

*The Registered Designs of  
Belfield's Pottery, Prestonpans*



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Scottish Pottery Studies 5



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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.**

## *Registered designs*

The products of the industrial potteries could be granted legal protection in a number of ways. This became necessary when a good idea (for a function, a design, or a name) was thought up by a pottery which wished to retain exclusive rights to its use. There was, and still is to a large extent, a widespread belief that the Scottish pottery industry was essentially imitative, merely copying, with varying degrees of success, the products of Staffordshire. However, research has shown the utter fallacy of this assumption. Many Scottish potteries were truly innovative, and their sense of novelty and invention contributed quite considerably to the development of industrial ceramics in general.

Probably the best-known form of legal protection is the patent. Basically, this involves the granting of a monopoly to a manufacturer by royal warrant (known as 'letters patent'). In ceramic terms, three different elements could be patented: firstly, the machinery used to form a specific item of pottery; secondly, the special process by which an item of pottery was made; and thirdly, the actual item of pottery itself, which performed some specific function. The issue of a patent afforded legal protection, and if the manufacturer gave it some catchy name by which it might be more widely known and thereby achieve greater commercial success, this could be registered as a trademark. Upwards of 50 Scottish pottery patents were issued between 1852 and 1934, the

current count being 58. No patent has yet been traced belonging to a pottery in Prestonpans.

The other form of legal protection was the registered design. Basically, this involves the granting of copyright by Act of Parliament. In ceramic terms, two different design elements could be registered: the shape of a pottery item (in three dimensions), and the pattern applied to a pottery item (in two dimensions). Upwards of 400 Scottish pottery designs were registered between 1841 and 1954, the current count being 405. Belfield & Co., Potters of Prestonpans, contributed to that number.

Prior to the first Design Act, an item of pottery could only have its design registered if it was moulded in relief to give a highly upstanding surface in which case it could be classified as a piece of sculpture and given copyright protection. No item of Scottish pottery has been recorded in this category. Pottery of any category could be registered for the first time under the Design Copyright Act of 1839, by which it received protection for one year. Only a single group of four items was registered by a Scottish factory under this Act. The Designs Act of 1842 increased the period of protection to three years, created thirteen classes of materials (pottery being Class IV), and instituted a code composed of two numerals and two letters, arranged within a diamond-shaped mark, which concealed the

details of registration from competitors. The letters stood for the year and the month, and the numerals for the day and the order in which the package was received on that day. In the centre of the diamond is a large “Rd.” abbreviated from ‘Registered’, while at the apex in a three-quarter circle is “IV”, the classification number for pottery. One combination of coding operated between 1842 and 1867, and a different combination between 1868 and 1883. Belfield’s Pottery registered five designs under this Act, all utilising the second combination.

A further Act of 1884 extended the period of protection from three to five years, and also abandoned the diamond mark with its clandestine code, in place of which a straightforward numerical sequence was introduced. It began with No.1 and simply kept on running, as it still does today, now well into the millions. Belfield’s Pottery registered three more designs under this Act, making eight in all – ten really, as one of

them was a triple. Another Act of 1907 allowed for the five-year protection period to be doubled, or even trebled, if the manufacturer so requested. By this time, it would appear that Belfield’s interest in registering new designs was over. They had played a significant part in the registration system, all of their designs being for shapes.

### **BELFIELD’S REGISTERED DESIGNS**

No. 268309 (diamond coded series)

Date: 1872, November 30th, no.8

Proprietor of registered design: Belfield & Co., Prestonpans

Item: teapot, with moulded bamboo decoration

Method of representation: photograph, by Lawrie & Mitchell of Edinburgh (see *Figure 1*)

This, the first of Belfield’s registered designs, proved to be enduringly popular (see *Figure 2*).

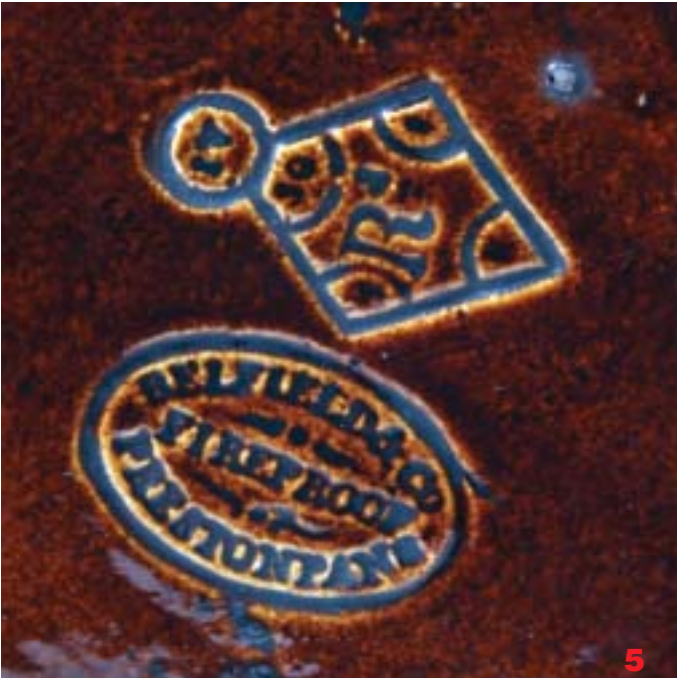




Not only are these bamboo teapots relatively common, even today, but also the great majority do not bear the registration mark (just Belfield's standard large-scale mark, see [Figure 3](#)) indicating that they were made outwith the period of registration. Indeed, a photograph exists showing one being made (see [Figure 4](#)) around the late 1920s or early 1930s, which indicates that this shape of teapot had a life span of over half a century in production, which is remarkable. The operative in the photograph is Hannah Ritchie who is thought to have been employed by Belfield's Pottery in the packing department and was therefore not concerned with the production side. She presumably features in this photograph on grounds of being photogenic, though some doubt it cast on the authenticity of the operation on which she is supposedly engaged. The purpose of the equipment which she is handling has so far not been determined.

Potteries may well have given names to the various shapes which they produced, but it is exceedingly rare for products to carry such names. Another way in which they might be recorded is if they appear in the trade catalogues. Neither situation applied in this case, though we do have a verbal record of what the name may be: 'Duchess'.

The design features closely packed vertical stalks of bamboo, sliced through at an angle at the top, along with a little clump of bamboo leaves and a ribbon tied in a bow. Although the teapot alone is shown in the registration records, a range of other items exhibiting these motifs, sometimes bearing the same registration mark (see [Figure 5](#)) were also made by Belfield. These include a tea kettle (see [Figure 6](#)), a sugar basin (see [Figure 7](#)), a cream jug (see [Figure 8](#)), a cheese dish (see



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*Figure 9*), a planter (see *Figure 10*), and a spittoon! (see *Figure 11*). Mostly they had the regular all-over treacly-brown Rockingham glaze, though they could be cane-coloured (see *Figure 12*) or pure white (see *Figure 13*). Sometimes different glaze colours were introduced; this could be done sparingly – retaining the brown bamboo but having the leaves in green and the ribbon in yellow (see *Figure 14*), or a variety of mottled colours could be used in the style of majolica (see *Figure 15*). Both in terms of the range of objects made and the variety of colourings applied, Belfield’s bamboo style proved to be one of their most popular lines. These bamboo Rockingham teapots were so widely appreciated that Belfield & Co. even won a contract to supply a consignment for use in a cantina in Valparaiso, Chile!

**No. 305150 (diamond coded series)**

Date: 1876, November 9th, no.10

Proprietor of the registered design: Belfield & Co, Prestonpans

Item: three-part dessert service (comport, round dish, and oblong dish) with moulded leafy decoration, the first two pieces being leaf-shaped as well

Method of representation: photograph, by Lawrie & Mitchell, Photographers, 25 North Bridge, Edinburgh (see *Figure 16*)

This registration is special in several ways. Firstly, it comprises three distinctly different items, and although the decorative theme is common to all, it is surprising that the Pottery was not required to register each item separately. The dish is relatively common, the tazza (adjacent) is not, while the comport (top) is so rare it is known only by means of this photograph.

The registration of a design is normally done because of its novelty, but this leaf-shaped dish has something of a pedigree. Indeed, the concept of a leaf-shaped dish goes back at least one and a quarter centuries. A more natural shape than Belfield's circular version was produced in Staffordshire in white salt-glazed stoneware around 1740.<sup>1</sup> It long remained a favourite, with several English potteries producing green-glazed versions, notably Wedgwood, and also Robert & George Gordon of Prestonpans. Their version was rounder in outline, had a much more heavily serrated rim, and the single loop stalk handle became a double (see *Figure 17*). The Gordon moulds (block and keeper) are in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland (see *Figures*





*18 and 19*), the block being dated 1828 (see *Figure 20*).

This item has been the subject of some controversy. It was described and illustrated by Patrick McVeigh in his 1979 work,<sup>2</sup> noting that it had come from Belfield's works, and although the next paragraph described how Charles Belfield moved into Gordon's Pottery at the Cuttle, no attempt was made to link this mould with the Gordons. When this writer reviewed McVeigh's book for the *Museums Journal*,<sup>3</sup> some scepticism was expressed about the number 1828 being a date, given the ample evidence supplied by marked Belfield pieces bearing the registration mark for 1876. I would now like to retract my objection, on two grounds. Firstly, items are known which were produced from this mould,



21

green-glazed, carrying the impressed mark of R & G GORDON beneath a crown (see *Figure 21* for the style of mark). Secondly, the National Museum also has the moulds for another press-moulded dish, this time featuring basket-weave with a looped border; the block is dated, precisely this time, 24th May 1830 in a similar style to the 1828 block, while the keeper bears an inscription in a completely different style which repeats the original date and adds, in the same hand, the date 26th October 1881.<sup>4</sup> We thus have unassailable proof that Belfield was using Gordon's moulds of half a century earlier.

In the case of the leaf-shaped dish, it would appear that Belfield's Pottery was not registering a novel design but an adaptation of a much older design which they had inherited from their predecessors. Their contribution was to give it a stunning majolica glaze (see *Figure 22*) which was also the case with the tazza (see *Figures 23 and 24*). The Dunmore Pottery of Peter Gardner



22

produced a somewhat similar dish, more naturally leaf-shaped and with a sharply serrated edge which was hand-cut, and glazed in characteristic 'autumn colours'.<sup>5</sup> If it was turned out at a very early stage in Dunmore's production of such wares, then it could have preceded



23



Belfield's registered design, in which case it might have been the catalyst for Belfield to reuse the old Gordon mould and enhance the output with their own striking majolica glaze.

Very unusually, the registration mark is used in conjunction with different maker's marks (see *Figures 25 and 26*).





**No. 320030 (diamond coded series)**

Date: 1878, April 2nd, no.6

Proprietor of the registered design: Belfield & Co, Prestonpans

Item: teapot, with moulded hyacinth decoration

Method of representation: photograph, by Lawrie & Mitchell, Photographers, 25 North Bridge, Edinburgh (see *Figure 27*)



This, the second of Belfield's registered teapot designs, features a fairly natural-looking hyacinth (see *Figure 28*). It is particularly notable for the unusual floral knob to its lid (see *Figure 29*). The registration mark is accompanied by one of Belfield's regular maker's marks (see *Figure 30*).





**No. 385527 (diamond coded series)**

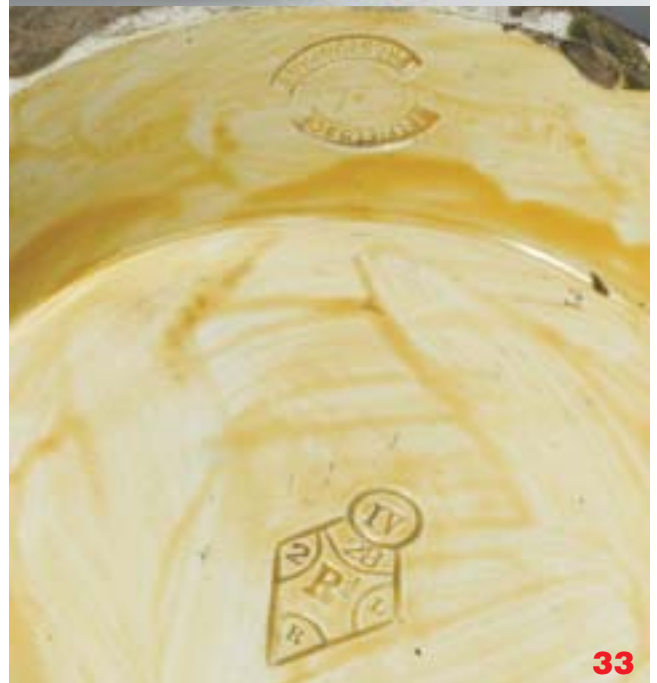
Date: 1882, August 28th, no.2

Proprietor of the registered design: Belfield & Co.,  
Prestonpans

Item: jardinière, with spiral reeded decoration

Method of representation: photograph, by Lawrie  
& Mitchell, Photographers, 25 North Bridge,  
Edinburgh (see *Figure 31*).

This handsome object is both large and heavy,  
and all of the examples seen to date have  
colourful running glazes (see *Figure 32*). The  
majority do not bear the registration mark,  
indicating that they were produced over an  
extended period. The example shown here (see  
*Figure 33*) is on a different plane from the  
maker's mark, which is most unusual.







No. 399319 (diamond coded series)

Date: 1883, June 13th, no. 3

Proprietor of the registered design: Belfield & Co,  
Prestonpans

Item: teapot, with spiral reeded decoration

Method of representation: photograph, by  
Lawrie & Mitchell, Photographers 25 North  
Bridge, Edinburgh (see *Figure 34*).

This, the third of Belfield's registered teapot designs, essentially repeats the spiral reeding of the jardinière which had been registered less than ten months earlier. Its shape is particularly elegant, and the spiral motif appears on the body, the lid, and the knob (see *Figure 35*). The registration mark is accompanied by yet another style of maker's mark (see *Figure 36*).





**No. 181087 (numerical series)**

**Date:** 1891, October 17th

**Proprietor of registered design:** Belfield & Co, Potters, Prestonpans, Haddingtonshire N.B.

**Item:** teapot, moulded with oval decoration

**Method of representation:** photograph (uncredited), fixed to its card by a pair of brass rivets (see *Figure 37*)

The fourth and last of Belfield's registered teapot designs finds itself sandwiched in the series between a pair of lavatory bowls. It is an elegant design featuring a series of upright ovals reminiscent of cameos. The stark registration photograph looks as if the item was only bisque-fired; the example illustrated here carries typical Belfield majolica glaze (see *Figure 38*) and mauve interior (see *Figure 39*). The mark is extra-



ordinary not only for its size, but for the fact that the registration number is incorporated into the maker's description, which is a most unusual feature (see *Figure 40*).



**No. 36453 (numerical series)**

Date: 1885, October 26th

Proprietor of registered design: Belfield & Co,  
Potters, Prestonpans

Item: lavatory bowl and trap, with moulded  
anthemion-scroll decoration

Method of decoration: photograph, by Lawrie &  
Mitchell, Photographers, 25 North Bridge,  
Edinburgh; side view and front view (the latter

captioned), each  
photograph fixed  
to its card by a  
pair of brass  
rivets. (see *Figure  
41*)



**No. 210883 (numerical series)**

Date: 1893, April 19th

Proprietor of registered design: Belfield & Co,  
Prestonpans, Haddingtonshire

Item: lavatory bowl and trap, with moulded  
decoration in the form of stylised flowers and  
floral motifs

Method of representation: photograph (uncredited),  
side view and front view (see *Figures 42 and 43*)

Lavatory bowls and traps were regularly  
patented, but it is very unusual for their designs  
to be registered. These two merit such treatment  
because of their elegant relief decoration – not  
that it would be allowed nowadays for reasons of  
hygiene, providing for too many hiding places for  
bacteria. Such items had been a mainstay of  
Belfield's production right from the start, Arnold  
Fleming crediting the Pottery with being “the first





place to make white sanitary ware in Scotland of a superior quality”.<sup>7</sup> They clearly remained popular for some time, into the 20th century indeed, for when Belfield’s workforce was assembled for a group photograph in 1904, the two youngest lads were positioned in the centre of the front row, each holding a prize item – and between them pride of place was given to the registered lavatory bowl designed 1893<sup>8</sup> (Ref.8) (see *Figure 44*).

### Conclusion

Belfield’s Pottery clearly took a pride in its products, and a total of ten shapes were registered between 1872 and 1893. All of their representations were submitted by means of photography. Of the eight photographs, the first six were taken by the old-established Edinburgh

firm of Lawrie & Mitchell, whose premises were located at 25 North Bridge. They were normally engaged in photographing people, and they posed the Belfield pots as they would when dealing with their human clients. The studio setting is particularly evident in the shots taken in 1876 and 1885, the later being of one of the lavatory bowls, elevated on a draped plinth as if a work of artistic merit – which, in its own way, it was. The last two photographs, taken in 1891 and 1893, are not credited to Lawrie & Mitchell, and do not bear their name or appear in the portrait card format. Perhaps this was because the firm was going through an unsettled period; in 1895 it relocated to 1 Nicholson Square, and in 1899 it closed.

It would be fitting to end this discourse with a photograph of Belfield’s Pottery in full



production, but none is known to exist. The best we can manage is a rather sombre shot (see *Figure 45*) in which one kiln is visible, but not smoking, probably taken around the time of its closure in 1938.

## References

- 1 see Mountford, Arnold 1971 *An Illustrated Guide to Staffordshire Saltglazed Stoneware* (London),
- 2 see McVeigh, Patrick 1979 *Scottish East Coast Potteries, 1790–1840* (Edinburgh), p. 107, Figures 57 & 58
- 3 *Museums Journal*, vol. 89, part iv, March 1980
- 4 for illustrations, see Cruickshank, Graeme 2007 *Prestonpans Pottery* (Prestonpans), pp. 86 & 87) Figures 118–121
- 5 see Cruickshank, Graeme 2002 *A Visit to Dunmore Pottery: a contemporary account with additional commentary*. (Stirling), front cover

- 6 see Cruickshank, *Prestonpans Pottery*, p. 29, Figure 16
- 7 see Fleming, Arnold 1923 *Scottish Pottery* (Glasgow), p162
- 8 for full photograph, see Cruickshank, *Prestonpans Pottery*, p. 228, Figure 305

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Thanks are due to the following institutions for allowing the reproduction of items of pottery in their care:

Figures 7, 38, 39, 40: Victor Murphy Memorial Trust;

Figures 8, 12, 13, 43: Edinburgh City Museums;

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Figures 4 and 45 are taken from *Prestonpans in old postcards* compiled by Alister Tulloch (1989, 2nd edn. 1991, Zaltbommel, Netherlands).

Figure 17: photograph by the late Robin Hill.

Figures 1, 16, 27, 31, 34, 37, 41, and 42 are by courtesy of the National Archives of the UK. They show the original design representations which were submitted to the Designs Registry by Belfield & Co, and were extracted in the course of a research project conducted by Graeme Cruickshank in the 1980s funded by the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland.