

Clarice Cliff Rediscovered.

Introduction

‘Clarice Cliff is, today, regarded as one of the most influential ceramic artists of the 20th century’.

Reading this statement on the Clarice Cliff Collectors’ Club website provided the impetus for me to recall the circumstances which led to her rediscovery in the 1970s. For anyone accorded such a tribute it must be possible to substantiate so bold a claim with supporting evidence. There is no doubting that the Clarice Cliff phenomenon continues to thrive in the world of ceramic collecting. However, it does not in any way answer the question of who she influenced. Her influence certainly did not extend to any of her designer contemporaries in the industry. Indeed, as I will in due course go on to explain, most of the ceramic designers I had the good fortune to have known, who were present at the height of her initial popularity, were generally dismissive of the claims being made on her behalf by participants in the antiques trade and collecting fraternity.

Given that the views I am about to present will not be universally endorsed it is important that my credentials are made clear at the outset. I was until my move to what became Staffordshire University in the post of Keeper of Ceramics at Stoke-on-Trent’s City Museum and Art Gallery. Perhaps more importantly in this particular context I met Clarice Cliff in the year prior to her death at her home, Chetwynd House at Clayton on the outskirts of Newcastle-under-Lyme. The circumstances of our meeting resulted from an invitation concerning certain items she believed might be of interest to the museum.

My aim in writing Clarice Cliff Rediscovered is to dispel the hyperbole that is evident in some accounts of her career as a ceramic designer, while acknowledging her undoubted ability in developing an impressive response to the style we identify as Art Deco.