

Prestonpans Porcelain



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Scottish Pottery Studies 6



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Foreword

SCOTTISH POTTERY STUDIES is the name of a series of booklets, the aim of each being to examine some specific aspect of Scottish Pottery history. The scheme was initiated in 1980 as a result of a bequest from Frank E. Cruickshank of Aberdeen. This author researched, compiled, scripted, designed, produced, and distributed the first two booklets, and is therefore grateful that succeeding titles have been published by organisations which relieved me of some of these practical chores. I would like to thank Gordon, Baron of Prestoungrange, for allowing two special aspects of Prestonpans pottery production to become part of the series, which develop themes from the book *Prestonpans Pottery* published by the Prestoungrange Arts Festival in 2007.

Previous titles in the series:

- No. 1 Scottish Spongeware (1982), out of print.**
- No. 2 Scottish Saltglaze (1982).**
- No. 3 Campsie Ware (1992), Glasgow City Libraries.**
- No. 4 A Visit to Dunmore Pottery (2002), Stirling Museum.**

Prestonpans Porcelain

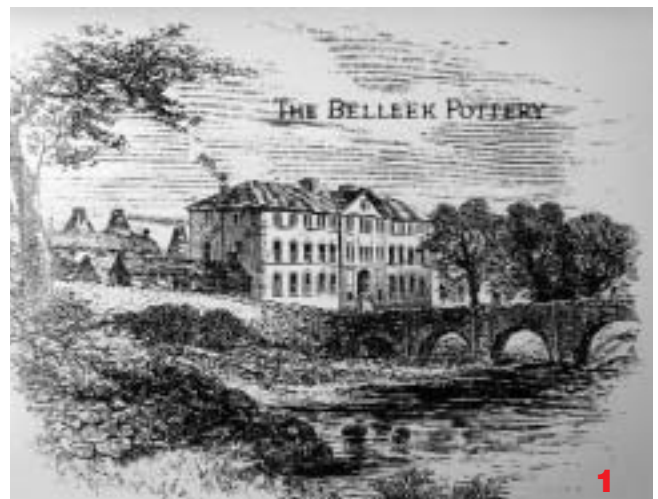
The potteries of Prestonpans are justly famed for the range of their ceramic products, some of which are unique in Scottish terms, and others being taken to a high level of production which won widespread renown¹. Porcelain, however, is not generally thought of in these terms, but such a product was made in Prestonpans in the early 20th century, and to an acceptably high standard. Totally overshadowed by Scotland's other porcelain producer, the celebrated Nautilus Porcelain Company of Glasgow, the manufacture of such ware in Prestonpans has been overlooked to a large extent. The basic fact is known to Scottish pottery enthusiasts, as there is a section on it in Arnold Fleming's book *Scottish Pottery*, and marked pieces are known though their numbers are small. This booklet is an attempt, at least in part, to redress the balance.

The pedigree of Prestonpans porcelain

There is quite a tale, at times rather tangled, behind the production of porcelain at Prestonpans, which has its spiritual home at Belleek in Co. Fermanagh in Ireland (see *Figure 1*) The story begins in 1852, some five years prior to the construction of the Belleek factory, when large deposits of feldspar were discovered at the estate of John Caldwell Bloomfield of Castle Caldwell on Lower Lough Erne. His interest in ceramics had been stimulated by the acclaim won by some of the pottery displays at the Great

Exhibition of the previous year, held in the Crystal Palace in London, and the discovery of feldspar literally under his feet inspired notions of establishing a porcelain factory. When the other essential ingredient, kaolin, was also discovered at Castle Caldwell, porcelain production became a realistic proposition. A further stimulus was provided by the Dublin International Exhibition of 1853, at which the Worcester Porcelain Company won the highest category of award for a dinner service made of Belleek clay – yet Ireland had no pottery exhibits of its own on show.

The Belleek Pottery was started in 1857 by Robert Armstrong, a Dublin architect then working at the Royal Worcester factory, which at that time was importing large quantities of Castle



Caldwell feldspar. His interest had been aroused sufficiently for him to join Bloomfield in his porcelain tests. Armstrong's partner was David McBirney, a wealthy Dublin merchant; it was he who financed the venture, which traded as McBirney & Co. After slow beginnings, the pace changed with the arrival of William Bromley from the famed Goss factory in Staffordshire. In 1857, the same year as Belleek was founded, William Henry Goss had joined the celebrated Staffordshire firm of William Taylor Copeland. Having quickly risen to the position of chief designer in Copeland's factory, the young William Goss launched out on his own account in 1858, establishing himself in Stoke. He progressed so rapidly in the business that his new firm won a gold medal at the London International Exhibition of 1862. By this time, he had built up a team of talented designers, headed by William Gallimore. In 1863, ten of Goss's most skilled workmen were induced to join the new Belleek Pottery in Ireland, including foreman William Bromley and chief designer William Gallimore. The Goss style therefore had a profound effect on the Belleek manner of production.

One of the 'Goss ten' was a designer named James Cleary, who was trained by William Gallimore. Following the return of Gallimore to the Goss factory in 1866, Cleary succeeded him as head of the modelling department at Belleek. This was a successful time for Belleek, with gold medals being won at the Dublin Exposition of 1872, and commissions were received from royalty (including Queen Victoria) and the nobility. Export markets opened up. However, in the early 1880s both partners died, McBirney in 1882 and Armstrong in 1884, at which point, after a brief period of closure, Joshua Poole came

from Staffordshire to manage the works. It is at this time that we first encounter the name which was to play such a crucial role in the production of porcelain at Prestonpans: John Boyle. In his *Story of Belleek*, John Cunningham has recorded: "at the first AGM under the new management, a decision was taken to employ the first commercial traveller on behalf of the Pottery, a local man, Mr J. Boyle" (p.38). Assuming this to be the John Boyle of our story, he was a young man aged about 22 years at this time.

After a period of prosperity, Belleek Pottery was now heading for stormy waters. Poole was quickly replaced by an uneasy workforce who wanted an Irishman and a Catholic in charge, but he was succeeded as manager by the head of the modelling department, the above-mentioned James Cleary, who ran the works from 1884 to 1900. It was during this tenure that an event occurred which was to direct John Boyle away from Belleek. Tensions arose over working practices and the efficiency of the factory, and adding to these difficulties were internal divisions in local nationalist politics which spilled over into the Pottery, and commercial rivalries within the village of Belleek. Matters came to a head, and a strike broke out in 1888. At a tempestuous meeting there was a call for a change of management, but when the seconder of the motion rose to speak, clutching a large bundle of papers, he was ruled out of order because he had not paid for all the shares he had acquired. After several impassioned speeches and a deal of mud-slinging, a key moment in our story occurred, as described by John Cunningham: "Then Mr Boyle, who had until recently been the traveller for the Pottery, arose to speak holding a large sheaf [probably the papers of the ousted seconder of

the motion].... but he was utterly routed when in response to his opening questions, Mr Myles [one of the Pottery's directors] asked him was it not true that while he had been selling Belleek ware and the Pottery paying for his hotels and travelling expenses, he had also been selling glass for another company? Since Boyle was unable to deny the allegation, he was unceremoniously dismissed from the fray" (p.42). Belleek Pottery recovered from these difficulties, and indeed it continues to prosper to the present day, but the focus of our attention now moves to Glasgow.

The firm of McDougall & Sons was a long-established business dealing in china, earthenware, and glass, which could trace its origins back to 1790. A century later, it had grown to be the largest of its kind in Glasgow, with several branches throughout the city, its head office and showrooms being located at 77–79 Buchanan Street. The McDougalls did not simply act as retailers; they also had a glass engraving and china painting business. The breadth of their activities is evident from the Post Office Directories. Conflating two similar entries for 1895, we find: "McDougall & Sons, wholesale, retail, and export glass and china merchants, glass engravers, china decorators and gilders, and importers of foreign goods". The firm's telegraphic address was 'Porcelain'. Their success in these ventures encouraged the proprietors, brothers Daniel and John McDougall, to enter the field of porcelain manufacture.

In the following year, 1896, the lengthy Directory entry for McDougall & Sons had a very interesting addition: "porcelain manufactory, Barrowfield". It would appear that they had leased a portion of the mighty Barrowfield

Pottery of Henry Kennedy, stoneware manufacturer, where they initiated their porcelain-making enterprise. It was an immediate success, and a move to larger premises was a necessity. The Directory entry for 1897 gave the name of its new base: "works, Possil Pottery, Possilpark". This factory had been established in 1876 under the name of the Saracen Pottery for the manufacture of earthenware, ceasing production in 1893. Now it was given a new lease of life by the McDougall brothers. More than that, their new venture and its output received a name, for in that same year of 1897 another entry in the Directory reads: "The 'Nautilus' Porcelain Company, manufacturers of 'Nautilus' porcelain; showrooms 77 & 79 Buchanan Street; works, Possil Pottery, Possilpark". In the following year, a further description – "art pottery ware, &c" – was added.

The range of Nautilus porcelain is indicated by an advertisement which appeared in the *Pottery Gazette* in 1903 (see *Figure 2*). The production of such wares demanded a high degree of professional expertise from the workforce, and in his study of the subject, Gerard Quail indicates (though without stating his sources) where they came from: "They [the McDougalls] procured the best china modellers, mould makers, and china painters, from Worcester, Staffordshire, and Limoges in France to ensure a high standard. From Belleek in Ireland craftsmen in porcelain were induced to come to Scotland to practice their art of making delicately woven baskets from fine strands of porcelain (p.16).

None of the Belleek workers' names are mentioned by Quail, but it would seem that John Boyle was among them. Whether he had survived



at Belleek after the stormy events of 1888 and what he had been doing since is not known at present, but he was certainly in Glasgow before the turn of the century, holding a position of great relevance to our story. The 1901 Census includes the name of John Boyle, aged 39, "Pottery Manager"; the name of the Pottery is not stated, but a strong pointer is provided by the address – 277 Saracen Street (the original name of the Possil Pottery was the Saracen Pottery, being situated diagonally across a plot of land from Saracen Cross and facing the mighty Saracen Foundry). John Boyle had been born in Ireland (the record being no more specific than that) as had his wife Hannah and their first four children, the youngest of whom was then aged 8. However, the fifth child, aged 3, had been born in Glasgow. This implies that John Boyle had moved with his family to Glasgow between 1893 and 1898. The median is 1895/6 – right at the time when the McDougalls initiated the production of porcelain.

The products of the Nautilus Porcelain Company were justly famed as they reached the epitome of this class of ware. Some of their shapes possess a classic simplicity, but more often than not they are exotic, frequently in the extreme, with finely painted decoration and lavish gilding. The other mainstay of production consisted of a wide range of porcelain miniatures bearing the coats of arms of burghs from all over Scotland and sometimes beyond, very similar to Goss wares. Nautilus Porcelain was given a stand at the 1901 Glasgow International Exhibition where its wares received high praise. Technically and

aesthetically, it was reckoned to be the equal of Limoges, the leaders in the field till then, and the McDougalls' cursive M mark was sometimes mistaken for Meissen! Throughout the first decade of the 20th century Nautilus thrived, and although his name is absent from the Directories, John Boyle was apparently the works manager for most if not all of this period. Tough times lay ahead, however; the leading light in the firm, John McDougall, died in 1910, and although Daniel tried to carry on, assisted by his son and two nephews, it was not to last. An economic recession hit hard, the finer classes of ware being the first to suffer, and early in 1911 the McDougalls were forced to close down the Pottery. The fine display of Nautilus Porcelain at the Glasgow Exhibition later that year was very much its swan-song, yet a phoenix had already arisen from the ashes, and its birthplace was Prestonpans.

The advent of porcelain production at Prestonpans

Prior to considering the move from Glasgow to Prestonpans, it is necessary to look back beyond the start of porcelain production here to the origins of its progenitor, a company called Clunas Tiles and Mosaics Ltd. Its Articles of Association were drawn up in 1906 and registered under the Companies Act on 30th June that year² (see [Figure 3](#)). The founder was William Clunas, a tile

and marble merchant with premises in Edinburgh and Leith, who had ambitions to expand his range of interests. Objective 3 in the accompanying Memorandum of Association spelt these out: “To carry on the business of manufacturers of encaustic tiles, glazed and enamelled tiles, bricks, ceramic mosaics, faience, pottery and glass ware, and generally to carry on the business of clay workers in all its branches” – but note, there was no mention of porcelain. As if this range was not enough, it was continued in Objective 4: “To carry on the business of tile-fixers, mosaicists, marble, slate, stone, and granite workers, cement merchants and manufacturers, coal-masters, carriers and contractors”; and it did not end there.

A plot of land was purchased in the south-west quarter of Prestonpans from James McNeil of Northfield House, located near the mineral railway line which branched off the main east-coast line just to the west of Prestonpans Station, and then came northwards before swinging east into Northfield Colliery. Unfortunately, the building seems to have just missed inclusion in the Ordnance Survey map of 1906, but from the description given in the feu charter³ it lay in the irregular plot of land bounded by the curve of the outer rail of the said railway (though not to come within six feet of it), the southern extension of Redburn Road, and Rope Walk (though neither of these street names are mentioned). This means it is probably unconnected with the large structure labelled “Brick Works (Disused)” which is shown on the succeeding Ordnance Survey map of 1932; although the railway had gone by this time, it would have lain inside the curve of the *inner* rail (see [Figure 4](#)). William Clunas had ambitious plans for his company, Objective 8





Figure 4 Ordnance Survey map of 1906 showing the area where the Castle Pottery is believed to have stood; superimposed to the south (heavily stippled) is the precise position of the later brickworks, which would appear to be unconnected, while to the west the complex captioned “Pottery” is that of Belfield & Co.

being “To employ agents and maintain agencies in the United Kingdom, its Dependencies and Colonies, and in foreign countries”. Sadly for him, however, the venture seems barely to have got off the ground, and in 1909 after just a couple of years the company went into liquidation, according to the Valuation Rolls.

The works did not remain vacant for long. In 1910, the Valuation Rolls show that a Pottery (unnamed) was established on Redburn Road, under the proprietorship of John Smith and others, per J. & T. Allison, house and estate agents and valuers of 11 South St. David Street, Edinburgh. It was not until the closure of the

Pottery several years later that the Valuation Rolls named these “others”. There was a distinct carry-through from the Clunas concern, with two directors and two contractors among the Pottery’s proprietors. Additional information comes from the Post Office Directories. The full list reads:

- John Myrtle Smith, 44 Blacket Place, Edinburgh (a plumber);
- D. Wilson’s representatives per J. & T. Anderson, WS, 48 Castle Street, Edinburgh (David Wilson, a joiner and builder, had been a director of Clunas Tiles and Mosaics Ltd.);
- J.P. Cochrane, Southlea, Cramond Bridge (this

was James P. Cochrane whose company ran the Murano Works in Murano Place, Edinburgh, golf ball makers and manufacturers of golf clubs and all golfing accessories);

James Hardie, 18 Chapel Street, Edinburgh (of George Hardie & Son, joiners, cabinet-makers, and house agents);

J. Smith & Son, 10 Bath Street, Portobello (who had been contracted for the mason, brick, and tiling work in the construction of the Clunas factory, George Smith coming in as a Clunas director);

T.C. Kelly, 113 Rose Street, Edinburgh (this was Thomas C. Kelly of John Kelly & Son, ironmongers, who had been a Clunas director);

J.M. Smith's representatives (presumably another reference to John Myrtle Smith, at the top of the list);

R. & G. Scott, 247 High Street, Portobello (Robert and John Scott, joiners and upholsterers, who had been contracted for the joiner work in the construction of the Clunas factory);

Cowan & Stewart, WS (William Cowan and James Stewart), 10 Castle Street, Edinburgh, per J. & T. Allison as above.

Thus the new Pottery had an impressive array of different types of tradesmen as directors, but the key name does not appear in this list. The Valuation Rolls for 1910 give as tenant of the Pottery none other than John Boyle of the Possil Pottery, Possilpark, Glasgow. It seems that he had initiated the production of porcelain the

Prestonpans before it had totally ceased in Glasgow. Curiously, he is listed in this fashion for the next seven years, even though the Possil Pottery was out of operation between 1911 and 1922.

The works name: Castle Pottery

We know from ceramic marks and documentary sources that the name of the factory which produced Prestonpans porcelain was the Castle Pottery – but what castle? Prestonpans does not have one. The ancient Preston Tower would hardly seem to merit such a title, but the names of several other buildings offer possibilities. A house situated near Preston Doocot had the name 'Castle View', while a larger villa located not far from the Pottery was known as 'Castle Park'. On a more mundane level, there could be a connection with a notable building in the High Street colloquially called 'Castle o' Clouts', though it was demolished in 1910, the same year as Castle Pottery went into production, to allow for the expansion of the soapworks of James Mellis & Co. Another possibility is to abandon a Prestonpans connection and look instead at Edinburgh Castle; the group of proprietors which ran the Castle Pottery included two Edinburgh legal firms, J. & T. Anderson and Cowan & Stewart, and both of them had their offices in Castle Street at numbers 48 and 10 respectively.

In truth, none of these theories sound all that plausible, and perhaps it is necessary to return to where we started for the answer. Preston Tower today, mildly impressive though it is, is but a stump when compared with what it looked like when complete. A rare view of it in its entirety appears in a detailed and competently executed sketch showing the disposition of the troops in



the famous local battle of 1745, which was drawn by “an officer of the Army who was present” (see *Figure 5*). It is unnamed there, but on John Ainslie’s map of the ‘Southern Part of Scotland’ of 1821, it is captioned “Castle”. Furthermore, this structure is called “Preston Castle” on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1854, 1892, and 1906, adding “(remains of)” on the earliest version and “(ruins of)” on the others, only being given its present name of “Preston



Tower (ruins of)” on the 1932 edition. Ruinous it may have been by the early 20th century when the Pottery was in operation, but the name of Preston Castle was still in use. Constructed in about 1365, it was twice burned by English invading armies (in 1544 and 1650) and twice restored, but an accidental fire in 1663 left it in its present ruinous state (see *Figure 6*). The chequered history of this venerable pile gave it a degree of local renown, and its name of ‘Castle’

was apparently borrowed by the Pottery which was erected less than half a mile away.

The brand name: Coral Porcelain

One of several factors which intimately linked Castle Pottery with Possil Pottery was the fact that Scotland's only two producers of porcelain each gave their products exotic trade names, in both cases applying them to the companies as well.

Firstly, Nautilus porcelain. The nautilus is a shelled marine creature belonging to the cephalopods, the highest class of molluscs (see *Figure 7*). It is seen here in motion, the shot being taken by the author in Singapore; the reason why not all of it is in the frame is that the nautilus swims by employing a system of jet propulsion, resulting in rapid jerky movements. This was the best shot I could achieve in half a dozen attempts). There are two types: the pearly nautilus of the Southern Seas, and the paper nautilus of the Mediterranean, the latter also known as the argonaut. This name has connotations in Greek mythology, the Argonauts being a band of adventurous sailors, led by Jason, who set off in their ship the *Argo* on a quest to bring back the fabulous golden fleece from Colchis on the distant shores of the Black Sea. They encountered many hazards on the way, none greater than the Sirens with their alluring songs, but in the end they were successful. Many pieces of Nautilus porcelain are marked with a representation of the *Argo* (see *Figure 8*). The shell of the nautilus makes the creature's name very appropriate for a brand of porcelain, combining qualities of beauty, delicacy, and translucence (see *Figure 9*). The name "Nautilus" was registered as a trademark by McDougall &





Sons in 1895⁴ (but not including the representation of a winged snake, as suggested in some of their advertisements). By way of confirmation that McDougall & Sons had not yet begun the manufacture of porcelain, they are described simply as “glass and china merchants”, though clearly plans were well advanced and the start of production was imminent. The words “Nautilus Porcelain” appear on pieces as the maker’s mark, in a variety of formats.

Coral porcelain continues the theme of an exotic marine life-form providing the name, though the link with porcelain does not possess the same validity. Coral takes many forms, and some of them are indeed beautiful, but there is little to connect it with porcelain beyond that. Certainly the type represented in the Coral Porcelain trade mark bears no resemblance to porcelain (see [Figure 10](#)); it appears to be a fragment from the common *corallium nobile* which looks like a bush shorn of its leaves and twigs. Some other

explanation needs to be found for the use of this name.

The answer may lie in the artistic linking of the nautilus shell with coral (the latter supporting the former) which seems to have fascinated the porcelain producers of the British Isles. It may be remembered that the pedigree of Prestonpans porcelain had a distant connection with Worcester, and sure enough Royal Worcester produced a delectable piece of fine modelling showing just such a nautilus/coral combination. Some earlier versions (eg dated 1867) were close to gaudy with their decoration, which became more restrained later. The same shape was made by Goss, the first solid link in the chain, which produced a fine nautilus shell supported on branches of coral (see [Figure 11](#)) – even if it is rather incongruously embellished with a coat-of-arms, for which Goss became famed above all. Belleek then took up the theme. It had already displayed a liking for quasi-coral embellishments, in particular with the production of Queen



Victoria's dinner service (made at Her Majesty's express request and presented by her to the Empress of Germany). The grounds basin took the form of the shell of an *echinus* (sea-urchin) supported on stalks of coral (see [Figure 12](#)); note also the buckie shell lying on top of the base. An even more extravagant use of coral as an applied motif by Belleek occurred on Queen Victoria's mirror frame (see Marion Langham, p.70 and p.71 upper left). A small sketch⁵ of a nautilus shell supported by coral on a base of large pebbles does little justice to the actual stunning piece of ceramic art (see [Figure 13](#)). Possil Pottery





also made a nautilus and coral item, though the coral takes the form of a circular foot-rim rather than supporting stalks. Given that John Boyle was employed at Belleek before coming to Prestonpans via Possilpark, he would surely have been aware of the nautilus/coral ceramic grouping, which may possibly have inspired his selection of a trade-name for Prestonpans porcelain – having Nautilus succeeded by Coral.

The Coral Porcelain trade mark (which does not appear to have been registered) consists of not one but two forms of marine life, the other being a shell of the buckie variety, perhaps a whelk.

The presence of this motif may also be explained by the Belleek/Nautilus heritage, for both produced a similar shell, standing vertically, supported on stalks of coral! As it happens, the Belleek example shown here (see *Figure 14*) has been photographed beside a nautilus/coral combination with some coloration this time, while the Nautilus example (see *Figure 15*) is embellished with hand-painted floral decoration typical of such wares. Furthermore, John Boyle may also have been aware of an existing Prestonpans connection, for Belfield & Co also produced a vertical buckie shell (see *Figure 16*) though the supports here look more like stalks of



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seaweed than of coral. Such products do not appear to have been marked, but they are typical of Belfield's renowned majolica ware, even having their interiors coloured crimson or mauve just as with marked Belfield tea-sets. All of the above may add up to the provision of a reason for the choice of brand-name and trade-mark for Coral Porcelain.

Coral Porcelain products

Considering that the Coral Porcelain Co. operated at the Castle Pottery in Prestonpans for seven years (1910–1916), identifiable products are remarkably rare. We are therefore fortunate indeed to have a surviving bill-head which lists the range of wares which was produced (see *Figure 17*). Although less extensive than that of Nautilus (see *Figure 2*), the three major categories all feature within the Nautilus range, and in many ways it looks as if Coral was very much a continuance of production on the other side of the country. Looking at the three Coral categories one at a time, they are:

- 1) “tea, dessert, centre pieces...” – an example in this category may be a large vase of exotic form (see *cover illustration* and *Figure 18*). Its general shape, and in particular its gilt handles, may be compared with Nautilus items (see for example *Figure 19*), while the hand-painted floral decoration featuring red and yellow pansies could have been executed by a Nautilus decorator (see for example *Figure 20*). Another spectacular item is a large bowl of irregular shape standing on a base of vine stalks (see *Figure 21*). The shape could well be Nautilus and the decoration even more so, not just the painting of the natural subjects but also the pierced and gilded rim. Despite



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their close similarities with Nautilus, there is no doubt about the Prestonpans provenance of these two pieces, as they both carry the complex Coral Porcelain mark (see [Figure 10](#)). **Note:** Just as we are about to go to press, the author has seen two items of marked Nautilus porcelain identical in shape to the two Coral pieces described above, though with quite different decoration. There seems no doubt that the Coral Porcelain Co. were using Nautilus moulds.



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- 2) “wicker flower baskets...” – this description sounds as if it means ‘flower baskets made of simulated wicker work’, but perhaps what was meant was ‘wicker flowered baskets’, as with the Nautilus advertisement for “flowered and wicker baskets”, *ie* baskets of simulated wicker-work encrusted with flowers. This was very much a Belleek speciality and remains so until the present day, winning the company world-wide renown. Such items were also made by Nautilus⁶ (although they are



notoriously difficult to identify, partly because of the problem in applying a mark). It is therefore no surprise to learn that Coral made them also, and the appearance of a proven Prestonpans example is awaited with interest.

- 3) "...coat-of-arms ware" – miniature items in a wide variety of shapes bearing coats-of-arms became the staple of the Goss factory to such an extent that the term 'Goss ware' is often used to describe this range, which was also turned out by many other makers. Adolphus Goss (son of the founder, who eventually took





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over the running of the factory) introduced heraldic embellishments on a range of miniatures based initially on ancient vessels recovered by archaeology, in which he had a keen interest. He did this without the enthusiastic support of his father, but within a few years his marketing acumen had been proved correct, and the enormous success of this class of ware meant that the factory floor-space had to be trebled to cope with demand and the production of all other lines ceased. Not surprisingly, Belleek also produced heraldic miniatures, though not in anything approaching such numbers: first period examples (1863–1890) are rare, those from the second period (1890–1926) a little less so. On the other hand, Nautilus did produce them in quantity; an extensive range of objects carried the coats-of-arms of burghs all over Scotland and a few from further afield –

southern England, Ireland, even as far away as India (for two examples see *Figures 22 and 23*).

Coral Porcelain heraldic miniatures are more common than their large exotic items, but still may be regarded as rare. A small vase (see *Figure 24*) may be regarded as typical, and the somewhat larger rococo teapot (see *Figure 25*) is still smaller than one of average size. There is a certain irony here, for both of these pieces carry the coat-of-arms of the city of Glasgow! On occasions, novelty miniatures were produced in the best tradition of the enormous Goss range of such items. Such wares are now keenly collected, but when a book was published called *Crested China: The History of Heraldic Souvenir Ware* compiled by Sandy Andrews (Horndean, 1980), Coral Porcelain did not make an appearance. The omission was rectified in what was essentially a second edition, *Price Guide to Crested China* by



Nicholas Pine (Waterlooville, 2000), which includes a good drawing of the mark and a very brief mention of the company. The wares listed consist of “a range of ‘smalls’ with Scottish crests.... Models, home/nostalgic [example: cradle on rockers]... and traditional/national souvenirs [example: thistle vase]” (p.149). Incidentally, this class of ware is often erroneously referred to as ‘crested’, but invariably the pieces carry the full achievement of arms, not just the crest.

Coral Porcelain at the Scottish National Exhibition, Glasgow, 1911

Perhaps the finest hour for the Coral Porcelain Company came with its participation in the Scottish Exhibition of National History, Art, and Industry, which was held in Kelvingrove Park, Glasgow, from May to October 1911. By this time, the Scottish pottery industry had passed its peak, but many factories throughout the country still had some way to run; Glasgow itself supported eight potteries at this time. The paucity of pottery on show at this major event is therefore somewhat surprising. This may be partly explained by the fact that ‘Industry’, which

had been the dominant theme in the Glasgow International Exhibitions of 1888 and 1901, was now displaced by ‘History’. Indeed, the 1911 Exhibition’s declared aim was to fund the endowment of a Chair of Scottish History and Literature at Glasgow University. The event proved hugely popular, and during its six-month run it attracted not far short of ten million visitors.

A large exhibit was put on by Doulton & Co Ltd of Lambeth in London, who at that time also operated a branch in Hawkhead Road, Paisley. Their displays, however, were confined to sanitary items. Another London firm, Norman W. Franks of Bayswater, put on a show of reproduction “Old English Hand-Painted Pottery and Persian Pattern Pottery” (the latter very gaudy and having little to do with Persia, though they were by no means the only firm to give it such a moniker), “all dipped in leadless glaze [as proudly declared in the mark on items which still today are not uncommon in Scotland], thus preventing lead poisoning to the workers in the potteries”. This company were merchants rather than manufacturers, but the latter category was represented by Pilkington’s Tile and Pottery Co Ltd of Manchester, producers of the famed Lancastrian lusted wares.

A most interesting exhibit was mounted by Sneddon & Sons of Glasgow (further details of the company appeared in the Post Office Directory of that year: Alexander Sneddon & Sons, wholesale and retail glass, china, and earthenware merchants, and glass engravers and ship and hotel furnishers, 123–127 Stockwell Street and 88 Union Street). They cast their net widely, and included “a large collection of medium and high-class China Ware, useful and

ornamental, including articles of the famed Coalport, Royal Worcester, Royal Crown Derby, and other well-known British makers”. Fascinatingly, they had arranged an “Exhibition of fine old Glasgow Ware, manufactured in Glasgow sixty to seventy years ago [*ie* in the 1840s], including the following pieces made in Glasgow Pottery – *viz.*, one Parian China [a dubious term] Figure (‘Dante’), two Red and Gold Vases, one Etruscan Vase, [and] a China Ink-Stand in Green and Gold”. By the phrase “made in Glasgow Pottery”, the compiler of the Catalogue surely must have meant the Glasgow Pottery of J. & M.P. Bell & Co., for no other Scottish firm possessed the capability to produce such wares.

Approaching closer to our topic was a display by Todd, Cunningham & Petrie of Albion Street, Glasgow. Their “general fancy goods” were manufactured from a variety of materials, and their “Souvenir and Crest Goods” sound like the heraldic china miniatures bearing their TC&P mark, generally made in Staffordshire, which still may be found today. Coming closer still was a double exhibit staged by McDougall & Sons of Buchanan Street, Glasgow, comprising the following: “Glass, China, and Earthenware. Painters showing process of Decoration on China. Special exhibit of ‘Nautilus’ Porcelain manufactured in Glasgow”. However, as we have seen, the production of Nautilus porcelain had been wound down by this time to the point of cessation, so this exhibit was more of a nostalgic retrospective review than representative of a current commercial enterprise. Glasgow had followed Edinburgh’s lead in holding three major exhibitions in less than quarter of a century, the first two international and the third national. The

assessment of all the pottery on show at the Glasgow National Exhibition of 1911 given above reveals one most surprising fact – the going pottery concerns were all English, with Scottish representation being confined to historic displays only – with one exception: the Coral Porcelain of Prestonpans.

The Official Catalogue of the Exhibition (which had a most attractive cover, (see *Figure 26*) gave



**613—THE CORAL PORCELAIN CO.,
CASTLE POTTERY, PRESTONPANS,
EDINBURGH, N.B.**

Ivory Porcelain, plain and decorated, consisting of—Tea, Dessert, and Dejeuner Sets, Vases, Centre Pieces, Wicker Flower Baskets, Figures, Flower Pots and Coat of Arms Ware.

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details on page 211 of the display of Coral Porcelain, at Stand No.613 (see *Figure 27*). Interestingly, they termed their product “Ivory Porcelain”, which they could supply either plain or decorated. The items made are largely as discussed before: tea, dessert, and dejeuner sets,

vases (as *Figure 18*), centre pieces (as *Figure 21*) wicker flower baskets (as discussed), figures, flower pots, and coat-of-arms ware (as *Figure 24*). The notable new line is figures, and in manufacturing these Coral was following one of the most acclaimed achievements of Nautilus. We even have a piece of Coral porcelain which was specially made as a souvenir of this Exhibition. It takes the form of a miniature lighthouse, appropriately inscribed, and including a coloured view of part of the Exhibition itself (see *Figure 28*).

The McDougalls had their display of Nautilus porcelain placed in the prestigious Palace of Industries, its position clearly marked on the plan of that building, while Coral had to be content with an unspecified location in the grounds which contained numerous minor pavilions and kiosks (see *Figure 29*). Nevertheless, this Prestonpans company could be proud that it was the sole representative of the Scottish pottery industry to



put on a display of a range of its products then current. Given that the Coral Porcelain Company was only a year old at the time, its success in Glasgow must have given the firm a tremendous fillip.

Some Coral Porcelain workers

The main man was of course John Boyle, ex-Nautilus, and ex-Belleek before that. The odd thing is that throughout the seven years he ran the company in Prestonpans he is listed as associated with the Possil Pottery in Glasgow, even though it was closed for that period and the production of Nautilus Porcelain had ceased. Given the possibility of a slight overlap, the description in the Valuation Rolls may have been valid in the first year, but not thereafter.

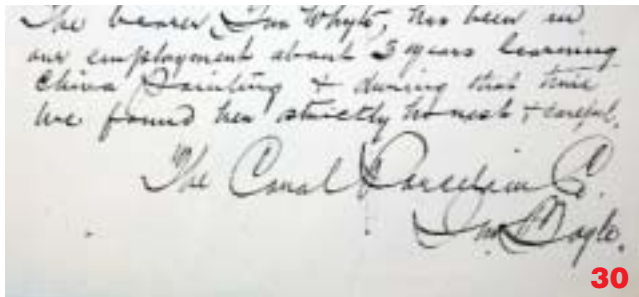
The bill-head described and illustrated in the last section was not in this instance a financial account; it is headed “Memorandum” and took the form of a personal reference, written in John Boyle’s own hand, of the ‘to whom it may concern’ variety (see *Figure 30*). It is dated 21st January 1915, and records:

“The bearer, Ina Whyte, has been our employment about 3 years learning China Painting & during that time we found her strictly honest and careful.

The Coral Porcelain Co.

Jno. [ie John] Boyle”

No address is given beyond “Castle Pottery, Prestonpans, by Edinburgh N.B.” (the inclusion of a preposition is an improvement over the description given in the mark). There was no telephone, but the concern did have a telegraphic address: “Castle Pottery, Prestonpans”. Ina



The bearer, Ina Whyte, has been in our employment about 3 years learning China Painting & during that time we found her strictly honest & careful.

The Coral Porcelain Co.
Jno. Boyle.

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Whyte (later Mrs Davidson) reportedly recalled that John Boyle had indeed come from the Belleek Pottery in Ireland. The tale is related of another pottery worker, Mrs Nelson, who had a novel way of being called home for her midday meal. When lunch-time arrived, this was signalled by a teacup being placed in the window of her house, which faced onto the factory.

In 1913, John Boyle entered into a co-partnership agreement with Daniel Harrigan, of 33 Hope Street, Glasgow, the address of D. Harrigan & Co, glass importers. The purpose was probably to secure an injection of cash – it is difficult to see what else Harrigan had to offer – but the arrangement did not work out, and just a year and a quarter later the co-partnership was dissolved by a decree of the Court of Session. Notice was given in *The Scotsman*, and also in the *Edinburgh Gazette*⁷. The petitioner was Daniel Harrigan, now described as a commission agent at the same address as before, and the respondent was John Boyle, china manufacturer, Castle Pottery, Prestonpans. Not only was the partnership thereby dissolved, but the whole estate and effects of the Coral Porcelain Co was sequestered. The departure of Daniel Harrigan in 1915 after such a short period of time must have been a blow to John Boyle, and it seems that Coral Porcelain did not continue in production very long after that.

In 1917, his residence was listed in the Valuation Rolls for the first time, at 1 Bath Place, Portobello, though no pottery affiliation is stated. In the following year, 1918, the [Castle] Pottery is listed under 'occupier' as "empty", while under 'tenant' there is just a blank. It was the end of the road for the Coral Porcelain Co – but not for porcelain production in Prestonpans at this location, nor indeed of John Boyle's involvement.

The Scottish Porcelain Co. Ltd.

After lying vacant and tenantless for two years, the Castle Pottery came back to life under the control of the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd. Its certificate of incorporation under the Companies Act is dated 30th October 1919, and its principal objective was made clear in a Memorandum of Association of the same date: "To acquire and take over as a going concern and carry on the business of manufacturers of and dealers in porcelain, earthen, and similar wares, now or lately carried on by John Boyle at the Castle Pottery, Prestonpans". Three directors are listed: John Boyle, porcelain manufacturer, residing at 1 Bath Place, Portobello; James N. Stewart, an Edinburgh solicitor; and Alexander G. Anderson, a fancy goods manufacturer in Edinburgh, with premises at 3, 5, 6, 15, and 16 The Arcade, Princes Street, at 41 Leith Street, and works at 23 Montgomery Street. A total of 5,000 £1 shares were issued and allocated as follows: 1,000 to John Boyle (being the purchase price of moveable machinery, implements, and stock, plus the acre or so of land where the factory stood), 1,000 to Alexander Anderson as the new player in the game, and 1,500 (being the purchase price of the building and fixed machinery therein) to a group consisting of George Smith, builder (375), the lawyers Cowan & Stewart acting as trustees (750,

divided equally between William Cowan and James Stewart with 375 each), and Robert and John Scot, joiners (375, divided almost equally with 188 and 187 respectively). This accounted for 3,500 shares, the remaining 1,500 were not allocated. In terms of the people involved, it was almost as if the Coral Porcelain Co lived on.

By virtue of an agreement dated 22nd October 1919, the new company purchased from John Boyle "the good will of the said business, with the exclusive right to use the name of the 'Castle Pottery', and all trade marks connected therewith". In return, he agreed to act as manager of the Pottery, and "to devote his whole time to the interests and business of the Company" for a minimum period of three years, "subject to the right of the Company to terminate this engagement at any time in the event of his services not being satisfactory in the opinion of the Board of Directors". (This may be an oblique reference to the failure of the Coral Porcelain Company; and a question mark still hangs over the reasons for his departure from Belleek and from Possilpark.) Boyle also gave an undertaking that "he shall not directly or indirectly engage or be interested in any similar business in any capacity, and that in the event of his leaving the services of the Company", the same would apply "for the space of three years from the date of leaving said service and within a radius of thirty miles from Prestonpans"⁸.

Attached to this agreement is an inventory detailing the accommodation and contents of Castle Pottery at that time. This inventory was reproduced in full in a study of the subject by Jean Shirlaw in the *Scottish Pottery Historical Review*⁹. (Unfortunately, the title of the article, the author's name, and the reference for the

inventory and associated documentation were all omitted from the published article; my thanks to Mrs Shirlaw for supplying the latter.) The accommodation of the Pottery included the casting rooms, the gilding and painting room (with 12 painters' rests), the sagger house, the kiln department, the colour and enamel mill room (though the gold was dealt with in the gilding and painting room, with 1 gold grinding slab and 1 gilding wheel), the slip kiln room, and the making room. Besides the engine room, a lot of machinery was listed. Materials included white lead, boracic acid, china clay, ground Cornish stone, cullet, raw feldspar, calcined feldspar, fireclay, terra cotta clay, and fritt. There was also a long list of sundries. In terms of the types of ware produced, there were some revealing entries. There were all of 600 engraved copper plates;

597 were of "crests, views, etc." while the other 3 were of "Thistle Pattern, for tea and dessert ware". The huge number suggests that some if not all of these copper plates were taken from the Possil Pottery when the production of Nautilus porcelain ceased. In terms of what was actually being made, there were 23 boards of fettled porcelain, 15 wicker flower baskets (flowered), and 15 boards of terra cotta, all in the 'green' state.

Items made by the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd are even rarer than items of Coral Porcelain; indeed, this author knows of no piece bearing such a mark. The closest is a miniature vase in the shape of a thistle, again of the heraldic ware type (see [Figure 31](#)). It carries the mark SCOTCH PORCELAIN and a thistle (see [Figure 32](#)) which



I have speculated previously (in 1979) *may* be the mark of the Scottish Porcelain Co. Ltd¹⁰. This was put forward with a considerable degree of caution, and it was pointed out that the item bearing the mark “goes to great lengths to present itself as a Scottish piece: it has been modelled in the shape of a thistle, the transfer mark illustrates a thistle, and the name of the ware is ‘Scotch Porcelain’ – is all this overt Scottishness a put-on to deceive unwary English tourists?” (p.51). There certainly are pitfalls to avoid when going down this road, with products carrying Scottish-sounding names actually being made in England, such as the Caledonia China of Glasgow – except that the Glasgow association is through its retailer, with its maker doubtless in Staffordshire; likewise the Scotia Pottery, which was operated by Edward T. Bodley & Co in Burslem. Even so, I was perhaps being over-cautious, because my suggestion won quick support from Irene MacDonald, who ran an antique shop in Haddington. She knew of a fine lattice-work basket in the Belleek style which had been given to its owner by her aunt in Prestonpans who said that it had been made in the porcelain factory there. The aunt also had a tea-set from the same factory, the cups being shaped like flowers and the sugar basin like a thistle; the mark was “Scotch Porcelain”. Irene Macdonald also described a little Belleek-type vase with applied porcelain flowers, which carried the Scotch Porcelain plus thistle mark (as illustrated here). Such evidence led me to conclude: “ ‘Coral Porcelain’ and ‘Scotch Porcelain’ may simply be the names of similar products made by the same factory [Castle Pottery] under different phases of management” (p.74). That was my feeling in 1981, and it is the same but stronger now.

Conclusion

With porcelain being produced in Prestonpans for around fourteen years, it is most surprising that so little can be identified as such. One obvious explanation for this odd state of affairs is that the great bulk of it was unmarked. A likely example of such an item is a cup and saucer of undecorated porcelain with an off-white body (remember the 1911 description of Coral porcelain as “ivory” ware which could be supplied “plain”). The rim of the saucer has a striking ‘concertina’ effect (see [Figure 33](#)); the matching cup with its three-stemmed handle has borrowed a Nautilus shape (see [Figure 34](#)), though while the Nautilus product was given a glossy glaze over a fine white body, the one from Prestonpans had a matt glaze over a creamy body full of grit. The likelihood is that the unmarked cup and saucer are products of the Castle Pottery.

Another possible explanation for the dearth of Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd marked items is that they do exist, marked – but not with the mark of their maker, rather with that of their retailer. A candidate is the porcelain bearing the brand-name ‘Porcelle’. This was registered as a trade mark in 1910 by William Ritchie & Sons Ltd of Edinburgh, “fancy goods merchants.”¹¹ Pieces have been recorded carrying the Porcelle name plus a shield, with a helmet crest with visor closed, containing the initials W.R. & S. (see [Figure 35](#)). Little is given away regarding the maker, for the mark simply says “British Manufacture”, but a case can certainly be made for the possibility, even probability, of a Prestonpans provenance. The Post Office Directories give William Ritchie & Sons Ltd at 24, 26, 28, 30 and 32 Elder Street, Edinburgh,

manufacturing and wholesale stationers, and printers and publishers of Christmas cards and calendars, followed by the description of relevance here: “specialists in leather and fancy goods”. The Porcelle trade mark device is very similar to Ritchie’s company trade mark which they had registered seventeen years earlier in 1897¹² though with some differences: the basic shape of the original shield is nearly the same but not identical, and in place of the company’s initials it bears three crosses, a crescent, and a diagonal bar (known as a ‘bend’, even though it is quite straight) inscribed with their telegraphic address ‘Reliable’. Although William Ritchie & Sons Ltd were basically stationers, their wider interests are reflected in the term “fancy goods” contained in the two descriptions referred to above, seemingly a reference to porcelain trinkets



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carrying coats-of-arms, and so these Porcelaine goods may well be Prestonpans products.

The Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd seems to have operated successfully at Castle Pottery for a few years, the key – as always when examining porcelain production at Prestonpans – being John Boyle. The Company's annual share capital reports show that he continued to live at 1 Bath Place in Portobello until 1921, then nearby at 52 Bath Street until 1923. After that date, uncertainty sets in. In 1924, his name disappears from the list of directors, his shares in the Company having been redistributed among the other share-holders on 21st May of that year. That seems to have been the end of John Boyle's connection with the porcelain industry of Prestonpans, and the days of the industry itself were numbered. The Company appears to have continued in operation in 1925, though it faltered badly in 1926. A letter from its secretary, James Stewart, to the Registrar of Joint Stock Companies at Parliament Square, Edinburgh, dated 11th October of that year, contained the following bleak statement: "This Company is being continued on the Register only until the heritable property can be disposed of, when the Company will be wound up". This sounds very much as if production had ceased, and the situation is reflected in the Valuation Rolls. The Pottery (still unnamed) continued at Redburn Road under the proprietorship of the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd, its administrative address being 13 Castle Street, Edinburgh, the chambers of Cowan & Stewart WS. There is no telling how active it was, if at all, in its later years. In 1929, the 'occupier' column states "empty", and in 1931 that changed to "ruinous". By

1933, both the Company name and the property itself had been expunged from the Rolls.

The closing phase of the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd makes rather sad reading. The directors and share-holders continued as before in the annual share capital reports until the end of 1932, when in place of the annual report, an extraordinary general meeting of the Company passed a special resolution resolving that it be wound up voluntarily. This was easier said than done, because there were no funds out of which the expenses of going through the formal procedure of winding up could be met, and so on 4th September 1937 another application was made to the Companies Registration Office in Edinburgh to have the Company statutorily removed from the Register. This was submitted by James Stewart, its former secretary and now its liquidator, who added rather poignantly: "I may say that at the statutory meeting held following upon the Company going into liquidation, I was the only person present, and I have no doubt that this would happen if a final meeting was convened". Notice of the Company being struck off the Register and dissolved appeared in the *Edinburgh Gazette* of 22nd October 1937, confirmation being given in the certificate issued by the Registrar dated 25th January 1938.

The standard work *Scottish Pottery* by Arnold Fleming does have a section on Castle Pottery, but with a huge omission. He places the building of the original factory rather too early (*viz* at the end of the 19th century), though he is correct about the pre-porcelain phase: "It was erected by a man Clunas, who, after a brief period, was compelled to give up the venture and close the place" (pp. 167 & 168). He then moves straight



on to the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd as the current operators, which they were in 1923, without the slightest mention of the Coral Porcelain Co – which is why this writer felt compelled to record it when a marked piece came to light (see Cruickshank 1974). The rest of his account is mostly sound: “The works are under the management of Mr Boyle, who at one time was in the Belleek Pottery at Fermanagh, in Ireland. The pottery produces small articles in lustre porcelain, with the coats-of-arms of various Scottish towns painted on them [actually printed on in black, with the colours painted in], and also a large variety of fancy ornaments, among which may be noted wicker baskets beautifully and delicately made of woven clay in the manner of the original Belleek ware” (p.168).

It is certainly to be hoped that more specimens will come to light which can be positively attributed to the Castle Pottery, better still if they bear one of that factory’s marks. It is regrettable that no map is known to exist which shows the precise location of the Pottery and the layout of its work buildings, but we are fortunate in having a photograph of Castle Pottery, which shows three kilns (possibly there was another) and a couple of chimneys (see *Figure 36*). The two people standing in front are Colin Campbell senior and junior, who lived nearby; young Colin was aged about six at the time, and as he was born in 1920 that dates the photograph to around



Figure 37 A simplified chart suggesting the pedigree of Prestonpans porcelain by means of makers' marks.



1926, during the period when the Castle Pottery was operated by the Scottish Porcelain Co Ltd All these strands of evidence combine to tell the story, partially at least, of the Castle Pottery and its wider associations (see *Figure 37*), and to firmly establish Prestonpans as a producer of porcelain among its many other ceramic products.

Acknowledgements

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Sources of Illustrations

- Figure 1** Drawing of the Belleek Pottery, produced by Butterworth & Heath, published in Jewitt's *Ceramic Art of Great Britain*, Vol. II, p. 487; 2nd edn., p. 601. With caption, cover of McCrum's *Belleek Pottery*.
- Figure 2** Advertisement for Nautilus Porcelain, *Pottery Gazette*, 1st May 1903.

Figure 3 ‘Articles of Association, Clunas Tiles and Mosaics Ltd.’, 1906: National Archives of Scotland, BT2/6230/4.

Figure 6 Old photograph of Preston Tower, from Tulloch’s *Prestonpans in old picture postcards*, No. 4.

Figure 11 Photograph of Goss nautilus/coral from Rees and Cawley’s *Pictorial Encyclopaedia of Goss China*, p.28 upper.

Figure 12 Drawing of a Belleek echinus shell supported on stalks of coral from Jewitt’s *Ceramic Art of Great Britain*, Vol.II, p. 489, Figure 727; 2nd edn., p. 602, Figure 1725, per the *Art Journal*.

Figure 14 Photograph of Belleek nautilus/coral and buckie from Langham’s *Belleek Irish Porcelain* published by the Quiller Press Ltd, London.

Figure 35 Photograph of Castle Pottery, circa 1926, from Nan Campbell, widow of Colin Campbell junior, the young boy in the photograph.

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- 1 For further details, see Cruickshank, Graeme 2007 *Prestonpans Pottery* (Prestonpans)
- 2 National Archives of Scotland, BT2/6230.
- 3 *loc.cit.*, copy of Feu Charter held in the Register of Sasines for the County of Haddington, RS100/206; signed 12th April 1907.

- 4 No.189,577 registered on 31st August 1895 (see *Trade Marks Journal*, 25th September 1895, p.827).
- 5 Jewitt, *Ceramic Art*: 1st edn., Vol.II, p.490, Figure 728 no.2; 2nd edn., p.604, Figure 1728.
- 6 For a good photograph of such wares, see the *Pottery Gazette*, 1st July 1907, p.803.
- 7 Inserted in *The Scotsman*, 20th February 1915, p.1, and the *Edinburgh Gazette*, 23rd February 1915, p. 331 (the latter noted by Henry Kelly in the *Scottish Pottery Society Bulletin* No. 21 [n.d.], p.10).
- 8 National Archives of Scotland, BT2/10708.
- 9 *Scottish Pottery Historical Review* No.8, 1984, pp. 63–66.
- 10 See Cruickshank 1979.
- 11 No. 325,923 registered on 6th August 1919 (see *Trade Marks Journal* for 1910, p. 1521; also noted and illustrated under ‘New Trade Marks’ in the *Pottery Gazette*, October 1910, p. 1137).
- 12 No.173,833 registered on 11th July 1893 (see *Trade Marks Journal* for 1893, p. 803).