

KERR & BINNS 1852 - 1862



In 1852 two Irishmen, Richard William Binns (1819 - 1900) and William Henry Kerr (1823 - 1879) took over the management of the Chamberlain & Co. porcelain works in Severn Street, Worcester. The factory had been ravaged by fire and an extensive rebuilding programme took place in the 1850's. Modern machinery and working methods improved the quality of the product in every department.

The first public display of new company products was at the Exhibition of Art & Industry, Dublin in 1853. The Shakespeare Dessert Service, an example of restrained Classical design, used a combination of new materials, Parian for the figures and white bone china.

Parian, a new type of porcelain received great attention when first displayed at the London, Great Exhibition of 1851. The new material imitated marble, which was mined in Paros, Greece.

Introduced at Worcester in 1853, Parian only needed one firing to produce a cleanable material with a matt finish. Parian was used to make small versions of Classical sculpture at an affordable price and was in great demand by the new middle classes. Many sentimental and moral subjects were popular alongside National Heroes and characters from mythology. Worcester also produced Ivory Porcelain (glazed Parian) from 1856 that imitated carved ivory.

Richard William Binns brought a new way of thinking to the training of staff and the application of design. We shall never know how Binns selected his apprentices, but by the end of the 1850's he had gathered an exceptionally talented team. James Hadley, Josiah Davis and John Hopewell started in 1852, James Callowhill, Samuel Ranford, Luke Wells and Josiah Rushton in 1853. Thomas Callowhill in 1855, David Bates in 1858, Thomas Brock and George Owen in 1859. Apprentices were paid three shillings a week. They were enrolled at the newly opened Worcester Government School of Design and studied anatomy, botany, still life and the Grammar of Ornament.



Only a handful of people were involved in the design and modelling of shapes at Worcester in the 1850's. Figure modelling was a new introduction at Worcester. The Irish sculptor William Boynton Kirk A.R.H.A. (1824-1900) was employed from 1852 working in the department with Charles Toft, Edward Locke (1829-1909) and the young James Hadley (1837-1903). Some modellers and designers, such as Charles Palmere were employed on a freelance basis.

Many small ornamental items were produced in Parian; large numbers of thimbles, salts, tapers and small figure groups and a whole range of plain Parian candle extinguishers were made. Decorative finishes included the soft and sugary Raphaellesque colours introduced in 1861 and oxidised silver introduced in 1855.

Enamel work on copper from Limoges, France inspired Thomas Bott (1829 - 1870) to create the Worcester Enamels. In 1854 his work was admired by Prince Albert and the following year a display at the Paris Exhibition received excellent reviews. In 1859 Queen Victoria ordered a dessert service to be decorated with Worcester Enamels. A special turquoise background was used and the new 'Queen's shape', with pierced panels was designed by Thomas Reeve. Drawings of the Vatican Loggia by Raphael inspired the enamel decoration by Thomas Bott and a unique factory mark was created for the service by Digby Wyatt. Josiah Davis applied the most complex chased gilding ever used and the service re-established the reputation of the Worcester Royal Porcelain Works after many troubled years.

In 1862 W.H.Kerr returned to his native Ireland. Under the leadership of Richard Binns, having established new materials, bodies and glazes and trained new staff the factory was set to climb to new heights as Royal Worcester.

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