevingtons. In 1817, it was realised that the ability to produce high quality translucent porcelain at Swansea as exemplified by the characteristic and desirable duck-egg porcelain body was not commercially profitable and experiments that had been carried out by Samuel Walker under the aegis of Lewis Dillwyn did result in a more robust porcelain body through the introduction of Cornish soapstone into the body, a magnesium silicate, from Lord Falmouth's mine at Gwgraze. There are ample records which indicate that a flourishing business existed with the waterborne transportation of soapstone from Falmouth directly into Swansea docks.

However, the markedly inferior translucency and rough pigskin-like texture of this new porcelain was an instant dislike of the London retailers and their clientele—meaning that the days of porcelain production at Swansea were now severely numbered indeed. Dillwyn now came to an opt-out agreement with the Bevingtons who then took on the lease of the Swansea China Works and the Cambrian Pottery in late 1817. A rather fractious dispute ensued over the true valuation of existing unsold stocks of undecorated porcelain which seemed to comprise the excellent quality duck's egg and the poorer trident variety. The sum of £13,600 was deemed to represent the stock value, later readjusted to £9,500 by the Bevingtons, but an important clause in the settlement related to the very finely executed *Garden Scenery* dessert service of beautiful, duck-egg porcelain which had been painted personally for Lewis Dillwyn by Thomas Baxter, which still remains in the possession of the Dillwyn-Venables-Llewellyn family. It is alleged that no more china was made at Swansea during the Bevington period and that the existing stock was then decorated locally and sold off, much of the trident ware being purchased locally. Elis Jenkins has suggested that perhaps up to 100,000 pieces of porcelain were held in stock at that time ready for sale, but there seems to be little in the way of documentation to support this idea. By 1824, the Bevingtons decided that they would not renew the lease and the Swansea China Works and Cambrian Pottery reverted back to Lewis Weston Dillwyn, who thereafter manufactured domestic earthenware only. It is alleged that around this time Samuel Walker again approached Dillwyn with the idea of resuscitating porcelain manufacture at Swansea, but Dillwyn was by then totally disinterested. After the death of Billingsley in 1828, Walker left Coalport and set up a ceramics earthenware manufactory in New York, eventually becoming a prosperous man.

In 1831 Lewis Weston Dillwyn brought his 17 years old son, Lewis Llewellyn Dillwyn, into the business and the son ran the works from 1836. Dillwyn Jr embarked upon a short-lived venture between 1848 and 1850 to manufacture Swansea Etruscan Ware, red and black earthenware vessels in a pseudoclassical style which did not succeed as a venture, so in 1850 he transferred the lease to David Evans and J. E. Glasston, who traded under the name Evans & Glasston. In 1862, David Evans' son took over and renamed the output under the title D. J. Evans & Co., manufacturing simple domestic wares and clay pipes for smokers until the final closure of the Swansea Pottery in 1870. As with several other ceramics factories, the advent of the cigarette in the middle to last quarters of the 19th century dealt a mortal blow to the clay pipe tobacco industry and this probably contributed to the final demise of ceramics production at Swansea. Although the roll-your-own variety of cigarette using pipe tobacco was certainly still extant in the mid-19th Century, the invention of the mechanised cigarette machine by American Tobacco in 1883 made commercial cigarette production cheap and effective for wider public consumption, so dealing a final death blow thereafter to ceramic clay pipe manufacture.

Whereas the Swansea porcelain factory can be seen to have developed in about 1812 from an earlier pottery works and in fact co-existed with two ceramics factories at Swansea, namely the *Cambrian* and *Glamorgan* potteries, for a few years until its closure in 1824, Nantgarw, on the other hand was started up in its first phase as a totally new venture in 1813. By the early to mid-1820s, however, both porcelain factories were finally closed, the last of four auction sales of undecorated and decorated pieces which commenced in 1821 was carried out in Swansea in 1826. From the statement of a Swansea china works employee and noted ceramic artist, Henry Morris, made to Colonel Grant Francis in January 1850, some 28 years after the formal closure of the factory in 1822, it is apparent that Lewis Weston Dillwyn had the idea of manufacturing porcelain at Swansea in about 1812/1813 when he acquired the services of two former Coalport workers to construct a kiln in the premises of the *Cambrian Pottery*, but this venture was doomed to fail because of the lack of expertise of the personnel concerned and at best several pieces of rather mediocre glazed earthenware termed "stone-body" were produced here. Dillwyn then looked elsewhere for expertise and persuaded Samuel Walker and William Billingsley to leave their troubled enterprise at Nantgarw, which they had started up in 1812, and set up with him at Swansea in 1814. Their collaboration lasted just short of 3 years, creating the best porcelain ever produced at Swansea—having the famous duck's egg translucent body—before Billingsley and Walker left Swansea to embark upon their second phase of production at Nantgarw where they made what transpired to be the finest quality porcelain ever made in the British Isles in the 19th Century, which has never been emulated since. However, both factories in striving for excellence, and eventually achieving, it ran into severe economic distress and by 1819 for Nantgarw and 1822 for Swansea, porcelain production ceased. As noted earlier, ceramics manufacture still persisted at Swansea in the form of earthenware until 1870; at Nantgarw William Henry Pardoe, the son of Thomas Pardoe, took over the vacant

and derelict Nantgarw Pottery in 1833 and manufactured stone bottles, brown glazed earthenware and clay pipes but again, mainly due to the advent of commercial cigarette manufacture, this business had to close in 1920.

This account is verified by reference to existing documentation; however, controversy still exists as to whether the Nantgarw porcelain body was actually used at Swansea when William Billingsley and Samuel Walker arrived there from their initial start-up at Nantgarw in 1814; it could be argued that Dillwyn's favourable response to the invitation of Sir Joseph Banks to visit Nantgarw and to assess the quality of the porcelain being made there, followed up by his invitation to Billingsley and Walker to transfer to Swansea, must surely have involved his appropriation thereby of the successful Nantgarw china body. Dillwyn has himself stated that the very first pieces to emerge from his fledgling porcelain manufactory at Swansea were impressed "Nantgarw"—and several authorities since have claimed to have recognised these pieces that are still extant. However, even whilst Samuel Walker was building the two new kilns at Swansea for porcelain manufacture, he is said to have received a letter dated the 12th November, 1814 from Flight, Barr & Barr, the new name of the Worcester china factory following the death of Martin Barr Sr. in 1813 (prior to this it was called Barr, Flight & Barr from 1807 for the period when Billingsley and Walker were employed there). This letter was written in an aggrieved tone and remonstrated with Walker about the manner of departure of Billingsley and himself from the Worcester china works after the kind treatment they had both received there and expressing astonishment on hearing that they had formed "*some sort of contact with a person named Young*" and that he was about to make the secret porcelain composition for Lewis Dillwyn and the Bevingtons. This letter also informed Walker of "*the firm resolution of instantly giving our attorney instruction to commence an Action against you for the amount of the Penalty of 1000 Pounds named in the bond given you on the 17th November, 1812*". Clearly, someone had alerted the Worcester china works to the activities of Walker and Billingsley at Swansea, but we can raise the question as to the timing of this: Dillwyn is not mentioned at all in the letter, but Young is certainly mentioned there. William Billingsley and Samuel Walker had already been attempting to make their improved porcelain body which they had perfected at Worcester during the preceding year at Nantgarw: no secret was made of this and they had even applied for Government funding and had acquired support and sponsors through William Weston Young. So, why should Messrs. Flight, Barr & Barr of Worcester wait until they had moved to Swansea to issue this threat, which actually must be regarded as quite an empty one as Billingsley and Walker had seemingly departed Worcester amicably and had even been paid £200 by Martin Barr as a leaving gift, on the understanding that they should not inform anyone else of the secret recipe and there was actually no reason at all to prevent them from setting up themselves elsewhere to make porcelain with that formula. This, of course, is exactly what they did at Nantgarw—with no demur from Worcester—and it was only when they were engaged by Lewis Dillwyn that the threat of legal action was issued. Did this shot across the bows mean that Flight, Barr & Barr at Worcester finally saw the financial backing of the Dillwyns

along with the “Nantgarw” porcelain formula manufacture a real hazard to their own operations? Dillwyn in a letter to Marryatt mentions that he had received a gentlemanly warning from Flight, Barr & Barr that the persons calling themselves Walker and Beeley had clandestinely left their service and that they should not be employed by Dillwyn under any circumstances, whilst also advising Dillwyn that the new experimental porcelain formula was useless! It must be said that this letter was obviously of a very different tone from the letter sent to Samuel Walker noted above. This situation must have caused Dillwyn to consider that the new Nantgarw body would be very likely not economical to make and that if he undertook to do so he would further incur the legal wrath of Flight, Barr & Barr. It is sensible to argue that these threats, real and perceived, could well have convinced Lewis Dillwyn to immediately abandon the idea of using the identical Nantgarw body at Swansea and to preferentially create a new improved body there using the newly acquired skills at his disposal in the form of Walker and Billingsley. This is a reasonable proposition as it is believed that whilst Walker was pressing ahead with Dillwyn to perfect the formulation and trials of the new duck’s egg translucent china, Billingsley walked out and disappeared for some months only to return later to Swansea but then adopting a more distinctive role of china decorator and overseer of the artists’ workshop, which rather pointedly excluded him from any decisions involving the manufacture and body compositions there.

For the very few years that these china works were actually in production in the first quarter of the 19th Century they undoubtedly made some of the finest porcelain in the world, which rivalled and even surpassed the output of the revived French *hard paste* porcelains from Sevres in a post-Napoleonic era—so, we can attempt to theorise what factors conspired to cause their closure after effectively just 2 or 3 years total operational output? A complex tale of commercial intrigue and the constant striving for perfection of an already high quality output in a highly competitive and demanding market resulted in extraordinarily large kiln losses of up to 90% output wastage in the firing process at Nantgarw in particular and the development of a stronger but markedly inferior and less attractive “trident” body at Swansea saw, firstly, the demise of Nantgarw in 1819/1820 and then of Swansea in 1822/1823.

However, this is really a retrospective success story in that these porcelains today represent some of the finest ceramic artworks in existence which rightly command first tier and premier prices for collectors in international auction rooms and in dealers’ sales. William Turner (W. Turner, *The Ceramics of Swansea and Nantgarw*, 1897) records that the final Nantgarw dessert service retailed after closure of the factory by Mortlock’s, their London retailer and distributor, which they had owned for some 45 years since the factory closure in 1819, was purchased in about 1864 for the princely sum of 500 guineas: this apparently represented the largest sum ever paid for a dessert service from this or any other British factory from retailers at that time and is equivalent to approximately £100,000 today.

2.1 The Influence of William Billingsley

The porcelains made at Swansea and Nantgarw in South Wales under the direction of William Billingsley, Samuel Walker, William Weston Young and Lewis Weston Dillwyn during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, which grew from the initial pottery production by Coles' successors, Lewis Weston Dillwyn and George Haynes (O. Fairclough, *Welsh Ceramics in Context II*, 2005, pp. 215-218), in the early 19th century are some of the finest examples of *soft paste* (*pâte tendre*) bodied ceramics produced anywhere. A superior translucency coupled with exquisite painting decoration and the finest gilding accomplished by local artists and by established ceramics enamellers in the London ateliers or workshops engaged by the London retailers rapidly established these manufactories as the most desirable for purchase and acquisition by the aristocracy and landed gentry in the extended Regency period from about 1812 to 1823 (W. Turner, *Ceramics of Swansea and Nantgarw*, 1897; E. Morton Nance, *Pottery and Porcelain of Swansea and Nantgarw*, 1942; W. D. John, *Nantgarw Porcelain*, 1948; W. D. John, *Swansea Porcelain*, 1958; E. Jenkins, *Swansea Porcelain*, 1970; R. Williams, *Nantgarw Porcelain: 1813–1822*, 1997), rivalling the very best output then available of Sevres *hard paste* (*pâte dure*) French porcelain.

An interesting press clipping from the London newspaper “*The Morning Chronicle*” on July 11th, 1816, supports this acclaimed superior standing of Nantgarw porcelain in London society.

Improvement in porcelain has succeeded in this country beyond the most sanguine expectations, a new manufactory has been established in Wales, the brilliancy of the white and transparency being equal to the celebrated Porcelaine of the Royal Sevres Manufactory. We understand that Her Royal Highness Princess Charlotte and Princess Mary have each a superb dejeuner (Cabaret service) of the Cambrian Porcelaine. Mortlocks in Oxford Street is the only house where this rare production can be seen.

Although the name Nantgarw is not mentioned, being substituted by Cambrian (which also existed contemporaneously and confusingly as the Cambrian Pottery in Swansea!), the recognition of the high esteem in which this porcelain was held in Regency London is immediately apparent, and by mid-1816 the impact on London society was significant—directing them to Mortlock's in Oxford Street, London, as sole retailer for purchase of this desirable commodity.

Several experimental bodies based on the incorporation of the finest Cornish kaolin, fine Lynn sand, soaprock and bone ash were undertaken in the pursuit of perfection, an analysis of which will be discussed later, which resulted in significantly high kiln losses (it is claimed up to 90% at Nantgarw, and damaged goods transported to the waste tip by “the cartload” at Swansea) and the eventual closure of the two factories in 1819–1822 after which large sales of unsold stock, decorated and in the white, were disposed of in a series of auction sales until 1826 (A. Church, *English Porcelain from Museum Collections*, 1904; H. Eccles and B. Rackham, *Analysed Specimens of English Porcelains in the V&A Museum Collection*, 1922; W. D. John, *Nantgarw Porcelain*, 1948; W. D. John, *Swansea*

Porcelain, 1958; M. S. Tite and Bimson, 1991; J. Owen et al., 1998; J. Owen and Morrison, 1999; M. Hillis, *Welsh Ceramics in Context II*, 2005; H. G. M. Edwards, *Encyclopaedia of Analytical Chemistry*, 2015a). Such was the desirability of these porcelains, particularly Nantgarw, that they have always commanded very high prices: the esteemed American ceramics writer and collector, G. Ryland-Scott Jr. in 1961 (*Antiques Porcelain Digest*, 1961) described Nantgarw porcelain as:

... the fascinating story of William Billingsley, who created the most beautiful porcelain ever produced anywhere.

William Billingsley and his enthusiastic and all-consuming drive for perfection is the key figure in the story of Welsh porcelain; his skill, dynamism and association with especially Samuel Walker provided the impetus and practical abilities whereby some of the most beautiful renditions of ceramic art were created first at Swansea and then at Nantgarw in the opening quarter of the 19th Century. We shall address the question of “Why Nantgarw?” elsewhere, but suffice to note for the moment that a suitable property was available for rental on the banks of the Glamorgan Canal, with local supplies of the highest grade anthracite Welsh steam coal available (which possessed the highest calorific value of any coals mined in Britain at that time) and Cardiff Docks only seven miles away at one terminus of the Glamorgan Canal for the importation of china clay and minerals from Cornwall and for the export of the finished goods to London and elsewhere. A further point is that the services of a local miller David Jones, who had a mill adjacent to the Cross Keys public house nearby with a water powered wheel driven by a leat from the Glamorgan Canal, could be arranged for the especially fine grinding of calcined bones mixed with clay to form the essential frit for the production of fine porcelain; as will be highlighted later, the thorough grinding and mixing of the source materials is a critical parameter in the production of the finest porcelain body when fired.

2.2 Factory Output

It is certainly true that since the premature closure of these two factories, collectors who have had the privilege to examine and handle Swansea and Nantgarw porcelains have been most enthusiastic and eager to acquire examples and this has contributed materially to their continued interest and in maintaining their appreciated position as ceramic art works; it is testament to their perceived quality that the very limited production of these fine porcelains emanating from two rather small factories which were only in production for a relatively short time, perhaps summed only over a total of 2 or 3 years at best intermittently, has generated so much interest that it still continues internationally today. It has been recorded that immediately after the final auction sale of Nantgarw porcelains on 28th October, 1822, that Nantgarw plates were changing hands for 2 guineas per plate; several

notabilities who had travelled some distance by carriage to purchase these porcelains expressed their extreme dissatisfaction that they were unable to acquire Swansea and Nantgarw china at these sales but this was paradoxically not sufficient to save the factories at this late stage—for example Sir Watkin Williams-Wynn of Wynnstay in North Wales arrived too late by carriage to participate in this final sale in Swansea much to his annoyance and chagrin (see Henry Morris' statement, Appendix, Document 2) and he vented his dissatisfaction upon the vendors.

The porcelains of Swansea and Nantgarw were very much sought after and they can be broadly classified here into two main categories: namely, examples locally decorated by esteemed artists such as David Evans, Henry Morris, William Pollard, George Baxter, George Beddoes, Thomas Pardoe and William Billingsley (W. D. John, *Nantgarw Porcelain*, 1948; W. D. John, *Swansea Porcelain*, 1958; W. D. John, *William Billingsley*, 1968) and items usually more flamboyantly decorated for aristocratic Regency consumption in the London ateliers. It will be seen later that this class division into two of the porcelain output from these factories is actually too simplistic and we shall need to expand this after discussion. Much of the porcelain output from both Swansea and Nantgarw, but especially Nantgarw, was sent in the white, i.e. simply glazed, to the London enamelling ateliers of John Sims of Pimlico and Robins & Randall of Islington, who employed famed ceramic artists and enamellers such as Moses Webster and James Plant, from where the finished outlet production was ordered through retailers such as John Bradley's of 47 and 54, Pall Mall, Bailey, Neale & Bailey of 8, St Paul's Churchyard, Boucher & Guy of 128, Leadenhall Street, John Powell of 91, Wimpole Street, Daniell and Co. of Wigmore Street, and Pellatt & Green of 16, St Paul's Churchyard. John Mortlock's of Oxford Street and Orchard Street acted as the major London purchaser of Nantgarw porcelain in the white and they decorated it in their own workshops and in that of Robins & Randall according to specified orders and commissions placed with them. Bradley and Co. of Pall Mall had a similar retail position and there was stiff competition to acquire as much of the output of the factories as possible, especially Nantgarw porcelain. It is known that Mortlock's regarded themselves as the prime suppliers of Nantgarw porcelain to an insatiable London clientele and John Mortlock urged William Billingsley to let him have all the output from his kilns—which Billingsley strived to do, keeping back perhaps just a few pieces for local purchase and gifts and, of course, some minor flawed items for local decoration only. Here was the first manifestation of the unacceptably high kiln losses thwarting the successful promotion of Nantgarw porcelain—the supply just could not keep up with the demand, even at the premium sale prices being applied by the London retailers.

Richard Robins and Thomas Martin Randall employed over 40 people in their enamelling atelier in Sparfields, Islington, where much Swansea and Nantgarw porcelain was decorated for the retailers' commissions. Other contemporary china manufacturers tended to have their own dedicated outlet retailers in London, e.g. Derby and Worcester, who employed itinerant artists and decorators. For example, Moses Webster had initially served his apprenticeship at Derby then joined

Thomas Randall in London in 1819, working there until he returned to Derby in the early 1820s, where he decorated many fine items of china including the celebrated dessert service for John Trotter Esq. of Dyrham Park in 1825, an example of which is shown in Fig. 2.1 (J. Twitchett, *Derby Porcelain: An Illustrated Guide* 1748–1848, 2002; p. 168, Colour Plate 133 depicts a cup and saucer from a generic tea service of this same pattern). A fine cup and saucer from a Nantgarw tea service decorated in London by Moses Webster at Robins and Randall's atelier is illustrated in Fig. 2.2, comprising delicate arrangements of pink roses and foliage accompanied by typical dentil edge gilding: a similar cup and saucer is illustrated in the *Nantgarw Porcelain Album* (W. D. John et al., 1975, Colour Illustration 79) and a sucrier (*ibid.*, Coloured Illustration 86). It is of relevant interest that the definitive artistic work of a named artist on another porcelain factory output, in this case Derby, can be instrumental in the identification of his work on Welsh porcelains also. Moses Webster is quoted by the ceramic historian Bemrose (*Bow, Chelsea & Derby Porcelain*, 1898) as saying

... in 1819 he painted quantities of Nantgarw porcelain for Mortlock's in Oxford Street, who purchased everything that Billingsley made at this time in the glazed white state....

Indeed, this was praise from one of the premier china retailers in London, who had their pick of the output from contemporary factories, including the famed Sevres porcelain factory. It is known that Mortlock's, by securing the bulk of the Nantgarw output, could sell the porcelain at the best prices once decorated, fetching some 300% premium at least on its nearest English porcelain competitors and rivalling if not outmatching that of the Sevres porcelains in the desirability of its possession. It was even alleged, perhaps unfairly, that Mortlock's passed off Nantgarw items (presumably unmarked) successfully as Sevres porcelain, which then retailed at a further premium of over 500%—a rumour possibly circulated by jealous competitors in the porcelain retail trade! An interesting difference becomes manifest between the Welsh porcelain factories, especially Nantgarw, and those of their contemporary rivals in that much porcelain output from Swansea and Nantgarw was sent in the white, i.e. glazed but undecorated, to their London retailers' workshops and enamelling ateliers. In contrast, other factories such as Derby, Worcester and Coalport decorated their own china locally and then sent this for distribution and marketing to their own dedicated London agents, or indeed just used their specific agents to create the business orders which were then sealed through their own factory order books—clearly, in this scenario any discussion of patterns and design would have been taken up with the factory concerned through their agents, and this is documented in the work books of, for example, the Derby factory. Edmundson (*Welsh Ceramics in Context I*, 2003) makes a particular reference to a statement made by Billingsley at Pinxton in 1796 that it was much more profitable to decorate and then sell the fired china from one's own factory than to supply retailers and other factories with undecorated wares in the white. This

means that locally decorated Swansea and Nantgarw porcelains were invariably commissioned directly with the factory and that London decorated pieces were very different in style and concept, which could be reflected in the different tastes of the local gentry and of London high society. Examples of locally decorated Swansea services are the *Lysaght* service and the *Lady Seaton* service whereas the *Burdett-Coutts* is a London decorated service. Similarly, for Nantgarw porcelain, locally decorated services are represented by the *Edwards* and *Ferguson* services, whilst the typical, and rather more flamboyant London decorated analogues are represented by the *Duke of Cambridge*, *Brace* and *Mackintosh* services. The decoration of porcelain supplied in the white to the London retailers has also generated the possibility that for completion of a commission to a special order items of non-Welsh origin were sometimes included to meet a deadline and this will be alluded to later. As an example of a dedicated London agent, Joseph Lygo dealt exclusively for Derby porcelain from 1777, shortly after the factory had achieved their Royal Warrant from King George III in 1775, until the early 1800s when Robert Bloor transferred his agency to Courtney's at 34, Old Bond Street. It has already been mentioned that Derby, in contrast to its Swansea and Nantgarw contemporaries, decorated all of its output at the factory even for its London commissions.



Fig. 2.1 Derby plate from the *Trotter* service painted by Moses Webster for John Trotter Esq., Dyrham Park, which documents his flower painting, ca. 1820. *Private Collection*



Fig. 2.2 Nantgarw coffee cup and saucer with heart-shaped handle, dentil edge gilding, London-decorated with pink roses, buds and moths by Moses Webster in the atelier of Robins & Randall, Spa Fields, Islington and retailed through Mortlock's, Oxford Street, London. Illustrated in W. D. John et al., *Nantgarw Porcelain Album*, 1975, Colour Plate 79, and also a sucrier and cover from the same service in Colour Plate 86. *Private Collection*

John Sims, in his atelier in Five Fields Row, Pimlico, employed several fine ceramic artists, including Billingsley's mentor at Derby, Zacariah Boreman who worked there after leaving Derby in 1794 until he died in 1810, James Plant and James Turner—the first two artists specialised in landscapes and figures and the latter in flower painting. It should be recognised that these ateliers did not exclusively decorate Nantgarw and Swansea porcelain and W. D. John (*Nantgarw Porcelain*, 1948) has suggested that a possible explanation for his own discovery of several items of French hard paste porcelain in otherwise large nearly complete Nantgarw services he examined at that time could well arise from a shortage of items delivered from South Wales and unobtainable immediately due to the exceptionally high kiln losses in Nantgarw. Another intriguing possibility, of course, is that the French porcelains were later substitutes for breakages in Nantgarw services following the factory closure in 1819, but the consistent and similar decoration undertaken by apparently the same artist seen on both the original and putative “replacement” items would tend to negate this view. Nevertheless, several Nantgarw and Swansea services today are acknowledged to contain these rogue items from other factories, such as some dishes and ice pails ascribed to Coalport manufacture in the *Lysaght* Swansea dinner-dessert service, although both the true Swansea and the fake “Swansea” items have been decorated locally by Henry Morris. The attribution of Coalport to these rogue pieces has been made solely on the basis of non-Swansea shapes and this clearly gives a very sound experimental base for some further investigation of the porcelain body composition of individual items in this service by non-destructive analytical chemical spectroscopy (see later) which has not yet been undertaken but which would achieve the

scientific support for recognition of associated items in otherwise incontrovertibly designated porcelain services from Swansea or Nantgarw, and even from other factories (H. G. M. Edwards, *Encyclopaedia of Analytical Chemistry: Historical Pigments*, 2015b).

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