

Ironstone Children's China with Copper Lustre Decorations

From the 1850s through the turn of the century, ironstone china decorated with copper lustre motifs was a child's playtime favorite. TLC charter member Dale Abrams specializes in collecting these lustre-decorated ironstone sets and provided photos of examples from his collection as well as from other Tea Leaf enthusiasts.



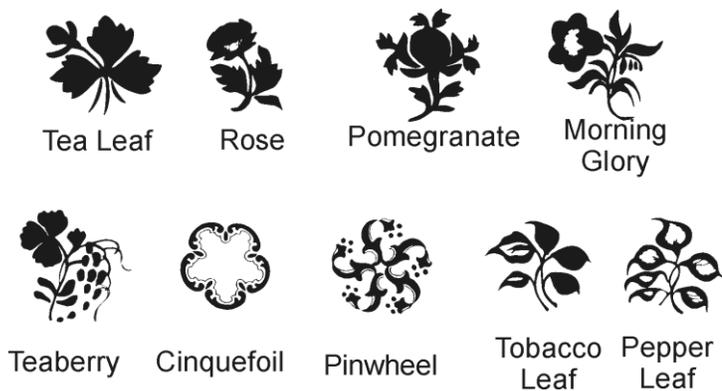
A sampling of children's- size copper lustre decorated ironstone teapots

Tea Leaf ironstone china was made primarily in the Staffordshire district of England. Although ironstone production in England began in the early 1800s, it wasn't until the 1850s that some ironstone potters began to enhance their wares with various copper lustre effects and embellishments. Beginning simply with the addition of copper-colored lustre bands, the decorators eventually employed a variety of fanciful copper lustre floral and geometric motifs (see photo above). This copper lustre treatment was obtained by the addition of gold or copper oxide to the glazes which the potter used in the decorating phase of the firing.



So what is Tea Leaf Ironstone China? Strictly speaking, Tea Leaf is considered to be any English or American ironstone china decorated with the traditional Tea Leaf motif consisting of three leaves and a bud (see illustration), in copper or gold lustre. Today's collectors, however, have expanded that definition of Tea Leaf to include any white ironstone decorated with copper lustre motifs, whether those decorations are floral, botanical, geometric or simply lustre banded.

Originally introduced by Anthony Shaw in the mid-1850s, nearly 100 well-known English potters eventually adopted the Tea Leaf motif and used it on over 200 recognized ironstone body styles. About a dozen of these body styles were also made in child-size pieces so that children could play with the same miniature-size dishes that the adults used. Beginning in the 1880s, American potters also entered the ironstone market and several also employed the Tea Leaf (or close variant) motif. The chart to the right shows several of the copper lustre motifs found on white ironstone children's china that are considered to be a part of the Tea Leaf family.



Anthony Shaw appears to be the first of the Tea Leaf potters registering the earliest of the body styles decorated with a Tea Leaf in 1856, and his wares are highly collectible. Below are four of his different child's sets, along with some Shaw child's mugs.



▲ These Anthony Shaw Tea Leaf child's pieces on the beautifully embossed Lily-of-the-Valley body style are shown in the left photo with ▲ an adult-size Tea Leaf sugar bowl, coffeepot and creamer for size comparison. This ironstone body style was registered in 1856. The LOV set is interesting because the cups to this set are found in both handled and handleless versions (see right photo).



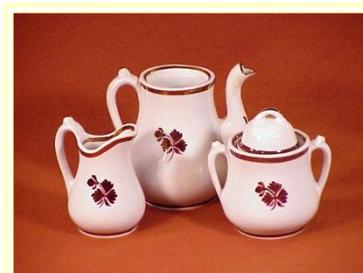
▲ This Shaw child's set does not have an adult-size equivalent but is reminiscent of Shaw's Pear body style.



▲ These Shaw Tea Leaf child's pieces on the Many Panelled Gothic body style are among the most hard to find. Shown here are an adult size and child's size creamer.



▲ Child-size Tea Leaf mugs, many made by Anthony Shaw, come in numerous sizes ranging from 2.5" to 3.25"



▲ Anthony Shaw Tea Leaf on the Simplicity body style. The same set was made in an adult size.

Powell and Bishop is the maker of this Rose motif child's set on the Simplicity body style. (Shown below with an adult-size coffeepot and creamer on the Washington Shape body style ▼ circa 1870s).



Wm. Davenport and Thos. Hughes

These two potters were in business from the 1850s through the 1880s and these sets are estimated to have been manufactured circa the 1860s.



▲ Wm. Davenport Tea Leaf with copper and pink lustre Tea Leaf on the Fig Cousin Body Style, shown here are three child's pieces with their adult-size equivalents (which have far more pink lustre embellishments).



▲ Thomas Hughes Tea Leaf on the Fig Cousin Body Style, similar to Davenport but with a different style of Tea Leaf.



▲ Also on the Fig Cousin body style, this child's set is decorated with numerous copper lustre bands.



▲ Also by Davenport, these Tea Leaf pieces don't have an adult-size counterpart and the body style, although similar to Fig Cousin, has a different style handle and has not been named.

Panelled Grape and Grape Octagon body styles were made by several different potters and are often not marked. The pieces below are by Edward Walley, Livesley & Powell and others.



▲ Panelled Grape adult and child-size coffeepots with copper lustre banding.



▲ Panelled Grape child-size items with copper lustre Chelsea Grape decorative motif.



▲ Panelled Grape adult and child-size creamers in the Cinquefoil decorative motif with a child's Cinquefoil cup and saucer set.



▲ Made by many potters, including Livesley & Powell and Edward Walley. These child-size and adult Grape Octagon pieces are decorated with simple copper lustre bands.

Elsmore & Forster was in business from 1853 through 1871. They are most famous for their Ceres body style, decorated with many different color combinations.



▲ This Morning Glory child's set on the Columbia Shape body is shown here with its diminutive child's cups in both handled and handleless versions. This set does not have an adult-size equivalent as the adult size pieces are on the Portland Shape ironstone body.



▲ Also on Elsmore & Forster's Columbia Shape body style, this Tobacco Leaf-decorated set is a charmer. This set does not have an adult-size equivalent as the adult size pieces are found on the Fanfare ironstone body.



◀ The most popular of Elsmore & Forster's production is their Ceres pattern. Made in many color combinations (three of which are shown here), the copper lustre pieces are particularly elusive. Shown in the photo below are a caramel lustre and green color combo 3-piece set, a cup and saucer in two shades of blue and a copper lustre Ceres cup and saucer set. Circa 1850s.





▲ This Elsmore & Forster Pepperleaf child's set (shown with a full-size coffeepot) is on the Crystal body style.



▲ Elsmore & Forster Tobacco Leaf child's mugs shown in several sizes and styles, with an adult-size Tulip Shape mug for comparison.

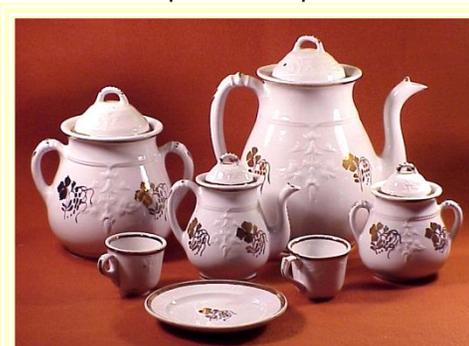
The **Primary Hexagon** body style is decorated with a couple different copper lustre motifs, as shown here decorated with copper lustre Chelsea Grape (▼ on the left below) and Pinwheel (on the right below ▼).



Teaberry, a very popular decorative motif, was made primarily by Joseph Clementson and can be found on many different body styles.



▲ Two examples of Clementson's Prairie Shape body style, one with copper lustre banding and the other ▲ with the Teaberry motif. The photo on the left shows an adult-size coffeepot and a child-size sugar bowl. The rightmost photo shows child's pieces along with their adult-size coffeepot counterpart. Circa 1860s.



▲ Clementson's Balanced Vine body style, shown here with two different lustre applications, one with lustre bands and the other ▲ with the Teaberry design. Both photos show child-size items along with adult-size examples. Circa 1860s.



▲ Clementson's New York Shape body style (above) with both copper lustre bands and Teaberry decorative motifs. Circa 1850s. ▲



◀ This unnamed body style is not found in adult-size pieces but a pair of child's creamers is shown here with both copper lustre banding and copper lustre Teaberry motifs.

Mellor Taylor child's sets are the most commonly-found Tea Leaf sets and are characterized by their gold lustre Tea Leaf motif, rather than the more popular copper lustre. The two styles made were "slant-sided" (below left ▼) and "rounded" (below right ▼).



American Tea Leaf is considered to have been made late in the 19th century and few examples are found. Circa 1880s-1890s.



▲ American-made Tea Leaf set potted by East End Pottery, body style unnamed but the "star" finials are very distinctive.



▲ Steubenville Pottery (Ohio) made this Cable shape child's set with the Tea Plum motif.

A full child's set generally consists of six plates (normally around 5"), six cup and saucer sets, a coffeepot, creamer, sugar bowl and waste bowl. ***Can you imagine the joy of the children who were able to recreate their mom's tea parties on miniature versions of the family china?***

It is rare to find a full set today and Dale has been purchasing single pieces for more than 35 years in order to assemble sets piece-by-piece. Dale says the process seems never-ending as he continues to hunt for pieces. Special thanks go out to all the ironstone collectors who allowed him to photograph their pieces.

Dale also recommends visiting the Tea Leaf Online Identification Guide to help answer your questions about lustre-decorated ironstone child's items at www.TeaLeafClub.com.

Dale would love to hear from you with reports and photos of lustre-decorated ironstone items not pictured here. He can be reached at TLAntiques@aol.com or you can write him at 960 Bryden Road, Columbus, Ohio 43205.

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