Torquay Potteries in the 1920s

John Bowden

In South Devon in the 1920s there were potteries at Torquay, Aller Vale, Bovey Tracey, Liverton, Heathfield, Exeter and Plymouth. This paper will focus on the five potteries located in Torquay: Watcombe Pottery, Longpark Pottery, Torquay Pottery, Barton Pottery, and the Lemon and Crute Pottery.

The founding of the potteries

Potteries existed in North Devon in the seventeenth century producing slip-coated wares decorated with slip and sgraffito designs. Although the trade fell away in the eighteenth century, it was redeveloped from the 1820s, growing after 1879 into a centre of art pottery production, through the company founded by Charles Brannam, and by those established by William Baron and Alexander Lauder.[1] In the Torquay area, there was no comparable tradition of decorated pottery making.[2] When the Watcombe Pottery was established in 1869 to produce the terracotta art pottery fashionable at the time,[3] it had to be established from scratch. Two further potteries were established to produce terracotta ware: the Torquay Terracotta Company at Hele Cross in 1875, and the Longpark Pottery in 1883.[4] These potteries continued, with changes of ownership, through the later nineteenth century and into the twentieth century, their output reflecting changes in fashion – terracotta being largely replaced from the 1890s by slip-coated ware decorated with slip, sgraffito and pigment-painted designs. The Lemon and Crute Pottery was established in 1914 and the Barton Pottery in 1921/22.[5]

The great majority of the ware produced by the Torquay potteries was of red or red-brown clay, dug in Torquay: this clay, visible on the undecorated bases of the pots, was almost a

[1] Audrey Edgler, *Art Potters of Barnstaple* (Nimrod Press Ltd., 1990), pp. 23–29, and sections on Brannam, Baron and Lauder.

[2] There were, however, commercial potteries near Newton Abbot, which produced utility ware such as clay pipes. See LTC Rolt, *The Potters' Field: A History of the South Devon Ball Clay Industry* (David & Charles, 1974).

[3] Suitable clay had been discovered in the 1860s at Watcombe.

[4] Longpark was based in the unused buildings of Brunel's atmospheric railway: the tower still exists on Newton Road. Its original name was 'Critchlow, Ridley and Taylor, terracotta manufacturers' (personal communication: Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).

[5] Foundation dates for the potteries are from Peter Whight, 'Lifespans of the Potteries' in Keith Poole (ed.), *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters* (The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society, Members' Special Edition, 1996), p. 176. Barton Pottery's foundation date is discussed on pages 6–7.

defining characteristic of the pottery. Watcombe, Longpark and Torquay [6] had clay pits on site, or very close to the works.[7] Lemon and Crute, and Barton did not have their own clay pits, and had to acquire clay from elsewhere, sometimes from Torquay Cemetery,[8] sometimes from 'local roadworks'.[9] The Torquay potteries during the period to the First World War produced much pottery of high artistic, and production, standards. In the 1920s, while output was concentrated on a growing tourist market, the pottery continued to be handmade, and the decorative quality of a significant amount of the output remained high.

Sources of information on the potteries

The earliest researchers of the Torquay potteries, D. & E. Lloyd Thomas, noted that, as the potteries' records no longer existed, the pots produced by the potteries were the principal source of information for research, supplemented by articles in trade journals of the time.[10] While a few written records have since emerged, particularly material given to the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society (TPCS)[11] by John Tilstone, the last manager of Watcombe,[12] the necessary focus of further research has been on the study of the pots themselves, mainly by people associated with the TPCS, and they have added to this by using sources such as *The Pottery Gazette and Glass Trade Review*, and by conducting interviews with people who still had knowledge of the potteries, through working in them or through family connections. The research has generated a significant amount of information about the design and decoration of the pots; the marking of pots; the dating of pots; the skilled potters, particularly some of the decorators and throwers; the markets for which the pots were produced; and some information on the materials used and their sources, production processes and the ownership and staffing of the potteries. It will be evident from the footnote references that, in addition to the original work by D. & E. Lloyd Thomas, this paper draws to a significant extent on research and writing by a small number of people associated with the TPCS.[13] These sources

[6] The names of the potteries have been simplified in this paper. The word 'Pottery' will usually be omitted in the description of each pottery: for example, Barton Pottery will be 'Barton'. Though the word 'royal' occurs in some formulations of the company names of Watcombe Pottery, Longpark Pottery and Torquay Pottery, the 'non-royal' names will be used.

[7] D & E Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries, From Castle to Cottage* (Arthur H Stockwell Ltd., 1978) pp. 43, 50, 81, 140.

[8] Edna White*, '*Gleanings – Notes from Interviews with Pottery Workers', in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 156.

[9] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).

[10] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, pp. vii–viii. Andy Violet notes that 'most of the records kept at Longpark were lost in August 1938' due to flooding: Andy Violet, 'Longpark Lauder Wares' in *Scandy: The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society* (Winter 2012/2013), pp. 12–21, 146, 18.

[11] Some of the papers of the TPCS are deposited at the Devon Heritage Centre: www.swheritage.org.uk, Devon Archives Catalogue.

[12] Grahame Vanstone, 'A Glimpse into our Archives' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, pp. 177–79.

[13] Two of these people, Virginia Brisco and Andy Violet, have provided very useful and positive feedback on a draft of this paper, for which I am grateful. Thanks are also due to Lewis Bond, Chairman of the TPCS, for his positive and supportive comments on a draft of the paper.

are supplemented by data from the 1921 census, and from contemporary newspapers: the destruction of the 1931 census, by fire, prevents an examination of changes over the decade.

What follows is arranged under six headings: the potteries as organisations; products and designs; marketing and sales; production processes and skills; staff management; people working in the potteries. These divisions will be seen to interrelate. In each section there are clear gaps between what we would like to know and what we seem to know from the available evidence. The paper focuses on the potteries, touching only briefly on the social and economic contexts in which they were set.

The potteries as organisations: owners, managers and business aims

We know little about the thoughts of those who owned and managed the potteries. What were their principal aims, and how did these vary between individuals, organisations and over time? As the potteries were commercial operations, but also made 'artistic' products, was there tension between different but overlapping aims within the organisations? How were the organisations structured and financed? This section examines some of these questions, and, reflecting the lack of internal company records, provides some partial answers.

Were the potteries 'art potteries' in the 1920s? Watcombe described itself as an 'art pottery' after 1901, part of Longpark used the term from 1914 for a period of time,[14] and H. E. Crute & Co. did so after 1926.[15] Was this done to signify difference in the marketplace? In the 1921 census returns,[16] some employees used the term 'art pottery' in describing their employing company,[17] and Wallace Hexter, a member of one of the families that had been involved in the ownership of Watcombe, described himself as 'Art Pottery Manager'. 'Art pottery' is an elastic term with blurred edges. It may be used to describe decorative, rather than utilitarian ware – but vases are made to be used. It may signify a style of decoration, for example that showing the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement. Arising from Arts and Crafts principles, it may indicate handmade ware – but some Arts and Crafts work was designed to be machine-made. It may indicate relatively short production runs. If 'art pottery' implies handcrafted products, then all of the potteries continued with this as their major production method until they closed. If 'art pottery' implies something about the design or decoration of the wares, or the length of production runs, then 'art pottery' may have become less

[14] Kerry Fisher, 'Torquay Grotesques and Model Animals' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 57.
[15] Lemon and Crute was renamed H.E. Crute & Co., Daison Art Pottery in 1926: Keith Poole (ed.) *Torquay Pottery Mark Book, 5th Edition* (The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society, 2007), p. 35.
[16] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[17] Nine employees used the term in their census returns – one each from Lemon and Crute, Longpark and Torquay, and six from Watcombe. The larger number from Watcombe could be interpreted as an indication of a stronger 'art pottery' identity there, or it might simply reflect the company's name.

appropriate as the concentration on the tourist market increased after the First World War. However, work of 'very high quality' continued in the 1920s.[18]

Watcombe Pottery was bought in 1901 by Hexter, Humpherson and Company,[19] based in Kingsteignton. Hexter and Humpherson had purchased the Aller Vale Pottery in 1897, and they combined this with Watcombe Pottery under the title Royal Aller Vale and Watcombe Pottery Company.[20] Rolt notes that in the late nineteenth century the organisation produced pipes, were potters' merchants, and dug and exported their own clay; they became a limited company in 1903 with C. D. Blake as chairman.[21] They also made bricks: houses of yellowish brick still exist in Kingsteignton and Newton Abbot.[22]

The senior management of Watcombe in the 1920s is unclear. The 1921 census contains information on one member of the Humpherson family and two members of the Hexter family involved in pottery management: Ernest William Humpherson, age 41, occupation 'Sanitary Pipe and Brick manufacturer', place of work Kingsteignton; Ernest John Hexter, age 48, occupation 'Manager of Pottery', place of work Aller Vale; Wallace Hexter, age 39, occupation 'Art Pottery Manager', place of work 'At Home'.[23] As all three describe themselves as *employees* of Hexter, Humpherson & Co., it is not clear if members of their families were still involved in the ownership of the company. Rolt indicates that the ownership and senior management of the company in the 1920s is not clear and needs further research.[24] Neither Ernest nor Wallace Hexter gave Watcombe as their place of work, and no others with the title 'manager' at Watcombe have emerged from the census.[25] D. & E. Lloyd Thomas's view was that the 'Hexter family' ran the part of the company based in Watcombe:[26] it may be that both Ernest and Wallace Hexter were involved in managing the Watcombe Pottery, but this is not clear from the census. Ernest Humpherson would seem to have concentrated on the Kingsteignton works. Virginia Brisco notes that 'members of the Cole family were managers of Watcombe (i.e. works managers) for many years',[27] and the

[18] Virginia Brisco, 'A Century of Ceramics: The rise and decline of the pottery industry of South Devon' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 6.
[19] Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book*, p. 52.
[20] Aller Vale Pottery, between Kingskerswell and Newton Abbot, was established in 1881, and followed Arts and Crafts ideals closely, principally producing slip-decorated wares. Production on its original site was ended in about 1924. Virginia Brisco, 'A Century of Ceramics: The rise and decline of the pottery industry of South Devon' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 5; Virginia Brisco, *Torquay Commemoratives and Advertising Wares* (The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society, 1991), p. 2; Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book*, p.6.
[21] Rolt, *The Potters' Field,* p. 63. Clay extraction continued into the twentieth century: the 1921 census shows William Henry Clements as the foreman of the clay mines of 'Hexter Humpherson, The Potteries, Kingsteignton'.
[22] Philip Carter, *Newton Abbot* (The Mint Press, 2004), p. 180.
[23] The 1891 census indicates that Ernest and Wallace Hexter were brothers (see footnote 137). In 1921, Ernest lived at 'Moor Park', Aller and Wallace at 'East Park', Kingsteignton Road, Newton Abbot.
[24] Rolt, *The Potters' Field,* pp. 63–64
[25] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[26] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, p. 61.
[27] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).

Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser in April 1928 reported a presentation at Watcombe by colleagues to Thomas Cole who was retiring because of ill health after 57 years, 35 of which were as foreman. His son was to follow him as foreman.[28] 'Foreman' and 'works manager' are probably synonymous here, and the Cole family would seem to have managed the pottery at a middle management level during the 1920s. Ernest or Wallace Hexter may have exercised an overall managerial role from Aller or Newton Abbot.

Len Mayo, who had worked at the Longpark Pottery in the mid-1920s, recalled that its management was:

> 'Bob Skinner, the Managing Director, Fred Blackler, George Bond and George Causey – Fred Blackler "sort of run the works", George Bond also worked as a lathe turner and George Causey was a thrower.'[29]

The 1921 census includes the following self-descriptions: Frederick Blackler, 'Pottery Manager, Employer'; George Bond, 'Pottery Manufacturer, Employer'; George Causey, 'Pottery Director' ('Employer' section left blank); Robert Skinner, 'Pottery Manufacture, Employer'.[30] Skinner would appear to have acted as managing director, and Blackler may have been works manager. Bond and Causey seem to have maintained their roles as skilled craftsmen, in addition to whatever managerial duties they may have carried out. Some, or all, of these men may have been involved in the ownership of the company, but formal ownership details are not known.

Torquay Pottery was established in the premises of the defunct Torquay Terracotta Company in 1905 by Enoch Staddon.[31] In the 1921 census, Staddon, born in Bovey Tracey, describes himself as 'Pottery Manufacturer, Terra Cotta, Employer'. He lived in Bovey Tracey in 1921, and, in addition to the Torquay Pottery, owned the Bovey Tracey Art Pottery from 1919 to 1930.[32] Virginia Brisco records that the pottery 'was noted for trying to undercut all the others', often resulting in lower quality products.[33] This view would appear to have been shared by at least one other potter at the time: in a 1925 letter to an ex-colleague, a Watcombe thrower wrote that, in comparison with a slack period at Watcombe, 'Staddon's place is very busy doing a whole load of rubbish'.[34] Virginia Brisco, however, adds that the

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[28] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 13 April 1928. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[29] No author's name given, 'Men of Longpark, A Personal Recollection by Len Mayo', in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 168.
[30] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[31] No author's name given, 'Marks and Backstamps of the Torquay and South Devon Potteries' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 199.
[32] Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book*, pp. 16, 43; Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[33] Brisco, *A Century of Ceramics,* p. 6.
[34] Andrew Barker, 'John Barker – Pottery Artisan and Artist' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 130 (Winter 2008/9), p. 20.

pottery 'also produced some beautifully decorated work', particularly that produced by a decorator who had worked at two well-known potteries.[35]

The Lemon and Crute Pottery, owned by partners Thomas Lemon and Harry Crute, had an interesting beginning in 1914. Lemon, who had worked as a thrower at Brannam in Barnstaple, moved to a job at the Tor Vale Pottery, Torquay,[36] but, very soon after his arrival, the owners closed the company. Virginia Brisco recalls (from communication with Tom Lemon's son, Cyril) that 'Tom Lemon and Harry Crute, who had known each other for two weeks, decided to carry on potting. They took over the pots being made, the equipment, and the "paperwork" in the office';[37] an abrupt beginning for an organisation that went on to produce high quality pottery. In the 1921 census, Lemon categorised himself as 'Employer,' and described his job as 'Throwing in Pottery and things in General to Pottery Work'. Crute, born in Torquay and trained at Watcombe, was a decorator of some skill; he described himself in the 1921 census as 'Earthenware Manufacturer' and 'Employer'.[38] The pottery closed 'for a couple of months through a lack of coal' in 1921:[39] the coal shortage probably resulted from the miners' strike which followed the return of the mines to private ownership after the First World War. The pottery also survived a serious fire in its decorating shed in June 1923, the store and packing shed being saved by the fire service.[40] The partnership ended in 1926: the two men had 'differing ambitions – Tom Lemon wanted to produce more "modern" wares so he started his own pottery (Wesuma) at Weston Super Mare'.[41] After the ending of the partnership, apparently on friendly terms, Crute founded 'H. E. Crute and Co. (Torquay) Ltd., Daison Art Pottery – a private limited company with capital of £3,000', the directors being Harry Crute and J. Brewer of Newton Abbot.[42]

D. & E. Lloyd Thomas concluded that the Barton Pottery, was 'apparently established in 1922 as the Mayville Pottery by a group of five men trading as H. F. Jackson and Company': these were Harry Jackson, Ellis Forster, John Bradford, Alfred Macey and Alexander Hudson.[43] Virginia Brisco notes, however, that *The Pottery Gazette* recorded, in its edition of 1 September 1922 (p. 1392), that Barton Pottery Ltd. had been registered as a private company with capital of £3,000 'to acquire the business of potters carried on at "Moorview", Barton Road, Torquay, as "H F Jackson & Co."'[44] This reference to an earlier organisation reflects the 1921 census which records Ellis Sydney Forster, born in Burslem, Staffordshire, as a Pottery Manufacturer, employing people, and living at 'Mayville', Barton Road, Torquay. The census records six people working at the pottery, five of whom gave their place

[35] Brisco, *A Century of Ceramics*, p. 6.
[36] Virginia Brisco, *'The Tor Vale, Lemon and Crute and Daison Potteries'* in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 42.
[37] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[38] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[39] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 29 July 1921. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[40] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 8 June 1923. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[41] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[42] Brisco, *The Tor Vale, Lemon and Crute and Daison Potteries*, p. 42.
[43] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, p. 179.
[44] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, emails to John Bowden, 22 and 24 April 2024).

of work as Jackson & Co., Mayville Pottery,[45] and one as Mayville Pottery. Ellis Forster had earlier run the Forster and Hunt Pottery, Honiton, which was sold in about 1918 to Charles Collard, an ex-Aller Vale and Watcombe decorator.[46] Although the name Jackson & Co, was used by the employees in 1921, only one member of the founding group of five men listed by D. & E. Lloyd Thomas, Ellis Forster, could be found in Torquay in the 1921 census.[47] Forster was the Barton managing director.[48] An interview with a clerical employee at Barton records that Forster 'was a perfectionist, always striving to produce perfect pots – if it did not meet with his approval it was scrapped'.[49] High production standards would appear, therefore, to have been a managerial priority.

There are few traces left of the pottery buildings in Torquay: no kilns remain. Watcombe Pottery was located north of St Marychurch, on Teignmouth Road, just past the junction with Pavor Road: all that remains is a single storey building, which may have been a sales office, to which is fixed a memorial plaque provided by the TPCS. The tower of Brunel's atmospheric pumping station set back from the Newton Road, and visible from Riviera Way, is the most obvious relic of Longpark Pottery. Of Torquay Pottery at Hele Cross, Barton Pottery on Barton Road, and Lemon and Crute on Teignmouth Road, there are no remains.

Products and designs

The output of the Torquay potteries in the 1920s could be divided into two broad categories: general decorated ware and mottoware, although the categories are not watertight. General decorated ware included articles such as slip-coated vases and jugs, decorated under glaze with pigments or slip, with representations of birds, flowers or butterflies, or with views of places and buildings. Most of the output, however, would seem to have been of mottowares. Virginia Brisco argues that this was the case by the beginning of the First World War at Watcombe and Longpark,[50] the two largest potteries, and this was, probably, still the situation in the 1920s. Mottowares were, usually, decorated with a design on one side and the motto on the other, the motto usually scratched through the slip to expose the clay body beneath. Most mottowares were decorated with one of four designs: cockerels, fishing boats, thatched cottages, or the 'scandy' pattern of scrolls surrounding a plume of feathers.[51] The design was executed in slip or painted in pigments. Virginia Brisco lists over 120 different mottoes recorded by the TPCS up to 1989 on pots produced by the Aller Vale, Watcombe, Longpark,

[45] The company name given varied slightly between respondents, but 'Jackson & Co., Mayville Pottery' was common to all.
[46] Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book*, p. 30.
[47] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[48] Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book*, p. 12.
[49] White, 'Gleanings – Notes from Interviews with Pottery Workers', p. 160.
[50] Virginia Brisco (ed.), *Torquay Mottowares* (Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society, 1989), p. 16 (The text is by Virginia Brisco, Shirley Everett and Bill Brisco, but their separate contributions are not noted).
[51] Brisco, *Torquay Mottowares*, p. 10.

and Torquay potteries.[52] Mottoes included those which were humorous ('Hold me tight and don't be clumsy or you'll break this mug from Romsey'), conveyed words of wisdom ('If you can't lift the stone, perhaps you can roll it'),[53] or expressed wishes ('May you live as long as you want, and never want as long as you live').[54]

The Torquay potteries made a very wide range of mottoware products for domestic use. Virginia Brisco's list demonstrates this variety, including teapots, jugs, tobacco jars and candle sticks.[55] Mottowares also included commemoratives and advertising wares. The Torquay potteries produced commemorative wares over a period of about 85 years. Although no royal events were marked in the 1920s, commemoratives were produced for meetings of associations and professions: Rotary International in 1924, R.A.O.B.[56] in 1928 (both Torquay), Incorporated Municipal Electrical Association in 1929 (Longpark).[57] Torquay Council worked to develop the town as a conference venue, the entertainment of important visitors 'often' including the 'presentation of commemoratives made by the local potteries'.[58] Local retailers also sought business from conference delegates: a newspaper advertisement by E. Hardman, a Torquay bookseller and stationer, in April 1922 offered a discount on 'Torquay Pottery' to delegates at the N.U.T. conference.[59] Members of the public also commissioned personal commemorative pots to mark births, weddings and anniversaries. The Watcombe Pottery jug inscribed 'Old Folks Gathering 1924 With Best Wishes H Ellis' indicates that social or institutional events were also commemorated.[60]

Advertising wares, carrying the organisation's name, were commissioned by a range of organisations, for example shops, brewers, pubs and hotels. The wares included plates, mugs, ashtrays, match holders, and scent bottles. Virginia Brisco lists the names of fifty-seven 'companies, shops, brand names etc. which were advertised' on wares made in potteries in Torquay. Watcombe produced most of the examples listed (40), followed by Longpark (9), Royal Torquay Pottery (5) and Aller Vale (3).[61] No dates are given, but the examples probably cover a period longer than the 1920s.

One particular form of advertising ware, the scent bottle, usually containing violet scent, was a very successful product line, and was produced by several of the potteries.[62] Violet scent bottles were 'introduced just after WW1 and were an instant success with the tourists',[63] with

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[52] Ibid., pp. 58–64. Mottoes recorded from each pottery: Aller Vale 34, Watcombe 43, Longpark 42, Torquay 3.
[53] Ibid., pp. 59.
[54] This motto is on a teapot commissioned by my uncle, Leslie Dolbear, to commemorate his parents' silver wedding anniversary in 1924.
[55] Brisco, *Torquay Mottowares*, pp. 16–17.
[56] Royal Antediluvian Order of Buffaloes.
[57] Brisco, *Torquay Commemoratives and Advertising Wares*, pp. 48–51.
[58] Ibid., p. 49.
[59] *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 15 April 1922. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[60] Andy Violet, 'Charitable Jugs' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 157 (Autumn 2005), p. 26.
[61] Brisco, *Torquay Commemoratives and Advertising Wares*, pp. 95–97.
[62] Ibid., pp. 89–93
[63] No author name, 'The Sweet Smell of Success' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine*, January 1987, p. 8.

chemists' shops playing an important role in their sale, for example Bathes in Torquay and St Marychurch, Lowndes-Pateman in Babbacombe[64] and Quants in Torquay.[65] Watcombe produced scent bottles as souvenirs for use on the ocean liners *S.S. Melita*, *S.S. Empress of Australia* and *R.M.S. Mauritania* in the 1920s and 30s.[66]

Pottery with similar decoration could be made by different potteries. Keith Poole noted that, as workers moved between potteries, they took with them designs with which they were familiar, and in which they had developed considerable skill.[67] Kerry Fisher found that pottery with very 'Torquay' decoration was made in the 1920s by the West Hallam Art and Earthenware Co. Ltd. in Derbyshire, and that one of their decorators had worked at Watcombe.[68] To what extent did the potteries in Torquay attempt to protect their designs? The only reference to this found in the TPCS magazine *Scandy* is of a Barton Pottery design which 'appears to have been registered on the 3rd April 1922 by the company', its copyright expiring five years later.[69] This issue requires further research.

Did the quality of the pottery change over time? It could be argued that the quality of the wares, particularly their decoration, declined as commercial pressures resulted in the more repetitive production of the relatively simple designs required by the tourist market. Virginia Brisco notes that at about the time of the First World War the potteries started to develop 'a much cheaper version of cottagewares',[70] and Kerry Fisher recorded the fading of the art pottery element in the output.[71] Virginia Brisco, however, qualifies this view of decline, noting that art pottery of high quality continued to be made in the potteries, particularly by Lemon and Crute,[72] and Keith Poole notes the quality of the colours and glazes of Barton Pottery.[73] In addition, not all mottowares were batch produced for the tourist trade: some showed great skill. An article in the TPCS magazine *Scandy* discusses the production of large plaques and trays in the 1920s and 1930s 'inscribed with long mottoes', in addition to other decoration. In describing a plaque and an oval tray inscribed with Charles Kingsley's poem

[64] Win Annis, 'Reminiscences of Longpark', p. 10, *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine,* October 1995; Virginia Brisco, 'Scents and Nonsense', pp. 14-19, *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine*, October 1995,14.
[65] Andy Violet, 'A Whiff of Devon', in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 163 (Spring 2017), p. 22.
[66] Andy Violet, 'Ocean Liner Souvenirs', in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 182 (Winter 2022), p. 9.
[67] Keith Poole, 'Preface' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters,* p. v.
[68] Kerry Fisher, 'Torquay Type Pottery in Derbyshire' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine* (April 1993), p. 8.
[69] No author name, 'Striking Art Deco Designs', in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 158 (Winter 2015), p. 20.
[70] Virginia Brisco, *Let's Collect Cottagewares* (Virginia and Bill Brisco, 1992), p. 6.
[71] Fisher, 'Torquay Grotesques and Model Animals', p. 57.
[72] Brisco, *A Century of Ceramics,* p. 6.
[73] Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book,* p. 12.

‘A Farewell’, the writer highlights the skill required to fit ‘the text into the given space’ and emphasises that ‘no mistakes have been made’.[74]

Judgements of quality are complex and subjective. Indicators of quality may range from comments made in the trade press in the 1920s to the prices that collectors are prepared to pay today – and the assessments of the makers may have been different from those of current collectors. Judgements may vary between potteries, and between different product lines. While there were highly skilled employees in the Victorian and Edwardian periods, the production of good-quality work in the 1920s, consistently, under piece work, batch production conditions still reflected a high level of skill

Marketing and sales

The potteries operated in a highly competitive market.[75] The market, and the companies’ orientations to it, were important elements in the fortunes of the potteries over the decades. What role did innovation play in the potteries in Torquay in the 1920s? To what extent did the owners and managers of the potteries see the design and production debates of the day as relevant to their businesses? Although new designs were introduced after the First World War, and the tourist market developed, the Torquay potteries do not appear to compare favourably with a pottery such as Poole, where, using well-qualified designers and decorators, there was a clear plan to develop designs and markets in a systematic way.[76] The location of responsibility for sales and marketing within the companies is not clear, but it was probably one of the responsibilities of the owners and directors. The 1921 census includes only one employee with a job title relating to sales: Watcombe Pottery employed a ‘Traveller Earthenware’, but what he did, or how far he travelled, we do not know.[77]

The Torquay potteries’ approaches to marketing and selling included adapting designs to changing customer preferences; using the trade press; displaying at trade fairs; developing overseas markets; using agents at home and overseas; developing domestic markets, particularly tourism; claiming prestige through royal patronage; opening the potteries to visitors to watch the production process and to visit the pottery shop; producing self-advertising wares; producing for the requirements of pottery merchants and large retailers. The activities listed overlap in places and may vary in importance across the potteries and

[74] No author name, ‘“A Farewell”, by the Reverend Charles Kingsley’, in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors’ Society*, 157 (Autumn 2015), p. 28. Note: this article was written by Andy Violet. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).
[75] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, p. 163
[76] Leslie Hayward (edited by Paul Atterbury), *Poole Pottery, Carter & Company and their Successors 1873–1995* (Richard Dennis, 1995), pp. 10, 14, 30–37. Based on contact with former pottery employees, Virginia Brisco notes that ‘sometimes new designs were suggested by the workers themselves and a few were made – if they sold, more were made.’ This may have been after the 1920s. Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[77] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.

over time. The relative importance and effectiveness of the various marketing and sales approaches is not known.

Writers in the *TPCS Magazine* note that the potteries 'did try to "modernize" their wares by applying more colourful and decorative finishes to their traditional shapes',[78] that there was some attempt to keep up with emerging fashions in pottery, for example the crocus pattern and other 'stylised flowers' produced by Watcombe and Daison,[79] and the chequered design at Watcombe,[80] but that 'the majority of the Torquay potteries paid scant attention to the Art Deco movement'.[81] Virginia Brisco notes that 'the potteries did try to offer some decorations which would appeal to the customers who liked Art Deco – the Torquay Pottery is the only one (to my knowledge) who made a range of pots with angular shapes.'[82]

The potteries seem to have made much less use of the trade press and trade fairs than might be expected. Andy Violet notes that Longpark 'very rarely advertised in, or had features written in *The Pottery Gazette*',[83] and Virginia Brisco records that Longpark did not 'exhibit very often at trade fairs'.[84] Trade fairs were, however, sometimes used. Torquay Pottery 'exhibited at the British Industries Fair' in 1924 and 1928: after Queen Mary bought some of their wares at the 1924 Fair, they described their products as 'Royal Devonshire Pottery'.[85]

The development of export markets appears to have been an important activity at the Watcombe and Longpark potteries. Watcombe had 'agents in Canada, the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Hong Kong and Holland'.[86] Longpark 'sent all over the world, especially to Canada and New Zealand'.[87] (A cup, probably made at Longpark, was on display in 1995 in the Falkland Islands Museum, inscribed 'A present from

[78] No author name, 'Pots with an Art Deco theme' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine* (August 1998), p. 36. Note: this article was written by Andy Violet. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).
[79] No author name, 'Stunning Deco Designs' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 180 (Summer 2021), p. 24. Note: this article was written by Andy Violet. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).
[80] No author name, 'Pot Shot – Check Mate' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 176 (Summer Special 2020), p. 27. Note: this article was written by Andy Violet. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).
[81] No author name, 'Pots with an Art Deco theme' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine* (August 1998), p. 36. Note: this article was written by Andy Violet. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 2024).
[82] Personal communication (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[83] Andy Violet, 'Longpark Lauder Wares' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 146 (Winter 2012/2013), p. 18.
[84] Virginia Brisco, 'The Longpark Potteries', in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine*, July 1995, p. 17. Longpark may have had a different approach in earlier years: Virginia Brisco notes that the pottery exhibited 'at the St. Louis Exhibition (in the U.S.A.) in 1904 and 1906.' Personal communication (Victoria Brisco, email to John Bowden, 22 April 2024).
[85] Virginia Brisco, 'The Torquay Pottery Company' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 45.
[86] Andy Violet, 'The Rare Kookaburra' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 158 (Winter 2015), p. 16.
[87] No author name, 'Reminiscences of Longpark Pottery with Mrs W Annis' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 153. Reminiscences recorded by John Bailey and Virginia Brisco.

Stanley F.I.'[88]). The processes by which the potteries moved into exporting are not known: contacts may have been made with existing agencies, based in the UK or in the target countries, and Virginia Brisco's reference (footnote 84) to Longpark's involvement in the St Louis Exhibitions of 1904 and 1906 suggests that the exporting process was active early in the century. Apart from the USA, the countries involved were nearly all linked with the British Empire and the Commonwealth. The quantities of pottery exported, and the proportions of the firms' output involved, are not known.

Some aspects of the development of domestic markets, for example commemorative and advertising wares, are discussed above in the section on products. Tourism was a significant domestic market, in the Torquay area and across the UK.[89] Mottowares, inscribed with the names of tourist resorts, and sold as holiday souvenirs, were important products in these markets. For the local Torquay tourist market, the potteries used their own premises as a sales device, welcoming visitors to view the works, and to buy pottery during their visit. A Longpark employee in the 1920s remembered the number of coaches that brought visitors to the pottery,[90] and Watcombe and Longpark produced advertising material encouraging people to visit the potteries by bus.[91] H.E. Crute and Co.'s Daison Art Pottery advertisement inviting people to visit the pottery described the company as 'The only pure handcraft pottery in Torquay',[92] which might have raised a few hackles amongst their competitors. A pottery visit which may have had both local and international marketing results was the 1924 visit of the All Blacks to Watcombe Pottery: the pottery took the opportunity to present players and committee members with decorated mugs. [93]

Following royal patronage, Watcombe, Longpark and Torquay potteries incorporated the word 'royal' into their company names, or the description of their products, as a means of creating a desirable image in the marketplace. Watcombe and Longpark produced self-advertising wares, for example giant teapots for display in tea shop windows,[94] and other specially designed ware for display by their agents. Direct sales were also made to pottery merchants: Daison Art Pottery made 'Herbert's Devon Art Pottery', for the London porcelain and earthenware merchants E. Herbert & Co Ltd. [95] The lack of company records means that little is known about the use of agents in marketing and selling. Longpark used agents in London (Sparrows) and in Plymouth (Lawleys).[96] One agent in London was almost 'home

[88] No author name given, 'A Present From Stanley F.I.' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine* (July 1995), p. 11.
[89] Tourist locations were also important in the export markets discussed above.
[90] Brisco, *Torquay Commemoratives and Advertising Wares*, p. 86
[91] No author name, 'Visit the Potteries with the Devon General Omnibus & Touring Co.' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 151 (Spring 2014), p. 35. Note: this article was written by Margaret Sloman. Personal communication (Andy Violet, email to John Bowden, 26 April 24).
[92]No author name, 'Torquay Guide Book' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 96 (Summer 2000), p. 48.
[93] Brisco, *Torquay Commemoratives and Advertising Wares*, pp. 60–61.
[94] Andy Violet, 'Torquay Pottery Giants' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 169 (Winter 2018), p. 30.
[95] Ted Wade, 'A Most Unusual Pattern' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 104 (Summer 2002), p. 23.
[96] No author name, *Reminiscences of Longpark Pottery with Mrs W Annis,* p. 153.

grown': Frank Findlay, who represented a range of English pottery manufacturers, including Watcombe, had been trained in pottery skills at Aller Vale.[97]

Production processes and skills

How were the pots made? The range of processes and skills was not limited to the popular image of a potter throwing at a wheel. Virginia Brisco notes that vases, teapots and jugs were thrown, that plates were shaped on a former using a tool called a jigger, cups were shaped in a mould using a jolly, and solid objects, such as animal models, were formed in moulds.[98] As information on work practices in the Torquay potteries in the 1920s is limited, reference is made below to the recollections of two men who worked in the potteries after the Second World War. While we cannot be sure, it will be assumed that their recollections are generally applicable to the 1920s.

John Tilstone became the manager of Watcombe in 1959, and later described how the pottery compared with his previous experience in the mechanised potteries of Staffordshire:

> It was almost like going back into the past; so much of the pottery was handmade and the entire production was hand decorated. There were many skilled operatives including: throwers, turners, handlers, slip dippers, jolliers, pressers and hand decorators – at Watcombe were four throwers who could shape almost any symmetrical pot you can mention using just their hands and no moulds whatsoever. To see a completed six foot board of thrown shapes as regular as could be, all the same height and diameter was to see potting at its best.[99]

Two points stand out: the focus on hand – not machine – work, and the level of skill which was evident to this experienced potter.

Cyril Wilson worked at the Watcombe Pottery from 1947 until it closed. His description of the work highlights the batch nature of production, the pace of the work, and, although he was a highly skilled thrower, its repetitive nature, as he would generally work on one shape for a whole day. In a day, he could produce 216 small teapots and lids, or 144 larger teapots, or 500 cruets, or 288 mugs. If handles were needed, the handler could make and fix handles at the same pace as the thrower. Decorating took longer: 'for relatively simple designs such as cottages, two to two and a half decorators were needed for each thrower or turner'.[100] Assuming an 8½ hour day, and not allowing for pauses (which is unlikely), Cyril Wilson therefore threw a small teapot with lid every 2.4 minutes, a large teapot every 3.5 minutes, or a cruet in just over 1 minute. If the pots met John Tilstone's description of consistent size and

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[97] No author name given, 'A Veteran London Agent: Retirement of Mr Frank Findlay' in *Scandy, The Magazine of the Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society*, 190 (Winter 2023), pp. 13–14.
[98] Brisco, *Torquay Mottowares*, pp. 54–55.
[99] John Tilstone, 'Some Memories of the Watcombe Pottery 1959–1962' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, pp. 141–42.
[100] Virginia Brisco, *'An Interview with Cyril Wilson'* in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters,* p. 140.

shape, this demonstrated skill of a high order, maintained over long time periods. Cyril Wilson's estimate of the required ratio of decorators to throwers (2 or 2.5:1) is echoed in the 1921 census where four decorators and two throwers are recorded as working at Watcombe.

Staff management

How were employees recruited? Although company records do not survive, the 1921 census provides some insights. Information on place of birth suggests that recruitment was predominantly local: place of birth – Torquay 53, Kingskerswell and Newton Abbot 19, Bovey Tracey 8, rest of Devon 20, Staffordshire 5, other UK 18.[101] A search of the British Newspaper Archive shows that Torquay Pottery advertised twice in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* in 1922 and 1924 for skilled staff,[102] and Barton Pottery advertised in the same newspaper nine times between 1922 and 1929.[103] Barton also advertised twelve times in the *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo* in the same period.[104] No evidence has been found of the other potteries advertising for staff in newspapers.

How were employees trained? It is known that, in the nineteenth century, potters training for high-skill roles served apprenticeships, for example William Howard and Charles Collard at Aller Vale,[105] and Cyril Wilson noted that there were five-year apprenticeships after the Second World War, although for which trades is not clear.[106] It is interesting, then, that the 1921 census respondents' descriptions of their occupations do not mention apprenticeships, although one person at Torquay Pottery was described as 'Potter Pupil'. The potteries employed twenty-one males aged 21 years and under. While seven were labourers or warehousemen, occupations less likely to be associated with apprenticeship, the remaining fourteen *could* have been apprentices, although the occupational descriptions which they provided for the census might have been, for example, 'decorator' or 'handler'.[107] The possibility of the census data containing 'hidden' apprentices is supported by Virginia Brisco's statement that 'the potteries took on boys as apprentices and they would initially learn all the trades' and then 'specialise according to their abilities'.[108]

One influence on training requirements is the amount of standardisation, and Virginia Brisco notes that cottage ware decorators 'were given drawings to copy – thus the potteries

[101] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmy past website.
[102] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 April 1922; 22 May 1924. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[103] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 6 June 1922; 24 & 25 January and 21 March 1923; 21 February 1928; 6 & 9 March 1926; 22 & 25 March 1929. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[104] *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 19, 21 & 23 April, 8 June, 19 August and 9 September 1926; 16, 17 & 18 February 1927; 16 February and 3 December 1928; 6 February 1929. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[105] Virginia Brisco, 'Bill Howard – Pottery Artist' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 114.
[106] Brisco, *An Interview with Cyril Wilson*, p. 140.
[107] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website. The analysis focuses on males as it is assumed that females would be unlikely to be apprenticed.
[108] Personal communication. (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).

positively discouraged individuality'.[109] However, she also recalls that 'John Tilstone told me that it took 6 months to train a good decorator'.[110] In February 1927, Barton advertised for 'several smart boys – to learn decorating',[111] and in March 1923 advertised for an 'apprentice'.[112] Training may have varied for different tasks, one factor being the extent to which roles had become standardised and, to an extent, deskilled. Decorating, if using relatively simple designs, may have been a task which became *relatively* deskilled. The employees may also have taken a hand in the training process: probably thinking of a time in the 1940s, Cyril Wilson recalled that decorators attended evening art classes, 'at their own expense and in their own time'.[113]

The mobility of workers between potteries in England is mentioned above in the section on products and designs. Evidence about the nature and extent of mobility between the Torquay potteries is limited and mixed. Mobility may have been greater among employees with higher level skills. The managerial view of mobility was probably influenced by the scarcity of the skills involved, and the nature of the knowledge that could be transferred, knowledge of glazes apparently being particularly protected.[114] Company records do not exist, but it is likely that mobility varied by trade, between potteries, and over time and varying economic conditions.

On hours of work, Cyril Wilson, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, worked from 8 to 12.30 and 1.30 to 5.30 from Monday to Friday, and 8 to 12.30 on Saturdays. He recalled that when he (Wilson) was a boy, his father had worked considerably longer hours as a pottery decorator in the summer to meet demand, and that in winter, before the Second World War, workers were often laid off for periods of time.[115] The 1921 census includes eight people who self-identified as being unemployed pottery workers.[116] An indication of the unpredictability of employment, and of fluctuations in company fortunes, is contained in a letter from a thrower at Watcombe to an ex-colleague, written in January 1925: 'We are having a very lean time at the works. Nothing to do, we only work – about 30 hours a week. – The funny part of it all the other places seem to have plenty to do'.[117]

While the potteries had an artistic focus, they were still companies that had contractual employment relationships with staff. Evidence about the industrial relations climate in the potteries is limited, but, in October 1920, *The Western Times* carried reports of a strike of pottery workers in Torquay. From the reports it would seem that employees at Watcombe, Longpark and Torquay potteries were members of trades unions, that those at Watcombe came out on strike, that employees of Longpark were locked out by their employers (who

[109] Brisco, *Let's Collect Cottagewares,* p. 30.
[110] Personal communication. (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[111] *Torbay Express and South Devon Echo*, 17 & 18 February 1927. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[112] *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 21 March 1923. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[113] Brisco, *An Interview with Cyril Wilson,* p. 140.
[114] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, p. 68.
[115] Virginia Brisco, 'An Interview with Cyril Wilson', p. 140.
[116] Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[117] Barker, 'John Barker – Pottery Artist and Artisan', p. 20.

claimed that the union had made unreasonable demands, claims refuted by the union), and that employees of Torquay Pottery were due to cease work. *The Western Times* reported that the strike was about pay.[118] The length of the strike is not known.

Most work was probably paid on a piece work basis. An insight into the structure of the payment system is given by Cyril Wilson. At 'the top end' of the pay scale were throwers and some mould makers, and on lower 'steps' decorators and turners, followed by handlers, slip dippers and glaze dippers: 'at Aller Vale the throwers considered themselves "a cut above" the rest'.[119] Virginia Brisco notes, however, that 'the highest paid were the "firemen" in charge of the kilns. They had to live very close to the pottery so they could tweak the temperatures during the night if the wind changed – failure to do so could ruin a whole kiln full of pots.'[120] Winifred Annis, an ex-employee of Longpark, recalled in a letter to the *TPCS Magazine* in 1997 that 'wages were paid to employees who lined up outside the office. I had to call out the amount and Mr Skinner would pay the men from the loose cash on his desk.'[121]

What did the employees think about their work? While the potentially boring nature of repetitive work in batch production has been raised above, there is little information on which to base an assessment of employees' attitudes to their work and the wares which they produced.[122] The quality of many of the finished goods in the 1920s, and John Tilstone's comments in the 1960s, suggest that high levels of skill continued to be displayed, but attitudes to work cannot be inferred from the quality of the work.

The industrial relations problems in the potteries need to be set in the context of unemployment and reductions in wages in the years after the end of the First World War: these issues, in Torquay, were referred to in an article in January 1923 in the *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*.[123] The newspaper covered unemployment in Torquay regularly in 1921 and 1922, with references to the *Mayor's Fund for the Relief of Unemployment in Torquay*, descriptions of events to raise money for the fund, and the encouragement of donations.[124] The *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser* also covered the increase in unemployment in Torquay in 1923 and the role of unemployment relief schemes.[125]

Many hospitals relied heavily on voluntary contributions in the 1920s, and Torquay hospital benefited from a scheme, in which the Torquay Trades and Labour Council was involved,

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[118] *The Western Times,* 19, 23 & 26 October 1920. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[119] Brisco, *An Interview with Cyril Wilson,* p. 140.
[120] Personal communication. (Virginia Brisco, note to John Bowden, 19 April 2024).
[121] Win Annis, 'Greetings from two of our honorary members' in *The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society Magazine*, February 1997, p. 32.
[122] There is evidence that skilled potters had a commitment to high-quality work, with a number leaving the reorganised, more commercially oriented, Watcombe/Aller company soon after its acquisition by Hexter, Humpherson & Co. in the early 1900s. See Poole, *The Torquay Pottery Mark Book,* p. 6, and Brisco, *A Century of Ceramics,* p. 5
[123] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 19 January 1923. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[124] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 4 & 25 March, 25 November, 2 & 16 December 1921; 27 January, 3 February, 31 March, 7 April 1922. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[125] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser,* 26 January 1923; *Western Morning News*, 27 October 1924. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

whereby employees contributed a regular amount from their wages, collected either through their trade union or their employers: in 1923, the level of contributions was maintained despite the background of wage reductions and unemployment.[126] Contributions were recorded from 'Watcombe Pottery Employees' and 'Longpark Pottery Sick Club.'[127] The importance of voluntary contributions in hospital funding in the 1920s is reflected in a gift of £100,000 from Mrs Ella Rowcroft, 'to cover the costs of erecting the New Torbay Hospital'.[128]

A brief endnote on working conditions: Winifred Annis, who worked at Longpark in a clerical role in the 1920s, recalled the lack of electricity and the use of oil lamps:[129] *The Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser* reported in July 1925 that Torquay Town Council had agreed an application for the supply of electricity to the Shiphay area, including Longpark Pottery.[130]

People working in the potteries

How many people worked at the potteries in Torquay? From the 1921 census, 114 people have been identified as working in the Torquay potteries, plus a further nine who had been pottery workers, but were unemployed at the time of the census.[131] These people were distributed across the potteries in the following way (unemployed in brackets):[132] Hexter, Humpherson & Co. 36, comprising Watcombe 27 and Aller Vale 9; Longpark 35 (2);[133] Torquay Pottery 28 (1); Barton 6 (2); Lemon and Crute 9 (4). These figures show the significant size difference between the three larger and two smaller potteries.

What roles did these people play? The way in which people chose to describe themselves in the census makes it difficult to allocate all individuals to particular work roles: 'potter' could mean a thrower, a worker with the complete range of skills, or simply a worker in a pottery, and 'pottery worker' and 'pottery hand' do not help in clarifying roles, therefore a 'miscellaneous' category has been created. The number in each role across the five potteries was (unemployed in brackets): throwing 10; turning 4; handling 7 (1); glazing/dipping 6;

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[126] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser,* 19 January 1923. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[127] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser,* 21 January and 13 May 1927. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[128] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser,* 10 July 1925. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[129] No author name given, *Reminiscences of Longpark Pottery with Mrs W Annis,* p. 154.
[130] *Torquay Times and South Devon Advertiser*, 10 July 1925. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.
[131] This section is largely based on the 1921 census. Census material from the 1921 census in this paper is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast website.
[132] The Census asked respondents who were unemployed to give the name of their last employer. Nine were found who did so, but we do not know how many who were unemployed did not give this information. An unemployed 15-year-old, who had worked for Lemon & Crute, was described in the census as 'out of employment owing to strike': this was probably the miners' strike mentioned on page 6. As four of the nine recorded unemployed worked for Lemon & Crute, the company may have been more affected than the other potteries by the resulting coal shortage.
[133] Len Mayo notes 35 employees at Longpark in about 1926. No author's name given*, Men of Longpark, A Personal Recollection by Len Mayo*, p. 168

decorating 26 (2); firing and packing kilns 11; warehousing 3 (1); engine working 4; labouring 13 (3); clerical 4; miscellaneous 16 (2); owner/director 10.[134] These broad categories may, in some cases, hide variations in role and skill, particularly, perhaps, in the case of decorators. In the 1921 census, one person described himself as 'Pottery Designer and Decorator', and three described themselves as 'Pottery Artist': the work of one of the pottery artists, William Howard, is the subject of a chapter in a TPCS book.[135]

The age distribution of those working in the potteries shows a relatively young workforce: those aged under 20 years made up 22% of the workers, those under 30 made up 50%, those under 40 made up 68%, and those under 50 made up 89%. This was not an industry in which people worked much beyond middle age. There were almost equal numbers of married and single people, but many more men than women were employed: 87% and 13%.

Of the sixteen women working in the potteries, seven were aged under 20 years, eight between 20 and 26, and one aged 41; all were unmarried. The largest number of women (8), worked at Longpark, four at Torquay, three at Watcombe and one at Lemon and Crute. The work roles they followed were decorator (6); dipper (1); clerk (4); miscellaneous – 'pottery worker' or 'assistant' – (5). Writing of Watcombe, D. & E. Lloyd Thomas said that women entered the workforce in the First World War, and in the 1920s decorated cottage and motto wares, the 'better quality painting' still being done by men.[136] It would be interesting to pursue a number of questions further: how many men were recruited from the potteries into the armed forces in the First World War? How many women worked in the potteries during the war? How many men returned to pottery work after the war, and how did this affect women's employment?

Where did the pottery workers live? The 1921 census shows that, of the 123 pottery workers identified, including those unemployed, 99 lived in Torquay, and that many lived very close to the potteries: 53 lived in one enumeration district close to Watcombe and Torquay potteries, and another 21 lived in two further adjacent enumeration districts. Part of the Hele area of Torquay appears to have been almost a small pottery village, with 28 employees living in, or near to, Hele Road. Of the 24 who lived outside the Torquay boundary, seventeen lived in Kingskerswell or nearby villages (within 2 or 3 miles of the potteries), five in Newton Abbot (within 5 miles) and two in Bovey Tracey.

The census also suggests that family relationships were an important element in the potteries. Census data from 1891 to 1921 show that 54 of the 123 current and past employees were related in some way at a 'primary' level – father/son, father/daughter, brothers, sisters: the 54 came from 24 families.[137] The commonest relationship was fourteen sets of brothers, 30 people in total, and there were fourteen cases of relatives working in the same pottery. There

[134] As a non-potter, I have made allocations from respondents' descriptions which may need revision, particularly in relation to the category 'firing and packing kilns'.
[135] Brisco, *Bill Howard – Pottery Artist*, pp. 113–15.
[136] Lloyd Thomas, *The Old Torquay Potteries*, p. 68.
[137] Census material from 1891 to 1921, used to identify family relationships, is from The National Archives, accessed at The National Archives, Kew, via the Findmypast and Ancestry websites.

may have been other family relationships that have not been identified, for example uncle/niece/nephew or in-law. There is limited evidence of children following parents into the same company: two cases of fathers and sons, and two cases of fathers and daughters. The proportion of related employees would seem to be high, but it is not known if this was unusual at this place and time, or if this family element affected recruitment practices or work relationships.

Continuity or change

One aim of the Devon in the 1920s Project is to explore the nature of change over the decade in different aspects of the life of the county. This paper has presented some evidence of change in the potteries in Torquay. One new pottery, Barton, was established. The tourist market grew in importance, and the potteries responded to this growth. Linked to this, and to general changes in customer preference, there was some adaptation in product design. To an extent there was a reduction in the quality of output, associated with changing, highly competitive markets. There was a greater involvement of women in some areas of the workforce.

However, if they looked back over the decade from 1930, those working in the potteries would have found much that was familiar. The potteries in Torquay in the 1920s were probably characterised more by continuity than by change.

Soon, however, the depression of the early 1930s took its toll. In 1931, H. E. Crute and Co. entered into voluntary liquidation, and the Torquay Pottery also failed, although a new company, Torquay Pottery (1932) Ltd., was soon established.[138] The Barton Pottery closed in 1938: in Keith Poole's words 'the pottery produced was technically of a high quality, especially in terms of colours and glazes, but its wares were probably too old fashioned to sell well'.[139] Watcombe, the last pottery, closed in 1962.

[138] Virginia Brisco, 'The Torquay Pottery Company' in Poole, *The Art of the Torquay and South Devon Potters*, p. 46.

[139] Poole, *Torquay Pottery Mark Book 5th Edition,* p. 12.

Illustrations

The photographs below are of pots from the Watcombe, Longpark, Barton, and Lemon and Crute potteries. They provide an indication of the kinds of pots that were made in Torquay in the 1920s, and include examples of motto, commemorative, and general decorative wares. The illustrations make clear the skills of the potters, decorators and motto writers, as described in the text.

The dates given are derived from the backstamps on the bases of the pots, using information from Keith Poole (ed.) *Torquay Pottery Mark Book, 5th Edition* (The Torquay Pottery Collectors' Society, 2007). A range of dates is given for each pot as backstamps were often used over a number of years, making it difficult to date a pot precisely.

Figures 3 and 4 below were photographed courtesy of Mrs B. L. Willis.

Figure 1: Watcombe Pottery jug, 14cm (5½in) high, cockerel decoration, late 1920s–c.1953.

Figure 2: Longpark Pottery vase, 36cm (14in) high, Devon violets decoration. May have been used as an advertising display in a shop, c.1930–40 and 1947–57.

Figure 3: Longpark Pottery, personal commemorative teapot (inscription side), 1918–30.

Figure 4: Reverse side of Figure 3, scandy decoration.

Figure 5: Longpark Pottery teapot stand, scandy decoration, 1918–30.

Figure 6: Barton Pottery bowl, 7.5cm (3in) high, floral decoration, no motto, c1922–30.

Figure 7: Longpark Pottery jug, 19cm (7½in) high, kingfisher design, c.1918–30.

Figure 8: Watcombe Pottery teapot, 7.5cm (3in) high, Cockington forge, c.1935–62.

Figure 9: Watcombe Pottery vase, 15cm (6in) high, scroll decoration, no motto, c. late 1920s–53.

Figure 10: Longpark Pottery coffee pot, 17cm (6¾in) high, cockerel decoration, c.1918–30.

Figure 11: Reverse side of Figure 10, showing motto.

Figure 12: Watcombe Pottery coffee pot, 22cm (8¾in) high, cottage decoration, late 1920s–53.

Figure 13: Reverse side of Figure 12, showing motto.

Figure 14: Lemon & Crute Pottery vase, 36cm (14in) high, pheasant decoration, no motto, one of a pair, 1914–20.