

# From One Extreme to Another?

by Chris Watkins

My introduction to Shelley was as a kid on summer holidays with my auntie 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! Thank you Eric Slater. To this day I have my breath taken away when I see similar items. When I met Eric some twenty years later I was surprised to learn how short-lived these designs were in the difficult 1930s.



As a student in London, I got the idea that there could be more of this lovely stuff to be found and started to wander into antique markets. There I met up with someone who was to become co-author: William Harvey. I still remember wandering round an antiques Market in Alexandra Palace in 1976: my eye was strongly drawn to something surprising - a piece of earthenware that I knew nothing of. I was puzzled why it interested me and had to turn it over - to find a Shelley backstamp! - Intarsio tyg-like vase pattern number 3626. Thank you Walter Slater. That introduced me to the idea that a very different core ingredient (earthenware rather than bone china) could also take my breath away.



The next few years were spent researching the book and preparing the exhibition that travelled round England and Scotland. In the process we met all sorts of folks interested in Shelley, including a lovely lady in Bournemouth who sold me something I have never seen before, or even referred to since: a Mode harlequin set.



But early earthenware was still a major interest, especially since my eye had been pulled by an Intarsio stick stand just before the exhibition (3165 storks flying into the sun). It appeared on television twice, and on the front cover of the 1986 edition! And as someone who has spent the last 35 years academic publishing, it's fun to note that my first article was on Intarsio (and my most recent!). Frederick Rhead had a wonderfully rich way of grabbing my attention. Even though it is only 5% of the clubs' interests I have spent most time recently on early Wileman earthenware: Urbato, Spano-Lustra, Primitif etc. So as someone who likes Art Deco, the hallway is now looking a bit peculiar!



I value myself as a non-extremist in important domains of life - but not Shelley!

Watkins C, Harvey W, and Senft R (1980, 1986, 1999), *Shelley Potteries: The history and production of a Staffordshire family of potters*. London: Barrie & Jenkins / Forsyth  
 Watkins C (1981) "Shelley Intarsio" *Antique Collector*, October, <sup>2</sup> 6-3.  
 Watkins C (2015) "Let's Put Intarsio on a Pedestal" *Shelley Group Newsletter* No. 559 (June), 64-21.  
[www.senft.co.uk/shelley-pottery.htm](http://www.senft.co.uk/shelley-pottery.htm)