

THE FLIGHT & BARR PARTNERSHIPS 1783 - 1840

Flight (1783 - 1792)

In 1783 the Worcester Warmstry House factory was purchased by its London agent, Thomas Flight (1726-1800) for his two sons Joseph (1762 - 1838) and John (c.1766 - 1791). Over the next few years the Flights struggled with countless technical problems, aggravated by the departure of the head of the decorating department Robert Chamberlain, but slowly their fortunes began to change. John Flight travelled in France to study the latest French porcelain designs and the introduction of new spiral fluted shapes and French sprig patterns at Worcester heralded a period of great success.

In 1788 King George III and Queen Charlotte attended the Worcester Music Meeting (the forerunner of the Three Choirs Festival). They also toured Flight's Worcester Porcelain factory and ordered a breakfast service in the Blue Lily design, giving great encouragement to the company. Flight issued a porcelain token to commemorate the Royal visit and renamed the chosen design Royal Lily in honour of Queen Charlotte. On the advice of the King, they also opened a prestigious new London shop at no.1 Coventry Street (off Piccadilly Circus) and the following year George III gave Flight his Royal Warrant, allowing them to use the Royal Coat of Arms and the words 'Manufacturers to their Majesties'

In 1789 Mrs. Charlotte Hampton was brought from London to take charge of the decorating departments, introducing a new method of gilding using mercury. The new gold had a flat mirror-like finish different to anything produced at Worcester before.

Flight & Barr (1792-1804)

Following the death of John Flight in 1791, Joseph Flight took Martin Barr

(c.1757-1813) into partnership and by the end of the 18th century the Worcester Company had developed a new harder body and glaze that compared well with the best French porcelain. Monochrome sprays and borders enjoyed great popularity and the artist John Pennington (c.1765-1842) mastered the art of painting landscapes and other scenes in monochrome. He supervised the painting department and worked for the firm for over 50 years.

Barr, Flight & Barr (1804 -1813)

In 1804 Martin Barr Junior (c.1784-1848) joined in partnership with his father and Joseph Flight. The next decade was to be exceptionally successful; some of the finest quality British porcelain was made at the Warmstry factory.

Porcelain services were made up at a customer's request with views of his own properties and grounds, local beauty spots and landmarks. English aristocrats travelled around Britain in search of Picturesque and beautiful landscapes. Prints of country houses were published and fashionable places such as Cheltenham, Worcester and Malvern were depicted on porcelain, alongside famous beauty spots such as Warwick castle, Carisbrooke Castle and High Tor near Matlock.

During the late 18th century scientific enquiry replaced Curiosity hunting and representations of collectables such as foreign and rare feathers, shells, minerals and plants became more accurate. Botanical recording also gained popularity through publications such as Curtis's Botanical magazine. Rare specimens were painted on porcelain, usually copied from printed books and flowers were also painted in a more traditional style from Dutch Still Life painting. Barr, Flight & Barr employed the

infamous rogue and artistic genius, William Billingsley from 1808.

Employed first as a painter, he must have influenced those working with him, before moving on to help Samuel Walker, who was experimenting with new kilns and materials. Billingsley and Walker left Worcester around 1813 for Nantgarw.

During the late 18th and early 19th centuries Chinese porcelain decorated with the family Coat of Arms was a great status symbol. The porcelain took years to arrive and was sometimes full of mistakes, as Chinese artists did not understand the painting instructions sent to them. Worcester produced a magnificent alternative, whiter with brighter colours and more readily available, becoming the height of fashion in the early 19th century. The customer accounts of this period would read like a 'Who's Who' of the day. Rich personalised services were made for the wealthiest customers including, Tzar Alexander I, The Duke of York, King George III, King William IV, The Duke of Clarence, The Imam of Muscat, The Marquis of Buckingham and the Nabob of Oude.

The elite, led by The Prince of Wales, favoured extravagant styles which could not be imitated cheaply, keeping one step ahead of the increasingly wealthy industrial and merchant classes. The Prince of Wales was criticised by his contemporaries for his eccentric decoration of Brighton pavilion. He spent huge sums of money on porcelain, buying at least six rich services from the Worcester factory. The Prince's love of red, blue and gold Imari designs is reflected in two of his dessert services made by Barr, Flight & Barr in 1807. In the same year he awarded the company his Royal Warrant.

Flight, Barr & Barr (1813 - 1840)

Martin Barr died in 1813 and once again Joseph Flight became the principal shareholder with George & Martin Barr junior in partnership. The great success of the company was continued and boosted by the employment of the talented artist Thomas Baxter (1782 - 1821) from 1814 to 1816. Baxter had had a formal training at the Royal Academy School under Henri Fuseli and had perfected the art of porcelain painting at his father's decorating studio in London. He painted a broad range of subjects including flowers, shells, landscapes, portraits and figure subjects in Classical style. Baxter started a drawing school in Worcester where he taught the best porcelain painters of the next generation. The paintings of Solomon Cole, Samuel Astles, Henry Stinton, Moses Webster and Enoch Doe are often difficult to distinguish from the work of their teacher.

In the 1830's the Neo-Rococo style became popular with up and coming industrialists, who now had more money than old established families. The demand for rich classical porcelain diminished and the Flight, Barr & Barr factory was resistant to change designs that had been so successful.

Only the most adaptable and innovative porcelain factories survived. In 1840 the Flight, Barr and Barr factory joined forces with its former rival, Chamberlain and between them they evolved new products and ideas, which were to establish the Worcester Company in the Victorian Era..

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