

ROYAL WORCESTER PORCELAIN

1862 - 1900

On the retirement of William Henry Kerr (1823 - 1879) in 1862, The Worcester Royal Porcelain Company Limited was formed with Richard William Binns (1819 - 1900) and Edward Phillips (d.1881) as joint Managing Directors. Edward P.Evans (1843-1928) joined them as Company Secretary in 1867, and over the next 21 years the freehold was purchased, the works almost reconstructed and £600,000 was paid in wages.

Between 1851 and 1887 the Severn Street factory expanded from 70 to 700 employees.



Royal Worcester kept pace with public demand for novelty in design with the development of a wide range of new materials and glazes, including glazed and unglazed Parian, earthenware, majolica and bone china. The firm concentrated on the production of figures and vases, introducing over 2500 new decorative items between 1862 and 1900.

The Victorians believed that good designs from the past should be adapted and improved to create tasteful new designs. They favoured a mixture of period and foreign styles in the home. Furniture, carpets, wallpapers, silver and fabrics were elaborately decorated. Royal Worcester's Art Director, Richard Binns encouraged the design of decorative objects in many styles including Japanese, French Empire, Persian, Indian, Renaissance and Classical Greek.

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The Aesthetic Movement - In the 1860's, after 100 years of isolation the Japanese started to trade again with Europe. In 1872 His Excellency Sionii Tomomi Iwakura, Junior Prime Minister of Japan, visited Royal Worcester and saw Japanese style wares being made for display in Vienna the following year.

Japanese bronzes, ivories and prints, purchased by R.W.Binns in Europe, inspired the Worcester craftsmen who did not slavishly copy, but adapted ideas for the English market.

(For more go to - The Origins of the Museum of Worcester Porcelain)

Japanese designs were fashionable with the supporters of the Aesthetic Movement, championed by Oscar Wilde. Arthur Liberty, whose shop opened in 1875, first sold Japanese goods in London. Aesthetic ideas affected even the average household, encouraging people to think about their homes. In theory an Aesthetic interior would display a few beautifully made items. In reality people packed their homes with the symbols of Aestheticism, ferns, palms, Japanese fans, and screens, feathers, books and drawings. Victorian clutter was born!

Special Services - Porcelain decorated with a family coat of arms or corporate badge was very fashionable in the second half of 19th century. Many colleges, shipping companies, hotels, clubs and individuals had specially commissioned services made by Royal Worcester. Well-known customers included The Royal St.George Yacht Club, Hyde Park Hotel, H.M.Treasury, The Royal Irish Dragoon Guards, The Great Eastern, The Marquis of Bute and the Duke of Hamilton. When a special service was ordered the customer would choose an existing numbered pattern or border design. The factory would then copy the coat of arms or badge from a wax seal or printed visiting card. A sample, printed from an engraved copper plate or hand painted would then be sent to the customer for approval.

Many of these bespoke services were made of Royal Worcester Vitreous, a high-fired earthenware, for durability.

In 1878 Royal Worcester displayed a fascinating pair of vases at the Paris Exhibition. They were designed by James Hadley (1837 - 1903) in Italian Renaissance style, using the novel idea of making pottery tell its own story. The vases illustrate Longfellow's poem 'Keramos'. The original vases, gilded in coloured metals by Josiah Davis (1839-1913) and the Callowhill brothers won a gold medal and were sold on the spot and the Worcester Art Director, Richard Binns was awarded the Legion D'Honour. A second pair of vases, decorated in soft Raphaelesque colours were made for promotional display and are now in the Museum of Worcester Porcelain.

As a result of rapidly developing communications, the postal service, the telegraph and the railways, the public became more aware of other countries and cultures. Royal Worcester enjoyed great success with figures of Eastern Water carriers, Indian Craftsmen, and a series of National figures in the 1880's modelled by James Hadley. Unusual animals and birds were also represented, heads of elephants were even used as designs for tureen handles.

In 1893 Royal Worcester created some of the most adventurous objects (now on display in the Museum of Worcester Porcelain) for the Chicago World Fair. The Exhibition surpassed all its American and European predecessors, in concept and scale. The Exhibition covered more than 200 acres and millions of visitors went to be entertained by the marvels of new technology and the cultures of 44 Nations. The Seasons Vase, the largest vessel ever made by Royal Worcester was designed as the centrepiece of the British Exhibit. The 53-inch vase took over a year to produce and cost £500. It was designed and modelled by James Hadley, the clay pressed in giant moulds by John Finney and carefully painted with flowers by Edward Raby (1863-1940) The whole was completed with raised paste work by Thomas and George Shaw and gilding by Josiah Davis.



A display of pierced or reticulated porcelain was also displayed at the Chicago Exhibition. The technique of piercing was developed in the 1880's to imitate Oriental and Indian Ivory carving. George Owen (1845 - 1917) perfected the art of piercing, producing individual, unique patterns of tiny holes, designing them to fit accurately onto totally blank areas. Every hole was cut by hand using an oiled knife when the clay was still damp. One slip of the knife would mean starting again!

In the mid 1890's fashions started to change and there was a decline in the demand for heavily modelled objects in an historical style. In 1896 James Hadley and Edward Locke (1829-1909) set up their own independent companies and Richard Binns retired in 1897.

At the turn of the century new styles and ideas were beginning to emerge under the guidance of Managing Director, Edward P.Evans, Art Superintendent, William Moore Binns (1861-1920) and Head Designer, Frederick H.Thorpe (1859-c.1916)

The influence of Art Nouveau in Europe with its organic shapes and natural decorations, can be seen in Royal Worcester's development of Blush Ivory wares at the turn of the century. A huge range of small decorative objects were made of matt glazed Parian, decorated with enamel flowers designed by Edward Raby and Frank Roberts.

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