

Collection Significance Report: Scottish Decorative Arts & Design: Ceramics

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About this Document

This document is extracted from a report by Glasgow Museums submitted to the Scottish Executive's Recognition Committee as part of its recognition scheme for non-national collections.

Overview

Ceramics are items made out of clay that have been fired at high temperature in a kiln. After firing they are often hand or machine decorated with glazes, clay slips, paints or transfer prints. The production of commercial ceramics began in Scotland in the mid eighteenth century.

Collection Size

About 2000 pieces.

The Collection

This collection spans the main period of Scottish ceramic manufacture from c1750 to c1990, with an emphasis on ceramics manufactured in Glasgow and the West of Scotland. The collection includes domestic tablewares, utensils and tea services, ornaments and decorative items, sanitary ware, commemorative pieces and ceramic shards.

The collection represents the great variety of techniques employed by Scottish artisans and manufacturers, ranging from crude earthenwares produced in small rural potteries to tin-glazed earthenware and transfer printed porcelains from major manufactures. Key Glasgow potteries represented include the Delftfield Company, the first commercial pottery in Scotland, which opened in 1748, the Glasgow Pottery of J. & M. P. Bell & Co., and Govancroft, Glasgow's last pottery, which closed in 1976.

Craft and studio ceramics include late nineteenth and early twentieth century hand-painted wares, including work from Weymss, Bough and by the Glasgow Girls. Early twentieth century Scottish studio and art pottery and late twentieth century art ceramics and sculptures are also represented.

Collection Significance

This substantial collection has a breadth and scope that is of national significance. It is a key collection for the study and understanding of the Scottish pottery industry. Much of the collection has added significance in that it has direct associations with people who worked in or managed some of the key Glasgow potteries.

The 25 pieces attributed to the Delftfield Company are of particular importance and reflect the output of the company from early tin-glazed earthenware to later pieces of stoneware and creamware. A collection of shards from two archaeological excavations at the Delftfield site are potentially of vital importance to the history of this pottery. Key items of this collection include the Saracen's Head punchbowl of 1760, and a pearlware church dated 1789, which is the only factory-marked piece in the collection.

Most of the key potteries of Glasgow are very well represented. Perhaps the best-represented overall is the Glasgow Pottery of J. & M. P. Bell & Co. (1841-1912). This group includes mostly transfer-printed wares, but also porcelain and an early lavatory bowl. The collection contains an enormous number of fine examples of work from other city potteries active over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including decorative and commemorative porcelain by Verreville and Nautilus, and items from Govancroft, the last Glasgow pottery to close. The collection relating to the Britannia Pottery has the added significance that it was gifted by J. Arnold Fleming, a partner in the firm and the author of the first book on the history of pottery in Scotland.

The craft and studio ceramics are also strong. There is a wide range of hand-painted wares from both West and East coast cottage industries dating from the late nineteenth century to mid twentieth. The collection includes work from Weymss, Mak'Merry, Bough and by the Glasgow Girls, including Jessie Marion King, Anne Macbeth and Elizabeth Mary Watt. A good selection of Scottish studio and art pottery has been purchased or acquired directly from the makers, including an impressive number of pieces from Dunmore Pottery in Falkirk, the short-lived Allander Pottery at Milngavie, and ceramic sculptures and items made by craftspeople living and working in Scotland from the 1960s to 1990.



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How to Cite this Document

The full bibliographic reference for this document is shown below. Make sure to add the date you downloaded the document.

Brown, A (2008) *Collection Significance Report: Scottish Decorative Arts & Design: Ceramics*, Glasgow Museums, online at: http://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/media/scottish_ceramics_significance_report.pdf, last downloaded dd/mm/yyyy



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