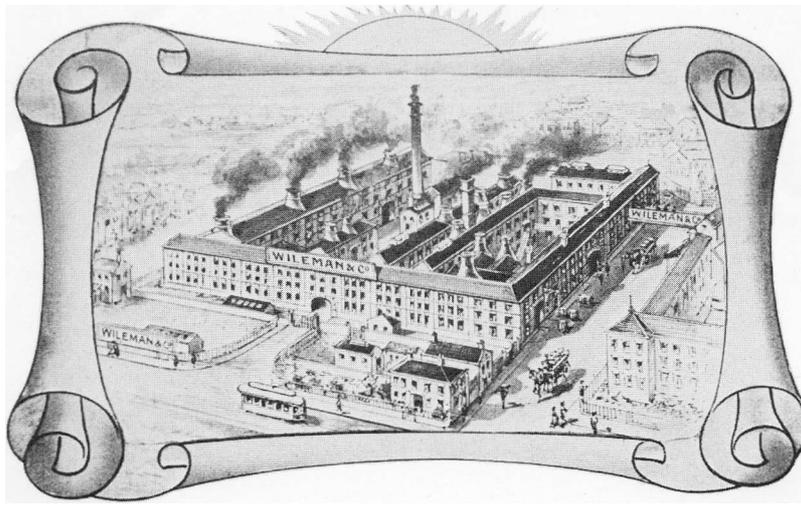


SHELLEY IN THE PRESS



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THE SHELLEY POTTERIES

An exhibition of stylish pottery and porcelain of the Art Nouveau and Art Deco eras

The present exhibition at London's Geffrye Museum, E2 demonstrates, amongst other things, that a trio of enthusiastic amateurs can still create a very impressive display in today's increasingly professional museum world. The show of Shelley pottery, which is to tour England and Scotland during 1981, has been a labour of love for William Harvey, Chris Watkins and Robert Senft. For the past three years their pastime has been that of researching and collecting wares of the Shel-

ley family of potters, and their efforts have culminated in a comprehensive exhibition and publication of a definitive text. Their joint achievement is the more impressive considering that although informal advice came from a number of sources, the exhibition was refused formal support from both public and private sectors. The Arts Council deemed the subject outside their scope, while sponsorship from Royal Doulton (owners and present users of the Shelley name) amounted to zero. Research for the book had its own difficulties, since none of the company's records have survived the various takeovers since the family pottery closed in 1966.

The Shelley family has been associated with potting in Staffordshire since the eighteenth century. Of the first generation in Lane End pieces are known by Michael Shelley from 1780, and of the second generation by John Shelley from 1799. However, their name is more commonly associated with twentieth-century productions - what is not commonly known is that their successes have their roots in a nineteenth-century partnership. In 1872 Joseph B. Shelley joined forces with James F. Wileman to form Wileman & Company at the Foley China Works, Longton. That title was to remain until 1925 when the firm was renamed Shelleys, and even on the backstamp the trade name Foley was replaced by the Shelley name only in 1910, though the pottery was solely a Shelley concern from 1884.

An important event came in 1881 when Percy Shelley joined the company. Percy instituted the policy of appointing adventurous artistic directors, with the aim of produc-

ing wares which were superior to those of other small potteries. This approach was to prove extremely successful, with Shelley wares becoming the envy of many of the better-known pottery names.

The first Art Director, from 1896, was Frederick Rhead, member of a noted family of artists and designers. Following previous employment at Minton, Wedgwood and others, Frederick had a vision of *sweetening every cupboard in the kingdom with daintier*



china and healthier looking earthenware. He welcomed the challenge of artistic production on a commercial scale and contrasted the areas where advances in design were affecting mass-produced items such as furniture, metalwork and fabrics, with pottery where late Victorian revivalism had been rife. He complained of *wobbling cupids and smirking nymphs* and imitations of every type. Early successes included various styles of decoration on earthenware. *Intarsio* refers to wares with deep coloured decorations under the glaze, and shows several influences including Frederick's visits to the Dutch Rozenburg pottery. Shapes were characteristically free-flowing and multiple handles were a regular feature. By the turn of the century the works had been expanded and two hundred girl decorators were employed.

1905 saw Walter Slater become Art Director. Also from a family of distinguished artists with members working for Derby, Davenport and others, Walter trained at Minton and worked for Doulton for many years before joining Percy Shelley. The economic conditions probably did not favour much experimentation in Walter's earlier years. Later he developed a number of decorative effects which showed the fashionable influence of oriental ceramics - a new range of *intarsio* in Persian style, Japanese effects in gold decoration under lustre glazes, flambe wares and cloisonne patterns. More important, perhaps, he supervised the further development of Shelley's fine bone china with print and enamel decoration, for which they became well known.

This period also saw the development of other wares which no doubt created a sound financial base to the company. Heraldic wares were added to the commemorative productions, advertising wares, domestic earthenware including jelly moulds, hospital wares, toilet sets: all helped the firm through difficult years. In overseas markets, especially USA, Canada and Australia, gains were consolidated in the sales of traditional styles in bone china and china dinner services.

The 1920s were a time of strength for Shelley's: Percy's three sons had joined the business, as had Walter Slater's son Eric. Perhaps an atmosphere of optimism stimulated the creation of fanciful nursery wares including those designed by Mabel Lucie Attwell.

The economic depression of the 'thirties paradoxically stimulated even greater risk-taking in design, and produced some of Shelley's most striking wares. Eric Slater, now Art Director, showed that same desire to turn away from tradition as had his predecessors. This was especially so in 1930 when he introduced the Vogue and Mode shapes in fine bone china. Although their success was short-lived these designs provided some of the strongest examples of Art Deco ceramics. The advertising, promotion and display from this period also showed an ultra-modern, vital

look. Eric later created a range of ornamental earthenware with flowing coloured glazes; this Harmony ware was copied unsuccessfully by a number of neighbouring potteries.

After the 1939-1945 war a different picture presented itself. Percy and two of his sons had died, as had Walter Slater. Earthenware production ceased and effort was mainly invested in producing bone china with traditional English shape and decoration, especially for the American market. Eric still created designs in a contemporary style, but the works was falling behind in the general increase of high technology in the potteries. Rationalisation was the theme of the 'sixties, and when Norman Shelley died in 1966 the remaining family decided to sell the pottery to a larger group.

Thus in less than a hundred years a pottery name had been made and lost. Throughout important changes in style and design, and critical economic conditions, a small firm had not only survived but had also produced strong examples of the various fashions. These not only inform our present tastes but also continue to influence them.

The book, 'Shelley Potteries' by Watkins, Harvey and Senft is published by Barrie and Jenkins, 176 pages plus 16 pages in colour. £15.00.

The Exhibition closes at the Geffrye Museum, Kingsland Road, E2 on 25 January 1981.

It then travels to:

City Museum, Stoke-on-Trent: 31 January 1981-28 March 1981.

City Museum, Bristol:

6 June 1981-2 August 1981.

Huntly House Museum, Edinburgh: 18 September 1981-21 November 1981.

(Left, above)

An engraving of the Wileman factory in Longton, c. 1900, used originally as part of an advertisement. [Ill. 14]

(Far left, below)

The Shelley Girl, featured on the cover of the Shelley Standard, the company house magazine in 1927. Shelley Girls were used extensively to promote the wares during this period. [Ill. 60]

(Left, below)

Umbrella stands and an advertising plaque showing the typical Art Nouveau and Japanese-inspired styles that characterised Foley Intarsio Ware. [Plate 2]

(Below)

Teaset in the Eve shape, 1932, typical of the advanced Art Deco designs that helped to spread the Shelley reputation around the world. [Ill. 52]

