

PLYMOUTH CHINA.

BY PHILIP WHITEWAY.

The true china clay or kaolin was first discovered and identified in England by William Cookworthy, about the year 1755. Hard paste-porcelain was made, in exceptional instances only, at several English factories, but none produced it as a regular manufacture except the works at Plymouth, Bristol and Lowestoft. The discoverer of the method of making hard paste-porcelain was William Cookworthy, Quaker, scientist, and expert chemist. He was probably the first person in Europe to attack practically, and finally to conquer, the problem of making a true porcelain exactly on the lines of the Chinese. The two necessary ingredients, Petuntse and kaolin—the former a fusible, and the latter a non-fusible substance—were found by him at St. Stephen's between St. Austell and Truro, in the centre of what is now the great china-clay district of Cornwall.

After many years spent in experimenting with the new materials Cookworthy, in conjunction with Thomas Pitt, of Boveconock (afterwards—1784—created Lord Camelford), on whose property the china-clay was found, succeeded in making true china. He therefore took out a patent, which is dated March 17th, 1768, and started a factory at Cosside, Plymouth, which does not

opening of the Plymouth factory, Cookworthy secured the services of a Sevres artist—Soqui or Sequoi or Le Qui, for the correct spelling of his name is not known—whose paintings on the articles produced were very beautiful.

The wares were mostly blue-and-white, imitating the Chinese. Many elegant salt-cellars, in the form of open couch shells resting on a bed of coral, shells,

ways found on the uncoloured Plymouth statuettes. All the above-mentioned examples are in the South Kensington Museum.

In the China Room at the British Museum are a number of fine specimens of Cookworthy's porcelain. On the lowest shelf are a shell-shaped dessert tray, and a figure of a goat in white, but disfigured by smoke staining—a defect that

the difficulties with which Cookworthy had to contend. On the same shelf are a coffee pot and bowl, carefully enamelled with Chinese figure subjects, and a mug with exotic birds, etc., in bright colours after the Chelsea style.

From 1768 to 1770, a distinguished enameller—Bone (afterwards an R.A.)—was employed, and introduced the brilliant "exotic birds," as they are called,



EXAMPLES OF PLYMOUTH CHINA.

etc., all beautifully modelled in hard white porcelain were made here, and were very popular at the period when they were made. Sauce boats, too, of elegant design, resting on a stem or foot, formed of groups of shells, are often met with. The relief-work in shells, flowers, and embossed work was employed for vases as well as on services. Sweetmeat dishes occur on rock-work or coral bases; a good example of this type of Plymouth ware is a shell dish, supported on three feet of coral and mussel shells, painted

Cookworthy found great difficulty in avoiding. With these is a mustard pot painted in bright enamel colours, a much more finished, if not a more pleasing, object. With reference to the smoke-staining—a characteristic feature of this ware—to which we have just alluded, Cookworthy speaks in one of extant MSS. of the vapours tingeing the surface of the ware, and of the grey colours—another characteristic feature—which the glazing material exhibited when insufficiently fired.

which were favourites at Sevres and Worcester. Bone served his apprenticeship with Cookworthy, and no doubt painted many of the finer specimens of the ware. This consisted chiefly of tea and dinner services, painted some in blue and white, after the Oriental manner, which latter had a great sale, as well as groups of figures and animals, mostly in white. The usual decoration of this ware, at least of the more ornate examples, consist of flowers, birds, monsters, and butterflies, in rich colours, and sometimes much gilding. Many of the white figures are coarsely modelled, and



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seem to have been carried on for more than three years, since we find that "Messrs. Cookworthy & Co." had a china factory at Bristol from 1771 to 1773 on premises now known as Castle Green (number 15). In the autumn of the last named year, Richard Champion, who had been experimenting for some time, bought Cookworthy's patent and other rights, the legal transfer being completed in the spring of 1774, and the Plymouth works ceased. It is recorded that Cookworthy lost no less than £3,000—a large sum in those days—over his uncommensurate experiment. It is possible that the works were transferred to Bristol in 1770, which would only give them a lease of life of two years in Plymouth; for in the "Worcester Journal" of March 22nd, 1770, there was inserted an advertisement for "a number of artists capable of painting in enamel or blue," required by the "Plymouth New Invented Porcelain Manufactory." It seems incredible that the works were then at Plymouth, for if so, why should applicants be invited to communicate with T. Frank, of Castle Street, Bristol? But if the works were just then being moved to Bristol, such a direction would be quite natural. Shortly after the

with lake and blue flowers and green leaves.

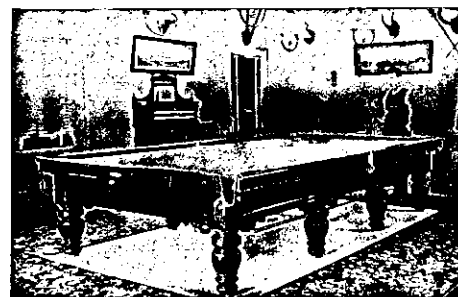
Many statuettes and busts were produced, and were usually the reproductions of the work of other factories. Those most frequently met with are: Woodward the actor, Kitty Clive the actress, and large busts of George II. (he died in 1760, eight years before the establishment of the Plymouth manufactory). All these are very similar to pieces which are well known to have been produced at Bow, ten or twelve years before. This great similarity may perhaps be accounted for by the possible organising of Cookworthy's factory by workmen from the Canton Works at Bow.

Amongst undoubted early pieces we would name a mug with gilt chevron border and painted with coloured flowers (it bears the Plymouth mark in brown); a tea-cup, painted with conventional foliage in blackish blue and marked under the glaze with the same colour (a plate painted in dull blue under the glaze and also marked); and an unmarked tea-cup enamelled with flowers in red, yellow and green, over the glaze. All these pieces are glazed with dull-limed thick glaze similar to that al-

On shelf 2 (British Museum China Room) is a mug, with an Oriental landscape painted in blue under the glaze, in which the ware is specked, the glaze too thick in parts, while the colour has run and the design become hazy; it is evidently an early piece, and illustrates

show the crack in the glaze by which the Plymouth porcelain is generally identified. Some of the vases are oviform, these are painted with birds and insects in the Chinese style. Many cups are white and decorated with blue Oriental figures.

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