

ADDINGTON STUDIO
WORKSHOP NOTES No 1
CONSERVATION OF UNMARKED COMPORT

White earthenware body with a dark green glaze: diameter 24 cm; height 6cm; 8 pieces (Photo 1 before; Photo 2 after repair).



Photo 1



Photo 2

There are many examples of these wares, usually flat ware i.e. dishes or plates that were mass produced by the Victorians. These ceramics have been passed down through the generations so they have become of great sentimental value to their owners. The decorative effect of these ceramics is created by the strong green glaze and surface of the white earthenware body which is cast in relief. In places where the glaze collects in pools created by the low points in the decorative surface the glaze appears black whilst in other places where the pattern is raised it is a very pale green because the molten glaze has run. These plates are time consuming to airbrush and often have a slight lustre effect as the result of the deterioration of the glaze which makes airbrushing them even more difficult and time consuming.

Condition

This object has undergone an enormous impact to smash into 8 pieces (Photo 1). Fortunately there are not too many large chips missing from the break edges. There are, however, mini chips lessening the final appearance of the stick that are time consuming to repair.



Photo 3



Photo 4

There is another problem with this comport (Photo 3). There are thick black sooty deposits that have accumulated in the indents of the surface pattern, particularly at the base. The same black deposit is clearly visible as a stain in the micro cracks in the glaze (Photo 4). This tiny cracking is caused by the different rates of shrinkage of the glaze and the earthenware body of the pot. As the plate arrived newly smashed the edges arrived in pristine condition. I wanted to keep the edges that way and to remove the surface deposits without getting the object wet. Even the cleanest water will discolour a freshly broken break edge causing it to show when stuck. Water is also a solvent that will mobilise any underlying stains, sometimes causing them to rise to become more visible. In the case of this pot the crazing was helpful because the sticks would blend in.

TREATMENT

Cleaning

The surface of the comport was cleaned using a scalpel blade size 15, acetone, cotton wool buds and cheap white toilet tissue. I emphasise cheap because the paper comes in small sheets and it doesn't deposit fluff all over the object as the expensive tissues do (Photo 5) It took 1½ hours to clean the comport.

Sticking

The comport was then ready to stick. The key to any stick is accuracy. To stick and to unstick causes more mini chips on the edges to detach and eventually the stick edges become more ragged and noticeable. To ensure that I get a stick right first time I do as many dry runs as I think necessary. I make far more strips of tape than I think I will need and stick them on a jam jar ready for use. I fold the edge of the tape over at one end so that I can remove the tape easily. I plan my sticks.



Photo 5



Photo 6

The pieces of ceramic were stuck together using tape making simple shapes. Any pieces making irregular larger shapes were relocated to reduce the possibility of locking any of the pieces out.

I decided to use B48 because it is stronger than B72 and has a higher TG point which means that it softens at 50°C rather than 40°C. The B48 was mixed using the Koob method.

The Koob Method.

- Take an immaculately clean jam jar with a screw lid, a piece of sterile gauze available at any chemists, some white sewing thread, not coloured and some sticky tape.
- I usually mix 2 gms of granules with 4 gms of acetone.
- Put the granules onto the gauze, tie up into a little bag with the thread (Photo 10). Leave long strings on the knot to allow you to suspend the bag over the acetone.

- Put the acetone into the jam jar. Some people put a pinch of fumed silica into the acetone, optional
- Suspend the bag over the acetone so that it just touches the acetone. Leave overnight for the granules to dissolve into the acetone. Do not stir.
- Dilute or allow to thicken as the acetone evaporates as required.

Once the adhesive is ready it can be diluted with acetone or allowed to thicken by allowing some acetone to evaporate. I apply it using a new child's paint brush that I change regularly whilst sticking the object, throwing the old one away.

A large amount of tape was put on every stick to keep it straight. The larger pieces were wrapped in clingfilm and stood in a high sided bucket part filled with rice until the comport was completely assembled.

For this object all the sticks were done together because I decided that this would give a better result. This is not always the case – sometimes its one piece at a time. The excess adhesive P4 was cleaned of the sticks using a 15 scalpel blade. I checked that the paraloid had sealed all exposed parts of the earthenware body. I sealed the unbroken parts of the plate where the glaze had worn through with thinned down B72. This was to protect the earthenware body from further staining.

Filling and touching in

Where the glaze had been rubbed away I touched in the surface with Rustin's water based glaze tinted with Golden acrylic paints. I always check my colour matching for painting and filling on a plate or tile before applying it to the object (Photos 7 and 8).



Photo 7



Photo 8

For the Hxtal fills the green colour was mixed using Kremmer pigments. The chips were then filled with Hxtal tinted with the green pigment. The Hxtal had been previously mixed, left overnight on the work bench to thicken and then stored in the deep freeze. Freshly mixed Hxtal is never applied to earthenware as it can seep into the porous body and leave an irreversible shadow under the glaze.

The chips were small but different depths; they were touched in using an adult's paintbrush [blue handle in price list] and cocktail sticks. The difficult bit was matching the glaze with the density of the green which was done by altering the quantity of pigment added to the Hxtal. The Hxtal was then left to almost cure. After 3 days the hxtal was cured but not brittle - the timing varies depending upon the environment. Left another day it would have been ready to rub down which I wanted to avoid because of the softness of the green glaze. I then took a very sharp scalpel blade and cut away the surplus adhesive. This was very effective because the original glaze is dulled with wear so it was a happy coincidence that the hxtal matched the glaze when cut with a sharp knife. The blade needs changing as soon as you encounter any resistance when paring back the Hxtal otherwise you will get a ragged edge. The Hxtal was pared back to the edges of the fills. It was possible to achieve an excellent match of shine by wiping over the surface with a tissue or paintbrush dampened in acetone or not as required. Think painting rather than filling (Photo 9).



Photo 9



Photo 10

The process was repeated for the chips that were not fully filled. Some were refilled with clear Hxtal some with Hxtal tinted with the same green pigment; zinc white and green pigment were added to the Hxtal in places where a lighter and more opaque effect was required.

Finally once the Hxtal was fully cured some very small chips were filled using Golden High Solid Gel Matt tinted with Golden acrylic paint to give a unified finish. The useful feature of this gel is that it is semi-translucent so it apes the glaze. Again the variation in colours was created by the thickness of the gel, just as the thickness of the glaze created the decorative effect in the original. The mix was applied with a miniature paint brush, smudged using my little finger then cut back with a very sharp scalpel blade. This gel is not robust enough for deeper, bigger opaque fills or structural filling. Golden High Solid Gel Matt is useful for fills in glaze which by definition are very thin. The advantage of using this gel was the hours of rubbing down it saved making repairing this comport cost-effective.