

Chris Watkins - Joint Honorary President

The committee is delighted to announce that Chris Watkins has accepted to join Paddy Owens as joint Honorary President of the Shelley Group. Shelley collectors world-wide owe a huge debt of gratitude to Chris and his co-authors, Harvey Pettit and Robert Senft, for writing the first Shelley Potteries book in 1980. Still considered the definitive work on the family history of the Longton pottery, it was its publication, 38 years ago, that boosted interest in the Wileman and Shelley wares, leading to the formation of the Shelley collectors' clubs that we now know.

In 1980-81 the three enthusiasts staged an exhibition of a wide range of Wileman and Shelley ceramics, coinciding with the launch of their book. The exhibition commenced in the Geffrye Museum in London, over late 1980 to early 1981. Then, during 1981 it became a travelling exhibition, showing at: The Pottery Museum, Stoke on Trent, The City Museum, Bristol and Huntly House Museum, Edinburgh.

Paddy wrote:

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for writing to tell me that Chris Watkins has been offered and accepted the position of joint Honorary President. The committee has made an excellent decision and I am delighted with the news.

Without doubt, the research that produced the first Shelley Potteries book and the travelling exhibition, was what unearthed the hidden gem that is Shelley/Foley and galvanised into action those of us attracted by the pottery. The book became our bible.

Chris' more recent activities and input to the Group are of course well known to the committee and members and I look forward to all our subscribers, new and old, enjoying a thorough and inspirational article about him in the magazine as soon as possible, bringing us all up to date with the extra history, research and development that will flow from Chris' even closer involvement with us.

Congratulations all round

Paddy Owens.

Chris responded to the invitation:

(P)residing with Shelley

Chris Watkins

I'm honoured and moved by the invitation to become Honorary President of the Group.

Thanks are first due to my Auntie Bess. As a kid on summer holidays with her in Wales, if we were very good she allowed us to take down a box from on top of the wardrobe, unwrap the contents from their newspaper and lay them onto the dressing table. Beautiful bone china, arresting shape and stunning pattern - a Mode shape coffee set in pattern 11791! We just sat and looked.

After a few years as a maths teacher and training as a school counsellor, I got offered a research studentship - that gave me access to everything to research the Shelley book (I never finished that PhD!). In my spare time I met my co-authors Robert and Harvey, and we put together the (travelling) Shelley exhibition.

I spent 40 years in various roles at the Institute of Education with a developing contribution to a minority topic - learning. On various sites my publications have topped 100,000 downloads, but the most popular downloads on my site (chriswatkins.net) are:

Effective Learning in Classrooms book 2,362

Classrooms as Learning Communities book 1,823

Shelley Potteries book 1,634

When I retired I got a grip on Shelley again - making lists (illustrated of course). It's a reason for lots of looking.



Chris and Shelley on BBC TV, 1980 "watch video at chriswatkins.net/Shelley"

Each morning as I come down the stairs, the wares are vibrating even more now!
Since re-kindling his interest in Shelley, Chris has put his wide range of IT skills to work to our huge benefit. In 2015 he took the article written about Wileman in the Artist magazine 1899, "Some beautiful English pottery" and, substituting colour pictures for the original black and white, had the nine pages printed in booklet form, issued free of charge to all Group members. More studies followed with numerous articles in the Shelley Group magazine and additions to the data available from our web site, particularly on vase shapes and patterns. Access to the pattern book information has allowed a deeper understanding of the history and development of the wares and Chris has been collating otherwise this uncollected information. A recent study has added 50 Intarsio designs to Les Foley's original catalogue and Chris has liaised with David Deller for this to be printed.
Chris's primary interest lies in the earthenware ranges and his knowledge in this area is great. His generosity benefits all members, with the results of his research freely available via the magazines and through the web site, for any interested viewer. His own web site relating to Shelley is best accessed via the Shelley Group web site - "links" - "other sites of interest", where you will find much information including a video clip of the "BBC Pebble Mill at One" interview about Shelley, which was made at the time of the Exhibitions and featured in the picture above.

Thank you Chris, for all your Shelley work, past and present.
Gerry