

OBSOLESCENCE AND RENEWAL

NEIL BROWNSWORD

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Copies, doubles, and skeuomorphs

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**Three hundred years of pottery production in Newcastle-under-Lyme,
c.1670-1956**

Miranda Goodby

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Biography

Obsolescence and Renewal
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Preface

Obsolescence and Renewal extends artist Neil Brownsword's examination of marginalised histories associated with the origins of British ceramic manufacture. North Staffordshire's industrial and economic growth was fuelled in part by its imitation and assimilation of Chinese styles and commodities to supply demand for the burgeoning fashion of tea drinking in the 17th and 18th centuries. Pre-industrial attempts to emulate the sophistications of porcelain and other ceramics imported from southern China eventually led to material and technological advances that later influenced the region's development as a global centre of production.

In revisiting these histories, Brownsword sets out to further this process of exchange between materials, artefacts and production practices. Through copying his own ceramic culture, he dismantles methods of uniform reproduction by subverting traditional and digital technologies. Transferring his knowledge of ceramics to other materials and processes, Brownsword deliberately embraces the deviations and errors that occur within the thresholds of image and object simulation. His 'copies without originals' aim to reconnect a contemporary audience to innovations of an obscured industrial past that remain significant contributions to the cultural identity of north Staffordshire.

The texts that follow introduce Brownsword's artistic practice from a range of theoretical positions, and offer a historic context to Newcastle-under-Lyme's important contributions to early ceramic industrialisation.

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Copies, doubles, and skeuomorphs

Tan-dem

Read any text about artist and researcher Neil Brownsword's practice and you'll be prompted to think about industrial histories, systems of labour, archaeological remnants of ceramic production, tacit knowledge, and intangible heritage: ideas that reverberate like an echo across multiple texts. This allusion to echoes – to the repetition or reflection or sounds – has an affinity with the 'dual movement', the *no longer* and the *not yet*, of hauntology.¹ The repetitions, utterances, and preoccupations of a time, as well as the 'unexplored potentials' of the past and 'the tantalising ache of a future just out of reach'.² The late radical thinker Mark Fisher wrote that: 'The future is always experienced as a haunting: as a virtuality that already impinges on the present, conditioning expectations and motivating cultural production.'³ A hovering between past and future.

Brownsword's use of history is dynamic. Not confined to a symbolic or social register: the workers, technicians, factories, yards, and pits of Stoke-on-Trent that have been subject to the inexorable drama of boom and bust, invention, re-invention, opportunity, post-industrial real estate, and contemporary art. The compelling image or source of nostalgic reverie is only half the story. Brownsword's focus on the material intricacies of ceramic production and the uneven technological advances in North Staffordshire from the late-seventeenth century onwards throw us back to sites of invention such as Bradwell Wood, only to be wrested back to the present through the digital processes that constitute Brownsword's portal through time. Walter Benjamin used the term *jetztzeit* to describe moments from history that fall outside time's linear flow, which, once recognised, can be applied to the present and future to radical effect. Fashion scours history – its images, spectres, ghosts – to satisfy its audiences' quest for the new.⁴ Anchored by the failures, wasters, slips, evidence of trial and error, and the pockmarked topography of the Potteries, Brownsword's mining aims not for new commodities but expressions of material culture that finished objects conceal.

It is no surprise that hauntology is of interest to Brownsword – in particular, its manifestations in the materials and technologies of our time. There is a resistance to change, an inertia, to be felt in ceramics production, by which past forms remain visible in new, digitally led designs. 3D-printed ceramics made using ceramic resin often rely on recognisable forms to foreground to their striated and 'scribbled' materiality. There is a ghosting here, too, in their return to an aesthetic past in the face of an as-yet-unexplored future. 3D printers have promised much, yet as design historian Tanya Harrod intuited back in 2012, the artistic possibilities of desktop rapid prototyping are, at best, a novelty.⁵

A concept that can help us to navigate this complex hovering of past and future is the skeuomorph. The skeuomorph, which roughly translates as "structure-form", is a nineteenth-century formulation that acknowledges the formal interrelationship among material things. It denotes an object whose method of production corresponds to an altogether different material – such as basketry techniques assimilated into ceramics, or woodwork into masonry – and is described accordingly as "skeuomorphic". It was conceived within a newly industrialising context where the ideological role of objects, as well as the impact

of new fabrication methods and materials, was central to architectural and design discourse.⁶ The skeuomorph is an object whose form markedly differs from its constituent material, or vice versa, that its materials are at odds with its form. This owes to its method of production, to taking up, or experimenting with processes from across material practice. The skeuomorph exhibits the inventiveness that issues from the exchange of ideas, materials, and techniques across disciplines, and is very much in keeping with the contemporary mode of making.

The skeuomorph also exhibits a hauntology of its own. What art historian Alice Donohue has keenly observed, in her critique of the role of description in the interpretation of ancient Greek sculpture, is that the skeuomorph simultaneously embodies the 'formal histories' of its making, the *before* and *after*, and *all events in-between*. This, she argues, is owing to 'the capacity of clay and other materials to carry information about the formal history of artifacts.'⁷ A clay form, for example, bears witness to the circumstances of its making, and its life thereafter. It maintains those circumstances as form. *It is telling of its own making histories*. The temporal complexity of the skeuomorph is its most potent asset.

Brownsword is equally astute. His recent exploration into the Elers brothers' activities in Staffordshire is motivated by his fascination with the translation of skill, technical know-how, and histories across materials. The Dutch-born silversmiths, who relocated from London to Bradwell Wood in the 1680s, slip-cast wares using the Staffordshire red clays and used 'carefully prepared metal profiles' for the accurate arrangement of raised bands and handles with 'machine-like precision'.⁸ Their success lay in the prudent translation of silversmithing techniques – of moulds, casting, and lathing – to the production of ceramics, in their ability to recognise the skeuomorphic potential of clay. Yet, this precision also gave rise to doubt: the 'fineness and sharpness of detail evident in the Elers' relief ornamentation'⁹ pointed to two different material contexts and the ambiguity of its origin. *The future experienced as a haunting*.

The conventional understanding of ghosts is that they draw their potency and power from the reservoir of the past: an ill perpetrated against the ghosted subject that necessitates their re-iteration in the present, usually as a warning. It is a device that regularly used in literature and film. Once the ghost has shocked the living and conveyed its story (the tragic truth of Hamlet's father's murder, for example), its temporal frame is resolved ushering in the denouement, whether that be peaceful or gory.

Outside the framework of Hollywood horror and page-turners, ghosts and ghosting are much more commonplace. Ghost writers exist everywhere (think J. R. Moehringer's ghosting in Prince Harry's *Spare* published early in 2023 as one notable example), and ghost sites – websites that can be viewed but have not been updated for years – pepper the Internet like fragments of old satellites in space. These are examples of ghostly activity-in-the-present; spectral entities that live rather than drift.

In attempting to frame an existence-in-the-present for ghosts and spectres we can look to the Russian author Fyodor Dostoyevsky's novel *The Double* published in 1846. The book follows the story of a St Petersburg civil servant called Golyadkin whose life is turned upside down by the appearance of a doppelganger at his workplace, who proceeds to steal his identity. The double becomes more respected, liked, and admired by colleagues and those higher up on the social scale. Golyadkin's replica manages to convince the superior officers of

his merits by claiming authorship of work completed by his twin in a cunning, deceiving trick. After this he proceeds to humiliate the original Golyadkin.¹⁰

Golyadkin's double is a ghost or spectre with limited historical baggage that flourishes in the present – what we might refer to as a very capable ghost. Deceitful maybe, but performing duties better than the original. It is no surprise that Dostoyevsky wrote this book as mechanical reproduction was taking hold of European countries in its various and uneven way. The precise, accurate and effectively functioning products of industry highlighted the frailty of the original, left 'shivering like a kitten drenched in cold water,' as Dostoyevsky describes the demise of the original Golyadkin.¹¹ We sympathise with the original, named as the book's 'hero,' and follow his journey to madness. But the modern, industrial world favoured the qualities of the capable ghost-in-the-present.

In nineteenth-century industrial production, including the ceramics of North Staffordshire, the pre-eminence of the copy simultaneously cemented the power of the original as the ultimate authenticator. Out of reach objects stowed away in private collections and museums served as a barometer by which to judge all the clever copies. However, like Dostoyevsky's capable ghost in *The Double*, Brownsword challenges this entrenched faith in the power of originals and, at the very least, invites us to appraise the way in which the copy achieved its ascendancy.

Far from being imitative, the skeuomorph emerges from an exploratory encounter with materials, from a productive merging of technologies, histories, and materialities. Skeuomorphic forms exhibit the specificity of their making, as a form of present-ness, as well as gesture towards their origin, as a form of past-ness. In other words, they are telling of their own history. This telling-ness of form is significant to the skeuomorph for two reasons. Firstly, the form objectifies the processes of its making – as cultural theorist Pierre Lévy declares, 'it traces the situation'.¹² This notion of artistic form as an act of disclosure enables makers and researchers to work backwards from the final object-form to learn about the specifics of its genesis. Secondly, form is telling of its own history, the time of its own making. Form is representative of "present-ness" and "past-ness," of "before" and "after": form is an aggregate of times. *The no longer and the not yet, of hauntology*.

Brownsword pushes this idea of translation (after the Elers' brothers) in multiple ways in his new exhibition *Obsolescence and Renewal*. Having trained as a modeller for the ceramics industry, he is attuned to the limitless potential of the mould, its reproducibility. He sees the mould as 'a means to capture the memory of an object in another material form,'¹³ yet he plays with its faithfulness and precision, wilfully introducing glitches, fault-lines, and imperfections into the casting process. It's a deconstructive project, a way to destabilise the replica, but in doing so, Brownsword is also laying bare the systems of production embodied in the mould's fabrication. By casting the natches, feeds, and spares of a haul of defaced and discarded rubber moulds salvaged following the closure of numerous factories, he exposes their 'mechanics', how they function to form objects. This translation into other materials produces sliced and fragmentary forms, a hybrid of histories that pile up in the mould.

And it's not just histories that are assembled, but also failures. Having been slashed and defaced by their manufacturers to sabotage future production, the moulds are rendered useless, stripped of their use-value and context. Yet, it is at

exactly this fissure in economic reproduction that Brownsword intervenes. The disfigured moulds are re-moulded as a regenerative act, cast in bone china – to replicate the "whiteness" of porcelain – and reactivated, destabilising notions of industrial perfection and material hierarchies. A conscious repetition of failures.

Given the radical potential Walter Benjamin invested into the mechanically reproduced image, it is curious that he did not dwell on the dynamics of manual reproduction. Akin to forgery, Benjamin dismissed the ability of manual reproduction to challenge the authority of the original work.¹⁴ It was unlike the mechanical reproduction of photography and film that channel the aura of artwork out into new democratic artefacts that Benjamin saw revolutionising the experience of visual culture all around him.

Manual copying, forgery, attempting to replicate a technique, has medieval, pre-industrial connotations; suggestive of an age where technology had not achieved technological autonomy or a life force of its own. Forgery conjures up the image of skilled painters chancing their arm at deceiving museum authorities and collectors in accepting a copy as original. But the category of manual reproduction can be a much broader church and include the most commonplace practices of acquiring artistic skill that are far from the dubious morality of faking a signature. Medieval apprentices imitated and copied the work of their master as a pathway to their own accession to membership within a guild. Sure, the auratic qualities of the original were not threatened in this context; however perfect an imitation, the apprentice's work was shackled to that of the master. In the period of nascent industrialisation manual reproduction started to pose a much greater challenge to the authority of the original, questioning Benjamin's expectation of its quiescence.

Staffordshire potteries vied with each other in the eighteenth century on two counts: to achieve as close an imitation as possible to Chinese porcelain, a European project of imitation that had lasted centuries, and to do so with repeatable precision. This was a very hands-on affair, with various materials stretched and tested to see whether they could match the fabled whiteness, thinness, and quality of Chinese ceramics. The Pomona works of Newcastle-under-Lyme led (probably) by William Steers, was one of these manufacturers, whose existence is proved only by scanty historical documentation and pot sherds found during a renovation of a car park. Brownsword has taken these fragments, digitally scanned, scaled up, and flipped them multiple times to produce almost-unrecognisable copies from which he has produced physical moulds. Recipes for the Pomona proto-porcelain paste are to be remixed and used to fill the moulds. The Pomona ware might exist again as chipped, handleless totems to the ingenuity of forgotten inventors.

Cultural geographer Tim Edensor writes that 'artefacts consigned to the status of waste, are not intended to be remembered, and they announce themselves as the objects of unfinished disposal. Yet the absent presences they raise up are vital signs of prior life. [...] This erosion of singularity through which the object becomes "un-manufactured" remembers the process by which it was assembled: the materials that were brought together for its fabrication, the skilled labour that routinely utilized an aptitude to make similar things, the machines and tools which were used to shape it.'¹⁵

This same process of disintegration is evident in Brownsword's large-scale tapestry pieces, drawn out and marred across the coloured weft threads to resemble Chinese landscape paintings. They, too, are "un-manufactured" – the product of a 'rudimentary scanning process' explored by Brownsword.¹⁶ Taking his collection of early north Staffordshire chinoiserie (c. 1800), with their hand-painted motifs in magnificent reds, pinks, and yellows, Brownsword has developed a method for rotating, turning, and manipulating their imagery through his scanner, introducing slippages and repeating errors – a digital slur of their analogue precursors. Yet, what results is a spectacular unveiling of their fabrication, a detailed account of their inherent skill, as if on long pause. Like a *fermata* used in musical notation to signal a prolonged note or rest.

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In his last work, *Rythmanalysis* (1992), the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre made the startling, but simple, observation that absolute repetition could only exist in the world of logical and mathematical thought. In other arenas of life, and certainly in the realm of material culture, $A \neq A \neq A$. 'The second A differs from the first by the fact that it is second,'¹⁷ he writes, essentially providing a unique temporal dimension to otherwise entirely similar things. Following this, Lefebvre quickly asserts that rather than resulting in homogeneity as we might expect, repetition produces differences.

There is no equivalent extract that helps us park the idea that mass or industrial production was homogenous, repetitious, and effaced difference. Diversity in what was produced, to borrow terminology from furniture designer David Pye, certainly diminished as mechanical reproduction achieved a degree of certainty, each product churned out the factory looking like the one next to it.¹⁸ Nevertheless, verisimilitude need not signal the end of an object's uniqueness. Standardised products were produced by different workers in the factory whose mood and execution of skill changed day on day, similar objects ended up with completely different biographies, how technique was adopted varied.

Brownsword's work alerts us to the differences that arise in the context of producing ceramic copies destined for non-elite markets. For the work *FACTORY* (2017), he commissioned the skilled Stoke-on-Trent china flower-maker Rita Floyd to produce delicate flowers that would normally adorn plates, dishes, tea sets, but in this work accumulated in a pile on the floor. In the radical jettisoning of such delicate forms into the mound, the difference in the repetition is amplified, each flower taking on a slumped, disorderly form. Photographs have neatly captured this moment where the repeated motif is subverted. The work – like the squidgy kiln furniture that bears the imprint of the factory worker's hands, broken saggars, and kiln failures that featured in *Alchemy and Metamorphosis* (2021–22) at the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery – attest to the differences and material drama produced by a culture shaped by repetition and routine.

\ EPILOGUE \

In an attempt to unveil more about Brownsword himself, the idea came to subject him to the same digital renderings as his ceramic works. When asking the open-source AI software ChatGPT to expand on how Brownsword's work relates to the copy, it replied that although 'he does not focus on "the copy" in the traditional sense, his work often delves into issues related to authenticity, heritage, and the impact of mass production on traditional craft.'

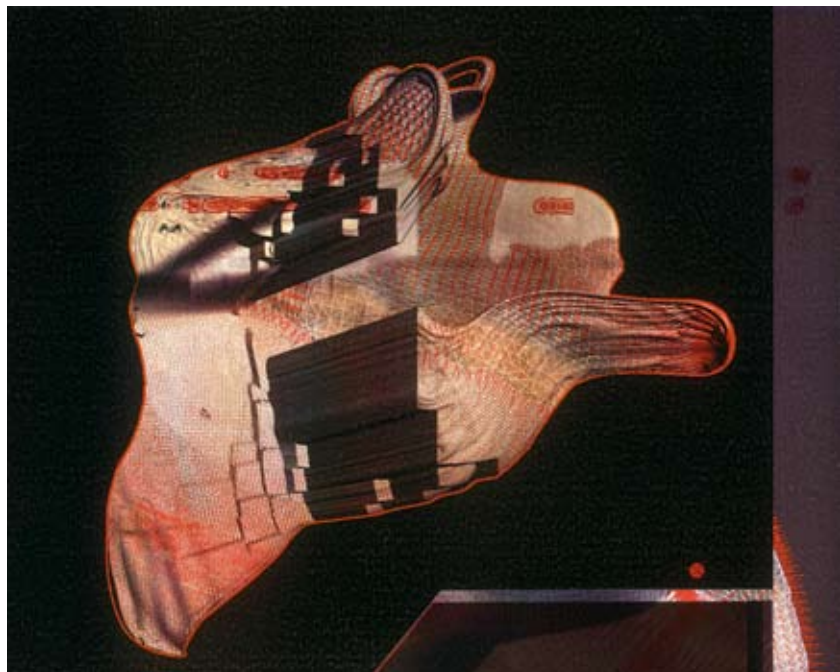
Within this series of vignettes, the intention has been to stretch our understanding of copies, doubles, and skeuomorphs, questioning their parameters and quasi-spiritual qualities in the context of industrial material culture. As with Brownsword (according to ChatGPT) our focus also has not been on "the copy" in the traditional sense.'

ChatGPT is a chatbot that also doesn't produce copies in 'the traditional sense', the words produced are completely new each time. When typing a question again and again, slightly different variations emerge. ChatGPT doesn't plagiarise 'in the traditional sense' in that the words produced are not stolen from others' writing. Instead, ChatGPT mines the vast wealth of data on the Internet to produce sentences that represent the *most likely* best response to the question being asked. The algorithm identifies which words best fit alongside each other and how they embed within a larger sentence.¹⁹

ChatGPT constitutes an amalgamated, conglomerated response to a question rather than lifting text directly. Yet, its ability to reproduce text can produce a moral panic and suspicion. Texts produced by AI can be copied by individuals and attributed to their own authorship (creating a headache for educators and assessors as plagiarism checkers don't work). As with the Elers' brothers developing moulds for slip-cast ceramics, the technological parameters of AI can easily be characterised as destabilising authorial authority, ushering in a period where craft – and its intimate connection to sentient humans – is threatened.

Like technological advances in ceramic manufacture, ChatGPT has been subject to inordinate amounts of testing to improve its efficacy. Still, quirks exist within the text where the flow of words is interrupted by an anomaly, like a deep pothole on a smooth road. These can be spotted by the astute reader who might want more from their text than a 'vanilla press release'.²⁰ ChatGPT, in its response to our question, frequently used the words 'delving' and 'in-depth' to articulate Brownsword's attention to detail. It reads as contrived (can you 'dive into the implication of copying?') And the algorithm infuriatingly persisted – despite attempts to throw it off course – in presenting ideas about the copy (and Brownsword's work more generally) within the very linear historical narrative of craftsmanship being replaced by mass production. There was limited acknowledgement of how Brownsword's work complicates the idea of technological determinism, how he is drawn to instances of craft in mass production, and moments of technological failure.

Perhaps this is a message the computer just doesn't want to hear.



Neil Brownsword, *Obfuscation Series*, archival print, 2023

Tan-dem

Set up in 2018, Tan-dem is the collaborative writing and research partnership of Kimberley Chandler and Stephen Knott. Working alongside one another and in dialogue, their aim is to broaden our understanding of craft and materiality, through writing, teaching, and talking. To date, Tan-dem has presented an alternative history of British ceramics comprised of archival fragments (Centre of Ceramic Art, York, 2018); taken up residence in Camberwell College of Arts, London, for *On The Way To Language* (2018); and compiled an annotated list of global 'Useful Craft' initiatives as part of a research residency for Grizedale Arts (2020–21).

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Dr Stephen Knott is a writer, researcher and educator in craft theory and history, and, in June 2023, he was appointed director of the Crafts Study Centre, Farnham, part of the University for the Creative Arts. He is author of *Amateur Craft: History and Theory* (Bloomsbury, 2015), a book that derived from his AHRC-funded PhD at the Royal College of Art/Victoria and Albert Museum. He is one of the editors of *The Journal of Modern Craft* and has written articles for *Design and Culture* and *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History and Material Culture*, and *Crafts*.

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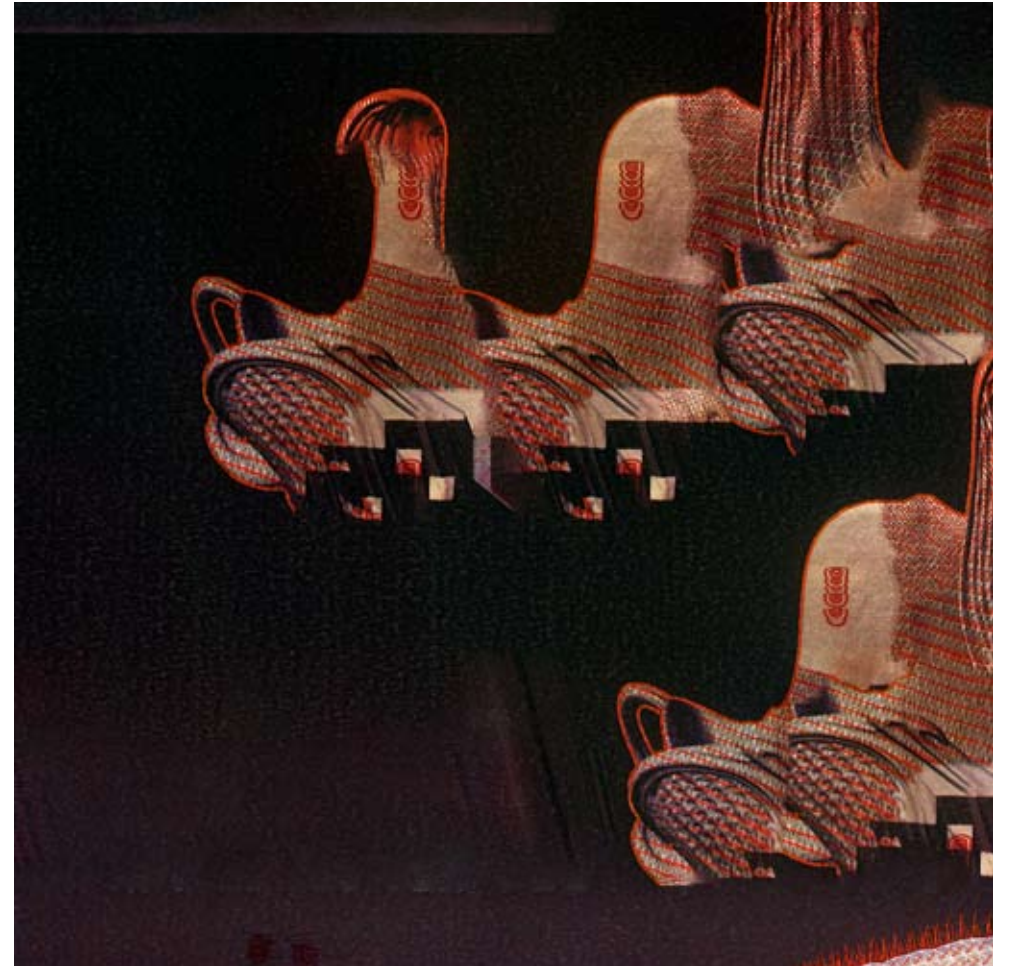
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Neil Brownsword, *Obfuscation Series*, archival print, 2023



Detail of map from Robert Plot's
The Natural History of Staffordshire
published in 1686



LAND

Thursfield
als
New Chap

Endon

Talk on
the Hill

Kidcren
Turnhurst

Brownedge

Chedleton

Ashenhurst

Ferny-hill

Golden Hill

G Chell

Bemersley green

Norton i the
Moors

Heakly Hall

Basford

Sharpdij

Eardley

Red Street

L.Chell

Bignall
hill

Chaterley

Tunstall

Ford green

Stanley

Babton

White hough

63

Bradwall

Sheydgreen

Millton

Bagna

Chumet R

50 Ipston

Chesterton

Burlem

Hilton Al.

Cunsall

Dimsdale

Hanley green

Bucknall

WETLEY

Kingsley

Grubbers Ash

Woolstanton

Shelton

Botflon

MOOR

Woodhead

Keel Pavillion

NEWCASTLE
under Lyne

L. Fenton

Fenton Park

N. Holme

Whiteyst

Lockwood

82 Keel hall

Stoke upon Trent

Lane Delph

Park Hall

Roughcoat

The Hill

86 Penkhull

G. Fenton

72 Weston
coyne

Caverswall

Shutland head

Boothen

Hanford

Meerlane end

Meer

Dilhene
Dilhene
Heb

17

Cheadle

64

Butterton

Clayton

Hanford
Bridge

59 Lonston

Normacot Grange

Fulbrook

CHEADLE

Cheadle ewes

Whitmore

Hanchurch

Hanford

Blurton

Cocknage

Blithe Bridge

Stone House

Huntley

Castle Cro

H

Trentham

38

Barlaston

Stallington

Fulford

Severly Green

Braycot

4

Shelton under
the hill

Hareley

Beech

Tittensor

13 Modersall

Knen Hall

Lees

U. Tene

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orlton

Hatton

Three hundred years of pottery production in Newcastle-under-Lyme, c. 1670-1956

Miranda Goodby

Despite the physical closeness of Newcastle-under-Lyme to the neighbouring six Towns that make up the north Staffordshire Potteries, the 'Loyal and Ancient Borough' is not known as a major pottery producing centre in its own right. Instead, Newcastle is primarily known as a market town, founded by charter in 1173 and until overtaken by the neighbouring settlements in what is now Stoke-on-Trent, it was the main town in the district. Situated on the main transport routes north-south, it was home to lawyers, doctors, bankers, coaching inns, and the post office – in the late 18th century even Josiah Wedgwood's important Etruria factory was described as 'near Newcastle'. However, there is a long tradition of pottery making in and around Newcastle, including brick and tile making, and tobacco pipe production.

Geologically the town of Newcastle is situated on "barren measures" comprising thick deposits of red marls overlaying inaccessible (hence barren) coal measures, unlike the Potteries towns where the coal is easily accessible. Although this limited the development of fine pottery making in Newcastle itself, nonetheless during the late 17th and 18th centuries it made small but significant contributions to the development of the pottery industry, while the surrounding district flourished as a centre for brick and tile making.

The earliest written description of clay working in Newcastle is that of Dr Robert Plot (1640-1696) in his *Natural History of Staffordshire*.¹ Plot visited Newcastle-under-Lyme in the 1670s and described the few examples of pottery-making that he saw there. These included the tilemaker Thomas Wood whose tiles were: "...so good and lasting, that notwithstanding they have been put to the hardship of dividing the parts of Garden knots, to endure not only the perpetual moisture of the earth, but frost, snow, and all sorts of weather: yet they few of them decay, scarce 5 Tiles in 500 having failed in 20 years' time; so that now he has been followed by all the Country thereabout."²

Plot added that "on a bank by the wayside, betwixt Newcastle and Keele, I met with a peculiar sort of brick-earth, which when burnt became all over blew, those bricks only which were placed furthest from the fire, having any redness in them."³

Brick and tile making has continued to be an important industry up to the present day, although confined to the edge of the urban areas where the clay could be dug, processed, and fired. The town's new Guildhall, completed in 1713, was constructed from bricks made at Newcastle Corporation's own Kingsfield brickworks at Basford⁴, and today Ibstock Brick at Chesterton continues to exploit the significant local clay deposits for worldwide distribution.

Plot also visited the tobacco pipe maker Charles Riggs who made "very good pipes of three sorts of Clay, a white and a blew, which He has from between Shelton and Hanley green, whereof the blew clay burns the whitest, but not so full as the white, i.e. it shrinks more; but the best sort He has from Grubbers Ash, being whitish mixt with yellow, it is a short brittle sort of Clay, but burnes full and white, yet He sometimes mixes it with the blew before mentioned."⁵

Although he was using local clays Riggs was also using foreign technology to make his pipes, with Plot reporting that he had "a sort of Engin [*sic*] I never saw elsewhere, with which he punches the bolls [bowls] of his Tobacco pipes much quicker and truer than others of his trade, unacquainted with this instrument... invented as he told me in the Kingdom of Ireland...".⁶

While tobacco pipe making flourished in Newcastle in the 17th and early 18th century, it declined thereafter. There were a dozen people who described themselves as pipe makers in the 1861 census but only one pipe business mentioned in the town's Post Office Directory of 1876.

Plot did not describe any potters making hollow wares or dishes in Newcastle instead saying: "...the greatest Pottery they have in this County, is carried on at Burslem near Newcastle under Lyme, where for making their severall sorts of Pots, they have as many different sorts of Clay, which they dig round about the Towne, all within half a miles distance."⁷

If Plot had only visited Newcastle a few years later, he would have been able to give a different report on pottery making for by 1690 there was a new business venture operating at Bradwell Hall, less than three miles from the town, which was making fine quality stonewares: teapots, mugs and cups from the local red-firing clays. This new venture was not set up by Staffordshire potters however, but by outsiders – the Dutch-born brothers John Philip and David Elers.

The Elers brothers, who had trained as silversmiths, had emigrated to England in the 1680s, joining their father, Martin, and uncle, Theodore, who were both already established in London. Martin sold 'East Indian rarities',⁸ while Theodore also sold goods imported from the Far East including 'lackery' [lacquer] ware and china.⁹ By 1686 David Elers, who had apparently spent some time in Cologne, a major production centre for German salt-glazed stoneware,¹⁰ had also set up a shop in London where he sold silver.¹¹

At Fulham, a few miles from the Elers' shops, and then a small riverside village outside London, the potter John Dwight, who already had a patent giving him a monopoly to make German-style salt-glazed stoneware, took out a second patent in 1684. Dwight claimed to have discovered the 'mystery' of making both "transparent Porcelaine and opacous redd and darke coloured Porcellane or China" and his patent was designed to give him a monopoly in making those types of wares.

At this period the only "Porcellane or China" available in Britain was that imported from China via the East India Company, which held the monopoly on its import. Both white translucent porcelain, made in Jingdezhen, and unglazed red stoneware, made in Yixing, were highly regarded, very fashionable, and very expensive. By securing a monopoly on its manufacture in England Dwight had a valuable asset.

John Phillip and David Elers, whose father and uncle both traded in Far Eastern goods, were also aware of how much imported Chinese pottery could be sold for in London. Some time in the late 1680s the brothers came to Staffordshire to start making their own version of Yixing stonewares. John Philip leased Bradwell Hall on the outskirts of Newcastle from the Sneyd family of Keele and set up a small pottery works. What drew the Elers to that location was the easy availability of a good quality red clay which, when fired, produced a red stoneware similar in appearance and vitrification to the desirable and expensive Yixing wares.

A number of writers have questioned why Elers chose what has been described as a 'remote' and 'secluded' location, but Bradwell Hall was ideally situated for their needs. The clay deposits were on their doorstep, the coal needed to fire the ware was mined nearby, and Bradwell Hall lay only a quarter of a mile from the main coach road to Newcastle and then onto London, where their pots were sold. They may also have thought that it was less likely that London-based John Dwight would discover that they were, in fact, encroaching on his patent. The earliest reference to the brothers' success is from the Newcastle-under-Lyme Corporation Minute Book of 18th August 1691 where it was "Ordered that

A

Ordered that a present be made to my Lord Chief Justice Holt at his coming to this Burrough from Lancaster Assizes of some of Mr David Elers earthenware to the vallew of three pounds or thereabouts.

Augustus de Hobo
Cestricus sub Lyman

<p>Assumptal in Guildhall Burgi ad Westime nono d. s. septembri anno Regni domini Jacobi sexti marie regine septimo regni Jacobi sexti anno domini 1691 festo Annuntiationis Burgi ad Willelmo Burslem Mayor</p>	<p>Edmund Henton Willelmus Louchen Johannes Burgess Guilbertus Valey Edmundus Haddley Edmundus Burgess Thomas Carter Radus Colby Thomas Swinerton Samuel Hote Willelmus Hears Johannes Harrison Johannes Hinds</p>
--	--

Agreed at the Assise of (New) Northwicke that the small bill of spot belonging to the Court of the Burrough of this Burrough now used in (at) by Mr Tom Middleton Deputy Town Clerk of this Burrough that the same be hereafter the standing spot of the said Court for the time to come and its further ordered that the Town Clerk or his Deputy cause this same entered in the Court booke and also cause the said bill of spot foreverly ingrossed in parchment & put into Affiance and sett upp in the Guildhall of the said Burrough

B

Ordered that above be at the Towns charges bought for the buying of all such (charitable) uses that shall be by any person given to this Burrough or to the poor thereof

Ordered that the whole made the third of the month of July in the first year of their now Majesty's reign for the reformation of Religious uses in the Guildhall of this Burrough be repeated and it is hereby expressed accordingly

Ordered for the future no person or persons whatsoever be admitted to advertise or sell any poppet playes or stices in the Guildhall of this Burrough any usage or custome to the contrary notwithstanding

a present be made to my Lord Chief Justice Holt at his coming to this Burrough from Lancaster Assizes of some of Mr David Elers earthenware to the vallew of three pounds or thereabouts." (Fig. 1). There is no further mention of what this gift comprised, but we know that the Elers were making small teapots, mugs, cups, tea canisters and jugs.

The Staffordshire historian Simeon Shaw gave an account of the Elers' time in Staffordshire although he was writing over 120 years after they had left the district. Shaw said that "great obscurity attaches to the subject" but that around 1690 "for some time, the brothers made Red Porcelain unglazed Tea Pots, merely of the fine red clay of Bradwell, and a small proportion of the ochreous clay from Chesterton, to vary the shade..." He went on to say that in the early 19th century, the remains of the Elers' oven in which they fired their wares was still visible at Bradwell. The upper part of the structure was described as being about seven feet in height and "adapted to fire choice articles" A few years later, the leading Burslem potter, Enoch Wood, examined the oven with its five fire mouths, and measured its inside diameter at five feet. In both instances, it was stressed that the Bradwell oven was unlike the contemporary salt-glaze ovens used in north Staffordshire, being much smaller and having no "inside flues, or bags, to receive the salt" for glazing. Sherds of red unglazed pottery were also found around the site.

In his unpublished memoir, compiled in 1826, Enoch Wood reminisced about visiting the site of the Elers workshop saying that:

"the Red Clay & Coals being so near, they fixed upon that place to make the Dry bodied ware before mentioned - I well remember my late friend Mr T[homas] Wedgwood of the Big House & myself, seeing the foundation of this small five mouthed oven, at Bradwell, about 20 years since - I have this year [1826] been there again, to have measured the diameter, but I now find it is covered by an enlargement of the old thatch'd Barn -The foundation which we saw, was then at the North end of the now long Barn near to the House."

There was a long-standing oral tradition that the Elers had also introduced, or at least made, salt-glazed stoneware in north Staffordshire but there is no evidence of this - either archaeological or documentary, and the experienced early 19th century potters who had examined the site and its remaining structures also discounted this story.

David Elers appears to have returned to London quite quickly while John Philip continued to run the pottery, which was in production until c.1698. John Dwight, when he sued the Elers in 1693 for infringing his patent, claimed that they had enticed away his former workman, John Chandler, and had so learned Dwight's secrets from him. This was something which both Chandler and the Elers denied, but even if true, more than one skilled workman was needed to operate a pottery workshop. Chandler's contribution to the Elers' workshop may well have been confined to his skills in the practicalities of managing the oven firing because how the Elers made their pottery was revolutionary - and quite unlike Dwight's methods.

At this period almost all British pottery was made by throwing the clay on a wheel before decorating, and firing it, and it was glazed with lead or salt. By contrast, the Elers took the techniques and skills that they had in metal working - the use of moulds and casting - and transferred them to pottery making. Unlike traditional potters, they did not throw their wares on a wheel from plastic clay but instead used clay in its liquid form, as 'slip', pouring - or 'casting' it into moulds to form the ware before turning it on a horizontal lathe to refine the external surface. Decoration was then added either by turning parallel lines into the clay or by using small moulds, probably of brass, to shape individual motifs in clay that

Fig. 1. Newcastle-under-Lyme Corporation Minute Book of 18th August 1691
Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council, (page 74v.)

were then applied to the ware, leaving them in relief. Finally, instead of glazing their pottery to make it waterproof, it was fired to such a high temperature that it vitrified and was capable of holding liquids without the need for a glaze.

The shapes that they produced were also unparalleled in contemporary British pottery. They made small, fine quality tea wares – particularly teapots – that closely imitated Chinese Yixing wares in appearance with restrained decoration of turned bands and applied relief decoration of small flower sprays and sprigs. These wares were designed for a sophisticated metropolitan market, for consumers who were already fascinated by the ‘exoticism’ of Chinese and Indian goods that the East India company were importing, and who were wealthy enough to be able to assimilate that exoticism into their lives by both the consumption of the newly-fashionable Chinese drink of tea,²⁰ and by purchasing the specialised vessels need to prepare and serve it.

The Elers were already fully aware of the potential market for their wares. Their pottery was a deliberate and close copy of the expensive imported wares, in form, material and decoration. A small number of their surviving teapots bear pseudo-Chinese seal marks²¹, making them even more difficult to distinguish from the Yixing originals, but they also produced red stoneware small mugs, ‘capuchine’ cups and tea canisters in the same style. These were forms which the Chinese did not make - but which the Elers knew would be attractive to European consumers.

According to Simeon Shaw, writing in 1829, the Elers’ teapots were sold for high sums - between 12 and 24 shillings - which pushed them into the status of luxury goods. A number of their surviving wares also have contemporary silver or silver-gilt mounts, usually rims, spout ends or knops (probably replacements when the originals were damaged) or small chains linking the cover to the spout and handle. These pieces were not only expensive to acquire but were seen as worth enhancing or even repairing with precious metals (Fig. 2).

Despite Newcastle Corporation’s gift to Justice Holt, most of the Elers pottery was sent to London to be sold in the small number of fashionable shops that specialised in East India goods and consequently it was not long before Dwight discovered that the brothers were making their own “opacous redd” wares and infringing his patent.

In 1693 John Dwight issued a lawsuit against John Philip and David Elers, his former workman, John Chandler, and a Nottinghamshire potter, James Morley, for infringing his patents of 1672 and 1684. Morley was charged with making brown (salt-glazed) mugs, but the Elers were not only charged with making red teapots, but two of their teapots were produced to the court in evidence. In their reply the brothers claimed that their wares were “different in substance and shape”²² from Dwight’s teapots and that, despite them employing Dwight’s former workman, that David Elers had learnt about pottery-making in Germany. Ultimately, Dwight and the brothers came to an agreement that the latter could continue to make their red wares under licence from Dwight.

The Bradwell workshop seems to have continued in operation for several years after the court case but by the summer of 1698 it had finished. The traveller Celia Fiennes (1662-1741) noted in her diary:

“I went to this New Castle in Staffordshire to see the making of ye fine tea potts. Cups and saucers of ye fine red Earth in imitation and as Curious as yt wch Comes from China, but was defeated in my design, they Comeing to an End of their Clay they made use of for yt sort of ware, and therefore was remov’d to some other place.”²³



Fig. 2. Red stoneware teapot with applied decoration. The cover is a later replacement in metal, John Philip & David Elers, Bradwell Hall, c. 1690s
NMI 994.17, Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council
Acquired with assistance from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and The Art Fund

Despite what Fiennes was told, there was no shortage of clay available, indeed, it is still being exploited in great quantities today, but for brickmaking. Instead, it appears that John Philip had decided to move his production site to Vauxhall in London, closer to the market for his goods and his brother David’s shop in the City of London. A surviving lease for the next tenant of Bradwell Hall, from September 1698 stipulated that the tenant should “takeaway pull downe and destroy a Certain Potthouse or pot oven adjoyneing to the stable.... And shall not nor will not make or suffer to be made any potts or earthenwares in the said Pott house or Pott oven.”²⁴

John Philip’s move to London was not a success. Only two years later, in 1700, the *London Gazette* recorded “A Commission of Bankruptcy being awarded against David Elers and John Philip Elers, late of Foxhall [Vauxhall] in Surrey, Pot-makers...”²⁵ It was the end of their pottery-making venture. John Philip moved to Dublin and set up a shop selling East India goods, supplied by his brother David, who continued trade in the City of London, buying porcelains from the East India Company as late as 1722.



Fig. 3. Jasper portrait medallion of John Philip Elers, modelled by William Hackwood, Wedgwood & Bentley, Etruria, Staffordshire
Collection of the Art Fund, Inc. at the Birmingham Museum of Art; The Buten Wedgwood Collection, gift through the Wedgwood Society of New York

In the 1770s, John Philip's son, Paul Elers, wrote to Josiah Wedgwood asking the latter to make a portrait medallion of his father (Fig. 3) and which, he suggested, should have an inscription to the effect that his father was the inventor of pottery making in Staffordshire. This did not go down well with Wedgwood who wrote a long and indignant letter on the subject to his business partner, Thomas Bentley saying that what the Elers had introduced was:

"...the refining of our common red clay by sifting and making it into Tea and Coffee ware in imitation of the Chinese Red Porcelain, by casting it in plaster moulds, and turning it on the outside upon lathes, and ornamenting it with the tea branch in relief, in imitation of the Chinese manner of ornamenting this ware – for these improvements, and very great ones they were for the time, we are indebted to the very ingenious Messrs. Elers, and I shall gladly contribute all my power to honour their memories, and transmit to posterity the knowledge of the obligations we owe them but the sum total certainly does not amount to inventing the Art of Pottery in Britain."²⁶



Fig. 4. The Old Pomona Inn Lower Street, c. 1890
Samuel Bell's house in Lower Street. His earthenware factory (working c.1724-44) was behind the house and subsequently it was where Staffordshire's first porcelain was made. In the 1890s it became the Old Pomona Inn. Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council. PA 934

The Elers, despite their ingenuity and skills, left no legacy in north Staffordshire. Their workshop at Bradwell lay at a distance from the then main pottery-producing towns of Burslem and Shelton, and despite the enduring story, repeated by Simeon Shaw, that they employed two local men, Astbury and Twyford, who learned the Elers' secrets and put them into production, neither the technique of slip casting, nor the production of unglazed red stoneware, continued in the district after the Elers left. It was only in the second quarter of the 18th century that slip casting was re-introduced on a small scale, while unglazed red stoneware was not produced again until the second half of the century.

By the 1720s, however, there was a new pottery in Newcastle, this time in the town itself. It was established by Samuel Bell (1684-1744), a local politician. In 1724 Bell bought a large property in Lower Street²⁷ and set up a pottery making business there. The following year he submitted a patent to make "red marble stone ware... capable of receiving a gloss so beautiful as to imitate if not to compare with ruby..." which was granted in May 1729.²⁸ His pottery continued until 1744 when Bell died and, despite it being in production for approximately twenty years, the pottery's existence was virtually forgotten until the 1890s when building work on the site of the Old Pomona Inn, as the site had then become, turned up broken examples of the glazed red earthenwares that had been made on the site (Fig. 4). These sherds and other examples subsequently unearthed by Paul Bemrose, then Curator of Newcastle Museum, in 1969-1971 show that the factory produced a wide range of red-bodied earthenwares.

Overleaf, Fig. 5. Map of Newcastle-under-Lyme, c. 1782-1797. Samuel Bell's factory was situated just below the 'L' of Lower Street. Sutherland Papers, D593/T/10/12. Reproduced courtesy of Staffordshire Record Office





Fig. 7. Teapot, lead-glazed red earthenware, imitating agate. Samuel Bell, Lower Street, c.1724-1744
 NM:2006.98.26 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council



Fig. 8. Hexagonal teapot, lead-glazed red earthenware, slip-cast with a monkey and other animals. Samuel Bell, Lower Street, c.1724-1744
 NM:2006.98.30 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council



Fig. 6. View of the Lower Street pottery site prior to excavation, showing the location of two of the kilns
 Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Bemrose's excavation also showed that the factory had had at least three ovens while a series of advertisements in 1746 when the pottery was to let lists "...sundry Warehouses, workshops, Laths, Throwing Wheels and other Utensils..."²⁹ (Fig. 6).

Some of these fragments matched the description of Bell's patent, being composed of different coloured clays mixed together to resemble reddish marble or agate (Fig. 7). Others were of plain red earthenware. The forms were largely hollow wares – teapots, tea bowls and mugs - often with the rims, handles and teapot spouts highlighted with white slip. Some pieces had inlaid decoration of agate clays which was produced by turning out bands of clay on the body, using a horizontal lathe, and then filling in that band with agate clays before turning the whole piece to produce a smooth surface. Although the great majority were made by throwing and turning, a few more elaborate pieces, such as hexagonal teapots, were made by slip casting – the same technique that the Elers had used a generation earlier and which was just starting to be reintroduced as a manufacturing technique in north Staffordshire (Fig. 8).

Nothing is known of why Bell chose to set up a pottery in his forties, or to take out a patent for his "red marble stoneware". Nor is it known what practical knowledge he had of pottery making, to what extent he was personally involved in the production of the pottery itself, how many men he employed, or who they were. Documentary evidence for contemporary potteries in north Staffordshire suggest that a factory at this time would have employed 8-12 men and a small number of boys, with each of the men having one or more specialist roles (thrower, turner, handler, clay preparation, fireman, etc.) assisted by boys as general assistants and 'gofers'.³⁰ These workers would have lived within walking distance of the factory but there is no clue to their existence in the Newcastle records and it is probable that some of them travelled to Lower Street each day from nearby Burslem or Stoke-upon-Trent.

Like the Elers, Bell was producing well-made drinking vessels from the local red firing clay. These including teapots decorated, in his case, with 'exotic' subjects of animals, including monkeys, and Chinese figures. Unlike the Elers wares, Bell's pottery, was a lower-fired lead-glazed earthenware, more typical of the wares that were being produced by his contemporaries in the adjacent Potteries towns. Excavations on the Shelton Farm site, at Thomas Whieldon's Fenton Low site, and elsewhere, show that by the 1740s the production of similar wares was widespread in the area.

To be LET at Lady-Day next,
 At Newcastle Under-line, Staffordshire,
A Very Commodious House, (late in the
 Occupation of Mr Steers) with three Parlours, a Hall, and
 two Kitchens on the Ground Floor; Chambers and Garrets an-
 swerable, lately built and fash'd; a large Garden well planted
 with all sorts of useful Fruit, sundry Warehouses, Work-shops,
 Lath's, Throwing-Wheels, and other Utensils useful in making
 fine Earthen-Ware or China, three Pot-Ovens, one lately built
 on purpose to burn China, good Stabling and Yards, all entire
 in itself. For further Particulars enquire of Mr Crowther, in St
 Katharine's, near the Tower; Mr Eell, in Aldermary Church-
 yard, Bow-Lane, London; or of Mr Brittain, at Newcastle
 aforesaid, where the Premises are to be seen.
 N. B. Provision and Coals are very cheap there

Fig. 9. Advertisement published in the *Westminster Journal or New Weekly Miscellany*, Saturday 22 March 1746, issue 225, page 4

On Bell's death, aged 60, in December 1744, the pottery was inherited by his brother John, a London merchant, and was briefly leased to William Steers, of Hoxton, London, who, in February 1742/3, had himself, unsuccessfully, applied for a patent to make transparent earthenware "in imitation of porcelain or china".³¹ The rate books for Hoxton where Steers lived, show that he was paying rates on his house until September 1745, suggesting that he left Hoxton for Newcastle-under-Lyme sometime after September 1745.³²

Much has been made by later writers of Steers' occupation of the Lower Street site, his unsuccessful patent application, and the porcelaneous tea bowl dated 25th July 1746 excavated on the site³³, but it has recently become clear that Steers was only at Lower Street for a matter of months and had left by 22nd March 1746 - three months before the tea bowl was made.³⁴

The much-quoted advert, for the Lower Street works "To be Lett at Lady-Day next, at Newcastle-under-Line, Staffordshire a Very commodious House.... now in the possession of Mr Steers with sundry Warehouses, Workshops, Laths [sic], Throwing Wheels, and other Utensils useful in making Fine Earthenware or China; three Pot-Ovens, one lately built on Purpose to burn China..." was published in mid-March 1746 and followed by a second advertisement published one week later on 22nd March stating that the site was now "late in the possession of Mr Steers".³⁵ (Fig. 9). William Steers' brief porcelain making experiment of less than one year had been unsuccessful, and he returned to London where he became the inventor of a highly successful patent medicine.³⁶

How the London-based Steers had become interested in porcelain making is unknown, but there were several fledgling porcelain factories being established in the capital at this time. It appears very probable that the next tenant of Bell's factory also had connections to London – and to one of these early factories.

The tea bowl dated 25th July 1746, three months after Steers left, suggests that the tenant who succeeded him continued with experimenting with making porcelain. These experiments were still underway in July 1750 when Dr Richard Pococke visited Newcastle. Pococke wrote that "there are some few potters here and one I saw at Limehouse, who seemed to make the best china ware but disagreed with his employers... he cannot bake it with coal, which turns it yellow, wood being the fewel which is proper for it. I took a piece of what he had perfected here."³⁷ As well as the porcelain Pococke also saw various other types



Fig. 10. Excavated teapot, experimental porcelain, decorated with metallic oxides under the glaze, Lower Street, 1746-1754
 NM:2006.98.41 (R) Brompton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

of pottery being made including tortoiseshell earthenware and enamelled white salt-glazed stoneware (Fig. 10).

There has been a great deal of discussion as to who the potter "I saw at Limehouse" was. Newcastle historian Thomas Pape assumed that Pococke was referring a pottery close to the Lyme Brook – which ran at the back of the Lower Street site.³⁸ Other writers have concluded that Pococke was referring to a potter that he had previously met at the short-lived porcelain factory in Limehouse, east London, which operated from 1744-1748, and whom he met again in Newcastle at the factory at Lower Street. Unfortunately, Pococke does not name the potter that he met in Newcastle.

One of the proprietors of the London Limehouse factory was a Joseph Wilson. This factory closed in 1748 and historians have made much of the fact that in 1751 "Joseph, son of Mr Wilson, potter" was baptised at St Giles parish church, Newcastle.³⁹ It is still not proven, however, that the Joseph Wilson from London is the same Joseph Wilson who was operating the Lower Street Works until at least 1754, when he is mentioned several times in a lease.⁴⁰



Fig. 11. Excavated mug, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with a Chinese landscape of rocks and trees, Lower Street, 1746-1754
 NM:2006.98.14 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

Excavations on the Lower Street site by Bemrose from 1969-71 produced sherds of a number of porcelaneous wares which, like the Elers stonewares and Bell earthenwares before them, were strongly influenced by Chinese wares in their shape and decoration. Nonetheless, they stand in stark contrast to those earlier, red-bodied wares as they use a non-local white-firing clay and, rather than having applied or moulded decoration, they are painted under the glaze with floral and landscape subjects in direct imitation of Chinese porcelain. Stylistically, in shape and decoration they are also similar to the contemporary Limehouse, London, porcelains, which, along with Pococke's comment that "...there are some few potters here and one I saw at Limehouse..." has encouraged the idea that the two factories had some of the same workmen in common. We know that the Staffordshire potter William Tams was working at Limehouse in 1745⁴¹ before returning to Stoke in the late 1740s and there is documentary evidence for other local pottery workers being employed in London porcelain factories before returning to north Staffordshire.⁴²

The blue and white painted wares excavated at Lower Street are the earliest Staffordshire examples of what was to become one of the staples of the pottery industry – blue painted or printed patterns that soon moved from being simply copies or adaptations of Chinese designs to becoming *chinoiseries* – wholly European interpretations of what the decorators thought Chinese designs *should* look like (Figs. 11-13, 15). Such designs were to become hugely popular with consumers and were assimilated into the pottery manufacturers' repertoire to the extent that the printed *Willow* pattern, introduced less than forty years later in the 1780s to appeal to the *chinoiserie* fashion, is now seen as a quintessentially English design.

These blue and white wares are skilfully painted in what was, at this period in north Staffordshire, a new and untried technique of underglaze decoration. Like porcelain making the skills for underglaze painting were brought into the district by workmen who had learned their skills elsewhere. No records for who was working at Lower Street have been found but there are two interesting records in the Newcastle parish registers, showing that in the mid-1750s there were two pottery decorators, neither of them local men, living in Newcastle-under-Lyme. On 12th January 1754/5 the infant daughter of Edward Abby was buried at St Giles church.⁴³ Her father was described as a "pot painter" and he was not a native of the town. Between 1744 and 1751 he had been living in central London where two of his children were buried and by late 1757 he was living in Worcester where a fourth child died. Also in 1754, on June 9th, the son of Tristram Percival, also described as "a pot painter" was buried at St Giles Church.⁴⁴ Less is known about Percival's career, but he subsequently moved to Birmingham, possibly for employment in the enamel workshops there, dying in 1776.

Despite the attractive decoration of the Lower Street pieces, all the excavated examples have serious firing flaws. Found in small quantities alongside the more profitable earthenwares and stonewares that were also being produced at the site, no complete examples have been found in extant collections and it seems that they were little more than experimental wares. Nonetheless these were the first porcelains produced in the area. Quite when the Lower Street pottery ceased production is unknown. It was still operating with Joseph Wilson as the tenant in 1754 when the site was sold and shortly afterwards subdivided. It seems probable that the factory ceased at this point and no further advertisements or documentary evidence has been found for a pottery in Lower Street.



Fig. 12. Excavated jug, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers.
Lower Street, 1746-1754
NM:2006.98.36 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council



Fig. 13. Excavated jug, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers.
Lower Street, 1746-1754
NM:2006.98.54 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

By the mid-18th century, the fashion for tea drinking had become widespread in England and no longer confined to the very wealthy. Tea was being imported in huge quantities by the East India Company, as was porcelain. In response, the north Staffordshire potteries were expanding rapidly and supplying customers with affordable alternatives to Chinese porcelain. The locally abundant red clays were no longer the staple of the north Staffordshire industry, instead the makers of fine pottery had, like the Lower Street pottery, switched to using white-firing clays brought into the area from Devon, Dorset and later, Cornwall to make their white salt-glazed stonewares and cream-coloured earthenwares.

Despite its good road links, the town of Newcastle was increasingly hampered in developing as a pottery making centre. The main centres of the 18th century industry, Burslem, Shelton and Hanley, Fenton, and Lane End, were all situated where coal lay close to the surface. Newcastle, by contrast was not. Although until the mid-18th century the raw materials for the white wares and the finished goods were transported to market by road via Newcastle, it was the pottery ovens' insatiable demand for coal that largely dictated where the industry was situated and could efficiently expand.

The opening of a new turnpike road exacerbated the situation. Previously the main trunk road, which brought in the white clays and flint for the expanding industry from Liverpool and Chester, had passed Church Lawton and then through Newcastle before going on to Burslem or Stoke. In 1763, however, the potters successfully petitioned for a new road that went directly from Church Lawton to Burslem, by-passing Newcastle. In the 1770s further road developments meant that it became possible to travel from London to any of the pottery towns without going through Newcastle, while the opening of the Trent & Mersey Canal in 1777 isolated the town yet further from the main transport network.

There was a short-lived attempt to set up another pottery in Newcastle in 1790 with a partnership between William Bent and James Bulkeley, both local men, but neither of them practical potters. Based at Water Street, the factory benefited from access to affordable coal now being brought into town by canal from Sir Nigel Gresley's colliery at Apedale. Little is known about the partnership's products with only one marked example known to exist, a dry-bodied stoneware jug with an applied hunting scene in relief. A surviving apprenticeship enrolment of 20th November 1794 for Joseph Scarlett, however, shows that he was to learn "enamelling [*sic*] painting and Blue Painting",⁴⁵ so the business presumably made a range of wares, including stonewares and lead-glazed earthenwares. When the partnership ceased in 1797, Bent converted the pottery into a highly successful brewery.⁴⁶

On the outskirts of Newcastle, in the village of Red Street, there were some small potteries which continued to use the local red clays both for brick and tile making, and to produce low-value kitchen, dairy and garden wares, for which there was still a demand. In the third quarter of the 19th century, however, the manufacture of wares for "ready-money sale"⁴⁷ to the country trade by these workshops had ceased, unable to compete with the larger factories of nearby Stoke-on-Trent.⁴⁸ (Fig. 14).

In many ways Newcastle's greatest impact was as the economic centre of the Potteries district. Its wealthy businessmen and landowners provided much of the economic and financial backing for the expanding industry, either investing directly as sleeping partners in pottery businesses or by providing loans through the locally-owned banks. It also, increasingly, became a dormitory town for the adjacent pottery towns as these expanded towards the borough. Election Poll Books from the late 18th and early 19th centuries show a rise in local men describing themselves as 'potters', who would have been working in the nearby



Fig. 14. Excavated earthenware tea cup, Samuel Riles or T & H Moss, Red Street, c.1800-1810 NM:2006.97.47 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

pottery towns, while the census returns of the 19th century show that families were moving from those towns to the outskirts of Newcastle. Situated on a ridge above Stoke-on-Trent and so above the smoke pollution from the bottle ovens and heavy industry of the Six Towns, Newcastle was seen as a healthy and aspirational place to live. Not only was it within easy walking distance of many of the larger pottery factories, but with the rise of public transport – trains and trams – in the late 19th century, Newcastle increasingly became where potters lived but did not work. By the early 20th century numerous pottery manufacturers, their senior managers, and their creative staff - designers, artists, and modellers - lived in Newcastle and its rapidly developing suburbs. Pottery was made in Stoke-on-Trent, but its creators were increasingly based in Newcastle.

The last known pottery in Newcastle-under-Lyme was the Kingsfield Pottery Co., which operated from the site of the old Newcastle Corporation brickworks and specialised in making inexpensive teapots. An advertisement in the trade newspaper, the *Pottery Gazette & Glass Trades Review*, proudly stated that "All our teapots are made from the genuine Kingsfield teapot-clay, obtained and prepared on the site of the pottery"⁴⁹. Over 230 years after the Elers brothers first started their workshop, the local red clay was still being used to make teapots in Newcastle.

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Fig. 15. Excavated plate, experimental porcelain, painted in cobalt blue under the glaze with Chinese-style flowers. Lower Street, 1746-1754
NM:2006.98.18 (R) Brampton Museum & Art Gallery, Newcastle-under-Lyme Borough Council

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Born Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire, UK

Education

- 1999-2006 PhD, Brunel University, London, UK
- 1993-1995 M.A. Ceramics and Glass, Royal College of Art, London, UK
- 1990-1993 B.A. (Hons) Ceramics, University of Wales, Cardiff, UK

Selected Teaching

- 2019-present Staffordshire University Professor of Ceramics
- 2015-2018 Bucks New University, High Wycombe, UK. Professor of Ceramics and Glass
- 2011-2020 University of Bergen, Norway. Professor II, Department of Fine Arts
- 2017 Kookmin University, Seoul, Korea. Guest Lecturer
- 2017 ENSAB, Rennes, France. Visiting Professor
- 2016 Nanjing University of the Arts, Jiangsu Sheng, China. Visiting Professor
- 1996-2016 Royal College of Art, London, UK. Guest Lecturer
- 2013 Geneva University of Art and Design, Switzerland. Guest Lecturer
- 1995-2013 Bucks New University, High Wycombe, UK. Senior Lecturer in Ceramics and Glass
- 1995-2012 Bath Spa University, UK. Visiting Lecturer
- 2011 New York State College of Ceramics at Alfred University, New York, USA. Guest Lecturer
- 2011 University of Wisconsin, Madison, USA. Guest Lecturer
- 2009 Konstfack, University College of Arts, Crafts and Design, Stockholm, Sweden. Guest Lecturer
- 2008 Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, Denmark. Guest Lecturer

Employment

- 2011-2014 Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, UK. Curator of Collections, Ceramics
- 2011 Consultant for Ceramics: *A Fragile History*, BBC4 documentary, UK
- 2009 Consultant for educational development, Ceramics Making Gallery, Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
- 1995 Sir Eduardo Paolozzi, London, UK. Assistant & Modeller
- 1987-1991 Josiah Wedgwood & Sons Ltd, Stoke-on-Trent, UK

Selected Exhibitions

- 2022 *Tangible World: New Social Dynamics in Ceramics*. 2022 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale
- 2021 *Alchemy and Metamorphosis*, Neil Brownsword. Potteries Museum and Art Gallery in conjunction with British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
- 2020/2021 *Taskscape*, Whitegold International Ceramic Prize, St Austell, UK
- 2020/2021 *Relic*, Whitegold International Ceramic Prize, Wheal Martyn Museum, St Austell, UK
- 2019/2020 *FABRIK*, Gustavsbergs Konsthall, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2019 *Externalising the Archive*, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent
- 2018 *Further Thoughts on Earthy Materials*, Kunsthau Hamburg
- 2018 *60th Faenza Prize*, Museo Internazionale delle Ceramiche in Faenza, Italy
- 2018 *Pattern Book*, Victoria and Albert Museum, London
- 2017 *Factory*, Neil Brownsword, Blas & Knada, Stockholm, (solo)
- 2017/18 *Putting It at Stake*, Lidköping, Sweden 2017, RIAN Design Museum, Sweden
- 2017/2019 *Woman's Hour Craft Prize*. Victoria & Albert Museum, BBC, Crafts Council (touring)
- 2017 *Place and Practices*, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent
- 2017 *Neil Brownsword: Factory*, Icheon World Ceramic Centre, South Korea (solo)
- 2016 *Central China Ceramics Biennale*, Henan Museum, Henan Sheng, China
- 2016 *Re-Apprenticed: Factory*, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, UK
- 2016 *Material Language*, Roche Court Sculpture Park and Gallery, Salisbury, UK
- 2015 *Re-Apprenticed*, Raphael Gallery, Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK
- 2015 *Fragile?* National Museum Wales, Cardiff, UK
- 2015 *8th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale*, Icheon, Korea
- 2014-2015 *Transformator*, Bomuldsfabrikken, Arendal, Norway (touring)
- 2014 *Terra Nova, 2014 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale*. Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan
- 2013 *Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void*, Spode, British Ceramics Biennial, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
- 2011-2012 *Thing, Tang, Trash, Permanenten*, The West Norway Museum of Decorative Art, Bergen, Norway
- 2011 *Relic*, Permanent Gallery in conjunction with Brighton and Hove Museum, Brighton, UK (solo)
- 2011 *Interloqui*, Caterina Tognon Arte Contemporanea, 54th Venice Biennale of Art, Italy
- 2010 *WCC-BF Second European Triennial of Ceramic and Glass*, Mons, Belgium
- 2010 *Contemporary British Studio Ceramics: The Grainer Collection*, The Mint Museum of Art, North Carolina, USA
- 2009 *Possibilities and Losses: Transitions in Clay*, Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, UK
- 2009 *Elegy*, Blas & Knada, Stockholm, Sweden (solo)
- 2008 British Pavilion, Fu Le International Ceramic Art Museums, Shanxi Sheng, China
- 2008 *Neil Brownsword: Poet of Residue*, Galerie Besson, London, UK (solo)

- 2005 *Collaging History*, The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK/Blås & Knåda, Stockholm, Sweden (solo)
- 2002 *Mellum Rum*, Galleri Norby, Copenhagen, Denmark
- 2001 *Selections*, Nancy Margolis Gallery, New York, USA
- 2000 *3-up: Close*, Crafts Council, London, UK
- 2000 *Neil Brownsword*, Gallery for New Ceramics, Copenhagen, Denmark (solo)

Selected Publications

- 2023 Graves, A., Harrod, T., *Studio Ceramics*, Thames & Hudson, V&A
- 2022 Brownsword, N, in Køppe, B., Danielsen, C., Rishovd, A (eds.) *Afterglow New Nordic Porcelain*, Arnoldsche
- 2021 Thorpe, A., *Contemporary British Ceramics: Beneath the Surface*, Crowood Press Ltd
- 2021 Peters, T., Whitegold, in *Critical Reading: Functional Dissonance*, Project 7 and a half
- 2021 Brownsword, N., (ed) Breen, L., Barker, D., Klarner, R., *Alchemy and Metamorphosis, Topographies of the Obsolete Publications*
- 2020 Brownsword, N., (ed) *Topographies of the Obsolete: Phase Two - Rhizomatic Trajectories*, Topographies of the Obsolete Publications
- 2020 Gray, L., 'Gross Domestic Product: Contemporary British Ceramics and the Subversion of the Monument', in Hart, I., and Jones, C., *Sculpture and the Decorative in Britain and Europe, Seventeenth Century to Contemporary*, Bloomsbury Academic
- 2019 Breen, L., 'Making cities: place, production and (im)material heritage', in N. Cass, G. Park, A. Powell (eds) *Intersecting Practices: Contemporary Art in Heritage Spaces*, Oxon: Routledge, 2019
- 2018 Harrod, T. (ed), *Documents of Contemporary Art: Craft*, Whitechapel Gallery, MIT Press ISBN 978-0-85488-266-3
- 2018 Gray, L., *Contemporary British Ceramics and the Influence of Sculpture: Monuments, Multiples, Destruction and Display*, Routledge Advances in Art and Visual Studies
- 2017 Brownsword, N., (ed.) *Topographies of the Obsolete: Ashmolean Papers*, Topographies Publications
- 2016 Vieteberg, J., *Why Ceramics, Portage Ceramics Award*, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery
- 2015 Harrod, T., *The Real Thing: Essays On Making in the Modern World*, Hyphen Press
- 2015 Dahn, J., *New Directions in Ceramics: From Spectacle to Trace*, Bloomsbury Academic
- 2015 Bull, K. A., Scott, P., *Horizon: Transferware and Contemporary Ceramics*, Arnoldsche Art Publishers
- 2015 8th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, Icheon World Ceramic Center, Korea Ceramic Foundation, Icheon, Korea
- 2014 *Terra Nova*, 2014 Taiwan Ceramics Biennale. Yingge Ceramics Museum, Taiwan
- 2013 Brownsword, N., Mydland, A., (ed.) *Topographies of the Obsolete: Vociferous Void*, Topographies Publications
- 2011 Vieteberg, J., (ed.) *Thing, Tang, Trash, Upcycling in Contemporary Ceramics*, Permanenten West Norway Museum of Decorative Arts
- 2011 De Waal, E., *The Pot Book*, Phaidon
- 2010 Adamson, G., Harrod, T., Mickey, M., *Contemporary British Studio Ceramics: The Grainer Collection*, Yale University Press
- 2010 Adamson, G., Vieteberg, J., *Possibilities and Losses*, Mima/Crafts Council Publication
- 2009 Whiting, D., Goldmark, J., *Modern British Potters and their Studios*, A&C Black
- 2009 Cooper, E., *Contemporary Ceramics – An International Perspective*, Thames and Hudson
- 2008 Adamson, G., *Neil Brownsword: Up from the Ashes*, Ceramics, Art and Perception, No.73
- 2005 Harrod, T., Barker, D., Brownsword, N., *Neil Brownsword: Collaging History*, Potteries Museum and Art Gallery
- 2000 Pitts, J., & De Waal, E., *Neil Brownsword, Close*, Craft Council, Pentogram, London

Selected awards/Accolades

- 2019 Quartz Award, Whitegold International Ceramics Award
- 2017 Shortlisted for the Woman's Hour Craft Prize, BBC Radio 4, Victoria & Albert Museum and Crafts Council Partnership
- 2015 Grand Prize Winner, 8th Gyeonggi International Ceramic Biennale, Icheon, Korea
- 2015, 2013 Norwegian Artistic Research Programme, Topographies of the Obsolete
- 2009 One-off Category Award-Winner, British Ceramics Biennial
- 1998 Recognition for Achievements in Ceramics, Buckingham Palace, London, UK

Selected Collections

- 2016, 2011, 2007, 2002 Victoria & Albert Museum, London, UK
- 2016, 2005 The Potteries Museum and Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
- 2015 Korea Ceramic Foundation, Icheon, Korea
- 2015, 2011 Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Middlesbrough, UK
- 2014 Yingge Ceramics Museum, New Taipei City, Taiwan
- 2011 Brighton and Hove Museum, Brighton, UK
- 2009 National Public Art Council, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2008 British Pavilion, Fu Le International Ceramic Art Museums, Shaanxi Sheng, China

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