



The Revival of ROCOCO

*The Industrial Revolution gave rise to a super-rich tranche of society who could finally afford porcelain and craved a brand new style, says **Willa Latham***

Having supplied a demanding nobility with neoclassical wares of unrivalled quality throughout the late 18th century, Worcester factories went into decline and in the 1830s the glory shifted to Staffordshire, where hundreds of porcelain factories had emerged. From about 1800 onwards, the Staffordshire Potteries began generating a huge output, not only for the nobility, but also for the rapidly emerging middle class and a growing global export market.

The Industrial Revolution was underway, and entrepreneurs were making large sums of money that would not have been accessible before industrialisation. Now, anyone hard-working with intelligence and a bright idea could lay their hands on investment, make a fortune and move up society's ladder. And this wasn't just in Britain: as the Empire catapulted these

ambitious young people into all corners of the world, and the United States turned to industrialisation, suddenly many more people could afford porcelain. And thus a new style of decorative arts was born: Rococo Revival.

By the 1820s the prevailing neoclassical style had ended up in a bit of a muddle. The Prince Regent (later King George IV) was largely responsible for first popularising and then wrecking it: he was at the centre of a race among the nobility to spend more, be more lavish, embrace more gilt and decorations, which of course undermined the very idea of simplicity that the neoclassical style was based upon.

Enter the Revival of the Rococo – a return to that lavish 18th-century style, but with a twist. Rococo had been all about fun, sensuality, unpredictability and escaping the strict protocols in which the nobility had

ensnared themselves, but it was a style for the super-wealthy. Rococo Revival wasn't providing an escape for the nobility, but offering a lavish expression of the good lives that the aspiring middle class were making for themselves. Queen Victoria, whose reign began in 1837, not only presided over the emergence of this unprecedented wealth, but also nudged her people towards family life and the blessings of a good home.

Rococo Revival, which began in Britain in the 1820s and had its high point in the 1830s and 1840s, was less about the palace and more about the home. Rather than having delicate pastel-coloured and gilt furniture stacked against the walls of the ballroom in readiness for an exclusive party, people wanted a drawing room full of sturdy wooden furniture that was able to withstand wriggling children and an endless stream of visitors. Afternoon tea became a thing for ladies who found themselves peckish well before dinner and, for this, elaborate tea services were required. Tableware became sturdy and highly practical for frequent use. They also wanted their homes to be cosy as well as impressive, with vases galore to put on every chimneypiece and pedestals dotted around each room.

Shapes of Rococo Revival, while derived from 18th-century Rococo, were given a 19th-century Romantic twist. At a time when cities grew ever more stifling and polluted, people longed for the purity of nature and, to make up for the loss of it, they worked nature into the decorative arts. If you were the daughter of an industrialist family, you might spend your morning reading the Romantic poets nestled on a sofa with curved shapes and abundantly carved vines, pouring tea from a teapot with a 'duck spout'. After all that serious neoclassical symmetry, asymmetry made a comeback with natural shapes of vines and knotty twigs and foliage. Even the humble tea cup could look like something that had grown in your garden rather than designed at a factory, resembling twisted twigs, moulded vines and flowing shapes. And vases? There was no end to the weird and wonderful shapes that could be added to these vessels!

Worcester couldn't quite make the switch, but Staffordshire and other places were full of young, talented people who made this new style flourish and filled the enormous demand of the new middle class. Big names were Spode, Alcock, Daniel, Ridgway and Minton in Staffordshire, Coalport in Shropshire and Rockingham in Yorkshire... and there were hundreds of others, so we'll have plenty to discuss next time!

Willa Latham

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

How do we distinguish between ROCOCO & ROCOCO REVIVAL?

- Rococo was a lavish, fun and sensual style for the young elite nobility in their palaces. Rococo Revival was designed for the homes of a growing industrial middle class.
- Rococo colours were often light pastels. Rococo Revival colours tend to be deeper.
- Rococo was more purely fine handwork. Rococo Revival was the beginning of industrialisation with a larger output and more robust character made for daily use.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM BELOW Minton vase with typical Rococo Revival handles, 1830–1835; Samuel Alcock vase with 'swan' handles, c1840, £595, *Gentle Rattle of China*; Ridgway compot with typical moulded Rococo Revival shapes, 1845–1850.



ABOVE, TOP LEFT TO RIGHT A Coalport sucrier in Rococo Revival shape, c1840; Coalport cake plate with typical Rococo Revival gilt patterns and flowers by Thomas Dixon, 1834; Ridgway dish, part of a large dessert service on the cusp of Regency and Rococo Revival, c1825; an H&R Daniel sucrier from a set with 'duck spout' teapot, £950, *Gentle Rattle of China*; Coalport 'duck spout' teapot, c1835.