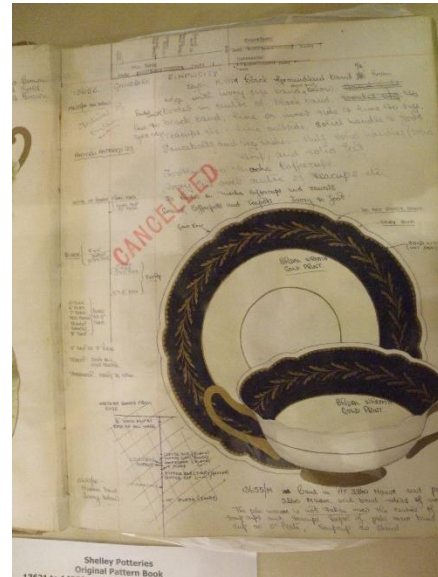


The Holy Grail

By Lyle Keating

Like the knights' quest of old, our search for access to the Shelley Pattern Books continues. For the first time in a long time, the end appears to be in sight. But first, a little history...

The Pattern Books are almost as old as Shelley. They were the equivalent of a modern day database. As new patterns were created, a detailed description, complete with hand painted pictures, was carefully added to the book so that the particular ware could be replicated in the future. Although this may seem implausible to our modern minds, Shelley was willing to assist individuals in replacing a broken piece to a set. If the piece was not in production they would source a white ware piece and decorate it to the required design and finish. This was done until the company found that it was very time consuming and not financially viable. Ray Reynolds, Shelley's last Decorating Manager, then went through the pattern books stamping the pages with a cancelled stamp (as shown in photo), so that if someone asked for that particular pattern, they would be advised that it was no longer possible to produce it.



As one can imagine, these books are an invaluable window into the past: a modern day Rosetta stone to cryptic pattern numbers adjoining a backstamp or the key to the name of a beautiful, but unknown, litho. Under the circumstances, one would have thought that the books would be safeguarded against all perils, but nothing could be farther from the truth.

In 1966 Shelley was acquired by Allied English Potteries (AEP). The old Shelley molds were smashed, and the Pattern Books literally tossed into a dumpster. Miraculously, they were rescued by Ray Reynolds, who coincidentally had painted many of the pictures in the later books. From Ray, the books eventually made their way into the care of the Royal Doulton archive. AEP acquired Royal Doulton in 1971, merging the two groups under the Doulton name. AEP was renamed Royal Doulton Tableware Ltd and became a subsidiary of Doulton & Co.

The Shelley Pattern books then became part of the Minton Archive as the brand names of the combined group included Minton (which was the most detailed collection of historical information dating from 1793), Royal Doulton, Beswick, Royal Albert, Royal Crown Derby, Shelley, Paragon and six other smaller pottery companies.

In 2005, Royal Doulton was acquired by Waterford Wedgwood, which was itself created by the 1986 merger of those two venerable companies. Following yet another round of retrenchments and a heated battle over employee pensions not unlike those going on in many American states, Waterford Wedgwood filed for bankruptcy protection, was subsequently acquired by KPS Capital Partners in 2009 and became known as WWRD (Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton).

For the vast majority of this time, the Pattern Books, and the data they contained, were inaccessible but for the dedicated work of Chris Davenport,



our club's historian, who painstakingly transcribed the wartime and postwar books to make their content available in his seminal work Shelley Pottery: The Later Years, Heather Publications Ltd., Congleton, Cheshire, UK: 1997. Thanks to Chris's efforts, two of the books were on public display at the UK Club's twenty-fifth anniversary conference in 2011.

Light at the End of the Tunnel?

Following Waterford Wedgwood's 2007 decision to auction the Minton Archives, the fate of the Shelley Pattern Books was placed in grave doubt as the Minton Archive and the Shelley Pattern books were moved to Bonham's in London in preparation for their sale.

The public outcry against the piecemeal breakup of this quintessential bit of British patrimony was deafening. The auction was cancelled, and a seven year crusade commenced to rescue the Archive. Thanks to action by the British Art Fund, backed by a £1.1 million grant from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and private donations, the Minton Archive has been purchased for £1.5m. The archive has been gifted to the Stoke-on-Trent City Archives. Below is an update from the city archivist as of April 2015:

"Thank you for your interest in the archive of Doulton and Minton. We are absolutely delighted this wonderful archive is coming home to Stoke-on-Trent. We are now arranging to take delivery of the archive from the various locations in which it has been stored. We are not yet able to say when parts of the collection will be available to the public in the reading room of Stoke on Trent City Archives, but it will inevitably take some time and a lot of work to process this very large collection of material. Parts of the collection, notably the archive of the firm of Minton itself, already have been catalogue(d) and we expect that this will be the first to become available. We will put no definite time on this at this stage but are hopeful that it will be by early autumn when also the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, which is no stranger to hosting world-class exhibitions will be putting on an initial display.

"We are compiling a mailing list of people who have expressed an interest in the archive. We will use this to share any news we have about access and exhibitions or other work around the collection. Please confirm if you would like to be added to this list. Alternatively or in addition you can follow the Archive Service on Twitter @ArchandHeritage and on Facebook www.facebook.com/StaffordshireArchivesandHeritage, where we will also be keeping people informed."

More information at:

<http://www.stokesentinel.co.uk/Iconic-Minton-collection-safe-thanks-1-5m-deal/story-26263070-detail/story.html>

The Penultimate Chapter

On May 1, 2015, Finnish home and garden firm Fiskars paid \$437m (£280m) to buy Waterford Wedgwood Royal Doulton. Fiskars said the deal will allow the company to extend its portfolio of garden and home goods.

In the middle of May 2015 the Minton and Shelley Pattern books were returned from Bonham's London to the City Archive. The remaining patterns books and historical literature from the various other companies that have been stored at WWRD at Barlaston, have been listed onto a database and are due to be moved to the City Archive by the end of June 2015.

And so the quest continues, but this time with more hope. As Churchill put it, "Now this is not the end. It is not even the beginning of the end. But it is,

perhaps, the end of the beginning.”

--The assistance of Chris Davenport in providing information for this article is gratefully acknowledged.



March 2016 Update

The pattern books are now available to view for research in Stoke on Trent. An online catalogue is being prepared with assistance from the UK Shelley Group. The catalogue will list the books detailing pattern numbers covered, with date ranges where possible. Before visiting the archive, carefully read the information and conditions from the web sites below:

Hours and Location:

<http://preview.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/contact/stoke/home.aspx>

Planning a visit?

<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/contact/planningavisit/home.aspx>.

Archives Research Service:

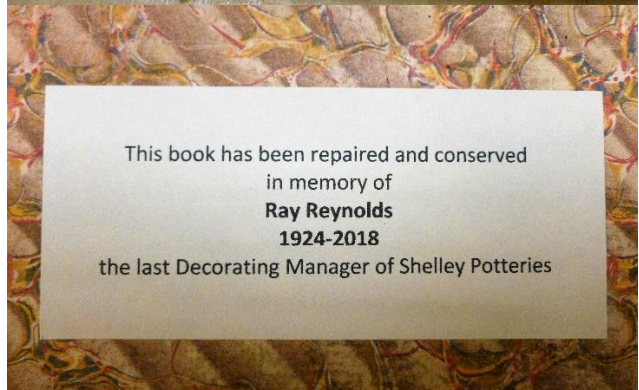
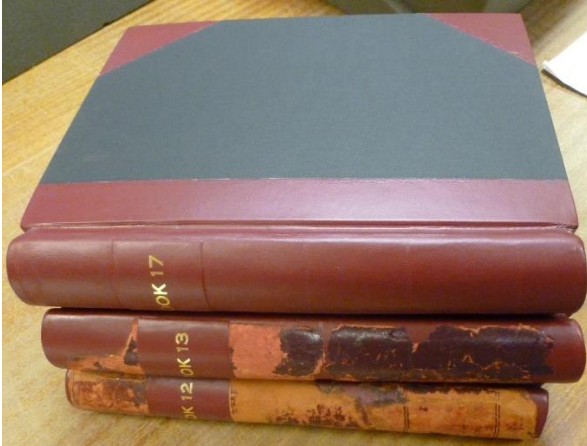
<http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/services/research/ResearchServices.aspx>

Email:

stoke.archives@stoke.gov.uk

Pattern Book Restoration - 2019

Through a cooperative effort on behalf of the UK Shelley Group, The Australasian Shelley Club, and the National Shelley Club, arrangements have been made to commence restoration of the Pattern Books.



This book has been repaired and conserved
in memory of
Ray Reynolds
1924-2018
the last Decorating Manager of Shelley Potteries