

Unlocking the Minton Archive Treasure Chest

by Loren Zeller

Guardians of Staffordshire's Ceramic History

Destined for almost certain liquidation, the valuable Minton Archive was saved by the Art Fund with other donors who jointly raised £1.56m to purchase it from WWRD on 31 March, 2015.* The Archive was immediately gifted to the Stoke City Archives ensuring that it would forever be conserved and available nationally and internationally for the public to enjoy.

The Archive contains a treasure trove of items related to Minton's Ltd from its establishment in 1793 by Thomas Minton until the firm was closed 1990s. The Archive also includes thousands of items from the archives of Royal Doulton (which Minton purchased in 1968) along with all the companies it had been acquired by Royal Doulton; an impressive list of more than twenty companies that contributed to Britain's success in the ceramics industry. The list includes such famous names as Adderley, Booth, Davenport, Paragon, Ridgway, Royal Albert, Shelley and more. The Minton Archive is the name given to the whole of this collection.

The Archive is now owned, managed and made publicly accessible by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council Joint Archives Service, who will also loan objects to the Wedgwood Museum and the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery for display and exhibition. An important number of Minton's original copper plates can be found in the Wedgwood Archives.

* In addition to the grant from NHMF, the campaign received donations from Sir Siegmund Warburg's Voluntary Settlement, The Pilgrim Trust, the Bamford Charitable Foundation, the bet365 Foundation, and many other generous supporters.

Ensuring Public Access to the Minton Archive

But this is just where the story begins. The real news, now, is about the new guardians of the Minton treasures; who they are and what they are doing to make the content of the archives available to the public.

An inventory of the Minton company records, containing well over 5,000 entries, was initially completed for the firm by archivist Alyn Giles Jones over three decades ago. The current team of archivists is actively engaged in the process of enhancing this excellent catalogue by making it available online and adding images from some of the items. This online catalogue will be extremely useful to interested parties who live an inconvenient distance from Stoke-on-Trent or, like this author, reside on the opposite side of the Atlantic and can not easily access the physical documents.

The commitment of City Archivist Chris Latimer and his team is to be commended. Imagine learning that literally thousands of records would be delivered at your site within a matter of weeks and having to quickly design a plan to house them for access to the public in a matter of a few months.

I can personally attest to the dedication of this team to serve their constituency. In June of 2015, shortly after learning of the acquisition, I contacted Chris on the chance that he could assist me in acquiring a digital image of a design from Minton's pattern book number 2. I needed the image quickly to meet an editor's deadline for an article I had written on the patterns and sources for a Minton bone china series. The day after the container with all of Minton's pattern books arrived, Chris wrote to tell me that he had, indeed, found the pattern I needed and that colleague Andrew Dawson would photograph it and send it to me. This made it possible for me to meet the editor's deadline and include the pattern image in my article.

In October, prior to visiting Stoke-on-Trent for the TCC annual meeting and tour, I was able to schedule a visit to the Archives. Chris had sent me a digital copy of Alyn Giles Jones' inventory, which enabled me to select the items I would like to see during my short visit. When I arrived, after brief introductions, Archivist Louise Ferriday and other staff members quickly presented me with the documents I had requested.



City Archivist Chris Latimer and Archivist Louise Ferriday display one of the pattern books from the Minton Archives.

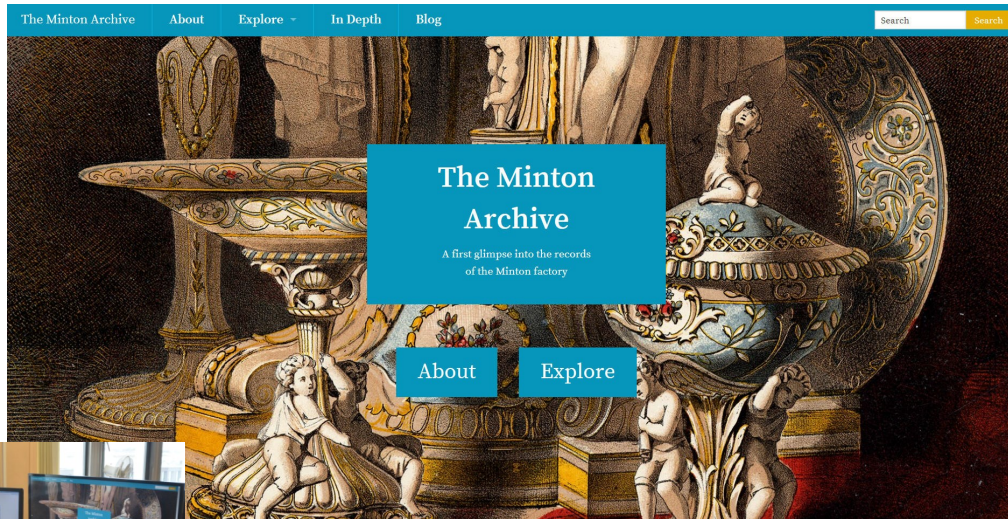


The City Archive's team (from left to right) Louise Ferriday, Andrew Dawson and Chris Latimer

Read about the New Minton
Archive Website
on Page 2



The Minton Archives Go Online



Designing the Minton Archive's online catalog, Digital Development Officer Andrew Dawson partner's with Archivist Louise Ferriday to develop the site's content.

Authors of the site state that *"The Minton company records are a relatively complete record of the Minton Factory. Through these records one can learn about how the factory was managed, how the ware was produced, marketed and sold, who was employed by the factory and what they did."*

Launched at the end of November, 2015, the full Minton Company Catalogue is now online on the Minton Archive website and also on the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service online catalogue. The structure of the catalogue still requires further work . . .arranging 5,328 records is a big challenge . . . but all the catalogue entries for records are now accessible and searchable within these two databases. The website gives interested users a glimpse into what the site content will ultimately contain. What can be found to date are digital examples from the archives dealing with the following categories: The Company, Artists, Artwork, Shapes, Patterns, Production, and Employees. While

examples of content are provided for each of these categories, including images like those of the first pattern book



Cover of Minton's Pattern Book Number 1

shown here, the key deliverable from this new site is the list of all the catalogue records which can be found by using the search function. Users can search for a specific item or topic to verify if it is, indeed, contained in the archive. Search results provide a brief description of the item, the "finding" number (i.e. catalogue or inventory number), the type of item (referred to as a "level"), the number of documents found, and their current availability. Viewing the actual item will require a

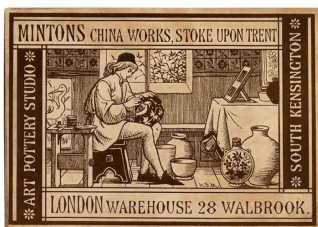
visit to the Archives or submitting a special request, for a fee, for a digital copy of it. One would hope that, in the future, funding will be made available to digitize the items themselves and to make them available online for download.

The team also maintains a blog to which information about site updates is regularly published.



Hand painted example of pattern number 64 in Minton's Pattern Book Number 1

The Archives' small, dedicated team should be commended for the speed with which the site has been developed and for the content already made available.



Trade Card for Minton China by Stacy Marks

To review the new Minton Archives online catalog, go to: <http://www.themintonarchive.org.uk/>
Also see the Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service online catalogue: <http://www.staffordshire.gov.uk/leisure/archives/collections/OnlineCatalogues/GatewaytothePast/home.aspx>.

Loren Zeller is President of the Transferware Collectors Club