

Cow creamers

With the fashion for taking tea, coffee and chocolate in the mid 18th century came the need for equipment for preparing and serving it. One of the more fanciful inventions of potters (and silversmiths) in this respect was the cow-shaped cream jug, a novelty which proved so popular that production has continued to the present day.

Cow cream jugs were imported from Holland in the early 18th century but were first made in this country in saltglazed stoneware around the mid 18th century. They have since been made in a variety of pottery types, examples of most of which are represented in the Keiller collection owned by this museum, including lead glazed, enamel painted, underglaze blue printed, underglaze printed and lustred earthenwares, in addition to some porcelain examples. These jugs were made in many pottery-making areas including Staffordshire, South Wales, Yorkshire, Tyneside and Scotland.

The hollow cows could be filled through an opening in the back, with the mouth serving as a spout and the tail as a handle. The popularity of these jugs was not diminished by the fact that they were very unhygienic and were potentially the cause of salmonella poisoning.

THE KEILLER COLLECTION OF COW CREAM JUGS

This magnificent collection of 667 cow cream jugs built up over a period of 30 years was generously presented to the City of Stoke-on-Trent Museum & Art Gallery in 1962 by Mrs. Gabrielle M. Keiller of Kingston Hill, Surrey. A condition of the gift stipulated that a minimum of two thirds of the Collection should be on permanent exhibition - the remainder available for study by appointment.

In such a large collection with so wide a scope, attribution is somewhat hampered by the absence of marked examples. The bulk of the cow cream jugs were manufactured in the second half of the 18th century and the first quarter of the 19th century when few earthenware potters were using an identifiable backstamp.

Excluding Dutch importations during the first quarter of the 18th century, the earliest type of cow cream jugs was manufactured in Stoke-on-Trent about 1740 in saltglaze stoneware. An early model in this collection (25P1963) is of earthenware in which the lead glaze has been stained with metallic oxide for a decorative effect, similar to tortoiseshell.

The earliest porcelain specimens in the collection (666 and 667P1963) date from the mid 18th century and have been attributed to the Longton Hall manufactory of William Littler, the first Stoke-on-Trent potter to make porcelain, a venture which only lasted for ten years. In 1770 Littler was at West Pans, Musselburgh, Scotland, where, after the failure of Longton Hall, he had opened another porcelain factory.

The main centres for the production of cow cream jugs outside of Stoke-on-Trent were Tyneside, Yorkshire, South Wales and South Scotland, where earthenware in the Staffordshire style was manufactured. From the second half of the 18th century there is ample evidence of Staffordshire potters moving to these areas to establish or manage factories. For example Samuel Shaw built a potworks at Rothwell near Leeds in 1774, Ralph Wedgwood went to Ferrybridge in 1796, Thomas Ball left Burslem for Sunderland around 1800 and his brother Richard went to Hylton Ferry. In 1802 Job Ridgway of Shelton was at Hull; in 1804 Peter Barker moved to Mexborough near Swinton. Thomas Rathbone of Tunstall settled in Portobello in 1810 and was later joined by his brother Samuel. Thomas Lakin managed the Leeds factory from 1810 until 1824; John Walley entered into a partnership at Stockton-on-Tees in 1826. Members of the Toft family worked in Scotland and Tyneside - South Wales received such potters as Clowes, Wood, Ridgway and Bevington. Even with this abridged list the reason for the wide diffusion of the Staffordshire style is apparent.

MARKED EXAMPLES IN THE COLLECTION

St Anthony's Pottery, Newcastle-on-Tyne

Possibly built by Thomas Lewins about 1780 and taken over by Sewell in 1804.

Marks:- ST. ANTHONY; SEWELL

St. Peter's Pottery, Newcastle-on-Tyne

Established in 1817 by Thomas Fell and Thomas Bell under the style of Fell and Company.

Mark:- FELL

Tyne Pottery, Felling Shore

Pigot's Directory of 1820 lists the owners of this manufactory as J. Taylor & Co.

Mark:- TAYLOR & CO

I. Mole, P & O, E. Brown are impressed on several examples in the collection but these potters have not yet been traced. From the style and decoration, however, these specimens have been attributed to Tyneside.

Glamorgan Pottery, Swansea

Began about 1813. Between 1814-39 the firm was Baker, Bevans & Irwin

Mark:- B.B. & I.

Cambrian Pottery, Swansea

Founded about 1764. Purchased by William Dillwyn in 1802. Cow cream jugs were made here between 1824-31.

Marks:- D: T: J.

Derby

Porcelain specimens were made during the period of Robert Bloor, 1811-26.

Marks:- DERBY: BLOOR, DERBY

Copeland, Stoke-on-Trent

WT Copeland bought the Spode factory in 1833. For fourteen years he ran it in partnership with Thomas Garrett. From 1847 the firm was known as Copeland.

Mark:- COPELAND