



SPODE MUSEUM TRUST

PROGRESS REPORT

Registered Charity No. 519597

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March Re-opening

At the end of March 2016 the Spode Works Visitor Centre re-opened, with a number of new displays. In the lower room, last year's 'Art of the Engraver' display was expanded, with an exhibition of printed pieces from the early and mid- 19th Century, showing European landscapes visited by participants on the Grand Tour, and particularly by Byron, inspired by prints published by Finden. The ceramic display is accompanied by facsimiles of the Finden prints and some of the Copeland and Garrett copperplates. The printing demonstrations on the Victorian press continue weekly. In the main gallery, on an 'Upstairs Downstairs' theme, there are new exhibitions of 'Downstairs' domestic wares and very fine 'Upstairs' pieces from the nineteenth century, including items painted by Hürten and a tea service in pattern 1709 from around 1815. This display also includes part of a very generous recent donation to the Museum by a family in Lancashire, a superbly gilded near complete tea and coffee service painted with birds around 1830, which, being in mint condition, has strong visual impact due to its "dripping with gold" effect.



Items from a Spode tea and coffee service, pattern number 4807, c.1831

Lastly there is a new exhibition celebrating 220 years of continuous production at the Spode factory, focusing on style development from Georgian to 21st century, including some of the very earliest Spode productions, colourful pieces from the Regency, Victorian pieces painted by Alcock, Besche and Birbeck, art pottery, Edwardian pieces painted by Arthur Perry and Kate Bruce, Art Deco pieces, 20th century top sellers and poignantly, two of the last patterns ever produced at the factory. A particular delight is a version of the Christmas Tree pattern where Walt Disney characters have been superadded, giving the pattern that extra je ne sais quoi. Being largely in storage, not all pieces in the Spode collection are easily accessible and many thanks are due to long-time supporters Bill and Marguerite Coles, who lent pieces from their own superb collection to fill gaps in this display.

Also in March, the Spode Museum Trust appointed Michael Escolme as Manager of the Visitor Centre. His enthusiasm for Spode knows no bounds and members can keep up daily with the latest events at the Visitor Centre not just on Facebook, but also on Twitter.



A bone china shell dish, c.1815; an Art Deco owl in Velamour, c.1930 and a Copeland plate decorated by Samuel Alcock, c.1890 - three of the objects in the 220 year display.

The Blue Room

Two important new developments for 2016 were planned. The first was the return of the Blue Transferware Collection to the historic Spode site and it can now be reported that this has been carried out and the Collection located in a new Blue Room on the floor above the Visitor Centre.

The Blue Room collection mainly comprises hundreds of blue transfer-printed pieces made between around 1790 and 1830. It was originally displayed on antique oak furniture as a showpiece in a specially built 'Blue Room' at the Spode Factory in the 1930s. Over subsequent decades, it was augmented by donations and acquisitions of rare pieces from private collections. By the end of the twentieth century it was almost certainly the largest and most important collection of Blue and White on public display in the world. The designs on many of the items in this collection, including the first known printed Willow pattern variants on earthenware, were inspired by Chinese originals, and some of these can be seen alongside the Spode pieces based on them. Other designs, used in series for dinner services and embodying the spirit of the age, are more European in concept - Continental landscapes that would have been visited on the Grand Tour, hunting scenes in India, classical Greek figures, floral studies and the earliest examples of the famous 'Spode's Italian' pattern; all these in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. Many pieces are rare and unusual – items made for apothecaries, footbaths, bourdaloues, suckling pots, pap boats and spitting pots. Also armorial pieces made for army regiments on duty in India and across the Empire.

The process for underglaze printing on earthenware was perfected by Josiah Spode around 1780. It revolutionised ceramic decoration, and although widely copied, Spode's productions are considered the finest of all.

The reinstatement of the Blue Room Collection was made possible through funds donated by the Friends of the Spode Museum (FOSM) on both sides of the Atlantic. However, a number of the Trustees also shouldered a massive workload, personally refurbishing the previously semi-derelict space where the Blue Room and Conference Room are now located.

The formal opening of the new Blue Room took place on 8th September 2016 at a ceremony attended by the Lord Mayor of Stoke on Trent, the Lord Lieutenant of Staffordshire and a number of other local celebrities, funds providers and the press. The guest of honour was Lars Tharp, the well-known ceramics specialist, who appears regularly on Antiques Roadshow and similar TV programmes.



Opening of the new Blue Room with Lars Tharp, Chairman Paul Wood, the Lord Mayor and the Lady Mayoress

For the first time since manufacturing ceased at the historic Spode factory, the Museum now has something unique and of worldwide interest to offer. Even before the formal opening, two interesting events had taken place in the new Blue Room. Firstly, Stoke on Trent City Council, hosting a visit by a delegation from Jingdezhen (the Chinese ceramics 'capital') chose the Blue Room and conference room as an appropriate venue and the event was reported in the press and on radio. Secondly, the BBC TV programme 'Antiques Road Trip' visited and spent several hours filming footage and conducting interviews with Paul Wood and Paul Holdway to insert in the middle of an episode which will be transmitted early in the New Year. Considering the number of times 'Antiques Road Trip' gets repeated ad nauseam on digital TV, the publicity value of this must be incalculable.



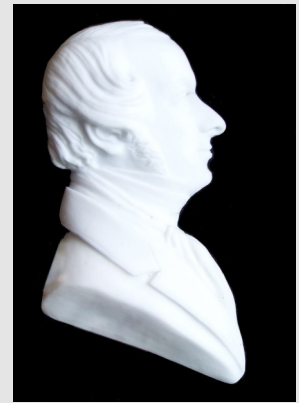
The New Blue Room and the adjacent Conference Room

The Museum Shop

The second planned new development concerned the expansion of the retailing area. While optimistic about the future, the Trust recognises that money needs to be constantly generated in order to fund day to day operating costs, which at the moment are kept to an absolute minimum. Every next step forward, however, is likely to entail additional operating costs and income will need to keep pace. The Trust's retailing activities have so far been very successful in keeping the Visitor Centre open after the original HLF grant monies had run out and the importance of their development cannot be understated. It is therefore a priority to develop a larger and more inviting retail area. Unfortunately there have been delays for reasons beyond the Trust's control, which have inevitably deprived it of some of its 2016 income. The most recent news is that Stoke on Trent City Council has now earmarked a substantial sum for the refurbishment of the proposed expanded retail area adjacent to the Visitor Centre, and hopefully the work will be finished by the time the Visitor Centre re-opens next spring.

Donations to the Museum

As well as the financial donations from FOSM and AFOSM and the fine tea service pictured above, the Museum was absolutely delighted to receive three interesting items from a descendent of Thomas Battam, the art director at the factory from 1835 to 1857. As well as a large and probably experimental ceramic pot owned by Battam, there was a letter from Leonard Whiter dated 1969, researching a proposed new book on Spode covering the post 1833 period. This was interesting news, but sadly this book was never finished.



In his letter, Whiter was on the lookout in particular for any photographs of Battam. It is not known whether Whiter ever came across it, but the third and by far the most interesting object is a cameo of Thomas Battam's profile, made in Parian and shown here. There can be little doubt that, from their vantage point up there in the great potbank in the sky, both Battam and Whiter will be smiling delightedly that this unique and wonderful object has finally come to its proper home at the Spode Museum.

Another grant received

A £7,000 grant has been received from the Hayward Foundation to assist the Trust in improving the storage conditions in which the ceramics collection is kept – some of the old cardboard crates have been perishing in the environment in which they have been kept and at least two good ceramic items have been damaged. Most of the money is being spent on purchasing and repacking in stronger plastic crates, but part, along with the money specifically donated by FOSM members, has been earmarked for repairing the two damaged pieces, the Good Samaritan Loving Cup and a Copeland vase painted by Frederick Adams. Both are presently with a professional ceramics restorer, who has sent images at the first stage of their restoration.



The Good Samaritan Loving Cup, c.1825



Copeland Vase painted by Frederick Adams

At some time in the near future, conservation work will also be needed on some of the copper-plates which have been affected by damp in their temporary storage conditions.

Trust status and new appointees

The trusteeship of the Spode Museum Trust has been changed by a newly formed company limited by guarantee known as SMT Trustees Ltd. This has replaced the original 12 trustees and is now the sole trustee of the Trust. However, the original 12 trustees plus the two new appointees mentioned below are the members of the company. The main purpose of the change is to reduce the collective and individual personal liability of individuals – a risk which serving trustees had previously faced. Last year, to protect the Trust from risks associated with trading and to minimise any tax liability arising therefrom, a wholly-owned trading subsidiary company known as SMT Enterprises Limited was formed to undertake trading activities on behalf of the Trust and to donate its profits to the Trust by way of ‘gift aid’. These two changes mean that the Trust will now operate in the same way as most other charitable trusts.

Independently of these changes, two new Members have been appointed to the Trust; Professor Neil Brownsword and Mr Danny Callaghan. Both have strong Stoke on Trent, ceramics and heritage connections.

The Future

The future for the Spode Museum is looking brighter now than at any time since the closure of the historic Spode factory. Stoke on Trent City Council, the owners of the Spode site, are more active than ever before at restoring the Spode site and populating it with other enterprises complementary to the Museum, such as artists’ studios etc., and it is probable that some form of on-site catering enterprise will also be established at some time in 2017. Supported by the National Trust, the Trust is working on grant applications for further, more substantial funds to support the eventual move of the entire collection and archive back to the Spode site – although timescales can last several years when larger amounts of funding are needed.

The Trust’s top priority for 2017 is the opening of a substantially larger and more inviting retail area. The current level of income from retailing operations has been more or less sufficient to keep the Visitor Centre going on the present basis, but is nowhere near enough to fund qualified curatorial staff or the additional overhead cost of keeping the collection and archive in safety on site. Providers of the substantial funds required to realise these ambitions will need to be satisfied that the Trust has a sufficient operational income stream to cover future operating costs. Hence the importance of expanding the means of earning it.

Friends of the Spode Museum in the USA and the UK

The Trust is particularly grateful to the very generous donors to American FOSM and to UK FOSM for the donations received during 2016. Combined, these contributions have gone, and will go, some good way towards the completion of the new Blue Room and the formation of the new Retail Area.