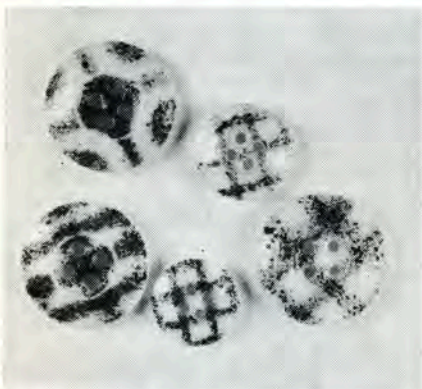


Ginghams, Calicoes and Stencils

By Bob Ferguson

What are the differences between the ginghams, calicoes, and stencils? Many new collectors, and occasionally some more experienced ones, get the three types of decorated china buttons confused. I have known people who said they had a cache of gingham buttons, but when they produced them, they were only the most common of the stencils. By the same token I have encountered collectors who were confusing the stencils with the calicoes.

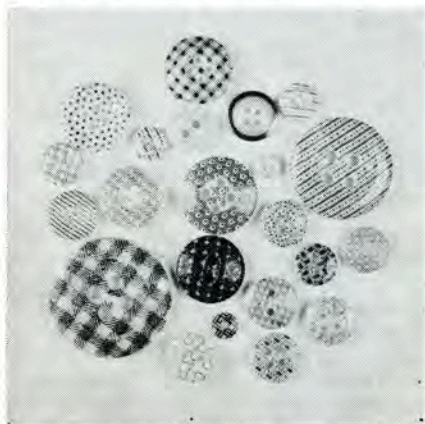


It is really quite easy to distinguish the ginghams from the calicoes. Just remember that the ginghams tend to imitate the plaid designs of gingham cloth, and are more often than not found in two colors; calico buttons are usually found in one color only (although there are a number of two-color calicoes), and have a much finer pattern, which is repeated across the entire width of the button. Stencils have, as a rule, coarser patterns, less delicate colors, and a less fine degree of workmanship than either of the other two. Stencils are the only one

of the three to fit into the modern category.

How they were made:

Ginghams are found on both two-hole and four-hole bodies. Those with four holes will almost invariably have the knob in the center between the four holes. Each color of the gingham pattern was dusted onto a plain button body, and adhered to pre-painted stripes of liquid medium, which had been applied to the button. Excess dust (color) was then blown or shaken off, and the button was then fired to cause the color to become fused to the body of the button. After cooling, stripes were applied for the second color in the same way as the first were done, then the button was re-fired fusing the stripes of the second color. Notice in the picture of the ginghams that the patterns seem to have a stippled, or speckled, texture. Gingham buttons are rare.



Calicoes were made in an entirely different way. The plain button bodies

were prepared and laid out on a flat surface. The paint (pigment and medium) was printed from copper plates onto a very thin tissue paper, which was then laid over the group of plain china-bodied buttons while the paint was still wet, causing it to adhere to the buttons. After the paint dried, the paper was removed, and the buttons were then fired to make the designs permanent. Calico buttons are found on almost all body shapes. They are found in the dish-type with three holes or four holes. They are found in two-hole oval-eyes both in white and colored bodies. Other shapes are ink-well, saucer, and tire, all with four holes. Pin-shanked calico buttons are rare, as are some of the body shapes and/or patterns in the others.



There is no really reliable documentation available on just how the stencils were made, but they do appear to have been decorated with stencils, and the paint was probably applied by spraying. This is supported by the many examples which may be seen on which the color seems to have run, or the stencil shifted while color was being applied. Also examples may be found where the

designs are way off-center, or even applied to the back of the button. Note examples of this in the picture. The stencil buttons come on two basic body shapes — round, and square with truncated corners. Of the round buttons there are ivory and white bodies, with fish-eye centers on each color. The ivory bodies are found also with oval-eye centers, while the white may be found with the eyes set in a rectangular, box-like depression. The square stencils, while all have fish-eye centers, may be found on white or ivory bodies. A few of the stencils are very hard to find.

There are many other types of china buttons, but there doesn't seem to be as much confusion in identifying any of the others as there is among the gingham, the calicoes, and the stencils. It is hoped this article and the pictures will help to clear up some of the confusion.

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