

NOTES ON THE MANUFACTURE OF PORCELAIN AT CHELSEA.

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SOME antiquaries may perhaps deem the history of modern porcelain scarcely within the range of archæological investigation. When we consider, however, how much this country owes to the industrial arts which have been practised here, any investigation into the *incunabula* or early history of those arts seems not only proper but desirable, such subjects sometimes require as much research as historical questions of an earlier period, and are often shrouded in greater obscurity.

Any inquiry of this kind is the more appropriate when archæologists have selected for their place of meeting the city of Worcester, one of the ancient seats of the Ceramic art, where it has shone, and continues to shine, with great lustre.

Every country has been wont to boast of having been the first to create or bring to perfection some specific industrial art, and the writers on pottery and porcelain have claimed indirectly for England as early a fabric of porcelain as for any country in Europe. The claim of Meissen or Dresden to having been the first in Europe to make hard porcelain (in the year 1709) remains undisturbed, but it has been shown that at St. Cloud, in France, there was a yet earlier manufactory of soft porcelain, and it has been further presumed that there was a contemporary manufactory of soft porcelain in England.

Both these claims sink into insignificance before the unquestionable priority of Florence,² where it has been recently ascertained that soft porcelain was made, under the Medici, as early as 1575. Still it is desirable to see on what

¹ Read at the Worcester Meeting of the Archæological Institute, July, 1862.

² See Jacquemart et Le Blant, *Histoire de la Porcelaine*, p. 635.

grounds rested the claim which was formerly put forth on behalf of England.

Mr. Marryat, in his useful history of Pottery and Porcelain, has the following passage :³—

“ Of the origin of the porcelain manufactory at Chelsea, there does not exist any authentic record, though some information as to its early date has been incidentally gleaned. Dr. Martin Lister, an English physician and eminent naturalist, who travelled in France in 1695, remarks in his account of the ‘Potterie of St. Clou,’ that the ‘gomroon ware’ at that time made in England was very inferior in quality to the porcelain of St. Cloud. He further observes that ‘our men’ (meaning the workmen employed) ‘were better masters of the art of painting than the Chineses,’ alluding no doubt to the circumstance of oriental porcelain being painted at Chelsea before the native ware attained its excellence.

“ From the above it may be inferred that there existed at Chelsea previously to 1698, the date of Lister’s account, a manufactory of porcelain (little better at first than opaque glass), and also that good painters were employed to embellish oriental porcelain, in consequence of its quality being very superior to that produced at home.”

The passage in Lister’s work⁴ to which Mr. Marryat alludes is as follows :—

“ I saw the Potterie of St. Clou, with which I was marvellously well pleased, for I confess I could not distinguish betwixt the Pots made there, and the finest China Ware I ever saw. It will, I know, be easily granted me, that the Paintings may be better designed and finisht, (as indeed it was) because our Men are far better Masters in that Art than the Chineses ; but the Glazing came not in the least behind them, not for whiteness nor the smoothness of running without Bubbles ; again the inward Substance and Matter of the Pots was to me the very same, hard and firm as Marble, and the self-same grain, on this side vitrification. Farther, the Transparency of the Pots the very same.”

Now it is quite evident that in this passage Lister understands by “our men,” Europeans, as better skilled in the art of painting (not necessarily painting on porcelain) than the Chinese, and it is rather too much to rest on so slender a foundation the existence of porcelain making in England, or even that Chinese porcelain was decorated in this country.

Further on Lister makes the following observations :—

“ I did not expect to have found it in this perfection, but imagined this

³ History of Pottery and Porcelain by Joseph Marryat, 2nd Ed. London, 1857, p. 276.

⁴ A Journey to Paris in the year 1698, by Dr. Martin Lister. 2nd Ed. London, 1699, p. 138.

might have arrived at the Gomron Ware ; which is, indeed, little else but a total vitrification ; but I found it far otherwise, and very surprising, and which I account part of the felicity of the Age to equal, if not surpass, the Chinese in their finest Art."

It must be from this passage that Mr. Marryat derived his statement that "the 'gomroon' ware at that time *made in England* was very inferior in quality to the porcelain of St. Cloud;" every one must, however, allow that the passage will not admit of this interpretation.

While on the subject of Gomron, or Gombroon, ware, which has been noticed in the same work in another passage⁵ as the name given to Chinese porcelain in consequence of the East India Company having established an entrepôt at the port of Gomron in the Persian Gulf, I may perhaps be allowed to make a few remarks. It is quite evident from the passage in Lister that he considers Chinese porcelain and Gombroon ware as distinct. He says he expected the St. Cloud to have been equal to Gombroon ware, which he looks upon as an actual vitrification, but he was much surprised to find it equal to the best Chinese porcelain, which was only partial vitrification. Gombroon ware is, as far as I know, mentioned only once elsewhere, *viz.*, in the Strawberry Hill Catalogue,⁶ where Walpole notices "two basons of most ancient Gombroon china, a present from Lord Vere, out of the collection of Lady Elizabeth Germaine." Now Walpole knew very well what was Chinese porcelain, and there must have been some peculiarity about the ware in order that he should adopt another name. But there was a ware made in Persia itself, of which specimens are to be met with occasionally, and which differs from Oriental china in being of inferior porcelain and more fusible. A specimen, which I believe to be of this ware, was exhibited at Worcester by Sir Edmund Lechmere, Bart., and there were several examples in the Loan Exhibition at South Kensington.⁷ Specimens are preserved in the collections of Mr. Henderson, Sir Walter Trevelyan, Mr. Huth, and myself.

The ware in question may be divided into two varieties, possibly made at different places ; one consists chiefly of bowls, with a white granular paste, and ornamented with holes or slits

⁵ P. 192.

⁷ Catalogue of the Loan Collection,

⁶ Lord Orford's Works, 1798, vol. ii. p. 414.

No. 3324—3331.

filled in with glaze ; the decorations are principally a few black and blue lines ; the other variety is of a white, very soft, paste with ornaments in a copper metallic lustre, sometimes placed on ground of an intense blue.

Having thus disposed of Gombroon ware and Dr. Lister's account as evidence of the existence of an English porcelain manufactory in the seventeenth century, I may add that he expressly mentions⁸ the manufacture of red stoneware in England, probably that of the Elers.

“As for the Red Ware of China, that has been, and is done, in England to a far greater perfection than in China, we having as good Materials, viz., the Soft Hæmatites, and far better Artists in Pottery. But in this particular we are beholden to two Dutchmen, Brothers, who wrought in Staffordshire (as I have been told), and were not long since at Hammersmith.”

And yet he says nothing of any porcelain having been made in England.

As to the actual date of the manufactory at Chelsea, it is probable that it existed before 1745 ; about that time a French company solicited a patent for establishing a porcelain fabric at Vincennes, in which they are stated to have urged the benefit France would derive from counteracting the reputation of the German and English fabrics.⁹ I have, however, been unable to find the document in question. That the manufactory was in existence before 1752 is shown by “a case of the undertaker of the Chelsea manufacture of porcelain,”¹ where it is mentioned that the Duke of Orleans (who died in 1752) had tried the Chelsea paste in his kilns. The name of the undertaker is not given, but we learn from this document that he was “a silversmith by profession, who, from a casual acquaintance with a chemist who had some knowledge that way, was tempted to make a trial,” but that at that time “the thing was new.” Now, from internal evidence, it is certain that the document was written after 1752, and probably before 1759.

A direct proof, however, of the existence of Chelsea porcelain in 1745, is furnished by a specimen in Mr. William Russell's collection ; it is a white cream jug which has become warped in baking, the design is composed of two goats, and in front is a bee in relief, the wings of which are unfortu-

⁸ P. 139.

⁹ Marryat, 2nd Ed. p. 277.

¹ Lansdowne MS. 829; printed in Marryat's work.

nately broken. It is, in fact, one of the well-known cream-jugs which have been sold of late years at fabulous prices as Bow Jugs, and of which a fine specimen from Dr. Bandinel's collection is represented in the accompanying wood-cut.²



Chelsea Cream Jug. (Bandinel Collection.)

Like those jugs it has at the bottom a triangle scratched in the clay ; but below the triangle it has this peculiarity, that before baking there had been added "Chelsea, 1745."



Chelsea 1745

Before the discovery of this jug, which came from the collection of Dr. Wellesley, and now belongs to Mr. William Russell, the Accountant-General of the Court of Chancery, I had been led to express a very decided opinion that these jugs, and other specimens of similar china, were not made

² We are indebted to the kindness of Mr. Murray for the use of this cut.

at Bow; not only from there being no evidence of the triangle being a Bow mark, but from their differing completely in paste and style of decoration from the only well authenticated specimen of Bow-ware, the bowl in the British Museum made by Thomas Craft.³

As an additional confirmation that china of this kind was made at Chelsea, I may notice that Walpole, in his Description of Strawberry Hill,⁴ speaks of "two white salt-cellars, with crawfish in relief, of Chelsea china;" a very uncommon design which I have found only once, *viz.*, at the Earl of Ilchester's at Melbury, in Dorsetshire, where are four such salt-cellars, all marked with a triangle.

We may, therefore, characterise the Chelsea of this early period as of a creamy paste, not unlike St. Cloud porcelain, with a satiny texture, very transparent body, often distorted in baking, and frequently left white.

There is another class of Chelsea-ware which differs entirely from this in character; it has very much the appearance of oriental porcelain, is thickly made, but with well composed paste, and often decorated with oriental patterns. It is marked with an embossed anchor in the paste.

Among the most remarkable specimens of this variety of porcelain may be mentioned a figure of a mother suckling a child,⁵ copied from Bernard Palissy's *Nourrice*, and also a bust of the Duke of Cumberland, a great patron of the manufactory, of which an example is in the Jermyn Street Museum.⁶

Shaw, in his history of the Staffordshire Potteries,⁷ tells us that Aaron Simpson and six other Staffordshire workmen went in 1747 to work at the Chelsea china manufactory. That they soon ascertained that they were the principal workmen on whose exertions all the excellence of the porcelain must depend; when they resolved to commence business on their own account at Chelsea, and were in some degree successful, but at length, owing to disagreement among themselves, they abandoned it, and returned to Burslem, intending to commence there the manufacture of china. I merely mention this to show the changes and chances to

³ See Arch. Journ. vol. viii. p. 204.

⁴ Lord Orford's Works, 1798, vol. ii. p. 409.

⁵ One is in my own collection; another belongs to the Earl Stanhope; a third to Dr. Turner.

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⁶ It is there described as of Plymouth manufacture; and catalogued under No. Ce. E. 13. I have seen several examples with the raised anchor.

⁷ 12mo. Hanley, 1829.

which early manufactories such as this were subject, and how much difference and sudden alterations of form and material we may look for in a manufactory so dependent as this on the caprices of the workmen.

Another period of the manufacture is characterised by being copied in some degree from Dresden porcelain; it is generally decorated with delicate bunches of flowers on a smooth white ground; the glaze is very vitreous, the anchor mark, commonly in red, is neatly painted and small. The date of this mode of decoration seems to be fixed by a small smelling bottle in my collection which is in the form of a group, being a boy seated and writing a letter, while a girl looks on: the letter is inscribed, "*Fe: 1759, This is.*"

There seems about this time to have been a considerable number of such little bottles, &c., made, as we learn from an advertisement which appeared in the Public Advertiser of December 17th, 1754, as well as in other papers, and ran as follows:—

To be Sold by Auction by Mr. FORD,

At his great Room in St. James's Hay-Market, this and the four following Days,

ALL the entire Stock of CHELSEA PORCELAIN TOYS, brought from the Proprietor's Warehouse in Pall-Mall; consisting of Snuff Boxes, Smelling Bottles, and Trinkets for Watches (mounted in Gold, and unmounted) in various beautiful Shapes, of an elegant Design, and curiously painted in Enamel, a large Parcel of Knife Hafts, &c.

The said Stock may be view'd till the Time of Sale, which will begin each Day at half an Hour after Eleven o'Clock.

Note, Most of the above Things are in Lots suitable for Jewellers, Goldsmiths, Toyshops, China-Shops, Cutlers, and Workmen in those Branches of Business.

Catalogues may be had at Mr. FORD's, at Six Pence each, which will be allowed to those who are Purchasers.

The kind of China most in vogue at this time is illustrated by the advertisements issued by various dealers in such wares, for instance some of those inserted in the Public Advertiser by Mr. Hughes, Ironmonger in Pall Mall, who, in his advertisement of May 2, 1755,

"begs leave to inform the Nobility, Gentry, and others that he has a greater Choice of the Chelsea Porcelain than any Dealer in London, both

useful and ornamental; and as they were bought cheap can be sold more reasonable than they can be made at the manufactory. He has compleat services of Plates and Dishes, Tureens, Sauce-boats, &c., which no one else has; several Elegant Epargnes for Desarts, and one beautiful one bought at the last sale; several Figures and greatest Choice of Branches with the best Flowers, such as were on the Chandelier at the last Sale; and upwards of three thousand of those Flowers to be sold by themselves so that Ladies or Gentlemen may make use of them in Grottos, Branches, Epargnes, Flower-pots, &c., agreeable to their own taste."

The next style may be termed in the French taste, and to it belong some of the finest specimens of the manufactory. They are chiefly vases, painted somewhat in imitation of the Vincennes and early Sevres porcelain, with figures, birds, &c., in panels, and with rich grounds, either *gros-bleu*, turquoise, apple-green, or a claret colour, a tint rarely found on other porcelain. Many fine specimens of this variety of Chelsea are preserved in the collections of English *amateurs*. Their date seems to be fixed by a pair of vases in the British Museum, no less than 20 in. high; they have panels with figures on one side and with birds on the other; the ground is *gros-bleu*, with rich and massive gilding. They were presented 15th April, 1763, and are thus noticed in the Donation-book of the Museum.

"Two very fine porcelain jars of the Chelsea manufactory, made in the year 1762, under the direction of Mr. Sprimont: from a person unknown, through Mr. Empson."

As this was the same date at which a still finer vase of the same porcelain, perhaps the centre piece of the pair in the Museum, was presented to the Foundling Hospital by Dr. Garnier, the unknown donor may have been that gentleman.

At any rate, if this date be correct, they fix 1762 as the period at which these large and important specimens were being made.

There is another style to be noticed, consisting of vases, &c., which, had they not been marked with an anchor, we should have been disposed to class among the productions of the Derby manufactory.⁸ They may have been the latest productions of Chelsea. They are characterised by simplicity and elegance of forms, with the frequent occurrence of gold stripes. Some of the early Derby was made after the same models and in the same taste.

⁸ See, for instance, Marryat, 2nd Ed. (1857), pl. iv., No. 7.

The close of the Chelsea porcelain manufactory, which had shone so brightly during its short career, has been referred to about 1765, in which year Mr. Grosley visited England: he speaks of the manufactory having just fallen; but at any rate its effects were not sold off till 1769, as is shown by the following advertisement, which appeared in the *Gazetteer*, or *New Daily Advertiser*, of May, 1769.

To be SOLD by AUCTION,
By Mr. BURNSALL,

At his Auction room in Charles-street, Berkeley-square, on Wednesday the 17th of May, and the following days, by order of Mr. NICHOLAS SPREMONT, the Proprietor of the Chelsea Porcelain Manufactory, he having entirely left off making the same,

ALL the curious and truly matchless pieces of that valuable manufactory; consisting of beautiful vases, antique urns, perfume pots, table and dessert services, tea and coffee equipages, compotiers, leaves, &c., beautiful candlesticks of different shapes; variety of figures, very large and curious groups, particularly two groups of the Roman Charity, toilet boxes of various forms and sizes, and many other articles, most highly finished in the mazarine blue, crimson, pea-green and gold, finely painted in figures, birds, fruit, and flowers, enriched with gold and curiously chased.

To be viewed on Monday the 15th, and till the sale.

N. B. Likewise will be sold all the fine models, mills, kilns, presses, buildings, and all other articles belonging to this most distinguished manufactory. For further particulars apply to the said Mr. Burnfall.

Before concluding these scanty notes, it may be well to call attention to a passage in a work entitled "*Handmaid to the Arts*," written, I believe, by Robert Dossie, which may furnish indications useful to future inquirers. The first edition appeared in 1758, in one volume 8vo, and does not contain any mention of "*China-ware*." In the second edition, published in two volumes, in 1764, part iv. of vol. 2, is devoted to the "*nature, composition, glazing, painting, and gilding of porcelain or china-ware, &c.*" In the preface to vol. 2 the following reason is given for inserting this portion: "*In the fourth part the nature and manufacture of porcelain or china-ware is taught, which will be doubtless acceptable at this time, when attempts are making to establish manufactories in our own country.*" After describing various compositions of paste, &c., the following passage occurs (vol. 2, p. 354):—

"There have been several similar compositions used for the imitation of China-ware in the works set on foot in different parts of Europe, and among the rest I have seen at one of those carried on near London eleven mills at work grinding pieces of the Eastern China, in order, by the addition of some fluxing or vitreous substance which might restore the tenacity, to work it over again in the place of new matter. The ware commonly produced at this manufactory had the characters correspondent to such a mixture, for it was grey, full of flaws and bubbles, and from want of due tenacity in the paste wrought in a very heavy clumsy manner, especially with regard to those parts that are to support the pieces in drying. A very opposite kind is produced in another manufactory in the neighbourhood of London, for it has great whiteness, and a texture that admits of its being modelled or cast in the most delicate manner; but it is formed of a composition so vitrescent as to have almost the texture of glass, and consequently to break or crack if boiling water be suddenly poured upon it, which quality renders it unfit for any uses but the making ornamental pieces. A later manufactory at Worcester has produced, even at very cheap prices, pieces that not only work very light, but which have great tenacity, and bear hot water without more hazard than the true China ware."

It is probable that the writer, who was, unfortunately, unwilling to mention the manufactories by name, intended to speak of Bow and Chelsea. It is, however, possible that there were more than two manufactories in the neighbourhood of London, as may be gathered from a paragraph in the London Chronicle of 1755, which is as follows:—

"Yesterday four persons, well skilled in the making British China, were engaged for Scotland, where a new porcelain manufacture is going to be established in the manner of that now carried on at Chelsea, Stratford, and Bow."

I feel certain, that if the newspapers of the period, both local and metropolitan, were carefully examined, much curious matter might be brought together, which would throw light on many debated points in the history of porcelain.⁹ In concluding these remarks, I will venture to suggest the importance of collecting together such scattered notices, which are far more useful and far more to be depended upon than the vague opinions formed by collectors, resting frequently on hearsay, and on a misconception of the true bearing of some fact or document which is not given in full.¹

⁹ I am indebted to Mr. Gale, of Holborn, for having given me, some years since, two of the advertisements in question.

¹ An account of Chelsea porcelain is

in preparation by Mr. Llewellyn Jewitt, F.S.A., for the Art Journal: he will no doubt throw much light on a subject which he is so well qualified to handle.