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FIG. I.
MANOR HOUSE TEA SERVICE.
(See also fig. 2 & 10.)

[*T.L.T.*

TO FACE P. 117.

Wirksworth China.

BY THOMAS L. TUDOR.

THE question of Wirksworth China is bound up with some interesting details of local history, and in opening this monograph on the subject, we cannot do better than quote the following passage from *Ceramic Art in Great Britain*, by the late Llewellynn Jewitt:—

“Wirksworth is much more intimately mixed up with the history of the Ceramic Art than is usually imagined, and yet but little is known of the works which were there carried on, or of their productions. Dugdale, in 1799, says, ‘About forty years ago, a manufacture of porcelain was attempted; but it proved unsuccessful It was in the Holland Manor House that the unsuccessful manufacture of porcelain was attempted;’ and Davis, in 1811, repeats the same thing: ‘In the Holland Manor House the manufacture of porcelain was attempted, about forty years ago, but proving unsuccessful, it was relinquished.’ Holland House, where this manufacture was carried on, was the Manor House of the manor of Holland, otherwise Richmonds, which was given by Thomas, Earl of Lancaster, to Sir Robert Holland, in which family it remained until the attainder of Henry Holland, Duke of Exeter, in 1461; it afterwards belonged to Margaret, Countess of Richmond and Derby, and was subsequently granted by the Crown to Ralph Gell. In 1745 Philip Gell leased the manor to ‘Robert Atkinson and Francis Parry, of Lincoln’s Inn, gentlemen,’ and to ‘Andrew Wilkinson, of Boroughbridge, com. York, Esq., and Thomas Wilkinson, Esq., brother of the said Andrew

Wilkinson.' In 1777 it was 'leased by Philip Gell, Esq., of Hopton, to Richard Arkwright, of Cromford, cotton merchant.' "

"In this latter lease (dated 6th November, 1777), the china works are thus named:—' All those several messuages, tenements, or dwelling-houses, and all other buildings, warehouses, workshops, and appurtenances, situate, standing, and being in Wirksworth, in the said county of Derby, heretofore used for the making and manufacturing of China Ware, and now in the tenure or occupation of the said Philip Gell, his assignee or assigns, tenant or undertenants.' So that at that time the first china works had probably ceased to be in operation. In 1793, by deed dated 1st November, Richard Arkwright, Esq., assigned the remainder of the lease to Charles Hurt, Esq., of Wirksworth, in the following words:— ' All those several messuages, tenements, or dwelling-houses, and all other buildings, warehouses, workshops, and appurtenances, situate, standing, and being in Wirksworth, heretofore used for y^e making and manufacturing of china, but now for picking cotton.' "

"My late friend, Mr. T. N. Ince, to whom Wirksworth is indebted for much patient research into its early history, thus wrote to me regarding the china works, having at my request turned his attention to the matter:—' I much regret that I did not extract from the original deed of co-partnership, which I once had in my hands, at least its dates, parties, and the like. My opinion is that it was begun about the middle of last century, and did not continue more than a few years. I know the Hurts of Alderwasley, Gells of the Gatehouse and Hopton, Sir Thomas Burdett of Foremark, and many others were partners—nearly the same who were partners in the English and Welsh Mineral Company, of whose concerns were many papers in a bundle in my grandfather's and father's office, labelled 'Tissington v. Burdett and others,'

and amongst them, Mr. Julius Cæsar Robiglio, of Hopton, gentleman, who was said to have been present at a duel in Italy, in which the then Philip Gell of Hopton slew his antagonist and fled to England with Mr. Cæsar Robiglio, who, I have heard my mother say, was a most gentleman-like man. He died at Hopton, and was buried at Wirksworth or Carsington. The premises called 'China House Yard' were afterwards the property of the late Charles Hurt, Esq., senr. His son, Charles Hurt, junr., died in 1834, on whose death it was sold to the late Mr. John Wilson, malster; whose son, Mr. Daniel Wilson, wine merchant, is the present owner.' Mr. Wilson, who has examined his title-deeds specially for me, tells me they contain no information as to the china works."

"Some years ago, during excavations which were being made, portions of saggars and of china were found; some of these are in my own possession."

"It is said that after leaving Pinxton and other places Billingsley attempted to establish china works here, being probably led to do so by the fact of felspar being abundant in the neighbourhood. Of this, however, there is no proof. Earthenware is also asserted to have been made here; but of this also, there is no proof."

Regarding the discoveries here spoken of by Mr. Llewellynn Jewitt, on the site of the Holland Manor House, it was owing to the recurrence of similar circumstances in 1914, that the present writer renewed his attempts to get to the bottom of this question. Saggars, stilts for packing, lumps of china clay and many fragments of unglazed biscuit were found. These latter tended without doubt to establish the genuineness of certain reputed specimens. The paste is of the kind known as bone paste, soft, fine and translucent; very smooth and fragile; slightly grey in colour. On the whole, very

similar to that used in the second Derby period, about 1770. Fragments of pottery and lustreware were also found, but on this matter the writer has no independent information.

Some interesting remarks might be made on the subject of the Holland Manor House, but this is not our business now. We pass to the main question.

The quotation stated to be from Dugdale is unsatisfactory. This author died in 1686 and no new edition of his works appeared in 1799. The *Monasticon* was first published in 1655. The *Baronage* in 1675-6. Presuming however, on the authority of Jewitt, that there is foundation somewhere for this reference, we observe that the manufacture of china at Wirksworth, appears to have been in full swing about the year 1759, not at all an unlikely date. Also, that according to a lease of 1777, it had come to an end before that date. The statement quoted from Davies,¹ is of little value, being merely a copy of the same record, wherever it is, made twelve years later and without any attempt to adjust the figures to the interval which had elapsed.

In 1863, the late William Chaffers first published his *Marks and Monograms on Pottery and Porcelain*, and the following passage, which occurs in the 12th edition (1908), seems to have been brought forward without alteration from the first edition:—

WIRKSWORTH.

“About the year 1770 there was a manufactory of china here, said to have been established by a person of the name of Gill: pottery was first made, and a punch-bowl of copper-coloured lustre, in the possession of Mr. Lucas, of Bentley Hall, Ashbourne, is believed to be a specimen of the manufacture; they afterwards made porcelain (soft paste), the usual decorations being flowers roughly painted, and shells, tea services, white and gold borders.

¹ *Derbyshire from the remotest period to the present time.*—D. P. Davies, 1811.

No mark is known. About seventy years ago it was a cotton store, occupied by the Arkwrights of Cromford; the place where the Old Works stood is still called China Yard."

As stated in Jewitt, the place where the works stood was called "China House Yard," and the locality still goes by that name among old inhabitants of the town.

Another notice of the subject was published in 1870, on the occasion of the Fine Art and Industrial Exhibition held in Derby in that year. It reads as follows:—

WIRKSWORTH CHINA AND EARTHENWARE WORKS.¹

"This factory must have been upon a very large scale, and probably was even more extensive than the Derby works, which it preceded as a china manufactory, but to whose rising power it was obliged to succumb in 1777, when it was finally broken up. The goods made here were of the very finest description, and specimens may occasionally be met with both of china and earthenware, the decorations of which are very similar to those of Lowestoft. The green colour is bright and peculiar, and the paste is white and very translucent. The pottery from this factory is remarkably soft and fragile. Some articles in white (soft paste with a thick glaze) with plain gold lines are elegant in the extreme (see case E. north avenue). No writers upon the History of Derbyshire Porcelain have hitherto given any idea of the variety of valuable works turned out from this factory. We are in a position to state that figures of a graceful character, beautifully moulded urns and lamps were made here. In addition to these articles, tea-ware of a fine and transparent paste and ordinary earthenware were manufactured. We have not, at present, been able to trace any distinctive mark to this factory."

The foregoing contains some bold statements as to the character of the Wirksworth products, which seem to lack adequate support. We cannot claim to have any trace of the beautifully moulded urns and lamps referred

¹*The Pottery and Porcelain of Derbyshire; a sketch of the History of Fictile Art in the County* by Alfred Wallis and Wm. Bemrose, Jun., for the Guidance of Visitors to the Midland Fine Arts and Industrial Exhibition held in Derby, 1870. London: Bemrose & Sons, 21, Paternoster Row: and Derby, 1870.

to. Perhaps readers of this article may be better enlightened, in which case the author will be grateful for information. One must admit, however, that certain unglazed fragments now preserved in the Manor House, give clear proof of ornamental potting, and perhaps the rather ambiguous expression "we are in a position to state," etc., may rest on previous discoveries of a like nature.

The reference to Lowestoft has not escaped attention, but of all doubtful styles this is the most notorious, and least suitable for any standard of comparison for the purpose of criticism.

On turning to the catalogue of the exhibition, we are surprised to find that the above highly eulogistic notice is only backed up by three small exhibits, viz. :—cup and saucer," "custard cup and saucer," and "sucrier." Nor do we find the statement that the Wirksworth factory preceded the Derby works in point of date, at all supported by records. Nor, for the matter of that, is there anything to prove the contrary.

The limited range of exhibits just referred to, is the more remarkable, in that Mr. William Bemrose was himself an enthusiastic collector of ceramics, and possessed many examples which he regarded as Wirksworth in origin. But he does not appear to have left any written record as to his reasons for so attributing them.

Notwithstanding the several notices of the subject herein quoted, there seems to have been little general interest in the matter, and even some scepticism, while many people have scarcely heard of Wirksworth china at all. The whole question seems to need restating.

Jewitt's work contains no illustration to help out the very interesting passage quoted above. The only illustration we are aware of, occurs in a noble work by the late William Chaffers, published in 1872, viz. :—"Ceramic Gallery." But the cup and cover shown here (fig. 389) and assigned

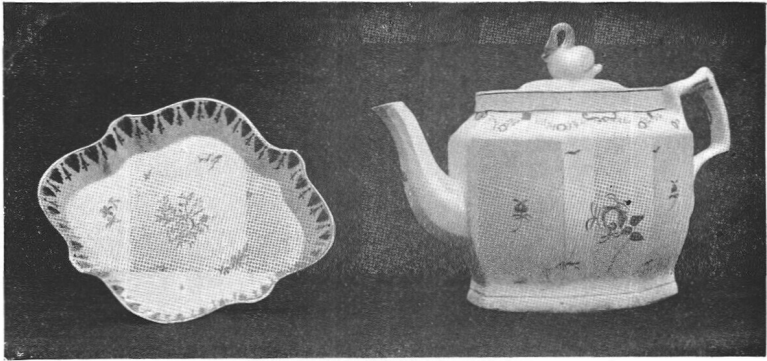


Photo. by]

FIG. 2.

[A. J. B.



Photo. by]

FIG. 3.

[T. L. T.

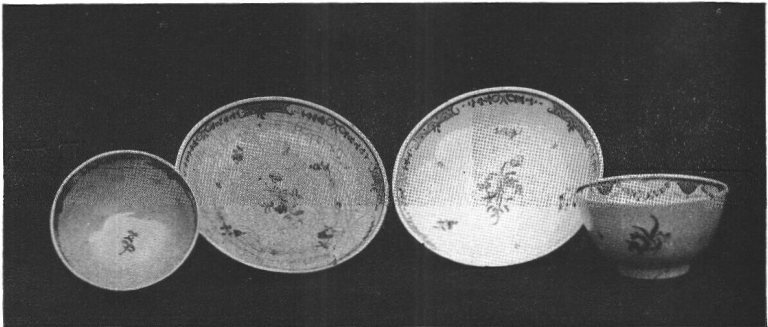


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FIG. 4.

[T. L. T.

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to Wirksworth by W. Bemrose, are insignificant and disappointing. Presumably, the author was not acquainted with any very good specimens. Yet, as he was evidently in touch with both William Bemrose and Alfred Wallis, this is again remarkable. The notice in "Keramic Gallery," reads thus ;—"Wirksworth. A china factory existed here about 1770, as well as pottery (*sic*). Established by a Mr. Gill and continued for about 20 years. No mark is known."

The only specimen we have seen, that in any degree suggests the ornamental standard of production claimed by the Exhibition Guide, is a basin and cover belonging to Mrs. Meade Waldo, and of which we give an illustration (fig. 3). It is well potted, though the glaze is somewhat heavy in hue and slightly peppered in places. The ornament is bold and striking. Fortunately, this has also an interesting record, which proves, beyond doubt, its Wirksworth origin. We are indebted to the kindness of Mrs. Meade Waldo for the following copy of a note which, we understand, accompanied the basin when given to her some years ago :—

"I brought the Basin from Mr. Thomas Smedley's, Bonsall, uncle to my mother, who was dying in July, 1823. He stated it had been his father's and Grandfather's to his knowledge, and wished my mother to have it, on account of it having been made at the China Works, Wirksworth. Wm. Walker."

The decoration on this interesting specimen consists of roses, honeysuckle and foliage ; the handles are ribbed and twisted. At the points of attachment of the latter, occur small white daisies in the round.

Chaffers goes to the other extreme and speaks of the decoration as "flowers roughly painted." Again we ask, on what evidence? A piece here and there may answer

¹ William Walker was a tailor in Wirksworth and was always known as "Tailor Walker." His wife was a Miss Evans of the family which supplied the background of George Elliott's novel, *Adam Bede*.

to this description. Mr. Fox of Wirksworth has a basin showing a roughly painted shell, (fig. 7) but in other examples the decoration, though simple, is dainty and refined. These are chiefly of the tea service variety and are, in every way characteristic of the true early style in England, being decorated with scattered sprigs of flowers, mostly roses, and light swags of flowers and foliage along the borders. It cannot be claimed that the painting is of an elaborate kind. It is simple and unaffected, and on the whole charming. We must bear in mind that the date of the Wirksworth factory is very early in the history of English china, and no products at this period were anything but simple, though they varied in merit. The factory also came to an end probably before it was able to develop an advanced style. Sometimes a little more elaboration is given to the Wirksworth style by a pink diaper or lattice, disposed in panels along borders and edges. This is a pleasing enrichment (see figs. 4, 6 and 7, Plates II. and V.).

Mr. Thomas Atkinson of the Holland Manor House, has a tea service of this early character, very fine and translucent, though somewhat discoloured with age and use. It is lightly decorated in crimson, blue, green, yellow and reddish-brown, with swags of dots in puce. This service also has a well authenticated history. Before coming into possession of the present owner, it belonged to a family at Middleton-by-Wirksworth for many years. It was known to have been made at the Wirksworth factory, and was originally a wedding gift. This would be considerably over a century ago. The cups have no handles. The swan forming the handle of the teapot lid is interesting, as showing the tendency of the early potters to borrow ideas from the silversmiths. The teapot stand seems a little different in style but similar in period (see figs. 1, 2, and 10, Plates II. and V.).

The late Mr. Richard Wall, senior, of Wirksworth, had

PLATE III.



Photo. by

FIG. 5.

[T.L.T.]

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PLATE IV.



Photo. by]

FIG. 6.

[T.L.T.

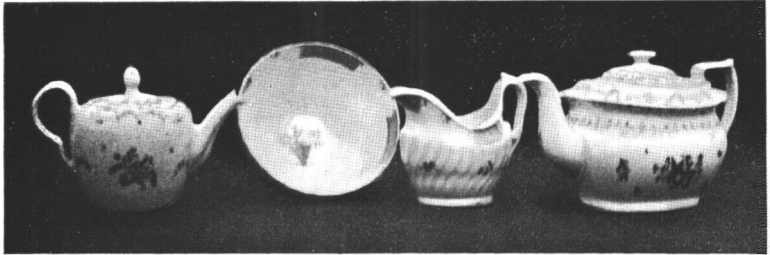


Photo by]

FIG. 7.

[T.L.T.

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a tea service which was well known in the neighbourhood to have been of local make. Most of this was dispersed, but through the kindness of friends we are able to illustrate two cups and saucers which still remain in Wirksworth. This was evidently a very dainty and charming service and leaves no doubt as to the capabilities of the factory in this class of work. It is painted with roses, bluebells, pinks, scattered sprays, and bows of ribbon. The colours are green, pink, blue, lilac and orange (fig. 4).

The most considerable collection of reputed Wirksworth china known to the writer, is that belonging to Mr. William Fox, of Wirksworth. The nucleus of this was certain pieces from the Bemrose collection attributed to Wirksworth, and the tea service (fig. 5) has been, so to speak, built up around these early acquisitions. The added pieces are precisely the same in every respect, and the fact that these were bought in the neighbourhood, must be allowed due weight.¹ These circumstances, together with the Bemrose labels attached to the original pieces, practically constitute the evidence. The colours are of similar character to those given above. The style of decoration is, generally speaking, a little more free and profuse. A series of wavy lines in red makes one of its chief characteristics. Mr. Fox also has three teapots (fig. 6) which rest on similar authority, and which also possess every indication of the same origin. Fig. 7 shows a jug and basin in the centre, about which there can scarcely be any doubt. The two teapots in this illustration were also attributed to Wirksworth before coming into Mr. Fox's possession. The same applies to a well-made cup and saucer in white and gold (fig. 8, Plate V.).

A very charming cup and saucer labelled "Wirksworth" may be seen in the Derby Art Museum (Olivier collection). The style is just what we have described, but here there

¹ Most of these were purchased at the sale of the effects of the late Charles Wright, Esq., Yokecliffe.

is a little more elaborateness of design and a touch of style in the quaint border motive, very pleasing.

Other specimens of similar style have been shown to the writer, but at present, it is necessary to ascertain something of their history before expressing a definite opinion, as the early factories often copied each other. Moreover, when a factory adopted no distinctive mark, there is always an added difficulty. Fig. 9 shows a teapot of more ornamental character. The decoration is a trifle coarse, but otherwise agrees in general style with several of Mr. Fox's specimens.

On the whole the characteristics of the Wirksworth tea services seem clear enough, within the limited range we are at present confined to, but there is great need of more information, and the discovery of more examples showing the scope of style in potting and decoration.

It would be a pity to close this article without some reference to the old building which is still standing in China House Yard, 58 ft. long by 30 ft. wide and now used as a cart shed. Two cottages near by, evidently adapted from part of the same building, are of that interesting eighteenth century brickwork of which so much remains in old fashioned quarters of Derbyshire towns, and are roofed on one side with pantiles and on the other side with stone slabs. It was in the cart shed that the discoveries were made in 1914. This building also still retains the old flue.

The author's best thanks are due to all those friends who have allowed their china to be photographed, and especially to Mr. Thomas Atkinson and Mr. William Fox for much kind assistance in other ways. Valuable aid has also been most kindly rendered to the writer by the author of *The China Collector*, Mr. H. W. Lewer, of Loughton, Essex, to whom sincere acknowledgments are now made.

PLATE V.

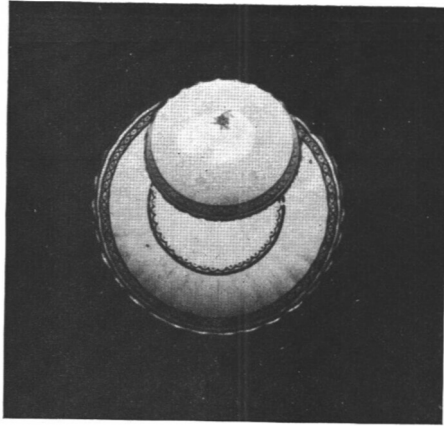


Photo. by]

FIG. 8.

[T.L.T.



Photo. by]

FIG. 9.

[T.L.T.



Photo. by]

FIG 10.

[E.W.A.

TO FACE P. 126.