

## Pots, Personalities and Propaganda.

Because the majority of early ceramic artefacts were made to serve a utilitarian purpose, typically as containers for the storage, preservation and serving of food, the hazards arising from frequent use have inevitably reduced their chances of survival through to modern times. Pots that have survived the vicissitudes of time were perhaps considered exceptional at the date of their production, either by virtue of unusual artistic qualities, or an intended purpose. For example, Italian maiolica wares and many types of Chinese porcelain were valuable possessions even at the time of their first appearance. While in many cases they possessed characteristics beyond their obvious functionality their apparent artistic or technical qualities were occasionally sufficiently extraordinary that they proved a deterrent to frequent use, in other words they became treasured objects which might have gone on to become family heirlooms, or ultimately in some cases museum exhibits. Items qualifying for this designation were from the time of their manufacture often priced beyond the purchasing power of the average citizen; hence their artistic qualities and ever increasing age have ensured their perpetuity into modern times.

In order to expand our criteria for determining rarity and often increasing preciousness we need to evaluate ceramic artefacts in a wider context. Prior to the invention of paper and, later, printing the dissemination of news and knowledge was largely limited to word of mouth, a means of communication that was obviously over dependent on personal contacts. Despite the advent of the town crier, which was in recognition of the need for information and news amongst a wider audience, alternatives in the form of printed ephemera signalled an increasing presence by the early eighteenth century. The distribution of information in a documentary form was, however, affected by circumstances relating to their storage and, not least, their continuing relevance. Domestic circumstances also determined whether the printed word survived for more than a period of days. Engraved images and later photography, which increased in use from the 1850s, enabled the printing of newspapers and magazines which, in addition to their news content, introduced opportunities for depicting personalities and places which previously were known only via rare publications and written descriptions. A publication which by its appearance laid the foundations for a new and revolutionary approach to the chronicling of world events made its appearance on Sunday the 14<sup>th</sup>. of May 1842 under the title of the Illustrated London News with the proclamation; **'Here we make our bow, determined to keep continually before the eye of the world a living and moving programme of all its activities and influences'**

Prior to the appearance of printed newspapers the application of an engraved image on a metallic surface was already known to the armourer, silversmith and other metal working trades, and from the 1750s as a basis for the transference of engraved decoration to glazed and enamelled surfaces.

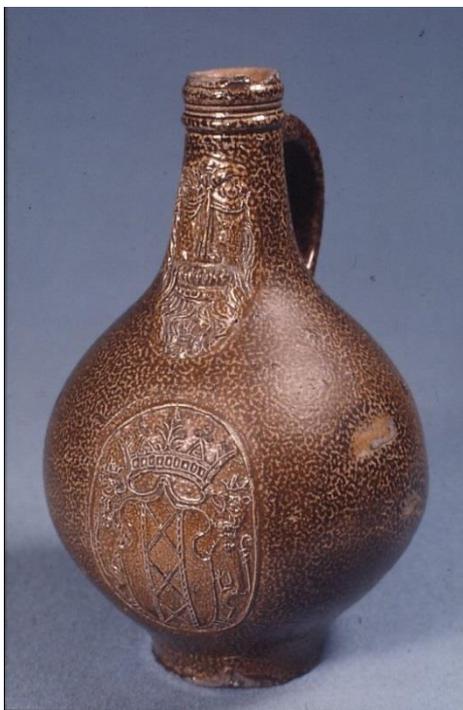
However, prior to its benefits being introduced to the medium of ceramics potters had occasion to add names, letters, and short dedications on their wares, especially from the late sixteenth to the eighteenth century, via the use of incised lines etc sgraffito and slip trailing (enamelling and other technically sophisticated decorating techniques were not to appear until the following century) for the commemoration of births, betrothals, even adding expressions such as 'The best is not too good for you', and in rare cases the maker's name. The limitation common to the aforementioned decorating techniques was that they were dependent on the potter's innate artistry. However, the duplication of three dimensional subjects, such as figurines and portrait busts, was made possible with the introduction of moulding. Although fired clay moulds had existed since antiquity it was the availability of plaster-of-Paris that initiated the potential for what would later become mass production.

The late 1760s witnessed the appearance of printed porcelain wares ornamented with either miniature-like portraits of eminent contemporaries or scenes adapted from available printed sources. In Britain such subjects were created by, for example, Robert Hancock and Richard Holdship, by a method of decoration occasionally used on certain porcelains from the Worcester Porcelain factory. While there is perhaps a tendency to think of printed wares as a less expensive alternative to similar porcelain products decorated by hand, Worcester and its competitors in London and Staffordshire, especially in the first mentioned case, succeeded in creating objects which achieved acceptance at the highest levels of the market for luxury items. Similar printed images also appeared at this period on enamelled copper bibelots; products emanating from small workshops at establishments located at Battersea in London and in the South Staffordshire town of Bilston.

The need for increased production, then as now, presupposes evidence concerning the existence of a demand for a given product, perhaps exceeding that previously satisfied by an existing technology. For example, the survival figures for early delftware and slip-decorated earthenwares indicate a requirement for products readily satisfied by hand methods, thus suggesting that the demand for such items was relatively modest. The essential difference separating these early earthenwares from the earliest printed porcelains is evident in the superior technical qualities of, for example, mid eighteenth century tablewares in porcelain from the Bow or Worcester factories. The main difference indicated by these later products and the wares previously identified is their respective target markets. Slipwares, as represented by examples made in Staffordshire, were largely distributed through markets catering for what may be identified for present purposes as agriculturally- based communities.



Prince Rupert F.R.S. of the Rhine is described as a noted German soldier, admiral and scientist. His Wikipedia entry goes on to report that Rupert's involvement in scientific invention and art made him one of the more colourful individuals of the Restoration period. As a founder member of the Royal Society he would have surely known the Roberts Boyle and Hooke who in turn via their links with the University of Oxford moved in the same circle as the potter John Dwight, indeed, this fine portrait bust was possibly made at Dwight's Fulham pottery to commemorate the Prince's death at Westminster in 1682. It has been claimed as a rare example of Grinling Gibbon's work in what for him was the less familiar medium of clay. Rupert's other biographical details include the information that he frequently assisted fellow members of the Royal Society in the development of technologies with their origins in the Netherlands and Germany. In this connection it is significant that even in cases of patented innovations protection was applicable only to their country of origin, an absence of protection which would have been much to the advantage of John Dwight, in his access to the technique of salt glazing with its origins in Germany, and for which he took out an English patent in 1672.



German saltglaze bellarmine of circa 1670. The name bellarmine was a satirical swipe against a notorious Cardinal Bellarmine for his alleged persecution of German Protestants.



English 'mottled ware' imitation in earthenware of a bellarmine, circa 1680.