

# BRITISH

HERITAGE

15  
YEARS



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2. **Dennis Bardens** is an author and journalist of long experience. He has worked as reporter, feature writer and special correspondent on leading British newspapers, including the *Sunday Express* and *Daily Mirror*. For several years Mr Bardens was editor of the BBC's weekly radio documentary series *Focus*, and was also the co-founder and first editor of the BBC television programme *Panorama*.

3. **Julia Braun Kessler** has had an extensive career in writing, editing and teaching. She has been editor for the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, features editor for *Seventeen* magazine, teacher of Humanities at U.C.L.A. and currently writes features for the *Los Angeles Times*, *Herald Examiner* and the *Los Angeles Daily News*. Ms

Kessler is the author of the book *Getting Even with Getting Old* and has written more than 200 articles on the arts, artists and social issues.

4. **Eric Minton** graduated from the University of Missouri-Columbia with a Bachelor of Journalism degree. He is a freelance writer with 18 years experience—working as a copy editor, assistant city editor, publicity director and sports writer on various publications in the United States. Mr Minton became a specialist in adventure participation stories as a freelance writer in Britain—he rode horses through the Ring of Kerry in Ireland and the Alps in Austria, piloted a glider over Scotland, crawled through a cave in Somerset and was once amongst the crowds on the first day of Harrods' after-Christmas sale.

**Steven Eramo** is a writer and artist who lives in Stoneham, Massachusetts. Along with a long-running regular monthly column for the New Hampshire public television programme guide, he has written several articles for British interest publications both here and abroad. Among his numerous projects, Mr Eramo is currently writing a book about British cookery.

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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES

# MINTON



FROM THE FLOORS OF THE UNITED STATES CAPITOL  
TO THE DRESSING TABLE OF QUEEN VICTORIA, IT IS A  
NAME THAT HAS SPELLED QUALITY, ELEGANCE AND  
STYLE FOR 200 YEARS. **BY ERIC MINTON**

If you ate off the floor of the Houses of Parliament, you would be dining from a product of one of England's premier china manufacturers. Minton, founded in 1793, laid its encaustic tiles in Parliament in the 1850s.

Such elegant 'floorware'—as opposed to Minton's more famous tableware—also lies in Lichfield Cathedral, the Victoria & Albert Museum, and the Royal Dairy at Frogmore. Queen Victoria's Osborne House on the Isle of Wight has Minton tiles on the floor, Minton china on the dining table, and Minton figurines on display.

Though today, as part of the Royal Doulton Company, Minton is known primarily for elegant dinnerware, for much of the 19th century it dominated the English china and ornamental wares industry, becoming a royal favourite and a vaunted name around the world. That status is, to a degree, returning as designers rediscover the early pattern books in the vast Minton archives. These discoveries have inspired books, fabric and custom-framed prints. Porcelain desk sets copy the Royal Dairy's Minton tiles and picture frames mimic antique Minton Majolica. In 1990 Royal Doulton introduced 'The Thomas Minton Collection' of coffee 'cans' (Minton's 1796 coffee cup shape), dinner services and giftware based on early Minton patterns, designs and Parian ware.

Minton's legacy continues, too, in its original form at the Minton factory at Stoke-on-Trent and in museums, mansions and public buildings, not only in England but in America too.

The legacy started 200 years ago with Thomas Minton. The son of a poor Shropshire farmer, Minton became a successful designer and engraver of copper plates used by potteries around Stoke-on-Trent, the centre of Britain's ceramics industry. In 1793, backed by two partners, Thomas founded a pottery under his own name.

Thomas Minton took Joseph Poulson into partnership in 1796 and the business, now known as Minton & Poulson, quickly made an impact on the industry, not only through Minton's artistry, but his business sense, too. His first major contribution was to get good raw



materials to the potteries economically. Though large deposits of china clay had been discovered near St Austell in Cornwall around 1750, nobody had mined and shipped it to Stoke-on-Trent in profitable quantities. In 1880 Thomas Minton formed a partnership of four potteries to found the Hendra Company that would mine and sell Cornish china clay. Josiah Spode II pro-

Page 47: A sample of Minton's encaustic tile, which uses coloured clay to create the pattern. Opposite, top: A plate from a dessert service commemorating Lord Milton's expedition across Canada. Opposite, bottom: Queen Victoria's Minton toilet set. Below, left: Artist Lynn Sumner paints a limited edition vase. Below, right: Herbert Minton. Bottom: Minton's most popular Parian figures.



## WHEN VISITING

Minton China is on display at the following locations:

### GREAT BRITAIN

Birmingham Central Museum and Art Gallery, Chamberlain Square, Birmingham B3 3DH. Tel: 021 235 2834.

The British Museum, Great Russell Street, London WC1B 3DG. Tel: 071 636 1555.

Gladstone Pottery Museum, 26 Uttoxeter Road, Longton, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST3 1PQ. Tel: 0782 311378.

Lichfield Cathedral, Lichfield, Staffordshire. Tel: 0543 256120. The cathedral's floor is decorated with Minton tiles.

Liverpool Museum, William Brown Street, Liverpool, Merseyside L3 8EN. Tel: 051 207 0001. Examples of Majolica Peacock are displayed.

Manchester City Art Gallery, Moseley Street, Manchester M2 3JL. Tel: 061 236 5244. The museum holds a varied Minton collection but visitors should check on the collection's accessibility beforehand.

The Minton Museum, Royal Doulton Ltd., Minton House, London Road, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST4 7QD. Tel: 0782 744766. The museum holds a comprehensive collection of pieces from 1800 to date. The Minton archive is open by appointment only to serious researchers.

Royal Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh, EH1 1JF. Tel: 031 225 7534. Visitors should check on the collection's accessibility beforehand.

Paisley Museum and Art Galleries, High Street, Paisley, Renfrewshire  
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vided the next key ingredient—animal bone ash. When combined with the clay it formed an easily modelled material durable enough to withstand firing and daily use. This formula for bone china continues today.

Account books show Minton stopped buying animal bone around 1815, indicating the pottery, for some reason, stopped producing bone china, an apparent setback. Thomas's two original partners had died, so he formed a partnership in 1817 with his sons Thomas Webb and Herbert. After his brother left to become a priest, Herbert became an equal partner with his father in 1823. Almost immediately, the company's fortunes improved. Bone china reappears in the stock books for 1822, and the pottery began supplementing its 'useful' wares with the figures and ornamental wares that became so beloved in Victorian households.

Thomas died in 1836 leaving Herbert in sole control of the pottery. Though the founding patriarch had established Minton's reputation for quality, his son's acute business sense, fascination with technology and patience to let innovations take root and flourish took Minton to the top of the Victorian ceramics industry. Nowhere is that more evident than in Herbert's quest to revive the medieval art of inlaid encaustic tiles.

From 1835 to 1914 tiles were among Minton's most important products. One of the pottery's customers was the United States Government, which used Minton floor tiles when constructing the Capitol Building wings from 1856 to 1861.

In choosing Minton tiles, the architect of the Capitol followed the recommendation of Sir Charles Barry, who used Minton tiles when he rebuilt Parliament House after the 1834 fire. Augustus W. N. Pugin, a designer associated with Minton, assisted Sir Charles. Today, Minton tiles grace the floor of the Peers' Lobby in the House of Lords, and Pugin's designs are visible throughout the interior, such as on the fireplaces of the Prince's Chamber.

The 1840s proved to be the watershed decade for Minton. Queen Victoria purchased her first Minton piece in 1840, beginning a royal patronage that



*Above: Original artwork discovered in the Minton archives documents the creation of the company's best-selling design: 'Haddon Hall.'*  
*Below: A pair of peacock blue and white Minton vases re-creating the pâte-sur-pâte technique.*



exploded as her children and grandchildren married into the European royal houses. Minton wares have since been commissioned for the Royal households of Belgium, Russia, Siam, the Netherlands, Prussia and Jordan.

Osborne House on the Isle of Wight epitomizes Minton's royal patronage, displaying many of the pieces purchased by Victoria and Albert. Among them are Albert's 1853 Christmas gift to Victoria, a Minton toilet service and dressing glass decorated with cherubs, in Queen Victoria's dressing room; and the *pâte-sur-pâte* Queen's Jubilee Vase, presented for the 1897 Jubilee.

Herbert, the astute businessman, recognized that he was not his father's equal as a designer, so in 1848 he took on Leon Arnoux, a second-generation French potter and designer who would remain with Minton as art director and advisor for the next 50 years. Where Herbert was fascinated by technology and its applications to business, Arnoux applied his own matching enthusiasm to art, design and the rediscovery of long-lost techniques.

Arnoux's interest in glazes and colours led him in 1849 to revive Italian Majolica, an earthenware covered with a white opaque glaze and carefully painted freehand. At the same time, Arnoux developed Palissy, a technique in which low-temperature coloured glazes are painted directly onto the earthenware before it is fired. This technique allowed Arnoux to fire his rainbow of colours, including 14 reds, 10 yellows and oranges, 31 greens, 13 blues and 14 turquoises, all at once.

Majolica and Palissy wares were Minton innovations, but, as with tableware, Minton also scored major successes by capitalizing on the latest technology. The company began producing Parian ware—named for its resemblance to Parian marble—after acquiring an interest in Benjamin Cheverton's Reducing Machine. A three-dimensional pantograph, the machine allowed sculptors to translate full-scale statues to table-top size while retaining their fine details. Minton produced its first Parian figure about 1845, and the product totally replaced biscuit porcelain figures in two years. To appreciate the process, com-

pare some of the original sculptures of the royal children with their Parian twins at Osborne House.

Frogmore House in Windsor also has Parian figures of the children. Recently opened to the public after an extensive restoration, Frogmore has returned rooms to the way its three most famous occupants knew them: Queen Charlotte's 1792 Green Pavilion, the Duchess of Kent's (mother of Queen Victoria) Lilac Drawing Room and dining-room from 1860, and Queen Mary's 'Black Museum' of 1939.

Meanwhile, the Royal Dairy at Frogmore, designed in part by Prince Albert, is a colourful showcase of many Minton products. The dairy features a majolica frieze, tiles, fountains and panels; encaustic and printed tiles; and dairy wares such as churns, milk jugs, cream skimmers and curd moulds, all by Minton.

Through mutual friendship with Sir Henry Cole, Herbert had established a relationship with Prince Albert, who served as chairman of the Society of the Arts. Through this connection, Herbert put up £10,000 as a guarantor of the 1851 Great Exhibition and Minton was both a sponsor and major exhibitor at the Crystal Palace, where the pottery won top honours. It was as much marketing ingenuity as social conscience for Herbert, who used trade and international exhibitions to display and sell Minton wares, a strategy the company continued for the next 130 years. One such event was the U.S. Centennial Exhibition in Philadelphia. All the Minton ware displayed in Philadelphia ended up at the Smithsonian Institution. From this and donations of two other collections, the Smithsonian counts more than 180 Minton items among its treasures.

The Victoria & Albert Museum, naturally, looks after the most important stock of Minton wares in England. Minton, in fact, took part in the Museum's construction, thanks to the friendship between museum patron Sir Henry Cole and Herbert Minton. The pottery contributed architectural ceramics in the refreshment rooms, a ceramic staircase, ceiling panels and tile panels.

Herbert formed a partnership in 1849 with Colin Minton Campbell—his

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PA1 2BA. Tel: 041 889 3151. The collection includes *pâte-sur-pâte*.

St Giles Roman Catholic Church, Cheadle, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire. Tel: 0538 753130. A Pugin church, with Minton tiles. Visits are by appointment.

Stoke-on-Trent City Museum and Art Gallery, Bethesda Street, Hanley, Stoke-on-Trent, Staffordshire ST1 3DE. Tel: 0782 202173

Thomas Goode & Co. Ltd., 19 South Audley Street, Grosvenor Square, London W1Y 6BN. Tel: 071 499 2823. Minton tour-de-force elephants are displayed.

Victoria & Albert Museum, Cromwell Road, South Kensington, London SW7 2RL. Tel: 071 938 8500. Minton Majolica tiles can be seen in the Silver Galleries and staircase, Old Grill Room and Refreshment Room.

## CANADA

George R Gardiner Museum of Ceramic Art, 111 Queen's Park, Toronto. Ontario M5S 2C7. Visitors can see the Cumming collection of first period Minton.

## UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

Cooper-Hewitt Museum, (The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of Design), 2 East 91st Street, New York, NY 10028. Tel: (212) 860-6868. Visitors should check accessibility beforehand.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, 5th Avenue at 82nd Street, New York. NY 10028. Tel: (212) 879 5500.

Philadelphia Museum of Art, 26th Street and Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19102. Tel: (215) 763-8100. Visitors should check accessibility beforehand.

nephew and Thomas's grandson—who took over upon Herbert's death in 1858. Colin maintained the pottery's reputation for quality while exploring new technology and artistic methods. Minton rose to its still-standing status as the most elegant of china tableware when in 1863 the company bought the patent for the acid gold process from James Leigh Hughes, a Minton gilder. Before Hughes's invention, artisans applied liquid gold or gold paste by hand. Hughes etched designs into bone china with acid, then overlaid and burnished gold leaf, resulting in a three-dimensional effect.

Today, Minton still uses the acid gold process, alone or in combination with hand-crafted gold decoration, on its most expensive patterns and specially commissioned services. Tours of the factory at Stoke-on-Trent take visitors through a workshop where artisans apply gold by hand.

The last independent survivor of the great Victorian retailers, Thomas Goode & Company, 19 South Audley Street, London, still sells the finest Minton tableware. By the 1860s, Goode's had become Minton's London showroom.

Because of this special relationship, the Victoria & Albert Museum's 1976 exhibition of Minton wares used the South Audley showrooms as an auxiliary exhibition hall displaying the Thomas Goode & Company collection of *pâte-sur-pâte* wares, along with Minton pieces from the Paris Exhibitions of 1878 and 1889.

Minton developed *pâte-sur-pâte* with the help of another French designer. Colin met Louis Solon in 1867 and purchased *pâte-sur-pâte* decorated panels from him. Three years later, Solon made his way to Stoke-on-Trent and joined Minton, becoming Arnoux's partner and future son-in-law. *Pâte-sur-pâte* rivals Majolica as Minton's most important contribution to the ceramics industry. It was exclusively Minton, but whether Solon brought this technique to Minton and perfected it there, or if *pâte-sur-pâte* was already being produced at the pottery when Solon arrived is uncertain.

Solon claimed he painted layers of fine white slip on tinted Parian clay, building designs that had both translucence, with the colour shadowing





through, and opaqueness, resembling cameo glass. Some of Solon's pieces took weeks or even months to complete. His artistry is above reproach, for each of his pieces is unique.

Minton was then at the pinnacle of its success. It was the largest pottery in Britain, employing almost 1,800 people. But with Colin's death in 1887 passed Minton's greatness, although the pottery survived in some form until today. His son, John Fitzherbert Campbell, became Minton's sole governing director but was not active in the pottery's management.

The pottery showed no profits from 1886 to 1900, surviving only because of Minton's established reputation and the management of Arnoux, Solon and his son Leon, the new art director. Without the vision of a Minton family member, the pottery began travelling the same road as many other family potteries during the 19th century, never again to match its initial brilliance.

For Minton, however, a renaissance came with the 1976 exhibition at the Victoria & Albert Museum. It inspired

the company to open its own Minton Museum to the public in 1977. Located at the pottery on London Road in Stoke-on-Trent, the museum, which is open from Monday to Friday, includes pieces from the international exhibitions and Colin Minton Campbell's private collection.

Meanwhile, the Minton archives at the pottery started drawing designers to study—and emulate—its treasures. The archives, containing the Minton pattern and shape books, Minton family documents, letters, account books and inventories, is open by appointment only by calling 0782 744766. Joan Jones, the museum's curator, has recently written *Minton—The First Two Hundred Years of Design & Production*, featuring material from the archives and fabulous colour photographs. The book is available through the Antique Collectors' Club, for \$140, by calling (800) 252-5231. A selection of commemorative products has also been produced to celebrate the bicentenary of Minton. Unfortunately, the small number of pieces that were available in the United

States has already been sold.

For the Minton bicentenary year, the company has produced probably the largest vase made in this century. A new series of collectors' 'Arthurian Legend' plates reflects the eclecticism associated with Minton, and 'Haddon Hall', Minton's most popular tableware pattern, has been produced in an alternative colourway.

In American china stores, Minton is usually relegated to shelves under the Royal Doulton name. Among china connoisseurs and historians, however, the Minton name epitomizes the term 'fine china', and the company that a poor but talented Shropshire lad started 200 years ago is synonymous with Victorian interior elegance. **B**

*Opposite, top: Neptune brandishing his trident on the floor of Osborne House. Opposite, bottom: Three majolica glazed earthenware teapots produced in the 1870s: the 'Monkey', 'Cadogan' and 'Chinaman' models. Below: A contemporary reproduction of the 19th century Monkey teapot.*

