

ART POTTERY AND INDUSTRY

The term 'art pottery' is used to describe those wares produced over the period from about the 1870s to the 1930s which were made in the spirit of the Arts and Crafts movement, or had the appearance which made them appealing to the 'artistic' taste of the day. These were usually hand-made wares which were purposefully decorative, although industrial processes did become quite important later on in the production of what has now come to be known as art pottery.

North Staffordshire has been the centre of the British pottery industry for more than three hundred years. Production of fine ceramics grew up around the readily-available raw materials and all-important skilled workforce and the area became known as the Potteries - a testament to the importance of its local industry. Pottery making in other areas of the country continued, both on an industrial level and as a traditional craft, but for centuries the Potteries have led the way in commercial production.

During the second half of the nineteenth century a period of changing attitudes to art, design and industry, now referred to as the Arts and Crafts movement, resulted in the re-discovery of the importance of traditional manually-based crafts, including pottery-making. Industrialisation and mass-production techniques were criticised. Focus shifted towards the artist-craftsman working in a small and, according to Arts and Crafts exponents, more self-fulfilling way and away from the industrial centres, such as Staffordshire. The fashion for art pottery sprang up in this way.

Decorative, hand-made wares began to be produced by individuals or small groups of people, often middle class, with no grounding in pottery-making and certainly with no connection with commercial ceramic manufacture. The production of art pottery was away from the Potteries at first. London was the initial focus, followed by other, often rural, regions where a tradition of craft pottery existed. This changed, however, once a market for decorative, often relatively expensive hand-made pottery had grown up. The commercial opportunities for the production of art pottery were taken up, both in Staffordshire and in other regions, on the back of the existing industry and public demand.

It seems a contradiction in terms to refer to art pottery being produced industrially, but in any line of production, the aim is to exploit market forces in order to trade successfully. The type of decorative, highly creative and technically advanced pottery which was produced, by whatever means, in response to the Arts and Crafts movement can only be described as art pottery. It gave the Potteries a foothold in a market that had shifted away from their traditional products and brought a new spirit of experimentation which benefited the industry as a whole.

Conversely, two of the most far-reaching features of the Arts and Crafts movement: the importance of individual craftsmanship and the attention paid to pre- and non-industrial cultures, gave rise to the revival of a range of crafts. In ceramics, the studio pottery movement and its focus on the wares of the Orient owes much to the experimental art potters.

COLLECTION DETAILS

A range of wares produced by different companies and studios involved in the manufacture of art pottery can be seen in the ceramics galleries. These include Martin Brothers; Doulton (Lambeth and Burslem); William de Morgan; Minton; Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian; Bernard Moore; Moorcroft and Bullers.

FURTHER READING

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SKINNER, D. & *Art pottery : the legacy of William Morris*. City Museum & Art

THOMAS, E. L. *Victorian art pottery*. Guildart, 1974