

**FROM LEFT** One of a trio of pot pourri vases with paintings of grouse, c1840, £2,250; one of a pair of Rococo Revival maroon vases, c1835, £1,750; dish, c1827, £295, all *Gentle Rattle of China*. **BELOW** Small spill vase with stunning flowers from the 1820s.



# THE TALENTED *Mr Daniel*

*Having left Spode to set up on his own, this skilful designer developed innovative designs using traditional methods, says Willa Latham*

**T**oday we are visiting Stoke in Staffordshire to get to know more about a man whose name is little known outside a small circle of porcelain collectors, yet he has been responsible for some of the most beautiful British porcelain designs.

Henry Daniel was the son of a family of Staffordshire colour makers and decorators and, after his apprenticeship, he set up his own decorating studio. Remember when we talked about Josiah Spode's knack for profitable partnerships in the July 2022 issue? Daniel's workshop was within the Spode factory, decorating Spode's porcelain between c1805 and 1822. He bought the blanks, decorated them, and sold them back to Spode. From flowers to Imari to chinoiserie to neoclassical scenes: when you look at a beautiful Spode piece of this period, it is as much a Daniel piece.

In 1822, Daniel decided to leave Spode and produce porcelain with his son, Richard; this became the H&R Daniel factory. In an amicable split with Spode, the workers could choose who they wanted to work for, and many went with Daniel. Why Daniel took the huge risk to set up



his own factory is slightly puzzling. The Spode factory was a beacon of innovation with its early development of bone china, felspar porcelain, the printing press and steam grinders. Spode's output was huge and Daniel had a guaranteed supply of work, with access to all the latest technology.

Yet, Daniel created what we could call the last cottage industry. No more than about 250 people worked by candlelight in old, dark rooms, even though everyone else now used gas lights. There was no steam engine; Daniel needed to rent time at the grinders of other factories. As a Chartist, Daniel believed in egalitarianism and there were few rules for the workers, who reported that their masters were kind to them.

But the skills! The Daniels jumped on the Rococo Revival trend and started to create some of the most beautiful shapes ever made: elegant, yet robust, flowing with vines and shells and acanthus and anthemions. Daniel pieces feel wonderful in your hand; their moulded surfaces are pleasing to the fingers and lips. The flower painters were the best; for a few years William Pollard was there and he must have trained an army of young painters.

Willa Latham



## HOW TO RECOGNISE H&R DANIEL PORCELAIN

- Except from some early neoclassical designs, the style is Rococo Revival
- There's no factory mark
- Pattern numbers range between around 3,500 and just over 9,000
- Often has beautiful deep ground colours
- Lots of imaginative shapes with shells, scrolls, piercings and embossed or encrusted surfaces

**CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT** Two H&R Daniel plates with exquisite detail, in Willa's personal collection; trio of two cups and a saucer, c1825, £325; cake plate with Etruscan shape, c1825, £185. **RIGHT** Teapot in royal blue and gilt, from a set, 1831, £950, all *Gentle Rattle of China*.

Thomas Steele, the fruit painter, is believed to have been there for a short time, and many unnamed brilliant artists churned out the most beautiful flowers, exotic birds and lavish gilding. And did I mention colours? Over the course of his life, Daniel recorded thousands of extraordinary colours, some noted down from others, many invented by himself. Deep red, pink, green and warm apricot, fresh lilac and cool blue...

But all these chemicals had an unfortunate effect. Similar to the Mad Hatter (affected by mercury vapours) in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, many porcelain decorators suffered from early-onset dementia due to the effects of standing over vessels filled with materials containing arsenic and lead. By the mid 1830s, Daniel became confused and wrote letters to various British nobles, laying claim to lands he believed were his: estates in Canada, Ireland and Jamaica. Polite rejections are in museum archives.

At the factory, father Henry and son Richard fell out. Things were difficult enough as they were; the lack of mechanisation and weak discipline meant that output was low, while costs of these extraordinarily beautiful designs were high. The quality started to decline in the 1830s. By the 1840s you can see a split between the cheaper wares, which were often either hand-printed and coloured or painted in haste, and the top lines made for important clients, which were ever innovative and gorgeous. Every Daniel collector

knows that some wares can spontaneously break in your hands while others are wonderfully crisp and strong. You can tell these are the products of a scrambling factory that was run by the principles of a designer, rather than a shrewd businessperson.

When Daniel's beloved wife Elizabeth died in 1838, his mind declined notably and he died heartbroken and confused in 1841. Richard kept running the factory, still bringing out some sublime designs, but eventually it failed in bankruptcy in 1846.

Daniel porcelain is not marked and it disappeared into obscurity for many years; it wasn't until the 1960s that people started to realise its value and slowly the picture emerged. Even the V&A Museum found that many pieces supposedly by Coalport, Ridgway, Rockingham or Minton were actually from the H&R Daniel factory – a kind collector reidentified them only years ago. You can see some vases here that only months ago were confirmed as Daniel. The small H&R Daniel factory had such a low output compared to its more powerful rivals, yet it produced some of the most sublime British porcelain. So let's make tea or coffee, and drink to the brilliant Henry!

*Willa Latham*

Read Willa's blog [gentlerattleofchina.com](http://gentlerattleofchina.com), follow her @gentlerattleofchina