

The revival of pottery at Upchurch – Dora’s Upchurch Pottery 1913–35

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Introduction

From the 1880s to the opening years of the 20th century, Britain’s pottery landscape was dominated by the established factories of De Morgan, Burmantofts, Doulton etc., producing Art Pottery. It is widely accepted that Studio Pottery took over following Bernard Leach opening his pottery in St Ives, Cornwall in 1920. However, there were a few small-scale potters working from the very early years of the century who have more in common with Studio Potters than with Art Potters. They worked alone, were self-funded and were inspired by the simple undecorated forms of early Sung (China, AD 960–1279) and Korean pottery. They were the Sung Revivalists or the Chemist Potters.

Given that Art Pottery was born from the Aesthetic Movement’s desire for ‘art for art’s sake’ where the method of manufacture was of little importance, the object simply looking beautiful taking the lead, the Sung Revivalists or Chemist Potters produced wares in stark contrast to those already on the market. They followed most of the ideals that Studio Potters later followed, ideals that ultimately fell in line with William Morris’s (1834–96) teaching and that were later formally laid down by Bernard Leach. Morris believed that to be truly beautiful an object must be shaped by human hands from start to finish. Leach declared that a pot’s beauty and essence was directly linked to the clay being dug by hand, worked by hand and coated in a glaze sourced from nature; Leach’s own most iconic glaze was made from bracken collected and burnt to ash. Indeed, one of Leach’s pupils, Katherine Pleydell-Bouverie (1895–1985) dedicated her life’s work to understanding and mastering the ash glaze, collecting vegetation by hand, turning it to ash, making a glaze to coat the clay before allowing fire to bind it all together.

Leach was the first potter to travel to the east to study the art form first-hand, to learn at the coal face. Other Westerners had obviously been to the East: Dr Christopher Dresser (1834–1904) was one of the first, in 1865. He had travelled, sketchbook in hand, and had studied the design of everyday objects alien to a western eye, but he did not understand the yin to that yang, the craft. Leach, however, immersed himself in both.

Potters like Reginald Wells,¹ George Cox,² Alfred Hopkins,³ Dora Lunn,⁴ William Dalton⁵ and Frances Richards,⁶ to name but a few, all fall into post-Art yet pre-Studio category. Working alone without the backing and facilities of large factories, they wanted to revive and recreate early oriental wares of a much simpler and plainer type, yet little is really known about them. British pottery writing and research to date dedicates an early chapter to them to illustrate the landscape in the run-up to Bernard Leach, even though most of them preceded and then exhibited alongside Leach, receiving praise and success along the way.

The Sung Revivalists or Chemist Potters were not always interested in the process of making the body of a pot, however; for some their focus was on the mastery of the sometimes-mysterious glaze, relying on the glaze to become the decoration and allowing the fire from the kiln to control the glaze creating the soul of the pot. To start with Wells or Cox did not even touch the clay – they paid the same one man to throw their pots, so they could concentrate on controlling the chemistry. Hopkins, Lunn, Dalton and Richards threw their own pots, and the experimentation overall was their purpose. Whatever their inspiration, they were working by themselves in their own small workshops, at the start of a new period in British decorative pottery.

In 1905 the *Art Journal* published Wilton Rix’s article ‘Modern Decorative Wares’. This was the first indication that public taste was moving away from highly decorated Art Pottery. He wrote: ‘The most original and decorative types of pottery in the past have been marked by a freedom from this undue elaboration. Simplicity and directness of aim have indeed constituted the greatest charm of ceramic art.’ He went on to note:

Among the developments of the last two or three years, it is interesting to notice that the most striking have been chiefly influenced by new advances in technical skill. Thus, the careful study of the behaviour of crystalline glazes, the efficient control of matt texture and other similar results involving the accurate treatment of vaporous

atmosphere in the kiln, have all played an important part in securing new decorative effects (...). All these methods are largely dependent for the success on scientific control of the firing process, which has generally been left too much in unskilled hands.

This shift in taste was solidified when the Burlington Fine Arts Club staged the third exhibition of Chinese ceramics in London in 1910, called ‘*Early Chinese Pottery and Porcelain*’.⁷ The lion’s share of the pieces shown belonged to the collector George Eumorfopoulos (1863–1939),⁸ who operated an open access policy for keen potters looking to study his collection at his home on the Chelsea Embankment (1). The public had now been exposed to the purity of pottery from the Chinese Sung dynasty.



1. Part of the George Eumorfopoulos Collection in his home on the Chelsea Embankment, London, late 1934; Collection of the Benaki Museum, Athens Greece

From 1913 the Upchurch Pottery joined this movement. Their unique take was that they were the only pottery of this period to be reviving an industry that dated back to the Roman occupation of the British Isles, combining this heritage with the new vogue for the Sung revival.

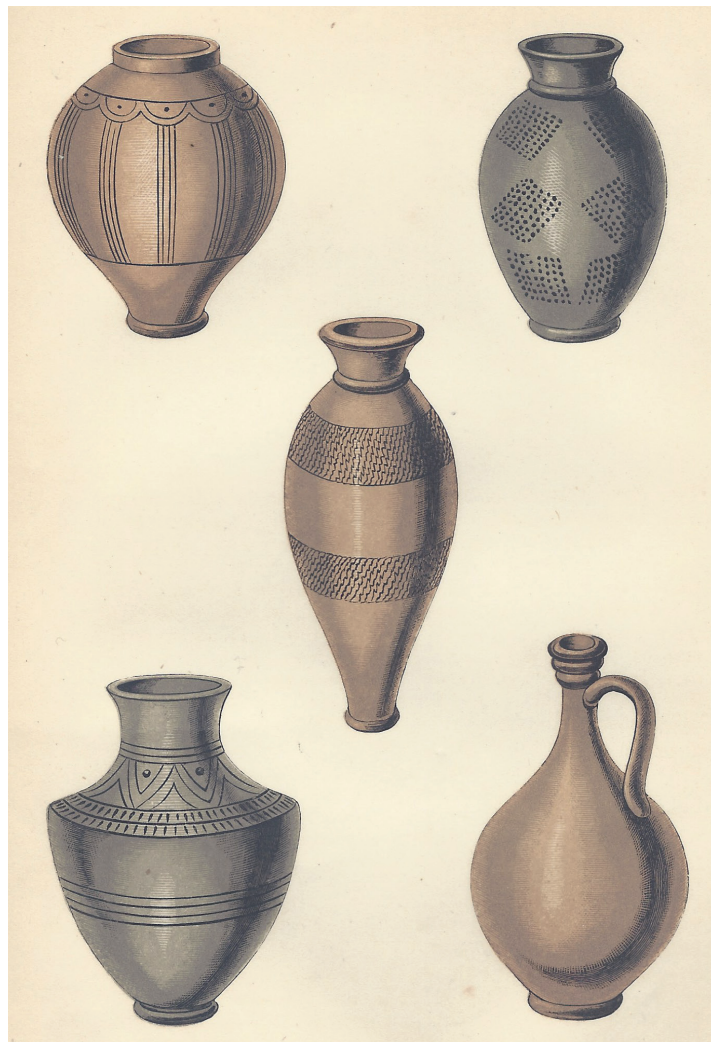
In March 1917, when arranging loans to the Victoria & Albert Museum for their upcoming ‘Modern Pottery’ exhibition, the architect, collector and Martin Brothers patron, Sidney Greenslade (1867–1955) suggested that pieces by Wells, Cox and Upchurch were included as they ‘represent an important group in the revival and mark a definite phase in it’.⁹ After clarification that the V&A meant modern pottery such as William De Morgan (d. 1917) and Martin Brothers (ceased trading 1914) only and not ‘contemporary’ pottery, the suggestion was not acted upon, with the museum preferring not to borrow from ‘firms or makers’. Despite this early praise from an influential connoisseur, history has brushed Upchurch aside, whilst their contemporaries (Wells and Cox) are today described as pioneers.

This article hopes to set the record straight, that the revival of the Upchurch Pottery was the product of Mrs Dora Wakeley’s passion and knowledge and Mr Edward Baker’s heritage and skill and that it was also a pioneering Studio Pottery.

Romano-British ‘Upchurch Ware’

The existence of Roman potteries at the mouth of the Medway River in Kent was first noted in Archdeacon John Battely’s (1688–1708) *The Antiquities of Richborough and Reculver* in 1711 (published posthumously by his nephew).¹⁰ By 1865 the antiquarian Thomas Wright FSA was writing about a layer of ‘soft, but very tenacious, clay’ on the south shore of the creeks of the Medway marshes and in that clay a continuous deposit of Roman pottery has been found.¹¹ This article terms the finds as ‘Upchurch Ware’.

Between 1883 and 1885 the discovery of three Roman kilns in the Upchurch marshes was noted by Mr Robert Elliot of Camberwell. Mr Elliot describes a dozen urns, vases and *patere* in his collection as having come from this site.¹² This ‘Upchurch Ware’ was considered unique to the Medway/Upchurch area until 1954 when Mr Ivor Noël Hume, OBE (1927–2017) debunked these ‘sweeping generalisations’ and stated that the types of Romano-British pottery found at Upchurch could be found all across the south of Roman Britain and that the finds from the Medway sites dated between AD 40 and AD 200 (2).¹³



2. ‘Pottery from Upchurch Kent’ *Intellectual Observer*, October 1865; private collection

Dora’s Upchurch Pottery 1913–34

Amy Dorothea ‘Dora’ Crake (1873–1954) and Seymour Tanner Wakeley (1872–1961) were married on 28 December 1899 by her father, the Revd Edward Ebenezer Crake at his parish church of St Andrews, Jevington, East Sussex. Seymour Wakeley, along with his brother, Sidney [Wakeley] were the pair behind Wakeley Brothers Ltd, who owned three brick fields and a red brick and tile works. They were corn factors, fruit and hop growers, farmers and merchants for hay, straw, manure, guano and general farm supplies, they also had the charter of more than forty barges running bricks into London where they owned a brick-selling agency;¹⁴ before this the family were well known in the area as far back as the 15th century.¹⁵

Sometime between 1907 and 1909 the Wakeley brothers built a small workshop and bottle kiln in an old chalk-pit on their land, just off Seymour Road, Rainham, Kent,¹⁶ and by 1909 they had added ‘the manufacture of brick, oven tiles and agricultural drain pipes’ to the list of their activities.¹⁷ Whilst footings were being dug for the new workshop, evidence of three Roman kilns and numerous pottery fragments were found.¹⁸

Prior to her husband’s new venture, Dora’s hobby was collecting pottery and fragments and studying the Revd John Woodruff’s famous collection of local Romano-British pottery donated to the Rochester Guildhall Museum on his death in 1869. At some point between 1909 and 1912 Dora realised the possibility of combining her husband’s brick manufacturing business with her enthusiasm for ancient pottery, a possibility that initially remained just out of reach owing to her lack of skill in the art of throwing clay.¹⁹

Enter Edward James Baker (1873–1954), a third-generation potter who left the family flowerpot-making business at the Hoo Pottery in 1901–02 and went to work on throwing pots for (the sculptor, artist, potter, chemist, aviator, aircraft designer/manufacturer and architect) Reginald Fairfax Wells (1877–1951) at his Coldrum Farm pottery in Wrotham, Kent; this continued until 1909 (3). During this period Wells would watch Baker throw for hours at a time and greatly admired his ‘light throw’. In 1909 Baker

moved briefly to Poole to work for Carter & Co. and then on to London,²⁰ where he was employed once again as a thrower-for-hire by Wells, this time at his Coldrum Pottery in Chelsea. At the same time, he was also employed by George Cox in his Mortlake Pottery (4) and by Doulton & Co.²¹ Cox immortalised Baker in an engraving for his book *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen and Teachers* first published in 1914, a book that clearly would not have been possible without Baker’s input but for which Cox failed to mention him by name – sadly this was to become a common thread (5).



3. A Coldrum vase, thrown by Edward Baker between 1902 and 1909 at Wells’ Wrotham Pottery in Kent; private collection



4. A Mortlake Pottery vase thrown by Edward Baker. signed GJC for George Cox and BB for Edward Baker, dated 1912; private collection

In 1913 Wells returned to Kent so he could test his new sea-plane design on the local creek and Baker followed him to continue their pottery work in order to retain an income for Wells' many projects. Seymour Wakeley shared Wells' passion for aeroplanes and having seen the testing, offered him a room as it continued. This act ensured that Baker was introduced to Dora, their shared passion for pottery cemented their friendship and set the scene for the rest of their lives. Fortunately for Dora, by this time Wells was behind in paying Baker's wages and so she offered him a job—she now had her potter.²²



5. 'Hollowing the Ball' in *Pottery for Artists, Craftsmen and Teachers*, p. 18, by George J. Cox A.R.C.A., first published in 1914 by Macmillan & Co. Ltd, London; private collection

With the fresh public appetite for minimally decorated pottery well under way, it was shrewd of Edward Spencer (1872–1938) to become involved. Spencer, having newly re-established the Artificers' Guild in 1907,²³ was keen to re-introduce pottery to their repertoire, having previously exhibited the now old-fashioned Martin Brothers' pottery. 1914 was an important year for Upchurch Pottery – it seems the Guild was their exclusive retailer and the pressure was on. It is not clear how Spencer became involved but he is first connected with the Upchurch Pottery in the London press on 24 January 1914 when his Guild

staged an in-house exhibition.²⁴ An article titled ‘New Departure in English Pottery, Corean (*sic*) Bowls and Vases Made in Kent’ announces that:

Interesting new pottery is being shown by Mr Spence (*sic*), its designer, at the Artificers’ Guild in Conduit-Street. The pots in many respects are similar to the early Chinese and Korean ware, and are remarkable for their graceful shape and fine surface. The effect is obtained, as in all the best modern pottery, by simple colouring, without any applied decoration (...) We are now getting a return to simpler forms and simpler decoration, and the result is the production of pottery which certainly marks an epoch in the history of the handicraft.²⁵

The article continues by stating that the pottery is made at Upchurch in Kent, by a hop-grower named Mr Wakeley, marking the start of Dora’s removal from the history of the Upchurch Pottery. A simple hand-tied pamphlet printed on hand-made paper was produced to accompany this show titled ‘Upchurch Pottery, Old Corean Colourings, Made in Kent’ (6).²⁶

UPCHURCH POTTERY

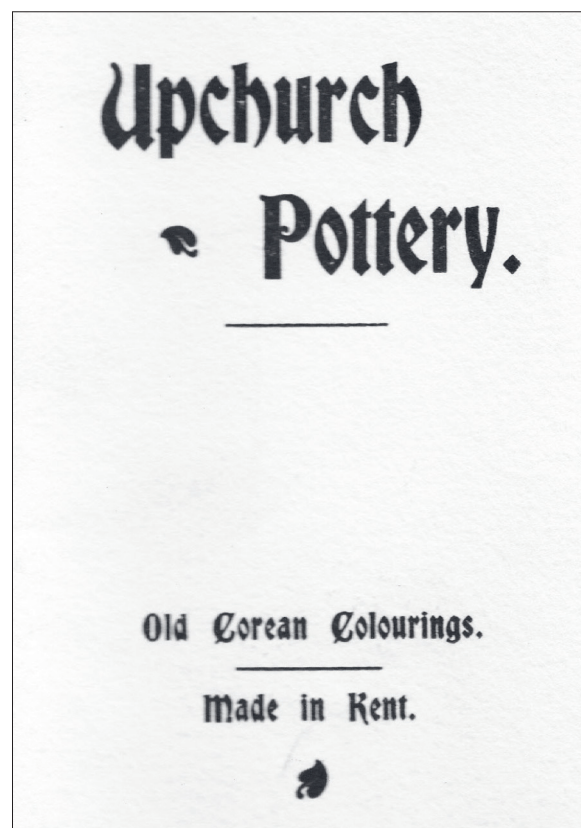
A NEW departure in English Pottery, which in its way is quite distinct from any made in modern times, is now on show. The bowls, vases and pots are very similar in their colourings and shapes to the old Chinese and Corean (*sic*) wares made in the 15th Century. The colourings are simple, and as in all the best pottery of any age, obtained without any applied decorations.

The pots are fired to a very great heat, which accounts for the beautiful and often unexpected artistic colours.

The finest specimens vary slightly in colour, consequently it is impossible to ever hope to reproduce any of these in pairs. Each pot is a unique specimen.

The ware itself is difficult to describe, the glaze having a curious satiny appearance almost as dull as salt glazed ware.

The colours range from the so called “Mutton Fat White” through all the lighter shades of greys,



6. Upchurch pamphlet of January 1914; Collection of Ealing Local History Centre

some lovely shades of old ivory in many cases just flushed with hardly perceptible tones of violet, green or gold to rich purple reds.

These light coloured pots are simply wonderful for decorative purposes; flowers look better in them than in any other form of vase, as they do not detract from the beauty of the piece; the vase having no superfluous decoration of vivid colour, seems to add a new beauty to the flowers; in fact one feels that each vase or bowl has been made for its own particular flower.

Besides these light colours there are distinctly beautiful shades of old blue-green, reminding one of early Ming wares, curious claret colours, and a wonderful range of heliotrope to purple. The dull blues are also a distinct departure, they seem to be shot with a silver colour which gives them more of the appearance of old silk.

It is impossible to imagine anything more suitable to complete the decoration of an artistic room, as there are pieces to suit any colour scheme: the shapes are in every case correct, and have been copied from the finest old Chinese and other early pieces. These are entirely made by hand, being thrown on a wheel and finished by a most skilful workman, no moulds being used at all on the Works.

It may be interesting to know that this industry is a revival of the old Roman Pottery Works at Upchurch, Kent.

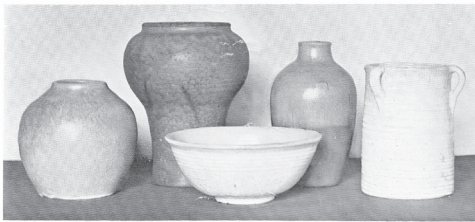
The sites of the ancient kilns are still in existence; the same clay is being used; and the Roman pots are frequently found when excavating the clay. The local Museum contains many fine specimens of Roman Pottery which have been un-earthed in the neighbourhood.

The attempt to revive this industry has proved a great success, and Upchurch Pottery will stand

distinct and alone for all time, and is a credit to the potting productions of Great Britain. All pots, &c., have the name "Upchurch" cut in the bottom.

Following this, a single-page leaflet titled 'Revival of the Upchurch Pottery'²⁷ was produced in spring of that year, this time, assuming Spencer's descriptions were not enough to tempt buyers, a single image was included (7). The same image was also used as one of the pair in *The Studio Year Book* coverage of the same show (8).

Revival of the UPCHURCH POTTERY



This Pottery is made on the site of the old Roman kilns and the same clay is being used. The old Roman shapes are faithfully copied, as well as those of ancient Chinese and Samian ware, also more modern shapes.

The colouring is a special feature, aiming at the reproduction of some of the beautiful glazes and colour combinations of the best period of Chinese art.

No tool is used on the pots, the marking of the potter's thumb being purposely left on the work, and the whole idea is simplicity in colour and design.

To produce perfect glazes, some of the pots have to be fired many times before a satisfactory result is obtained, adding considerably to the cost of production.

The simple lines and colouring of these pots make them pre-eminently suitable for floral decoration.

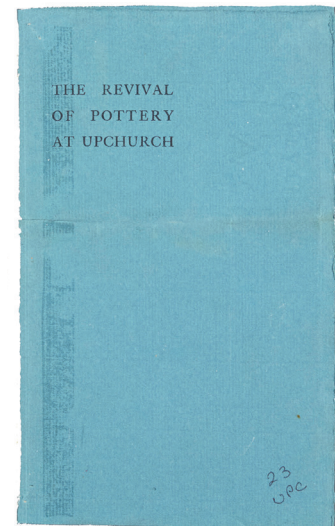
7. Single-page leaflet, Spring 1914; Collection of Ealing Local History Centre



8. Group of pots exhibited at the Artificers' Guild showroom, *Studio Yearbook*, 1914, p. 75

THE REVIVAL
OF POTTERY
AT UPCHURCH

9. Summer 1914 pamphlet;
Collection of Kent History
& Library Centre



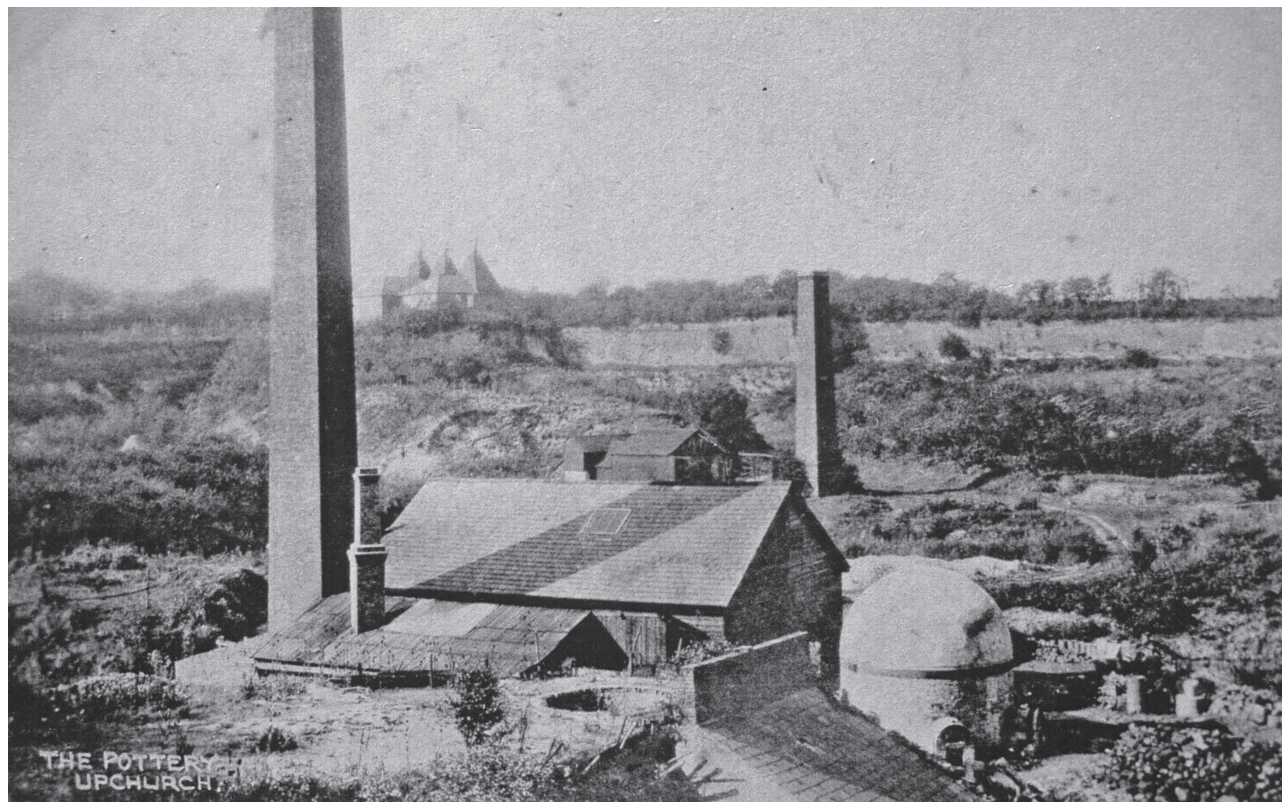
Despite his efforts, by July sales were slow,²⁸ and Spencer was encouraged to put on a further exhibition in November.²⁹ To accompany it he wrote a somewhat florid promotional pamphlet titled ‘The Revival of Pottery at Upchurch’ (9).³⁰ Clearly meant to boost sales, he described: ‘keeping the potter in touch by photographs, drawing and actual specimens – so far as these have been procurable’.

Given this was purely marketing for his own retail interests, it is not surprising he did not acknowledge Dora’s own collection as the ‘*actual specimens*’ and her private study of local Roman pottery by name but instead he referred to her inspiration. Spencer went on to inform the reader of their experiments:

... among the vigorous shapes and simple markings of the crafts beginnings and the refinements of glaze, colour and modelling of the best periods of Chinese art – it is our intention to allow the craft itself to develop, as the craftsmen develops to accept

his individual suggestions when everything seems to make in any degree towards that perfection, and to suffer no passing caprice of fortune or fashion to divert us from our adventure.

This must have been thrilling for Edward Baker, whose teeth were cut throwing flowerpots and drain pipes. His surviving recipe books, some of which date from this period, illustrate the fervour with which he was experimenting, something that would never have been possible at the Hoo Pottery or, being merely a pair of hands, at the Mortlake or Coldrum Potteries. But the workshop was less than ideal: a reclaimed chimney was used as the up-draught for the coal-fired kiln, built following measurements of the kiln at the Fulham Pottery. Water was carried on site from a nearby pond, he threw on a kick wheel, with no electricity, and initially 100% of the clay was dug by hand.³¹ The workshop was to remain like this until its closure 50 years later (10 & 11).³²



10. Postcard of unknown date, showing the Upchurch Pottery; private collection



11. Photograph of unknown date, an aerial view of the chalk pits that contain the Pottery at the bottom of the picture with Upchurch village in the distance (the pre-existing brick kiln seen above the pottery); collection of Mike Gunnill

The year 1914 also saw Spencer take three pieces of Upchurch Pottery to Paris for the Exhibition of British Arts & Crafts held at the Louvre between April and October. On the Guild’s stand were shown a purple cup, a red vase and a white pot,³³ all ascribed to Spencer as designer and G. Baker as the maker. Once again credit for the design was swallowed up by Spencer with careless regard to the owner of the pottery or the potter himself.

The two pamphlets and one leaflet of 1914 are the last physical reference to Edward Spencer’s involvement with the pottery. It seems the Wakeleys gave him one year to prove himself before they expanded into other markets, although they did continue to stock Upchurch Pottery up to at least 1923 when Sidney Greenslade acquired four pieces in his capacity as the curator of the University College of Wales’ Arts and Crafts Museum (now the collection of School of Art Museum and Galleries, Aberystwyth University).³⁴ That is not to say that Spencer stopped all promotion of the pottery: in 1915, for example, Spencer’s Guild sent ‘well finished and executed articles in Pottery, Glass

and Metal’ to the ‘Exhibition of Handicraft work at Hampshire House Club, West London’. The Anglo-Belgian Arts and Crafts Exhibition at Hampshire House was a significant moment for the Upchurch Pottery, albeit identified by medium only. Organised to benefit the Hampshire House Belgian Refugee and Repatriation Fund, the exhibition ensured Upchurch Pottery would be seen alongside work by many of the leading figures of the Arts and Crafts movement, including jewellery and needlework by May Morris, watercolours by Frank Brangwyn, lithographs by Gerald Spencer Pryse, stained glass by Christopher Whall, watercolours by Edward Reginald Frampton, pastels and furniture by Charles Spooner, sculpture by Eric Gill, statuettes by Phoebe Stabler, enamelling on metal by Harold and Phoebe Stabler, engravings by Emery Walker, and household articles by Romney Green, to name but a few.³⁵

Choosing not to remain exclusive to the Guild, Dora took examples of Upchurch Pottery to the British Industries Fair, organized by the Government from 1915 to 1932 to encourage British businesses

to produce and sell goods for the home market and initially held at the Royal Agricultural Hall in London. In 1918 they were to reach a whole new height when Queen Mary purchased a ‘fine greenish blue Roman-shaped vase’.³⁶ History repeated itself when at the 1919 fair Queen Mary was ‘specially interested in the ware brought together by the Art Section of the Ceramics Society’. Among other pieces from well-established factories such as Doulton and Wedgwood the Queen purchased a ‘bowl of Roman shape’ from Dora’s Upchurch Pottery.³⁷

Accordingly, from 1915 the Artificers’ Guild were not the only retailers to stock Upchurch Pottery. In 1919 an article in the *Dundee Courier* entitled ‘A Glimpse at the Shop Windows, Christmas Gifts Noted by our Lady Correspondent’ mentions the Pottery by name.³⁸ This must refer to the Dundee retailers, Frains of Castle Street, as they themselves specifically advertised Upchurch Pottery throughout the spring/summer of 1920,³⁹ with the heading ‘To Decorate an Artistic Room’.⁴⁰ In Edinburgh the retailers, Jenner’s of Princes Street, ran adverts mentioning they were stocking Upchurch Pottery in the run-up to Christmas of 1920–23, 1925 and again in 1928.⁴¹ In 1930 the retailers, Francis & Sons Ltd of Bath Street, Leamington Spa, advertised ‘Upchurch Ware’ as an ‘Xmas Gift’⁴² and on one occasion the Pottery themselves advertised in the run-up to Christmas 1929.⁴³ Being stocked by countless retailers was clearly the direct result of their exposure at trade fairs.

Dora herself is quoted in an article about the 1920 Crystal Palace trade fair saying that her wares are ‘to be sent to America, Denmark and Australia’ and that she supplies ‘Upchurch pottery to several West-end firms, and as a result of the fair I have been asked to accept far more orders than I can ever hope to execute.’⁴⁴ Due to the increased demand from 1920 Edward Baker is now assisted by his eldest son William Benjamin Joseph Baker (1889–1983) and another unknown man and Dora is quoted as being responsible for all the designs. Dora reveals in this interview that she started in ‘a very small way just before the war’ and that she ‘little dreamt that it would develop into a revived industry’. In a further article of 1920, it is noted that

‘seven years experiments with glazing pottery have resulted in the production of a ware of which the name “Upchurch” has already become a by-word amongst connoisseurs (...) H.M. the Queen and the Princess Victoria have both shown a keen interest in the ware, purchasing samples a (*sic*) various times. And its fame has extended from beyond the familiar John o’ Groats



12. ‘At the door of a kiln in which the pottery is fired’ 1920; Collection of Medway Archive Centre



13. ‘Baker, the potter, is seen standing at the wheel modelling a vase’ 1920; Collection of Medway Archive Centre



14. ‘On the left, three Roman vases dug up in the Medway. On the right, four examples of Upchurch ware made recently at Mrs Wakeley’s pottery’ 1920; Collection of Medway Archive Centre



15. ‘A corner of the Upchurch showroom with a valuable collection of vases and bowls, some of which were exhibited at the British Industries fair last month’; Collection of Medway Archive Centre



16. ‘At work in the glazing room’ 1920; Collection of Medway Archive Centre

to Land’s End. Early in 1914 Upchurch vases and bowls were known in Munich but with the outbreak of war they were lost to their makers’. Accompanying the article are five annotated photographs of Baker, his son and the other man in the workshop and a display of pots in the showroom.⁴⁵ (12–16)

In 1925 Dora took the Upchurch Pottery to exhibit at the Paris International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts. Here her pots were judged against the established titans of the industry. ‘Grand prix’ winners included Doulton & Co. and Josiah Wedgwood while ‘Gold medal’ winners were Bernard Moore, Gordon Forsyth, and William Moorcroft (among others). Other medal winners

included William Howson Taylor, William Staite Murray, G. H. Brannam, Bernard Leach and Alfred & Louise Powell. Receiving an ‘Honorary mention’ from the judging panel alongside Dora Lunn of the Ravenscourt Pottery was Dora Wakeley’s Upchurch Pottery.⁴⁶

Her exhibits the following year in the Ideal Home Exhibition at London’s Olympia were noted by the national press as marking ‘A new departure in English pottery’ that ‘is now enjoying the impetus of public interest’.⁴⁷

The British Industries fair of 1932 was notable as Queen Mary again bought a piece of Upchurch Pottery, this time a ‘copy of a three-cornered Roman bowl which was discovered near the works.’⁴⁸ But by 1934, when the Upchurch Pottery was finally beginning to show a financial return, chronic heart disease⁴⁹ forced Dora Wakeley to give it all up.⁵⁰ What began as a mere hobby, collecting fragments of Roman pottery in her garden, grew into the revival of an industry that rode a wave of reform in public taste of British decorative pottery, that ultimately became the movement we know today as British Studio Pottery.

Dora Wakeley suffered a stroke and died on the 13 September 1957 aged 81 years.⁵¹ Following the death of Mr Wakeley on 8 March 1961 an auction of their effects was held by W. Wood & Sons of Rochester at the family home, Pope’s Hall, Hartlip, Kent, where some 180 examples of Upchurch Pottery were included.⁵²

The Pottery after Dora, 1935–63: a brief account

In 1934 Oscar and Grace Davies (*née* Emily Grace Barnsley, 1896–1975), daughter of architect and furniture maker Sidney Barnsley, moved to Rainham. Grace had learned to decorate pottery as a teenager with Alfred and Louise Powell and had worked as a freelance decorator for Wedgwood. In 1935 the Pottery buildings were leased to the Davies’ for a few months but the Bakers were reluctant to change, so the Davies’ established their own pottery, Roeinga Pottery, also in Rainham.⁵³ They installed Edward James (Ted) Baker Jnr (1913–98) to run the workshop. By this time the Davies’ also ran the Tudor Café and pottery shop next to the Roeinga Pottery,⁵⁴ a sign in

the window reading ‘Stop and have a pleasant meal and see the potter at his wheel’.⁵⁵ After the war the name was changed to Rainham Pottery and in 1956 Ted Baker bought the business and named it Rainham Potteries Ltd. This closed in 1975.⁵⁶

1936–48

The Wakeley Brothers sold their business to the painter, potter and modeller Mrs Alice Buxton Winnicott (1891–1968) and the ‘Claverdon’ range of tableware was born (17). Examples of these were shown in the *Studio Magazine* and seem to be both old and some new designs, regardless of all being falsely attributed to Mrs Winnicott. The pots made during this period are often stamped or incised ‘CLAVERDON’.

1948–63.

By 1948 the business was finally in the hands of the Baker family; Edward Baker, his son James Alfred Baker (1918–92) and grandson Frank Edward Chambers (1925–19??) now ran the family business and were ‘using their skill to earn the nation dollars at his quaint old pottery’ and ‘turning out nearly 1000 pieces of pottery a fortnight, a third of which is going to markets all over the world as part of the country’s vast export programme’ (18).⁵⁷ Edward’s eldest son, William Baker, worked as a potter in Fulham, London. Sometime between 1948 and 1954 he returned to assist his elderly father, who was often working seven days a week exclusively making tableware using ‘Dorsetshire clay’ (*sic*).

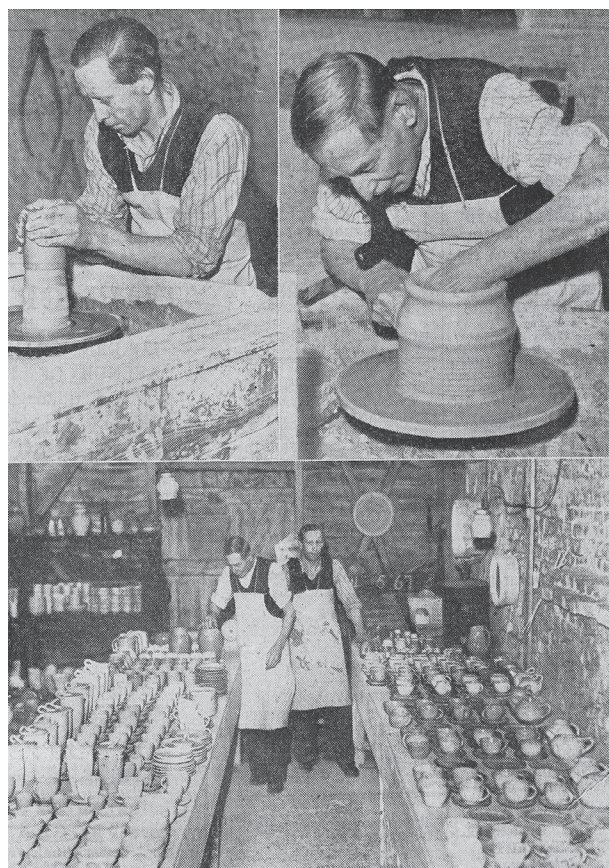
Edward Baker died 23 April 1954 aged 81, after a three-month illness (19).⁵⁸ In 1963 William Baker stopped the potter’s wheel for the last time.

The Goldsmiths’ Company Archive

In spring 2019 a cache of drawings and photographs were found by the author undisturbed for decades within the Artificers’ Guild archive, held by the Goldsmiths’ Company, London. Included are various watercolour designs for pottery. The group contains eight sheets showing 19 watercolour designs; although unsigned it is



17. ‘Upchurch Pottery Designed by Mrs Winnicott’ *Studio* Vol. 112 (1936), p. 277

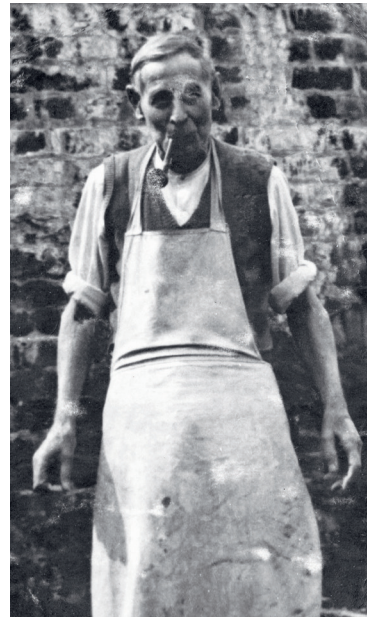


18. ‘A Family Industry’ *East Kent Gazette*, 16 April 1949, Collection of the British Library

fair to assume that they are by Edward Spencer (20). To date no pots related to these designs have been found. The exception to this is the only design to be on its own sheet of paper, although ascertaining authorship might be tricky, given its design is somewhat derivative.

Another possible candidate might be the one design also to have a plan-view included. It is a design for a barrel-shaped pot that, with the addition of concave or convex vertical and spaced fluting, might show the design for the distinctive Upchurch fluted vases made throughout the pottery's existence, they in turn having evolved from the Romano-British indented beaker (21). Whilst the Spencer design lacks the fluting, he does mention this ancient feature in the Summer 1914 pamphlet when he described the creative processes involved in pottery, writing:

In pottery, for example, when once the wheel-process has been discovered, the mere accidents of revolution and fingering supply the faint horizontal ribbing which is so often a feature of early wheel-thrown pottery (...) When the wheel has stopped the fingers press out vertical ribs or circular swellings to improve the grip and render more safe the handling of the finished utensil.



19. Edward Baker (1872–1954); collection of Mike Gunnill



20. Edward Spencer's designs for pottery; Collection of The Goldsmiths' Company



21. Romano-British indented drinking beaker, AD 71–410; Collection of York Museum Trust



22. Metal (presumably silver) mounted pottery; Collection The Goldsmiths’ Company

But as Dora was the Roman pottery inspiration, he was merely channelling her passion.

Another group of drawings contains three sheets showing ten designs for what looks to be silver-mounted green pottery (22). Silver-mounted sycamore mazer-bowls are known, as are copper bowls mounted with silver but not pottery examples. To my knowledge no extant examples of mounted pottery from the Guild are known. The green colour is perhaps in imitation of jade or a celadon glaze, a green that Upchurch perfected (23).

The photographs included fall into two groups: the first are the two original photographs (displayed without flowers) used in *The Studio Year Book* and the one used in the Spring 1914 leaflet. The second is a hitherto unknown group of nine (24). The Summer 1914 pamphlet refers to illustrations, though neither extant copy contains any.⁵⁹ Going to the expense of taking nine photographs only not to use them does not seem realistic. Accordingly, it is plausible that they were intended for inclusion in this final pamphlet, although seemingly also taken in spring, owing to the flowers displayed.



23. Vase, 1930s; private collection



24. Collection of photographs, Spring 1914; Collection The Goldsmiths' Company

Dating pots, a mere guide

As Victoria Bergesen writes in her 1993 article on the Baker family, dating pieces by using the maker’s stamp versus the signature is inaccurate.⁶⁰ Following interviews with Ted Baker she reveals that a maker’s stamp was used from the inception of the Pottery, but it was often mislaid and so some pieces were signed by hand – a second stamp was acquired and also often mislaid. I illustrate the three marks that are most often seen (25).

The top maker’s mark varies in size depending on the available space on the foot of the pot but is characterised by the distinctive flourish on the letter ‘h’. The second is a stamp in a sans-serif font enclosed by a line box with rounded corners, albeit only partially visible in this image (the box is 60 mm long). This stamp is seen on a pot that exhibits a number of other early features, making it likely to be the first stamp used; unsurprisingly, the replacement stamps were much simpler in design. The third stamp is in capitals with serifs and without a box. Two versions have been noted, measuring 40 mm and 38 mm long. A further stamp has also been noted, not in capitals, but it has only ever been seen on one pot. Other anomalies include an incised ‘E’ on pre-1936 pots, and some pots also have numbers written in black – further research of Edward J. Baker’s recipe books may reveal their purpose.

The majority of pots seen today have a plain, flat, wiped-clean base and are made from a pinkish clay; the Ted Baker interviews also revealed that early on the Medway clay was dug locally and used exclusively, but better results were achieved when it was mixed with bought-in Devonshire ball clay.⁶¹ Baker does not give a date for this change; it is, however, noticeable that more iron flecks show through the glaze and the un-cut red clay is visible on the base of very few examples (26 & 27). These early pots sometimes also exhibit pairs of incised rings, a feature found surrounding a seal mark painted on Chinese wares. The main glaze is also left to run over to the base. This seems to have been discontinued almost immediately, as production

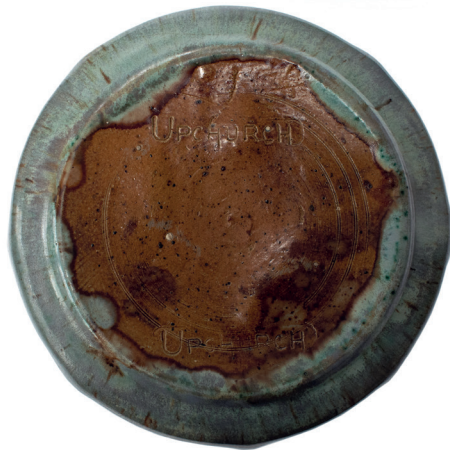
increased, in favour of a simple flat and wiped-clean base. Production increased considerably from 1915, following the Pottery’s exposure at the trade fairs and so the 1913–14 period preceding this seems a logical date for these features.

Considering the sad lack of any contemporary images, a useful method for dating pots from 1915 onwards (*i.e.*, examples with pink clay and a flat base), is to look for contemporary descriptions. The most valuable resources here are the reviews of the British Industry Fair exhibits in the *Pottery Trade Gazettes* as they were described and reviewed annually. The following is a timeline of these and other previously discussed contemporary descriptions (note – ‘dull’ refers to the matt finish of the glaze):

November 1914 – ‘the green of trembling willow stems’, ‘singed rose petals’, ‘turquoise touched with lavender’, ‘Aubergine purple’, ‘peach blossom red’ and finally, less poetically but no less descriptive, ‘Lard white’.⁶²



25. Three types of maker’s mark; private collection



26. Fluted beaker vase, c.1913–14, with early boxed maker's mark, un-cleaned foot, dark red clay, iron inclusions and incised foot rings; private collection

1914 – 'Mutton-Fat colour – a lovely shade of old ivory' (28).⁶³

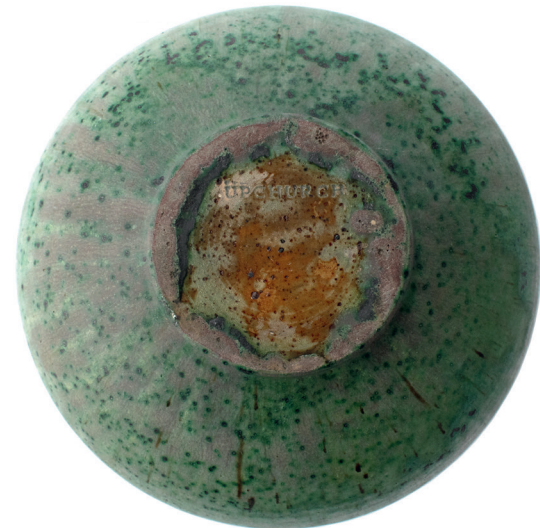
1915 – 'silk-like glazes in green, mauve and copper (...) deep green glaze which had been allowed to trickle downward over a coppery base' (29 & 30).⁶⁴

1918 – 'dull yellow, brown, blue, grey and green' (31 & 32).⁶⁵

1919 – '...dull blue glazes were admired.'⁶⁶

1920 – 'Lovely shades of old Ivory flushed with delicate tones of Violet, Green or Gold. To rich Purple, Reds may be seen (...) Old Blue Green, Unique Claret colours, and a most wonderful range of Heliotrope blending exquisitely to Purple...'⁶⁷

1920 – 'mutton-fat white (...) pinky mauve, blue-greens, turquoise, blue, plum-purple, brown and a number of attractive mottlings'.⁶⁸



27. Chinese-style brush washer, c.1914–15, with standard maker's mark, un-cleaned foot, dark red clay, iron inclusions and incised foot rings; private collection

1921 – 'dull or matt glazes.'⁶⁹

1924 – 'The ranges have been considerably extended of late years, chiefly in the matter of glazes.'⁷⁰

1925 – 'Shapes mostly of the severe type in keeping with the sombre decorations.'⁷¹

1926 – 'Shapes are classical and the glazes quiet.'⁷²

1930 – 'Severe shapes', 'soft colourings' and 'practically a replica of those that have been seen in years gone by.'⁷³

1931 – 'pastel shades on shapes that are for the most part, severe.'⁷⁴

1932 – 'severe shapes based on roman, Grecian and other creations of olden times' and 'delicate shades and single colour glazes.'⁷⁵



28. ‘Mutton Fat’ or ‘Old Ivory’ fluted beaker vase, c.1914–15, with early boxed maker’s mark, un-cleaned base; Collection of the Victoria & Albert Museum, CIRC.909.1967



30. A 1914–15 example of a vase (although not inspected), assumed to have an uncleaned base; Mallams lot 269, 27 June 2013; courtesy Mallams Auctioneers



29. Romano-British style collar-necked vase, 1915–1920s; private collection



31. Pieces purchased from the Artificers’ Guild in 1923 by Sidney Greenslade; Collection of School of Art Museum and Galleries, Aberystwyth University, C304-307



32. A Chinese-style lugged vase c.1920; private collection



33. Romano-British style flagon, 1920s; private collection



The four pieces in the Ceramics Collection (31), School of Art Museum and Galleries, Aberystwyth University are significant because they have direct provenance. This tells us they were all purchased from the Artificers' Guild in 1923 and we can see that they are in earthy or dull tones. As with this Romano-

British style flagon, the colours are allowed to run down the body (33).

Whilst this method of dating is far from perfect and should really only be read as a guide, it is clear that the glazes became more muted (34) and uniform from the early 1920s onwards.



34. Fluted beaker-vase, mid 1930s; private collection



Conclusion

It is clear that Edward Spencer’s active involvement with the Pottery was brief, being confined to the first year of promoting his stock of their pots. Even with the existence of watercolours, attributing specific designs to him is tricky, especially when he took such little regard when acknowledging the standard Coldrum pots also shown in the Guild’s catalogues, with their design also ascribed to Spencer with no evidence to confirm this. One cannot help but feel that his enthusiasm for the pottery in the form of his unrealised designs was not shared by Dora. No doubt on the advice of her business-minded husband (and backer), she preferred to keep control of both intellectual and selling rights. Although the Guild was the first retailer to stock her wares, it was not the only one, with department stores across the country selling them and pieces being shipped across the world, all marketed as ‘Upchurch Pottery’. If Spencer was directly responsible for the design of any of these pieces, most of which were repeated throughout their 21-year trading period, he would surely have insisted on being recognised as the designer.

Ultimately, unlike most of their contemporaries,

the Upchurch Pottery had to make a profit. To be a dynamic business their pots had to become a consistent product, an essential factor when supplying department stores and trading internationally. In doing so, their naïve power was lost, ensuring their infant years and their artistic high-point were one and the same.

So why have we forgotten Upchurch today? In part, one assumes because of the overwhelming quantity of mediocre pots (from the 1948–63 period) available today and partly because credit at the time was swallowed by others. First by Spencer, then by the press, then by Cox when he failed even to acknowledge Baker as his inspiration; even Sidney Greenslade twice incorrectly recalled Baker’s name and Dora has only ever been acknowledged when she herself was interviewed.

This inconvenient necessity for profit ensured their output increased but as a result, sadly for today’s collector, their artistic standard fell. This may appear as though they were a victim of their own success. For Edward Baker though, the opposite is true, he was in great demand throughout his life and eventually owned the business – his ability to make a usable

object using nothing but muscle-memory and an old kick-wheel was surely what William Morris meant all those years before.

There is so much we do not know when tantalising snippets of information still elude us. The 1949 ‘family business’ article refers to a movie having been made showing the process of potting – alas a copy has never been found.

Hopefully this article will ensure the once forgotten Dora Wakeley is accepted as the driving force and

passion behind the Upchurch Pottery. She tirelessly promoted her wares, both with fashionable retailers but also locally, and not a church fete, rummage sale⁷⁶ or country show⁷⁷ passed without Upchurch Pottery being offered beautifully arranged on trestle tables. However, family descendants inform the author that the Wakeley family archives were lost to fire in the 2000s, meaning that an image of Dora remains elusive.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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NOTES

- ¹ Coldrum pottery, Kent active 1902–09, Coldrum Pottery Chelsea active 1909–14, Soon pottery Chelsea, active 1919–24, then finally SOON Pottery Sussex 1925–51.
- ² Mortlake Pottery, London, active 1911–14.
- ³ Active c.1916–c.1932, own pottery on Lambeth Road London.
- ⁴ Ravenscourt Pottery active 1916–28, Ravenscourt Park, London, then Chiswick 1933–c.1943, then Shepherd’s Bush c.1943–55.
- ⁵ Active 1909–41 Longfield Kent, active Stamford, Connecticut 1941–c.1965.
- ⁶ Active, Highgate London c.1916–c.1931.
- ⁷ The first exhibition in 1895 showed blue-and-white porcelain and the second showed porcelain ‘painted in colours’ in 1896.
- ⁸ ‘Early Chinese Wares’, *The Globe*, 20 June 1910.
- ⁹ Letter from Sidney Greenslade, March 1917, Victoria & Albert Museum.
- ¹⁰ Battely (1711), pp. 58–64.
- ¹¹ Wright (1865), pp. 161–67.
- ¹² Payne (1915), p. 285.
- ¹³ Noël Hume (1954), pp. 71–90.
- ¹⁴ Bergesen (1993), p. 82.
- ¹⁵ ‘Ancient Family of Farmers’, *East Kent Gazette*, 6 January 1950, front page.
- ¹⁶ Bergesen (1991), p. 273.
- ¹⁷ Bergesen (1991), p. 273.
- ¹⁸ Payne (1915), p. 286.
- ¹⁹ ‘Mr & Mrs Wakeley’s Golden Wedding’, *East Kent Gazette*, 6 January 1950, front page.
- ²⁰ The 1911 census shows the Baker family living in Fulham with an 18-month-old daughter who was born in Kent, meaning they made the move from Kent to London within 18 months of the birth of the daughter, allowing for a delay in the registration of the birth.

- ²¹ Bergesen (1991), p. 273.
- ²² Conversation with Mike Gunnill who is currently researching Reginald Wells’ extraordinary life.
- ²³ Initially established in 1901 with Edith and Nelson Dawson and Edward Spencer as principals but closed in 1905 due to personal differences and financial issues, then re-opened by Spencer alone in 1907.
- ²⁴ ‘New Departure in English Pottery: Corean (*sic*) Bowls and Vases Made in Kent’, *The Globe*, 24 January 1914, p. 7.
- ²⁵ ‘New Departure in English Pottery: Corean (*sic*) Bowls and Vases Made in Kent’, *The Globe*, 24 January 1914, p. 7.
- ²⁶ Ealing Local History Centre, the papers of Sidney K. Greenslade, Item no. 2458. Whilst undated this pamphlet contains wording that mirrors that used in *The Globe* article of 24 January 1914, p. 7, implying the journalist was referring to it.
- ²⁷ Ealing Local History Centre, The Papers of Sidney K. Greenslade item number 2459. Although undated it is assumed to have been produced at the same time as the ‘The Revival of...’ pamphlet owing to the use of a shared font.
- ²⁸ Diary entry of Sidney Greenslade c. July 1914, ‘Wakeley of the Upchurch Pottery is hesitating about going on, the sales have been poor and the output too rapid. Also the hops happen to have had disease necessitating spraying which is costing a lot – so he feels the pottery will have to go.’
- ²⁹ Diary of Sidney Greenslade, 1 December 1914, ‘Edward Spencer sent me his little pamphlet on the Upchurch Pottery’.
- ³⁰ Spencer (c.1914).
- ³¹ The local clay was satisfactory for pottery but the mixture that worked the best was one part Upchurch clay to four parts Devonshire ball clay, cf. Bergesen (1993), p. 84.
- ³² Bergesen (1993), p. 84.
- ³³ *Arts Décoratifs de Grande-Bretagne et D’Irlande, Paris MCMXIV*, official catalogue, p. 21.

- 251 à 253. POTERIES. Envoi de ‘The Artificers Guild.’
Item 251. Coupe en poterie ‘Upchurch,’ décoration poupre.
Item 252. Vase en poterie ‘Upchurch,’ décoration rouge.
Item 253. Pot a côtes en poterie ‘Upchurch,’ décoration blanche.
Dessins d’Edward Spencer, de ‘l’Upchurch Pottery.’
Exécution de G. Baker, de ‘l’Upchurch Pottery.’
Courtesy of Paul Reeves.
- ³⁴ Upchurch bowl, Ceramics Collection, School of Art Museum and Galleries, Aberystwyth University, Item Number c305, bought from the Artificer’s Guild Limited 11 May 1923 for 10 shillings.
- ³⁵ ‘Exhibition of Handicraft Work: Interesting Display at Hampshire House Club’, *West London Observer*, 11 June 1915.
- ³⁶ *The Pottery & Glass Record*, February 1918.
- ³⁷ *Staffordshire Sentinel*, 25 February 1919, p. 3.
- ³⁸ *Dundee Courier*, 15 December 1919.
- ³⁹ ‘A Glimpse at The Shop Windows, Christmas Gifts Noted by our Lady Correspondent’, *The Dundee Courier*, 15 December 1919.
- ⁴⁰ ‘To Decorate an Artistic Room’, *The St Andrews Citizen*, 18 May, 19 June, 26 June 1920 etc.
- ⁴¹ *The Edinburgh Evening News*, 11 December 1920; *The Scotsman*, 5 December 1921, 6 December 1922, 29 November 1922, 23 November 1923, 7 December 1925 and 24 December 1928.
- ⁴² *Warwick and Warwickshire Advertiser*, 6 December 1930.
- ⁴³ ‘Christmas Presents’, *East Kent Gazette*, 9 December 1929.
- ⁴⁴ ‘Rainham Lady’s Successful Venture’, *East Kent Gazette*, 13 March 1920, p. 8.
- ⁴⁵ ‘Revival of Roman Pottery Making at Rainham’, special pictures exclusive to the *Observer*, *Chatham, Rochester and Gillingham Observer*, 10 April 1920.
- ⁴⁶ ‘Paris Exhibition: Awards to Pottery Firms’, *The Staffordshire Sentinel*, 31 October 1925.
- ⁴⁷ ‘Seen and Heard at Olympia’, *The Daily Mirror*, 4 March 1926.
- ⁴⁸ ‘Woman’s Pottery Enterprise’, *The Vote*, 18 March 1932, p. 94.
- ⁴⁹ Mrs Wakeley’s Death Certificate, 16 September 1957.
- ⁵⁰ ‘Mr & Mrs Wakeley’s Golden Wedding’, *East Kent Gazette*, 6 January 1950, front page.
- ⁵¹ ‘She Founded Upchurch Pottery’, *East Kent Gazette*, Obituary, 20 September 1957, front page.
- ⁵² *East Kent Gazette*, 16 June 1961, p. 10.
- ⁵³ Bergesen (1993), p. 91.
- ⁵⁴ The first reference to Upchurch pottery being sold at the ‘Tudor Café’ or the ‘Tudor Showroom, Broad Walk, Rainham’ was in ‘Christmas Presents’, *East Kent Gazette*, 9 December 1929.
- ⁵⁵ ‘A Family Industry’, *East Kent Gazette*, 16 April 1948.
- ⁵⁶ Bergesen (1991), p. 274–5.
- ⁵⁷ ‘A Family Industry’, *East Kent Gazette*, 16 April 1948.
- ⁵⁸ ‘Mr E. J. Baker of Rainham’, *East Kent Gazette*, Obituary, 23 April 1954, front page.
- ⁵⁹ One copy, Ealing Local History Centre and one Kent History & Library Centre.
- ⁶⁰ Bergesen (1993), p. 99.
- ⁶¹ One part Medway clay to four parts Devonshire ball clay, cf. Bergesen (1993), p. 84.
- ⁶² Spencer (c.1914).
- ⁶³ The Globe, ‘New Departure in English Pottery: Corean (sic) Bowls and Vases Made in Kent’, *The Globe*, 24 January 1914, p. 7.
- ⁶⁴ *The Pottery Gazette*, April 1915.
- ⁶⁵ *The Pottery Gazette*, April 1918.
- ⁶⁶ *The Pottery Gazette*, April 1919.
- ⁶⁷ ‘To Decorate an Artistic Room’, *The St Andrews Citizen*, 19 June, 26 June 1920 etc.
- ⁶⁸ *The Pottery Gazette*, April 1920.
- ⁶⁹ *The Pottery Gazette*, April 1921.
- ⁷⁰ *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, June 1924.
- ⁷¹ *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, September 1925.
- ⁷² *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, April 1926.
- ⁷³ *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, April 1930.
- ⁷⁴ *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, April 1931.
- ⁷⁵ *The Pottery Gazette & Glass Trade Review*, April 1932.
- ⁷⁶ *The East Kent Gazette*, 9 July 1921, front page.
- ⁷⁷ *Kent & Sussex Courier*, 27 July 1928.

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