



FROM LEFT A dish from a dessert service with transfer-printed and hand-coloured decoration; compoits in typical Rococo Revival shape. BELOW One of a pair of tall vases sublimely painted with flowers and fruits, £7,000, Gentle Rattle of China.



LEADING LIGHTS

During the Rococo Revival era, society went through a period of great change, but Spode continued to flourish under the management of Copeland & Garrett, says Willa Latham

This month, we are back in Staffordshire taking a look at what was happening at the Spode factory during the Rococo Revival period, when it went by the name Copeland & Garrett.

Originally founded by Josiah Spode I in 1770, the business was then run by Spode II (son of Josiah) in partnership with William Copeland. Both men brought in their sons, William Spode (Spode III) and William Taylor Copeland (known as WTC), to run the London branch of the business.

In 1829, following the deaths of Spode II, Spode III and William Copeland, WTC effectively got sole control over both the Staffordshire and the London branches of the business and, by 1833, he had raised enough money to buy them out entirely. He took Thomas Garrett as a partner and together they styled the business Copeland & Garrett. WTC also bought a large plot adjoining the Staffordshire factory and built new kilns and workshops, setting the stage for an expansion that would prove hugely successful.

While running the London business, WTC had not only become a successful

businessman but also a talented politician: his rise from being the grandson of an orphan is a classic example of the successful ascent made by many self-made British industrial families. Before the Industrial Revolution it would have been unthinkable that WTC could become Sheriff, Alderman, and eventually Lord Mayor of London, as well as being MP for Stoke-on-Trent.

Not surprisingly, WTC didn't have much time to spend in the factory in Stoke, so he left that to Thomas Garrett. But, having become a Londoner, WTC had developed a deep understanding of fashion. Spode had made its name and become one of the great names in ceramics during the craze for neoclassical and Regency design, but times were changing. Once WTC gained sole control of the factory in 1829, he abruptly changed its focus, and adopted the Rococo Revival style with its flowing lines and asymmetrical embellishments. The company's London clientele loved it, and countless wonderful table services, vases and all manner of practical items such as door handles, toilet sets and jardinières, were



Willa Latham: Gentle Rattle of China, Bonhams

churned out to satisfy the demands of a growing wealthy elite.

All this was happening against the backdrop of huge societal change in Britain. While WTC was busy maintaining the status quo in London, unrest was breaking out all over the country. In Staffordshire, this culminated in strikes in 1833 and 1836. Unfair industrial working practices (not to mention child labour, cramped conditions and exposure to toxic substances) kept people trapped in poverty. Is it any wonder workers organised themselves into unions?

There was the 'Good from Oven' rule, which meant that if a piece was ruined somewhere along the line, nobody would get paid, meanwhile the factory might still sell it as a priced-down 'second'. Workers demanded 'Good from Hand', where each worker would be paid for the good work they produced, regardless of what happened in the kiln. After a long battle, an unsatisfactory compromise was reached; the factory would destroy any spoiled pieces and not enrich themselves while withholding pay from the workers.

Then there was the annual Michaelmas hiring on 11th November, which, much like an extreme form of zero-hours contract, kept workers trapped for a whole year, regardless of the availability of work. Again, it took several strikes to come to an agreement where each worker was promised at least 16 paid days per month with a one-month break clause.

Copeland & Garrett survived all of this turmoil. When, following the discovery of abject poverty in the textile and mining industries, the government instigated an inquiry into the potting industry, the factory compared well with others, by the standard of the time – which was, of course, appalling compared to today! Thanks to its extended battery of kilns and spacious workshops and staff of about 1,000 workers, the factory was able to continue the great legacy of Spode with its wonderful blue and white pearlware, porcelain and Felspar, New Fayence and creamware; but it also simultaneously started a new line of fashionable Rococo Revival items. The stunning vase here betrays Henry Daniel's legacy of flower painting.

Thomas Garrett left the partnership in 1847, but his son, Spencer, a talented potter, remained and was involved in the discovery of 'statuary porcelain', a new porcelain – later named Parian by Minton – which would be used to make the large porcelain figures that the Victorians were so fond of. This would start a whole new chapter in the decorative arts. But that's for later. Before moving on, there is much more to see in Staffordshire, where the Rococo Revival inspired a period of great invention at a number of other factories.

Willa Latham

Read Willa's blog gentlerattleofchina.com, follow her @gentlerattleofchina

HOW CAN WE RECOGNISE COPELAND & GARRETT PORCELAIN?

- Nearly every piece is clearly marked either with a simple imprinted mark, or the laureled round mark
- Porcelain is in the Rococo Revival style
- The factory also continued many traditional Spode designs such as the famous blue and white transfer-printed ware, however the marks changed to Copeland & Garrett, with sometimes 'Late Spode' added.



ABOVE 'Late Spode' Felspar porcelain mark; coffee cup with Rococo Revival handle. BELOW, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT C&G pearlware plate with Spode 'Death of a Bear' transfer print; dessert service plate; parts of a tea service, sold at Bonhams.

