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Saucer

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I'm Andrew Raftery, Professor of Printmaking at Rhode Island School of Design. Right now I am looking at a Tea Service by Enoch Wood, made in England sometime between 1818 and 1840. It's made out of white earthenware, and it's decorated with cobalt blue transfer printing and then clear-glazed with a pearlware glaze.

These kinds of works from England at this time were covered with decoration, and I think the designers thought that because the shapes were so robust, they could really afford to have a ton of decoration. Once the designers had taken the measurements of the pot and figured out how much surface area had to be covered, the designer would come up with what the pattern would be. That pattern would then be given to copperplate engravers, and those engravers would incise copper plates and make the pattern, with various lines and dots, with punches, with burins: these were the incised marks that were going to hold the glaze.

Then the glaze would be transferred to tissue—using the same types of techniques for making prints that we regularly use for prints on paper—and then that image on the paper would be transferred to the bisque-fired ceramic body. One of the things that is fascinating when looking at these pieces is that we can always see places where there is some little bit of overlapping.

When I look at the sugar bowl, I can see evidence of the overlapping on the front. Right at the bottom, under the oval, I can see a place where the transfer paper somehow got some extra ink onto the pot. There was not the same requirement for absolute perfection in manufactured wares that we think of today. These things, even though they were made in factories, retain a strong sense of the hands that made them, and the many people who worked on them and touched them as they were being manufactured.