Fidelle Duvivier, a familiar name in English porcelain literature, is well known for the landscape vignettes he painted on New Hall porcelain between the years 1785 and about 1796. Often situated next to curiously shaped smoking kilns, his figures, dogs, horses and rural buildings were rendered in an easily recognizable, naively charming style, either in colours or in a soft sepia monochrome. Besides these subjects he also depicted figures in small sailing vessels, birds, animal fables and putti (little cherubs). A few larger New Hall tankards that were presumably commissioned pieces, represent his finest work, and two of these surviving tankards bear his signature. In addition, the past decade has witnessed the fortunate reappearance of some of his best-documented New Hall work, primarily at smaller auction houses. Causing a stir in 1998 was the unique twenty-five-piece dessert service (painted for the factory manager, John Daniel), and in 2003, another tankard with figures painted in sepia turned up which had not been seen for more than sixty years. Another surprising discovery made prior to 1988 took a little longer to be registered in the porcelain world: Fidelle Duvivier’s name was found in documents connected with the eighteenth-century Dutch manufactory at Loosdrecht, a village situated near the Vecht River 30 km south of Amsterdam. The man deserving credit for this discovery was the Dutch researcher, W. M. Zappey. While preparing his chapter for the exhibition catalogue, Loosdrechts Porselein, 1774-1784 (published in 1988 to accompany the exhibition of the same title shown at the Rijksmuseum), Zappey did a search of all available municipal and church records in the vicinity in order to identify some of the workers employed at the manufactory. In one baptismal registry (in nearby Slootdijk) he came across Fidelle’s name and that of his wife, Elizabeth Thomas, next to the name of their daughter, Maria Susanna Frederica Duvivier, who was baptised in this Catholic church on October 24, 1783.

Mr. Zappey recognized Fidelle’s name and went to no small length to relate the career of this widely-traveled porcelain painter, drawing details from some of the English reference works and articles available at the time. He knew that Fidelle had been born in Tournai in 1740 and begun his career as a porcelain painter there; that he had married and worked for a time in England during the 1760s, including four years at Derby. Around 1775 he had been employed at the Seaux porcelain manufactory near Paris, and much later in Staffordshire, after 1784. Zappey generally relied on the writings of Major William H. Tapp (1884-1959), who had conducted his own researches on the family and had them...
published in the 1940s.13 But a few of Tapp’s attributions were not accurate and a number of his claims have been disproved by later authors. Also, more recent genealogical findings contradict details in his accounts of the Tournei family.8 These factors explain some of the errors or omissions in Mr. Zappey’s summary. Prior to Zappey’s discovery of the daughter’s baptism, however, no one was aware of Fidelle’s presence at Loosdrecht. This small but invaluable piece of evidence led to a new chapter in the story of the painter’s career and movements around Europe.

This lecture presented about sixty examples of English and Continental porcelain decorated by Fidelle Duvivier, some of it only recently discovered and attributed to him within the past three years. Not only did he work for the Loosdrecht manufactory, but also for the Lynckers’ decorat-
ing business in The Hague (a new aspect to the story), during the same period from about 1782 to 1784.9

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But before introducing these discoveries, a few general background remarks were made on the history of the Loosdrecht manufactory. In 1774 the Reverend Joannes de Mol (1726-1782) founded his porcelain manufactory in Loosdrecht, the village where he had served the spiritual needs of his congregation since 1753. It was a region where much agricultural land had been turned into invasive marshes by centuries of peat removal, and the local population struggled to eke out a meagre living by fishing and farming. De Mol, a man of the cloth with a philanthropic nature, also devoted himself to his life-long interest in experimenting with minerals and clays, which culminated in his ambitious plans to manufac-
ture porcelain. In doing this he had hoped to lift some of his flock out of poverty by giving them employment in a com-
cmercial home industry that would put some of the local resources to profitable use.10

Unfortunately, during its entire ten-year existence De Mol’s enterprise was beset with countless financial, market-
ing, and production-related difficulties. Labour costs were high because most of his skilled workers had to be hired from abroad. Imported kaolin was a major expense factor, as were the kiln improvements he carried out to cut fuel costs and reduce wastage. Moreover, his porcelain never competed very well with foreign or less expensive wares. Just two weeks before his death in November, 1782, De Mol was at the point of bankruptcy and forced to make over all buildings, stock and factory equipment to his creditors, who eventually moved the factory to Ouder-Amstel nearer Amsterdam, in the autumn of 1784.

We do not know precisely when Fidelle Duvivier came to Loosdrecht (or what brought him to the Netherlands in the first place) – hence, his work can only be dated “about 1783.” As his name was not found in the lists of employees at Ouder-Amstel after the move in 1784, Zappey assumed that he returned to England about that time. This agrees with the general belief that he worked for New Hall for a five-year period from about 1785 to 1790 (doing commis-
sioned work after that, with one known New Hall service dated 1796).11

In the 1988 Loosdrecht catalogue the Dutch researchers hesitated to attribute any of the exhibited Loosdrecht pieces to Fidelle Duvivier’s hand. Neither W. M. Zappey nor his co-author, Abraham den Blaauwen (former ceramics curator of the Rijkmuseum), felt that they were qualified to do so, stating that they were not familiar with his style of painting.

Leaving the question of attributions open was a welcome invitation to examine the pictures in the catalogue more closely – for the chance to discover some of his work. Using the published New Hall work as my guide, I began searching for his work – first, in this catalogue, then in other literature and auction house catalogues.

A rare colour trial plate (actually a saucer) in the collec-
tion, the hanging roots at the lower edge, and the green leaves outlined in brown (also seen on Fidelle’s New Hall work).13 Some of these elements are also visible in the New Hall cup and saucer (Figure 1). The cup shows a soft, misty back-
ground with one of Fidelle’s famous smoking kilns in the foreground, a favourite Staffordshire motif. The saucer with the cow and herder also has the outlined leaves just referred to, and it illustrates another particular technique of the painter. As David Holgate once remarked, Fidelle avoided the problem of having to paint the legs of horses or cattle by depicting the animals “disappearing below the hill crest” so that the whole of the legs need not be shown.”14

Without a doubt, the anatomy of horses and cattle some-
times posed serious challenges to Fidelle. His horses are often strangely proportioned with their front legs rather

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Figure 2. Loosdrecht porcelain tea service
Diameter slop basin 8½ inches (22.5 cm)
Various M.O.L. marks in underglaze blue, c. 1783
Copyright Sotheby’s

Figure 3. Detail from a Loosdrecht porcelain deep plate
Diameter 7⅞ inches (20 cm)
Marked M.O.L. with star in underglaze blue, c. 1783
Kasteel-Museum Sypesteyn, Loosdrecht, the Netherlands. Inv. 8922. Photo by the author
spindly and often spread as an inverted “V”. Frequently he simply painted the animals from the rear, which was a slightly easier angle (Figure 3).

Several years ago Sotheby’s in Amsterdam auctioned the eighteen-piece Loosdrecht coffee and tea service (Figure 2). It shows a great variety of rural and river scenes (with sailing vessels), animals, figures and windmills by our painter, all in polychrome and strongly resembling his New Hall work of a few years later.14

Fidelle decorated similar Loosdrecht coffee and tea sets in a soft sepia tone as evidenced by examples in several museums and private collections.15 On such pieces one recognizes several other stylistic characteristics: the arc-shaped boughs of the trees with their stippled leaves, and human figures with small-brimmed hats. While studying the New Hall work that depicted buildings or involved a vanishing point, it became clear to me that Fidelle also had difficulty with perspective.16 This would also prove to be a very helpful clue in identifying his painting on Loosdrecht porcelain.

The Loosdrecht deep plate (Figure 3) found in the Kasteel-Museum Sypesteyn collection, is an extraordinary specimen of our painter’s work — and a curious one. This city scene with an arc de triomphe and larger houses in the background does not bring Holland to mind, but rather France, and one can see some difficulty with the perspective in the windows of the buildings.17 In the background near the gate is a mounted figure (shown from the rear), while in the foreground we see the edge of a market with stalls and a shoemaker with his peepbox. The children are looking through holes at vues d’optiques, i.e. specially coloured engravings of exotic places, world wonders or historic events. This box would have been fitted with a mirror and convex lenses to produce an enhanced viewing effect (lifting the lid on this model let in the light). Such itinerant showmen hawked their peepshows to viewers of all ages at markets in cities and villages across Europe for at least two centuries. The excitement they created amongst children is kets in cities and villages across Europe for at least two centuries. The excitement they created amongst children is frequently on his Dutch work than on New Hall. For instance, Fidelle painted groups of them with birds and a bird cage in a soft camaieu of puce and blue, on a Loosdrecht vase in the Rijksmuseum.20 This theme was likely inspired by one of François Boucher’s engraved works, such as L’Amour Oiseleur or Love, the Bird-catcher. A very fine cup with a monogrammed saucer in puce camaïeu in Kasteel Sypesteyn repeats this theme. The centre of the saucer is decorated with putti on clouds and the initials “CS”. On the reverse painted in gold are the words, “Souvenir De L’Amisté” (souvenir of friendship).21 The cup and saucer illustrated (Figure 5), which belongs to a Loosdrecht tea service, is another splendid example.22

About the time Duvinier was decorating Loosdrecht porcelain, such Boucher-inspired putti appeared on other porcelain that was being sold to the Dutch public as “The Hague porcelain”. In truth, there is no such thing as porcelain “made in The Hague.” This myth was laid to rest in the year 2000 with an exhibition held in The Hague Gemeentemuseum — and by the publication of a Dutch catalogue, Hoogs porselein, researched and written by Dr. Constance L. H. Scholten.23 Since many reference works do not include this newer chapter in Dutch porcelain research, a brief account of the Lynckers’ business was given:

In 1776 the German Anton Lyncker (c.1718-1781) and son advertised that they were setting up a factory to make porcelain and opening a sales shop in The Hague. In reality, they only imported blank or partially decorated soft-paste porcelain from Tournai as well as blank hard-paste porcelain (primarily from Ansbach in Germany), and had it decorated by their own skilled painters. The Lynckers paid well so they attracted able hands, and many of their painters came from Germany. The father and son could cut costs by importing undecorated porcelain, which was subject to lower import duties. And they obviously also saved themselves all the other expenses associated with processing clays, glazing and firing white wares.

The Hague mark is a blue stork with an eel in its beak, an emblem borrowed from the city’s coat-of-arms. The decorators painted it on the glaze in the case of the Tournai wares. On the porcelain from Ansbach one will also find the stork sometimes painted on the glaze — often cleverly incorporating and hiding the Ansbach “A”. But in other cases it appeared under the glaze. This fooled a great many persons — even up to the present day.

The Lynckers had an arrangement with the Ansbach factory, which could supply them with white porcelain, unmarked, or porcelain marked with an underglaze blue “A”, or, white porcelain with their stork mark already fired under the glaze. In The Hague they never had high-temperature kilns, only smaller decoration or “muffle” kilns on their properties. It would therefore have been impossible to fire this mark under the glaze in cobalt blue. This Ansbach connection has been substantiated by published studies showing that the incised workers’ marks correspond exactly to those used on other Ansbach porcelain.24 It is not hard to imagine that this business represented serious competition for De Mol. But right from the start the Reverend had his suspicions about the Lynckers’ claims that they were making porcelain. In 1777, having seen their advert in the local newspaper, he visited their shop for a first-hand look. Afterwards De Mol wasted no time in testing in a legal memorandum to the state authorities that only foreign porcelain was being decorated there, none of it originating from this so-called “factory”. Lyncker retaliated by levelling similar, but completely unfounded, accusations at De Mol. At the time both men were applying to the authorities for an exclusive 15-year patent which would have granted them privileges and exemptions from trade duties.25

Copyright Sotheby’s
Diameter 8 5/8 inches (22 cm)

and declining health, many in his workforce sensed they were facing a very uncertain future. In that year De Mol fell behind in paying wages. Could Fidelle have been forced to look for work on the side to support his family?

While studying the Haags porselein catalogue another piece of positive evidence was found: an Ansbach covered tureen painted in puce with figures and animals – and in Duvivier’s unmistakable style.

Constance Scholten was informed of these finds and she kindly checked the Hague municipal records for any trace of Fidelle Duvivier, but none was found. His work for The Hague therefore probably involved one or more journeys to the vicinity of Loosdrecht. Between November 1781 (when Anton Lyncker died) and 1784, Lyncker’s widow was running the family business, so presumably he engaged Fidelle as an outside painter.

There were further examples with Duvivier’s puce landscapes found in the reserve collection of the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague: one other covered Ansbach tureen (with platter) of a different shape, as well as two other Ansbach lavoir basins (all pieces having the under-glaze blue stork mark). The tureen (Figure 6) was on view at the Pretty Dutch exhibition in Leeuwarden (2007). No Ansbach-Hague dinner or coffee/tea services with his decoration have been found to date.

During a visit to the Historical Society in Loosdrecht in 2005, I was shown several pieces of a misfired Loosdrecht dinner plate (Figure 7) found in the water near the site of the manufactory. The sherd pieces show several boys who appear to be playing a game of boules. Their clothing and gestures appeared closely related to the peepshow man and children seen on the Loosdrecht plate illustrated here (Figure 3). Was this a further example of Fidelle’s work?

These plate sherds revealed a few of their secrets the following year when they were featured in an article written by Dr. Lili Kallenborn for the Dutch journal of ceramics and glass, Vormen uit Vuur. “A porcelain picture book” (the translation of the title) announced the opening of a porcelain exhibition with the same title at Kasteel Duivenvoorde, located just a few miles north of The Hague. This ancient castle is home to an unusual 137-piece Loosdrecht dinner service – to which this misfired plate would have belonged, as the article explained. Kept at Duivenvoorde since about 1912, this service had been decorated in monochrome puce with a remarkable variety of scenes depicting various activities and real-life events – not the usual scattered flowers, chinoiseries, or courtly pairs in gardens that one might have expected on porcelain of this period.

Dr. Kallenborn remarked that the service was unique for its highly unconventional subject matter and scenes that generally “reflected the world around the painters.” Their themes covered many categories, from leisure activities and everyday work to travel and commerce. She included in her text a sampling of thirteen scenes illustrating young people’s games (some played in taverns), public entertainments and sports such as horse-racing or young men at sword-play. In addition, there were city views, one having been identified as a gate in Delft and another showing actors on a stage in a large unidentified town square. Judging by differences in the styles of painting, several hands must have been engaged for the decoration.

It became clear that the same hand that had painted the boules players on the misfired plate (Figure 7) had also done the majority of examples shown in the article. That these were indeed Fidelle’s work was confirmed by the vegetation framing the views, the “soft” backgrounds, as well as some conspicuous trouble with perspective and animal anatomy.

In September 2006 I was fortunate to meet with Dr. Kallenborn at Kasteel Duivenvoorde and have a closer look at this dinner service. After a careful study of the available file photos, quite a number of further attributions could be added to the thirteen in the article. Some were obvious, such as the idyllic scene with the windmill, the kite-fliers, the herder and cow (Figure 8). The children’s game of “blind man’s buff” (Figure 9) is particularly noteworthy because it is a theme that Fidelle repeated on a New Hall teapot just a few years later. Certainly, this fondness for showing gatherings of young people going about their favourite pastimes was common in his Dutch work and it continued at New
Hall

Duvivier's scenes appeared on forty-five objects in the Duivendrooks service, comprising nearly one-third of the service. These were found primarily on dinner plates, two custard cups and two butter vats, some having multiple vignettes. They illustrated children at play, or participating in familiar sports and past-times such as boxing, fishing or hunting, and, of course, rural folk at work. The theme of the peep show and his box also occurred once more on a Duivenvoorde service, comprising nearly one-third of the Hall.

Figure 9. Detail from a Loosdrecht dinner plate

Notes

1 One twice-signed New Hall figure subject mug (C.128.1977) is in one chapter to Fidelle Duvivier's life and New Hall work. On the one hand, he and his wife were


3 Godden, op. cit., pp. 159-186. Godden devotes the better part of a chapter to Duvivier.

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12 See Apollo: Pretty Dutch. 18de-eeuws Hollands Porselein. 18th Century Dutch Porcelain (Meerhurst Press, London 1990), pp. 172, 173, plates VII and VIII.

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