

The Royal Worcester Pattern Books

Royal Worcester Managing Director and Art Director, Richard William Binns was passionate about the history of porcelain and in the 1850s he started to collect together not only ceramics, but also documentary evidence relating to the manufacture of porcelain in Worcester. He preserved a wide range of records relating to the factories, employees, general business and production methods as well as photographs, drawings and prints illustrating the finished products. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, he continued and expanded a detailed system for recording the thousands of porcelain designs for shapes and patterns made by the Royal Worcester factory under his direction.



The Royal Worcester, Severn Street manufactory made porcelain, bone china, parian and earthenware on an industrial scale for a world wide market. By the end of the 19th century the factory covered around 10 acres and produced millions of objects each year. It was therefore essential for the smooth running of the business to maintain detailed production records.



As the majority of objects were made from plaster moulds, each mould was given a unique (shape) number. Then as a large range of different surface patterns can be added to a single shape, each pattern was also given a unique (pattern) number. As many as 400 individual pattern designs could be created in a single year and they were meticulously recorded by hand, by a team of talented artists in a series of large leather bound ledgers. These pattern books were treasured by the factory as they were a testament to the quality of Royal Worcester porcelain and were used to show potential customers what could be made.

Thankfully Binns system of recording was maintained for over 150 years. The oldest factory books and records collected by Richard Binns were donated to the Worcester Porcelain Museum, which is an independent registered charity, in 1976. This was followed by a generous donation by Royal Worcester of a further 500 volumes in 1995. The last and most precious archives have now been purchased by The Art Fund, the UK's leading independent art charity, for just over £55,000 and they have presented them to the Worcester Porcelain Museum to mark the 40th anniversary of the foundation of NADFAS.

This wonderful gift from The Art Fund completes the transfer of records from the former factory to the museum, ensuring the preservation of these unique documents for further generations. The donation includes 27 tableware pattern books (1874 – 1999), 5 special order books (1937 – 1994), 300 loose designs for models (1930s – 1960s), 1000 loose

tableware designs (1900 – 1930s), an aquatint of the Warmstry factory by Paul Sandby 1778 and a drawing of the Severn Street factory by Alfred Parry 1890.



These particular records are of great significance today because they provide a wealth of detailed information that is not duplicated or published anywhere. They enhance our understanding of how the factory numbering systems worked and enable us to trace designs made for specific retailers or individual customers. Carefully inscribed notes on each entry indicate production methods, decorating techniques and the number of variations or 'colour-ways' that a pattern was

made in. The books, loose illustrations and animal designs also give details of the work of individual artists, that otherwise could not be identified, especially prior to 1900 when they were not permitted to sign the finished china pieces.

The books contain a wealth of Imari, Japanesque, Chinoiserie, Arts & Crafts, Art Deco, Art Nouveau and Classic style designs that chart changes in fashion and culinary etiquette as well as technical advances in ceramic manufacture. The Special Order Books provide a unique record of how commercial production of porcelain changed in the 20th century. They contain a wealth of information of historical importance about private orders from important customers such as HM Queen Elizabeth II, the Shah of Persia, King Farouk, the Sultan of Brunei and commercial customers such as the Dorchester, the Ritz and Raffles, Aspreys, Tiffany, Thomas Goode and Cunard. They relate directly to many pieces in our existing ceramics collection and enable the museum to answer hundreds of public enquiries every year.



The pattern books, along with thousands of loose designs and other records were kept in an especially built strong room, known as the 'Pattern Room' to employees. They were kept out of daylight, in a stable atmosphere, preserving the bright colours of the designs, however they were not just stored away. The records were regularly used by many generations of designers and craftsmen who inadvertently transferred china clay dust from their work benches and hands onto the books. Slowly the covers and pages became loose and worn at the edges and these precious archives now show their age.

Thanks to the generosity of many local donors the museum is working on an exciting project to give these precious archives a new start. A group of very experienced volunteers from Malvern Hills and Worcester NADFAS are cleaning, repairing and protecting the books and



documents, stabilising their condition. This work involves carefully mending page tears, removing loose dirt, repairing book spines and corners as well as making melinex book jackets and acid free protective boxes for especially vulnerable items. During the course of their meticulous and patient work they will also aim to identify any books in urgent need of further treatment or professional conservation in the future.

The NADFAS conservators can be seen at work in the museum every Wednesday. Pre-arranged private visits for small groups to view the archive collections are very welcome.

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The Worcester Porcelain Museum
Severn Street, Worcester WR1 2ND Telephone +44 (0)1905 21247

e-mail: info.admin@Worcesterporcelainmuseum.org
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