

RENAISSANCE TO REGENT STREET:
HAROLD RATHBONE AND THE DELLA ROBBIA
POTTERY OF BIRKENHEAD

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Renaissance to Regent Street: Harold Rathbone and the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead

Abstract

This thesis examines the ways in which the unique creativity brought to late Victorian applied art by the Della Robbia Pottery was a consequence of Harold Rathbone's extended engagement with *quattrocento* ceramics. This was not only with the sculpture collections in the South Kensington Museum but through his experiences as he travelled in Italy. In the first sustained examination of the development of the Della Robbia Pottery within the wider histories of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the thesis makes an original contribution in three ways. Using new sources of primary documentation, I discuss the artistic response to Italianate style by Harold Rathbone and his mentors Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt, and consider how this influenced the development of the Pottery. Rathbone's own engagement with Italy not only led to his response to the work of the *quattrocento* sculptor Luca della Robbia but also to the archaic sgraffito styles of Lombardia in Northern Italy; I propose that Rathbone found a new source of inspiration for the sgraffito workshop at the Pottery. The thesis then identifies how the Della Robbia Pottery established a commercial presence in Regent Street and beyond, demonstrating how it became, for a short time, an outstanding expression of these Italianate styles within the British Arts and Crafts Movement.

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Introduction

The work of the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead stands as a unique and gloriously idiosyncratic expression of late nineteenth-century ceramic art. Harold Steward Rathbone (1858-1928) founded the company in 1894 in Birkenhead inspired by the teachings of John Ruskin and William Morris and it remained a true expression of the tenets of the Arts and Crafts Movement until its closure in 1906. This thesis will argue that the unique creativity brought to late Victorian applied art by the Della Robbia Pottery was a consequence of Rathbone's extended engagement with *quattrocento* ceramics, not only in the sculpture collections in the South Kensington Museum but through his experiences as he travelled in Italy.

The Pottery had two stated aims; 'the production of an architectural decoration in earthenware, [...]and to manufacture pottery for various purposes, the distinction of which shall consist in the freedom of its shape and design, and in the quality of its colour'.¹ Rathbone named the Pottery in emulation of the *quattrocento* Florentine sculptor Luca della Robbia (1400-82) and produced architectural faience that was inspired by the work of the *bottega*. In a second workshop, the company made domestic ware; plates and chargers, vases, jugs and tall pitchers, tea services and ornaments. The decorators had a free hand to

¹ Anon., 'Art Items' *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 January 1894)

inscribe a pattern or design of their choosing in a sgraffito-style,² resulting in work in which no two pieces were the same and demonstrating a dazzling individuality that is unique to the pottery. Design historian Gillian Naylor referred to it as ‘highly regarded in Arts and Crafts as well as aristocratic circles’.³

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the critical reception of medieval sculpture was unenthusiastic, particularly the work of the della Robbia family. Describing the exterior tondi by Andrea della Robbia in Brunelleschi’s *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence, Peter Beckford wrote in 1805 ‘the children *fasciata* as an outside ornament, is a composition invented by Luca della Robbia, and so called after him. The art is lost, nor is it to be regretted’. He added that the work was a ‘kind of terracotta, painted and varnished’.⁴ By the last decades of the century the critical reception had changed to almost universal acclaim. The thesis examines the ways in which Rathbone’s engagement with the techniques and forms of these newly popular *quattrocento* Italian ceramics and architectural bas-reliefs reflected this new popularity and led to the creation of the Della Robbia Pottery. However, the thesis argues that Harold Rathbone was not only inspired by the work he saw in the newly developing collections at the South Kensington Museum, but by his experiences as he travelled in Northern and Central Italy.

² The techniques and methods used by the workers at the Della Robbia Pottery is described in detail in chapter two.

³ Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influences on design theory* (London: Trefoil Publications Ltd, 1990) p.151

⁴ Beckford, P., *Familiar Letters from Italy, to a Friend* (Salisbury: J Easton, 1805) Vol.1, pp.198-199

The tondi are discussed in chapter two, p.176; Ruskin also expressed reservations about the polychrome work of the della Robbia, chapter two, p.162

Three research questions have been addressed:

- In what ways did Harold Rathbone and his mentors engage with early Renaissance art in the late nineteenth century and how did their experiences as travellers in Italy influence them?
- The Della Robbia Pottery not only made architectural bas-relief in the style of Luca della Robbia, but produced a very disparate style of sgraffito-styled domestic-ware in a separate workshop. The thesis investigates the inspiration for this and argues that Rathbone looked away from the *bottegas* of *quattrocento* Florence towards a new source of inspiration in Northern Italy.
- In the last decade of the nineteenth century, these *quattrocento*-inspired ceramics were displayed in London's most exclusive department stores. How did the Della Robbia Pottery establish a commercial presence in Regent Street and beyond, and what were the agencies that buttressed that presence?

The production of decorative art of the late nineteenth century was, in large part, defined and shaped by the beliefs of William Morris. This was a time of social and political change and as the historian Peter Stansky points out, 'whether consciously or not, Morris and others were responding to the drive towards greater democracy in the 1880s'.⁵ For many of the craftsmen and women associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement, their endeavours became a moral statement about the methods of art production, their commitment to beauty and 'truth to nature', and a fundamental questioning about the values of full industrialisation. The Della Robbia Pottery was held in high esteem within the movement

⁵ Stansky, P., *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1985) p.265

and was what art historian and collector Robert Prescott-Walker described as one of the 'only true Arts and Crafts Potteries'.⁶ However, along with many other studio workshops of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Della Robbia Pottery was quickly eclipsed and faded from art historical discourse after its closure in 1906. For many years, it was the focus of only limited research but in recent years there have been several new publications including *The Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead 1894-1906* by Peter Hyland (2014),⁷ built on Hillhouse's *Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead 1894-1906 – An interim Report (1981)*⁸ which has provided a meticulously researched history of the pottery and its workers. Kathleen Hawley's doctoral thesis, *The lives and works of the Women Artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in late Victorian and Edwardian England (2001)*⁹, contributes to our understanding of the development of the company's female artists both as an integral part of the workforce and as part of the wider late nineteenth century women's movement. Hawley has devoted a chapter of her thesis to exploring the employment and status of women at the Pottery and, additionally, examined the relationship between the non-conformist meetings of the time, including Unitarianism, Positivism, and the Della Robbia Pottery.

There have been three important exhibitions of Della Robbia Pottery in the past decades; in 1980 at Jeremy Cooper Ltd. London; in 1981 at the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead and in 2016 at the Williamson Art Gallery. The most recent exhibition, *Renaissance to Regent Street: the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead (2016)* was researched and co-curated by this author to support the aims of the thesis and provided a visual interrogation of the

⁶ Prescott Walker, R., 'The Della Robbia Pottery' *Antique Collecting* (March 2001) pp.40-45, p.41

⁷ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894- 1906* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique collectors Club, 2014)

⁸ Hillhouse, D., *Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead 1894-1906 – An interim Report* (Birkenhead: Williamson Art Gallery, 1981)

⁹ Hawley, K.C., *The lives and works of the women artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford Brookes university, 2001)

relationship between the Pottery and late-nineteenth century travel to Italy.¹⁰ The supporting volume of scholarly essays addresses five significant concerns: how and why the Pottery was established as a substantial presence in Merseyside and how Britain's leading collection of Della Robbia Pottery was developed at the Williamson Art Gallery in Birkenhead; how Harold Rathbone's experiences in Italy informed the forms, techniques and designs at the Pottery; the sgraffito work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy; the revivification of the reputation of Luca della Robbia in nineteenth-century Britain and the influence on Rathbone; the overarching influence of William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement on *fin de siècle* studio craft production.¹¹ The works by Hyland and Hawley revitalised previous studies but until now very little original research has focused on the ways in which Harold Rathbone engaged with the work of the della Robbia family of sculptors. There has been no investigation into what drove the inspiration behind the production of sgraffito ware by the company. All company records and documents are missing, including invoices, sales receipts, glaze and slip recipes, personnel records and details of working practices and there has been no meaningful scrutiny of the commercial success of the Della Robbia Pottery.

The thesis will open with an introduction to Harold Rathbone and his family, examining Rathbone's artistic training and subsequent transformation from lack-lustre painter to the dynamic founder and works manager of a significant Arts and Crafts studio in Birkenhead, Merseyside. In addition to the examination of archival letters and documents, this draws

¹⁰Digital imaging LJM U, September 2016, 'Renaissance to Regent Street: the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead' <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bg2roEg3ym0>

¹¹ Carroll, J., Sheldon, J., Simpson, C., Trodd, C., Venturelli, E., in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015)

on work by both Peter Hyland and Colin Simpson who have re-investigated the history of Rathbone and the Della Robbia Pottery,¹² challenging the nebulous and investigating the known facts in detail. Simpson has discussed how the large collection of Della Robbia Pottery at the Williamson Art Gallery and Museum has been developed.¹³ The thesis discusses in detail why Rathbone chose to establish the Pottery in Birkenhead in chapter two.

Chapter one continues by examining the artistic responses of Rathbone's friends and mentors as they encountered early Italian art, considering the ways in which this was influential. The thesis provides the first sustained examination of Rathbone's position within the Arts and Crafts Movement and his professional relationship with artists including Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt, enriched by their own experiences of travel to Italy.

Ford Madox Brown's engagement with Italian art has recently been reassessed by Julian Treuhertz and Angela Thirlwell, and, particularly, in *Ford Madox Brown and History Painting*¹⁴ by Elizabeth Prettejohn, building on previous work by Kenneth Bendiner and Mary Bennett. Previous academic discussion connecting Rathbone and Brown has been scant but following the locating of a substantial archive of correspondence from Rathbone to Brown, spanning a period of almost ten years, this thesis addresses this by contributing in a meaningful and significant way. The letters not only reveal an affectionate and long-standing friendship between Brown and Rathbone, but also

¹² Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894- 1906* (2014).

¹³ Simpson, C., 'Della Robbia and Birkenhead' in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*

As Director of the Williamson Gallery since 1983, Colin Simpson can be credited with the successful building of this collection.

¹⁴ Prettejohn, E., 'Ford Madox Brown and History Painting' *Visual Culture in Britain*, 15 :227-238 (2014) pp.239-257

identify Rathbone's close relationship with the poet and feminist Mathilde Blind. Along with other female writers whose reputations have since disappeared into obscurity, Blind's work is once again receiving scholarly attention as one of the most widely published women poets of the late Victorian era. In recent times James Diedrick has published several academic papers that examine her work and questions her omission from the canon of subsequent literary criticism. Thirlwell has written about her as intellectually equal to her dear friend Ford Madox Brown, in a way that his wife Emma was not.¹⁵ William Holman Hunt, who later became a member of the controlling council of the Della Robbia Pottery was also a friend of Rathbone. A passing reference to this relationship is made by Anne Clark-Amor in her biography of Hunt and by Judith Bronkhurst in her excellent *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné*;¹⁶ this is within the context of Rathbone's raising a public subscription to purchase 'Triumph of the Innocents' for the Walker Art Gallery. A careful analysis of Hunt's painterly practice by Carol Jacobi indicates how the painter often revealed his own inner state of mind in his work.¹⁷ By applying Jacobi's argument to other works by Hunt, by conducting an examination of archived letters and with a critical reading of the limited information available, there are strong indications that Hunt had more influence over Rathbone than previously considered.

Continental travel had once again become possible during the long period of political stability that led from the end of the Napoleonic Wars in 1815 and modes of travel across

¹⁵ Thirlwell, A., *Into the Frame: The Four Loves of Ford Madox Brown* (London: Pimlico, 2010) p.200

¹⁶ Bronkhurst J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné* (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art) (Yale University Press, 2006)

¹⁷ Jacobi, C., *William Holman Hunt – Painting, Painter, Paint* (Manchester University Press, 2006)

Europe were transformed following the development of new road and rail networks.¹⁸ Many texts and academic papers have significantly informed our understanding of these new ways of travelling. *The Mediterranean Passion* by John Pemble remains a landmark work in this field:

No understanding of the lives of Victorian and Edwardian leisured and literary classes can be complete without some knowledge of how they travelled to the South, where they went in the South, why they went, how their experiences shaped their attitude, and how their attitude shaped their experiences.¹⁹

The Beaten Track by James Buzard²⁰ develops an important argument that contrasts the tourist and anti-tourist, as a new type of tourist arrived in Florence and Rome in large numbers as a 'Cooks tourist'. Brendon's *Thomas Cook: One Hundred and Fifty years of Popular Tourism*²¹ gives an overview of the development of the travel company and Cook's relationship with both the British middle-class traveller and Italy. The activities of the British in Florence have been subject to much academic scrutiny; of especial interest is Katie Campbell's evocative history of the Anglo-American experiences in Florence in the late nineteenth-century, *Paradise of Exiles* (2009),²² and *British perceptions of Florence in the Long Eighteenth century*²³ by Rosemary Sweet. However, the most intense interrogation of sources has been with the memoirs of Jane Rathbone and Alice

¹⁸ Foreign travel and serious study of the classics became an aspiration of the new middle classes and by the mid-nineteenth century the background of travellers had also changed; as Kathryn Walchester observes, the number of the aristocratic Grand Tourists in post-Napoleonic Europe lessened 'as travel infrastructure improved, costs reduced and Italy became popular with a different type of traveller'

Walchester, K., *'Our Own Fair Italy': Nineteenth Century Women's Travel Writing and Italy 1800-1844*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) p.12

¹⁹ Pemble, J., *The Mediterranean Passion: Victorian and Edwardians in the South* (London: Faber & Faber, 2009) p.14

²⁰ Buzard, J., *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and Ways to Culture' 1800-1918* (Oxford University Press, 1993)

²¹ Brendon. P., *Thomas Cook – 150 years of Popular Tourism* (London: Secker & Warburg Ltd, 1991)

²² Campbell, K., *The Paradise of Exiles: The Anglo-American Gardens of Florence* (London: Francis Lincoln, 2009). Based on unpublished doctoral thesis *Paradise of exiles: the Anglo-Florentine garden* (Bristol, 2007)

²³ Sweet, R., 'British perceptions of Florence in the Long Eighteenth century', *The Historical Journal*, Vol 50, No.4 (Dec 2007) pp.837-859

Sophia Briggs, Harold Rathbone's mother and aunt respectively. Privately published, the memoirs detail the histories of the two sisters from the mid-Victorian years of their childhood.²⁴ The journals inform our understanding of Harold Rathbone's experiences in Italy in a new way and in many cases, verify the details contained in Rathbone's letters. By interrogating these journals in some depth, the thesis also seeks to pierce the one-dimensional narratives of cultural tourism solely as a leisure activity. The experiences of both Jane and Alice engage with Pemble's analysis of hidden motives²⁵ and exemplify two social frameworks that caused disquiet in Victorian society; financial uncertainty and religious schism. These experiences were also significant in informing the ways in which Harold Rathbone evolved as an artist and business owner and establish the background to the central themes of the thesis.

The publications of the most prominent travel-writers of the day contributed to the rise in popularity of travel to Italy during this period and combined to re-shape the ambitions of Harold Rathbone. Rathbone was known as a 'Ruskinian' and had a life-long commitment to the principles of the writer and critic John Ruskin (1819-1900).²⁶ Keith Hanley & John Walton argue that 'Ruskin's work as an artist, commentator and critic [...] made a difference to the hierarchy of preferred journeys, halting points and objects of the tourist gaze' and that his writing helped to shape the nature and content of Victorian

²⁴ A copy of the journal of Jane Rathbone has been held in Liverpool University Special Collections for some years, but this is the first occasion that a full transcript of Alice Briggs' journal has been made available. It has been used with kind permission of John Stowell of Auckland, New Zealand, Alice's great-grandson.

²⁵ Pemble argues that the commonplace motives for travel to the continent by the British were pilgrimage, culture and health but these were often no more than rationalisations or 'excuses for motives that were less easily admitted'. The hidden motives included financial embarrassment and moral dissidence. Jane Rathbone became, for a short time, what Pemble describes as a 'spiritual casualty'.

Pemble, J., *The Mediterranean Passion – Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (London: Faber & Faber, 1987) p. 96

²⁶ Charles Collis, designer at the Della Robbia Pottery and author of the only extensive written account of the history of the Pottery recalled that 'Mr. Rathbone had personal contact with John Ruskin' (Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum, undated)

(and subsequent) cultural tourism in terms of 'where to go and what to see';²⁷ inevitably Ruskin's writing would shape the nature of Rathbone's experiences. Conversely, Amy Woodson-Boulton proposes that because of Ruskin's visual evangelism 'it was thus the role of the artist to act as an eye-witness whose sight testified to the glory of nature as Gods creation',²⁸ a role that Rathbone enthusiastically embraced.

Rathbone founded the Della Robbia Pottery as a response to his engagement with the forms and techniques of *quattrocento* ceramics. Chapter two of the thesis considers how the work of Luca della Robbia enriched the weaving together of early Renaissance Italian forms with *fin-de-siècle* design which was a strong characteristic of the Della Robbia Pottery and draws on important publications by Dora Thornton and Timothy Wilson, Eleni Sani and Luke Syson. Charlotte Drew evaluates the revivication of the work of Luca della Robbia in the nineteenth century and brings the contribution of J.C. Robinson (1824-1913), first superintendent of the South Kensington Museum, to a new prominence.²⁹ Drew explores the acquisition, display and reception of medieval and Renaissance sculpture in the newly opened South Kensington Museum and particularly focuses attention on the acquisition of work by the della Robbia family of quattrocento Florence.³⁰ This thesis has drawn on research that explores both the building of the collection and stimulation of a renewed interest in quattrocento sculpture in the 1850s and 1860s and onwards; we know that Harold Rathbone encountered the work of the della Robbia in the South Kensington Museum as well as in Italy. However, I propose that Rathbone looked elsewhere in Italy for a source of inspiration for the sgraffito-ware

²⁷ Hanley, K. & Walton, J., *Constructing cultural tourism – John Ruskin and the Tourist Gaze* (Bristol: Channel View, 2010) p.134

²⁸ Woodson-Boulton, A., 'Industry Without Art is Brutality: Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museum' *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.46 (Jan 2007) No.1 pp. 47-71

²⁹ Drew, C., *Displaying Italian Sculpture: Exploring Hierarchies at the South Kensington Museum 1852-62* (PhD thesis, University of York, 2014) pp.203-25

³⁰ Ibid.

produced by the pottery and found his influence not in Florence but in Lombardia, Northern Italy. Strong links can be found between the Della Robbia Pottery and the work of Carlo Loretz of Lodi. Very little research has examined the work of Carlo Loretz and the main body of published work is by art historian and curator Enrico Venturelli of Milan. Lastly, the chapter assesses the influence of other Italian potteries of this period on the work of the Birkenhead company through an examination of popular newspaper and art journal reports.

Chapter three of the thesis focuses on the commercial relationships forged by Rathbone between the Della Robbia Pottery and the new department stores of Regent Street and the west end of London. Previously, scrutiny has been restricted to briefly noting the presence of the Pottery in Liberty & Co., in Warings and in Morris & Co. Stephen Calloway, Alison Adburgham and Malcolm Haslam have made important contributions to the literature concerning the department store, particularly Liberty & Co., and the Aesthetic movement. The work of Paul Greenhalgh has informed this thesis in several ways, including in his essay '*The English Compromise: Modern design and National Consciousness, 1870-1940*',³¹ arguing that the Della Robbia Pottery became an archetypal articulation of the celebration of empire that typified late-Victorian society. Deborah Cohen's *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions*³² makes an important contribution to current debates concerning the 'house beautiful' and the business of interior display. Cohen also brings to our attention the redoubtable Charlotte Talbot-Coke, a 'lady art-writer' and interior designer, who this thesis establishes was of crucial importance to the commercial success of the Pottery. This chapter also has a strong focus on interrogating original period publications with the intent of

³¹ Greenhalgh, P., 'The English Compromise: Modern Design and National Consciousness, 1870-1940' In: Kaplan, W (ed) *Designing Modernity: The Arts of reform and Persuasion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995)

³² Cohen, D., *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2006)

building an historical account of the presence that Rathbone established within the world of exhibitions and commercial display. Through magazines like *The Studio* and *Magazine of Art, Hearth and Home* and *The English Woman's Review*, the Della Robbia Pottery was established as not only an outstanding expression of the Arts and Crafts Movement but was, for a short time, an important and successful commercial enterprise. The Italianate style of Luca della Robbia and the sgraffito potters of Northern Italy found a sincere articulation through the Della Robbia Pottery in the new department stores of Victorian Britain, inspired by the transformational force of leisure travel to Italy by the middle-classes. The chapter shows how both artist and traveller responded to this visual language in the booming consumer culture of late Victorian Britain. The thesis will begin by examining how an engagement with the early Renaissance art of Italy by Harold Rathbone and his closest friends and mentors underpinned his development as an artist.

Chapter One

Artistic and Literary Responses to Italy

As founder of the Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead, Harold Rathbone was transformed from an easel artist of little consequence to the dynamic driving force behind one of the most successful of the studio potteries of the Arts and Crafts movement. This chapter will examine how Rathbone and his friends and mentors Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt engaged with, and were inspired by, early Renaissance art as travellers in Italy. As Julie Sheldon points out, Rathbone's decision to name the company in honour of the della Robbia family of *quattrocento* Florence reflected his sincere interest in the Florentine artists, an interest that was undoubtedly stimulated by his own experiences in Florence.³³ We know that Rathbone's long-standing friendship with Brown and Holman Hunt influenced his practice; this chapter also examines the relationship between Rathbone and the first-wave feminist Mathilde Blind which has, until now, been judged short-lived and superficial. However, the friendship was long-standing and important to Rathbone's development as a craftsman of influence.

Italian art had been of great interest to British artists and writers since the sixteenth century.³⁴ In the nineteenth century this enthusiasm was stimulated for a new audience by the writing of John Ruskin, Anna Jameson and Walter Pater. They were amongst the most influential travel

³³ Sheldon, J., 'Inspired by Florentine original: Rathbone and the Della Robbia' in Sheldon, J., *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) p.71

³⁴ Notable amongst the many early examples of work in this capacious genre are Tobias Smollett's *Travels through France and Italy* (1766; Oxford University Press, 1981), Sterne's *A Sentimental Journey through France and Italy by Mr. Yorick* (1767; New York: Penguin Classics, 2001) and Goethe's *Italian Journey: 1786-1788* (1816; London: Penguin Classics, 1992), all of which are rooted in the traditions of the Grand Tour. Early nineteenth century British writers include Mary Shelley, Charles Dickens and of course, Samuel Rogers whose work *Italy: A Poem* (London: T. Cadell, 1830) was cited by Ruskin as directing 'the entire direction of his life's energies'.

writers of the century and through them many perceptions of early Italian art, often referred to as 'primitive' or 'early Christian art' were reframed and popularised. Ruskin's own experiences as a traveller had a fundamental influence on Harold Rathbone; firstly through the paradigms of the Arts and Crafts Movement, but also through Ruskin's writing of texts such as *The Stones of Venice* (1853) and, thirdly, as a friend of the Rathbone family. Anna Jameson was also a friend of the Rathbone family and one of the first nineteenth century writers to establish an art-historical framework that included the work of *trecento* and *quattrocento* Italian artists. Walter Pater's *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (1873) attracted the admiration of those associated with the Aesthetic Movement in the latter part of the century and his essay *Luca della Robbia* is widely cited as underpinning the renewed popularity in the *quattrocento* sculptor. The transformation of travel to Italy at that time not only influenced the family and close friends of Harold Rathbone but also the British artists and writers who determined his craft.

Harold Steward Rathbone was born in 1858 into the wealthy Liverpool merchant family, the fourth child of Philip and Jane Rathbone. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Rathbones had become a powerful and influential dynasty, particularly in Liverpool, and were known as civic campaigners and philanthropists. Philip and Jane brought up their ten surviving children in the family home at Greenbank Cottage, Wavertree, Liverpool,³⁵ although at a young age Harold and two of his brothers were sent away to school in Reading and to Clifton College, Bristol. Rathbone then went onto to study at Heatherley's School of

³⁵ The Rathbone family had owned Greenbank House and estate in Sefton, Liverpool, since 1809. Following the marriage of Philip Rathbone (1828-1895) to Jane Stringer Steward (1833-1905), parents of Harold Rathbone, Greenbank Cottage was purchased and extended to become their future home. This became the childhood home of Harold and his ten siblings. Many famous figures of the Victorian art world are reputed to have stayed at Greenbank Cottage, including Ruskin, Leighton and Holman Hunt.

Art in London in 1875. Alumni included Millais, Rossetti, Leighton, Burne-Jones and Walter Crane and it is likely that Rathbone had met many of the artists whilst a pupil there.

The Rathbone family were staunch Unitarians and descended from a long line of Quakers. The non-conformist Unitarian church was a strong and powerful presence in mid-Victorian Liverpool and by the 1850s had several large chapels in the city. In addition to the Rathbones', the shipbuilding families of Holt and Melly were wealthy Unitarians, as were the Tate family of sugar merchants and the chemical industrialist Sir John Brunner. Elizabeth Jay describes the non-conformists thus 'Unitarianism...strong beyond its numbers in the Victorian intellectual milieu and the circles of social reform'³⁶. These connections with the non-conformist church brought much-welcomed commissions to the Pottery, which executed large architectural panels for several Unitarian Churches in Liverpool and the environs.³⁷

In addition to Harold Rathbone's early immersion in art and culture, he served a long and varied training as an artist. A portrait of a highly-strung and probably over-eager young man emerges; keen to make his way as an artist but dependent on the support of his parents, both emotionally and financially. Philip Rathbone was particularly associated with the promotion of the arts in this fast-developing industrial city. Philip Rathbone sat on the Hanging committee of the Walker Art Gallery Autumn exhibition since its inception in 1877 and much of its success is credited to his influence. Philip Rathbone was also a founding member of the

³⁶ Jay, E., *Faith and Doubt in Victorian Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1986) p.76

³⁷ Unitarianism rejected a Trinitarian theology and taught that reason and scientific thought can exist alongside faith. Research by Hawley also suggests that Harold Rathbone had a strong affiliation with the Positivist Movement, the Church of Humanity. Hawley confirms that although Rathbone has never been recorded as a member of the congregation, he and his friend Arthur Mackmurdo often attended services and social events and has identified several of the artists at the Della Robbia Pottery as being members of the church, especially Ruth Bare and Rathbone's brother Edmund.

Hawley, K.C., *The Lives and Works of the Women Artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in Late Victorian and Edwardian England* (PhD. Thesis, Oxford Brookes University, 2001)

Both the Toxteth Mission Church and the Liscard Memorial Unitarian church were decorated with large re-redos (discussed in detail in chapter two).

Liverpool Art Club and a key member of the National Association of Advancement of Art in Industry.³⁸ Harold Rathbone would have undoubtedly found an easier admission into the artistic circles of bohemian London through the introductions of his father, but Rathbone was also a man of great personal charm who was a close friend of many of the great Victorian artists. William Rossetti (1829-1919) playfully described Rathbone in his autobiography of 1906: 'Owing to the close connection with Madox Brown, we saw a great deal of Mr. Rathbone and appreciated the frank and vivacious tone of his character. He is not addicted to hiding lights under bushel, and not infrequently starts or assists some object conducive to the advantage of art'.³⁹

Rathbone entered the Slade School of Fine Art in 1878, studying under the French artist, sculptor and teacher Alphonse Legros.⁴⁰ He was the first student to enrol for Legros's class that year, paying £7/7s in fees.⁴¹ His fellow students included Ellen Mary Rope, who retained a strong connection with the Della Robbia Pottery throughout its existence, and W G Collingwood who was a friend and assistant to John Ruskin and travelled extensively with Ruskin to Europe. We know that Rathbone himself had travelled to Italy in the summer of 1878 with his parents; maybe a last family holiday before he left home for London and student life at the Slade School. The family visited Palma, Moderna and Ravenna then onto Florence

³⁸ Together with William Conway, Chair of Fine Art at University College, Liverpool, Philip Rathbone organised the 1888 Art Congress in Liverpool. A major event in the British Art world, speakers included William Morris, Walter Crane, Holman Hunt and Lawrence Alma-Tadema. The conference was chaired by Frederick Leighton. The aims of the congress were to promote the inclusion of art in industry, inspired by William Morris. John Willett comments 'Utterly forgotten now, the Liverpool Art Congress of 1888 must have seen like a historic occasion'.

Willett, J., *Art in A City* (London: Methuen & Co, 1967) p.53

³⁹ Rossetti, W., *Some Reminiscences of William Rossetti, Vol.2* (London: Brown, Langham, 1906) p.496

⁴⁰ The French painter and sculptor Alphonse Legros (1837-1911) became Slade Professor of Art at University College in 1876. He held the position until 1892. Legros was also skilled in etching and the making of medallions, and much admired for his ability to complete a drawing in little over an hour. Legros was a friend of Philip H Rathbone who bought his painting *The Pilgrimage*, later bequeathed to the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Legros considered a pilgrimage to Italy was essential to the development of artistic practice and funded a scholarship out of his own salary.

⁴¹ University College, London, Special Collections, 'Slade School of Painting, Drawing and Fine Art, 1878'.

and Fiesole. A Maud Harris had travelled with them, and Jane wrote 'Philip used to walk with Maud, explaining subjects in art to her, and Harold and I often stopped for flowers, and then ran on to catch them up. Harold made many sketches and one of Ravenna for me. Altogether the trip was very pleasant'. The idyllic scene of early summer in the Tuscan countryside is captured by Jane's Forsteresque description of a return one day to Florence: 'Harold ran the whole way back from Fiesole singing snatches of Italian songs, his long dark hair flying in the wind'.⁴² The building of a comprehensive railway system through Europe was the lynchpin that made continental travel affordable. Until the mid-nineteenth century the journey from London to Rome took three to four weeks, unchanged since the days of the Roman Empire but by 1871 travellers made the rail journey from London to Florence in only thirty-six hours.⁴³ Rathbone's aunt, Alice Briggs, records throughout her journal that she frequently made the journey from Italy to visit her family in Liverpool, indeed she often returned for an important social event. The Rathbone family exemplified the new genteel middle-class traveller; a wealthy and influential merchant family which held an eminent place in society.

By the later decades of the nineteenth century, a collision of the different travelling classes had developed, defined by the terms 'tourist' and 'anti-tourist'.⁴⁴ Used by several commentators, notably James Buzard, the terms describe the widespread attitude of the Victorians abroad. Buzard argues that the 'snobbish anti-tourist regards his own cultural

⁴² Rathbone, J., *Recollections of Jane S Rathbone* (Rathbone Papers, Library, University of Liverpool Special Collections, 1895) p.64

⁴³ Campbell, K., *The Paradise of Exiles: The Anglo-American Gardens of Florence*, p.9

⁴⁴ The new type of traveller visiting Italy in increasing numbers in the late nineteenth century, were known as 'Cooks tourists'. Thomas Cook popularized tourism and made continental travel possible for the less wealthy. The first Cooks Tour to the Italian peninsula was in 1864 and was personally guided by Thomas Cook himself. In that year one hundred and forty people travelled with him to Italy. Cook organised a second tour to Rome in 1866, taking a party of fifty to the Holy See for Easter week. An increasingly ambitious programme of 'Cooks Tours' developed and by the 1890s, Cook was known as 'booking clerk to the empire'.

Brendon, P., *Thomas Cook – 150 years of Popular Tourism*, p.201

experiences as authentic and unique, setting them against a backdrop of always assumed tourist vulgarity, repetition and ignorance'.⁴⁵ He refers to the *genius loci*, or the authentic spirit of place, as lurking only in secret places that were 'off the beaten track', only to be discovered by the informed traveller rather than 'vulgar tourist'. Aggrandised by the Renaissance scholar and resident of Florence, Vernon Lee,⁴⁶ the *genius loci* allowed people of culture to be brought into an intimate relationship with the past in a manner that was denied to the tourist.⁴⁷ The writer Mary Ward, for example, railed against 'the European traveller which regards Italy as the European playground, picture gallery and curiosity shop, and grudges the smallest encroachment by the needs of the new nation on the picturesque ruins of the past'⁴⁸ and Tambling argues that Italy became to the English tourist the 'exotic and primitive other'.⁴⁹ Jane and Philip Rathbone were in many ways typical of the British tourist in the late nineteenth century; Jane Rathbone indicates in her journal that she rarely ventured far from the 'beaten track' and depended on the services of Thomas Cook.⁵⁰ Her travel journal describes visits to Naples, Rome, Perugia and Ravenna, in addition to Florence. However, there is no record of Philip and Jane visiting Jane's sister Alice in Salò or of venturing away from the major Italian cities. As an 'informed traveller' who regularly visited places that were

⁴⁵ Buzard, J., *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and ways to 'culture' 1800-1918*, p.5

⁴⁶ The writer Vernon Lee, pseudonym of the British writer Violet Paget (1856-1935) was described by Henry James as 'the most able mind in Florence'. She wrote widely on many subjects but her love of Tuscany and great knowledge of Italy imbue her writing. Campbell describes Lee's position in Florentine society: 'her villa was an international gathering place and the presence of this famous intellectual inspired independent women of means to settle in the vicinity... her writing shaped the English view of post-Renaissance Italy'. (Campbell, K., (2009) p.98). Lee was an early follower of Walter Pater.

⁴⁷ Cosslett, T., 'Revisiting Fictional Italy, 1887 -1908. Vernon Lee, Mary Ward and E. M. Forster' *English Literature in Transition 1880-1920* (2009) Vol 52. No 3 pp312-328. p.314

⁴⁸ Ward, M., *A Writer's Recollections by Mrs Humphrey Ward 1856-1900* (London: Collins.1918) p.349

⁴⁹ Tambling, J., *E.M. Forster* (London: Macmillan,1995) p.27

⁵⁰ Cook's coupons, first introduced in 1868 by Thomas Cook, could be exchanged at one hundred and fifty European hotels and in the 1870s he introduced the railway ticket, exchangeable on all continental railways. The hotel coupon entitled the holder to a bed, two substantial meals and lights for eight shillings – but no alcohol, as befitted the strict abstainer Thomas Cook. The use of Cook's Coupons to secure other travel services is described by Jane Rathbone in 1888; 'We then went to Naples, and here we had come to the end of our Cook's Coupons, the consequence was they charged a sovereign for landing our luggage'.

Rathbone, J.S., *Recollections of Jane S Rathbone* (Rathbone Papers, Special collections, University of Liverpool Library, 1895) p.85

'off the beaten track', Rathbone was a more independent traveller. He visited his aunt in Salò on at least two occasions and went on to the less known cities of Italy. Often a solo traveller, Rathbone did not rely on the group travel facilities offered by Cooks Tours but took a train from London to Paris, Florence, Milan and Venice. As an artist, his experiences were incomplete if a full immersion in early Italian art, particularly Florentine art, was absent and Rathbone travelled widely to immerse himself.

Florence itself had a quixotic appeal for the British. By 1865 a large Anglo-American expatriate community had already gathered in Italy, particularly in Florence where 30,000 of the city's 200,000 residents were British or American,⁵¹ responding to the wealth of art and antiquities, the well-established intellectual community of writers and artists, the congenial atmosphere and the high degree of physical comfort on offer. We know that Rathbone visited Florence on at least two occasions, the first being the visit recorded in 1878 with his parents. He then wrote to Ford Madox Brown in late 1882 or early 1883 'I have been away on the continent for some months with a friend';⁵² we can expect that Rathbone and his friend included a visit to Florence as part of their tour. However, we have unequivocal evidence that he stayed in Florence in 1887; Rathbone described in a letter to Brown that on his return to Paris from Venice he 'went to see the brothers in the Spanish chapel and thought of you'.⁵³ The Spanish Chapel or *Cappellone degli Spagnoli* is situated within the Basilica of Santa Maria Novella in Florence. A Dominican community and church since the thirteenth century, the richly

⁵¹ Campbell, K., *Paradise of Exiles*, p.9

⁵² Rathbone, H.S. (undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/ 1995/14/86/66

⁵³ Rathbone, H.S., (1887) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/ 1995/14/86/42

decorated Spanish chapel was the former chapter house of the monastery. As the birthplace and home of Luca della Robbia and the site of much of his work, Florence had an additional appeal to Rathbone. Here, he would encounter the work of Luca and Andrea della Robbia on the walls of churches, above Renaissance doorways and within the great *duomo* of Santa Maria Del Fiori. This became the premise for the architectural department of the Della Robbia Pottery, 'the revival of a modelled glazed or enamelled earthenware with coloured grounds for the purposes of architectural decoration'.⁵⁴ In addition to seeing the work of the della Robbias, Rathbone could also visit the contemporary pottery studios of Florence, for example, the family firm of Cantagalli which had been reinvigorated in 1878 by Ullises Cantagalli. The factory was soon successfully producing reproductions of *quattrocento* sculpture and maiolica ware, particularly by the della Robbia studio. It is unlikely that Rathbone would not have visited the factory when in Florence and been inspired by the possibilities presented by this reproduction of the work of the della Robbia.⁵⁵ Additionally, we know that Rathbone also visited Northern Italy. In February 1887 Rathbone wrote to Brown that he had spent a month there 'I had such a nice month in Italy; Salò for a fortnight, then Verona, Padua and Venice'.⁵⁶ When cross referenced with the diary of Alice Briggs, we can see that he had spent Christmas at Salò on Lake Garda with his aunt and family⁵⁷ and in July 1891, Harold wrote to Brown from Capolago where he had travelled with Mathilde Blind. He went on to visit his aunt in Salò in August 1891.⁵⁸ Rathbone had become part of an established tradition which dictated that a study of Italian art was an intrinsic part of an artistic apprenticeship. Friends and supporters

⁵⁴ [Anon], 'The Della Robbia Pottery Industry' *Magazine of Art* (London, Jan 1897) p.6

⁵⁵ Chapter two of this thesis includes a detailed discussion of the relationship between the Della Robbia Pottery and the workshops of late nineteenth century Florence, particularly the factory of Cantagalli.

⁵⁶ Rathbone. H.S., (1887) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/38

⁵⁷ Briggs, Alice S., *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her Family* p.192

⁵⁸ Rathbone. H.S., (1887) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/84 and Briggs, Alice S., *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her Family*, p.222

of the Della Robbia Pottery who studied in Italy included Frederick Leighton (1830-96), who travelled extensively on the continent including several years in Florence as a young man, as did his contemporary G. F. Watts (1817-1904) who spent several years in the city. Rathbone's friend Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo (1851-1942) accompanied Ruskin to Italy in 1874 and remained in Florence to study the art of the Renaissance. William Morris visited Italy for the first time in 1873 with Edward Burne-Jones and found much to admire in the Florentine gothic churches of the city; Santa Croce, Santa Maria Novella and the Baptistery. Morris was less impressed by the Renaissance architecture of the city '(he) could not separate Renaissance buildings from the regimes that commissioned and financed and erected them. These regimes he viewed with increasing loathing as cruel, bombastic and corrupt'.⁵⁹ Despite this Morris did a great deal of merchandising for his company while in the city, obviously attracted by the pottery he found. He wrote to his business partner Philip Webb on April 10th, 1873:

I have bought a lot of queer pots they use for handwarmers (*scaldini*) of lead-glazed wast (?); also, I have ordered a lot of flasks wickered in all sorts of pretty shapes. I suppose they will be in England in about six weeks.⁶⁰

The Pre-Raphaelite painter Maria Spartali Stillman (1844-1927), a close friend and former pupil of Ford Madox Brown and undoubtedly known to Rathbone, lived in Florence for five

⁵⁹ MacCarthy, F., *William Morris - A Life for our Time* (London: Faber & Faber, 1995) p.329

⁶⁰ Morris, W., in Kelvin, N., (ed.) *The Collected Letters of William Morris Vol.1 1848-1880* (Princeton: University Press, 1984) p.185

years from 1878.⁶¹ The potter William De Morgan (1839-1917)⁶² spent increasing amounts of time in Florence and worked in collaboration with Cantagalli. The renowned art historians Bernard Berenson (1865-1959), Herbert Horne (1864-1916) and collector Frederick Stibbert (1836-1906) had all settled in Florence. Horne and Stibbert were long-term residents, supplementing their income from writing with the trading of artifacts and antiques.⁶³ William Gair Rathbone (1849 -1919), cousin of Harold, owned a large villa on the outskirts of Florence and played host to some of the most influential in the city's artistic circles; John Singer Sargent (1856-1925) was a friend of William Gair Rathbone and a version of his painting *Daphne, Garden Fantasia* (1910) is dedicated to 'his friend William Rathbone'.⁶⁴ It is likely that Harold Rathbone was introduced into this society through his cousin.

The craftsman and writer Herbert Horne's relationship with Italy exemplifies the way in which many artists left Britain to settle in Florence as long-term residents. Horne was a skilled architect and craftsman within the Arts and Crafts Movement and he, Selwyn Image and Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo founded the Century Guild of Artists in 1883 with Horne

⁶¹ Maria Spartali Stillman had entered the cultural milieu of London in 1863, along with her sister Christina. Members of a wealthy Greek family, they were at the centre of an artistic circle that included G.F. Watts, the Rossetti family, William Morris and Walter Crane. Spartali became a prolific and talented artist in her own right in the tradition of the Pre-Raphaelites, initially studying under Ford Madox Brown. Following her controversial marriage to the journalist William Stillman, the couple settled in Florence for five years from 1878 and in Rome from 1886. Her painting *Madonna Pietra degli Scrovigni* is inspired by Rossetti's poem of the same name from *Early Italian Poets* and was presented to the Walker Art Gallery in 1884 by Harold Rathbone on behalf of the subscribers.

Frederick, M. & Marsh, J., *Poetry in beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite art of Maria Spartali Stillman* (Delaware Art Museum, 2015) p.18 & 98

⁶² The work of William de Morgan is discussed in more detail in chapter two

⁶³ Berenson had arrived from America in 1888 with a new commission to acquire early Italian art for his patron and went on to build a considerable fortune through attributing Old Masters and advising other collectors. Berenson's accurate attribution of the work of early Renaissance artists through a scientific examination of style and technique, rather than provenance, provided an authentication for art from this period that had previously been nonexistent. Berenson's immense success enabled him in 1900 to rent, then later buy and renovate, the large house and estate of *I Tatti* in the hills above Florence which he and his wife Mary Costelloe lived in for over fifty years. Campbell writes 'Berenson epitomised the best of the Anglo-Florentines: a scholar, a connoisseur, a cosmopolitan exile, he loved all things Tuscan'. (Campbell, K., *Paradise of Exiles*, p.131)

⁶⁴ Bardazzi F. & Sisi C., *Americans in Florence: Sargent and the Impressionists of the New World* (Florence: Palazzo Strozzi, 2012) p.262

becoming an early editor of *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, the journal of the Century Guild.⁶⁵ Chaney and Hall describe him as an 'archetypal polymath: poet, architect, editor, essayist, typographer, eclectic collector, connoisseur of art and music and an art historian of exceptional distinction'. In 1889 Horne was invited to tour Northern Italy for five weeks with the artist Frederic Shields (1833-1911)⁶⁶ in preparation for a church commission. The tour changed the direction of Horne's life. As Chaney and Hall discuss, Horne subsequently 'developed a deep appreciation of Italy which, over the next decade, resulted in his leaving Mackmurdo's architectural practice and abandoning his daily contact with London society to spend more and more time in Florence'.⁶⁷ Horne later wrote

For I hold that the best English Art (in contradistinction of our native, unsophisticated crafts) is essentially an illusive art in its nature, and at its most fortunate moments, has invariably drawn its inspiration from Italy. ... I am old fashioned enough to believe, that when English Art ceases to draw its inspiration from Italy, and through Italy, from the great tradition of Rome and Greece, it will deteriorate and lose its finer and more serious qualities.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ From 1892, the journal was known as *The Hobby Horse*

⁶⁶ Frederick Shields, artist and designer associated with both the Pre-Raphaelites and later with Art Nouveau, visited Tuscany, Umbria, Milan and Rome in 1889 with Herbert Horne. Ford Madox Hueffer described the friendship between Harold Rathbone and Shields:

'...Being of picturesque appearance he was walking with me and Mr. Harold Rathbone, the almost more picturesque originator of Della Robbia ware pottery. This was a praiseworthy enterprise for the manufacture amongst other things of beautiful milk jugs, which, at ten-and-sixpence apiece, Mr. Rathbone considered would be so handy for the Lancashire mill girls when they went on a day's outing in the country. We were in the most crowded part of Piccadilly; the eyes of Europe seemed to be already more than sufficiently upon us to suit my taste. Mr. Rathbone suddenly announced that he had succeeded in persuading the Liverpool Corporation to buy Mr. Holman Hunt's picture of 'The Triumph of the Innocents.' Mr. Shields stopped dramatically. His eyes became as large and round as those of the street child: 'You have, Harold!' he exclaimed, and opening his arms wide he cried out: 'Let me kiss you, Harold!' The two artists, their Inverness capes flying out and seeming to cover the whole of Piccadilly, fell into each other's arms. As for me I ran away at the top of my speed and hid myself in the gloomy entrance under the steps of the orchestra at the back of St. James's Hall. But I wish now I could again witness an incident arising from another such occasion'⁶⁶

Hueffer, F. M., *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections being the Memories of a Young Man* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1911) p.107

⁶⁷ Chaney E. & Hall J., 'Herbert Horne's 1889 diary of his first visit to Italy' *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, Vol. 64 (2002), pp. 69-125, p.73

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p.70

Horne moved permanently to Florence in 1904 and supported himself through his writing, through art dealing and as a tour guide. He bought and renovated the *quattrocento* Palazzo Corso in 1911 as a living museum of Renaissance life. On his death, he left his collection and the palazzo to the Italian state. It is known today as the Museo Horne.

This passage illustrates Horne's belief that all meaningful art draws its inspiration from Italy, and thus from Ancient Greece and Rome. We know that both Mackmurdo and Frederick Shields were close friends of both Harold Rathbone and Herbert Horne⁶⁹. It is therefore likely that Horne and Rathbone were also acquainted and Horne's passion for the art of Florence influenced Harold Rathbone. We can only speculate about this, but note that the Della Robbia Pottery became the consummate example of English craft influenced by the art of Italy in the following decade.

The enthusiasm for Italianate style that developed as the numbers of British middle-class travellers increased meant that an appetite for luxury goods informed by Italian culture was created in Britain; a large-scale response to this could be seen in the Italian Exhibition of 1888, discussed in chapter two. Cantagalli of Florence had successfully exported reproductions of the work of della Robbia and of maiolica ware since 1878; the response of Philip Rathbone exemplifies the way that the returning tourists responded to this stimulus. We know that Philip Rathbone bought a large bas-relief lunette by Cantagalli inspired by *A Madonna and Child with Goldfinch* by Andrea della Robbia which hung in the family home, Greenbank Cottage⁷⁰. Philip Rathbone also owned a Cantagalli tea-set which was copied by the decorators at the Della Robbia Pottery and several pieces of Cantagalli were included in the closing sale of the Della Robbia Pottery as part of Harold Rathbone's own collection. A further example of the way in which the work of the della Robbia family had stimulated an appetite for luxury hand-crafted pieces in this style could be found at the Savoy Hotel on the

⁶⁹ Rathbone, H.S., (undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections ref. MSL/1995/14/86/1/64 for Rathbone's reference to Mackmurdo.

⁷⁰ This piece has been passed through the family to the great-grandson of Philip Rathbone. It is discussed in detail in chapter two, p.150

Strand in London. A large freestanding fountain was commissioned from the Della Robbia Pottery and executed by Harold Rathbone in 1898, after a design by the architect Thomas Collcutt.⁷¹ T.W. Whitley in the *Art Journal* described 'for the architecture of the fountain Mr T.E. Collcutt is responsible, but the design and modelling of the ornament were carried out entirely by Mr Rathbone at his Birkenhead pottery'.⁷² The fountain was fourteen feet in height and stood in the main courtyard of the luxury hotel. 'The general colouring is in blue and creamy white, and the slightly roughened and unequal surface a great improvement upon the usual mechanical smoothness'.⁷³ Described by Whitley as 'Mr Rathbone's fountain in della Robbia ware', the motifs of the della Robbia workshop in Florence are articulated in the bas-relief architectural panels; the blue and white palette, intricately carved borders and putti with crossed wings, a motif repeated frequently in Rathbone's later work. The fountain brought a *quattrocento* aesthetic into the very heart of fin-de-siècle London as returning tourists stimulated a demand for della Robbia that was removed from the halls of the South Kensington Museum and immersed in a commercial marketplace. For a few short years a market was created for the architectural bas-relief of the Della Robbia Pottery by the wealthy middle-classes, who were able to afford these hand-crafted individual pieces.

⁷¹ Thomas Collcutt (1840-1924) was the architect of the Savoy Hotel on the Strand in London, opened in 1889. The hotel was built for the impresario Richard D'Oyly Carte with profits from his Gilbert and Sullivan opera productions. Collcutt began work in the office of George Street. Known for working in free Renaissance style, by the 1890s he was also associated with an Arts and Crafts style. Collcutt was President of RIBA from 1906-08.

⁷² Whitley, T.E., 'The Arts and Industries of Today', *Art Journal* (July 1898) p.222

⁷³ Ibid.

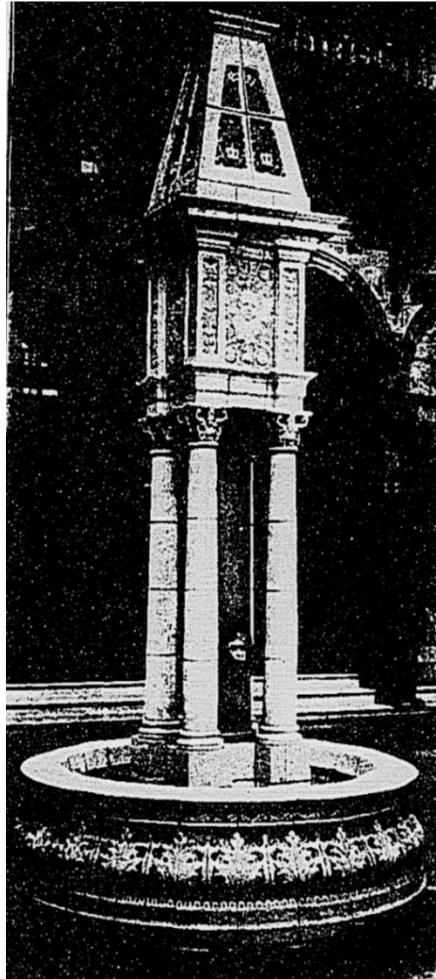


Figure 1. Rathbone H.S., after a design by T.E.Collcutt, (1898), The Della Robbia Pottery, fountain for the Savoy Hotel, London. Glazed Terracotta bas-relief panels, destroyed WW2. Illustration from Art Journal (July 1898) p.222

Rathbone and Ford Madox Brown

After his time at the Slade School, Hyland has identified Rathbone as lodging at 23 Great Russell Street in London in 1881, aged twenty-two, and striving to establish himself as a painter.⁷⁴ The following year approaches were made to Ford Madox Brown to take Rathbone on as a pupil. There is no indication that he was ever encouraged to enter the family banking firm; indeed, his close relatives appear anxious for him to secure an apprenticeship with

⁷⁴ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894- 1906* (2014) p.19

Ford Madox Brown. In September 1882 Philip Rathbone wrote to Ford Madox Brown in Manchester, requesting that the artist take his son Harold as a pupil. Describing Harold's studies to date as 'erratic', his father had become concerned that he should 'really study and become thoroughly trained as well'. Philip Rathbone drew a distinction between 'what I call amateur work and a real apprenticeship as in the old days'.⁷⁵ There is however a certain anxiety weaving through the letter; Philip Rathbone writes that his son Harold has 'mistaken somewhat a very good (impression?) of willfulness for independence' and that 'his wish to be outdoors lately shows a distinct sign of improvement'. Philip Rathbone travelled to Manchester to speak to Brown and it appears that in November 1882 he paid a premium of 200 guineas for his son's training.⁷⁶ At the same time Alice Moore, sister of Harold, wrote to Brown to reassure him about any concerns that Brown may have about her brother. It seems her brother had been 'knocking about Wales and is as a consequence better than when he started'. She was however concerned that Harold Rathbone's letters to Brown may 'strike one as wild and flighty' which implies that her brother's difficulties were psychological rather than physical;⁷⁷ Alice requested that she may visit Brown in Manchester the following week. This is the only known surviving letter to Brown from Alice Moore and we do not know if she did visit Brown in Manchester.

Although the importance of Rathbone's relationship with Brown has been referenced in many previous studies, little detail has been available. Hyland restricts himself to a brief description of Rathbone's contribution to the Manchester Murals, his friendship with

⁷⁵ Rathbone, P.H., (1882), *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/107

⁷⁶ This sum equates to approximately £18,000 today

⁷⁷ Moore, A., (1882) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, National Art Library: MSL/1995/14/86/106. Such a letter, or letters, from Harold Rathbone, have not survived.

Brown's grandchildren and a note that Brown was initially reluctant to accept Rathbone as a pupil.⁷⁸ Hillhouse merely describes Rathbone as a pupil of Brown at the time that Brown was painting the Manchester Murals.⁷⁹ However, this research has uncovered an archive of letters from Rathbone to Brown; the earliest surviving letter from Rathbone is dated May 7th, 1882 and the last one July 16th 1892 but unfortunately Brown's responses have not been found. Rathbone writes to Brown about the minutiae of his life; his friendships, social events, a few details of the paintings he is producing, his travels in Italy and visits to his aunt in Salò. Many early letters contain apologies for his continued absence from his work on the Manchester Murals, for example, in June 1884 he wrote 'I am afraid you will be thinking I am a very bad pupil being away all this time'⁸⁰ His later letters describe his time on Skye, Scotland, as he worked on the illustrations for his epic poem *Dunvegan Castle*.⁸¹ Frustratingly, Rathbone only fleetingly mentions the men and women of influence who he mixed with although we know that he was close to William Rossetti, Mackmurdo, F.G. Stephens, Burne-Jones and Ford Madox Ford. He exhibited his paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery in London and visited Kelmscott, the country home of William and Jane Morris (discussed in chapter three) but gives no details of either event. But the letters give us new insights into Rathbone's experience as a cultural tourist, his friendships with the influential women in his life, his time in Paris at the Académie Julian and, most importantly, his relationship with Ford Madox Brown and his family.

⁷⁸ Hyl and, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906* (2014) p.22. Rathbone's contribution to The Manchester Murals is discussed in this chapter.

⁷⁹ Hillhouse, D., *Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead 1894-1906 – An Interim Report* (Birkenhead: Williamson Art Gallery, 1981) p.8

⁸⁰ Rathbone, H.S., (1884) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/74

⁸¹ Rathbone, H.S., *Dunvegan Castle. A poem. [With illustrations chiefly by the author.]* (London: British Library Historical Print Editions, 1900/ 2011)

In one of his earliest letters to Brown, Rathbone claims that his father had suggested that he approach the great artist 'in order to learn the simple techniques of painting' all the sooner. Rathbone adds that 'it is a little humiliating to find out at the age of twenty-three when one should be well on the way to keeping myself by the trade of painting that one has managed time so injudiciously as to require and lean on one's parents for the simple means of study'.⁸² The combined efforts of his family succeeded and Rathbone started work as a pupil of Ford Madox Brown in 1883 in Manchester, where Brown had been commissioned to paint a cycle of murals depicting the long history of the city.⁸³ Through the Manchester Murals Brown introduced Rathbone to the clear, simple forms of the *quattrocento*. Julian Treuherz comments that the scheme came to be regarded as a model of 'the collaborative ideal of architecture and fine arts, an idea initially associated with the Gothic Revival but later taken over by the Arts and Crafts Movement'.⁸⁴ Harold Rathbone always referred to this time with Brown with the words 'whatever artistic and practical success I have had with the pottery... I attribute mainly to his influence, and I consider it a duty to hand on those traditions to my pupils'.⁸⁵ Rathbone himself was the model for the figure of John of Gaunt in panel five of the Manchester Murals, *The Trial of John Wycliffe*.⁸⁶ Bendiner argues that the murals reveal a tie between Brown and the sweeping, serpentine figures of Art Nouveau; 'the rhythmic

⁸² Rathbone, H.S.,(1883) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, National Art Library: MSL/1995/14/86/74

⁸³ Rathbone, H.S.,(1883) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/7.

Dated April 5, 1883, in this letter Rathbone first refers to Brown as 'my dear Master', suggesting that he started his pupilage then.

⁸⁴ Treuherz, J. 'Ford Madox Brown in Manchester' in *Ford Madox Brown Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer* (London: Philip Wilson, 2011) p.58

⁸⁵ Cooper, J., *The Della Robbia Pottery 1893-1906* [exh. Cat] (London: Jeremy Cooper Ltd, 1980) p.14

⁸⁶ Treuherz, J., *Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer* p.293

responses of the curving bodies to one another are evidence of the Art Nouveau style',⁸⁷ a style that was boldly woven into the artistic devices of both the architectural and *sgraffito* workshops of the Della Robbia Pottery ten years later.

The influence of Ford Madox Brown on Rathbone can be seen in several early pieces of architectural faience from the Della Robbia Pottery, particularly by examining a series using the cartoons designed by Brown for stained glass windows. After Brown's death in 1893 a sale of his studio effects was held. Rathbone bought the series of twenty cartoons drawn by Brown for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company; he then issued them in autotype for use by art students.⁸⁸ The *Magazine of Art* described the designs as 'homely, sincere and convincing',⁸⁹ terms also used to describe the work of the Arts and Crafts Movement; for example, Gillian Naylor proposes that the products of the movement had a 'straightforward, honest craftsmanship'.⁹⁰

From 1895, the Della Robbia Pottery produced a series of architectural plaques inspired by Brown's cartoons, including *Gideon; Elkana and the Dores; The Blessing of Isaac, Mary Magdalene; Peda, King of Kent; King Edward the First and Young Milton*.⁹¹ *The Artist* of 1896 describes how Rathbone carved these in 'the manner of Donatello and the Della Robbia School after the cartoons of his Master, Ford Madox Brown'⁹² and in the bottom right corner is inscribed 'after Ford Madox Brown'. Twelve of these figurative panels were exhibited at

⁸⁷ Bendiner, K., *The Art of Ford Madox Brown* (Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997) p.71

⁸⁸ [Anon] *St James Gazette* (April 23, 1895) p.12

⁸⁹ [Anon] 'A note on the Cartoons of Ford Madox Brown' *Magazine of Art*. (Jan 1896) p.29

⁹⁰ Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influences on design theory* (London: Trefoil Publications Ltd, 1990) p.102

⁹¹ Wildman, S., *Waking Dreams: The Art of the Pre-Raphaelites* (Art Services International, Virginia, 2004) p.126

⁹² [Anon] 'The Della Robbia Pottery', *The Artist*. (November 1896) p.521

the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society fifth exhibition in 1896 but the whereabouts of many of the pieces is presently unknown.

The cartoon of *Gideon* was used by both Brown and Rathbone. In 1863, a large stained-glass window was designed by Ford Madox Brown for Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Company which incorporated the cartoon (Figure 1). The window was commissioned for the Church of St. Martins on the Hill, Scarborough, Yorkshire and includes the figure in the right-hand pane (Figure 3). The cartoon for the figure is now in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum but it is highly likely that it, or an identical copy, was included in the large number of drawings that Harold Rathbone bought at Brown's posthumous sale. The figure of *Gideon* by the Della Robbia Pottery (Figure 2) is an almost identical representation of Ford Madox Brown's figure in the cartoon, with an additional detailing in the floor. The child-like figure wears full armour and carries a shield and the swirling acanthus leaf design in the background becomes noticeably tactile when executed in glazed terracotta; the tiled floor adds perspective and depth to the pictorial space. The same design was also incorporated into a stained-glass window commissioned for Harden Grange, Bingley, Yorkshire, where the figure represents *Lancelot*.⁹³

⁹³ Cooper (1980) attributed the plaque to *St Michael*, exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery in 1900, a misattribution noted by Wildman (2005).



Figure 2 (left): Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (Ford Madox Brown), design for stained glass window. 1862, pencil and wash, Victoria and Albert Museum, London.



Figure 3 (right): The Della Robbia Pottery (Harold Rathbone), 'Figure of Gideon after Ford Madox Brown', 1896, glazed terracotta, Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington



Figure 4: Morris, Marshall, Faulkner and Co. (Ford Madox Brown,) Figure of Gideon, 1863, stained glass, St. Martins on the Hill, Scarborough.



Figure 5: The Della Robbia Pottery (Harold Rathbone), signed 'after Ford Madox Brown', Alfred Ye Greate (1895), relief panel in glazed terracotta, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead

The panel *Alfred ye Greate* is signed 'H.S. Rathbone - after Ford Madox Brown' (Figure 4). The original cartoon by Brown was made in 1878 as part of his 'Great men' scheme. This cartoon was never executed in stained glass and Treuhertz reports that the latter part of the series was intended to promote Brown as a historical painter when he was being considered for the Manchester Murals commission.⁹⁴ The panel by Rathbone is not a reproduction of Brown's cartoon, for example Brown's figure holds a sword, a volume of poetry and lyre, whereas Rathbone has depicted the English king with an orb and sceptre. Rathbone has drawn on Brown's stylistic influence however and the figure of Alfred bears a strong resemblance to that of John of Gaunt in the Manchester Murals; arguably Rathbone painted a self-portrait in homage to Brown. The ceramicist Janet Holmes has commented on the exceptional quality of execution in these panels by Rathbone, but particularly in this panel.⁹⁵

Brown's cartoons and the glazed terracotta interpretations by the Della Robbia Pottery recall the simplicity of medieval art. Angela Thirlwell proposes that Brown's experiences as he travelled to Italy was central to his own predilection for primitive art,⁹⁶ therefore underpinning the development of Harold Rathbone's own delight in the work of the *quattrocento* masters. Ford Madox Brown had spent the first twenty-five years of his life in northern Europe and commenced his own artistic training there. He had first travelled to Italy in 1845 with his first wife Elizabeth, primarily to seek relief from the symptoms of consumption that made it impossible for her to remain in London. In Rome, Brown

⁹⁴ Treuhertz, J., *Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer* p.274

⁹⁵ Conversation with Janet Holmes, ceramicist, Rathbone Studio, Birkenhead (Mar 20, 2017)

⁹⁶ Thirlwell, A., *Into the Frame: The Four Loves of Ford Madox Brown* (London: Pimlico, 2010) p.35

encountered the work of early Italian Masters, which was recently beginning to gain credibility within the British art establishment. Julian Treuherz argues that Brown's art then took a new direction. His palette became lighter and almost shadowless, in imitation of the work of the early fourteenth and fifteenth century painters he saw, and he pioneered the practice of painting the entire canvas *en plein air*, striving, as he later wrote, for pure realism in painting.⁹⁷ On his return Brown described the work of these 'primitive' artists as 'guileless and inexperienced', and singled out Fra Angelico and Benozzi Gozzoli for their 'simplicity and a childlike sincerity'.⁹⁸ Brown did not intend these comments in a pejorative manner but to reflect an art that signified moral worthiness and suggested innocence and faithfulness, sentiments that were in accord with the deep evangelical fervour that was abroad in Victorian Britain. Brown's increasing disenchantment with contemporary academic painting led directly to a search for its opposite values through 'the study of those imperfect though truthful masters'.⁹⁹ This suggestion that early Italian art was in some sense more 'truthful' and pleasingly imperfect was, of course, more fully articulated in Pre-Raphaelitism and became a fundamental principle of the Arts and Crafts Movement. An example of this influence of early Italian art can be seen in *Oure Ladye of Saturday Night* (Figure 5) about which Elizabeth Prettejohn comments 'Brown had just returned from Italy when he first designed it, and the composition clearly refers to an early Renaissance mother and child'.¹⁰⁰ Treuhertz points out that Brown would have seen many paintings of the Virgin with Jesus in

⁹⁷ Treuhertz, J., *Ford Madox Brown: Pre-Raphaelite Pioneer* p.15

⁹⁸ Bendiner, K., *The Art of Ford Madox Brown* p.10

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* p.10

¹⁰⁰ Prettejohn, E., 'Ford Madox Brown and History painting', *Visual Culture in Britain* (2014) Special edition pp.241-257, p.242

Italy and many features of this work, including the patterned cloth of honour and canopy above her, were frequent motifs in early Renaissance work.¹⁰¹



Figure 6: Ford Madox Brown, *Oure Ladye of Saturday Night (Our Ladye of Good Children)*, 1847–61, pastel, watercolour, chalk, gold paint. Tate Collection.

¹⁰¹ Pettejohn also argues that the work of Brown and the Pre-Raphaelites provoked frequent controversy; was their work to be considered as revivalism or part of a new realism? She enlarges this theme by emphasizing that Rossetti had no doubts of Brown's innovative style, exemplified in a newspaper article describing the impact of *The Last of England* (1856). In this, Rossetti discusses the labour involved in painting the whole 'under the open sky' as 'it involves much immense forethought and preparation to insure(sic) success, and has hardly ever been attempted before, even in pictures of the new naturalistic school'. Ibid., p.242

While in Italy Brown also encountered the work of the German artists Johann Friedrich Overbeck and Peter von Cornelius, members of the early nineteenth century brotherhood of German Romantic painters of The Brotherhood of St Luke, or the Nazarenes. This group was, like Brown, instinctively anti-establishment and anti-academic. The preoccupations of the Nazarenes were colour harmonies and simplicity of line set within a moral and religious framework. They aimed to pre-figure the Humanist aesthetics of the Medici court and to recreate the exquisite harmonies of the early Renaissance Tuscan and Umbrian painters including Perugino, Fra Angelico, Piero della Francesca and Signorelli. The end of the *quattrocento* had marked the beginning of what is now referred to as the High Renaissance and art increasingly reflected in a neo-classic Greco-Roman humanism which separated art from religion; Evelyn Welch observes that it is widely perceived this separation was the moment when 'individualism, nationalism, secularism and capitalist entrepreneurialism were born'.¹⁰² Lionel Gossman claims that it was the Nazarenes who revived interest in early Italian art in the nineteenth century by rejecting this neo-classicism and advocating the return of the Christian values that they perceived in this medieval and early Renaissance art¹⁰³ and Hilary Fraser that 'it was Ford Madox Brown who made contact with the Nazarenes... and brought them to the attention of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, John Everett Millais and William Holman Hunt'.¹⁰⁴

This period in Brown's life coincided with the publication of Ruskin's *Modern Painters* and his call for art to reflect that 'truth to nature is part of the truth to God; to him who does not

¹⁰² Welch E., *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1997) p.9

¹⁰³ Gossman, L., 'Unwilling Moderns: The Nazarene Painters of the Nineteenth Century' *Nineteenth Century Art Worldwide*. Vol 8, Issue 2. (2009)

¹⁰⁴ Fraser, H., *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p.94

search it out, darkness, as it is to him that does, infinity'.¹⁰⁵ Treuhertz describes how Ruskin's *vade mecum*, positing 'truth to nature', accompanied Brown's development as an artist; his use of vivid colours and intense natural detail became hallmarks not only of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood but of Brown himself. A careful examination of Harold Rathbone's landscape painting reveals the same close observation. In *The Banqueting Hall, Conway Castle* (Figure 6), Rathbone has fully articulated Ruskin's clarion call of over forty years before, echoing the fundamental principles of his mentor Ford Madox Brown, a rendering that can also be seen in *The White Farm (1882)* and *A Country Landscape (c1890)*.

¹⁰⁵ Ruskin, J., 'Modern painters' in Cook, E. T. and Wedderburn, A., (eds.) *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12) Vol.1, part II, p.101



Figure 7: Harold Rathbone, The Banqueting Hall Conwy Castle, 1888, oil on canvas, National Museums of Liverpool.

The Banqueting Hall, Conwy Castle depicts two young girls playing in the moat surrounding the ruins of Conwy Castle, North Wales. Both children gaze out of the painting towards the viewer. Central to the scene are the ruins of the medieval castle at Conwy, heavily overgrown with ivy and other climbing plants. The eye is drawn through a series of gothic arches in the middle ground from which rise a series of ruined towers. A flock of black birds, possibly ravens, fly around the turret. This is a romantic and picturesque rendering of this imposing medieval castle and Rathbone's depiction of the plants and vegetation is notable in its photographic execution of leaves and branches and the play of light upon the foliage. The plants are central to the composition and become the focus of the gaze; God, represented here by nature, will inevitably overwhelm mammon, represented by the castle. The children are merely players at the scene. A limited palette of greens, browns and ochres creates a realism that is at odds with the romantic subject matter but encapsulates all that was important to the Pre-Raphaelites; strict botanical accuracy, archaising compositions and sharp, clear colours.

Harold Rathbone remained a pupil of Ford Madox Brown until 1886 when he moved to Paris as a student at the Académie Julian. This was an exciting time to be a young artist in the 'City of Light'. His correspondence with Brown continued;

I have never been so thoroughly well and consequently happy in my life. The tremendous 'go' in the atelier where at present in our one room there are from 150 to 200 at work gives one an impetus and brings out the best work in one...twenty-five fellows were working their very eyes out to get their canvases completed on the last day of the sitting, in the other room next door there was a tremendous band of music consisting of two harps,

two violins, a flute and our big drum which belongs to the atelier and is carried out in the boulevard every time.¹⁰⁶

With a reputation as one of Europe's most illustrious schools of Art, the Académie attracted the finest students. Rathbone's contemporaries included Alfonse Mucha,¹⁰⁷ Eduard Vuillard and Paul Serusier who later became part of the 'Nabis' school. Arthur Trevechin Nowell studied in the same *atelier* as Rathbone; his first great history painting was bought by Liverpool Corporation for display in the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool in 1897 and we can speculate that these young men became friends as they studied together in the heady, effervescent atmosphere of Paris in the 1880s.¹⁰⁸

Few of Rathbone's surviving paintings interrogate the stylistic innovations of Impressionism and the *belle époque*; only one has been attributed to Rathbone that shows a possible influence from his time in Paris. *A View of a House and Farm Buildings* (Figure 7) demonstrates an open composition and visible brushwork, a subject matter that passes a fleeting glance at everyday life and an interest in the effects of light and weather on the landscape. In this loose and informal composition, a group of buildings, possibly by a river or lakeside, are depicted in a way that is unlike any other known painting of Rathbone and may also show the influence of Turner; Philip Rathbone owned a *Liber studiorum*, a collection of

¹⁰⁶ Rathbone, H.S.,(1886) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/103

¹⁰⁷ Alfonse Mucha (1860-1939) The Czech-born Mucha was a painter, lithograph artist and leading poster artist between 1890 and 1900. His distinctive style was known as 'Style Mucha', synonymous with Art Nouveau which suggests a direct connection between Rathbone's schooling and the Art Nouveau designs of the *sgraffito* workshop at the Della Robbia Pottery. Mucha is best known for a series of iconic posters for Sarah Bernhardt, including *Gismonda (1894)* and *La Dame aux Camélias (1896)*.

¹⁰⁸ Arthur Trevechin Nowell (1862-1940) was a classmate of Rathbone at the Académie Julian. He was a classical painter in the Pre-Raphaelite tradition, who had already exhibited at the Royal Academy and won both a gold medal and a Turner prize for landscape. He had first studied at the Manchester School of Art.

drawings, etchings, mezzotints and copper plates published by J.M.W. Turner between 1807 and 1809.



Figure 8: Harold Rathbone (attributed), A view of a House and Farm Buildings, undated, oil on panel, William Morris Gallery

Ford Madox Brown established an aesthetic style that incorporated the values of early renaissance Italian art and passed these values onto his pupil. Although Ford Madox Brown died in the year before the establishment of the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead, it is certain that he would have supported his former pupil in the venture. As Gillian Naylor argues, William Holman Hunt acknowledged 'decorative design as part of a true artist's ambition' but Ford Madox Brown was the only artist associated with the Pre-Raphaelites who could truly be considered a designer. Naylor continues by arguing that as a founder

member of the firm Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co. (1861–1875), Brown's designs came closer to the 'robust, crude simplicity as defined in *The Nature of Gothic*'.¹⁰⁹ Naylor's description may also be applied to many of the products of the Della Robbia Pottery but in the eyes of Harold Rathbone this characteristic of 'robust, crude simplicity' was both admirable and commensurate with the aims of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Rathbone had returned to the family home at Greenbank Cottage in 1888 after his exhilarating days in Paris; by this time, he was approaching thirty years old and yet to establish himself in his chosen field despite training at three of the most illustrious schools of the day – the Slade Art School, the Académie Julian and as a pupil of Ford Madox Brown. Rathbone's surviving correspondence with Brown continued until 1892; by this time, he was living in London and seeking to establish himself as an artist, with some limited success. Contemporary newspaper reports confirm that he successfully exhibited his paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery in Bond Street and at the Hogarth Club in Dover Street in London. In 1893 Rathbone had his own exhibition at the Hogarth Club.¹¹⁰ Both these galleries were an important site of display for artists of the Aesthetic Movement. The Liverpool Autumn Exhibition of Painting and Sculpture at the Walker Art Gallery consistently displayed Rathbone's work; between 1884 and 1916 his work was represented annually and Rathbone's letters to Ford Madox Brown regularly discuss commissions and sales. However, Rathbone was still dependent on his parents for financial support, demonstrated by a letter of 1892; writing to Brown from Dunvegan, Isle of Skye, he describes how his 'equanimity had been considerably upset' by his father, Philip Rathbone, requesting that his son repay the

¹⁰⁹ Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Studio Vista, 1971) p.99

¹¹⁰ Talbot-Coke, C., 'People, Places & Things' *Hearth & Home* (June 23, 1893) p.176

£12.10/- that his 'account at the office' was overdrawn by. Rathbone expressed considerable outrage at this demand, writing

It seems ridiculous to me that anyone who works as incessantly and perseveringly as I have been doing ... should have to think about paltry money affairs, but I am too proud to beg from my father, with whom I have had some rather hot words written over your unsold fresco at Liverpool which I thought might have advanced better.¹¹¹

He later asked Brown for a loan of £10-£15. It appears from a previous letter that although Brown had paid for the basic expenses of Rathbone's trip to Switzerland with Mathilde Blind,¹¹² the travellers were dividing the other expenses. Blind had reimbursed him with an autographed book of her poems.¹¹³

By 1892 a picture emerges of a man who, at thirty-two years old, had exhibited at several London galleries and at the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition in Liverpool yet was still unable to support himself by his art. Rathbone was viewed by some in the family circle as the 'wild, unstable artist'.¹¹⁴ The letters from Rathbone to Brown suggest that Rathbone was a man of ill-health who lacked tenacity and a commitment to both his art and studies with Brown. A review of his career from his time as student at the Slade Art School demonstrates a mundane and rather lacklustre trajectory with a *catalogue raisonné* of portraits of family and friends, seascapes of the west coast of Scotland and of Welsh landscapes. However, in the next two years he uncharacteristically developed a sustained enthusiasm for the applied

¹¹¹ Rathbone, H.S., (1892) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/54.

¹¹² Rathbone's friendship with Mathilde Blind is discussed in detail later in this chapter.

¹¹³ Rathbone, H.S., (1892) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/52

A copy of Mathilde Blind's *Dramas in Miniature* is inscribed with the words 'To my dear friend Harold Rathbone from Mathilde Blind. November 1891' and 'In memory of the Gotthard Pass August 1891'

Colbeck, N., *A Bookman's Catalogue: The Norman Colbeck Collection Vol 2* (University of British Columbia Press, 1987)

¹¹⁴ Robinson, J., *Relatively Rathbone* (Rathbone Papers, University of Liverpool Library, 1992)

arts and in ceramic making, becoming sufficiently confident to invite Conrad Dressler to move his family from London to a studio pottery in the north of England and to convince several of the most prominent of Merseyside's merchants to invest in the venture. What had happened to Harold Rathbone to change him into an imaginative and self-assured man of business with the confidence to assemble a formidable board of investors? The thesis proposes that his close friendship with Mathilde Blind, writer, poet, feminist, confidante of Ford Madox Brown and at the heart of artistic circles in London, was the catalyst for this new dynamism.

Mathilde Blind (1841-1896)

Rathbone's *A Portrait of Mathilde Blind* (Figure 8) was painted in 1889 and successfully entered the Autumn Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery in 1890. In *Chapters from Childhood*, Juliet Soskice, grand-daughter of Ford Madox Brown, relates that the sittings were fractious affairs that resulted in tears from Harold and abrupt departures from Mathilde.¹¹⁵ Rathbone wrote to Brown of the 'difficulties he had to overcome' and suggested that he had great challenges in arranging sittings with Mathilde; writing 'she has, as you can guess, been going out a great deal and of course gets up too late to do anything. Last night a banquet and only down at 1.30 – we were to have a grand séance of two hours today!' Rathbone goes on to ask if he can set up in Brown's studio in the artist's absence so he can get on but philosophically notes that 'the only way with Mathilde is to take what you can get'.¹¹⁶ There is, however, no evidence in Rathbone's letters that he was 'broken' by the sittings with

¹¹⁵ Soskice, J., *Chapters from Childhood* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1973) p.41

¹¹⁶ Rathbone, H.S., (1889) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, National Art Library ref MSL 1995/14/86/79

Mathilde, as suggested by Thirlwell, or that his 'overwrought religiosity' foundered in the face of Mathilde's agnosticism;¹¹⁷ by 1889 their friendship was long-standing and they had visited Paris together on at least one occasion.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ Thirlwell, A., *Into the Frame: The Four Loves of Ford Madox Brown* p.230

¹¹⁸ Rathbone wrote to Brown from Paris in 1886; 'I am returning next week after I have shown our little friend round a little if she will deign to accept my services'.¹¹⁸

Rathbone, H.S., (1886) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/85



Figure 9: Harold Rathbone, Portrait of Mathilde Blind, 1889, pastel on paper, Private collection.

Mathilde Blind moved easily in the artistic circles of English society. James Diedrick positions her as a central figure in Bohemian society from the 1860s until her death in 1896.¹¹⁹ Blind's radical views did not endear her to all; in an undated letter from Florence, Mary Robinson closed a letter to Ford Madox Brown thus 'I have heard a rumour that Miss Blind is ill – I hope not seriously. I am truly very sorry but Mamma told me not to write to her'.¹²⁰ Blind was a radical iconoclast; as an enthusiastic traveller, she also brought her experiences as a cultural tourist to the literary world of Bohemian London, travelling widely throughout Europe, particularly in Switzerland, Italy and France. Blind consistently disregarded the mores of Victorian society to gain her own independence and overcame ill health, poverty and prejudice to maintain her position at the heart of London society. Diedrick has observed that Blind identified herself with the writer Maria Bashkirtseff,¹²¹ placing herself at both the centre of late nineteenth century debates about decadence and the New Woman and with Bashkirtseff's 'artistic ambition, rage at gender constraints, her iconoclasm – and she (Blind) expected her contemporaries to do so as well'.¹²² Moncure Conway noted that Blind was deeply interested in the education of women and 'one of the last physical uses she made of her failing physical strength was to visit the female colleges of the country to inquire into their methods'.¹²³ Newnham College, Cambridge, was a beneficiary under her will.

¹¹⁹ Diedrick, J., A Pioneering Female Aesthete: Mathilde Blind in 'The Dark Blue' *Victorian Periodicals Review*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2003. p.210

¹²⁰ Robinson, M., (undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL 1995/1/88/4

¹²¹ In 1890 Mathilde Blind published a well-received translation of *The Journal of Maria Bashkirtseff*: Bashkirtseff, M., (trans. Blind, M.) *The Journal of Maria Bashkirtseff* (London, Cassell & Co., 1890)

¹²² Diedrick, J., 'The Hectic Beauty of Decay: Positivist Decadence in Mathilde Blind's Late Poetry'. *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol.34 no.2, *Fin de Siècle Literary Culture and Women Poets* (2006) pp. 631-648. p.635

¹²³ Moncure Conway in Blind's funeral address reported in *London Daily News*, 2nd Dec 1896.

Blind was born in Germany in 1841; both her mother and stepfather were left-wing political activists who were imprisoned and then expelled from Germany, eventually settling in St. Johns Wood, London. Blanc, Garibaldi, Mazzini and Karl Marx became frequent visitors to the Blind home, which Diedrick writes 'had become both a haven for Europe's radical exiles and an influential intellectual salon'. Richard Garnett, Blind's lifelong confidant and eventual biographer, noted that it was Mathilde's upbringing that nurtures her independence and 'unconquerable defiance' particularly within the lexicon of 'the women's question' and the proto-feminist movement.¹²⁴ That Blind was a charismatic figure is noted by Garnett in his undoubtedly partisan memoir *Mathilde Blind: My Recollections*. He writes 'from the time of her coming into a ballroom to the time of her leaving it she would be besieged by applicants'.¹²⁵ She never married and enjoyed a freedom and independence denied to most Victorian women; as a scholar, linguist and self-proclaimed atheist Blind claimed her place in society on her own terms, supporting herself by her writing and literary criticism. Harold Rathbone seems a most unlikely companion for the dazzling Mathilde but his correspondence indicates that this was the case.

The friendship between Rathbone and Mathilde Blind appears to have developed from 1886 although Rathbone had probably met her during his apprenticeship in Manchester. He wrote to Brown on the 16th July 1886 'I went after all to Miss Blind's party and enjoyed it very much'¹²⁶ and goes on to say how delighted he was to meet Mrs. Brown and her daughter

¹²⁴ Diedrick, J., 'A Pioneering Female Aesthete: Mathilde Blind' in 'The Dark Blue' *Victorian Periodicals Review* (Vol. 36, No. 3, 2003. p.211

¹²⁵ Garnett, R., in Symonds, A., (ed.) *The Poetical Works of Mathilde Blind* (London: T F Unwin, 1900) p.12

¹²⁶ Rathbone, H.S., (1891) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/86/34

Mrs. Hueffer there.¹²⁷ Brown appears to have initiated the friendship as Harold thanks him for arranging the invitation;¹²⁸ henceforth Harold writes of Mathilde often.

The relationship between Rathbone and Blind develops in an intriguing way; in 1891, they travelled together to Lucerne and St Gotthard in Switzerland. Blind suffered from a chronic chest complaint and had frequently travelled to the south of France to seek relief. It is clear from letters that, for her, this journey was undertaken to alleviate a distressing deterioration in her condition. The journey appears to have been financed by Ford Madox Brown. Harold wrote to him to describe their journey in an undated letter, but by cross-referencing with a letter from Mathilde to her friend Richard Garnett, the journey was undertaken in August 1891.¹²⁹ In the letter to Brown, Rathbone describes the poor state of Mathilde's health as they travelled by train from England to Basle. That Brown had paid for both their tickets is suggested thus 'in the tickets that you got us, no allowance was made for the journey from Basle to Lucerne and 10F each had to be paid – I don't know if Cooks informed you that you were booked through. If so, of course they must refund. I shall keep the index half of the ticket as proof'.¹³⁰ An alternative interpretation suggests that Brown himself originally intended to travel with Mathilde but Rathbone took his place. Possibly the recent death of Brown's wife, Emma or possibly his own failing health prevented this. It seems that the travellers had difficulty in getting rooms in Lucerne but eventually secured ones on the

¹²⁷ Rathbone is referring to Brown's second wife, Emma Hill (1829 -1890) and their daughter Catherine (1850-1927). Catherine married the writer Francis Hueffer. Their son, the acclaimed author Ford Madox Ford (1873-1939) wrote a well-received biography of his grandfather.

¹²⁸ Blind, M., (1891) Correspondence Vol. III 1885-1896, n.d. Richard Garnett LLD. British Museum., British Library Ref. 61929

¹²⁹ *ibid.*

¹³⁰ Rathbone, H.S., (1891) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/ 1995/14/86/84

fourth floor 'overlooking the beautiful lake with a vista of the mountains that reminds one of the Himalayas'. Mathilde's letter to Richard Garnett of August 23rd, 1891 is written 'in the clouds, Hotel Mate, Griswold, Capolago' and describes how she and Rathbone had taken a trip on the funicular, opened only the year before; 'am pleased to have experience of the funicular (mountain train). This is a new sensation to be borne up and up to the steep and abrupt perpendicular incline almost like flying... up you go to heaven like Jesus Christ himself!'¹³¹ Rathbone left Mathilde in Capolago to travel on to Salò to visit his aunt. Blind wrote to Richard Garnett on August 30th 1891:

My Dear Friend... Harold Rathbone left me on Thursday and in spite of the lakes and mountains and memories of Rousseau, Byron and Shelley which haunt these vine-clad shores I feel that in my present state of nervous exhaustion with still constantly having bronchial asthma there is something very depressing in the complete solitude in which I am left.¹³²

Despite this, Rathbone's letters confirm that he and Blind enjoyed a close friendship and I propose that Mathilde Blind influenced Rathbone's decision to launch a high-risk commercial enterprise in several ways. Blind's influence on Rathbone was not solely through their shared experiences as travellers and a mutual friendship with Ford Madox Brown. Her influence also came through her indomitable spirit and fierce independence, galvanising Rathbone; their friendship provides an important key to understanding the sudden confidence of Harold Rathbone. It is also likely that Blind influenced the working practices of the Della Robbia

¹³¹ Blind, M., (1891) *Correspondence Vol. III 1885-1896, n.d. Richard Garnett LLD. British Museum.*, British Library Ref. 61929

¹³² Blind, M., *Correspondence Vol. III 1885-1896, n.d. Richard Garnett LLD. British Museum.*, British Library Ref. 61929
The friendship between Rathbone and Blind continued until her death in 1896, for example, the social pages of *Hearth and Home* report how he accompanied Blind and her parents to a dance in June 1893 in Queensgate, London.
Hearth and Home (London, England), June 22, 1893; p.176

Pottery; Rathbone promoted and encouraged the talents and interests of the female decorators in a way that was at odds with many coeval working practices.¹³³

Blind was a close friend of the German industrialist and chemist Robert Ludwig Mond and his wife Frida, with Mond appointed as one of Blind's literary executors. Mond subsequently became one of the major shareholders in the Della Robbia Pottery, owning fifty shares. We do not know why Ludwig and Frida Mond committed to the Della Robbia Pottery in this way but it is reasonable to suppose that their dear friend Mathilde would have encouraged them to do so. Blind spent the weeks before her death in 1896 at the Mond's home at Winnington Hall, Northwich, Cheshire. This memorial medallion (Figure 9) is a reduced version of the marble monument in St Pancras cemetery by Lanteri that was commissioned by Ludwig Mond after Mathilde's death; at least three versions of the medallion were cast.¹³⁴

¹³³ See Hawley, K., *The lives and works of the women artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Oxford Brookes University PhD thesis, 2001) for a detailed account of many of the women who worked at the pottery

¹³⁴ In 1905 Ludwig Mond commissioned the building of the new Westminster Children's Hospital in Vincent Square, London, in memory of his wife. The adjacent Nurses home on Udall Street SW1, built at the same time, is decorated with two bas-relief roundels in the style of Andrea della Robbia's *tondi* for the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence. These roundels are similar in style to the bas-relief production at the Della Robbia Pottery and as a major shareholder it is unlikely that Mond would go elsewhere to commission the *tondi*. However, Colin Simpson of the Williamson Art Gallery cannot categorically authenticate the pieces as made by Della Robbia Pottery; the use of the deep cut-away technique of the bas-relief has not been identified as being used at the pottery since the departure of Conrad Dressler and at this point in the pottery's fortunes it would have been difficult for them to realise a project of this scale. Further archival research may reveal the provenance of these pieces. The exterior of the Westminster Children's Hospital is decorated with bas-relief *tondi* from a later period. These have been identified by Hans Van Leemen as being probably manufactured by Doultons in the 1930s.



Figure 10: Edward (Edouard) Lanteri, *Mathilde Blind*, 1898, Bronze medallion, National Portrait Gallery, London

Mathilde Blind's large and well-attended funeral service was reported in the *London Daily News*. The address given by her friend Moncure Conway praised her loyalty, intelligence and literary genius. The funeral was attended by Harold Rathbone, Ford Madox Hueffer, Ludwig Mond and many from the Bohemian London artistic and intellectual circle that Mathilde had long been part of. The Daily News reports that 'at the close of the process of cremation, the ashes of the deceased were placed in a beautiful urn of the Della Robbia Pottery. The urn which was Grecian in shape, was decorated with three very fine groups of figures, emblematic of Faith, Hope and Charity in low sculptured relief on a ground of exquisite blue-green colour'.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ *London Daily News* (2nd Dec 1896). The present whereabouts of the urn made by the Della Robbia Pottery are unknown.

William Holman Hunt (1827-1910)

The interest in Early Italian art and travel to Italy that was an important feature of Rathbone's relationship with Brown and Mathilde Blind was also reflected in his friendship with the painter William Holman Hunt. Hunt became an influential figure in the life of Harold Rathbone in the last decade of the nineteenth century and an examination of the limited amount of documentation available indicates that this influence was more significant than was previously supposed. In Hunt's work, we see a resonance between *quattrocento* art and his own nineteenth century painterly practice, for example in *The Lady of Shalott* (1886-1905), *The Triumph of the Innocents* (1876-87) and *The Shadow of Death* (1869-73),¹³⁶ but it is also conceivable that he first introduced Rathbone to the practicalities of making bas-relief sculpture. Hunt travelled to Italy on many occasions and his *catalogue raisonné* includes several works that were painted there, including *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1868). The chapter now examines the connection between Hunt's responses to Italianate forms and their likely impact on the artistic practice of Harold Rathbone.

In 1893 William Holman Hunt painted a small portrait of Harold Rathbone (Figure 10). Harold's brother Edmund described it as 'very like the sitter, whose dreamy temperament is vividly conveyed'.¹³⁷ Within the milieu of the Aesthetic Movement, to be described as possessing a 'dreamy temperament' was not pejorative and when the craftsman C. R. Ashbee

¹³⁶ Jacobi, C., *William Holman Hunt – Painting, Painter, Poet* (Manchester University Press, 2006) p.177

¹³⁷ Bronkurst J. *William Holman Hunt: Volume 1 & 2: A Catalogue Raisonné* (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art) (Yale University, 2006)

wrote the following words, he was envisioning the dreamer as the force that carried forward

William Morris's explication of 'Art is man's expression of his joy in labour'¹³⁸

When all is said & done, your dreamer is the most powerful force in the whole body politic. It is he who puts the music and song into literature, it is he who fits the imagination into the machinery, it is he who stamps the character and the beauty onto craftsmanship'¹³⁹

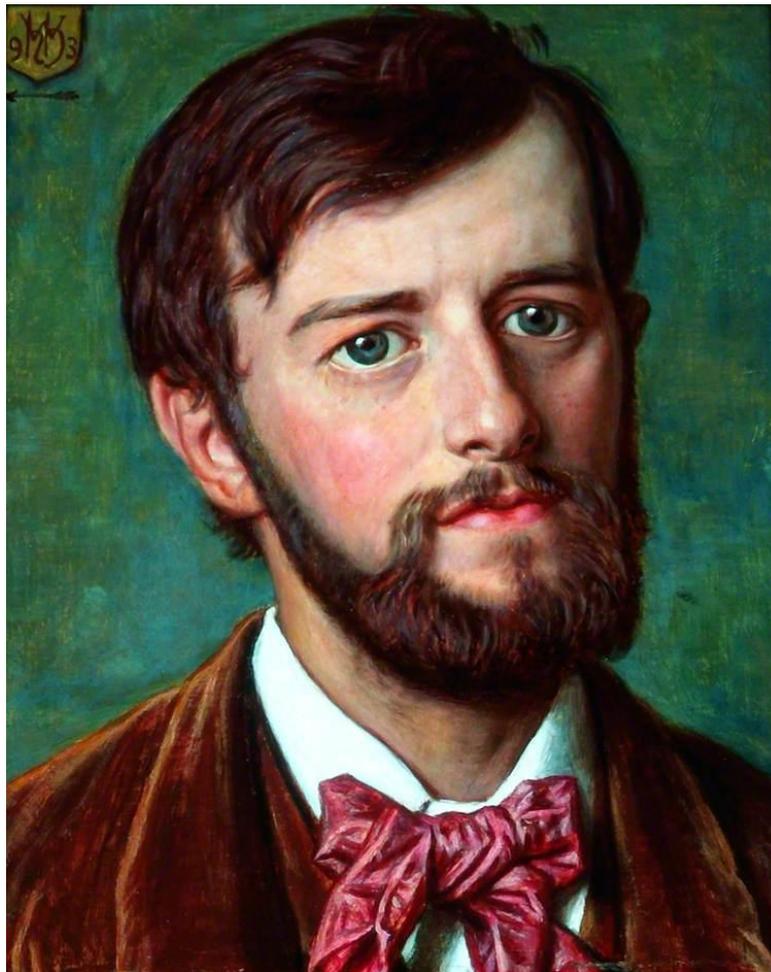


Figure 11: William Holman Hunt, *Harold Rathbone*, 1893, oil on panel, National Museums of Liverpool

¹³⁸ Morris, W., in Morris, M., (ed.) 'Art under Plutocracy' *The Collected Works*, (Cambridge University Press, 2012) vol. 23 p.173

¹³⁹ Ashbee C.R., *Socialism and Politics: A study in the readjustment of the Values of Life* (London: Essex House Press, 1906) pp.13-14

This sympathetic portrait of Rathbone shows the head and shoulders of the subject against a plain blue/green background. He was thirty-four years old when the painting was started, with a full beard and moustache. His face is fully lit on the left-hand side, and in deep shadow on the right and the colours are intense and jewel-like in their quality. The green background emphasises the colour of the eyes, the clothes and the subject's mouth and skin tones. Hunt achieved the intensity of colour by exploiting the reflective qualities of the white ground that he invariably laid on the primed canvas or panel, with the aim of achieving an enamel-like finish. Hunt generally added copal (amber) to the paint pigments, in the manner of early Renaissance painters. This portrait is painted on a wood panel and Carol Jacobi comments that Hunt's choice of support displays a preference for a smooth rigid appearance.¹⁴⁰ Rathbone wears a chestnut velvet jacket and waistcoat with a distinctive crimson bow tie. He gazes in unsmiling reverie into the mid-distance and does not engage with the viewer. In the top left of the canvas are Hunt's initials and the year '93'. The mood of the portrait is intimate and implies relaxed friendship. Rathbone's face is close to the picture plane in a manner that Hunt generally reserved for those who were dearest to him. Behind, there is little pictorial space and the quiet air of the portrait, the enamel-like colours and composition recall the Renaissance portraits that Hunt admired. F. G. Stephens found the portrait 'hard, yet brilliant, solid and vivacious'.¹⁴¹ Hunt became a prominent supporter of the Della Robbia Pottery and one of the six members of the Della Robbia Pottery council. There is little surviving documentation concerning the relationship between Hunt and Rathbone and our knowledge of the nature of Hunt's relationship with the Della Robbia Pottery is nebulous.

¹⁴⁰ Jacobi, C., *William Holman Hunt – Painting, Painter, Paint* (Manchester University Press, 2006) p.124

¹⁴¹ Stephens, F. G., *The Athenaeum* (23 June 1894) p.810

However, a friendship between Hunt and Harold Rathbone did develop and Holman Hunt had a direct influence on the artistic direction of the pottery.

William Holman Hunt was one of the original members of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood (PRB), inspired by the simple piety and uncluttered forms of *quattrocento* art made before Raphael. Tim Barringer describes the paradox at the heart of Pre-Raphaelitism as lying in the yearning for the past, expressed in the emulation of the simple forms of early Christian art, and the 'intensely modern nineteenth century realism and reformist zeal' that inspired this group of young artists. This paradox, Barringer goes on to state, was resolved through the belief of the PRB that the early Italian painters also observed the natural world and absorbed their insights into their work, rather than repeating the conventional forms of their predecessors.¹⁴² As a founding member of the PRB, Holman Hunt remained committed to these principles throughout his life and was often referred to as 'the last Pre-Raphaelite'.¹⁴³ This meaningful commerce with nature was an articulation of Ruskinian advice in *Modern*

Painters:

go to Nature in all singleness of heart...having no other thoughts but how best to penetrate her meaning, and remember her instruction; rejecting nothing, selecting nothing, and scorning nothing, believing all things to be right and good and rejoicing in the truth.¹⁴⁴

In 1899, William Rossetti recalled the fundamental belief of the Pre-Raphaelites as 'an artist, whether painter or writer, ought to be bent upon defining and expressing his own personal

¹⁴² Barringer, T. J., *Reading the Pre-Raphaelites* (London: Weinfield and Nicholson, 1998) p.13

¹⁴³ Fiona MacCarthy describes this as 'the beginning of the age of gazing. The Pre-Raphaelites were soon to rediscover what they saw as a lost innocence of vision, scrutinizing with an almost maniacal intensity the blades of grass, the veins of leaves, the bumps on pebbles. Holman Hunt's poor sheep and goats were subjected to scrutiny for days' MacCarthy, F., *William Morris* (London: Faber and Faber, 1994) p.17

¹⁴⁴ Ruskin, J., 'Modern painters Vol I' in Cook, E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn, A. (eds.) *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-1912) p.624

thoughts, and that they ought to be based on a direct study of Nature, and harmonised with her manifestations'.¹⁴⁵ In a lifetime of such a pursuit, William Holman Hunt travelled south in search of legitimate backgrounds for his work, seeking authenticity in such disparate landscapes as Egypt, Israel and in the lushness of Tuscany. He sought out and spent time with the Nazarene painters in Rome and was a regular visitor to Florence. Hunt's connection with Florence was not always happy – his first wife Fanny had died there after giving birth to their first child and is buried in the Anglican cemetery. Carol Jacobi draws a strong correlation between the emotional mindscapes that Hunt presents in his art and the felicity of his personal relationships. For example, after the death of Fanny in 1866, Hunt does not return to England with his ailing newborn son but felt compelled to remain in Florence to complete the painting *Isabella and the Pot of Basil* (1868), which was not going well. The painting was intended as a memorial to his late wife, using her features for the face of Isabella. As Isabella weeps over the pot of basil and watered it with her tears, the painting became a symbol of Hunt's own loss and grief. In the same manner, Jacobi argues that the resurrection of the children depicted in *The Triumph of the Innocents* reflects his happier home life after marrying Fanny's younger sister Edith in 1875.¹⁴⁶ Hunt subsequently returned to Italy and to Florence on many occasions and made at least four trips to Palestine and Egypt in his enduring quest for authenticity and 'truth to nature', which he believed could not be found by copying a photograph or sketch but by an authentic recreation of the natural world through direct observation and painting *en plein air*.

¹⁴⁵ Rossetti, W., *The Germ: Thoughts Towards Nature in Poetry, Literature and Art*, (London: Stock, 1901) p.4

¹⁴⁶ Jacobi, C., *William Holman Hunt: Painter, Painting Paint* p.167

Hunt had maintained a connection with Liverpool since 1851 when he had won a prize of fifty shillings for his painting *Valentine Rescuing Sylvia from Proteus* at the Liverpool Exhibition and frequently submitted paintings to the Autumn Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery. The Autumn Exhibitions were highly successful events and the profit generated was used to add to the growing collection of the Walker Art Gallery, for example, in 1881 over £5000 was taken at the door and works worth over £12,000 sold.¹⁴⁷ Harold Rathbone's father, Philip Henry Rathbone, was instrumental in organising many of the Autumn exhibitions.¹⁴⁸ The friendship between Holman Hunt and Harold Rathbone probably strengthened in 1890 when Rathbone undertook to raise a public subscription to buy Hunt's large and elaborate painting *The Triumph of the Innocents* for the Walker Art Gallery. The painting was eventually purchased by the Walker Art Gallery in 1891.

The original price asked by Hunt for the painting was 5500 guineas, of which, according to Hunt, £1000 had been promised by Liverpool Corporation.¹⁴⁹ Harold Rathbone wrote to William Rossetti in February 1891 asking for a letter of support for the fundraising project that he could

¹⁴⁷ Darcy, C. P., *The encouragement of the fine arts in Lancashire, 1760-1860* (Manchester: Chetham Society, 1976) p.58

¹⁴⁸ Philip Rathbone played a vital role in ensuring that the importance of the new Walker Art Gallery was established with the Liverpool Corporation and tax-paying public, on whom the operational costs of the new gallery fell. Exemplified in a acclaimed public speech in 1875, Philip Rathbone demonstrated the capacity of art to 'purify the tastes and express the consciousness of a people'. Liverpool's strength lay in its ability to organise highly successful Autumn Exhibitions, a success due in large part to the work of Philip Rathbone who led the development of the Gallery in the 1880s. The Walker Art Gallery's growing permanent collection was funded by the profits of the Autumn Exhibitions which enabled Rathbone to buy high-quality work from both British and Continental artists. 'Rathbone's approach to collecting was driven not only by a desire to obtain high-quality work through his best metropolitan sources but also by a determination to popularise the Gallery by choosing artists and subject matter that would appeal to a wider audience'.

Moore, J., 'The Art of Philanthropy: The Formation and Development of the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool' *Museum and Society*. (2) (Jul 2004) p.68-80

In his last will and testament Philip Rathbone left several paintings in trust to the Mayor Alderman and citizens of Liverpool to be hung in the Walker Art Gallery: 'The Shumanite (sic) woman' by Albert Moore, the six oil paintings purchased by me at the sale of the late Mr Graham's pictures, and the picture of the Madonna and Child being a copy of a picture by Raphael'.

Rathbone, P., (1895), Last will and Testament (HM Courts and tribunal service, Leeds, Ref. Rathbone 00/01/1900).

¹⁴⁹ Letter from Hunt to Harold Rathbone, 28 Dec 1890, Liverpool University Library Special Collections. MS 13.1.28.

send to the press for publication. Rathbone also stated his intent to ask a similar favour of Ford Madox Brown. He continued

I am nearly dead with the work...except for one Saturday afternoon and one day between Xmas and New Year I have not literally had five minutes to myself during the last month – out for dinner every night and all for the cause as Morris would say. When this is all through I shall be glad enough to get to my own work, which I long to do.¹⁵⁰

Rathbone also complained of some ‘stupid philistine letters in the paper against the scheme, which have taken time and trouble to reply to’, hence him requesting a letter of support from William Rossetti. Ultimately, a total of £3500 was raised which Rathbone convinced Hunt to accept¹⁵¹ and thus ensured that the painting would hang in the Walker Art Gallery alongside important works by Dante Gabriel Rossetti and Millais. The purchase of the painting ensured that the Walker Art Gallery acquired a further significant work from the Pre-Raphaelite school and, providentially, the soon to be established Della Robbia Pottery, would benefit from the support of William Holman Hunt. However, Rathbone went to extraordinary lengths to secure the painting as his letter to Rossetti demonstrates. A journal of Jane Rathbone in 1877 suggests that the subtle impact of the religious framework of that time had had a powerful effect on the teenage Harold Rathbone and propelled his efforts.

Although commanding Unitarian women reformers such as Mary Carpenter and Josephine Butler could challenge and subvert that framework to become influential and effective agents of social change, ordinary women were expected to conform to social norms.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ Letter from Harold Rathbone to William Rossetti, dated Feb 2, 1891, University of British Columbia Library, Angeli-Denis collection RBSC-ARC-23/12

¹⁵¹ Minutes of sub-committee, Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool, May 19, 1891 (H S Rathbone file, Walker Art Gallery archive, National Museums of Liverpool)

¹⁵² An example of this can be found in Sarah Ellis, a author of the widely read *Young Ladies Reader* (1845), who advises that ‘there is an honest pride which every true heart has a right to feel and England’s pride should be in the inviolate sanctity of her household’s hearths’.¹⁵² Sarah Williams comments that Ellis, along with a universally distributed plethora of religious pamphlets, magazines, sermons and literary works, subscribed to the ‘powerful thematic triumvirate’ of gender, spirituality

Widely held and divisive religious antipathies had developed in the nineteenth century because of diverging doctrinal opinions, leading to the formation of religious factions. Much of this division was based on the schism in this fervently religious society between evangelical, such as the Unitarian Rathbone family, and Catholic traditions. As Knight and Mason posit 'Evangelical identity was constructed partly in terms of what they were not, and opposition to Catholicism was integral to their growing self-consciousness'.¹⁵³ Pemble proposes that 'it is arguable that during the nineteenth century British people of property and influence were more obsessed with religion than at any time before or since'.¹⁵⁴

In 1877 Jane Rathbone wrote

About this time, I had strong leanings towards Catholicism; I had read Newman and a good many books that were lent to me by the priests who were using their influence to give up ritualism and embrace their faith. I worried myself a great deal and often went to mass in every Roman Catholic Church in Liverpool. It was thought desirable that I should go away... it was arranged that I should go abroad and stay with my sister in Ramleh, near Alexandria. Philip was much distressed and this was the most unhappy year of my marriage.¹⁵⁵

Jane was exiled from her husband and children and travelled alone on a journey of nearly two thousand miles. She does not state who decided that it was desirable that she should go away and it is not clear how many months it is before Jane is permitted to return to her immediate family but she writes that 'Philip met me at Charing Cross. When I saw him I could

and home that underpinned British culture and ensured that the position of ordinary women within coeval social hierarchies remained inviolate.'

Williams, S., 'Is there a Bible in the House? Gender, Religion and Family Culture' in Morgan, S. & de Vries, J., (eds.) in *Women, Gender and Religious Cultures in Britain, 1800–1940* (Oxford: Routledge, 2010) p.11 Ibid. p.11

¹⁵³ Knight, M. & Mason, E., *Nineteenth-Century Religion and Literature: An Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2006) p.125

¹⁵⁴ Pemble, J., *The Mediterranean Passion*, p.55

¹⁵⁵ Rathbone, J.S., (1877) *Recollections of Jane S Rathbone*, (Rathbone Papers, Special collections, University of Liverpool Library, 1895) p.52

Although she does not herself specify the year, by cross-referencing the account with the journal of her sister, it can be identified as 1877.

not speak for suppressed joy and emotion, it gave me actual pain in my head'.¹⁵⁶ There is no further mention in the journals of Jane's religious disquiet nor any indication that she pursues her nascent interest in Catholicism. Alice confirms in her own journal that Jane arrived alone in Egypt in 1877 and complains that nobody warned her that 'Jeanie was coming away to prevent her turning R.C.'.¹⁵⁷ Harold Rathbone was an impressionable eighteen-year-old when his mother was sent to the middle east and the thesis proposes that he responded to the exile by becoming an effective campaigner for the purchase of a major work by William Holman Hunt that articulates the setting and subject of his mother's journey.

The Liverpool version of *The Triumph of the Innocents* is the second of three interpretations that Hunt made. Hunt began work on this canvas during a trip to Palestine in 1876. He had found a suitable location during his preparation for the earlier version on the 'the plains of Philistia around Samson's country'¹⁵⁸ and now started work on a larger canvas during a twelve-day trip to the Philistia plain. Hunt insisted that both the accuracy of the landscape setting and garb in the painting must be authentic; Judith Bronkhurst proposes 'this may have been as a result of the mistaken nineteenth century view that Palestinian costume had remained unchanged since the birth of Christ, while his belief in the timelessness of the landscape validated his campaign to depict sacred subjects in their original setting'.¹⁵⁹ *The Triumph of the Innocents* (Figure 12) depicts the flight of the Holy Family to Egypt, with Joseph leading Mary and the infant Jesus on a donkey. They are travelling through an

¹⁵⁶ Rathbone, J.S., (undated) *Recollections of Jane S Rathbone*, (Rathbone Papers, Special collections, University of Liverpool Library, 1895) p.64

¹⁵⁷ Briggs, Alice, *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her family*, p.141

¹⁵⁸ Bronkhurst, J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné (The Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art)* (Yale University Press, 2006) Vol.ii, p.22

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

uninhabited landscape with only the flicker of firelight in the background. The family is surrounded by garland-laden children who represent the souls of the infant boys who had been massacred by Herod's troops in Bethlehem and were just recognising their own martyrdom. The children are bathed in a supernatural light and walk amongst globes rising from the eternal river of life, containing images of the Patriarchal prophecies, including a tree of life.¹⁶⁰ Bronkhurst assesses that Hunt's exposure to the work of the Old Masters whilst in Italy was a crucial factor in the composition of the painting¹⁶¹. An examination of the procession of children in the foreground of this painting reveals a strong concordance with the *Cantoria* bas-relief in the Duomo in Florence by Luca della Robbia (Figure 11). Based on the line in Psalm 150, 'Praise Him with the Sound of the Trumpets', the *Cantoria* presents a jubilant line of dancing children with musical instruments. In Holman Hunt's painting the procession of dancing children have metamorphosed to become the spirits of the massacred boys who have been restored to wholeness and health as, in Holman Hunt's words, 'Jesus recognizes the spirits of the slain Innocents . . . They reveal the signs of their martyrdom. Garlanded for the sacrifice, bearing branches and blossoms of trees, they progressively mark their understanding of the glory of their service' and the child in the foreground examines himself to see his wounds have vanished.¹⁶² In the review of the work by F. G. Stephens in *The Portfolio* of 1886, Stephens commented that 'In all art I know of no company of children more gloriously beautiful than these';¹⁶³ however, Stephens also criticised Hunt for mixing both realism and supernatural elements in the painting which caused a rift with Hunt that

¹⁶⁰Landow, G., *Replete with meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (1979).

¹⁶¹ The first and smallest version, an oil sketch, was begun in Palestine in 1870; (Fogg Art Museum Collection, Harvard University Art Museums). The main version in the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool was begun in 1876. A slightly larger replica was painted in 1883-85. (Tate)

Bronkhurst, J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné* Vol.ii, p.223

¹⁶² Landow, G., *Replete with meaning: William Holman Hunt and Typological Symbolism* (Yale University Press, 1979) (<http://www.victorianweb.org>. accessed 22.02.17)

¹⁶³ Stephens, F., 'The Triumph of the Innocents', *The Portfolio* (April 1885) pp.80-82

was never repaired. In a Slade lecture given at Oxford University in March 1883, John Ruskin proclaimed that 'I can say with deliberation that not even the most animated groups and processions of children which constitute the loveliest sculpture of the Robbias and Donatello, can rival the freedom and felicity of motion, or subtlety of harmonious line in the happy wreath of these angel-children' and described it as 'the greatest picture-painting of our time'.¹⁶⁴

Keith Roberts makes a convincing argument that the central theme throughout a lifetime of Holman Hunt's work is 'innocence'- for example, innocence betrayed (*Awakening Conscience*, 1853); innocence falsely accused (*The Scapegoat*, 1856); innocence threatened (*The Lady of Shalott*, 1886-1905), culminating in *The Triumph of the Innocents*.¹⁶⁵ Holman Hunt's journey to Palestine in 1875/76 to paint this picture coincided with Jane Rathbone's exile to that same region when Rathbone was a young man. I propose that the commitment that Rathbone demonstrated in ensuring that the painting was secured for the Walker Art Gallery was fired by an association that he made between the flight of the exiled Holy family rendered in *The Triumph of the Innocents* and his own mother's exile to Egypt. Rathbone demonstrated an extraordinary level of tenacity in raising the public subscription to buy the painting for Liverpool. He had been involved in fundraising efforts previously, for example in the purchase by public subscription of *Madonna Pietra degli Scovigni* by Maria Spartali Stillman in 1884¹⁶⁶ but his letters to Brown demonstrate that Rathbone found this later enterprise exhausting. Rathbone also made great efforts to secure a buyer for the third

¹⁶⁴ Ruskin, J., 'Realistic Schools of Painting' *The Art of England, Lectures given in Oxford. Lecture I* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1884) p.16

¹⁶⁵ Roberts, K., 'Holman Hunt in Liverpool & London' *The Burlington Magazine* (1969) Vol.111 No.794. pp.315-321

¹⁶⁶ Frederick, M. & Marsh, J., *Poetry in beauty: The Pre-Raphaelite art of Maria Spartali Stillman* (Delaware Art Museum, 2015) p.98

version of the painting. Completed in 1896, it was purchased by John T Middlemore of Birmingham for 6,000 guineas following 'intensive lobbying' by Harold Rathbone.¹⁶⁷ Originally loaned to Birmingham Art Gallery, it was given to the Tate collection in 1918. The Liverpool version had been secured several years previously and it is unclear why Rathbone should have such an interest in securing a purchaser for the third version. Although we cannot know for certain if this dedication came from a deep-seated sense of injustice on behalf of his mother, a connection between the two events is plausible.



Figure 12: Luca della Robbia, *Cantoria (The Singing Choir)*, 1431-38, Museo dell'Opera dell Duomo, Florence

¹⁶⁷ Bronkhurst, J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné* Vol.ii, p.257



Figure 13: William Holman Hunt, *The Triumph of the Innocents*, 1876-87, oil on canvas, National Museums of Liverpool

In addition to the subtle influence of his mother's exile propelling Rathbone's commitment to the purchase of the painting, we can surmise his interest was also stimulated by his knowledge of the *quattrocento* figures of Luca della Robbia in Florence. A comparison of the forms of the *Cantoria* and *The Triumph of the Innocents* with two polychrome terracotta pieces by Aphra Peirce and Harold Rathbone (Figure 13) for the Della Robbia Pottery reveals that the form of the young dancing child in each panel is clearly echoing the procession in the *Cantoria* and *The Triumph of the Innocents*. A band of cloth runs through the fingers of the child as if the swaddling bands that had restrained them in life had been removed by death and resurrection through martyrdom. The panels are executed in a limited palette of a blue background with the figures rendered in white slip and demonstrate the influence of the earliest work of Luca della Robbia in the *Cantoria*. *The Triumph of the Innocents* is a conduit that links the Italian art that Rathbone would come to emulate in the Della Robbia Pottery with the forms of Pre-Raphaelitism that he aspired to in his painting



Figure 14: The Della Robbia Pottery (A J Peirce & Harold Rathbone), Cherubs, 1896 and 1897, polychrome earthenware panels, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead

A limited archive of letters between Holman Hunt and Harold Rathbone has survived. Dated from 1890 to December 1891¹⁶⁸ there is a marked difference in tone to those exchanged with Ford Madox Brown and Rathbone does not refer to himself as ‘student’ or to Holman Hunt as ‘master’. Anne Clark Amor notes that the two men liked each other on first sight¹⁶⁹ and a letter from Hunt to Rathbone dated 28 December 1890 confirms that Rathbone was certainly visiting Hunt’s London home at that time.¹⁷⁰ Clark Amor describes three bas-reliefs in the style of Luca della Robbia that Hunt displayed prominently in his drawing room at Draycott Lodge. A contemporary photograph shows two of the pieces clearly visible¹⁷¹ and we know that one of those pieces was *The Madonna adoring the child with God the Father, six cherubs and a dove* by the workshop of Andrea della Robbia.¹⁷² Hunt and Rathbone shared both a longing for an informed contact with Italian art and an admiration for the work of the *quattrocento* sculptor; Rathbone would have become familiar with the pieces in Hunt’s collection and the men would have undoubtedly discussed these significant *objets d’art*.

Holman Hunt was also experimenting with his own production of bas-relief sculpture in the style of Luca della Robbia, reported in *The Pall Mall Gazette* in 1891. The article notes that the work was intended as a studio prop to serve as a background for the painting *The Lady of Shalott* (1886-1905) (Figure 14).¹⁷³

¹⁶⁸ H. S. Rathbone file, Walker Art Gallery archive, National Museums of Liverpool

¹⁶⁹ Clark Amor, A., *William Holman Hunt: The True Pre-Raphaelite* (London: Constable & Co. 1989) p.243

¹⁷⁰ H. S. Rathbone file, Walker Art Gallery archive, National Museums of Liverpool

¹⁷¹ Clark Amor, A., *William Holman Hunt – The True Pre-Raphaelite* p.243

¹⁷² Bronkhurst, J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné* Vol.i, p.272

¹⁷³ [Anon] ‘Art Notes’, *The Pall Mall Gazette* (July 1st 1891) p.1



Figure 15: William Holman Hunt, *The Lady of Shalott*, 1886-1905, oil on panel, Manchester City Art Gallery

Three bas-reliefs were designed by Hunt and prepared by E B Bromfield for *The Lady of Shalott*; *Hercules in the Garden of the Hesperides*, *The Vision of Scipio*, (seen top left) and *Floating Female Figures and Putti* (top right), depicting the Fates attendant on the planets, stylised with classical nudes and globes. We do not know when Rathbone first experimented with ceramic production and the execution of architectural bas-relief but the prospect of his

first experience being with Hunt in 1891 for *The Lady of Shalott* is a tantalizing one. Bronkhurst identifies the project to produce these bas-reliefs as dating from 1891 but this was not the first time that Hunt is documented as designing and executing this type of design. In this portrait of his son Cyril Holman Hunt (1880) (Figure 15), we can see that the trees in the background of the painting are echoed in the wood and gesso frame; the frame was designed and probably executed by Hunt inspired by a 'work in Hunt's collection now known to be a nineteenth century copy after Andrea della Robbia'.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Bronkhurst, J., *William Holman Hunt: Volume I & II: A Catalogue Raisonné* p.244

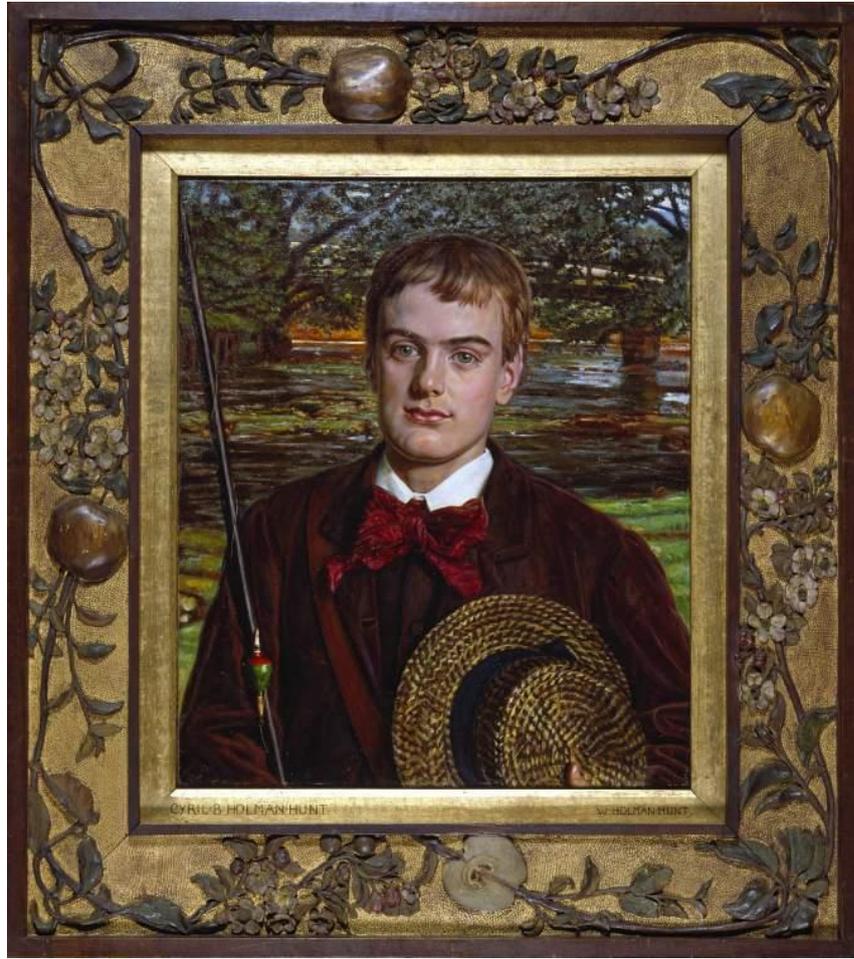


Figure 16: William Holman Hunt, 'Cyril Benoni Holman Hunt, The fisherman', 1880, Oil on canvas, Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge

The artist's son, then approximately twelve years old, wears a chestnut velvet jacket and waistcoat with crimson bow-tie that is markedly similar to those featured in the portrait of Harold Rathbone (Figure 10). He holds a rod and straw boater as he prepares for a leisurely day's fishing. The background of the painting is rendered in freely worked horizontal bands of colour and is in marked contrast to the figure of Cyril which is carefully executed in similar rich jewel-like colours as in Figure 10 and with a composition that is also reminiscent of a Renaissance portrait.

Through the compositional forms of the figures in *The Triumph of the Innocents* and as Rathbone reacted to the emotional mindscapes that puncture the intense physicality of the

painting, we can trace some of the impact of Hunt's work on the pottery. Additionally, Hunt's modelling in the bas-relief style of the della Robbia studio to prepare for *The Lady of Shalott* during this period may have been an important antecedent in preparing Rathbone to produce his own architectural faience. Hunt's friendship with Harold Rathbone continued after the purchase of *The Triumph of the Innocents* and in 1893 he agreed to be appointed as a founding council member of the Della Robbia Pottery. Details of Hunt's involvement in the pottery are sparse although Hyland suggests that he took a 'reasonably active interest'. In 1895 Hunt wrote in the *Pottery Gazette* to raise support for renewed financial support for the pottery stating:

we cannot review the past without recognising that no art grows in a day...for the time of its attempt to get on its feet some crudity and awkwardness in its struggles should be a welcome sign of life. It does artistically show signs of vigour and health.¹⁷⁵

At present, there are no further records to establish the nature of his involvement with the Pottery but the friendship with Rathbone seems to have endured. In 1907, an exhibition of pictures and drawings by Hunt was held at the Walker Art Gallery and then in the Kelvingrove Gallery in Glasgow. Rathbone is listed in the exhibition catalogue as a lender to both events; *Portrait of Harold Rathbone* (1893) (Figure 10) and *The Gazelle, Desert of Gizeh* (1854)¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁵ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906* (2014) p.73

¹⁷⁶ National Art Library: Catalogue of exhibition of pictures and drawings by W. Holman Hunt, O.M., D.C.L. Kelvingrove Art Gallery. 1907. Ref. 1244-1907

Harold Rathbone and a Literary Response to Italy

Nineteenth century art critics and writers assumed that their readers had travelled abroad; as we have seen, tourism increased exponentially in the second half of the century. Buzard comments that 'travel literature about the continent seemed to grow in almost self-perpetuating fashion because it was both symptom and contributing cause of the new atmosphere of the crowd'.¹⁷⁷ Writers who travelled to Italy and described it for the benefit of travellers and tourists were, of course, anticipating that their own written account would 'make its way out of the textual morass and into a putatively direct and meaningful relationship with the place it describes'.¹⁷⁸ John Ruskin encouraged the creation of an art that moved away from the neo-classicisms of the previous centuries and found inspiration in earlier and more simple forms and Anna Jameson and then Walter Pater created a new framework for evaluating early Italian art.

The new category of visitor, the Cooks tourist, also needed to navigate a way to experience the art and culture of Italy; they relied on the advice given in the many guidebooks that proliferated. Two of the most influential were published by Murray from 1836 and Baedeker, first published in English in 1861 and became an essential part of the experience of the tourist. The country was invariably viewed solely through a prism of high culture that was mediated by Murray and Baedeker as the handbooks regulated the behavior of the tourist to the point where there was little contact

¹⁷⁷ Buzard, J., *The Beaten Track: European Tourism, Literature and Ways to 'Culture' 1800-1918* p.160

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p.156

between the tourist and everyday Italian life. In 1826 Anna Jameson described her own experience as a cultural tourist through the voice of the narrator; ‘During our stay in Florence it has been one of my favourite occupations to go to the Gallery or Pitti Palace, and placing my portable seat opposite to some favourite pictures, minutely study and compare the styles of the different masters’.¹⁷⁹ Jameson’s experience was exceptional; from the mid eighteenth century onwards, guidebooks had been directing tourists on a highly partial and selective itinerary that left little time for minute and detailed study.¹⁸⁰ Murray’s *Handbook for Northern Italy* was first published in 1842 and revised throughout the 1840s by Francis Palgrave and John Ruskin. Ruskin wrote his own guidebook, *Mornings in Florence: being Simple Studies of Christian Art for English Travellers* (1875) to stem the influence of Murray’s guides¹⁸¹ and to direct experiences of the thousands of tourists who were visiting Italy for the first time. In a well-known diary entry of 1874, Ruskin described how he ‘lay long awake devising ways and planning attack on Mr. Murray’s guides’¹⁸² and *Mornings in Florence* was his response to the prescriptive nature of *Murray’s Handbooks* and the increasingly

¹⁷⁹ Jameson, A., *Diary of an Ennuye* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826) p.329

¹⁸⁰ Sweet, R., ‘British Perceptions of Florence in the Long Eighteenth Century’, *The Historical Journal*, Vol 50, No.4 (Dec 2007) pp. 837-859, p.848

The cultural tourist had some respite from relentless sight-seeing. The reading rooms of the Gabinetto G.P. Vieusseux, in the Palazzo Strozzi on via Tornabuoni provided both a affluent Florentines and visitors to the city with convivial reading rooms to find journals and leading periodicals sent from across Europe, to meet friends and to re new acquaintanceships. The surviving ledgers give us a unique insight into the world of the nineteenth century tourist. The signatures of some of the most influential figures in nineteenth century are registered in this most evocative of archives: Henry James, William Thackeray, Emile Zola and Mark Twain, *Dostoevsky*, *John Singer Sargent* and Edith Wharton. Jane Rathbone is registered as staying at the Hotel Gran Bretagne in October 1875 and paying for one week’s entrance to the Vieusseux although it was not uncommon for visitors to stay in the city for three months and more on a prolonged continental tour. There is no other record of Jane Rathbone in the ledgers but her sister Alice Briggs was a frequent long-term visitor to the city and from 1888 onwards appears to have visited the reading rooms whenever she was in Florence. There is no entry for Harold Rathbone in the ledgers – as a young man dependent on his parents for financial support, he may have begrudged paying the entrance fee - but many hundreds of visitors registered to join during their stay in Florence. The Vieusseux archive illustrates the changing nature of cultural tourism to Florence; few of these visitors were scholars or connoisseurs, but ordinary tourists who relied on Cooks Coupons, guidebooks and specialist handbooks for instruction and guidance.

¹⁸² Ruskin, J., in Evans, J. & Whitehouse, J.H., (eds) *The Diaries of John Ruskin* (Vols 1-2) (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959) p.808

popular *Baedeker* guide. However, Lori Brister concludes that although Ruskin was aiming to provide the traveller with a broader knowledge and better understanding of art history and aesthetics, he had been so closely engaged with Murray's handbooks that he was unable to resist providing the reader with his own beaten-track itinerary and commentary on what 'ought to be seen'.¹⁸³ Ruskin was scathing when confronted with a new class of traveller who arrived in large parties and relied on the prescriptive advice of a guide book but was in many ways culpable; many of these new travellers would have had their first introduction to the enchantments of Italy through his books and lectures. Sheldon shows that these guides were 'crucial in shaping the tastes of tourists in Italy' and that their itineraries appear to have been faithfully followed by thousands of visitors to Florence and other Italian cities.¹⁸⁴ By producing luxury goods that wove together the motifs of *quattrocento* Italy, Rathbone hope to capitalise on the newly-shaped tastes of returning tourists and create a market for his goods.

The guides contained recommendations for hotels, restaurants and travel arrangements and were supplemented with copious notes that orchestrated the experience of the tourist by dictating not only the itinerary and sites of culture that were to be visited but even recommended the optimal time of day to visit, for example in this entry from Murray's

Handbook of Rome and its Environs (1871):

The scene from the summit is most impressive and there are few travellers who do not visit the spots by moonlight in order to realise the magnificent descriptions in *Manfred*, the only description that has ever done justice to the wonders of the Coliseum.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Brister, L., in Broome-Saunders, C., (ed) *Women, Travel Writing and Truth* (London: Routledge, 2014) p.63

¹⁸⁴ Sheldon J., 'Inspired by Florentine original: Rathbone and the Della Robbia' in Sheldon, J., (ed) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) p.56

¹⁸⁵ Murray John., *A Handbook of Rome and its Environs* (London: John Murray, 1871) p.53

In a slender handbook that only pertains to Rome, there are at least six quotes from the poetry of Byron - the penumbra of English Romanticism was firmly cast over the pages of prosaic instruction. Barbara Schaff argues that by using these quotations the reader is coaxed to view Italy in a certain way; 'Italy is not only familiarised but appropriated for the British, as Italy is marked off as cultural capital for the British or perhaps even as part of British literary heritage'.¹⁸⁶ Scholarly research has examined the relationship between nineteenth century thinking and early Italian art,¹⁸⁷ articulated here by Rachael Teukolsky:

from the 1860s onwards, fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Italian culture was seen to embody many qualities that Victorian thinkers wanted to appropriate, with its flourishing of classical scholarship, its visual artistry, and its prizing of individualism captured in the bold type of the 'genius' inventor or artist.¹⁸⁸

John Ruskin was amongst the most significant of the writers who sought to appropriate the culture in the way that Teukolsky describes. Dinah Birch writes, 'Ruskin's voice pervades Victorian thought' and from the time of his first publication *Modern Painters (1843)*, written to celebrate the work of J.M.W. Turner, Ruskin was 'a commanding presence within the cultural debates of the Victorian period, and he made an enduring mark on later thinkers and writers. It is not possible to trace the development of nineteenth century culture, or its legacies, without knowledge of his work'.¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ Schaff, B., 'John Murray's Handbooks to Italy: Making Tourism Literary' in Watson, N., (ed.) *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth Century Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009) p.113

Despite the impact that large numbers of British tourists had on infrastructure, Walchester argues that this was not a 'colonialisation',

In Walchester, K., *'Our Own Fair Italy': nineteenth century women's travel writing and Italy 1800-1844*. (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) p.9

¹⁸⁷ In addition to previously cited works by Pemble, Walchester, Buzard and Pfister, a large body of academic research has been undertaken within the framework of cultural tourism to Italy in the nineteenth century. Excellent examples include works by Hibbert, Grewe and Fraser. (see bibliography)

¹⁸⁸ Teukolsky, R., 'Walter Pater's *Renaissance (1873)* and the British Aesthetic Movement.' *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth Century History*. (2012) In Felluga (ed.) *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*.

¹⁸⁹ Birch, D., (ed.) *John Ruskin Selected Writings* (Oxford University Press. 2004) p.ix

John Ruskin (1819-1900)

In 'Industry without Art is Brutality', Amy Woodson-Boulton proposes that because of Ruskin's visual evangelism 'it was thus the role of the artist to act as an eye-witness whose sight testified to the glory of nature as God's creation'.¹⁹⁰ As Ruskin wrote in *The Stones of Venice* 'Nothing must come between Nature and the artist's sight; nothing between God and the artist's soul'.¹⁹¹ Harold Rathbone had a deeply held personal spirituality, articulated in the collection of letters to Brown; his beliefs underpinned his artistic practice and the letters reveal that Rathbone believed that it was an essential part of his 'mission' to give prominence to God's glory in his work. By the latter half of the nineteenth century, the classical styles of eighteenth and early nineteenth century academies had altered; once again art could be seen as a mode of expressing appreciation for God's creation. As Harris argues, there was a shifting of the concept of the grand style away from a dedication to historical painting.¹⁹² Although Rathbone was from a family with strong connections to the non-conformist meeting, until now he has not been considered a particularly religious man. However, his letters indicate that he was a man of great faith;

my love of God (which I confess is but feeble) is the strongest and most important thing in my life, that when I am not doing his will and devoting my entire energies to his service I am not doing as I ought¹⁹³

¹⁹⁰ Woodson-Boulton, A., 'Industry without Art is Brutality: Aesthetic Ideology and Social Practice in Victorian Art Museums' *Journal of British Studies*, Vol.46, (Jan 2007) No.1 pp 47-71. p.51

¹⁹¹Ruskin, J., 'The Nature of Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice Vol II* in Cook, E. T. & Wedderburn, A. (eds.) *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12) Vol.11, p.49

¹⁹² Harris, W. V., 'Ruskin's Theoretic Practicality and the Royal Academy's Aesthetic Idealism' *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, Vol. 52, No. 1 (June 1997) pp. 80-102

¹⁹³ Rathbone, H.S.,(undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/91

This undated letter appears to have been written because of a heated exchange in which Rathbone had attempted to discuss his faith with Brown;

I have felt so fearfully low and oppressed since our talk the other night ... because of your request that I should not again touch on a certain subject that I have made up my mind to tell you at once all I feel about it.¹⁹⁴

Defining his art as part of his service and devotion to God and although he has ‘tussled with his fascination and sensuous pleasure of painting for its own sake’, he prayed that he may use his gifts in service to others. But Rathbone is clear that he will continue to speak of his faith; he goes on

it is all this and feeling the presence of God in a hundred things every day and the importance to repeat the many manifestations of Divine love in the Bible from the beginning of time until now that makes me feel I must be free at all times to speak out... I care and love you so much that I do not believe you will be able to send me away from you because of these things but will help me by your experience to empty my energies through hard work.¹⁹⁵

The expression of deep faith expounded in this letter locates Harold Rathbone firmly in the Ruskinian protocol of art as a transformational spiritual force rather than solely as an instrument of social good as propounded by William Morris, who was an atheist. These artistico-spiritual beliefs were attuned to many of the Pre-Raphaelite school including William Holman Hunt, Dante Gabriel Rossetti and to Edward Burne-Jones who had ‘his own peculiar brand of mysticism’.¹⁹⁶ Chapter two argues that it was Rathbone’s deep-seated

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁹⁶ MacCarthy, F., *The Last Pre-Raphaelite: Edward Burne-Jones and the Victorian Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011) p.389

spirituality that responded to Early Christian art of the *quattrocento*, particularly to that of the della Robbia studio.

John Ruskin (1819-1900) was a frequent visitor to Liverpool and close friend of Philip and Jane Rathbone, often staying with them at Greenbank Cottage. Rachel Dickinson notes that in 1872 Ruskin wrote to his cousin Joan Severn who was currently staying with 'Philip Rathbone Esq., Greenbank Cottage, Liverpool'. Dickinson goes on to speculate that 'the Philip Rathbone referred to here may be the father of 'Alice' of 'Greenbank', with whom Ruskin was fascinated in November 1878';¹⁹⁷ clearly this is Alice Rathbone, sister of Harold, who later married to become Alice Moore. Ruskin was aged nearly sixty at this time and Alice merely twenty-four. Peter Hyland notes that Alice Rathbone spent over a week at Brantwood, Ruskin's Lake District home, in September 1878.¹⁹⁸ When cross-referenced with Jane Rathbone's journal, we read that Philip and Jane, although just returned from a trip to Italy in late 1878 with Harold, immediately leave again for Italy in early 1879 with Alice and a former school friend. They pass through Menton and Monte Carlo then on to Pisa, where Philip instructs Alice and her friend in the work of the early Italian Masters, before travelling to Rome, Ravenna and Bologna. They return via Paris where they are met by Mr. Moore, who became Alice's husband the following year. Close as the friendship was between Philip Rathbone and Ruskin, it seems that Philip and Jane removing their unmarried daughter from potential gossip and speculation. Ruskin had recently been infamously associated with the now deceased Rose La Touche, who was twenty-seven years his junior and, as Catherine

¹⁹⁷ Dickinson, R., *John Ruskin's Correspondence with Joan Severn: Sense and Nonsense Letters* (Leeds: Maney Publishing, 2008) p.144

¹⁹⁸ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906* (2014), p.20

Robson notes, with Alice Liddell and her sisters, daughters of the Dean of Christchurch, Oxford.¹⁹⁹

Because of the friendship between Ruskin and his parents, Harold Rathbone had been familiar with the work of John Ruskin from an early age. Charles Collis, designer at the Della Robbia Pottery recalled that 'Mr. Rathbone had personal contact with John Ruskin' and, in a letter from the artist Edward Burne-Jones (1833-1898) to Ruskin in 1878, Burne-Jones wrote 'I saw little Harold Rathbone but could only talk with him for a minute or so with him – when I asked about you he said you would work too much and that you were as hard at it as ever'.²⁰⁰ Arguably, the inspiration that elicited an authentic response to Ruskinian principles by the Della Robbia Pottery came not only from Ruskin's published work but through personal contact at Greenbank Cottage.

As the only child of highly ambitious and over-protective parents, Ruskin's early education was managed with the sole aim of enabling him to achieve greatness. His mother was anxious that he should become a great man of the non-conformist church, his father that Ruskin should achieve fame as a poet, and thus join the ranks of 'the greatest and the best'.²⁰¹ In 1832, for his thirteenth birthday, Ruskin had received a copy of Samuel Rogers' *Italy*, illustrated by J.M.W. Turner.²⁰² He later claimed that the book inspired 'the entire direction of his life's energies'.²⁰³ He undertook his first Grand Tour in 1840/41, travelling with his parents, and embarking on a lifetime of yearnings, searching and departures. His mother eventually relinquished her ambitions for her son as he turned his back on any form

¹⁹⁹ Robson, C., *Men in Wonderland: The Lost Girlhood of the Victorian Gentleman* (Princeton University Press, 2001) p.95

²⁰⁰ Viljoen, V., *The Brantwood Diary of John Ruskin* (Yale University Press, 1971) p.422

²⁰¹ Absie, J., *John Ruskin: The Passionate Moralizer* (London: Quartet Books, 1980) p.45

²⁰² Rogers, S., *Italy: A Poem* (London: T. Cadell & Others, 1830)

²⁰³ Kite, S., *Building Ruskin's Italy: Watching Architecture* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2012)

of organised religion but arguably the stifling and friendless childhood that Ruskin endured contributed to a lifetime of unsuccessful and occasionally controversial relationships.

A wealth of academic writing has examined the life and work of John Ruskin and considered how his experiences as a cultural tourist informed his writing. In *A Wider Sea*, John Dixon-Hunt identified Ruskin's second journey to Italy with his parents in 1842 as a pivotal moment that initiated the writing of his first great work, *Modern Painters*.²⁰⁴ Ruskin viewed the dramatic outlines of both Capri and Monte Sant'Angelo from the Bay of Naples and attempted to capture their beauty in his sketches. His new sensitivity to the aesthetic appeal of sublime landscape forms was inspired by his championing of the work of J.M.W. Turner, whose watercolours he and his father had been collecting since 1834. In Ruskin's judgment, Turner was the apotheosis of all a landscape painter should be. Ruskin shared with Turner a passion for the sublime landscapes of the Alps and for the picturesque ruins of the medieval city. In what Dixon-Hunt describes as some of Ruskin's finest writing, his soaring, sweeping phrases elucidate the landscape of the Campagna area of Southern Italy:

Purple, and in crimson, and scarlet, like the curtains in God's tabernacle, the rejoicing trees sank into the valley in showers of light, every quivering leaf with buoyant and burning life; each, as it turned to reflect or transmit the sunbeam, first a torch then an emerald. Far up into the recesses of the valley, the green vistas arched like the hollows of the mighty waves of some crystalline sea.²⁰⁵

Until his final return from Italy in 1888, Ruskin rarely spent periods of longer than a few months in England. He then once again experienced a yearning to see his 'two bournes on earth' – Venice and Chamouni in Switzerland - and embarked on the long journey to Venice,

²⁰⁴ Dixon-Hunt, J., *A Wider Sea: A Life of John Ruskin* (Littlehampton Book Services Ltd, 1982) p.112

²⁰⁵ Ruskin, J., 'Landscape Painting to the Ancient Masters', *The Gentleman's Magazine and Historical Chronicle* (1843) vol. XX no.174. p.463

Geneva or the cathedral cities of northern France in what Dixon-Hunt has termed 'the cycle of longing and departing'²⁰⁶. Manfred Pfister proposes in *The Fatal Gift of Beauty* that nobody changed the English perception of Italy as did Ruskin; 'his achievement lies above all in teaching a new way of looking at Italian art and nature.'²⁰⁷ Hanley and Walton agree, describing Ruskin's way of looking at art as 'an interpretive scheme, extending from a focus on realistic perception, which became the consistent method Ruskin followed in his cultural criticism'.²⁰⁸ Through his books he became a cicerone of cultural tourism and roused both the newly wealthy middle-class merchants and the artists of the late nineteenth century to leave the comfort of home and to venture abroad; his own lifetime of experiences of Italy underpinned his theories and art criticism.

Ruskin's career as a writer coincided with the vast expansion of middle-class tourism; Steven Kite describes Ruskin's troubled relationship with modernity by pointing out that Ruskin was certainly a lodestar in this new world of mass tourism but one who despaired at its effects.²⁰⁹ In total Ruskin published over thirty-eight volumes of collected work including his seminal works of five volumes of *Modern Painters (1843-60)*, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture (1849)* and the three volumes of *The Stones of Venice (1851-53)*. Ruskin cast an analytical and schematic gaze over the art and architecture that he encountered; in prose and in detailed and highly accomplished drawings, paintings and early photographs he documented the

²⁰⁶ Dixon-Hunt, J., *A Wider Sea: A life of John Ruskin* p.113

²⁰⁷ Pfister, M., in Pfister, M., (ed.) *The Fatal Gift of Beauty: The Italies of British Travellers* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996) p.510
Ruskin frequently denounced nineteenth century Italy and the Italians in his writing however; 'I never saw anything in my life so fearful as the state to which Italy has fallen. I have not met with one of the nation whom I could look upon as of the same order as myself... I am quite sick of Italy - the people are too much for me - it is like travelling among a nation of malignant idiots... the modern Italians are lazy, lousy, scurrilous, cheating, lying, thieving... I felt on the Simplon as if I were escaping to the mountain out of Gomorrah' Shapiro, H. I., (ed.) *Ruskin in Italy - Letters to His Parents 1845* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972) Letter 153 p.228

²⁰⁸ Hanley, K., & Walton, J., *Constructing Cultural Tourism – John Ruskin and the Tourist Gaze* (Bristol: ChannelView, 2010) p.55

²⁰⁹ Kite, S., *Building Ruskin's Italy: Watching Architecture* (Kent: Ashgate Publishing 2012)

buildings and artworks from an era he termed 'universal gothic'.²¹⁰ In a lifetime spent in such endeavor and in well-documented despair at the relentless surge of pan-European industrialisation and redevelopment, Ruskin was attempting to stem the tide in Canute-like responses as the march of modernity swept away the buildings and architecture of an era of pre-Renaissance artisanship. Ruskin also argued that the engagement with medievalism was a true expression of Christian love that had reached its apotheosis in gothic architecture;

but in the medieval, or especially Christian, system of ornament ...having recognized, in small things as well as great, the individual value of every soul and its imperfections, it is perhaps the principle admirableness of the Gothic schools of architecture, that they thus receive the results of the labour of inferior minds; and out of fragments full of imperfection and betraying imperfection in every touch, indulgently raise up a stately and unaccusable whole.²¹¹

Ruskin's beliefs became the concerns of the Della Robbia Pottery. As Colin Simpson has observed, Harold Rathbone enthusiastically promoted the principle of education amongst his young workers, demonstrated in his wholehearted support for the philanthropic Home Arts and Industries Association.²¹² Additionally, Rathbone is quoted in the *Art Journal* (1902) as saying that the artisan workshop would 'make his employees realise the nobility of their labour rather than the degradation of employment in a factory'.²¹³ In 1896, an article in *The Artist* noted that at the Della Robbia Pottery

²¹⁰ 'I shall endeavour therefore to give the reader in this chapter an idea, at once broad and definite, of the true nature of Gothic architecture, properly so-called not that of Venice only but of universal gothic... to find out how far Venetian architecture reached the universal or perfect, type of gothic, or how far it fell short of it'

Ruskin, J., 'The Nature of Gothic' in *The Stones of Venice Vol II* in Cook, E. T. & Wedderburn, A. (eds.) *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12) p.181

²¹¹ Ruskin, J., in 'The Stones of Venice', Vol II 'The Nature of Gothic' p.190

²¹² Simpson, C., 'Della Robbia and Birkenhead' in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* p.13.

The contribution of Harold Rathbone to the Home Arts and Industries Association is discussed in full in chapter 3.

²¹³ Miller, F., 'A History of Artistic Pottery in the British Isles', *Supplement to the Art Journal*, (1902)

The intelligent visitor will find here a genuine effort to restore to the worker in an industrial and artistic manufacture the dignity and interest in his work that is his birthright [...] why, we may be asked, are the productions of the Della Robbia Pottery worthy of our consideration, our sympathy and our encouragement? Because the very qualities that they possess, although often far from perfect in execution, but always interesting and spontaneous, bear the impress of human entertainment and original design²¹⁴

The Artist noted the spontaneous and original design of the Della Robbia Pottery and, particularly, the imperfection of the work. Reflecting the principles of Ruskin's three broad and simple rules, this was perceived as 'worthy of our consideration, our sympathy and our encouragement'. Expressed in *The Nature of Gothic* to underpin his discussion, Ruskin had asked:

And how, it will be asked, are these products to be recognised and this demand to be regulated? Easily: by the observance of three broad and simple rules:

1. Never encourage the manufacture of any article not absolutely necessary, in the production of which invention has no share.
2. Never demand an exact finish for its own sake, but only for some practical or noble end.
3. Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving records of great works.²¹⁵

In the originality of design, the imperfection of the finish that reflected the hand of the workman and in the production of 'useful' items of tableware which had no association with the processes of mass industrialisation, the Della Robbia Pottery reflected Ruskin's rules.

²¹⁴ [Anon], 'Della Robbia Pottery', *The Artist* (November 1896) p.521

²¹⁵ Ruskin, J., in 'The Stones of Venice', Vol II '*The Nature of Gothic*' p.196

This association between art and spiritual values rather than with worldly concerns was articulated by other leading artists of the Arts and Crafts Movement; as Colin Trodd points out, Thomas Cobden-Sanderson (1840-1922), bookbinder and major figure in the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, proposed that 'the duty of art is to exult life by providing aesthetic form to religious consciousness and its manifestations'.²¹⁶ By challenging the primacy of academic painting in the salon and championing the validity of craft and artisan workmanship, Ruskin provided the inspiration and moral framework for the Arts and Crafts Movement. In *The Nature of Gothic* Ruskin had confronted the contemporary industrialization of artistic production in a way that reverberated throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. In laying out his definition of 'gothicness' and the elements that contributed to its identification, he argued that the empowerment of the individual craftsman produced a genuine form of creative expression and that his work, despite imperfections, was morally and aesthetically superior to work that was a result of a mechanized or divided process, although the latter work may have achieved a seamless perfection. In a passage that echoes through to artistic practice in our own time, Ruskin wrote:

²¹⁶ Trodd, C., *The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Crafting of Culture* Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University press, 2015) p.77

Ruskin's influence as an art critic was all-encompassing; in a letter of 1858, the writer George Eliot acknowledges both his influence on the young and the power of his writing; 'I venerate him as one of the great Teachers of the day — his absurdities on practical points do no harm, but the grand doctrines of truth and sincerity in art, and the nobleness and simplicity of our human life, which he teaches with the inspiration of a Hebrew prophet, must be stirring up young minds in a promising way ... The two last volumes of *Modern Painters* contain, I think, some of the finest writings of this age'

Eliot, G., Letter to Sara Hennell, 17 Jan 1858 in Gordon, S. H., (ed.) *The George Eliot Letters* (Oxford University Press, 1954) Vol 3. p.319

You can teach a man to draw a straight line, and to cut one; to strike a curved line and to carve it... and you will find his work perfect of its kind, but if you ask him to think about any of those forms, to consider if he cannot find any better in his head he stops; his execution becomes hesitating; he thinks and ten to one he thinks wrong... he makes a mistake in the first touch he gives to his work as a thinking being. But you have made a man of him for all that. He was only a machine before, an animated tool...you must either make a tool of the creature or a man. You cannot make both.²¹⁷

Harold Rathbone echoed these sentiments in *The Sphinx* in 1896: 'we endeavor to give those employed the fullest scope for their inventive faculties and all possible opportunity, within certain lines, to develop these'.²¹⁸

These principles are also demonstrated in the work of the craftsman and guildsman C. R. Ashbee (1863-1942) who in 1891 wrote 'The reading of Ruskin led to an experiment of a more practical nature and out of *Fors Clavigera* and *The Crown of the Wild Olive* sprang a small class for the study of design...and it was felt that the design needed application', going on to describe Ruskin as the inspiration that led to the founding of Ashbee's School of Guild and Handicraft.²¹⁹

By the time John Ruskin had written *The Stones of Venice*, the industrial revolution in Britain was well established and had engendered a hugely significant shift in the pattern of urban development; fortunes were made and lost as a new and affluent middle-class was born. However, to run the factories and sites of production there had been a behemoth movement of people to the cities. For example, Richard Brown tables that the population

²¹⁷ Ruskin, J., in 'The Stones of Venice', Vol II 'The Nature of Gothic' p.191

²¹⁸ Rathbone, H., 'The Industrial Aims of the Della Robbia Pottery Ltd.' in *The Sphinx*, 3 (March 1896) pp.141-143
The *Sphinx* was first published by the Liverpool Guild of Students in 1893 at University College, Liverpool.

²¹⁹ Ashbee, C. R., 'An Endeavour Towards the Teaching of John Ruskin and William Morris' in Greensted, M., *An Anthology of the Arts and Crafts Movement: writings by Ashbee, Lethaby, Gimson and their contemporaries* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2005) p.28

of Liverpool had grown from 7,000 in 1700 to 78,000 in 1800.²²⁰ The census of 1841 then confirmed that the population of Liverpool and its suburbs had grown to 343,963, a figure that included a transient population of some 50,000 seamen.²²¹ The philosopher Engels wrote 'What is true of London, is true of Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, is true of all the great towns... Everywhere barbarous indifference, hard egotism on one hand and nameless misery on the other'.²²² Ruskin increasingly wove his concerns about social injustice, the mechanization of factory production and the division of labour into his writing. Gillian Naylor argues that by the 1850s, Ruskin was seeing himself less of an art critic and more of a guardian of public morals; he wrote and lectured widely on the need for the manufacturers to treat their workforce justly and to 'surround their men with happy influences and beautiful things'.²²³ Ruskin's early championing of Turner and the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood had evolved into a unique and complex questioning of both industrial methodology and the moral and aesthetic impacts of the industrial processes that he abhorred. Roy Strong argues that in this abhorrence of the industrialization of aesthetic production, Ruskin was the first to attach art to political ideology, but in his defense of the working man Ruskin attempted to turn the clock back to a time of cottage industry and individual production rather than to strive for the reform of brutal working practice. Colin Trodd argues that the two great critics of the Victorian political economy were Thomas

²²⁰ Brown, R., *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850* (London: Routledge, 1991) p.232

²²¹ Baines, *History of the Commerce and Town of Liverpool* (London: Longman, Brown & Green, 1852)

²²² Brown contests this point of view, arguing that there was a great diversity of experience and conditions in the towns and that Engels had inherited a romanticised image of pre-industrialised Britain where in reality housing conditions were also poor and poverty widespread, driving people to the towns to find work. Without doubt, however, millions of people lived in overcrowded and insanitary urban conditions, with no access to safe drinking water. Housing was cramped and often in a appalling condition. Ten thousand people per square kilometre were living in some northern cities in 1850, making them some of the most densely populated in the world

²²² Twenty-eight percent of children between ten and fifteen were working and over 42,000 children under the age of ten were in full time employment.

Brown, R., *Society and Economy in Modern Britain 1700-1850*, p.410

²²³ Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Studio Vista, 1971) p.31

Carlyle (1795-1881) and John Ruskin, who both 'understood the turbulence of the modern world as symptomatic of a system that reduced human life to economic performance'.²²⁴

William Morris took up these concerns but as Roy Strong clarifies 'what set his contribution apart was linking his (Morris's) artistic production to the cause of socialism'.²²⁵

The 'turbulence of modern life' described by Trodd also had an impact on those close to Rathbone and the journal of his aunt, Alice Sophie Briggs, gives us an understanding of how leisure travel often discreetly masked a hidden motive for travel. The journals demonstrate how she and her family were compelled to travel abroad to avoid financial embarrassment rather than in pursuit of art and culture. Pemble argues that this was frequently an important agent of change:

Among the middle-classes it was a common response to straightened circumstances to go abroad to retrench [...] from the time of Byron to that of Oscar Wilde, the outlawed, the unfrocked and the blackballed made their way to Italy – Shelley's *Paradise of Exiles*.²²⁶

In *Leaves from the Diary of ASB* (1917), Alice Briggs recalls events that typified the experience of many of the Victorian middle classes as the family become a cypher of this 'hidden motive' described by Pemble. Rathbone's aunt and her husband Archibald exemplify the expatriates who are unable to return to England for financial reasons and as Elizabeth Browning claimed, for three hundred pounds a year one could live 'much like the Grand Duchess' in Florence²²⁷ and many left England to find a cheaper situation.

²²⁴ Trodd, C., *The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Crafting of Culture* in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*, p.78

²²⁵ Strong, R., *The Arts in Britain: A History* (London: Random House, 2004) p.512

²²⁶ Pemble, J., *The Mediterranean Passion*, p.102

²²⁷ 'For three hundred a year one may live much like the Grand Duchess, and go to the opera in the evening at fivepence-halfpenny inclusive. Indeed, poor people should have their patriotism tenderly dealt with, when, after certain experiments decide on living whole on the Continent. The differences are past belief, beyond expectation, and when the sunshine is thrown in, the head turns at once, and you fall straight into absenteeism'

Alice was a light-hearted woman who wrote in detail of her popularity, her parties and entertainments, reproaching herself for a lack of economy but immediately buying a grand piano. Alice depicted herself as the prettiest, most popular, the favourite of sea captains, the Mrs Briggs who all the young men are in love with and who 'the old ladies take a fancy to'.²²⁸ In the early years of their marriage, Alice and her husband Archibald lived well on his income as manager of a mine in the Wakefield area, a family enterprise. The first mention of concern comes in 1871 as Alice notes that

I think that we should have been quite on the safe side at Stanley as we lived well within our income, indeed could have put away half if we liked. But alas! the speculations always went on and Archie was deeply involved in the North of England Iron company... and in other ventures elsewhere.²²⁹

Alice writes with increasing anxiety about the failed investment in a tea plantation in Ceylon, and the 'downturn in trade' when the men at the Whitwood mine begin to strike. Archie resigned his directorship from the family firm at Whitwood and sailed immediately for Pernambuco in Brazil, chasing a business opportunity. Alice retreated to stay with her sister Jane at the Rathbone family home at Greenbank Cottage in Liverpool. She writes that she is 'over tired, very depressed and altogether upset at the loss of home, of a large part of our income [...] and Jeanie did not understand it and expected me to be full of gaiety and this only made me hysterical'.²³⁰ When Archie returns from South America, following a presumably unsuccessful visit, Alice meets him at Southampton and they decide to take the children from school and all go abroad. The family joins the numbers who moved to Italy as

Elizabeth Barrett Browning encouraging a friend to leave England for Florence in Kenyon, F.G., *The Letters of Elizabeth Barrett Browning* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1897) Vol.i, p.292

²²⁸ Briggs, Alice S., *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her family* p.41

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.113

²³⁰ Briggs, Alice S., *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her family* p.134

a way of living more cheaply. Alice describes Archie's increasing depression, the more desperate financial speculations and feverish attempts to find 'a really cheap house'; first in Menton and then in Italy. In 1886 Archie and Alice Briggs bought a small villa in Salò on Lake Garda, with a scheme to extend it into something grander. Briggs had met a Mr. Scott, an Englishman 'who had grand schemes and visions but was impecunious'²³¹ and who had convinced Archie that silver and lead mines that Scott had found in Brescia would provide Archie with the financial opportunity that he so anxiously sought. Scott proposed a partnership, with all the capital to be found by Briggs – four times more than he had ever invested before. They decided to consult a relative who was a mining engineer and take his advice. Edgar Rathbone, brother of Harold, travelled to Brescia from England and declared that he was greatly pleased by the rich mineral wealth in the mine and advised Briggs to proceed. Archie returned to England in an endeavour to borrow the capital; Alice wrote that 'the money seemed to fly, with miners' wages, Scott's, Blanchetti's salaries, special trains to the mines, lunches to visitors... but Archie seemed so satisfied with the prospects he found cash without complaint'.²³² However, all goodwill in the partnership vanished as rapidly as the capital; Briggs decided to break with Scott but at the subsequent business meeting, was persuaded by the plausible Scott to return to England yet again to raise more capital. 'A snare', as Alice later described the scheme - a snare that had brought Archie to despair and by the following week he was lost, presumed drowned, in Lake Garda. Alice was left to deal with the remaining payments due to the impoverished workers in the mine, the lack of income to support herself and her children and the continuing rapacious demands from Archie's partners in the venture. Indeed, the Villa Salò was no paradise of exiles but a trap

²³¹ Ibid.p.177

²³² Ibid., p.181

of straightened circumstances that isolated Alice from her family and life in England. When her son James becomes engaged to an Italian girl she writes 'It was a great blow, for I had felt the separation from all English relations and had always hoped to go back but considering James poor health, I accepted the inevitable and tried to be content'²³³ Alice is able to make the longed-for return to England in 1893 when she comes back to make a home for her son in Manchester. Archibald, of course, never returns.

In *The Devil take the Hindmost*, Chancellor writes 'the capitalist is confronted with a broad spectrum of risk with prudent investment at one end and reckless gambling at the other. Speculation lies somewhere between the two'²³⁴; it would seem that Briggs became increasingly reckless as his speculative investments failed and the dividends from the family mining business in Wakefield dwindled.

David Izkowitz points out that in the earlier years of the nineteenth century speculation in stocks and shares was equated with gambling but developed into an activity that was of respectable economic benefit and of high moral legitimacy; 'by the end of the nineteenth century roughly two thirds of the national wealth were invested in company shares and large numbers of upper and middle class people lived off dividends'.²³⁵ Many, including Briggs, eventually fell prey to what George Robb describes as

The entrepreneurial culture of Victorian England that bred aggressive businessmen who were impatient of ethical codes and whose preoccupation with material success led them to fear failure more than fraud.²³⁶

²³³ Ibid., p.216

²³⁴ Chancellor, E., *The Devil take the Hindmost: A history of Financial Speculation* (London: Macmillan,1999) p.xiii

²³⁵ Izkowitz, D., 'Fair Enterprise or Extravagant Speculation: Investment, Speculation, and Gambling in Victorian England', *Victorian Studies* Vol.45 No.1 (Autumn 2002) pp. 121-147, p.121

²³⁶ Robb G., *White Collar crime in Modern England: Financial fraud and Business morality 1845-1929* (Cambridge University Press,2002) p.181

Alice's journal confirms that Harold Rathbone visited them at least twice in northern Italy. Rathbone arrived at Salò in December 1886 in the immediate aftermath of his uncle's death, to spend Christmas with his aunt and family; 'Harold R came for Xmas and tried to cheer us up, but I felt most depressed and quite dreaded the year '87'.²³⁷ In contrast Harold Rathbone wrote to Ford Madox Brown of his time there:

The house is very pretty and artistic inside with a great deal of china and old rustic ware about and all on one floor, slightly above ground. There are roses in the garden though the weather is cold. I have done little portraits in chalk and pencil of my cousins while I have been here.²³⁸

In Rathbone's extensive correspondence with Brown he rarely describes his surroundings or the people around him; this letter is noteworthy in that he refers to the china and 'old rustic ware' in the villa. It may be that he was reluctant to discuss the difficulties of his aunt with somebody who was outside the family but he makes no mention of the circumstances to Brown. Certainly, Philip and Jane Rathbone had, by now, given financial and material support to the beleaguered Alice, including an offer to provide capital to open a *pensione* in Florence.

Harold Rathbone is next recorded by Alice as visiting Salò in 1891, 'Harold Rathbone came to see us and was very amusing. He got cold sitting out sketching, though he had a very large Scotch plaid around his knees; so he used to get up and wave the plaid and dance a sort of

Briggs was by no means alone in gaining nothing but penury from his investments and as early as 1855 *The Times* lamented that widespread financial failures were undermining the cardinal of Victorian society – the family – by 'scattering ruin over hundreds of quiet, respectable and virtuous households, the scene of sacred economy and sweet charity of life'. Victorian mores connected speculative investment with gambling of the most reckless sort and Mark Clapson reminds us that any form of gambling undermined the puritan work ethic embraced by the Unitarian and Quaker creeds of the Rathbone family; permitting capital to be gained by chance rather than 'earned through hard work, talent and delayed gratification'.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.186

²³⁸ Rathbone, H.S., (1887), *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, National Art Library ref 1995/14/86/38

Highland jig, and shout and clap his hands. The peasants stared and thought him quite mad'.²³⁹ Letters from Mathilde Blind confirm that on this occasion Rathbone had travelled with her to Switzerland then journeyed on to Salò alone.²⁴⁰

The financial misfortunes of Alice Briggs influenced her nephew Harold Rathbone in two ways. Firstly, it was the investment that Archie was making in the Brescia silver mine that took the family to Lake Garda. Salò was near the studio of Carlo Loretz in Lodi, south of Milan and chapter two argues that the work of Loretz had a significant influence upon the Della Robbia Pottery. It is also likely that financial speculation by Archibald Briggs affected Rathbone's own attitude to fiscal management. As Peter Hyland has pointed out, it is remarkable that Harold Rathbone kept the pottery operating for twelve years. Although both Jane Rathbone and his patron Elizabeth Holt subsidised the business and all share capital was fully paid up, by 1906 Rathbone had realised several assets to support production. This included the sale of a painting by Ford Madox Brown from his personal collection. However, Gertrude Russell, one of the last decorators at the pottery, commented that eventually Harold Rathbone 'would put no more of his private money into it'²⁴¹ and the liquidator was appointed in May 1906. Arguably it was because of the difficulties that Rathbone witnessed in the aftermath of Archibald Brigg's death that ensured that all creditors were fully paid and that his personal wealth remained sufficient to support his young family after the closure of the pottery.

²³⁹ Briggs, Alice S., *Leaves from the Diary of ASB for her family*, p.222

²⁴⁰ Blind, M., (1891) *Correspondence Vol. III 1885-1896, n.d. Richard Garnett LLD. British Museum.*, British Library Ref. 61929

²⁴¹ Williams, H., 'Recollections of the Della Robbia Pottery'. Northern ceramics newsletter no.29, republished in *Echoes and reflections*, N.C.S (1900) pp.5-9

Ruskin is central to the themes of this thesis; as a friend of Philip and Jane Rathbone and a visitor to their home at Greenbank Cottage, he was well-placed to influence Harold Rathbone's artistic direction. As a writer, Ruskin inspired generations of British craftsmen to challenge the brutal ascendancy of industrial production through what Trodd describes as a 'celebration of human vitality, human potential, through the principle of irregularity of method, process and outcome',²⁴² amply demonstrated in the work of the Birkenhead pottery. As an Italophile and cicerone of tourism to Italy, his volumes of art criticism were critical in the formation of a taste for the early Christian art of the *quattrocento* that underpinned the establishment of the Della Robbia Pottery.

A pair of single handled-jugs with a moulded lizard decoration, incised by Cassandra Walker and painted by Alice Jones demonstrate the qualities that Ruskin found most appealing; full of creative expression, individualistic and skilful with a design drawn from a close observation of nature and reiterated in a small workshop where the workers were encouraged to give full expression to their individuality. Cassandra Walker worked at the Della Robbia Pottery for most of its existence, and as Hyland comments, was probably the most highly skilled artist/designer to be employed there. It is likely that she had received some art training before leaving school, but also attended evening classes at Liverpool School of Architecture and Applied Art ('The Art Sheds') and took a course at Westminster School of Art in London.²⁴³ Throughout her years at the pottery, Cassandra Walker received positive reviews for her work. Alice Jones joined the Della Robbia Pottery late in 1903, with very little formal training. She spent a year as an apprentice of Harold Rathbone but Hyland rates her

²⁴² Trodd, C., 'The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Crafting of Culture' in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* p.79

²⁴³ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906* (2014), p.219

highly as an artist of imagination, with a good grasp of art nouveau design and a skilled colourist.²⁴⁴ Both artists produced the meaningful, authentic art defined by Ruskin.



Figure 17: The Della Robbia Pottery (Cassandra Walker and Alice Jones), Two lizard-handled jugs with moulding (1903), Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead

²⁴⁴ Ibid. p.185

Anna Jameson (1794-1860)

Ruskin was not the only nineteenth-century traveller to respond to Italianate art and architecture. As Walchester demonstrates, the fascination of the British writer with Italy had grown remarkably since the eighteenth century as accounts of tours by the upper classes became popular.²⁴⁵ Between 1820 and 1845, over eighty travel books were published about Italy, many of them by women travellers. Anna Jameson had successfully published travel guides and volumes of art criticism for many years, starting with her first publication, *Diary of an Ennuyée* (1826).²⁴⁶ Jameson was also a friend of an earlier generation of the Rathbone family that included Philip and Jane and Harold Rathbone's grand-parents. This relationship has not previously been widely noted but her first biographer, *Geraldine Macpherson*, refers to a letter of 1852 in which Jameson discusses her attendance at an educational conference in Birmingham 'I went down with Miss Murray, Miss Montgomery, and Mrs. Rathbone, to hear what the lawyers and the clergy had to say'.²⁴⁷ In October 1859, shortly before her death, Jameson wrote

On Thursday I go to Liverpool, to the Rathbones, and thence I will write again. I shall not be in Brighton probably till next week, perhaps the 26th. If any letters arrive, send them to me, care of William Rathbone, Esq., Greenbank, Liverpool.²⁴⁸

²⁴⁵ Walchester, K., *Our Own Fair Italy: Nineteenth Century Women's Travel Writing and Italy 1800 – 1844* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007) p.11

²⁴⁶ Jameson, A., *Diary of an Ennuyée* (London: Henry Colburn, 1826)

²⁴⁷ MacPherson, G., *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1878) p.182

²⁴⁸ William Rathbone was the father of Philip Rathbone. Macpherson, G., *Memoirs of the Life of Anna Jameson* p.201

The work of Anna Jameson has been subject to significant academic scrutiny in recent years as the role of the female traveller/writer is reassessed – both Walchester and Warr have built on earlier research by Holcomb. Thomas argues that Jameson’s own publications mark her as an original thinker as *A Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London* (1842),²⁴⁹ for example, predated Ruskin’s own interest in the British painters that he championed in *Modern Painters* a year later. Adele Holcomb argues that she made ‘the first substantial study of Christian Iconography in the English language’.²⁵⁰ In an early essay entitled *The Relative Social Position of Mothers and Governesses*, Jameson was one of the first to advocate equality between men and women in matters of education and charity and as a travel writer and prominent Italophile, Jameson successfully contributed to the advance of middle-class interest in early Italian art. Sheldon argues that Jameson was also one of the first to establish a template for discussing early Italian art and sanctioned the works of artists from the *trecento* and *quattrocento* with a vocabulary that distinguished their work for its ‘grace’, ‘simplicity’ and ‘charm’.²⁵¹ Jameson was an early pioneer of female academic writing and supported herself and her family by this means. Jameson wrote particularly about the iconography of early Christian art; Clara Thomas cites Jameson as harboring a strong personal preference for the ideally beautiful over the realistic, never really recanting of her earlier view of Michelangelo: ‘his exaggerated forms, his colossal figures [...] are, to my taste, worse than displeasing’.²⁵²

²⁴⁹ Jameson, A., *A Handbook to the Public Galleries of Art in and near London* (London: John Murray, 1842)

²⁵⁰ Holcomb, A., ‘Anna Jameson: The First Professional English Art Historian’ in *Art History* (1983.vol 6) p.180

²⁵¹ Sheldon, J., ‘Inspired by Florentine Original: Rathbone and the Della Robbia’ in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*, pp. 55-72. p.57

²⁵² Thomas, C., ‘Anna Jameson: Art Historian and Critic’ in *Woman’s Art Journal*, (1980, Vol.1 No.1) p.22

Jameson's tastes were very much in harmony with those of the emerging Pre-Raphaelites and the subsequent Arts and Crafts Movement. Here, her advocacy of the work of early Italian artists found a true articulation. Her passion for early Italianate style would have undoubtedly stimulated the aesthetic appetites of a wide audience and informed the cultural mores of Philip and Jane Rathbone and their family. The art of the quattrocento had been largely ignored until the 1840s, and Sheldon comments that it only acquired a greater familiarity in the second half of the nineteenth century as writers such as Ruskin, Jameson and Pater laid out the grounds for a fresh appreciation of pre-Renaissance culture.²⁵³ Jameson's work significantly contributed to this preparation of the Victorian traveller for an appreciation of quattrocento art, and became a source of inspiration for both the Della Robbia Pottery and larger Arts and Crafts Movement.

Rathbone, Walter Pater and the Aesthetic Movement

During the years that preceded the Della Robbia Pottery, Rathbone had worked to establish his reputation as a painter. Both the genre of his work and his network of friends indicate that he was a follower of the Aesthetic Movement that flourished in England in the second half of the nineteenth century.²⁵⁴ Rejecting the Ruskinian notion that art should have a social or moral purpose, the Movement moved art away from its position as a custodian of public morality to become 'art for art's sake'. Julian Bell describes the Aesthetic Movement as defining the time when artistic practice turned its back on piety and public virtue and

²⁵³ Sheldon, J., 'Inspired by Florentine Original: Rathbone and the Della Robbia' in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*, pp. 55-72. p.55

²⁵⁴ We know from surviving documents that Rathbone's close friends included William Rossetti, Mathilde Blind, Edward Burne-Jones, Arthur Mackmurdo, Frederick Shields and Agnes Garrett who were all part of Aesthetic art circles of London at that time.

devoted itself to 'aesthetic intensity without limit'²⁵⁵ and Steven Calloway as a reaction to the 'ugliness and vulgar materialism of the age' which 'sought nothing less than the elevation of this new beauty as the guiding principle of Life'; a touchstone of all the arts.²⁵⁶ As Lionel Lambourne clarifies in *The Aesthetic Movement*, 'Aesthetics is the name given since classical times to the study of the nature of the beautiful, and the theories that have involved defining what is meant by the word beauty'.²⁵⁷ By rejecting the religious or moral principles that had underpinned Victorian art for the first decades of the nineteenth century, its followers had developed their own dedicated pursuit of beauty and came to be associated with 'beauty, the novelty of more exclusive design and Oriental decorative arts'.²⁵⁸

The Oxford don Walter Pater (1839-1894) became a leading exponent of the discipline of aesthetics; his teachings were critical to the development of the Aesthetic Movement in the late nineteenth century with its deep concern for the sensual qualities of art and a belief that art should carry no moral message. As Pater wrote in 1873:

Only be sure it is passion that does yield this fruit of a quickened, multiplied consciousness; of such wisdom, the poetic passion, the desire of beauty, the love of art for its own sake, has most. For art comes to you proposing frankly to give nothing but the highest quality of your moments as they pass, and simply for these moments sake.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁵ Bell, J., *Mirror of the World: A New Art History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2007) p.328

The French poet and critic Theophile Gautier (1811-71) first formulated the phrase *L'Art pour l'Art*; 'Art for Art's sake', asserting that art should in no way be useful.

²⁵⁶ Calloway, S., 'The Search for a New Beauty' in Calloway, S & Federle Orr L (eds.) *The Cult of Beauty – The Aesthetic Movement 1860 – 1900* (London: V&A publishing, 2011) p.11

²⁵⁷ Lambourne, L., *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996) p.10

²⁵⁸ Denney, C., in Casteras, S, & Denney, C., (eds.) *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England* (Yale University Press, 1996) p.1

²⁵⁹ Pater, W., *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1873) p.213

His followers included Edward Burne-Jones, Oscar Wilde, Albert Moore, James Tissot and Algernon Charles Swinburne who identified with Pater's maxim that 'to burn always with a hard gem-like flame, to maintain this ecstasy, is success in life'.²⁶⁰ Harold Rathbone, however, described the internal conflict that this created in an undated letter to Brown; as a follower of Ruskin he viewed art as a mirror of God's creation. However, as an Aesthete, art became an expression of his own sensuality as he sought to discern the beauty in all things - an essential component of aestheticism. He articulated his dilemma thus;

I therefore pray that I may use the gifts that He gives me for His service rather than for my own delight. This has been a tussle for I believe I have felt as strongly as anyone ever did that fascination and sensuous pleasure in painting for its own sake which has almost grown into an idolatry with me.²⁶¹

Despite Rathbone's conflicting feelings, he remained a follower of a movement that became interwoven with virtually all artistic practice in the late nineteenth century. Pater had close family in Liverpool; we do not know if he and Harold Rathbone were acquainted but as they had many friends in common and moved in the same circles it is likely that they had met.

For this new generation of artists Walter Pater became a lodestar as he sought to embrace his convictions to conflate art and life. Family friend and popular writer Mary Augusta Ward embodies Aesthetic taste in her description of the Pater household in Oxford:

The drawing room, which runs the whole breadth of the house from the road to the garden behind, was 'Paterian' in every line and ornament. There was a Morris wallpaper; spindle-legged tables and chairs, a sparing allowance of blue pots and plates, bought, I think, in Holland; framed embroidery of the most delicate design and colour, the work of Mr Pater's elder sister; engravings, if I remember right

²⁶⁰ Lambourne, L., *The Aesthetic Movement* p.12

²⁶¹ Rathbone, H.S., (undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, ref MSL /1995/14/86/91

from Botticelli, or Luini or Mantegna; a few mirrors and a very few simple flowers, chosen and arranged with a simple yet conscious art. I see that room always with the sun in it, touching the polished surfaces of wood and brass and china and bringing out its pure, bright colour.

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In 1873, Walter Pater drew together a series of previously published articles as *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*. In these so-named ‘appreciations’ of early Christian artists, he established a new recognition of these artists in what Brake describes as a conflation of biography, history and character.²⁶³ Drawing on the lexicon of Anna Jameson, Pater described this early Christian work as fresh, charming, and with ‘grace, and purity and finish of expression’.²⁶⁴ The work not only influenced a generation of artists and provided a blueprint for the Aesthetic Movement but also contributed to the revivification of the reputations of artists who had been ignored for over three hundred years; Pater is credited with bringing Luca della Robbia and Botticelli to renewed prominence in the late nineteenth century, with essays dedicated to each artist. Charlotte Drew has examined the championing of Luca della Robbia by Pater, proposing that ‘in Pater’s hands, della Robbia’s nineteenth-century awakening would take an essentially contemporary, aesthetic and poetic direction’.²⁶⁵ In a manner and stylisation that places himself firmly in an art-historical tradition that included Vasari and Winckelmann, Pater draws the work of the Tuscan Luca della Robbia into an aesthetic that stretched from Pheidias in Ancient Greece to Michelangelo in the sixteenth century. In artful and finely-honed prose, he described the

²⁶² Monsman, G. *Walter Pater* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1977) p.40

Mary Augusta Ward, novelist and educator, married Humphry Ward, fellow of Brasenose College, Oxford, former pupil and then colleague of Walter Pater. The Humphrey Wards were neighbours and close friends of Pater and his sisters for nine years. Mary Ward would certainly be familiar to Harold Rathbone as she and his cousin Eleanor Rathbone were well acquainted, though at opposite sides of the political spectrum.

²⁶³ Brake, L., ‘Walter Pater (1839-1894),’ *The Yellow Nineties On-Line*, <http://www.1890s.ca> (16.12.16)

²⁶⁴ Pater, W., *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* p.45

²⁶⁵ Drew, C. K., *Displaying Italian Sculpture: Exploring Hierarchies at the South Kensington Museum 1852-62*. PhD thesis, (University of York, 2014)

work of Luca della Robbia as uniting elements of ‘tranquility, of repose, to that intense and individual expression by a system of conventionalism as skillful and subtle as that of the Greeks, subduing all such curves as indicates solid form, and throwing the whole into lower relief’.²⁶⁶

Walter Pater travelled in Italy from 1865 onwards, either with friends or with his sisters; but was not initially inspired by the *genius loci* of Tuscany but with the original pieces of della Robbia that were arriving in London and, in particular, in the South Kensington Museum. He had only a fleeting encounter with the work of Luca and Andrea della Robbia in Tuscany before describing the work of Luca della Robbia in familiar and evocative terms;

I suppose nothing brings the real air of a Tuscan town so vividly to mind as those pieces of pale blue and white earthenware, by which he is best known, like fragments of the milky sky itself, fallen into the cool streets, and breaking into the darkened churches.²⁶⁷

Sheldon comments that as Pater explored the expressive intensity of Luca della Robbia’s work rather than its technical qualities, he concocted images that would ‘echo in the imagination of generations beyond’.²⁶⁸ Pater eschewed a formal analysis of the glazed terracotta in favour of a more subjective analysis of ‘expressiveness’ and ‘intensity of feeling’. This of course echoed the sensibilities of the Aesthetic movement that championed the sensual and visual qualities of art rather than its more formal attributes.

Pater’s article *Art Notes in Northern Italy*²⁶⁹ discussed a less-visited region of Italy but one that Rathbone was very familiar with. Pater recalls his tour of the towns and cities

²⁶⁶ Pater, W., *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* p.37

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p.36

²⁶⁸ Sheldon, J., ‘Inspired by Florentine Original: Rathbone and the Della Robbia’ in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*, pp. 55-72. p.63

²⁶⁹ Pater, W., ‘Art Notes in Northern Italy’ in *The New Review*; Nov 1890;3;18 (British Periodicals) p.393

of the Lombardian plain including Brescia, Vercelli, Bergamo, Milan and, in a celebration of the local painter Callisto Piazza, Lodi. He found much to admire in the area, and although he did not mention ceramic production, praised the art of the area in a place where 'Catholicism, Renaissance, religion, holiness and culture may seem to be reconciled'.²⁷⁰ We know that Pater considered pottery, along with other decorative art production, as worthy of the title 'fine art' through his acclaim of the 'homely art of pottery' in *Luca della Robbia*, describing the art of pottery-making as

Desirous to realise the spirit and manner of that sculpture, in a humbler material, to unite its science, its exquisite and expressive system of low relief, to the homely art of pottery, to introduce those high qualities into common things, to adorn and cultivate daily household life.²⁷¹

The American engraver and painter William Sartain recalled Pater as 'In the proportion in which, in pottery or any other art, the worker asserts his sense of the thing, rather than the serviceable fact or thing only, it is fine art. Art is the reproduction of fact, colour etc., as connected with the soul'.²⁷² Harold Rathbone reiterated these sentiments in *The Sphinx*; 'our first avowed end is to do our utmost to produce a beautiful and artistic ware which can be utilised from the household table to the decoration of private and public building'.²⁷³ Arguably, the influence of Pater on Rathbone stemmed from his essays *Luca della Robbia* and *Art Notes in Northern Italy* but also in his championing of a more sensuous expression of useful artistic endeavour.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., p.40

²⁷¹ Pater, W., *Studies in the History of the Renaissance* p.40

²⁷² Sartain, W., 'Thoughts on Art and the Art Collector' *The Art World*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (Jan 1917), pp. 276-278

²⁷³ Rathbone, H., 'The Industrial Aims of the Della Robbia Pottery Ltd' *The Sphinx* (Liverpool University, 1896) p.141

Very few artists and writers of the period failed to make at least one visit to Italy and many reacted to Early Christian or 'primitive' art in a way that prompted and enriched Rathbone's own response. Ford Madox Brown and William Holman Hunt were amongst those whose own experience of this art influenced Rathbone's own artistic practice and the writings of Ruskin, Pater and Jameson informed his preferences in a crucial way. The next chapter examines the various ways in which Harold Rathbone responded to the stimulus of *quattrocento* art, culminating in the creation of the Della Robbia Pottery.

Chapter Two. Tools, Techniques and Vision of the Della Robbia Pottery

This chapter begins by examining the development of the characteristic style of the architectural workshop of the Della Robbia Pottery and then the impact on the Company of the revivification of interest in the bas-relief sculpture of Luca della Robbia. By the late nineteenth century, this obscure *quattrocento* sculptor had become, in the words of John Pope-Hennessy, 'the most popular sculptor of the fifteenth century'²⁷⁴ Aiming to reframe the literature concerning the history of the Della Robbia Pottery and to build on the empirical work of Hillhouse (1981) and Hyland (2014), the chapter not only reassesses the significance of Luca della Robbia's influence on the Della Robbia Pottery but also seeks out the source of inspiration for the sgraffito workshop, arguing that although this workshop also engaged with *quattrocento* style, it owed little to the motifs and stylistic devices of

²⁷⁴ Pope-Hennessy, J., *Luca Della Robbia* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1980) p.10

Florence and Tuscany. Clearly Rathbone had found another source of inspiration. The chapter also examines the work of coeval studio potteries in both England and Italy and identifies how companies like Cantagalli of Florence and The Potter's Art Guild in Compton also established an influential presence in the Arts and Crafts circles of late nineteenth century England through an interaction with bas-relief sculpture of the *quattrocento*.

Rathbone and Luca della Robbia: Inspired by an Art both Useful and Beautiful

The revival of the reputation of Luca della Robbia in the nineteenth century was a major factor in determining the artistic processes of the architectural workshop of the Della Robbia Pottery. The Pottery had two distinct workshops; Conrad Dressler, and subsequently Carlo Manzoni, managed the moulding, sculpting and painting of the architectural panels and plaques at the workshop at 28 Argyll Street in Birkenhead. The second workshop, in nearby Price Street, produced domestic tableware in a sgraffito style under the management of Harold Rathbone, although Rathbone and the more experienced sgraffito artists also produced bas-relief architectural work. The choice of the Hamilton Square area of Birkenhead as a site for the pottery would allow Rathbone to be near the source of suitable clay on the Wirral²⁷⁵ and to take advantage of cheaper rents and good transport links to Liverpool. Importantly, as Sandra Penketh has commented, the Wirral was home to many of the rich merchant class who worked in Liverpool but preferred to live in large Victorian villas in the leafy suburbs.²⁷⁶ Rathbone had lived in Hamilton Square, Birkenhead, for several years before this but to accommodate the pottery he rented a building at 2A Price Street, where

²⁷⁵ The subsequent unsuitability of the local clay is discussed in detail on page 207 of this chapter.

²⁷⁶ Penketh, S., in Sheldon, J., (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) pp. 1-4

the clay bodies were made and fired in the kilns. The decorating and architectural workshops were situated around the corner at 28 Argyll Street.²⁷⁷ Colin Simpson suggests that he may have had ambitions to establish an 'arts community' in the Hamilton Square area, similar to the Guild of Handicraft founded by CR Ashbee in 1888.²⁷⁸ The sculptor Conrad Dressler arrived in Hamilton Square in December 1893 and stayed for just over two years. Dressler was also inspired by the work of the della Robbia; he had exhibited eight pieces of bas-relief entitled 'Della Robbia ware' in the 1893 Autumn exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery. By December 1893 Rathbone had assembled a formidable number of investors, registered the new company as 'The Della Robbia Pottery, Limited' and had leased premises in Hamilton Square, Birkenhead. However, relations between Rathbone and Dressler had quickly become strained, undoubtedly due to differences in personality but possibly because Dressler had arrived to find he was not an equal partner but an employee in the venture. Dressler was appointed as 'Art Director' of the architectural department and Harold Rathbone 'Art Director' of the sgraffito workshop. Rathbone also assumed the title of 'Works Manager', giving him overall control of the company. Dressler left in March 1896 to found the Medmenham pottery in Buckinghamshire. Colin Simpson draws our attention to his characteristic sculptural style of heavily undercutting the figures in the architectural bas-relief panels and the flattening of perspective, no doubt proving a challenge for the mould-makers in the Pottery but allowing his work to make a modern, contemporary contribution to the work of the architectural workshop. The second sculptor to be recruited by Rathbone was Carlo Manzoni (1857-1910), originally from Turin who had settled in London. During the

²⁷⁷ This building has recently re-opened as 'The Rathbone Studio', a studio pottery founded by ceramicist Janet Holmes.

²⁷⁸ Simpson, C., 'Della Robbia and Birkenhead' in Sheldon, J. (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street*, p. 9

years of 1895-1897 Manzoni left to found the short-lived Minerva Pottery in Staffordshire and then to work in North London, but returned to become the loyal mainstay of the workshop from January 1898 until the closure in 1906.²⁷⁹ Rathbone also employed sculptors from the Liverpool School of Architecture and Applied Art to work in the architectural workshop, including Robert Anning Bell (1863-1933) and Charles J. Allen (1862-1956).

In one of the earliest articles concerning the opening of the Pottery, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that

Mr. Harold Rathbone had hit upon the happy idea of founding a Della Robbia Pottery. The first object of the company shall be the production of an architectural decoration in earthenware with figure or ornamental design, partially coloured and covered with a glaze or enamel capable of withstanding the effects of the English climate²⁸⁰

The artistic aspirations of Harold Rathbone and Conrad Dressler had collided in a powerful way with the work of the fifteenth century Florentine studio of the della Robbia family, Cooper stating that 'the initial incentive for the Birkenhead venture came from the fifteenth century Della Robbia Pottery itself'²⁸¹ and Hyland 'the inspiration owed much to the bright colours of Deruta, Gubbio and other sixteenth century Italian manufacturers'.²⁸² The influence of Luca della Robbia is confirmed in a letter from Harold Rathbone to his friend William Rossetti (1829-1919). Rathbone wrote to Rossetti on 16 June 1904 regarding the christening of his son and inviting Rossetti to stand as Godfather: 'For his second name we

²⁷⁹ Very little published research has been concerned with Manzoni, but Simpson, Hyland and this author speculate that he may be an important connection between Rathbone and the work of the northern Italian potters. It is intended to address this omission in the future.

²⁸⁰ [Anon] 'Art Items', *Pall Mall Gazette* (8 Jan 1894)

²⁸¹ Cooper, J., *The Della Robbia Pottery 1893-1906* [exh. Cat] (London: Jeremy Cooper Ltd., 1980) p.13

²⁸² Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.59

are calling him after the famous Italian sculptor 'Della Robbia' whose work during ten years I have tried to emulate by the effort devoted to that pottery called after his famous name'.²⁸³

The revival of the medieval guild

The *bottega* of Luca della Robbia was, as with most mercantile activity in the fifteenth century, underpinned by the processes of the medieval guilds. These were an intrinsic part of Florentine artisan production; Goldthwaite argues that the craft guild was 'one of the most characteristic institutions to appear on the medieval urban scene'.²⁸⁴ The Arts and Crafts Movement was associated with the medieval guild system in a way that revived the reputation of the guilds in a manner that they had not enjoyed since the fifteenth century, for example, the systems that governed the medieval guilds authenticated all artisan activity in the Birkenhead pottery. Ruth Kinna attributes this revival to William Morris, arguing that Morris integrated his ideas about industrialisation and division of labour into a wider analysis of the relationship between work and leisure, mediated through his understanding of art;

If work was seen as a necessity, then leisure could be thought of as non-work or free time. Alternatively, if it (work) was considered as pleasure, then leisure could be thought of as an extension of work, or voluntary labour.²⁸⁵

²⁸³ Rathbone, H.S., (1904) Angeli-Denis Collection, University of British Columbia Library Rare Books and Special Collections RBSC-ARC-1009

²⁸⁴ Goldthwaite, R., *The Building of Renaissance Florence: An Economic and Social History* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1980) p.242

²⁸⁵ Kinna, R., 'William Morris: Art Work and Leisure', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 61; 3 (July 2000) pp.493-512, p.494

Morris defined the four conditions necessary for the realisation of voluntary unforced labour as; work that would have to meet a vocation; it would have to be performed in pleasant surroundings; it would have to allow some scope for variation and would have to be useful. Morris, Kinna argues, drew on the idea of medieval production as a model for socialist organisation of work; within the medieval guilds there was but little division.²⁸⁶

By the fifteenth century, the Florentine guilds had been largely consolidated into twenty-one powerful organisations with a mass membership of craftsmen that were defined primarily by economic activity and defence of common interest; few craftsmen could practice without membership of a local guild. A workshop was often passed from father to son, or, in the case of the della Robbia shop, from uncle to nephew.²⁸⁷ Traditionally the master craftsmen would accept apprentices in their early teens and in exchange for assistance in the workshop give them training, board and lodgings and sometimes a small wage. Often a father would pay for his son to be apprenticed and a formal contract drawn up. Training commenced with menial tasks, progressing to drafting and modelling to collaborative status with the master craftsman. Eventually the apprentice would successfully present his 'masterpiece' to the guild and become an independent artist, often opening his own workshop.

In *Fors Clavigera*, Ruskin described the medieval Confraternities of Venice as 'distinguished by the quality and quantity of their members, their superior wealth and by the magnificence of the buildings in which they assemble', proposing that

²⁸⁶ Ibid., p.504

²⁸⁷ Luca della Robbia died in 1482 in Florence. The workshop – and Luca's glaze recipes - passed to his nephew Andrea della Robbia (1435-1525) and subsequently to Andrea's son Giovanni (1469-1529).

many of the confraternities had a temporal as well as a spiritual object, and those which were composed exclusively of members of the same trade regulated their worldly concerns, and established the rules by which the Brothers of the Guild should be bound. Their bye-laws were subject to the approval of the Government; they were stringent and exclusive, and were strictly enforced.²⁸⁸

As Harvey and Press note, Ruskin and subsequently William Morris, placed a high value on the virtues of the guild system of the late middle-ages, for example in *Unto the Last: Four Essays on the Principles of Political Economy* (1862), Ruskin argued that Britain's industrial society was morally degenerate and drove the labouring classes deeper into poverty.²⁸⁹ However, Cohen warns against a romanticised view of the medieval guild system by arguing that Florence at the time of Luca della Robbia had developed a successful capitalist economic order based on manufacturing, trade, mining and lending money at interest²⁹⁰ and that business decisions were carefully weighed up based on cost, demand, prices and profit. Cohen argues that although many of the guilds were often very powerful, setting prices, controlling output, restricting entry and maintaining the manufacture of traditional products, some were weaker and good workers were often enticed away from competitors to increase profits. Casillo also discusses this, pointing out that 'the loss of medieval spirituality and hierarchy was often a result of economic individualism' in the early *quattrocento* and resulted in 'the end of craft and the triumph of luxury and aesthetic formalism'. Consequently, the emergence of a self-aggrandizing modern state in the fifteenth century exemplified all that Ruskin feared and abhorred in industrialised Britain in

²⁸⁸ Ruskin, J., 'Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workman and Labourers of Great Britain' in Cook, E.T. and Wedderburn, A., (eds.) *The Work of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12) p.65

²⁸⁹ Harvey, J., and Press, C., 'John Ruskin and the Ethical Foundations of Morris & Company, 1861-96', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 14, No. 3 (Mar. 1995), pp.181-194

²⁹⁰ Cohen, J., 'Rational Capitalism in Renaissance Italy' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 85, No. 6 (May 1980), pp. 1340-1355

the nineteenth,²⁹¹ believing that a return to the small artisan workshop would have an emancipatory effect on an impoverished workforce. Following several attempts to unite physical and intellectual endeavour through labour, Ruskin founded his most ambitious project in 1871, a revivification of the medieval guild he named the 'Guild of St. George'. The Guild's associates, or 'Companions', contributed to a common fund to acquire factories and farming land and to practice a system of co-operative training and craftsmanship.²⁹² A major benefactor was Mary Greg, (1859-1949), nee Hope, of Liverpool. Both the Hope and Greg families were closely connected to the Rathbones.²⁹³

Several Guilds had been established in the late nineteenth century as part of the appropriation of the medieval that was an important element of the Arts and Crafts Movement. This included the Century Guild, (1882) founded by Rathbone's friend Mackmurdo, the Art Workers Guild (1884), Charles Ashbee's Guild of School and Handicraft (1888) and the Northern Art Workers Guild in Manchester (1896). Conrad Dressler wrote soon after his arrival in Birkenhead in 1894 that he planned the inauguration of a workman's guild, with the aim 'of reinstating the skills that have descended from a time when England was *Merrie England*.²⁹⁴ Although we have no confirmation that Dressler's plans ever came to fruition, it is evident that the founders of the Della Robbia Pottery were keen to introduce a similar studio working practice, no doubt encouraged by the writing of John Ruskin, the practices of their fellow artisans in the Arts and Crafts Movement and the enthusiasm of close family members such as Mary Greg and the Guild of St. George.

²⁹¹ Casillo, R., 'The Meaning of Venetian History in Ruskin and Pound' *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 55(3): 235-260 (March 1986) p.4

²⁹² Löwy, M. and Sayre, R., *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2002) p.144

²⁹³ Mitchell, L., *Treasuring things of the Least: Companion Extraordinaire Mary Hope Greg*
www.guildofstgeorge.org.uk (accessed 01.03.17)

²⁹⁴ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.169

The two workshops of the Della Robbia Pottery were organised in a traditionally hierarchical manner, with the Master Craftsmen - Dressler, Manzoni and Rathbone - responsible for training apprentices who had been recruited from the local art schools. An initial period of teaching without pay lasted three weeks, after which the apprentices in the decorating studio were put onto decorating small pieces before moving onto the larger ones. As the skills of the decorators developed, the individual worker had increasing personal influence over the design if not the production process, particularly in the sgraffito workshop. This mimics the progression path of the apprentice to master craftsman within the medieval guild and certainly craftsmen such as Cassandra Walker and Ruth Bare became highly accomplished artisans. This underlying principle of the Della Robbia Pottery successfully fused the practices of the medieval guild with their own workshop practices in a manner advocated by John Ruskin.

The Influence of Luca della Robbia

The Pottery was, of course, named in emulation of the *quattrocento* sculptor Luca della Robbia, who by the late nineteenth century was considered as

coining a language more universal than that of Donatello, his sculptures are accepted for the human consolation or the acute aesthetic pleasure that they offer, by a vast public to which Renaissance art is all but a closed book²⁹⁵

Luca was born in 1399 into an age that straddled the rigid structures of the medieval guild and the new challenge of developing entrepreneurship demonstrated by Cohen. Born into an educated family who ensured that he was literate and numerate, Vasari claimed that

²⁹⁵ Pope-Hennessy, J., *Luca della Robbia*, p.10

Luca della Robbia had been apprenticed under the guild system to Ser Giovanni, a goldsmith,²⁹⁶ although this has recently been challenged as chronologically impossible.²⁹⁷ Luca remained unmarried throughout his life, sharing a home in Florence with his brother and family, including his nephew Andrea. The earliest work by Luca della Robbia was recorded when he was a relatively mature craftsman of thirty, this being the *Cantoria* for the Duomo of Santa Maria del Fiori. Success followed with work for the Pazzi family under the direction of Brunelleschi, for Piero di Cosimo de' Medici in San Miniato del Monte, and for churches and public buildings throughout Florence. An artist such as Rathbone would thrill to the names that are wound through the life of Luca della Robbia: Donatello, Medici, Malatesta, Ghiberti, Botticelli, Michelozzi. We know that Rathbone visited Florence on at least one occasion, having ample opportunity to visit and admire the work of these artists himself. Luca della Robbia's *Cantoria* provided inspiration to several artists in the late nineteenth century: the articulation of the forms of the *Cantoria* by William Holman Hunt in *Triumph of the Innocents* and by Harold Rathbone and Aphra Peirce for the Della Robbia Pottery has been discussed in chapter one.²⁹⁸ The *Cantoria* is a complex composition of carved marble panes that served to decorate a choir loft within the Cathedral in Florence, based on lines in Psalm 150.²⁹⁹ The choir lofts were removed from the Cathedral in 1688 and, amid much controversy, put into storage until they were re-displayed in the new Museo dell' Opera del Duomo which opened in 1891. Harold Rathbone may have seen the *Cantoria*

²⁹⁶ Vasari, G., *The Lives of Artists*. Trans. Bondanella, J. & P., (Oxford University Press, 1991) p.66

²⁹⁷ Domestici, F., *Della Robbia: A Family of Artists* (Florence: Scala, 1992) p.14

²⁹⁸ Examples also include *The Daphnephoria* (1876) by Sir Frederick Leighton which drew inspiration from the *Cantoria* in his rendering of the row of singers in this large sized processional painting (Lady Lever Gallery, National Museums of Liverpool)

²⁹⁹ 'Praise him with the sound of trumpet: praise him with the psalter and harp. Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs. Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high-sounding cymbals'²⁹⁹. (<http://www.kingjamesbibleonline.org>) Donatello executed a similar commission in the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore between 1433 and 1438.

panels in the new museum as we know that he was in Italy in 1891, but he would also have been able to see a plaster cast of the panels that was made in 1877 and displayed in the Cast Hall of the South Kensington Museum.

Florence was a flourishing and vibrant city in the *quattrocento* with an expanding middle-class. Wealth came into the city through the wool and textile trade and Florentine banks could be found throughout Europe.³⁰⁰ The large and wealthy class of merchant traders were keen to display their new wealth in the commissioning of *palazzos*, chapels and works of art and Vasari confirms that the *bottega* of della Robbia was kept busy with commissions, including architectural pieces to decorate the courtyards of the new buildings, and with the sculpting of roundels and altar pieces. Commissioned art, a device that was widely used to confer status on the patron, was used in endowed chapels as a public means of atonement and, as Paoletti and Radke note, was often commissioned by the corporate bodies such as the guilds, confraternities and monastic communities as well as private individuals; 'Art was an integral part of functioning social and political fabric and provided visual structures for the patterns that governed not only earthly life but life in the hereafter as well'.³⁰¹ However, it would be a mistake to imagine that the della Robbia *bottega* only produced costly ecclesiastical bas-relief; Goldthwaite describes how the so-called 'potter's factory' of the della Robbia was also manufacturing low-cost items in series of mass-production, often armorial shields with a space left for the inclusion of a family coat-of-arms on the second firing.³⁰²

³⁰⁰ Hibbert, C., *Florence: The Biography of a City* (London: Penguin, 2004) pp.100-102

³⁰¹ Paoletti, J. and Radke, G., *Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: Laurence King, 2005) p.16

³⁰² Goldthwaite, R., 'The Economic and Social World of Italian Renaissance Maiolica' *Renaissance World Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No.1 (Spring 1989) pp.1-32 p.74

Vasari is acknowledged as the earliest, sometimes the only, source of information about many artists of the period although contemporary historians are sometimes sceptical about the objectivity of his prose and the credibility of his sources. Vasari was certainly well-acquainted with Andrea della Robbia, nephew and successor to Luca, and acted as a pall-bearer at Andrea's funeral. Luca's passion for finding new materials and techniques was described by Vasari; 'not because he was lazy...unstable, capricious or discontented with his craft but because he was drawn by nature to new techniques...thus the world and the arts of design were enriched by a new art, both useful and very beautiful, while he earned for himself glory and perpetual and immortal praise'.³⁰³ Luca della Robbia was also a religious man and Andrea similarly as devoted; in the period of tumult and political unrest in the last decade of the *quattrocento*, Andrea was one of the Dominican preacher Savonarola's closest allies and in 1498 was excluded from public office for two years for having participated in the defence of the preacher at San Marco.³⁰⁴ Both Luca and Andrea were *fratelli* of the confraternity *Compagnia di San Luca*, (1339-1563), the guild of painters, and in 1472 Andrea was listed as *Carnalingho* or cardinal of the order.³⁰⁵

This spirituality, combined with the serenity and tranquillity of the work, may have contributed to the appeal of the della Robbia pieces to the restless, inconstant but deeply religious Harold Rathbone. To reiterate, Rathbone's own faith is revealed in his letters to Brown, writing 'my love of God (which I confess is but feeble) is the strongest and most

³⁰³ Vasari, G., *The Lives of Artists* trans. by Bondanella, J. and P., p72

³⁰⁴ Domestici, F., *Della Robbia: A Family of Artists* p.38

³⁰⁵ Horne, H., 'Notes on Luca Della Robbia' *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, Vol. 28, No. 151 (Oct 1915), pp. 3-7

important thing in my life... I therefore pray that I may use the gifts that he gives me for His service rather than for my own delight'.³⁰⁶

Luca della Robbia fused the practice of ceramic making and sculpture in the latter half of the *quattrocento* to produce sculpture that was not only beautiful but also colourful, resilient and less expensive than marble or bronze. He adapted the glazing practices that had been developed in nearby Montelupo to produce weather- proof architectural plaques, sculptures and roundels and ensured that his work was long lasting and durable; many pieces can still be viewed on the external walls of the early Renaissance buildings of the city. Domestici attributes the success of the sculptor to his ability to infuse his work with 'a serene dominion of the passions in the name of the superior strength of reason and intellect'. This characteristic reflected the humanist values that prevailed in contemporary Florentine society; the della Robbia workshop in Florence gained patronage and a commercial viability as the work was guaranteed to demonstrate the 'restraint and classical equilibrium' that was highly valued in this conservative society.³⁰⁷ The quintessential piece of the della Robbia workshops is described by Laura Morelli as 'a pure white Madonna, against a blue background, framed in roundels or arched compositions with decorative borders'.³⁰⁸

Luca della Robbia found remarkable fame in his lifetime, due in great part to his technical innovations and the depth of pure colour that he achieved in his production of maiolica ware. Timothy Wilson defines maiolica as 'earthenware covered with an opaque white (or tinted) tin glaze'³⁰⁹ and Elisa Sani notes that although the term maiolica originally applied

³⁰⁶ Rathbone, H.S.,(1887), *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, Ref. 1995/14/86/91 (also quoted in chapter one)

³⁰⁷ Domestici, F., *Della Robbia: A Family of Artists*, p.11

³⁰⁸ Morelli, L., 'Della Robbia and Glazed Terracotta in Art' *Sculpture Review* Vol.53.Issue 2 (2004) pp.26-31

³⁰⁹ Wilson, T., *Maiolica- Italian Renaissance Ceramics in the Ashmolean Museum* (Oxford University Press, 2003) p.8
Wilson points out that so-called 'faience' and 'delftware' produced in other parts of Europe during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are technically the same kind of pottery.

only to Italian-made lustre ware, the term eventually came to describe all tin-glazed pottery.³¹⁰ A form of maiolica ware had been produced in northern Italy and Sicily since the thirteenth century when traders brought ceramics from Southern Spain and Africa. Syson and Thornton define the fifty years between 1475 and 1525 as the period when Italian craftsmen developed a new tin-glazed ceramic that ‘astonished contemporaries by its fineness and lightness and its white, clean surface’; by the late fifteenth century important centres of Italian maiolica production had developed in Deruta in Umbria, Urbino, Faenza, Montelupo Fiorentina, some twenty kilometres from Florence, and in Florence itself.³¹¹

This sophisticated method of tin-glazing was specified in *The Three Books of the Potter’s Art* (*I Tre Libri dell’Arte del Vasai*) by Cipriano Piccolpasso.³¹² Piccolpasso describes how the pieces were made using the finest white purified clay and then either thrown on a wheel or shaped by using various moulds before being first-fired at approximately 1000 degrees, known as the ‘biscuit firing’. The white tin-glaze was then applied by dipping, as the first layer of a three-layer method of decoration. A mixture of varied proportions of potash, sand and the oxides of lead and tin, gave the pieces a white, opaque appearance (the ‘bianco’) which was then painted with coloured glazes when dry. The work then received a final waterproofing clear lead-glaze, the ‘coperta’ that gave Italian Renaissance pottery the lustrous finish for which it is renowned, and the object was fired for a second time. By

³¹⁰ Sani, E.P., *Italian Renaissance Maiolica* (London: V&A Publishing, 2012) p.19

³¹¹ Syson, L. and Thornton, D., *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* (London: British Museum Press, 2001) p.200

³¹² Piccolpasso, C., *I Tre Libri dell’Arte del Vasai* (1557) National Art Library (Great Britain). Manuscript. MSL/1861/7446.

Cipriano Piccolpasso (1524-1579) founded a highly successful maiolica workshop in Castel Durante, near Urbino, and helped establish the Academy of Design in Perugia, Umbria. *The Three Books of the Potter’s Art* were written around 1557. Piccolpasso described the maiolica produced in this area as ‘bearing off the highest prize, for the making of pottery not only in all Italy but I believe in all the world, which I hope will shortly be seen in a treatise of mine on the potter’s art’ Wilson describes *The Three Books of the Potter’s Art* as ‘an incomparable source’ as Piccolpasso’s manuscript explains maiolica production in Castel Durante, Tuscany, in the 16C, supplemented by careful and evocative drawings’.

Wilson, T., *Maiolica- Italian Renaissance Ceramics in the Ashmolean Museum* (2003) p.8)

painting the coloured glaze onto the unfired *bianco*, the colours would fuse with the *bianco* during the second firing and form a smooth surface with bright, luminous colours that are 'as bright today as when they were first made'.³¹³

The *quattrocento* colour palette was limited, and characterised by blue (from cobalt), green (from copper), yellow and orange (from antimony), purple and brown (from manganese) and white (from tin). Red was difficult to produce and only sparingly used. The success of the workshop of the della Robbia family came from the innovative use of colour and glazes developed by Luca; the glaze recipes remained a family secret for centuries. Until recently it was assumed that Luca also used the three-layer glaze technique that had been pioneered in the Italian maiolica workshops but investigations by Kingly and Aronson in 1990 have identified that Luca achieved his extraordinary tonal depth and brilliant palette by milling the pigments with the glaze constituents so that the colour was uniformly distributed from the underlying terracotta to the surface and by increasing the proportion of tin oxide from 7 weight percent to 20 weight percent in his white glaze.³¹⁴ The saturated, jewel-like colours that this technique produced combined with the oxide-rich opaqueness of the white glazes brought a startling originality to his work. His deliberately limited palette of predominantly greens, yellows and blues was then re-fired and the subsequent fusing of the pigments 'ensured that the colours would be retained for centuries to come'.³¹⁵

This three-layered method of applying the paint over the *bianco* and then fusing by firing ensured that the colours did not 'bleed' or flow into the white tin-glaze, which enabled the marriage of the 'noble' art of history painting and new ceramic production. *Istoriato* or

³¹³ Rackham, B., 'Italian Maiolica: Notes on its materials from Piccolpasso' *Studies in Conservation*, Vol. 2. No.1 (Mar. 1955) pp. 41-44

³¹⁴ Kingery, W.D., 'Painterly Maiolica of the Italian Renaissance' *Technology and Culture*, Vol.34 No.1 (Jan.1993) p.40

³¹⁵ Welch, E., *Art in Renaissance Italy* (Oxford University Press, 1997) p.58

History Painting is a term that describes the finely detailed historical stories and narratives that artists of increasing renown, including Nicola of Urbino and Maestro Giorgio of Gubbio, painted onto the powdery white tin-glazed surface of plates, chargers, albarelli and a myriad of hollow-ware shapes. Interestingly, Syson and Thornton have noted that the bright colours and detailed narratives of *istoriato* maiolica was an achievement that not even the Greeks and Romans of the past had managed to accomplish.³¹⁶ This elevated the status of this style of earthenware pottery in the eyes of sophisticated patrons; *istoriato* maiolica was considered 'worthy of admittance to the realm of art'.³¹⁷ The term *istoriato* was probably coined by Piccolpasso; Syson and Thornton suggest that the term deliberately associates the painters of maiolica with the descriptions in Alberti's revered treatise *On Painting*.³¹⁸ The intricately detailed and beautifully executed narrative painting ensured that the best of this type of maiolica became an important medium for patronage and an indication of good taste.³¹⁹

Giulio Busti assesses that the archaic sgraffito production that had been the mainstay for several centuries had completely died out in Deruta by the end of the fifteenth century and was rapidly replaced by the manufacture of *istoriato* designs and patterns drawn from the Renaissance painting of Perugino, Pinturicchio and Raphael and of a grotesque and

³¹⁶ Syson, L. and Thornton, D., *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* p.200

³¹⁷ Finlay, R., 'The Pilgrim Art: The Culture of Porcelain in World History' *Journal of World History* Vol. 9, No. 2 (Fall, 1998), pp. 141-187, p.166

³¹⁸ Syson, L. and Thornton, D., *Objects of Virtue: Art in Renaissance Italy* p.213

³¹⁹ Derived from Islamic production, a further firing method was developed that gave a metallic lustre to maiolica wares. The twice-fired article was painted with a compound of oxides of silver, copper or red ochre then fired for a third time. Towards the end of this firing the vents to the kiln were blocked up and the resulting carbon monoxide caused a thin layer of metal to be deposited, producing an iridescent sheen of gold, red or golden-silver to the article, called lustreware. However, this process was expensive and prone to a high rate of failure. Only a few specialised medieval workshops committed themselves to this despite the higher prices that the work commanded. Ceramists and potters in the quattrocento faced similar difficulties to those encountered by Harold Rathbone in Birkenhead four hundred years later and the high cost of firing the kiln, the expense of high quality clay and of the chemicals and oxides required for the decoration added hugely to production costs.

calligraphic styling.³²⁰ The decorative style of grotesque came into vogue following the discovery of Nero's *Domus Aurea* in Rome in 1480, inspired by the acanthus leaves, masks, palmettes and classical busts found on the walls of the *grottes*, or caves. These motifs soon began to appear on maiolica ware. In *Italian Renaissance Maiolica*, Elisa Sani demonstrates that the Umbrian artist Pinturicchio made a detailed study of the classical motifs and incorporated them into his fresco cycles,³²¹ providing an inspiration to generations of potters. Pieces of Della Robbia Pottery are often decorated with motifs of the acanthus leaves and although grotesque design is not a common theme at the pottery it does occasionally feature. Several pieces were produced by the Pottery that position a central portrait on a plate or charger that also draw on a later Renaissance tradition, but the architectural workshop remained stylistically committed to the work of Luca della Robbia and rarely decorated a piece in the *istoriato* style that is associated with Deruta and Urbino. A glazed charger by Cassandra Walker (Figure 1) draws inspiration from a piece made in Deruta in approximately 1520. The stylised motifs also reflect the popular aesthetic of Art Nouveau. The central female figure is half turned with her face in profile. Her red hair is partially covered with an elaborate head dressing and she is surrounded by a rich pattern of flora executed in sgraffito style that includes six large flower heads which dominate the design. The piece has been finished with the signature blue/ green translucent glaze of the Della Robbia Pottery.

³²⁰ Busti, G., curator, Museo Regionale Della Ceramica, Deruta, (private correspondence July 2014)

³²¹ Sani, E.P., *Italian Renaissance Maiolica* p.50



Figure 1: Cassandra Walker, Large glazed earthenware plaque, 1904, Glasgow Museums Collection
© CSG CIC Glasgow Museums Collection

The sophisticated and intricate design was executed by one of the Pottery's most accomplished artists. Arguably, the piece was intended to fulfil a similar function to that of early Italian maiolica – to elevate the status of the sgraffito ware to that of fine art. Tattersall described Harold Rathbone as an 'Italophile with a predilection for the *quattrocento*';³²² however, Rathbone was selective in his enthusiasms and chose not to embrace the intricacies of *istoriato* maiolica, possibly rejecting the genre as an inappropriate way of 'embracing the homespun'.³²³

The Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead was founded with the intention of creating a market to decorate the exteriors of the newly built homes of the merchants of the industrial

³²² Tattersall, B., 'The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery: Il Progresso Sia Nostro Scorpo' *Apollo Magazine*, Issue 47, 137 (Feb 1973) pp.164-168

³²³ A term coined by Gillian Naylor in Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influences on design theory* (London: Trefoil Publications Ltd, 1990)

revolution. An article in *The Studio* suggests that the introduction of Della Robbia Pottery architectural panels made in the manner of the 'great Italian family of della Robbia' into the home would bring individuality to a place that may otherwise have 'an extraordinary similarity'.³²⁴ Rathbone and Dressler's vision of the Della Robbia Pottery as a true emulation of bas-relief faience from Florence appears to have been compromised by the pottery's apparent failure to use tin-based glaze on the architectural pieces that would characterise the work as true three-layered maiolica. Hillhouse comments that the pottery characteristically used a lead rather than tin-glaze applied over a white slip,³²⁵ resulting in pieces that would therefore not be a true homage to the work of Luca della Robbia but merely a poor imitation. However, an examination by the ceramicist Janet Holmes³²⁶ of the work produced in the architectural workshop challenges those previous assumptions. The examination revealed that several of the plaques, including those made for a private commission, had in fact been made using the three-layered method of maiolica production described by Piccolpasso and that a tin-glaze had been used to achieve the depth of white pigment. These pieces include the Wallasey Reredos (figure 2) and the *Madonna and Child with Angels* (Figure 6) roundel in the Williamson Art Gallery.

The Wallasey Reredos were commissioned to decorate the Liscard Memorial Unitarian Church. Founded in 1898, the chapel was funded by Martha Elam in memory of her late husband. The building was designed by Rathbone's younger brother Edmund Rathbone with Edward Waring and includes work by several artists in addition to the panels by The Della Robbia Pottery. The building was described by *The Studio* as 'a very careful and happy

³²⁴ *Magazine of Art* (January 1897) pp. 6-8

³²⁵ Hillhouse, D., *Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead 1894 -1906 – An Interim Report* (Birkenhead: Williamson Art Gallery, 1981) p.17

³²⁶ I am grateful for the expertise of Janet Holmes of the Rathbone Studio, Argyll St., Birkenhead.

collaboration of architect and decorative craftsmen'.³²⁷ These bas-relief panels were replicated for the Toxteth Mission Church in Liverpool.³²⁸



³²⁷ 'H.B.B' *The Studio*. (Nov 1899) Vol. XVIII. No.80. p.134.

³²⁸ The Toxteth Reredos were retrieved by curators from the Walker Art Gallery during the demolition of the Toxteth Mission Church in 1972 and subsequently restored. These panels were publicly displayed for the first time since their retrieval at the exhibition *Renaissance to Regent Street: The Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead* (2016) Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.



Figure 2: Harold Rathbone and Carlo Manzoni, *The Wallasey Reredos*, 1899, Liscard Memorial Unitarian Church, Wallasey.

Taking a well-known text from the Old Testament Book of Micah the verses within the Reredos ask, 'And what does the Lord require of thee but to do justly and love mercy and to walk humbly with thy God'.³²⁹ A mother and child dance together in the central panel, watched by an elderly man on the left and a young girl in aesthetic dress on the right.

The young girl is reading a small book; she is surrounded by lilies, traditionally symbolising purity and innocence. She walks through a field of spring-flowering daisies and the trees overhead are filled with early blossom. In the central panel the woman and child dance in a

³²⁹ *Micah* 6:8 King James Bible.

This well-known verse from the Old Testament promotes social justice rather than external religious rites.

summer meadow filled with tiny bellis flowers. Both are barefooted and appear light-hearted and carefree. The tree canopy, the bocage, is now in full leaf. In the left-hand panel, the elderly man carries his scroll through a meadow now strewn with falling leaves. The flowers have faded and the trees are beginning to change colour as autumn approaches. The moon and sun together in the upper panels symbolise the marriage of earth and heaven. Together with the five stars, the numerical symbol for mankind, the sun and moon rise over the primordial chaos represented here by the sea and the wings of the eagle symbolise Christ gazing upon the glory of God. The iconography of the upper panels is possibly inspired by the writings of the philosopher Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) with whom Unitarianism shared many philosophies.

The Reredos clearly recall rather than copy the example of the Florentine workshop of Luca della Robbia and in the stylised depiction of the trees in the background they also draw on the influences of Art Nouveau. A close examination reveals some use of tin-glaze intermingled with the white slip to give a tonality and depth to the figures. *The Studio* magazine reported the unveiling of the panels in late 1899 and commented 'here is something very fresh, unconventional, and fitting in the design of the newly completed church for the Unitarian Congregation of Liscard'. The interior decoration was a collaboration between several important craftsmen of the Arts and Crafts Movement, including Rathbone and Manzoni, Bernard Sleight of the Bromsgrove Guild of Arts and Crafts, Benjamin Creswick of Birmingham who carved intricate figures of 'Eloquence', 'Devotion' and 'Music' above the stone columns and Walter Gilbert, also of the Bromsgrove Guild, who

crafted the 'electroliers' hanging from the roof, made of beaten copper, 'very suitable in form, and not over-elaborated'.³³⁰

The *Madonna and Child* bas-relief (Figure 4) was designed by Ellen Mary Rope for the Della Robbia Pottery and once again recalls the influence of the della Robbia. We can see an archetypal arrangement of form and limited tonal palette; the piece has a similarity of composition and iconography with 'Madonna and Child' by Luca della Robbia (Figure 3). Both pieces present a mother and child together with a lily to signify purity, iconographical attribute of the Madonna. It is often associated with the Annunciation and is habitually displayed in the hand of the archangel Gabriel as he approaches Mary. The lily was termed by Dante as 'the lily of faith'.³³¹ A broken lily symbolises a life cut short, usually of a child; in the *quattrocento* plaque by Luca della Robbia, Mary gravely watches as the Christ child reaches forward to break the lily voluntarily, foreseeing his own death on the cross. The plucked lily is one of three, representing the Holy Trinity and the flowers all spring from the same plant. In the design by Ellen Rope, the child has also plucked one lily as his mother leans forward to support his unsteady gait. Neither of Rope's figures has a halo and they lack the delicacy and gentle simplicity of Luca della Robbia's work.

³³⁰ 'H.B.B.', *The Studio* (Nov.1899) No.80, p.134

³³¹ 'The white lily signifies faith (in the redeemer to come), purity and justice'

Durling, R., *The Divine Comedy of Dante Alighieri: Volume 2: Purgatorio* (Oxford University Press, 2002) p.506



Figure 3: Luca della Robbia, Madonna and Child, c1475, Glazed terracotta, National Gallery of Art, Washington

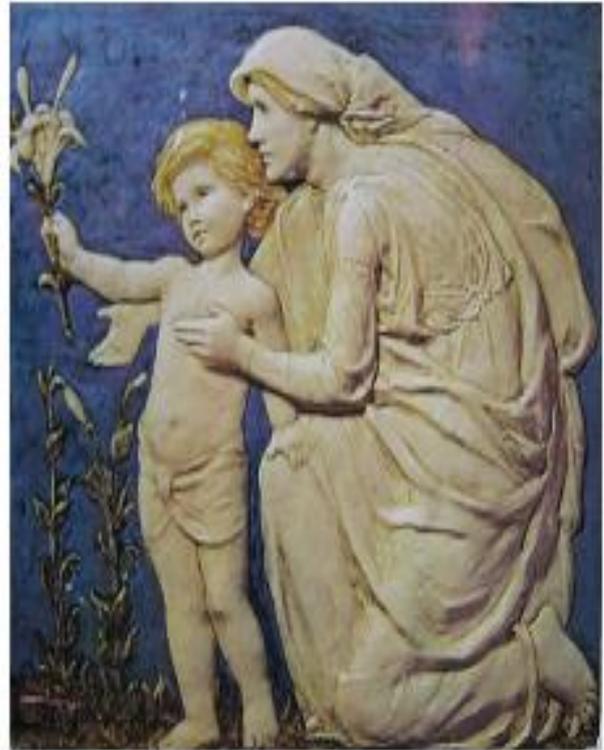


Figure 4: Della Robbia Pottery Madonna and Child, c1896, Glazed terracotta, Williamson Art Gallery

The designers of the architectural ceramics in the Argyll Street workshop were encouraged to compose an original scheme within a colour palette and set of forms inspired by the *quattrocento* Florentine workshop. The tonal range, the iconography and the modelling pay homage to the work of the Florentine sculptor although Ruskin's third simple rule 'Never encourage imitation or copying of any kind, except for the sake of preserving records of

great work'³³² prevented the artisans in the workshop from producing an exact replica. As Sheldon comments, Rathbone aspired to an 'Art Pottery' inspired by the Italian artisan craftsmen, in which his workers would be aesthetically stimulated and creatively motivated by the original della Robbia workshop.³³³

Architectural faience may be made by either slip-casting or by press-moulding although we do not know which technique was preferred at the Pottery. Press-moulding involves forcing the clay into a mould to take the form; when it is removed a 'positive' of the mould is formed. Slip-casting involves pouring liquid clay, or 'slip' into a mould made from plaster, which will absorb much of the water from the slip, and form a solid cast. Rathbone employed both a mould-maker, Edwin Turri, who used both plaster and gelatine, and a hollow-ware presser, Albert Richardson, who made jugs, vases, bowls and cups by pressing clay into a mould. Richardson was also the works chemist.³³⁴

The revival of interest in Luca della Robbia in Nineteenth-Century Britain

It is not certain that the employees of the Della Robbia Pottery had seen original work by Luca della Robbia in either London or in Italy, but in 1894 they would have been able to see a significant number of della Robbia bas-reliefs in Liverpool.³³⁵ The original works were loaned by the South Kensington Museum to the Walker Art Gallery's Spring Exhibition of Decorative and Applied Art; Thornton and Wilson confirm that the South Kensington

³³² Ruskin, J., in Birch, D., (ed.), *John Ruskin: Selected Writings* (Oxford University Press, 2004) p.44

³³³ Sheldon, J., 'Inspired by the Florentine Originals': Rathbone and the della Robbia' in Sheldon, J. (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street*, p.71

³³⁴ Charles Collis file, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead

³³⁵ *Leeds Mercury* (12.02.1894)

Museum had ‘an energetic policy of lending works around the country’.³³⁶ Newspaper reports suggest that the museum either extended or made a similar loan in the spring of 1895.³³⁷ In 1880 J.C. Robinson,³³⁸ curator of Decorative Arts at the Museum, summarised these loans as ‘the principal extensions of the actions of Museums brought about by South Kensington, beginning with the various types of lending to the Museum but not forgetting the lending *from* the Museum by circulating exhibition to Art Schools and Provincial Museums’ (my italics).³³⁹ The inauguration of a loan scheme to museums and recognized schools of art throughout the country was aimed at promoting good taste and design. The scheme was successfully making loans long before the 1894 Spring Exhibition at the Walker Art Gallery; in 1871 a collection of applied and decorative art from the South Kensington Museum was exhibited at the embryonic ‘Corporation Art Gallery’ in Birmingham.³⁴⁰ Thornton and Wilson contrast the South Kensington Museum with the British Museum; The South Kensington Museum was ‘educationally orientated and populist’ whilst the British Museum was seen as ‘staid and boring... with an air of sleepy, slatternly shabbiness’.³⁴¹

Despite this, both institutions were actively building their collections of both maiolica pottery and *quattrocento* sculpture, including that of the della Robbia. Under the direction of John Robinson, the South Kensington Museum was assembling a comprehensive

³³⁶ Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection*, Vol. 1. p.12

³³⁷ *Liverpool Mercury* (16.03.1895)

³³⁸ John Charles Robinson (1824-1913) was the first Curator of Decorative Art at the new South Kensington Museum, opened in 1857. He initially trained as an artist, including a time in Paris, and had for a short time taught at the School of Design in Hanley, Staffordshire. Robinson is credited with building the collection of Italian Renaissance sculpture at the Museum and his catalogue ‘*Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art*’ is considered still considered a landmark in the scholarly study of the subject.

Robinson, J. C., ‘*Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art; a descriptive catalogue of the works forming the above section of the museum, with additional illustrative notices*’ (London: Chapman Hall, 1862)

³³⁹ Eatwell, A., ‘Borrowing from Collectors: The role of the Loan in the Formation of the Victoria and Albert Museum and its Collection (1852 – 1932)’ *V&A Online Journal* Issue No. 2 (Autumn 2009)

³⁴⁰ Lewis, G., ‘Museums in Britain: A Historical Survey’ in Thompson, J. (ed.), *Manual of Curatorship: A Guide to Museum Practice* (London: Routledge, 2012) p.29

³⁴¹ Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A catalogue of the British Museum Collection* Vol 1, p.12

collection of sculpture, bas-relief and maiolica ware. Charles Eastlake, first Director of the National Gallery, had significantly enlarged the Gallery's own holdings of *quattrocento* art and had added a blue and white plaque by Luca della Robbia to his private collection. The British Museum was also increasing its holdings of ceramics and bas-relief sculpture although Thornton and Wilson point out that the acquisition policy of the museum was directed more towards the purchase of maiolica ware in the *istoriato* style.³⁴²

Charlotte Drew assesses that it was the building of the collection of the South Kensington Museum by Robinson, along with the publication in 1862 of his catalogue, *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art*, that first established the reputation of Luca della Robbia in the nineteenth-century and initiated a scholarly interpretation of his work.³⁴³ Robinson purchased many of the early pieces of *quattrocento* sculpture on behalf of the South Kensington Museum ; in 1854 from the Gherardini collection in Florence, in 1859 and 1860 through individual purchases made in Italy and 'finally the purchase of the Gigli-Campana collections brought the series to its present state'.³⁴⁴ Following the bankruptcy and subsequent imprisonment of the Marchese Campana, his art collection had been offered for sale throughout Europe and had been inspected in Italy first by Henry Cole, Director of the Museum, and in 1860 by Robinson himself.³⁴⁵ Only two sections of the huge collection were of interest to Cole and Robinson and after protracted negotiations, eighty-four items of Renaissance sculpture and maiolica ware were purchased for the Museum for

³⁴² Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* Volumes I & II (London: British Museum Press, 2009) Vol. 1, p.12

³⁴³ Drew, C., 'Luca Della Robbia: South Kensington Museum and the Revival of a Florentine Sculpture', *Sculpture Journal*, 32,2 (2014) pp.171-183

³⁴⁴ Robinson, J. C., *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art; a descriptive catalogue of the works forming the above section of the museum, with additional illustrative notices* (London: Chapman Hall, 1862) p.xv

³⁴⁵ Wainwright, C. and Gere, C., 'The Making of the South Kensington Museum III – Collecting Abroad' *Journal of the History of Collection* Vol. 14 no.1 (2002) pp. 45-61

the sum of 5,836/-³⁴⁶ (Figure 5). This major purchase of *quattrocento* art propelled the name of della Robbia firmly into the public arena; combined with the explosion of numbers of British tourists visiting Florence in this period, the sculptors of the early Renaissance were becoming as familiar to the British as the better known High Renaissance masters. By 1862 the South Kensington Museum had acquired over thirty significant pieces by Luca and Andrea della Robbia and had numerous other pieces without a confirmed provenance but which were ascribed to 'the school of della Robbia'.³⁴⁷ Robinson justified the large acquisition of medieval sculpture and maiolica ware by the museum by arguing that there is an 'intimate link between medieval and renaissance sculpture with the decorative arts',³⁴⁸ claiming the South Kensington Museum as the natural home of Early Renaissance sculpture.

³⁴⁶ Robinson, J. C., *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art* p.16

³⁴⁷ Ibid. p.47-72

³⁴⁸ Robinson, J. C., *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art* p. xi

Timothy Wilson describes the difficult relationship between Robinson and Henry Cole, Director of the Museum, which came to a head in 1863. As a result, Robinson was demoted to 'Art Referee'. However, Robinson pressed on with his plans to translate and prepare for publication the unique illustrated manuscript that he had obtained in Castel Durante, Piccolpasso's *I Tre Libri dell'Arte del Vasai* (1557). His proposal was not accepted by a hostile Cole and the Board of the Museum; Robinson was eventually dismissed in 1867. The manuscript was translated and published in an 800 page volume by Charles Fortnum (1820-1899) in 1873. Wilson comments that the new 'external art advisors', who included Fortnum, could not replace Robinson's 'opportunistic brilliance' for purchasing.

Wilson, T., *'Il papà delle antiche maioliche'*: C.D.E. Fortnum and the study of Italian maiolica. *Journal of the history of Collections* 11, No. 2 (1999) pp.203-218

A letter from Rome says :—" Mr Robinson, acting for the South Kensington Museum, has just made an important acquisition here. He has purchased from the Papal Government the section of mediæval Italian sculpture of the celebrated Campana collection. The number of specimens is between 80 and 90, and includes a series of twelve unique examples of majolica ware, which it appears was much coveted by the Kensington authorities. The principal work is a beautiful life-sized marble statue of Cupid, represented in a kneeling attitude, as a youth of 15 or 16. There seems to be no doubt that this is an authentic work of Michael Angelo. The purchase also comprises two admirable bassi relievi by Donatello, and important specimens of Jacopo della Quercia, Andrea Orcagna, Lorenzo Ghiberti, Desiderio di Settignano, Rossellino, Luca della Robbia, &c. Sir Charles Eastlake has also recently acquired in Rome a fine picture of Fra Angelico for the National Gallery."

Figure 5: *Western Daily Press* (January 11 1861)

Despite a new enthusiasm for this early religious art, some critics, particularly John Ruskin, had reservations about the work of Luca and Andrea della Robbia.³⁴⁹ Ruskin admired the sculptural qualities and fine craftsmanship of Luca della Robbia's work; but struggled with a marked antipathy towards the polychromatic colouring of the pieces. Writing to his father in 1845 following a visit to Pistoia, he fumed

There is a singular thing on the Hospital front, a series of bas-reliefs in coloured porcelain by Luca della Robbia, which have of course the most vulgar effect conceivable, looking like the commonest sign-post barbarisms. And yet if you struggle with yourself, and look into them, forgetting the colour, you find them magnificent works of the very highest merit—full of the purest sculptural feeling, and abundant in expression, grace of conception, and anatomical knowledge³⁵⁰

³⁴⁹ John Gibson's 'Tinted Venus' (1851-52) was one of the first nineteenth century polychrome sculptures. The work caused widespread controversy when first shown in 1862.

³⁵⁰Ruskin, J, 'Letter from Ruskin to his father, May 29 1845', in E. T. Cook and A. Wedderburn (eds) *The Works of John Ruskin* (London: George Allen, 1903-12) Vol.3, p.300

Commentators including the American writer Charles C. Perkins and French critic Theophile Gautier had also expressed reservations about the painting of sculpture, Perkins echoing Ruskin's remarks by describing the decorative frieze by Giovanni della Robbia at *L'Ospedale del Ceppo*, Pistoia, as having 'a brilliant, if not entirely tasteful effect'.³⁵¹ Walter Pater had no such reservations; *Studies in the History of the Renaissance*³⁵² included an appreciative monograph on the work of Luca della Robbia and his widely-read essay would stimulate Rathbone's interest in the work of the Florentine sculptor. It certainly contributed to Luca della Robbia becoming, in the words of John Pope-Hennessy, the most popular sculptor of the fifteenth century;³⁵³ ensuring that della Robbia became a source of inspiration for several Arts and Crafts Potteries but in particular to the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead. The work of the della Robbia family was not only to be found in the museums of London but was also widely accessible in Florence itself. The Uffizi Gallery, the Palazzo del Bargello - which had opened as a museum in 1865 - and the Church of Santa Trinita in Florence were important locations of della Robbia sculpture. It is implausible that Harold Rathbone failed to visit these places to see the pieces during his time in Florence. Rathbone's interest in bas-relief sculpture can also be dated from nearly fifteen years before the founding of the pottery when he was widely reported as encountering the young artist Frank Brangwyn in the South Kensington Museum and advising him to copy the newly-acquired *quattrocento* sculpture. Brangwyn was thirteen at the time and Harold twenty-two, making the year 1880. Writing about Brangwyn in 1910, Walter Sparrow Shaw³⁵⁴ noted that 'Mr. Harold Rathbone,

³⁵¹ Sheldon, J., 'Inspired by the Florentine Originals': Rathbone and the della Robbia' in Sheldon, J., *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street*, pp.55-72. p.61

³⁵² See chapter 1, pp.63-65

³⁵³ Pope-Hennessy, J., *Luca Della Robbia* p.10

³⁵⁴ Walter Shaw Sparrow (1862–1940) was a well-known writer and critic, publishing widely on art, architecture and crafts. He particularly admired the work of the artist Frank Brangwyn, a student of William Morris and Arthur Mackmurdo. An article in the *Art Journal* in 1903 also describes how Rathbone introduced Frank Brangwyn to William Morris and Brangwyn went on to train as an apprentice under Morris in his workshops in Oxford Street.

an artist, at once offered criticism and then set him to work from early Florentine sculptures.... with a hard pencil, he drew for months on very smooth white paper, copying the reliefs of Donatello and doing whatever Mr. Rathbone wished'.³⁵⁵

By positioning the work of Luca della Robbia as part of the western cannon, Robinson paved the way for Dressler and Rathbone's interpretation of della Robbia's work in at least three ways; firstly, his detailed and scholarly analysis, *Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art*, ensured that della Robbia sculpture was foremost in the nineteenth-century reassessment of *quattrocento* art – art that had previously been regarded as 'primitive' now became admirable. Secondly, by supporting the educationally-oriented protocols of the South Kensington Museum described by Thornton and Wilson, Robinson was party to the dissemination of the work of the della Robbia family in both the galleries of the South Kensington Museum and throughout Britain through display and loans. Thirdly, Drew proposes, the reconciliation between John Ruskin and the 'vulgar and barbaric' polychromatic palette of Luca della Robbia was facilitated by the scholarly writings of John Robinson. This rapprochement prepared the 'Ruskinian' Rathbone for his new venture by legitimising the work of Luca della Robbia as worthy of emulation.

Ruskin drew a sharp delineation between the beauty of the higher forms of nature; the human body as perfectly expressed by the Ancient Greeks, and the lower forms of nature; animals and plant forms. However, Ruskin argued that the depiction of these so-called lower forms of nature was as legitimate a form of artistic expression as its alternative. Robinson proposed that the work of Luca della Robbia, in which 'rich clusters of mingled leaves and

Rinder, F., 'The Art of Frank Brangwyn' *Art Journal* (Mar. 1903) p.78

³⁵⁵ Shaw, B., *William Morris: Writer, Artist, Socialist. Vol. I* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1936) p.10

fruit are grouped together with exquisite taste' and 'the spirit and beauty of the modelling, the truth to Nature, and the variety of the tints of the enamel colours', fulfilled the Ruskinian criteria of 'truth to nature'.³⁵⁶ This principle was of course initially articulated in the work of the Pre-Raphaelites from the middle years of the nineteenth century. By the time Harold Rathbone and Conrad Dressler had opened a studio pottery in Birkenhead, Ruskin was not only an admirer of the *quattrocento* ceramicist but owned his own piece of della Robbia bas-relief.³⁵⁷

The celebration of 'truth to nature' by the Della Robbia Pottery is acknowledged by Charles Collis in one of the few surviving accounts of the pottery.³⁵⁸ Collis was interviewed in 1949 by the *Birkenhead Advertiser* and recalled that 'the whole value of Della Robbia is, of course, in the design. They were rich sweeping designs with stylised leaf and flower work suggesting ripeness and abundance. Each leaf was executed with such a mass of detail that it took sometimes a whole day to execute'.³⁵⁹ Ruskin would surely have been delighted by the way the designers in the *sgraffito* department drew on botanical forms, fully expressing the principle of 'truth to nature'.

In *Madonna and Child* tondo (Figure 6), sculpted and painted by Harold Rathbone in 1898, the composition shows a clear affinity to the complex compositions of the della Robbia

³⁵⁶ Drew, C., *Displaying Italian Sculpture: Exploring Hierarchies at the South Kensington Museum 1852-62* (PhD thesis, University of York, 2014) p.225

³⁵⁷ In 1880 Ruskin bought *The Adoration of the Virgin* by Andrea della Robbia through the dealer Charles Fairfax Murray. Ruskin held that it was, in fact, an original piece by Luca della Robbia. The piece was prominently displayed in the study at his home at Brantwood.

³⁵⁸ Charles Collis (1879-1966) started work at the pottery in June 1895 aged fifteen. Other than a short time at Doulton & Co., Burslem in 1900 and at George Swift & Co. in Liverpool in 1904, he remained at the pottery until its closure. Collis was one of most distinguished of the artists at the pottery; in addition, he left one of the few contemporary memoirs and much of our knowledge of both the techniques and employees of the pottery results from his writings. Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, pp.150-159 includes a detailed biography of Collis

³⁵⁹ Interview with Charles Collis, *Birkenhead Advertiser* 10 September 1949 (from unpublished transcription by Peter Hyland)

workshop.³⁶⁰ Again, the Della Robbia Pottery tondo was not seeking to imitate the work of Andrea della Robbia rather to draw inspiration from it. The seated Virgin Mary holds the Christ Child on her lap and is turned towards him in a contrapposto pose. The child looks to us, the viewer, and holds our gaze, his right hand raised in a blessing. In his left hand, he clutches a golden apple, identifying him as the 'New Adam' and 'redeemer of our sins'. Four putti surround the mother and child and to their right an angel kneels in prayer, his wings folding into the circular lines of the composition. Unusually for a bas-relief of this type, Rathbone has painted a mosaic floor, perhaps referencing the floors of early Renaissance churches. The tondo is a demanding compositional form and this piece has an additional complexity by the inclusion of the bench and mosaic floor that adds an unusual perspective and depth. Together with the delicate rendering of the Madonna and infant, this is an ambitious piece and the use of the costlier tin-glaze on the central characters indicates that this was an important commission for the workshop.³⁶¹

³⁶⁰ Although Jeremy Cooper likened this piece to the della Robbia roundel owned by G. F. Watts, the composition is markedly different.

³⁶¹ The piece is signed 'Harold Rathbone Sculp. & Pinxt' which is possibly an abbreviation for the stylisation meaning 'painted' in widespread use in late medieval and Renaissance art.



Figure 6: *The Della Robbia Pottery (Harold Rathbone), Madonna with Child, 1898, Glazed terracotta, Williamson Art Gallery*

If we compare the piece with *Virgin and Child* (Figure 7) by Andrea della Robbia which was added to the collection of the South Kensington Museum before 1862, we can see similar, though not identical, composition and modelling.



Figure 7: Andrea della Robbia, Virgin and Child, Glazed Terracotta Relief, 1475-1500, Victorian and Albert Museum

Robinson describes the piece as being purchased in Florence where it was noted to have been 'let into the wall of a house [...] over an inner or court yard doorway'.³⁶² The figures of the Virgin and Child would have been seen to look down on the inhabitants of the house, perhaps affording them their protection; it may be that the tondo by the Della Robbia Pottery was intended to fulfil a similar function. The gaze of the Virgin and child are alike in both pieces and Christ meets our own eye unflinchingly. The iconography is dissimilar; the

³⁶² Robinson, J. C., 'Italian Sculpture of the Middle Ages and Period of the Revival of Art; a descriptive catalogue of the works forming the above section of the museum, with additional illustrative notices' (London: Chapman Hall, 1862) p.83

child in the *quattrocento* piece holds a bird in his right hand and his left hand is raised. The frame of fruit and foliage is not original nor the ledge that the figures rest on; both have been added later. The piece by Rathbone is also similar to the *Madonna of the Architects*, also by Andrea della Robbia, which has remained in Florence. It is now part of the collection of National Museum of the Bargello.

We can also see a marked similarity in modelling and form with this lunette (Figure 8) which is a copy by the workshop of Cantagalli in Florence of *Madonna and Child* by Andrea della Robbia and bought by Philip Rathbone. The lunette hung in Greenbank Cottage, home of Harold Rathbone until adulthood.³⁶³ Inspired by *La Madonna del Cardellino* by Andrea della Robbia, La Verna, Tuscany, the modelling of the child with a raised forearm and the position and facial expression of the Madonna suggest that Harold Rathbone also drew on features from this piece that he had known since childhood in his own *Madonna and Child* (figure 6)

³⁶³ The piece was inherited by Philip Rathbone's daughter Alice Moore and is now owned by her grandson. He remembers being taken as a child to Greenbank Cottage and the lunette hanging above the door in the conservatory. (Conversation with Mr R. Cotton, June 2016)



Figure 8: Cantagalli of Florence *Madonna and Child*, Glazed Terracotta, after 1878. Private collection.

The Della Robbia Pottery made a unique contribution to the Arts and Crafts Movement. The workshop fulfilled the criteria laid down by both John Ruskin and William Morris that underpinned the Arts and Crafts Movement and although the architectural workshop drew on the motifs of the Renaissance, they did so without resorting to imitation. The designers of the architectural ware were encouraged to compose an original scheme within a palette and form inspired by the *quattrocento* Florentine workshop; Rathbone encouraged his artists to take the della Robbia family as a source of inspiration but he did not instruct them to reproduce the roundels and plaques from the original Florentine workshop. As Sheldon comments, Rathbone and Dressler's motivation was a sincere homage rather than an attempt to capitalise on the currency of the name.³⁶⁴ Rathbone and Dressler were not alone

³⁶⁴ Sheldon, J., 'Inspired by the Florentine Originals': Rathbone and the della Robbia' in Sheldon, J. (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street*, p.71

in their appropriation of the *quattrocento*; their uniqueness however lies in the way the architectural workshop faithfully wove together and merged the principles of William Morris with the aesthetics of the medieval bas-relief. The close association between the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead and the Compton Pottery, later the Potters' Art Guild, was based on a shared admiration for early Italian art, a desire to revive the principles and systems of the medieval guild in line with other followers of William Morris and an appetite for cultural philanthropy.

Mary Seton Watts and the Compton Pottery

The painter George F. Watts (1817-1904) and his wife Mary Seton Watts (1849-1938) were early supporters of the Della Robbia Pottery. The couple had retreated from London in 1891 to Limmerslease, their house in the village of Compton in Surrey which served both as an escape for the couple and as a site for a purpose-built gallery to house his paintings. Both Mary and George Watts were admirers of John Ruskin and William Morris and appreciated the value of craftsmanship. Mary studied art in Dresden, Paris and at the Slade School in London in the years before her marriage and although Mary is often characterised as 'adoring wife and handmaiden to Watts',³⁶⁵ she was an accomplished and highly imaginative sculptor and potter in her own right.

³⁶⁵ Mary Seton Watts was described by Wilfrid Blunt (1901-87) as 'his companion, his nurse, his slave, his 'guide, philosopher and friend'; his watchdog. And finally, in her biography of him, his advocate and publicity agent. She worshipped him blindly. She gave him a new lease of life, and the best years of her own, to establishing him as a national monument'

In Bills, M., 'George Frederick Watts and Mary Seton Watts' in Bills, M. (ed.), *An Artists Village: GF Watts and Mary Watts in Compton* (London: Philip Wilson, 2010) pp.9-24, p.15

George Watts had travelled extensively in Italy and his nickname 'signor' came from his great love of the country; he had lived and studied in Florence for four years from 1843-1847. In a photograph of George Watts taken at Limmerslease in 1895 (Figure 9), Watts sits in contemplation before a polychrome tondo of a Madonna and Child in the manner of a work by Luca della Robbia, given to him as a gift from Florence by Lady Mount Temple. Writing in 1896, Julia Cartwright commented that 'on the terrace just outside the window is a Della Robbia roundel, lately brought back from Florence and given to the painter by an old friend. Now the vine leaves of an English garden trail over the roof that shelters this relic of the Italian Renaissance and the wild flowers of Surrey blossom before the blue and white Madonna which the Florentine carved with so delicate a grace'.³⁶⁶ The image was widely circulated by the Watts' as a commemorative postcard and later a painting of the same composition was undertaken by Louis Deuchars (1870-1927).³⁶⁷ At the time the tondo was considered as a genuine piece by Luca della Robbia. This attribution has been questioned in recent years and unfortunately the whereabouts of the tondo is presently unknown. Interestingly, Louise Boreham reports subsequent speculation that the piece may have been manufactured by Dressler and Rathbone in Birkenhead. However, the tondo was photographed with Watts in 1895 and it would have been unlikely that the architectural workshop could have developed the complex skills needed in such a short time or that Rathbone would not have widely publicised such an undertaking.

³⁶⁶ Boreham, L., 'G F Watts della Robbia tondo' *Sculpture Journal* 22.1 (2013) pp.133-137

³⁶⁷ Deuchars, a Scottish artist sculptor, came to Compton as an assistant to George Watts. He then assisted Mary Watts in the local classes producing tiles for the Mortuary chapel. From 1900 Deuchars managed the Aldourie Pottery, an enterprise initiated by Mary Watts near her childhood home near Dores in the Highlands. This venture only had a limited production and closed after five or six years.

In Underwood, H., 'Compton Pottery' in Bills, M. (ed.), *An Artists Village: GF Watts and Mary Watts in Compton*. p.105



Figure 9: George Andrews, G. F. Watts with della Robbia tondo, 1895, b/w photo, Watts Gallery, Compton

George Watts subscribed a sum of money at the start of the Birkenhead venture; Mary Watts noted in her journal ‘a letter from Mr Dressler, who is just off to Liverpool to start his scheme. Having had the money subscribed, we stand and mark’.³⁶⁸

It seems that the initial contact was with Dressler as she noted

I had to go out this afternoon to see Mr Dressler...He interests me much. He has got hold of the right idea and wants to found a confraternity of artists in Liverpool, starting a workshop where the artist is to be backed by a Liverpool merchant, that is given enough to live upon and work without anxiety. They are to train apprentices, to have no machinery that is not turned by water or by a donkey. They are to graft an English art onto a Lucca (sic) della Robbia ground’. At present the confraternity consists of Mr Dressler.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸ Greenhow, D., *The Diary of Mary Watts 1887-1904: Victorian Progressive and Artistic Visionary*, (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2016) p.141

The journals of Mary Seton Watts have been painstakingly transcribed, edited and published by Dr. Desna Greenhow. I am grateful for the help given by Dr Greenhow and the Watts Gallery, Compton, during this research.

³⁶⁹ Greenhow, D., *The Diary of Mary Watts 1887-1904: Victorian Progressive and Artistic Visionary*, p.136

Harold Rathbone was introduced to Mary and George Watts in late September. Mary wrote 'Mr. Harold Rathbone and Mr. Conrad Dressler are also here. They are full of their plans and of hope for their results'.³⁷⁰ Desna Greenhow cites Dressler as a formative influence on Mary's ambitions to start her own commercial pottery. Watts was, of course, on the council of the Della Robbia Pottery and he and Mary kept in contact with Dressler and Rathbone.³⁷¹

The Watts' first scheme began in 1895, when Mary set up a pottery class in Compton to produce the terracotta tiles that would ornament the new cemetery chapel in the village.

Greenhow describes this as

a communal effort, some of it by people who had done nothing creative before they came to the classes at Limmerslease. There were sometimes as many as 40 people there on a Thursday evening and, on Saturday mornings, the children's class had equal numbers.³⁷²

The tiles would form architectural panels within the chapel and incorporate a complex symbolic tapestry of Celtic and Judaic symbols and images interwoven with the flowing lines of Art Nouveau. The chapel was consecrated in July 1898 and declared by *The Studio* to be 'an architectural triumph' and 'the most original and perfect modern ecclesiastical edifice, unlike any other in the British Isles'.³⁷³

The pottery classes provided a framework for Mary's philanthropic ideals, expressed in the aims of Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) of which Mary was a founding member. In 1900 Mary began planning to establish the pottery class as an HAIA 'developed industry'

³⁷⁰ Ibid. p.146

³⁷¹ Ibid. p.111

³⁷² Ibid. p.14

³⁷³ 'A Mortuary Chapel', *The Studio* (Sept 1898) Vol.14. no.66 p.239

that would provide paid employment for its workers.³⁷⁴ The manager of this new pottery, James Nichol, was recommended by Conrad Dressler and the venture, The Potters' Art Guild, became one of the most successful and long-lived of the art potteries,³⁷⁵ specialising in garden ornaments including urns and sculptures, and coloured ornamental pieces including figurative plaques, bookends, bowls and vases. The wood-fired kiln could not maintain the heat necessary to fire a glazed piece, so many ornamental pieces were decorated with a soft tempura-like paint and then waxed for protection.

Harold Rathbone was also committed to the ideals of the HAIA and the sincere demonstration of cultural philanthropy demonstrated by both Rathbone and Mary Watts through the Association suggests close links between the two companies. As a commercial venture, several parallels can be drawn with the Della Robbia Pottery, noting that neither pottery worked in isolation of the other. Rathbone, Dressler and the Watts' were all close to Walter Crane, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, William de Morgan and William Holman Hunt; Hunt had joined George Watts as a member of the founding council of the Birkenhead venture.³⁷⁶ Each company used a local unskilled workforce and offered training through 'classes', both used local clay and each strove emulate the practices of a medieval guild. Both potteries attempted to use local clay although the Potters' Art Guild had markedly more success, The Della Robbia Pottery and the Potters Art Guild successfully sold their work through a wide network of department stores, including Liberty & Co.

³⁷⁴ Underwood, H., 'Compton Pottery' in Bills, M. (ed.), *An Artists Village: GF Watts and Mary Watts in Compton* pp.103-120, p.103

³⁷⁵ The Potter's Art Guild was constituted in 1904 as a profit-sharing enterprise, with Mary Watts as director. It remained in Compton until its closure in 1956.

³⁷⁶ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.37

In these ornamental plaques, we see the influence of Andrea della Robbia on both the Della Robbia Pottery and the Potters' Art Guild. The terracotta plaques (Figures 11 and 12) clearly draws inspiration from the series of roundels by Andrea della Robbia on the façade of the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* in Florence (example, Figure 10), but do not imitate the original work. The label on the reverse of the Compton piece warns of the fragile nature of the unfired waxed piece.



Figure 10: (Left) Andrea della Robbia, Polychrome terracotta roundel, c1487, Ospedale degli Innocenti, Florence

Figure 11: (Right) Della Robbia Pottery (Marian de Calawe) Polychrome terracotta roundel, c. 1903, Victoria Gallery, Liverpool, lately retrieved from Alder Hey Childrens Hospital, Liverpool, during renovation work.



Figure 12: Front and reverse of unglazed terracotta plaque in the style of Andrea della Robbia, undated, The Potters' Art Guild, Compton.

Within the closely inter-woven world of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Della Robbia Pottery maintained its unique position by consistently manufacturing bas-relief inspired by the style of Luca della Robbia. Companies such as the Potter's Art Guild shared many of Rathbone and Dressler's convictions but lacked the singularity of design principles that underpinned the architectural workshop at Birkenhead. A survey of contemporary art potteries suggests similar; Burmantofts in Leeds, Bretby Art Pottery, Martin Brothers, Linthorpe Pottery and Aller Vale Art Pottery show little or no evidence of the influence of the della Robbia family. For example, Burmantofts were making pressed mould bas-relief tiles with a single translucent glaze in the style *émaux ombrants* meaning 'shadow

enamels'.³⁷⁷ This example (Figure 12) demonstrates that although Burmantofts used bas-relief techniques to produce tiles and panels in the manner of their contemporaries in Birkenhead, they remained committed to the motifs of classical antiquity.



Figure 13: Press moulded bas-relief faience tile, Burmantofts Pottery, c1890.

Larger producers like Doulton's 'Lambeth Faience' (1873-1914) produced significant quantities of under-glazed and decorated earthenware in the manner of an art pottery but few architectural pieces. However, Doulton did manufacture architectural sculpture with 'Carrara Ware', named after the famed Italian marble and used to decorate many of the finest late Victorian buildings with sculptures, tiles and panels. Invariably styled in a neo-classical manner and illustrated here (Figure 13) by the exterior of the former Debenhams Building in Wigmore Street, numerous examples can be found on late Victorian buildings

³⁷⁷ Van Lemmen, H., 'Historic Tiles' <http://www.hansvanlemmen.co.uk> (accessed 10.3.16)

throughout the country. A hard-fired stone substance, the manufacturer claimed that Carrara could withstand the worst of the British weather.



Figure 14: Doulton's Carrara Ware, former Debenhams Building, undated, Wigmore Street, London

Minton also manufactured architectural ceramics and, in a manner similar to Doulton, invariably included the symbols of neo-classicism. An elaborate fountain by Minton (Figure 14) is styled with glazed moulded fruits and flowers, stars and beasts; a child stands with a hand raised in benediction. The child is similar to several della Robbia sculptures in the South Kensington Museum collection and the tonal palette of pure white and blue, bordered with an archetypal garland of fruit and flowers also draws on the tradition of the della Robbia family. The designer has also incorporated the shells, swimming fish and mythical beasts of antiquity whilst three female heads, possibly *tritones*, overlook the fish swimming in the basin. Minton incorporated many of the motifs of *quattrocento* Italy into its art studio pottery, but also ensured that the popular taste for neo-classicism was met.



Figure 15: Minton & Co. Fountain, moulded earthenware, decorated with coloured glazes, 1870-1890, Victorian and Albert Museum, London.

The architectural workshop was not the only area of production at the Della Robbia Pottery; the chapter now examines the work of the *sgraffito* workshop and asks if the aesthetic styling here was also indicative of *quattrocento* Florence or did Rathbone look elsewhere for his inspiration

Sgraffito production in Birkenhead

The sgraffito workshop was in Price Street, Birkenhead and here the style and methods were wholly distinct from the work of the architectural studio. Instead of panels and plaques, this workshop produced hand-made domestic tableware, vases and hollow-ware that was incised in the sgraffito style, decorated, fired and then finished with a unifying blue/green translucent glaze. The design and methods used in the sgraffito workshop were not typical of the designs of the *quattrocento* workshops of central Italy and Florence and this section argues that Harold Rathbone turned to the area of Lombardia in northern Italy for inspiration for this second studio. Until now, the inspiration and working practices of the sgraffito workshop have received little attention.

Methods of sgraffito production – or incised ware – had remained unchanged since the late Middle Ages. Liquid clay, or slip, was applied to the hand-moulded piece and allowed to air dry, then a pointed stylus inscribed a pattern in the slip to reveal the terracotta hues of the underlying clay. Charles Collis described the technique in Birkenhead; ‘the vase of red clay was dipped in white clay and when this was partly dried, Mr. Rathbone and his apprentice pupil etched the design through the veneer of white clay...the etching was done with a nail sharpened and filed to a point at one end and flattened into a chisel for cutting away the surface clay at the other’.³⁷⁸ The piece was then painted with various glazes and pigments and then first-fired to fuse the colours into the underlying slip. The medieval potters used metal oxides that were generally yellow, green or blue but by the nineteenth century a wider range of colours was available. A monochrome lead glaze was then applied, usually by

³⁷⁸ Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

dipping the pieces, before being fired again. A distinguishing feature of the workshop was Rathbone's insistence on the final glaze having a blue/ green transparency. No satisfactory explanation has determined why Rathbone insisted on this although Charles Collis suggests that the glaze was applied if 'the colours were bad after coming from the kiln'.³⁷⁹ The young decorators and designers of the sgraffito workshop were often recruited from local art schools so were not entirely without ability or training and as their skills developed many of the decorators also stipulated the shape to be thrown and then incised the design themselves before painting with metal oxides and coloured glazes.³⁸⁰

Much of the finest sgraffito ware is attributed to Collis, including a large platter (Figure 15) in the collection at the Williamson Art Gallery. The design is a painstakingly rendered interweaving of leaves and seed pods with a predominantly green colour palette. The flora is highlighted in yellow and salmon pink. Some of the leaves are turning into autumnal shades to correspond with the seed pods with a second translucent blue/green glaze that is typical of the pottery. The sensitive tracing of leaf pattern and flora seems a contradiction to the sometimes feisty and gruff personality that shines through Collis's writing but the work exemplifies the way in which the sgraffito workshop personified William Morris' impassioned plea for 'an art made by the people, and for the people, as a happiness to the maker and the user'.³⁸¹

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Kathleen Hawley explores the development of four young artists at the pottery; Cassandra Walker, Ruth Bare and Aphra Peirce and Charles Collis.

Hawley, K.C., *The lives and works of the women artists at the Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead in late Victorian and Edwardian England* (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Oxford Brookes University).

³⁸¹ Morris, W., 'Art of the People' in *Hopes and Fears for Art* (London: Ellis and White, 1882) p.64



Figure 16: The Della Robbia Pottery (Charles Collis), Circular Plaque, (undated, but style indicates c.1903) Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead

The decorative style of the sgraffito workshop was rarely figurative; the incised lines of the designs envelop the curves of the pots with abstract, naturalistic or occasionally geometrical lines. Rathbone was fond of telling his artists that the design should 'grow out of the pot

‘and if it looked imposed the piece was ‘no more than a piece of clay’; the piece was then taken outside to be broken.³⁸²

The designs of the sgraffito workshop were unique in the Arts and Crafts Movement. No other studio pottery in England was making sgraffito pottery of this type; a survey of Martin Brothers, Bretby, Aller Vale, Exeter, HM Exeter, Lancastrian, Rye, Lambeth and the work of Lewis F. Day and Heywood Sumner confirms that although these small potteries embraced many of the Morrisian principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement, the Della Robbia Pottery was unique in the way that all the workers at the Pottery had a freedom of artistic expression with no reference to pattern books, and, using a sgraffito technique, produced work of glorious individuality. The painter Edward Gregory compared the ‘interesting’ work of the Della Robbia Pottery with the work now being produced by Allervale Pottery:

In pottery, the Home Arts are always able to show interesting pieces from Birkenhead, where are Mr. Rathbone’s ‘Della Robbia’ works. I miss indeed the quaint vases and jugs from Aller Vale, which in former years have been so full of spontaneous vivacity and quiet refined colouring³⁸³

The senior decorators at the larger Art potteries had some artistic autonomy, but unlike the Della Robbia Pottery, the companies operated on a strictly hierarchical system. The Lambeth Art Pottery (1858-1956), part of Doulton & Co., employed over 350 people by 1890. Bergesen comments that ‘the Lambeth studios were organised in a very strict hierarchy. Most senior were the Artists, who painted, modelled and designed the pottery. Immediately below came the senior assistants and, lastly, the junior assistants. The assistants decorated

³⁸² Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

³⁸³ Gregory, E., ‘The Home Arts and Industries Association’ *The Artist: An illustrated Monthly record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* (American Ed). Vol. 31. No.259 (Aug 1901) pp.135-140, p.138

Aller Vale Pottery had recently been amalgamated with the Watcombe pottery to become the Royal Allervale and Watcombe Pottery Company.

wares to the designs of the Artist or decorated borders to frame the Artist's work'.³⁸⁴ This system left little scope for freedom of artistic expression except for the few most senior craft people. The Aller Vale Art Pottery is frequently compared with the Della Robbia Pottery. Founded in 1881 by John Phillips, the pottery employed young local artists and used local clay where possible in a similar manner to Rathbone. By 1885 the company was successfully producing faience and domestic art pottery and introduced an Iznic-inspired Persian pattern with tulips, hyacinths and carnations. The company began a relationship with Liberty & Co. in 1887 which lasted until 1901. By 1890, the Italian artist Domenico Marcucci of Faenza had joined the firm and is thought to have introduced an Italianate blue and white scrolling pattern, marketed as Sandringham ware.³⁸⁵ A marked difference between the two potteries is the use by Aller Vale of pattern books and fixed shapes and design as opposed to the artistic freedom that Rathbone gave his workers to experiment in innovative ways. Gertrude Russell (1875-1974), a decorator in Rathbone's sgraffito workshop, confirmed that the artists drew their own free-hand designs and could specify the shape of the pot to the thrower³⁸⁶ and in 1927 Rathbone wrote to Charles Collis 'Put as much meaning into your design as possible, whether story or form, and do not be content with the mere orchestration of optical effect'.³⁸⁷

This blue and white Aller Vale Pottery jardinière, inspired by Marcucci (Figure 16), demonstrates the inspiration of Renaissance design but demonstrates little similarity with the style of Della Robbia sgraffito pottery.

³⁸⁴ Bergesen, V., *Encyclopaedia of British Art Pottery 1870-1920* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1991) p.90

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p.20

³⁸⁶ Williams, H., 'Recollections of the Della Robbia Pottery' *newsletter of the Northern Ceramics Society*. No. 29 (March 1978)

³⁸⁷ Collis, C., *Birkenhead Advertiser* (10 September 1949)



Figure 17: Italianate Jardinière and Stand, blue and cream slip on white clay, Aller Vale Art Pottery (credit. Torquay Potteries Collectors Society)

The designers of the Della Robbia Pottery took their inspiration from the natural world, from the themes of art nouveau, from Izmir and occasionally from Renaissance artists such as Botticelli and Perugino, and they were free to interpret these influences. The bas-relief plaques of Luca della Robbia or the intricacies of *istoriato* maiolica were not influential in this second workshop; however, the concentric bands, the scrolling leaf patterns and repetitive geometrical shapes of archaic sgraffito ware are a marked feature, particularly in the early days of production.³⁸⁸ Clearly Rathbone was guiding his workers to a new source

³⁸⁸ Some pieces of archaic incised slipware had entered the collection of the South Kensington Museum by 1894. Rathbone had certainly seen these pieces; a large sgraffito decorated earthenware jar by the Della Robbia Pottery is currently on long-term loan to the British Museum and clearly had been inspired by a medieval sgraffito jar in the South Kensington Museum. The medieval jar had been bought by the Museum in 1884 as part of the posthumous sale of the collection of Alessandro Castellani and was possibly made in Orvieto, Umbria, in the early *quattrocento* (V&A Ref.671-1884). However,

of inspiration and instruction, one that had not been explored by other British Art potteries. The incised slipware produced at the Della Robbia Pottery owes more to production in an area of north eastern Italy than it does to the maiolica producing areas of Tuscany and Umbria or the Arts and Crafts tradition in Britain. It seems inconceivable that Harold Rathbone, who had spent many months in Italy during the previous two decades, had not encountered the work of Carlo Loretz of Milan. Moreover, the evidence that Rathbone was influenced by the work of the Loretz sgraffito workshop, although circumstantial, is so compelling that it challenges previously held assumptions about the Pottery. The workshop of the Carlo Loretz stands out as the template for Rathbone's Della Robbia Pottery workshop and it is likely that Rathbone encountered Loretz's work in Lombardia during one of Rathbone's visits to Salò in 1886 or in 1891. In addition to this possibility, there was also opportunity for Rathbone to see his work in England.

[Rathbone and the Sgraffito Pottery of Carlo Loretz](#)

How could such a relationship develop and how could Harold Rathbone, founder of a small pottery in Birkenhead and Carlo Loretz, who lived a thousand miles away in Lodi, near Milan, be meaningfully linked? In establishing a credible connection between Carlo Loretz and Harold Rathbone, we must first look to Carlo Loretz's unique collection of medieval ceramics. Loretz had amassed a rather eccentric collection of fragments of medieval ceramics over a period of twenty years. He was working in the Palazzo Galeano in Lodi in 1871 during the renovations and excavations of the main courtyard. During these

it was unusual for the Della Robbia Pottery to draw on the cooler colour palette and designs of archaic sgraffito from central Italy for inspiration.

excavations, several fragments of medieval pottery were unearthed, of no monetary value and of little interest at that time to anybody other than Loretz himself. Loretz went on to collect fragments not only from Lodi but also from Pavia, Cremona and from the excavation sites at the Monastery Maggiore in Milan in 1887. Eighty pieces, made in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, came from Padua. These remnants were the first known depository of archaic sgraffito assembled in Italy.³⁸⁹ The artist and connoisseur Henry Wallis is also known to have instituted his own collection of medieval period sgraffito fragments in later decades which entered the British Museum Collection in 1898³⁹⁰ but in the 1880s Harold Rathbone would have had few opportunities to engage with a collection of fragments of this provenance other than through Carlo Loretz.



³⁸⁹ Venturelli, E., 'The sgraffito Work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J. (ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) p.48

³⁹⁰ Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* Volumes I & II, Vol. 2. p.30



Figure 18: Sgraffito fragments from Lombardia (14th & 15th C), collected by Carlo Loretz. Musei Castello Sforzesco, Milan

Carlo Loretz (1841-1903) was born in Lodi, a town some twenty miles from Milan. He was of Swiss descent; his parents having left Grigioni when Carlo was a small child. Loretz initially trained as a painter and fresco artist and found work in the houses of the affluent families in Milan. In 1872 he came to the attention of Sig. Antonio Dossena, owner and manager of a large ceramics factory in Lodi, a company that was formerly the Ferrati Company. Dossena employed Loretz as one of his chief decorators and it appears from company records that Carlo's young son Giano was also employed to work alongside his father. Loretz initially produced the traditional *Vecchio Lodi* ceramics for which the Company Dossena was renowned. Writing in 1910 Giano Loretz described the relationship between his father and Antonio Dossena as close; they would often meet in the evening and, in an endearing passage that references the political tumult of Italy at that time 'it was obvious that they did not speak of Garibaldi, Mazzini or Gorni, but were always talking of Zafra, manganese, Armenian bole, tin yellow'.³⁹¹ However, in 1876 the Pallavicini brothers became managers

³⁹¹ Venturelli, E., Carlo Loretz (Lodi 1841 – Milano 1903) in 'Archivio Storico Lodigiano' CXXIV, (2005), pp.407-459, p.415

and subsequently owners of the Dossena Company. The relationship between Loretz and the new directors was more troubled than with Dossena. The brothers failed to credit the work of Carlo Loretz on a piece that took top prize at the Milan Exhibition of 1882 and the relationship deteriorated inexorably. Loretz left the newly-named Pallavicini Company in 1883 and went on to rent studio space and use of the kiln at the Fusari factory of Lodi. Here he employed several workers, including his son Giano, and exhibited locally under his own name. Little is known of his work during this period and it is difficult to specifically identify pieces from the time.

By 1896 Carlo and his son Giano could produce highly finished and complex pieces of sgraffito in the medieval style and opened a new company in Milan under the name of Loretz and Co. It is not possible that Loretz and his son Giano could craft such pieces and produce the complex glazes and techniques required without several years of development and experimentation; the techniques required had not been practiced in Italy for many decades. This strongly suggests that the father and son were producing sgraffito pieces during their time in the Fusari studio. New research by Venturelli has identified that Carlo Butterelli, a turner from Casalmaggiore, began work with Loretz from 1884 and could successfully produce sgraffito ware in an archaic style. Venturelli concludes that the making of slipped sgraffito pieces survived in Casalmaggiore, a small village in Cremona, until the end of the 19C, despite its disappearance in other areas of Italy and that Butterelli instructed Loretz in the techniques required for complex sgraffito ware.³⁹² Thornton and Wilson include an illustration from the Loretz photographic album held in the library of the *Museo International Della Ceramica, Faenza* and note the similarity with a bowl attributed to a

³⁹² Venturelli, E., 'The Sgraffito work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J.(ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* pp. 41-54. p.51

sixteenth century Tuscan workshop; Professore Nepoti of Milan has subsequently argued that this piece was made by Carlo Loretz in the 1870s or 1880s, a time when Rathbone was travelling in the region. It has been assumed that all sgraffito pottery signed 'Loretz' was manufactured in Milan from 1896; however, there is no evidence to support this premise and it is possible that signed sgraffito pottery could have been produced earlier. This illustration (Figure 18) from Loretz's time with Dossena shows that his mark did not change throughout his career and that it is not possible to date work through signature alone.³⁹³ It is difficult to see where Rathbone could have seen archaic-styled sgraffito ware being manufactured by anyone other than Carlo Loretz; we know that in 1884, no major Italian ceramics company could produce archaic sgraffito ware to be displayed in the Medieval Village at the Turin General exhibition as the techniques had been lost to them.³⁹⁴



Figure 19: Pieces from (Left) Dossena period in the early 1880s and (Right) from Milan period identifying the signature of Carlo Loretz.

³⁹³ Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: a Catalogue of the British Museum Collection Vol.ii*, (London: British Museum Press, 2009)

³⁹⁴ Venturelli, E., 'The Sgraffito work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J. (ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* p.52

An important site of sgraffito manufacture from the medieval and Renaissance period was found in 1982 in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region of north-eastern Italy. Excavations in Castelnovo del Friuli unearthed many fragments of archaic sgraffito pottery dating from the sixteenth century. Angela Borzacconi believes that the excavation marked the site of an important pottery that was responsible for the large-scale manufacture of sgraffito tableware that was distributed throughout north-eastern Italy. The Friuli fragments were treated with a transparent glaze of a bluey-green or yellow hue that is the defining characteristic of the archaic pottery found from Lombardy to Friuli.³⁹⁵ Although Rathbone could not have seen the pottery that was excavated at Friuli itself, it is remarkable to see how close the blue/green glaze of Della Robbia hollow-ware is to these medieval precedents. This monochrome blue/green glaze is the single unifying factor of the sgraffito studio in Birkenhead and suggests that Harold Rathbone identified this as a suitable motif for the workshop following his engagement with other sources of pottery from medieval period in north-eastern Italy.

The excavation in Castelnovo confirms that the methods and forms of sgraffito production were still widespread in this area of Italy long after such production had been replaced by the manufacture of maiolica ware in Tuscany and Umbria and that there was a large-scale manufacture of tableware throughout the area using the ornamental technique of sgraffito. 'The production we have been able to recover (Renaissance sgraffito, late archaic sgraffito) allows us to set its running around the very beginning of the 17C'.³⁹⁶ The new evidence from

³⁹⁵ Borzacconi, A., 'Technological Aspects of 16th Century Ceramics Production in Castelnovo del Friuli', *Materials and Manufacturing Processes*, 24, 9, (2009) p.1041.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p.1044

Venturelli suggests that production had never died out in Lombardia; Casalmaggiore was still producing sgraffito ware as late as 1884.

Borzacconi describes how the liquid clay, or *engobe*, was applied to the object and allowed to dry; it was always intended to be white. Using a pointed stylus, the *engobe* was inscribed to reveal the terracotta hues of the underlying clay and using metal oxides that were generally yellow, green or blue, the pieces were coloured and fired for the first time fixing and fusing the colours into the *engobe*. The monochrome lead glaze was then applied, usually by dipping the pieces, then fired again.³⁹⁷ Controlling the temperature of the kiln is crucial to the successful production of ceramics, be it fifteenth, sixteenth or nineteenth century. Borzacconi's highly detailed study was made possible because the large number of wastes that resulted were discarded after firing; the second firing that fixed the lead glaze is particularly hazardous as the glaze drips into any cracks and flaws causing the piece to come apart. Items were also lost during the first firing due to 'sulphuring', as smoke entered the kiln and dulled the colours, a problem noted by Charles Collis as also occurring in Birkenhead. Collis describes the first firing at the Della Robbia Pottery as lasting for sixty hours and the second, or glost, firing, which 'fixed' the translucent glaze, lasting twenty-four hours.³⁹⁸

By the end of the sixteenth century an extended range of metal oxide colours were widely available in Italy and was used extensively in maiolica production but a more limited tonal range was still used throughout northern-eastern Italy; the palette of green, yellow and, less often, brown and blue became regarded as a characteristic of pottery from the region.

³⁹⁸ Charles Collis file, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead

Several factors may be relevant; aesthetic choice and a concern for tradition; tableware produced in this way remained more affordable by omitting the expensive tin-glaze of maiolica ware or, as Borzacconi points out, tin-glazing was not popular since the local clay was low grade and considered inadequate for coating with very expensive tin-glaze.³⁹⁹

Although unearthed over a hundred years apart, a comparison of the fragments collected by Carlo Loretz and those discovered at Castelnovo confirm that *sgraffito* production in an area stretching from Lombardia to the Venezia used a decorative style of concentric bands with repetitive geometrical patterns, examples of early Renaissance iconography, a restricted use of metal oxides to colour the pieces and, crucially, an absence of tin-glaze despite its wide-spread use elsewhere in Italy from the end of the *quattrocento*.

Both the Della Robbia Pottery and Loretz & Co. produced *sgraffito* ware using the methods once popular in the fifteenth century and earlier. Stylistically, there are marked similarities between the work of Loretz and of the Della Robbia Pottery, particularly in a comparison of the designs, colours and forms; the similarities are most pronounced when comparing the decorative motifs and the tonal range of the pottery.

³⁹⁹ Borzacconi, A., 'Technological Aspects of 16th century Ceramics Production in Castelnovo del Friuli' p.1045



Figure 20: (top) *The Della Robbia Pottery (William Williams and Harold Rathbone), 1895, sgraffito decorated large charger with 'Tree of Life' design', Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead*

Figure 21: (bottom) *Loretz & Co., sgraffito decorated shallow bowl, c.1899, Private collection*

These two sgraffito plates from the two workshops exemplify the similarities between each pottery. The first is a buff and green coloured charger from the Della Robbia Pottery (Figure 19), the second a decorative plate from Loretz & Co. (Figure 20).

The plates share the same palette of greens and browns and use the same scrolling ribbon edge with a leaf pattern. The Della Robbia plate was incised and painted by William Williams and Harold Rathbone in 1895⁴⁰⁰ and has at its centre the motif of a tree surrounded by a green haze implying leaf growth. This device is also repeated frequently in the work of Carlo Manzoni, the Italian Sculptor employed by Rathbone after 1898. It is possible that the decorators drew inspiration from motifs from examples that Harold Rathbone had acquired either in Lodi or in Britain.

⁴⁰⁰ Little is known about William Williams, known at the pottery as Willie, although we know from this research that he also exhibited a vase made with Harold Rathbone at the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society event at the New Gallery in Regent Street.

The central motif of a female portrait, inspired by early Italian Renaissance paintings, and stylised images of a tree recur in both the Loretz and Rathbone studios. Carlo Loretz produced at least two similar decorative plates based on the *Portrait of a Young Woman* by the Florentine artist Piero del Pollaiuolo (1443-1496), demonstrating his interest in reviving the relationship between pottery and fine art. The portrait had entered the collection of the Museo Poldi Pezzoli in Milan in 1879, where Loretz would have easily been able to study the painting.⁴⁰¹ A version of this plate is presently displayed in the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum; the piece illustrated here remains in the Loretz family. Loretz's pottery rarely deviates from echoing the patterns and designs of archaic sgraffito and these motifs have been sampled repeatedly in the works of the Della Robbia Pottery.

A second example of the rapport between the two studios is illustrated by this shallow bowl, identified as the work of Loretz and Co. through the painted mark (Figure 21). However, the bold patterning, strong colours and freely-drawn sgraffito patterning make this difficult to distinguish from the work of the Della Robbia Pottery.⁴⁰² The unusual colour combination of aubergine and yellow, with blue / green detailing, was previously unknown in the work of Loretz and suggests that he was familiar with the work of the Birkenhead pottery.

⁴⁰¹ 'Portrait of a Young Woman' Piero del Pollaiuolo, Museo Poldi Pezzoli, via Manzoni, Milan. <http://www.museopoldipezzoli.it/#!/en/discover/collections/876> (accessed 01.09.2015) I am grateful to Enrico Venturelli for drawing my attention to this link.

⁴⁰² This example of Loretz pottery has proved difficult to distinguish from Della Robbia Pottery. During an examination, experts including Peter Hyl and were unable to conclusively identify the piece without consulting the pottery mark.



Figure 22: Loretz & Co., sgraffito decorated shallow bowl, 1899, Private collection

A further example of similarity is apparent in a jug produced by Ruth Bare for the Della Robbia Pottery (Figure 22) and shallow bowl plate made by Loretz and Co. (Figure 23). Both pieces have an analogous palette of green and black, the black probably produced by mixing cobalt, manganese and iron. Moreover, the likeness in decoration is remarkable; both pieces are stylised with cross-hatching, a scrolling leaf and the symbol of the serpent.



Figure 23: Della Robbia Pottery (Ruth Bare), Green and black sgraffito jug, 1900, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead



Figure 24: Loretz & Co. of Milan, Green and black sgraffito plate (1899) and bowl (1899). Private Collection.

Loretz made a direct copy of the patterns and tonal ranges found on his collected fragments whereas Harold Rathbone drew inspiration from the formal elements of the style and incorporated the patterns and particularly the colours into the sgraffito pottery produced in Merseyside. Loretz's pottery rarely deviated from imitating these patterns - the patterns have been sampled repeatedly in the works of the Della Robbia Pottery but 'slavish imitation' would have violated the principles of John Ruskin and been an anathema to Rathbone. However, the patterns of medieval design and the palette of browns and greens and yellows of north-eastern Italy feature repeatedly in the work of the Birkenhead pottery. Harold Rathbone included very few details of his visits to the area in his letters to Brown; however, I postulate that Rathbone and Loretz met during Rathbone's travels in the area. A meeting did not need to have been wholly by chance – as the chapter subsequently discusses, an introduction may also have been facilitated by the relatives of Carlo Loretz in England.

The work of Carlo Loretz is not widely known today. He had first exhibited in Milan in 1882 where his work was awarded a silver medal, but representing the company of Dossena with no personal recognition. Just two years after starting Loretz & Co. in 1896, the company was ready to take part in the Turin Exhibition of 1898, where the work was of such quality that the company won a gold medal. In 1900 the company showed at the Exposition Universelle in Paris where Loretz won a silver medal.⁴⁰³ He also attracted the attention of A.B. Skinner, Assistant Director of the South Kensington Museum, who acquired several pieces of Loretz & Co. pottery for the collection. Thornton and Wilson include the following description in their catalogue of *Italian Renaissance Ceramics in the British Museum*; 'Carlo and Giano Loretz were gifted makers of reproduction and revivalist slipware'.⁴⁰⁴ The successes at the Turin and Paris expositions were included by Loretz on this trade card (Figure 24).



Figure 25: Loretz & Co., Milan, business card, after 1900, Private Collection.

⁴⁰³ Venturelli, E., 'The Sgraffito Work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J.(ed) *Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) pp. 41-54, p.53

⁴⁰⁴ Thornton, D. and Wilson T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A catalogue of the British Museum Collection* Volumes I & II, (London: British Museum Press, 2009) Vol.II, p.648

Carlo Loretz had collected his fragments of medieval pottery over a thirty-year period, retrieved from the excavated or demolished palazzos country houses in the area. His collection began to be dispersed after his death in 1903 including a large donation made by Giano Loretz to the *Museo Civico* in Lodi.⁴⁰⁵ Giovanni Baroni, Director of the *Museo*, wrote in 1918 that there were 'over seven tables full of fragments'.⁴⁰⁶

Loretz was the first known collector of archaic pottery fragments in Italy; he did not confine his collection to Lodi, but to sites across Lombardia. An article in the magazine 'Faenza' of 1918 describes the collection as 'representing the territories of Lodi, Pavia, Cremona, Mantova, the Monastero Maggiore in Milano and other territories 'and the collection as 'the first that had been made in Italy'.⁴⁰⁷ The fragments are now in the collections of the *Museo Civico* in Lodi and in *Il Civiche Raccolte di Arte Applicata del Castello Sforzesco di Milano*. Carlo Loretz was not alone in assembling in such a collection; the artist Henry Wallis (1830-1916) later became an active collector of fragments of archaic ceramics from the Pavia and Lombardian area and in 1898 presented the British Museum with a large collection. Thornton and Wilson comment that Henry Wallis worked hard to convince both the British Museum and South Kensington Museum that building a collection of medieval ceramics was worthwhile and that Wallis was one of the first to identify the fragments as an important contribution to the study of medieval and renaissance ceramics.⁴⁰⁸ It may well be that Wallis and Loretz were acquainted; it is probable that Wallis and Harold Rathbone were as Wallis

⁴⁰⁵ Venturelli, E., 'The Sgraffito work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J.(ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* pp. 41-54, p.47.

⁴⁰⁶ Venturelli, E., Carlo Loretz (Lodi 1841 – Milano 1903) in 'Archivio Storico Lodigiano' CXXIV, (2005), pp.407-459

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁸ Thornton, D. and Wilson, T., *Italian Renaissance Ceramics: A Catalogue of the British Museum Collection* Volumes I & II, (London: British Museum Press, 2009) p.648

had exhibited in the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition in 1888.⁴⁰⁹ A certain zeitgeist was abroad and Loretz, Wallis and Rathbone were undoubtedly party to that spirit.

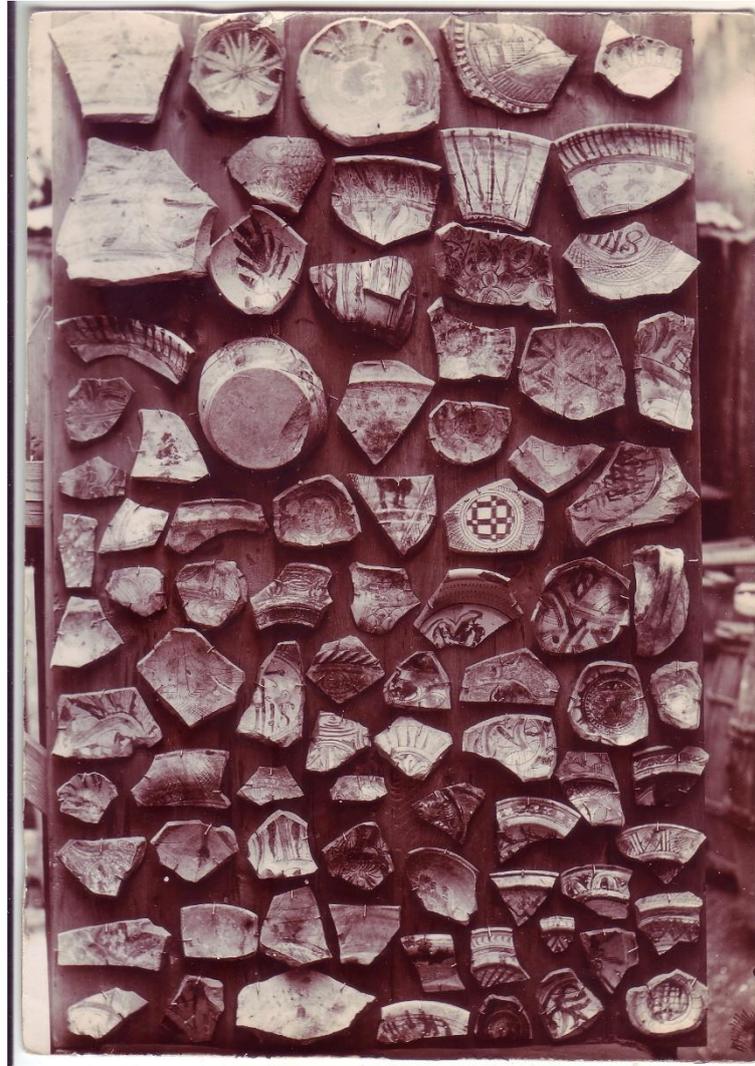


Figure 26: Loretz & Co. of Milan, undated, photograph of wood panel of medieval sgraffito fragments, curated by Carlo Loretz and photographed by his son Giano Loretz. Inscribed on the rear: 'Fabbriche miste'. Private collection

⁴⁰⁹ [Anon], *Liverpool Mercury* (29 September 1888)

A connection can also be established between Rathbone and Loretz & Co. through Giuseppe Loretz, the brother of Carlo who had settled in Bath in 1868 and become naturalized as Joseph Loretz.⁴¹⁰ Joseph set himself up in business as, variously, a publisher, a photographer and also as an importer and dealer in *objet d'art* sourced from the Continent; he regularly imported goods from Europe, confirmed in shipping reports in the local press: in March 1871 Joseph Loretz imported two cases of wood ware on the *SS Balmoral* from Rotterdam⁴¹¹ and two years later an import of a case of 'Figures from foreign parts'.⁴¹² ⁴¹³ With shops in London, Manchester and Bath, Joseph Loretz also acted as the chief seller of ceramic ware manufactured by his brother Carlo in Lodi. Giovanni Baroni wrote that 'Giuseppe Loretz was a dealer in works of art in his shops in Manchester and Bath' and that 'the majority of work by Carlo was sold in England through the medium of his brother Joseph, also of Lodi'.⁴¹⁴ Although Joseph Loretz died in December 1876 the family business continued to expand.

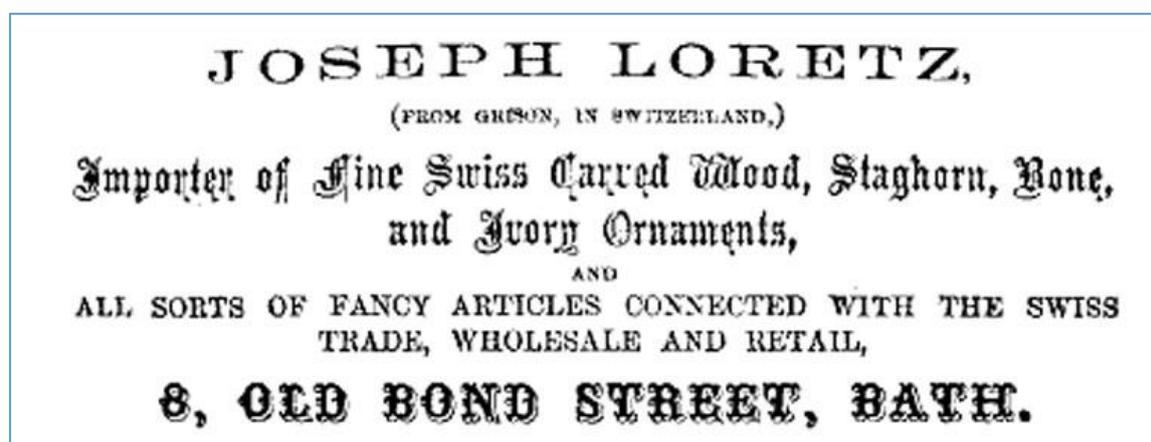


Figure 27: Joseph Loretz & Co., Advertisement, after 1868

⁴¹⁰ Nationalarchives.gov.uk.C7315039

⁴¹¹ [Anon], *Bristol Mercury* (11 March 1871)

⁴¹² [Anon], *Western Daily Press* (9 Dec 1873)

⁴¹³ Joseph remained in contact with his family in Lodi; in a recently rediscovered letter to his sister-in-law Enrichetta, wife of Carlo, Joseph responds to a plea for financial assistance due to Carlo's ill health; the letter is dated September 3 1873 and is written from Manchester. Joseph complains about his own ill-health, that he is overworked and missing his family who are over 200 miles away in Bath. (archive of private correspondence, Senora Giovanna Loretz)

⁴¹⁴ Venturelli, E., 'Carlo Loretz (Lodi 1841 – Milano 1903)' in *Archivio Storico Lodigiano*, CXXIV, (2005), pp.407-459

By 1880 the Loretz family had branches of their store in Birmingham, Hastings, Bath, and a branch at 66 King Street in Manchester very near to the Town Hall where Harold Rathbone assisted Ford Madox Brown with his murals.⁴¹⁵ Crucially, Loretz also opened a store on Bold Street in Liverpool in 1880. For the next four years Loretz & Co. ran large-scale art exhibitions and competitions for amateur artists in the Bold Street gallery. The exhibitions were large; in 1882 over 860 entries were recorded and prizes awarded for painting on china, terracotta and wood (Figure 27). The last exhibition under the name of Loretz & Co. was in January 1884, when an article in the press (Figure 28) implies that the company had recently sold the Bold Street branch to Messrs. Langs, who nevertheless were continuing the annual 'Ceramic' exhibition.

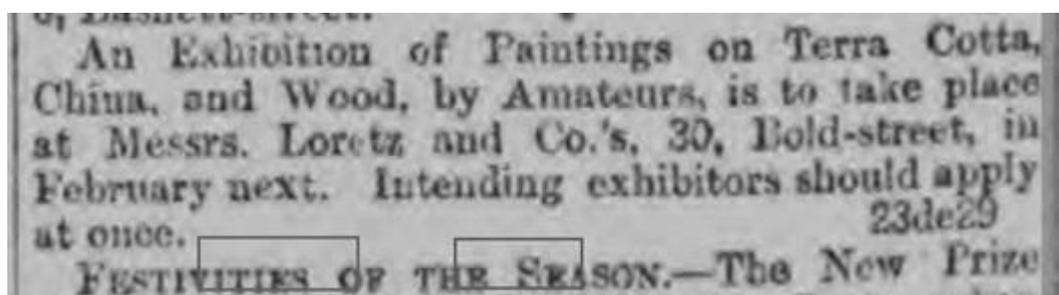


Figure 28: *Liverpool Mercury* (25 Dec 1882)

⁴¹⁵ [Anon], *Manchester Courier and General Advertiser* (5 May 1883)



Figure 29: Liverpool Mercury (18 Feb 1884)

During these years, Rathbone was living and working in Liverpool and Manchester. It is inconceivable that he was unaware of this large and well publicised annual exhibition in the centre of Liverpool and highly probable he was acquainted with both the English branch of the Loretz family and therefore the work of Carlo Loretz. If Rathbone had not encountered Loretz in Lombardia then certainly it was possible through his English family. Rathbone may also have become a regular customer at Loretz and Co. in Bath in the summer of 1883; in several letters to Brown he discusses his extended stay with the Fawcett family at 14, Camden Crescent, Bath. Initially he had intended to stay for a few days and then return to Manchester to resume his work on the Town Hall frescos. However, he remained in Bath for several weeks and during his time there was unexpectedly commissioned to paint a portrait of Mr. Dunn, Headmaster of Bath College as well as continuing to work on his portrait of Mr. Fawcett, the Postmaster-General.⁴¹⁶ It is reasonable to assume that Rathbone would have

⁴¹⁶ Rathbone, H.S., (1887), *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections, MSL/1995/14/63/17

regularly made the three-minute walk from his lodgings to Loretz and Co. on Old Bond Street to buy art supplies to undertake this commission.

Inspired by John Ruskin's rejection of the classic orderliness of Renaissance aesthetics and embracing of the 'savagery' of the medieval, and by his own experiences in northern Italy, Harold Rathbone was exceptional within the British Arts and Crafts Movement. William Morris himself articulated his own affection for the workman-like qualities of hand made goods, claiming in a paper first delivered in 1884:

it was necessary therefore for the very existence of the craftsman that he should be skilful, intelligent, and thoughtful; nor was he driven by the exigencies of the competitive market which might demand cheapness from him at the cost of other qualities... Such I say was the condition of the artisan in the middle ages; it may be allowed that he was politically oppressed, superstitious, and ignorant - but he was an artist or free workman, using his brains for the pleasure and the solace of his working hours.⁴¹⁷

Fundamental to his aim of re-establishing the harmony between craftsman and production, William Morris also advocated the use of high quality local materials. Both Carlo Loretz in Lodi and the Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead attempted this but it soon became apparent that for Rathbone, the clay from Moreton, Wirral was not of sufficient quality; as Charles Collis noted; 'The clays used - first Moreton clay, totally unsuitable. Clays were purchased from Messrs. Wengers, Etruria, Stoke-on-Trent. Mostly the clay was bought in different shales and had to be mixed'.⁴¹⁸ Collis notes that clay for the architectural workshop was initially bought from Fayles in Dorset, producers of one of the finest ball clays in the world. The same clay was also used by Doulton's studio workshop in Lambeth; Collis writes that

⁴¹⁷Morris, W., 'Of the Origins of Ornamental Art' First delivered at Kelmscott House, 21 Dec 1884 (<https://www.marxists.org/archive/morris/works/1883/ornament.htm>. 07.09.16)

⁴¹⁸Charles Collis File, Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

Doulton's went on to buy the Fayles estate and ended the supply of highest quality clay for the Birkenhead factory but this cannot be confirmed and it is more likely that the cessation of this supply was due to pressing financial concerns rather than commercial rivalry. Loretz & Co. used local clays from Lombardia to reproduce medieval slip ware; this area of the Po valley has a rich sub-stratum of clay that has long been used in the ceramics industry. Knowledge of the properties of the material was a fundamental principle of the Arts and Crafts Movement; as Gillian Naylor describes Morris's convictions 'the cardinal principle upon which all his theory rested centred around his conviction that the designer must have a personal knowledge of the potentials and limitations of the materials he is working with {...} it must be learned at first hand'. As Morris himself wrote 'never forget the material that you are working with, and try always for doing what it can do best.'⁴¹⁹

By December 1893 Harold Rathbone had convinced twenty shareholders to invest in his new venture, including philanthropists, members of the Rathbone family and several wealthy businessmen from Liverpool. He aimed to raise £5000 capital.⁴²⁰ Rathbone's business model established that the pottery would have two sites of production and therefore two sources of income; thus, the profits made by the production of domestic tableware would support his appetite for architectural faience in the style of Luca della Robbia, without compromising his fidelity to the Morrisean principles he and Dressler subscribed to.⁴²¹ The sgraffito workshop was arguably the more successful of the two workshops; the production of a more financially viable incised slipware for the domestic market allowed Rathbone to create an

⁴¹⁹ Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influences on design theory*, p.104

⁴²⁰ Philip Rathbone's last will and testament, made in April 1895, states that he had also made a gift of one thousand pounds to Harold Rathbone.

Rathbone, P., 1895), Last will and Testament (HM Courts and tribunal service, Leeds, Ref. Rathbone 00/01/1900).

⁴²¹ Hyl and, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894- 1906*, p. 33.

Hyl and has painstakingly researched the public records for details of the company and its shareholders.

architectural workshop under the management of Conrad Dressler to produce the costly and more exclusive architectural panels after Luca della Robbia. The artistic integrity of the two men was not compromised by turning to mass production; the inscribed slipware also allowed him to uphold the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement in what Robert Prescott-Walker describes as one of the 'only true Arts and Crafts Potteries'. The work of the sgraffito workshop was wholly original and Bruce Tattersall, in his generally recusant article, acknowledged that the Pottery successfully displayed artistic evolution and notes that 'the pervasive originality of interpretation is general'.⁴²²

Late Nineteenth- Century Italian Ceramic Production and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The work of Loretz & Co., Cantagalli and indeed of most nineteenth century Italian ceramic studios, has been notably absent from commentaries on the Arts and Crafts Movement, although many were exporting their products to Britain and exhibiting regularly at shows and exhibitions. Important Italian manufacturers including Cantagalli of Florence and Ginori of Doccia established a meaningful presence in the artistic circles of *fin de siècle* England; many of these companies also looked to the *quattrocento* for inspiration. By retrieving the histories that relate to the Della Robbia Pottery, the chapter asks if the influence of the Cantagalli workshop in Florence, in particular, and of the 1888 Italian exhibition in London inspired a creative response in Rathbone.

In 1897 the German/British writer Helen Zimmern (1846-1934) published a contemporary account of ceramics production in *fin de siècle* Florence and the surrounding areas. She

⁴²² Tattersall, B., 'The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery: Il Progresso Sia Nostro Scorpo' *Apollo Magazine*, Issue 47, 137 (Feb.1973) pp.164-168, p.167

describes the Italian ceramics industry as 'a large number of men, working in a small way, almost alone...which preserves the individual character, never lapses into purely commercial or technical'.⁴²³ These small enterprises stretched from Milan to Naples, Umbria and Tuscany, with many based in Florence itself. Many of these ventures were supported by British collectors; Zimmern reports that the small company of Torelli in Florence received encouragement from 'Mrs. Janet Ross, authoress and daughter of Lady Duff Gordon'. Zimmern described the work of Cantagalli as drawing inspiration from Persian and Hispano-Arabic patterns and styles and identifies his most successful products as inspired by the work of Luca della Robbia and the *istoriato* work of Maestro Giorgio of Gubbio. The article positioned these workshops as a nineteenth century restoration of the small medieval Italian workshop, operating in a way that corresponded to the Morrisean principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

A dispassionate analysis had appeared in an 1889 Board of Trade report by the Consul-General of Florence, Sir Domenic E. Colnarghi. Colnarghi had examined the practices of the small Florentine potteries and a series of articles in the *Staffordshire Sentinel* published the conclusions in some detail. This included a report concerning the working practices of Cantagalli in Florence and Agresti and Vanni, both of nearby Impruneta, all of whom had exhibited at the Italian Exhibition of 1888. *The Sentinel* reported that Cantagalli 'produced imitations of most Italian maiolica ware of the fifteenth and sixteenth century including della Robbia high reliefs and of Persian, Arabo-Moresque and Chinese pottery. The designs are generally good and the shape of the vases and other articles retain their antique elegance.... the colours are bright and harmonious'.⁴²⁴ Many of these pieces had been exhibited at the

⁴²³ Zimmern. H., 'Modern Italian Ceramics' *The Magazine of Art*, Jan (1897) pp.213-217

⁴²⁴ *Staffordshire Sentinel* (18 September 1889)

Italian Exhibition. The report states that the usual pay for a skilled craftsman was 3 francs per diem, but Cantagalli paid up to 6 francs for a painter and in 1889 was employing over one hundred male workers. Colnarghi also reported that Montelupo, to the west of Florence, had been an important centre of ceramic production for several centuries but by this time distinguished for producing the 'ugliest and most inferior painted pieces' as the town was no longer making the famed *mostacci* crockery but only kitchen utensils, toys and saving boxes. Torelli of Florence produced the 'usual artistic imitations of medieval ware', but was known especially as a sculptor and was 'a very clever modeller of terracotta statues'. Messrs. Tadolini, who had exhibited at the Italian Exhibition, manufactured flower stands and drawing room ornaments. The Board of Trade report had also noted that there was scarcely a small town or village in Florence which did not have its own brick-kiln for local use. Impruneta, some thirteen kilometres from Florence, had approximately twenty potteries, the three largest being Vanni, Rinieri and the most important, Agresti. The firm of Agresti had attempted the manufacture of enamelled Maiolica in imitation of Luca della Robbia for decorative purposes but the town was generally known for its production of large storage jars for oil and wine and for the manufacture of bricks and tiles.⁴²⁵

The Board of Trade report analyses in some detail the work of the Tuscan potteries, particularly the firm of Cantagalli. Several companies were making reproductions of the work of Luca della Robbia but there is no reference to a sgraffito style that was like that of the Della Robbia Pottery. This is in line with the research of Enrico Venturelli who contends

⁴²⁵ The details in the report give us a fascinating glimpse into Tuscan life in the late nineteenth century; although the firm of Vanni fired a kiln more than thirty times during the summer months, each firing consisting of over 30,000 pieces, during the winter months the men returned to work as agricultural labourers. Between November and March, the women of these labouring families returned to work in the straw-plaiting industry.

that no pottery in Italy was producing archaic sgraffito pottery.⁴²⁶ Colnarghi's Board of Trade report and the widespread newspaper coverage of the Italian Exhibition in British newspapers report that the Cantagalli factory exported substantial numbers of pieces to be sold in Britain and was considered the most important of ceramic manufacturers in Italy.

The Cantagalli factory in Florence was arguably an important influence on Harold Rathbone and the Della Robbia Pottery. That the Rathbone family was aware of Cantagalli's work is certain – this photograph (Figure 29) taken in the music room at Greenbank Cottage, shows a tea set on the small table that has been identified by Colin Simpson as being produced by the Cantagalli studio. Tea-set items were produced by Cassandra Walker and Liz Wilkins for the Della Robbia Pottery that were inspired by a Cantagalli pattern.



Figure 30: Photographer unknown, *The Music room at Greenbank Cottage*, b/w photo, c1890, Williamson Art Gallery & Museum, Birkenhead

⁴²⁶ Venturelli demonstrates this by arguing that in 1884, we know from surviving letters that no Italian ceramics company was able to produce archaic *sgraffito* ware to be displayed in the Medieval Village at the Turin General exhibition. Venturelli, E., 'The Sgraffito work of Carlo Loretz in Northern Italy' in Sheldon, J.(ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street*, p.52

The impact that Cantagalli had on the Della Robbia Pottery is hard to assess without documentation from the workshop. It is especially difficult to prove or disprove the long-held narrative that amongst the first pieces produced by the Della Robbia Pottery were several that were inscribed with the traditional cockerel mark of the Cantagalli factory in Florence.⁴²⁷ However it is reasonable to suppose that as Harold Rathbone and Carlo Manzoni each had a large collection of Italian ceramics that included work by Cantagalli,⁴²⁸ the pieces would occasionally make their way into the workshop as a reference. The 1906 catalogue of the Liquidator of the Della Robbia Pottery lists several items of Cantagalli pottery for inclusion in the sale of stock.⁴²⁹

The Cantagalli factory remains one of the most well-known of Italian ceramic producers of the nineteenth century. Ulisse Cantagalli (1839-1901) had assumed responsibility for the family factory in Florence in 1878 and very quickly achieved significant success. His links with Britain were strong, both through his Scottish wife Margaret and through his friendship with the potter William de Morgan. He drew inspiration for his products from the work of Italian potters of the *quattro* and *cinquecento*, travelling frequently to London to view the *istoriato* collections in the British Museum and South Kensington Museum. He was encouraged by the scholar C. D. E. Fortnum who had been associated with Cantagalli since the early 1880s, an acquaintance possibly developed during the Tuscan's first visits to London. Much of Cantagalli's work was a directly copied from the pieces he saw in the British and South

⁴²⁷ This story was repeated by Cooper, J., *The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery 1893-1906* [exh. Cat] p.16 but no such mark has been identified and recent research by Hyl and has also failed to substantiate the story. Colin Simpson, Director of the Williamson Art Gallery, has never seen such a mark.

⁴²⁸ Cooper, J., *The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery 1893-1906* [exh. Cat] p.15

⁴²⁹ Hyl and, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.246

Kensington Museums as well as pieces in collections in his native Florence. He also reproduced the patterns and shapes of *istoriato* design from Gubbio and Deruta. However, these were not pieces that were *inspired* by Renaissance originals, in the tradition of the Arts and Crafts Movement, but were direct copies of the roundels, plaques, decorative chargers and hollow-ware of Florentine and Umbrian maiolica from five hundred years earlier. In 1879, a year after Cantagalli assumed control of the pottery, James Jackson Jarves wrote in the *New York Times* that ‘the firm’s chief enterprise was now the reproduction of maiolica wares, inspired by the popularity and high prices commanded by fifteenth century wares’. Jarves comments that it had been possible to acquire medieval maiolica for trifling sums twenty-five years previously but by 1879 some pieces were exchanged for thousands of dollars or indeed ‘no money will now buy the finest specimens to be found only in the collections of the wealthiest connoisseurs... it is the impossibility of supply that induced Cantagalli last year to attempt the revival’.⁴³⁰ Much of Cantagalli’s work was a meticulous copy of *istoriato* ceramics; Jarves points out that only the cockerel motif of Cantagalli enabled much of the factory’s output to be discerned as a reproduction rather than genuine *istoriato* pieces.

Rathbone, Dressler and Manzoni never incorporated *istoriato* design into the work of the Della Robbia Pottery and a ‘slavish imitation’ of the original as practiced by Cantagalli would have violated the principles of Ruskin. William Morris’s own views regarding the cultural heritage of the High Renaissance were well known and would have influenced Rathbone and Dressler; he had found little to admire when he visited Florence and Sienna in 1873 and detested most of the classical stylisations of the Italian Renaissance, including *istoriato*

⁴³⁰ Jarves, J. J., ‘The Making of Majolica: a Florence pottery factory’ *New York Times* (March 9 1879) (widely reprinted in Britain e.g. *Yorkshire Post*. 13 May 1879 p.10)

ware.⁴³¹ However, Cantagalli's definitive reproductions of bas-relief sculptures of Luca della Robbia contributed to the popularity of the genre in the late nineteenth century and through the realisation of the Italian Exhibition in 1888, it would not have been necessary for Harold Rathbone to visit the Cantagalli factory in Florence to see these reproductions.

The 1888 Italian Exhibition was held at Earl's Court and was organised by John Robinson Whitley following the highly successful American Exhibition that he had staged the year before. That the exhibition was intended as a spectacle is beyond doubt; held over a sprawling site the Exhibition attracted at least two million visitors between May and October; Paul Greenhalgh describes it as a 'major event of the first order'⁴³² that aimed not only to promote contemporary Italian art but also to reinforce the political vision of a newly-unified Italy.⁴³³ Despite over 1600 fine and decorative art works being displayed, Stephanie Pratt argues that the Exhibition received little critical notice from the specialist art press in Britain although Cantagalli's undoubted success at the Exhibition was reported in the popular press. Pratt comments that influential journals such as *The Athenaeum* and *The Art Journal* failed to acknowledge the venture at all, despite the involvement of Lord Leighton, and *The Magazine of Art* contributed only an unenthusiastic summary.⁴³⁴ She speculates that it was the venue in West Brompton, far west of the Grosvenor and Goupils Galleries that were more usually associated with prestigious fine art shows. The great size of the Exhibition gave an air of mass entertainment and spectacle to the venture, suggesting that

⁴³¹ Harvey, C., *William Morris – Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*. (Manchester University press, 1991) p.74

⁴³² Greenhalgh, P., 'Education, Entertainment and Politics: Lessons from the Great International Exhibition' in Vergo, P., (ed.), *The New Museology* (London, 1989) p.78

⁴³³ See also Venturelli, E., in Sheldon, J.(ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* and Pratt, S., 'National identity on display: The 1888 Italian Exhibition in London and its critical reception' *The Italianist* 20 (1) (May 2000), pp.292-312

⁴³⁴ Pratt, S., 'National identity on display: The 1888 Italian Exhibition in London and its critical reception' *The Italianist* 20 (1) May 2000 pp.292-312, p.293

the more serious art journals would not wish to be associated with such a pageant. Such reluctance was probably fuelled by the daily re-enactment of a roman chariot race in the 'Coliseum', on one occasion unfortunately resulting in a fatality.

The British Architect was more enthusiastic, reporting that

The industrial arts occupy a very large section of the exhibition, and when one associates jewellery and pottery, furniture and decoration with these exhibits, it is not difficult to imagine how fine a display might be made {...} The best firms in the country will certainly be represented. Selections have been made by influential committees formed in Rome, Venice, Turin, Milan, Genoa and Naples.⁴³⁵

However, detailed reports could be found in the popular newspapers of the day; the *Manchester Courier* gave frequent coverage of the Exhibition. The Renaissance-styled cabinets with 'beautiful wood carvings that might have graced the apartments of the Medici' and 'a singularly picturesque chair modelled on a painting by Carpaccio' were reported, as were the ceramics displays and in particular the work of Cantagalli (Figure 30). Describing the Cantagalli company as one of the most important in Italy, the article comments that 'those who have been to Florence may possibly love Luca della Robbia's charming white glazed Madonnas, smiling so graciously upon us passing sinners from beneath their wreaths of unripe lemons and green leaves; Signor Cantagalli has reproduced them to perfection'.⁴³⁶ Harold Rathbone's letters to Brown indicate that he was frequently in London at this time; he would not have failed to attend such an event and seen these reproductions.

⁴³⁵ [Anon] 'The Italian Exhibition', *The British Architect* (April 13 1888) p.239

⁴³⁶ *Manchester Courier* (19 June 1888)



Figure 31: Cantagalli, 'Della Robbia' style Madonna and Child, late nineteenth century, earthenware and coloured glazes, private collection

The long-standing friendship that existed between Ulisse Cantagalli and William de Morgan (1839- 1917) also contributed to Cantagalli's success in Britain. De Morgan holds a unique position in nineteenth century Arts and Crafts history. An accomplished craftsman within the circle that surrounded William Morris in London, and as a friend and collaborator with Cantagalli in Cantagalli's workshop in Florence; both designed and produced ceramics there. De Morgan was also a friend of Conrad Dressler. Although no documentation has revealed that William de Morgan and Harold Rathbone were acquainted it is likely that they were; both moved in the same artistic circles and the relationship of both men to Conrad Dressler would be one of several possible links between them.⁴³⁷ De Morgan had designed and

⁴³⁷ Several tiles made by William de Morgan were sold to the Williamson Art Gallery by Harold Rathbone from his own collection.

produced tiles for William Morris from 1863 and Thornton describes how Cantagalli and De Morgan explored Renaissance techniques by reproducing the range of iridescent lustre glazes, including a beautiful ruby lustre that was first produced by the Maestro Giorgio of Gubbio in the early 1500s. This work was highly sought after by English collectors and provided a lucrative source of income for both men.⁴³⁸ The Della Robbia Pottery never developed the technical skills or the correct firing techniques to produce lustre-ware and, as Hyland comments, consistency in quality control was an issue that Rathbone failed to address.⁴³⁹ It is probable that Cantagalli was a commercial rival as well as a source of inspiration to the company.

Academic research into the position of nineteenth century Italian ceramics within the English Arts and Crafts Movement is scanty and presents an interesting prospect for future research. There was a clear inter-dependence on tourism, both as a mode of taste formation through middle-class travel to Italy and as a driver behind the improved transport systems that facilitated import of manufactured goods from Italy. Although it is hard to imagine that the Della Robbia Pottery could have existed without the inspiration of John Ruskin and William Morris, both the architectural and the sgraffito workshops were informed by Italian art and design from the *quattrocento* and the *diciannovesimo*. The company moved quickly to build a reputation as a popular exemplar of good taste and craftsmanship and the next chapter examines how the company established a commercial presence in the arena of late Victorian consumerism.

Simpson, C., 'Della Robbia and Birkenhead' in Sheldon, J. (ed), *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) pp.5-24, p.17

⁴³⁸ Thornton, D., 'Lustred Pottery from the Cantagalli Workshop' *Apollo* (London), Vol. 151, Issue 456 (Feb 2000) pp.33-40

⁴³⁹ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.137

Chapter three

Regent Street and Beyond: The Della Robbia Pottery and the Business of Display

Chapter two demonstrated that the work of Luca della Robbia and the archaic-styled sgraffito ware by Carlo Loretz of Lodi combined to fire the imagination of Harold Rathbone and inspired the creation of the Della Robbia Pottery. Chapter three of this thesis considers how Rathbone's *quattrocento*-inspired ceramics were displayed and marketed in the department stores and exhibitions of the nineteenth-century. By identifying how the Della Robbia Pottery established a commercial presence in Regent Street and far beyond, the thesis demonstrates how Rathbone capitalised on the new appetite for luxury goods inspired by the Italian *quattrocento* as tourists returned to Britain. Three important themes of consumption and display have emerged in this research - the department store, the newly developing agencies of interior design and the vibrant world of temporary exhibition culture. I argue that through these agencies the Della Robbia Pottery became an outstanding expression of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

The Department Stores of London

'If I were asked to say what is at once the most important production of Art and the thing most to be longed for, I should answer, a beautiful house'⁴⁴⁰



Figure 1: Harold Rathbone, *Philip Rathbone with his daughter Elfrida*, c1895, Oil on canvas, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum

⁴⁴⁰ Morris, W., *"Some Thoughts on the Ornamented Manuscripts of the Middle Ages"* (New York: Press of the Woolly Whale, 1934) Lecture, 1892.

In a portrait of his father and sister (Figure 1), Harold Rathbone captures the delight that the nineteenth century connoisseur, in this case Philip Rathbone, took in collecting a wide selection of *objets d'art*. Rathbone and his daughter are admiring his collection of ceramics. Philip Rathbone holds a large intricately decorated enamelled Chinese *cloisonné* bowl. His daughter Elfrida (1871-1940) is carefully dusting what may be a hispano -Moresque lustred vase. On the shelves behind them are more of Rathbone's collection: Japanese *imari* porcelain, a netsuke, Venetian glass and what appears to be an Italian renaissance bronze sculpture. Philip Rathbone is seated in an adjustable arts and crafts chair of the type made by Morris and Company. Leaning against the chair is a *Liber Studiorum*, a collection of landscape mezzo-tints published by J.M.W. Turner. The composition of the painting contains many of the significant elements that the late nineteenth century connoisseur delighted in: Japanese, Italian and the Arts and Crafts Movement, with the work of Turner to represent the influence of John Ruskin. Many of these goods could be bought in the new stores that had opened in London and throughout the country.

The later decades of the nineteenth century marked the rapid rise of large stores that offered an extensive range and variety of goods under the same roof. Previously, exclusive specialist shops selling luxury goods had proliferated and Helen Berry describes London as a place where the wide range of these shops successfully attracted wealthy clients.⁴⁴¹ The department stores offered the Victorian shopper vast new possibilities in the selection of goods to create the 'house beautiful' and as Harvey and Press point out, 'the Victorian middle-classes attached enormous importance to the symbols and trappings of prosperity

⁴⁴¹ Berry, H., 'Polite Consumption: Shopping in Eighteenth-Century England', *TRHS 6th Ser.* 12, (2002) pp. 375-394

[...] to meet this demand new shops were appearing aimed specifically at middle-class customers'.⁴⁴² Among the first large department stores to open was *Le Bon Marche* in Paris in 1852 and in London, Whiteley's in Bayswater (1863), Liberty & Company in Regent Street (1875). Bainbridge's in Newcastle (1838), Lewis's in Liverpool (1856) and Kendal's in Manchester (1836) were also amongst the earliest to be established. Interior design services were offered by companies including Morris and Co. (1875) and Waring and Sons whose branches included Oxford Street, London (1893) and in Bold Street, Liverpool (c.1880). The department stores gave Harold Rathbone an unprecedented opportunity to display his products as Della Robbia Pottery was stocked in these premier shopping destinations in London and throughout Britain.

Liberty & Co.

The 1896 catalogue of The Della Robbia Pottery specifies Liberty of London as one of its main agents.⁴⁴³ Through Liberty's, the Pottery also had a sales outlet in Paris and through McHughs of New York.⁴⁴⁴ By the 1890s Arthur Liberty was building strong links with the Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau designers, including the Della Robbia Pottery and in 1896 the Liberty catalogue noted that

the founders of the Della Robbia Pottery aim...by encouraging handwork to secure freedom of touch and charm of individuality. The designs are executed by young apprentices and are in the main of their own device. Girls are employed

⁴⁴² Harvey, C. & Press, J., *William Morris – Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester: University Press, 1991) p.77

⁴⁴³ *Catalogue of the Della Robbia Pottery 1896*, Birkenhead

⁴⁴⁴ The 1896 Della Robbia catalogue lists two outlets in Paris; at Liberty & Co. in Avenue de L'Opera and in Jansen Bros., Rue Royal. In New York, the pottery was stocked at McHughs Furniture store on 5th Avenue. Sales were probably limited to the finest pieces.

Catalogue of the Della Robbia Pottery 1896, Birkenhead.

for the painting process ... as a stimulus for superior work, a certain small sum is offered in prizes, in addition to the weekly wage.⁴⁴⁵

We know that that the Della Robbia Pottery played a prominent part in Liberty's 1896 Christmas campaigns from an advertisement placed by Goodalls in King Street, Manchester (Figure 2). This promoted the large display of Liberty's *Yuletide Gifts* along with an 'important exhibition of Della Robbia Pottery' and highlighting the influence of Luca della Robbia on the Pottery.⁴⁴⁶

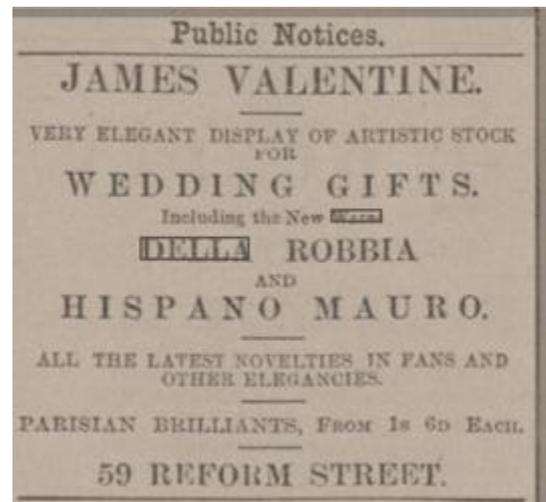
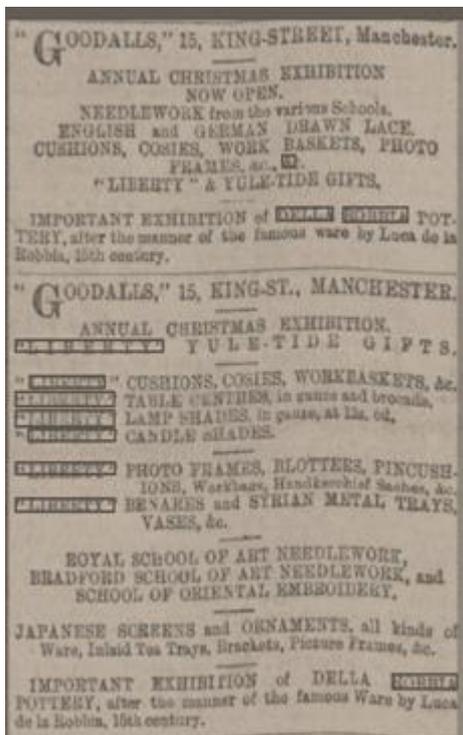


Figure 2: (left) Advertisement, *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 26 Dec 1896

Figure 3: (right) Advertisement, *Dundee Courier*, 24 May 1895

⁴⁴⁵ Todd, P., *The Arts and Crafts Companion* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004) p.237

⁴⁴⁶ [Anon] *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser* (26 Dec 1896)

**WARINGS',
BOLD-STREET,
LIVERPOOL.**

**WARINGS'. XMAS GIFTS.
WARINGS'. XMAS GIFTS.
WARINGS'. XMAS GIFTS.**

UNIQUE AND USEFUL.
UNIQUE AND USEFUL.
ARTISTIC AND INEXPENSIVE.
ARTISTIC AND INEXPENSIVE.

WHAT TO GIVE, WHERE TO BUY.

THE PROBLEM OF WHAT TO GIVE THAT WILL
BE ARTISTIC, SERVICEABLE, APPRECIATED, AND
STILL INEXPENSIVE AT ONCE SOLVED BY A
VISIT TO WARINGS' SHOWROOMS.

WARINGS'. BRICA-BRAC.
WARINGS'. OXYDISSED SILVER ORNAMENTS.
WARINGS'. ANTIQUE SILVER AND CARVED
IVORIES.
PRESENTS. MEDALLIONS.
PRESENTS. ORIENTAL EMBROIDERIES AND
SILK CUSHIONS.
PRESENTS. DOWN QUILTS.
PRESENTS. COSY EASY CHAIRS.
PRESENTS. ORIENTAL RUGS.
PRESENTS. JAPANESE SCREENS.
PRESENTS. HANDSOME STANDARD AND
TABLE LAMPS AND SHADES.

DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY.
DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY.
DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY.
SPECIAL DISPLAY.

WARING & GILLOW, LTD.
WARINGS'. BOLD-STREET.
WARINGS'. BOLD-STREET, LIVERPOOL
(Telephones 720 and 6478).
AND AT
181, OXFORD-STREET, LONDON.
118 and 120, DEANSGATE, MANCHESTER.

E. G. & S.

Figure 4: Advertisement for Waring's, *Liverpool Mercury*, 22 December 1897

Examples of advertisements that promote the Pottery can be found in newspapers throughout Britain from 1895 onwards. Della Robbia Pottery was successfully sold in department stores in cities including London, Liverpool, Glasgow, Birmingham and Dundee. The stockists of Della Robbia Pottery consistently included phrases such as 'important', 'artistic' and 'special display'. These stores were all premier shopping destinations for the

late nineteenth century homemaker and the adverts place the Della Robbia Pottery as a significant representation of the Arts and Crafts Movement.

LIBERTY & CO.
(LIMITED)
have now on view a representative and extensive Collection of
ENGLISH ART POTTERIES
in their Spacious Bazaar Galleries at 150, Regent Street.

(1) **THE FORMS** are reproductions of both Eastern and Western Antique and Classic Originals; (2) **THE DESIGNS** are multitudinous, highly decorative, and skilful; and (3) **THE COLOURINGS** are beautiful, brilliant, and artistic.

The Collection happily demonstrates the recent advance made in our English Art-Pottery.

Examples of **DELLA-ROBBIA POTTERY** (English).



Figure 5: Advertisement for Liberty & Co., *Magazine of Art*, November 1896

In January 1897, *The Magazine of Art* commented that 'the glazed Pottery of Mr. Rathbone's Della Robbia Company, which Messrs. Liberty have recently introduced to London, had been a notable exhibitor in the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society'.⁴⁴⁷ The Della Robbia Pottery was gaining an eminent position in the world of late nineteenth century crafts; only

⁴⁴⁷ [Anon] 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibition-II' *Magazine of Art* (Jan 1897) pp.63-66

the finest and most interesting of wares were stocked by Liberty & Co. and only a pottery of some success would have been selected to exhibit at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at the New Gallery. The New Gallery was only a short distance from Liberty's Regent Street store; we can imagine Arthur Lasenby Liberty strolling to the exhibition in search of captivating *objets d'art* to entice wealthy middle-class patrons seeking to embellish their homes. Stephen Calloway concludes that 'during the 1890s, Liberty was on good terms with all the most important names in the English design world and was frequently referred to as an expert on the history of the English decorative arts',⁴⁴⁸ by the end of the nineteenth century Liberty & Co. had become one of the most profitable and influential of the London department stores and acknowledged as an important arbiter of good taste.

Liberty had originally worked as a manager for Farmer & Rogers Great Shawl and Cloak Emporium in Regent Street and found early success by convincing the directors of the company to buy the entire stock of Japanese *objets d'art* that were displayed at the 1862 Great London Exposition at South Kensington. The artefacts sold astonishingly well and Liberty's own department became the most profitable in the company. As Alison Alburgham describes, Arthur Liberty felt confident enough to open his own store in 1875 in Regent Street; the store was so successful that he could repay the £2000 borrowed to start the company within eighteen months.⁴⁴⁹ Liberty made his name by importing exotic silks, porcelain, furniture, fans and textiles from the Orient. He visited Japan and China, exploiting the obsession for Sino-Japanese goods and went to India, importing huge quantities of silks, gauzes and other textiles to the Regent Street store. William Judd, his first assistant, who

⁴⁴⁸ Calloway, S., 'Liberty's and international Art Nouveau' in *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1992) p.48

⁴⁴⁹ Alburgham, A., 'The Oriental Bazaar' in *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* p.20

followed him from Farmer & Rogers recalled in later years that 'they sold nothing but silks from the east, the sort of thing that William Morris, Alma Tadema, Burne-Jones and Rossetti used to come in and turn over and rave about'.⁴⁵⁰ Over fifty years later Liberty said 'the soft delicate fabrics of the East particularly attracted these artists because they could get nothing of European make that would drape properly and which was of sufficiently well-balanced colouring to satisfy the eye'.⁴⁵¹

Liberty began to stock British Art Pottery from as early as 1883; until then the only ceramics the store supplied were Sino-Japanese, both antique and contemporary. Malcolm Haslam argues that Japanese art at that time was being perceived as 'living art', in contrast to European art that was considered 'dead' because of the influence of industrialisation in the creative process. However, the work of the studio potteries of the Arts and Crafts Movement began to change these perceptions and was increasingly acknowledged as sharing the same moral integrity as the work of Japanese artists.⁴⁵² The relationship between Liberty & Co. and the studio potteries was more straightforward than with suppliers of other products to the company; pottery sold in the store generally, though not exclusively, carried the mark of the studio and not the Liberty logo. The small globe vase (Figure 6) is unusual in that it has retained a Liberty label. Haslam proposes that the 'situation that prevailed at the Aller Vale and Della Robbia Potteries, where the pots were designed by experienced artists and decorated by young workers in the position of students or apprentices, suited Liberty who always endeavored to offer customers attractive goods at low prices'.⁴⁵³ The hand-made nature of the product and the control of materials, time and tools exerted by the artist

⁴⁵⁰ Victoria & Albert Museum, *Liberty's, 1875-1975: An Exhibition to Mark the Firm's Centenary July-Oct 1975* (London: V&A publishing, 1975) p.5

⁴⁵¹ Alburgham, A., 'The Oriental Bazaar' in Calloway, S. (ed.), *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* p.27

⁴⁵² Haslam, M., *In the Nouveau Style* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989) p.104

⁴⁵³ Haslam, M., 'Ceramics' in Calloway, S (ed.), *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* p.101

ensured that each of these studio potteries had a unique aesthetic and was aligned with the principles of William Morris.

In 1883 Liberty began to sell Bretby's Art Pottery, a firm with a strong Japanese aesthetic, through its connections with the designer Christopher Dresser and the Linthorpe Pottery and in 1888, Burmantofts Faience became a supplier, which again was a company with a Japanese aesthetic. It is possible that these potteries initially attracted Arthur Liberty as the work would satisfy the public demand for Japonaise but allow him a strong degree of quality control. C. H. Brannam's 'Barum Ware' first appeared in the Liberty 'Yuletide catalogue' of 1894. The pottery was initially decorated in a Japanese manner using an incised slipware technique but as the decade progressed, the decoration changed to a loose, swirling style of Art Nouveau.⁴⁵⁴ Other studio art potteries of interest included the Aller Vale Art Pottery of Newton Abbott in Devon, which had a trading relationship with Liberty's from 1887 until 1901. Their pots were decorated in sgraffito-style but lacked the glorious individuality of the Della Robbia Pottery and the company drew on a restricted number of patterns and house styles, including Rhodium ware.⁴⁵⁵ The first advertisements and press notices appeared for the Della Robbia Pottery in 1896; we do not know when Liberty & Co. began to stock the pieces but it is likely to have been some months before then.⁴⁵⁶ By this time, the ceramics department at Liberty was of a substantial size. Mass produced tableware from the great industrial manufacturers of the Midlands: Wedgwood, Royal Worcester, Royal Doulton and

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid. p.43

⁴⁵⁵ Bergesen, V., *Encyclopedia of British Art Pottery 1870-1920* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1991) p.21

⁴⁵⁶ The Della Robbia Pottery first exhibited at the Home Arts and Industries Exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall in 1894 to great acclaim (discussed in detail later in this chapter). It is probable that stores such as Liberty & Co. began to stock Della Robbia Pottery from then. Certainly, James Valentine of Dundee were stocking the pottery from May 1895 (figure 3)

Spode-Copeland was displayed alongside one-off pieces from the new ambitious studio potteries of Aller Vale, William Moorcroft and The Della Robbia Pottery.

Rising incomes in the late nineteenth century permitted an increase in expenditure on a wide range of household items like carpets, furniture, wall coverings, paintings and decorative art and the Victorian middle-class attached great importance to the symbols of prosperity. Department stores were quick to cater to this new market, offering a scheme of interior design to enrich the decorative arrangements of the new middle-classes. Figure 6 shows the rare example of Della Robbia Pottery that still retains the Liberty logo. Combining a design of *sgraffito* and hatching, this charming pot is rendered in a simple style of four-petal flowers and leaves. The tonal palette of yellows and greens contrasts with the areas of red terracotta revealed in the incising.



Figure 6: The Della Robbia Pottery, miniature sgraffito globe vase, marks obscured by Liberty label on underside. Private Collection.

The demand for far-eastern goods was not confined to England; the fashion for exotica had spread throughout Europe and Liberty quickly saw that his success, based on a ready supply of high quality wares, would be undermined as the Far Eastern producers struggled to meet the seemingly insatiable demands from the West. By the last decade of the century many of the goods imported from China and Japan were inferior in quality. *The British Architect* reported that Liberty had travelled to Japan to exhort the Japanese manufacturers to

abandon their recent 'mania for all that is foreign' and to 'regain their reverence for their old arts and industries'. Liberty argued that 'Japanese art need not therefore be stripped of its distinctive character' to meet the demands of a European market⁴⁵⁷ but he began to search for English manufacturers to secure a ready supply of the hand-made fancy-goods. Stephen Calloway identifies this as 'Like Morris, Liberty wanted to improve the nation's taste by giving ordinary people the chance to buy beautiful things'.⁴⁵⁸ Harvey and Press report that from the mid-1880s Liberty & Co. was manufacturing a wide range of its own goods.⁴⁵⁹ Liberty was willing to use a fully mechanised process in his production. William Morris did use some machines extensively, but was concerned not to remove all evidence of artisan labour from production. Jeffrey Petts argues that for Morris, it was not only the work of the human hand that must be visible in art, but also human design; in beautiful machine-made objects, we can still see the work of the artist who controls his labour and tools. The rejection of 'machines' is concerned with the manner of making – the alienating effects of the machine are significant when allied to processes of the division of labour.⁴⁶⁰ Liberty also drew together a 'look' that defined his store and the type of goods that he sold; firstly, as a purveyor of Oriental goods and then as an expression of the Aesthetic movement. By the *fin de siècle*, he became a crucial advocate of Art Nouveau, a style that became associated with Liberty's.⁴⁶¹ The store was synonymous with high quality and well-designed *objets d'art*,

⁴⁵⁷ 'Mr Lazenby Liberty's Mission to Japan' in *British Architect* (26 July 1889) p.58

⁴⁵⁸ Adburgham, A., 'The Oriental Bazaar' in Calloway, S. (ed.) *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* pp.26-34 p.31

⁴⁵⁹ Harvey, C. & Press, J., *William Morris – Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*, (Manchester: University Press, 1991) p.170

⁴⁶⁰ Petts, J., 'Good Work and Aesthetic Education: William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Beyond' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Vol.42. No.1 (Spring 2008) pp.30-45, p.36

⁴⁶¹ Art Nouveau is often referred to in Italy as *Stile Liberty*. Liberty relied heavily on strong lines and organic details, rather than the eroticised human form frequently seen in European Art Nouveau. Liberty frequently used the 'Celtic knot' as a motif, and developed his own line of Cymric and Tudric products, which showed a strong Celtic and Renaissance aesthetic.

many of which had been designed in the company's own design studio and 'had numerous departments specializing in silks, furniture, embroidery, carpets, curios and porcelain and could offer a complete interior design service'.⁴⁶² The policy of the store was to retain the anonymity of the designer and Calloway points out that because of this branding, key designers of Art Nouveau have remained unrecognised as their work was unaccredited and subsumed by the Liberty logo. Archibald Knox, Lindsay P. Butterfield and Arthur Silver are now widely acknowledged for the major contribution they made to the decorative arts of the *fin de siècle* but have been eclipsed by the Liberty brand name until now.⁴⁶³

We do not know when the trading relationship between the Della Robbia Pottery and Liberty & Co. ended, but magazines such as *Hearth and Home* make no mention of the Della Robbia Pottery at Liberty's after March 1900. Significantly, Haslam indicates that from 1899, the buyers from Liberty & Co. turned away from the small art potteries, for which an order from Liberty's was a significant boost to turnover, to the large manufacturers in Staffordshire. An example of this can be seen in Macintyre & Co, which became a major supplier to Liberty's with its large-scale production of 'Florian Ware', designed and developed by William Moorcroft. The new styles required by Liberty & Co. 'were more advanced in technical terms than any that had been adopted in the potteries for twenty years'.⁴⁶⁴ Given Rathbone's reluctance to compromise his Morrisian principles, the *quattrocento* forms of the architectural workshop or the limited production capabilities of the studio, it is probable

⁴⁶² Harvey, C. & Press, J., *William Morris – Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain* (Manchester University Press, 1991) p.170

⁴⁶³ Harris, J., in Calloway, S. (ed.), *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* p.54

⁴⁶⁴ Haslam, M., in Calloway, S. (ed.), *The House of Liberty: Masters of Style and Decoration* p.106

that the work of the pottery was no longer ordered by the great department store, with serious commercial consequences.⁴⁶⁵

S. J. Waring and Sons

In June 1897, Harold Rathbone gave an 'at home' exhibition at the re-opening of the department store of Messrs. S.J. Waring and Sons in Oxford Street, London. Samuel James Waring (1838-1907) was a successful Liverpool cabinet maker and merchant. His son, also Samuel James (1860-1940) was a contemporary and probably a friend of Harold Rathbone. Waring's had large department stores in Bold Street, Liverpool and in Deansgate, Manchester and in 1893 Samuel Waring (Jnr) opened two new stores in London's Sloane Street and Oxford Street. Following an extensive refurbishment, the Oxford Street store re-opened in 1897 with the 'at home'; hosted by Rathbone and featuring a large display of Della Robbia Pottery. Rathbone was at the vanguard of the celebrations to promote the new shopping galleries of this prestigious west-end store. Newspapers reported that 'HRH Princess Louise was received by Mr. Waring Jnr., Managing Director, and Mr. Harold Rathbone' and that the Royal visitor had displayed an intimate knowledge of the styles and techniques of the Pottery. The Princess commented that the visit had given her extreme pleasure, 'the development of modern art work for home use and decoration being a subject of intense satisfaction to her'.⁴⁶⁶ Newspapers from Scotland, Belfast and the English provinces reported the event, as did the Court Circular pages of the *Morning Post*.⁴⁶⁷ Newspaper articles generally commented that from then, the Della Robbia Pottery was 'under the direct Patronage of HRH Princess Louise'.

⁴⁶⁵ Similarly, the trading relationship between Liberty & Co. and the Allervale pottery ended in 1901.

⁴⁶⁶ [Anon] *London Standard* (2 June 1897)

⁴⁶⁷ [Anon] *Morning Post* (2 June 1897)

The actress Sarah Bernhardt visited the same exhibition in the following month. Both the *London Morning Post* and *The Era* report:

After her performance at Her Majesty's theatre on Saturday afternoon, Madame Sarah Bernhardt, accompanied by Lord Glensesk and Mr Michael (sic) Rossetti, went to an 'at home' given by Mr Harold Rathbone, Art Director at the Della Robbia Pottery, at the galleries of Messrs. Waring of Oxford Street.⁴⁶⁸

We do not know how the nature of the relationship between Sarah Bernhardt and Rathbone or how it first developed but it is possibly through a family connection. Bernhardt appeared regularly in theatres in Liverpool from the 1880s where she and Philip Rathbone first met⁴⁶⁹ and Harold Rathbone wrote to Brown in 1888 expressing his enjoyment about seeing her performance in *Macbeth*.⁴⁷⁰ On their second trip to South America in 1893, Jane and Philip Rathbone sailed on the same ship as Sarah Bernhardt and her company of forty players.⁴⁷¹ Bernhardt is widely accepted as a supporter of the Della Robbia Pottery although there is no evidence to confirm that she visited the studio itself; it seems unlikely that either Rathbone or the Liverpool press would pass up an opportunity to report a visit to the Pottery from such a celebrity. Further evidence of Bernhardt's support proves elusive and it is not until 1916, long after the closure of the Pottery, that a report emerges that connects Rathbone once more with Sarah Bernhardt. On that occasion, the actress was again in Liverpool and Harold Rathbone reported to the *Liverpool Echo* that he 'received a command' to call upon the actress at her hotel and recalled that Bernhardt had been a great supporter of the

⁴⁶⁸ [Anon] *London Morning Post* (26 July 1897)

⁴⁶⁹ [Anon] *The Era* (16 July 1881)

⁴⁷⁰ Rathbone, H.S., (1888) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/68

⁴⁷¹ Rathbone, J.S., *Recollections of Jane S Rathbone* (Rathbone Papers, Special collections, University of Liverpool Library, 1895) p.91

Pottery and had indeed visited it. Apparently, she clearly remembered her visit to Waring's in 1897 and had much appreciated the gift of a beautiful decorative Della Robbia panel.⁴⁷² Hyland has also identified a reference to a 'Sarah Bernhardt pepper pot'.⁴⁷³ At present, the support of Sarah Bernhardt is difficult to quantify and only the visit to the exhibition at Waring's in Oxford Street is certain.

Sales of Della Robbia Pottery overseas

The presence of the Della Robbia Pottery in leading department stores established the company as a significant producer of luxury goods and support given by Princess Louise and Sarah Bernhardt gave a resounding endorsement to the Pottery. As interior furnishing of the home increasingly became seen as an important indicator of social status and good taste, the Pottery was perceived as crafting superior or luxury individual pieces rather than being involved in mass manufacture, confirmed in a review by Edward W. Gregory in 1901 that reported 'the Pottery was far removed from the appearance of sloppiness and commercialism'.⁴⁷⁴ However, Harold Rathbone not only ensured that the ceramics were for sale in Regent Street but, as this chapter now demonstrates, exported pieces to Australia and Africa and appears to have profited from the commercial possibilities presented by Britain's exports to the colonies. Other than references to Liberty's overseas sales concessions, current research has not addressed the position of the Della Robbia Pottery as an exporter to countries around the world.

⁴⁷² [Anon] 'Great Artiste's Stay in Liverpool', *Liverpool Echo* (29 March 1916) p.5

⁴⁷³ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.53.

⁴⁷⁴ Edward W. Gregory, 'Home Arts and Industries', *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries (American Edition)* 31, 259, (August 1901) pp.135-140, p.138

In May 1895, the *Liverpool Mercury* reported that ‘The Della Robbia Pottery sent to South Kensington a collection of articles for mural and table decoration which have been selected as being examples of the best modern artistic industries in this country’. These articles were being forwarded to a ‘permanent’ museum in Melbourne, Australia.⁴⁷⁵ The pieces of Della Robbia Pottery that were sent to Melbourne are now part of the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria; Matthew Martin has confirmed that ‘these works were purchased by the trustees of what was then the Museum in 1895. Through the 1880s and 1890s the trustees were making small, sporadic purchases directly from workshops deemed to be leaders in ‘art manufactory’ and this is the context in which the Della Robbia works entered the collections’.⁴⁷⁶ The acquisition by the Melbourne Gallery signifies that the Pottery was considered an important new company in the Arts and Crafts Movement.

Women were as responsible for ensuring that their homes were seen to be of ‘good taste’ in Melbourne as they were in Manchester. Susan Lawrence argues that a sophisticated consumer culture that had developed in many countries across the British Empire as women accompanied their husbands to positions in the colonial administration or to acquire generous land-grants in these countries.⁴⁷⁷ Improved mercantile systems and the ready availability of magazines and periodicals such as *Hearth and Home* and *The London Illustrated News* encouraged a culture of middle-class refinement and aspiration and Lawrence identifies tableware as an important signifier of a colonial aesthetic. Although these shoppers were unable to visit the beguiling displays of the London department stores, they could order goods through an extensive selection of catalogues from the large

⁴⁷⁵ *Liverpool Mercury* (18 May 1895)

⁴⁷⁶ A point made by Matthew Martin at the National Gallery, Victoria NSW, in private correspondence (27 April 2015)

⁴⁷⁷ Lawrence, S., *Exporting Culture: Archaeology and the Nineteenth-Century British Empire Historical Archaeology* Vol.

³⁷ Issue 1, (2003) p.20

department stores such as Liberty's *Yuletide Gifts* and *The Book of the Bazaar*. After the arrival of Della Robbia Pottery in Melbourne, Australian housewives would now be able to select the pottery in Liberty's catalogues in the knowledge that it was considered an example of the best modern artistic practice.

Further commercial possibilities presented to the Della Robbia Pottery by export throughout the British Empire are also demonstrated by reports in the national press in 1904. The Alake of Abeokuta, ruler of a large province in South-eastern Nigeria, had been in Britain on a State visit and been received by King Edward VII. A major concern of this diplomatic mission was to resolve issues concerning the collection of tolls in West Africa on British merchant goods and Liverpool was the final city on his tour as the Alake set sail for Lagos on board the *SS Burutu*. The newspaper reports noted that 'Mr. Harold Rathbone of the Della Robbia Pottery, Birkenhead, presented the Alake with a vase containing allegorical scenes of lion-taming, sunrise and a cotton field in Abeokuta'.⁴⁷⁸ At present we have very little information concerning the orders and sales of the Della Robbia Pottery but these reports do indicate one of the ways in which Rathbone was active in promoting the Pottery. Workers at the Pottery report that Rathbone often presented visiting dignitaries and celebrities with pieces of Della Robbia Pottery. In addition to the decorative panel presented to Sarah Bernhardt (page 16), we know that significant pieces were also presented to Princess Louise at the time of her visit to the factory in 1898 and to the Mayor of Birkenhead, Edward Mason, to commemorate the same visit (Figure 7). The vase stands at 66cm high, and is decorated with swirling Art Nouveau forms in shades of yellow and blue. The insignia of the Della Robbia Pottery stands prominently above the shield with its bold inscription. The cobalt blue of the

⁴⁷⁸ *Aberdeen Journal* (July 11th 1904) p.5

decoration has flowed in several places, probably due to the unstable nature of cobalt when applied under a glaze. Rathbone may well have considered that this gave the requisite handcrafted quality to this prestigious piece.



Figure 7: The Della Robbia Pottery (Cassandra Walker), The Mason Vase, 1898, earthenware and glazes, Williamson Art Gallery and Museum.

Bears Inscription: 'This vase was presented The Della Robbia Pottery to the Mayor of Birkenhead, E.G. Mason Esq. on the occasion of the visit of HRH Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne to the Works in Hamilton Square'

The highly ornate piece (Figure 8) by Gwendoline Buckler for the Della Robbia Pottery is an archetypal example of the celebration of empire that typified late Victorian society. The octagonal casket was one of a pair, one of which was presented to Queen Victoria in celebration of her Diamond Jubilee in 1897. Paul Greenhalgh selects this casket as exemplifying the tension between nostalgic colonialism and the challenges of modernity and a new age.⁴⁷⁹



Figure 8: The Della Robbia Pottery (Gwendoline M Buckler), Presentation casket made for Queen Victoria for the Diamond Jubilee, 1897, Royal Collection.

⁴⁷⁹ Greenhalgh, P., 'The English Compromise: Modern design and National Consciousness, 1870-1940' In: Kaplan, W (ed.) *Designing Modernity: The Arts of reform and Persuasion* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995) p.112

The eight caryatids carry the names of the four countries of the Union and the four largest dominions: India, Australia, Canada and British Africa. Saint George, patron saint of England, stands proudly over a vanquished dragon or serpent and well-known lines from Shakespeare's *Richard II* scroll through Tudor roses and above a fleet of sailing ships that allude to both the Della Robbia Pottery and the past glory of the British fleet. A series of scrolling interlocked fish runs around the lower rim in a style strongly reminiscent of archaic slipware from Venezia or Lombardia as is the tonal palette with the unifying blue/green glaze of the Pottery. Greenhalgh comments that this is a 'strident and reactionary appraisal of English heritage that encapsulates the socio-cultural climate of Victorian and Edwardian England'.

Greenhalgh identifies the casket as an important expression of a colonial nostalgia that defines the economic and political decline of Britain through industrialisation while modernisation in other parts of the world gathers pace. He argues that 'Modernity, especially Continental and American versions of it, heralded a new world in which the English were by no means sure they wanted to participate'.⁴⁸⁰ Through the casket, the Della Robbia Pottery articulated a longing for both a more benevolent Medievalism and a colonial past and, as Greenhalgh argues, is a primary indicator of how the English would look away from early modernity and the impact of a fully industrialised world.⁴⁸¹

An example of the growing unease between modernity and nostalgia can be seen in the negotiations between Crown properties and the commercial tenants of the department

⁴⁸⁰ Greenhalgh, P., 'The English Compromise: Modern design and National Consciousness, 1870-1940' In: Kaplan, W (ed.) *Designing Modernity: The Arts of reform and Persuasion* p.112

⁴⁸¹ Greenhalgh defines modernism in design as having two phases; the early, 'pioneer' stage was essentially a set of ideas, a vision of how the designed world could transform human consciousness and material conditions as the activities of traditional art forms became increasingly outdated in a fully-industrialised world. In Greenhalgh, P. (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion, 1990) p.5

stores of Regent Street. Jonathan Schneer compares the position of those who believed that the neo-classical architecture of London should remain as a celebration of 'British heroism on the battlefield, British sovereignty over foreign lands, British wealth and power'⁴⁸² with the retailers of Regent Street who were insistent that the much-needed rejuvenation should also reflect the needs of a developing modern consumer culture. The retailers needed to attract the custom of the increasing number of middle-class female shoppers if the area was to retain its position as a premier shopping destination. Erica Rappaport argues that Liberty & Co. was an archetypal example of the blending of the Victorian belief in the supremacy of Britain's geo-political role and the demands of a new consumer culture: 'no store in London did more to identify with English craftsmanship, national identity and empire'.⁴⁸³ In addition to upholding notions of British superiority through design and architecture, Cheang argues that the marketing of non-western goods by stores such as Liberty's also informed the sense of colonial nostalgia discussed by Paul Greenhalgh.⁴⁸⁴

It was not only the importing of non-western goods for commercial purposes that informed this sense of colonial nostalgia. Bill Ashcroft describes how the exotic and foreign 'other' was increasingly appropriated and introduced into British society throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century to 'safely spice up the domestic';⁴⁸⁵ art, artifacts, plants, animals and indigenous people were brought back to England from all parts of the British Empire. Renate Wasserman assesses these 'innocent signifiers of an exotic other' quickly represented whatever was projected onto them by the society into which they were

⁴⁸² Schneer, J., *The Imperial Metropolis* (London: Yale University Press, 2001) p.7

⁴⁸³ Rappaport, E., 'Art, Commerce or Empire? The Building of Regent Street, 1880-1927' *History Workshop Journal*, No.53 (Spring 2002) pp.94-117, p.112

⁴⁸⁴ Cheang, S., 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store' *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 20, No.1 (Spring 2007) pp.1-16, p.3

⁴⁸⁵ Ashcroft B, Griffiths G & Tiffin H., *Post-Colonial Studies – the Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1994) p.94

introduced.⁴⁸⁶ Could the longing for a more benevolent Medievalism and a colonial past described by Greenhalgh and expressed by many of the studios of the Arts and Crafts Movement be regarded as a form of cultural appropriation? ⁴⁸⁷ The British cultural elite had long revered the aesthetics of High Renaissance art as part of the role of collector/connoisseur; Hilary Fraser describes the early Victorian period in England as ‘an unprecedented celebration of Renaissance art and culture [...] Raphael was the undisputed embodiment of the classical achievement of the High Renaissance’.⁴⁸⁸

Both the Pre-Raphaelite artists and the craftsmen of the Arts and Crafts Movement took the ‘innocent signifiers’ of early Renaissance Italy and projected their own longings for a pre-industrialised society onto them. In painting, this is exemplified by Ford Madox Brown’s *Oure Ladye of Saturday Night (1847)*; Prettejohn quotes Brown as commenting that ‘this composition was little more than the pouring out of the emotions and remembrances still vibrating within me of Italian art’. Prettejohn explores several ways in which Brown has taken the innocent signifier of the early Christian ‘Madonna and Child’ and appropriated it in what may be a representation of a modern baby’s bath or a concern for public hygiene and sanitary improvements:

In *Oure Ladye of Saturday Night* the baby is exemplary for hygiene, down to its tiny gleaming fingers and toes and the tight golden curls on its fair head. Could the point be then that we ought to attend to modern social issues so that we can interpret the alert, somewhat quizzical baby no longer as the son of God but rather as the good citizen of the future? ⁴⁸⁹

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid. p.95

⁴⁸⁷ Ashcroft defines cultural appropriation as the usurpation of a cultural domain by a dominant culture and the subsequent incorporation of that idiom into the dominant culture? Ibid.p.19

⁴⁸⁸ Fraser, H., *The Victorians and Renaissance Italy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992) p.44

⁴⁸⁹ Prettejohn, E., ‘Ford Madox Brown and History painting’, *Visual Culture in Britain* (2014) Special edition Vol. x pp. 241-25, p.250, p.249

Harold Rathbone of course openly interpreted the name, stylistic devices and techniques of the della Robbia. It is unthinkable that Rathbone would have considered this controversial; this is a debate of our own time and our terms of references are different but the examples of both Ford Madox Brown's *Oure Ladye of Saturday Night* and the pieces produced by the Della Robbia Pottery do fulfil the criteria of cultural appropriation defined by Ashcroft.⁴⁹⁰ The philosopher James Young, however, benchmarks cultural ownership as defining the object or aesthetic as one of that culture's greatest achievements and argues that to take the object or to misrepresent the culture through denigration is morally wrong. Nonetheless, in contrast to Ashcroft, Young then argues that it is not ethically wrong or aesthetically bad to take styles, motifs or subjects from other cultures if proper acknowledgement is given. Young agrees that some people may be offended but he concludes that this form of cultural appropriation is not morally wrong.⁴⁹¹ Therefore, the pieces made by the Della Robbia Pottery that evoke a colonial nostalgia or signifiers of empire, such as the casket made for Queen Victoria and the piece presented to the Alake of Abeokuta, may be considered as cultural appropriation within the paradigms of Ashcroft. However, the artisans of the Arts and Crafts Movement invariably acknowledged the sources of their inspiration although they may have imposed nineteenth century values upon the medieval, Young insists that the acknowledgement 'may create good'.⁴⁹²

⁴⁹⁰ Cultural appropriation generally refers to the historical legacy of extraction from cultures that have been colonised, such as those in the African continent and Asia. However, as noted in chapter one, academics including Rachel Teukolsky have entered this debate by pointing out that many Victorian thinkers sought to appropriate the qualities of the Renaissance for themselves. Teukolsky argues that 'In Britain, some late-Victorian writers promoted a cultural nationalism that assimilated the perceived superiority of Renaissance Italian culture into the economic and political dominance of modern-day Britain'

Teukolsky, R., 'Walter Pater's *Renaissance* (1873) and the British Aesthetic Movement.' *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth Century History*. (2012) In Felluga (ed.) *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*.

⁴⁹¹ Young, J., *Cultural Appropriation and the Arts* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010) p.18

⁴⁹² *Ibid.* p.18

We have seen how the Della Robbia Pottery found outlets for sales in the most prestigious of London's stores, including Liberty & Co. and S.J. Waring & Son and that it is likely that pieces of Della Robbia Pottery were exported across the world. But Rathbone was also familiar with leading interior decorators of the period, a new profession that grew out of the burgeoning interest in the creation of a beautiful home. This gave him an additional opportunity to bring Della Robbia Pottery to Regent Street and beyond.

The Business of Interior Design: Morris & Co., R. & A. Garrett and the 'house beautiful'

Until the 1880s, interior design was a 'man's world'; designed, manufactured and implemented by men but, as Deborah Cohen observes, from the middle decades of the nineteenth century, men and women both became increasingly anxious to ensure that their home décor stood as an appropriate testimony to their own good taste.⁴⁹³ Sarah Cheang comments that the reputation of stores such as Liberty's was only assured 'because of the men who came to shop there; Burne-Jones, Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) and James McNeill Whistler (1834-1903)'.⁴⁹⁴ However, several women also established themselves as interior decorators and design journalists during this period, including Agnes and Rhoda Garrett, who in 1874 had founded their own company 'R. & A. Garrett House Decorators'. The new interest in interior decoration presented an opportunity for other middle-class women to create a role for themselves both as respected interior decorators and as dispensers of advice and guidance. Charlotte Robinson opened her own business in Manchester in 1885

⁴⁹³ Cohen, D. *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2006) p.90

⁴⁹⁴ Cheang, S., 'Selling China: Class, Gender and Orientalism at the Department Store' *Journal of Design History* Vol 20, No.1 (Spring 2007) pp.1-16. p.2

and was appointed 'Home Art Decorator' to Queen Victoria in 1888. Charlotte Talbot-Coke not only wrote influential advice columns in her own journals but designed furniture. Mary Eliza Haweis was also amongst the most successful of the 'lady art advisors', publishing several popular books including *The Art of Decoration* (1881).⁴⁹⁵ Deborah Cohen persuasively argues that

Men such as John Ruskin and William Morris are only the best known, not necessarily the most influential of the 'art advocates'. The cast of characters is far broader than has been recognised. A powerful web of connections linked the spheres of high art, home decoration and the shops. Crucial to the propagation of the art gospel were Mrs Haweis and her rivals amongst the 'lady art advisors'.⁴⁹⁶

We know that Agnes Garrett was close to Rathbone as was Arthur Mackmurdo,⁴⁹⁷ co-founder of the Century Guild, who produced decorative work in every field of interior design, intending 'to render all branches of art the sphere no longer of the tradesman but of the artist, it would restore building decoration, glass painting, pottery, wood carving and metalwork to their rightful place beside painting'.⁴⁹⁸ William Morris was an important supplier of Della Robbia Pottery and a pivotal influence on Rathbone and the larger Arts and Crafts Movement. The chapter now discusses how the discerning consumer was guided to purchase Della Robbia Pottery through the influence of both interior designers and the female taste-forming press.

⁴⁹⁵ Haweis, M.E., *The Art of Decoration* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1881)

⁴⁹⁶ Cohen, D., *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2006) p.64

⁴⁹⁷ Mackmurdo worked in collaboration with several of Rathbone's relatives. In September 1893, *The Studio* reported that Richard Rathbone, cousin of Harold, had crafted new gas light fittings to Mackmurdo's design. Plans for the Gymnasium, Y.M.C.A., St. Helens were inscribed "Mackmurdo, Horne and Rathbone, Architects, The Temple, Liverpool and London. Aug. 1889". The partnership, listed as Architects, House Decorators, and Surveyors, was dissolved in October 1890. Edmund Rathbone, architect, was brother of Harold and was the Liverpool representative of the Century Guild for some years.

Catalogue of A.H. Mackmurdo and the Century Guild, (National Archives A157).

⁴⁹⁸ Cited, unauthored, in Naylor, G., *The Arts and Crafts Movement: A study of its sources, ideals and influences on design theory* (London: Trefoil Publications Ltd, 1990) p.117

William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement

The Arts and Crafts Movement in Britain developed in the mid-nineteenth century as a direct response to the convictions of William Morris, described by Colin Trodd as ‘poet, artist, designer, cultural analyst, founder of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, presiding genius of Morris & Co. and originator of the Kelmscott Press’.⁴⁹⁹ We know that the Della Robbia Pottery was aligned to the aims of Ruskin and Morris and the correspondence between Rathbone and Brown confirms Rathbone’s interest in Morris’s political beliefs. He described in 1884 how he had been to hear Morris give an address;⁵⁰⁰ archival records show that this was one of Morris’s most influential addresses ‘Art and Labour’ at the New Islington Hall, Ancoats, Manchester, on September 21st, 1884. In this lecture, Morris contrasted the ‘good work’ produced by the medieval workman and alienating conditions of production that typified the division of labour in nineteenth century industrialised society:

Now I must remind you that I have said that the work of all handicrafts in the Middle Ages produced beauty as a necessary part of the goods, so that some approximation to the ideal above stated was realized then; I have also said that the workman produced this beauty because he was in his work master of his material, tools, and time, in fact of his work: therefore you will not be astonished to hear me say that in order to produce art once

⁴⁹⁹ Trodd, C., ‘The Arts and Crafts Movement and the Crafting of Culture’ in Sheldon, J. (ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) pp.73-87, p.74

Morris’s reputation was not restricted to Britain; in 1900, the artist Pissarro wrote to his son Lucien ‘Decidedly we no longer understand each other. What you tell me about the modern movement, commercialism etc. has no relation to our concept of art, here at least. You know perfectly well that just as William Morris had some influence on commercial art in England, so here the real artists who seek have had and will have some effect on it.’ Pissarro, C., ‘Anarchy, Symbolism and Primitivism, from Letters to Lucien’ in Harrison, C., Wood, P. & Gaiger, J., *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009) p.1033

⁵⁰⁰ Rathbone, H.S., (1884) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/22

again the workman must once more be master of his material, tools, and time.⁵⁰¹

Jeffrey Petts argues that Morris's theory of art is marked by an inclusiveness regarding materials, methods and styles and that everything made under the right de-alienated conditions of production is beautiful and artful. Petts continues 'it is the case, then, that for Morris this mode of production is telling what is and what is not art, rather than art status being marked by specified activities (portrait painting but not furniture making, and so on)'.⁵⁰² Morris offered the craftsman and woman inclusivity and pride and pleasure in the work; as Petts concludes 'the process or mode of production is everything because the process determines aesthetic value'.⁵⁰³ Morris's convictions were fully articulated in the workshops of the Della Robbia Pottery as a growing mastery of materials and tools amongst the young workforce and a freedom to allow new design opportunities emerged. It is likely that Rathbone and Morris were friends; in 1886 Rathbone wrote to Brown from Kelmscott, the Cotswold retreat of William and Jane Morris, where he had stayed for a week.⁵⁰⁴ Frustratingly, in this letter Rathbone mentions neither his companions nor his activities whilst there, but does say that he enjoyed his stay immensely, how he had thought of the stories that Brown had told him

⁵⁰¹ Morris, William, lecture 'Art and Labour', Delivered 21 September 1884, at a meetings sponsored by the Ancoats Recreation Committee at the New Islington Hall, Ancoats, Manchester (www.marxist.org, accessed 09.01.17)

⁵⁰² Petts, J., 'Good Work and Aesthetic Education: William Morris, the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Beyond' *Journal of Aesthetic Education*. Vol.42. No.1 (Spring 2008) pp.30-45, p.34

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p.35

⁵⁰⁴ It is probable that Rathbone had been part of Morris's circle before then. In 1880 Morris wrote to Georgiana Burne-Jones regarding a rowing trip but commented that 'Rathbone can't come, being too hard at work after all'; Norman Kelvin comments that this possibly referred to Harold Rathbone. Kelvin, N., *The Collected Letters of William Morris Vol.1 1848-1880* (Princeton University Press, 1984) letter 640, p.578

of 'the long-ago times' there and how old-fashioned and romantic the place was, with such a delightful garden and grey-mullioned windows.⁵⁰⁵

Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co, widely known as 'The Firm', had been established in 1862 by Morris, Peter Paul Marshall, Edward Burne-Jones, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Ford Madox Brown, Charles Faulkner and the architect Philip Webb. The company designed wallpaper, fabrics, stained glass, tapestries, furniture and embroideries noted for the medieval and gothic influences first advanced by Ruskin. Morris's own career as a decorator rather than painter or architect had evolved from his participation in the decorating of the Oxford Union in 1857 and the building of the Red House in Bexley Heath with the architect Philip Webb, completed in 1861. Morris and his friends decorated the Red House in a medieval style that was at odds with the over-elaborate furnishings popular at the time, creating furniture, embroideries, stained glass, mural decorations and tapestries.⁵⁰⁶ Anne Janowitz, exploring the influence of the poet Keats on William Morris, identifies that 'the Victorian appropriation of medieval romance, via Keats, (became) a template for mid-century romanticism expressed as the mid-century revolt against the industrial age'.⁵⁰⁷ As Harvey, Press and Maclean argue, the 'all-too-evident by-products of industrialisation were filth and squalor which were quite at odds with Romanticism's love of nature, its sublime individualism and its quest for beauty. One consequence of this disharmony was the rehabilitation of medieval art'.⁵⁰⁸ Morris and his friends turned their hobby into a

⁵⁰⁵ Rathbone, H.S., (1886) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/36

⁵⁰⁶ Lambourne defines the foundation of 'the firm' as a key moment in the foundation of the aesthetic movement. His credo 'have nothing in your house which you do not think to be beautiful or know to be useful' underpinned the movement.

Lambourne. L., *The Aesthetic Movement* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996) p.19

⁵⁰⁷ Janowitz, A., 'The Pilgrims of Hope William Morris and the Dialectic of Romanticism', in Ledger, S. and McCracken, S. (eds.), *Cultural Politics at the Fin de Siècle* (Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.162

⁵⁰⁸ Harvey, C., Press, J. & Maclean, M., 'William Morris, Cultural Leadership, and the Dynamics of Taste' *The Business History Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (summer 2011), pp. 245-271, p.254

commercial enterprise; the Red House venture eventually led Morris to revolutionise public attitudes to decorative arts and interior decoration.^{509 510}

The products of The Firm were invariably infused with the distinctive qualities of romanticism, medievalism, mythology and the natural world and the decorative arts had recently found their greatest champion in John Ruskin; in *The Two Paths*, he advised his reader to

get rid of any idea of decorative art being a degraded or separate kind of art. Its nature and essence is simply its being fitted for a definite place; and in that place, forming a great and harmonious whole, in companionship with other art⁵¹¹

By 1875 it had become apparent that an imbalance of workload and profit share had developed and Morris dissolved the company and re-launched in the same year as Morris & Co., with himself as the sole proprietor.⁵¹² This was not straightforward and the resulting rift between Morris and Ford Madox Brown was not repaired until 1885. However, the decade following the establishment of Morris & Co. was the most creative of Morris's life and although he continued to take his inspiration from natural forms, simplicity and craftsmanship, he also responded to new consumer demands.

⁵⁰⁹ Parry, M., *Morris & Co.: A Revolution in Decoration* (Denham: Morris & Co, 2011) p.5

⁵¹⁰ Ford Madox Ford (known then as Ford Madox Hueffer) had a privileged position as a child at the centre of late nineteenth century artistic circles, both through his grandfather Ford Madox Brown and as a nephew of the Rossetti family. In his memoir, *Ancient Lights*, he discussed the artists and their position within the aesthetic movement, recalling the 'inner ring', the term he uses to define the founding members, as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones and Peter Paul Marshall of the Firm. Hueffer wrote 'there was absolutely nothing of the languishing. They were, to a man, rather burly, passionate creatures, extraordinarily enthusiastic, extraordinarily romantic, and most impressively quarrelsome'. Hueffer comments that Morris and his friends were concerned with decorative arts rather than literature or music and argues that it was the later artists and writers who passionately embraced the fashion for Japonaise and Chinoiserie; Morris and Burne-Jones remained medievalists and romantics. Hueffer, F. M., *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections being the Memories of a Young Man* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1911)

⁵¹¹ Ruskin, J., *The Two Paths* (1859) in Cook, E. T. & Wedderburn, A., *Complete Works of John Ruskin*. Vol.16 p.320.

⁵¹² Parry, M., *Morris & Co.: A Revolution in Decoration* (Denham: Morris & Co., 2011) p.21

In 1875 Morris opened a shop and showroom at 449 Oxford Street in London, where he sold to a fashionably wealthy elite. Morris's commercial success came at a price; E.P. Thompson described how 'when supervising work in the house of the Northern iron-master, Sir Lowthian Bell – he turned suddenly upon his patron 'like a wild animal' and declared: 'I spend my life ministering to the swinish luxury of the rich.' Thompson argued that Morris's rebellion was a 'moral rebellion, nourished by Carlyle and Ruskin – his enemies were 'bourgeoisdom and philistinism'. So costly were the products of the Firm in the decorative arts that it was forced to depend upon the custom of the wealthy.⁵¹³

Morris & Co. sold interior design products for the whole home; not only his own wallpapers, fabrics and furniture but other Arts and Crafts products including metalwork by W.A.S. Benson and ceramics by De Morgan. The 1896 catalogue of Della Robbia Pottery proudly announced Morris & Co. as a main agent for the company.⁵¹⁴ Morris & Co provided a complete interior decorating service for wealthy clients, for example the Beale family of Standen. The Arts and Crafts styled house at Standen, Surrey, is considered an icon of the Arts and Crafts Movement; built by Phillip Webb for the London solicitor James Beale between 1892 and 1894, Standen was decorated with carefully selected furniture, textiles and wallpaper by Morris & Co., lighting by W.A.S. Benson and ceramics by De Morgan, Burmantofts and the Della Robbia Pottery.⁵¹⁵ By the time William Morris died in 1896, he had established a Morrisean community of taste that had expanded into a wide range of

⁵¹³ A lecture to the Williams Morris Society, 1959. <https://www.marxists.org/archive/thompson-ep/1959/william-morris.htm> (accessed 30.03 17)

First published as Thompson, E.P., *Persons and Polemics, Historical Essays* (London: Merlin Press, 1994) pp.66-76.

⁵¹⁴ *Catalogue of the Della Robbia Pottery*, 1896, Birkenhead

⁵¹⁵ Coleman, B., *Historic Arts & Crafts Homes of Great Britain* (Utah: Gibbs Smith, 2005) p.119

products that appealed across the social strata and left an enduring impact on taste formation in the decorative arts that resonates from 1861 to the present day.⁵¹⁶

Agnes Garrett (1845-1935)

Agnes Garrett and her cousin Rhoda Garrett (1841-1882) have been described by Harvey and Press as a 'new breed of professionals'.⁵¹⁷ The cousins were the first women in England to become articled as apprentices in an architect's office and Emma Ferry identifies them as the first professional women to challenge the dominance of men in the business of interior display.⁵¹⁸ In 1874 the Garretts established their own interior design company, 'R. & A. Garrett House Decorators' which in 1887 was listed in *The Hobby Horse* by Mackmurdo's Century Guild as a member of The Century Guild's collective of designers.⁵¹⁹ The cousins overcame the prejudice directed at them as designers, writers and activists in important ways. They designed and sold their own furniture and carpets, including a very popular daybed⁵²⁰ and their advice manual 'Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture' (1876), part of the popular 'Art at Home' series, was successfully published in America; as Lisa Daniels points out, their early training in an architectural studio enabled the Garretts to incorporate a high level of technical skill into their writing. Both Agnes and Rhoda Garrett were enthusiastic suffragists and both served on the executive

⁵¹⁶ Harvey, C., Press, J. & Maclean, M., 'William Morris, Cultural Leadership, and the Dynamics of Taste' *The Business History Review*, Vol. 85, No. 2 (summer 2011), pp. 245-271. p.269

⁵¹⁷ Harvey, C. & Press, J., *William Morris – Design and Enterprise in Victorian Britain*, (Manchester: University Press, 1991) p.170

⁵¹⁸ Ferry, E., 'Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's 'Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture (1876)' *Journal of Design History* Vol. 16, No. 1, Domestic Design Advice (2003), pp. 15-33

⁵¹⁹ The Century Guild of Artists was founded in 1882 by Arthur Heygate Mackmurdo, along with his former pupil Herbert Horne, Selwyn Image and a 'loose partnership' of approximately 20 other craftsmen and women. The quarterly magazine *The Century Guild Hobby Horse*, later renamed *The Hobby Horse* (1884-1892) gave an authoritative voice to their aim to emphasise 'the essential unity of the arts'

Blakesley, R., *The Arts and Crafts Movement* (London: Phaidon, 2009) p.55

⁵²⁰ Standen in West Sussex, currently owned by the National Trust, holds fourteen of their surviving pieces.

committee of the Central Committee for the National Society for Women's Suffrage. Along with her sisters Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, Agnes remained a lifelong supporter of movements for women's rights. Ferry argues that R. & A. Garrett reclaimed the domestic sphere from the professional male designers⁵²¹ and Lisa Daniels that 'what truly differentiated Rhoda and Agnes from their contemporaries was the value they placed on professional training for themselves and for other women... and ambition, despite societal prejudices, to run their own business'.⁵²² Rhoda Garrett died in 1882 but Agnes successfully carried on for many years as sole director of the company. The firm exhibited at the first Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society show in 1888⁵²³ and in *Designers may be Compared to Doctors*, Emma Ferry argues that R. & A. Garrett had little difficulty in establishing a wealthy and bohemian clientele, challenging accepted ideas about the role of women both in the home and in society.

Rathbone was a close friend; he first mentioned Agnes Garrett in a letter to Ford Madox Brown in September 1883, written from The Firs in Rustington, Sussex, the country retreat of Agnes Garrett.⁵²⁴ A watercolour of the garden at The Firs by Harold Rathbone was presented to the William Morris Gallery in 1938 by Philippa Fawcett, niece of Agnes (Figure 9).

⁵²¹ Ferry, E., 'Decorators May Be Compared to Doctors': An Analysis of Rhoda and Agnes Garrett's "Suggestions for House Decoration in Painting, Woodwork and Furniture (1876)" *Journal of Design History* Vol. 16, No. 1, Domestic Design Advice (2003), pp. 15-33

⁵²² Daniels, L., 'Houses as they might be' *The Decorative Arts Society Journal* (2011) Issue 35. pp. 82-101, p.99

⁵²³ Daniels, L., 'Houses as They Might Be' *The Decorative Arts Society Journal* (2011) Issue 35. pp.82-101, p.95

⁵²⁴ Rathbone, H.S., (1883) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/12

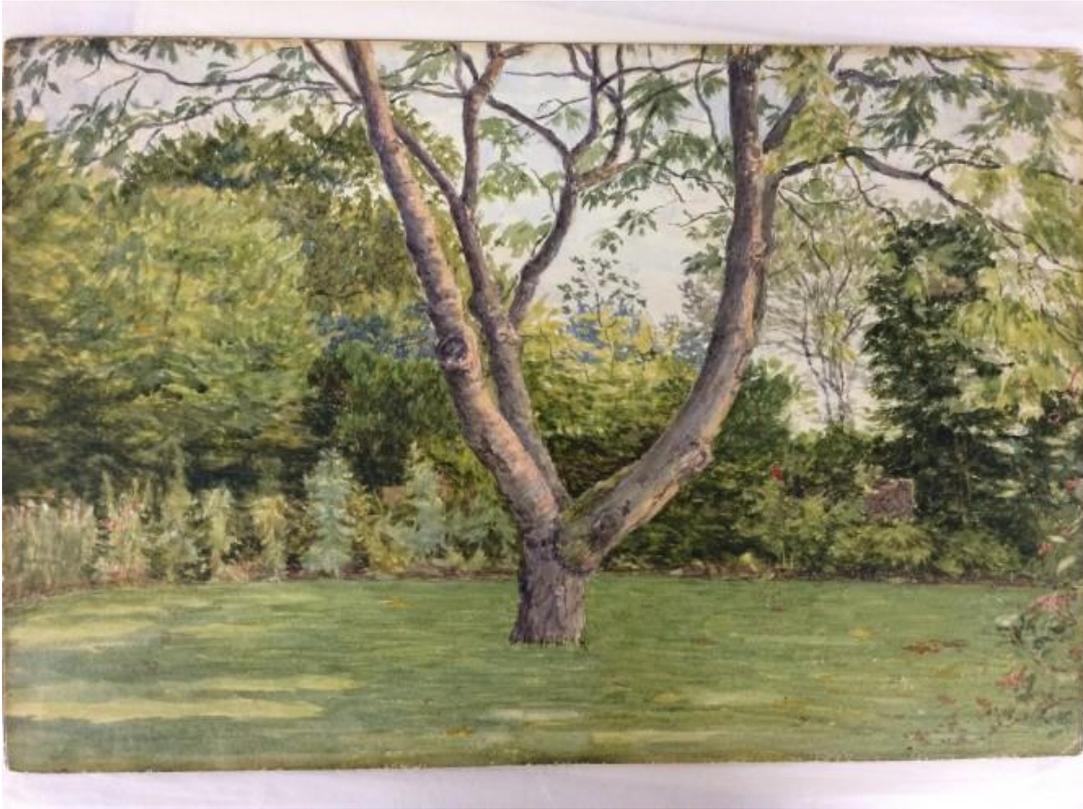


Figure 9: Harold Rathbone, *The Garden at Rustington*, Undated Watercolour, William Morris Gallery, Walthamstow.

An early portrait by Harold Rathbone is of the reformist Henry Fawcett (1833-1884),⁵²⁵ brother-in-law of Agnes Garrett; in January 1883 Rathbone wrote to Brown referring to the generous hospitality of the Fawcett's during his stay to complete the portrait.⁵²⁶ The composer Hubert Parry and his wife were also part of this circle and 'R. & A. Garrett' decorated both their Kensington home and holiday cottage, also in Rushington. Rathbone wrote to Brown in an undated letter that he had 'sketched his (Parry's) daughter'⁵²⁷ and

⁵²⁵ Harold Rathbone, *Henry Fawcett, Post Master General 1880-84, 1884*, oil on canvas, British Postal Museum and Archive, London.

Henry Fawcett was an economist and Liberal politician, married to Dame Millicent Fawcett, and Post-Master-General from 1880-84.

⁵²⁶ Rathbone, H.S., (1883) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*,. National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/5

⁵²⁷ Rathbone, H.S., (undated) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*,. National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/99

from 1883 wrote on at least three occasions to arrange meetings between Agnes Garrett and Brown from his position as a long-standing friend of Agnes Garrett.



Figure 10: Photograph of Agnes Garrett by Mary Olive Edis (Mrs Galsworthy) with portrait of Philippa Fawcett⁵²⁸ by Harold Rathbone in the background. 150 x 89mm, National Portrait Gallery. Identified by Elizabeth Crawford.

The portraits of family members and details from the correspondence with Brown indicate that Harold Rathbone was a close friend of Agnes Garrett for many years; it is very likely that she contributed to the stimulation of Rathbone's appetite for decorative art that reached fruition in the early 1890s. We know that Agnes Garrett had an interest in early Italian art; in 1891, she was hired to decorate the New Hospital for Women and incorporated 'Italian

⁵²⁸ Philippa Fawcett (1868-1948) was the daughter of Henry Fawcett and the suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett and the niece of Agnes Garrett and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. Philippa Fawcett was one of the first students at Newnham College, Cambridge. The founder members of the Newnham college included her mother Millicent and Mathilde Blind. At Newnham, Philippa Fawcett was acknowledged as an outstanding mathematician who went on to dedicate her life to improving secondary education. The Fawcett building at Newnham is dedicated to her memory.

casts of the heads of women and children on the ceiling with blue tiles on the walls'.⁵²⁹ The ceiling of her own home was decorated with portraits including Raphael, Titian, Michelangelo and Rubens⁵³⁰ and Crawford observes that those in the hospital were similar to those in her own home.⁵³¹

Hyland has noted that visiting artists and friends of Rathbone often produced work at the Della Robbia Pottery;⁵³² the otherwise unidentified artist 'Agnes' may be Agnes Garrett. Following her own success, it is probable that she encouraged Rathbone to make his own contribution to the 'good work' urged by Morris in his lecture of 1884 and promoted the Della Robbia Pottery within her decorative schemes. It is also possible that her passion for equality and women's suffrage influenced Rathbone in a manner similar to that of Mathilde Blind, discussed in chapter one.

So far, the chapter has identified how Rathbone successfully achieved sales of pottery through the department stores of London and the provincial cities, and through his friendship with professional interior designers. Also crucial to the commercial success of the Pottery were the female taste-forming press: columnists in weekly journals such as *Hearth and Home* who regularly advised readers to buy Della Robbia Pottery as luxury wares that were an example of individual craft rather than mass-production. This shaping of aesthetically informed appetites was paramount to the success of the company. Cohen notes that by the 1890s the home had shifted from a site for installing the virtues of self-restraint and humility to a stage for self-fulfillment.⁵³³ The running of a lower-middle class

⁵²⁹ Crawford, E., 'Spirited Women of Gower Street: The Garretts and their Circle' (www.ucl.ac.uk/bloomsbury-project/articles/events/conference2011/crawford.pdf. 09.01.17)

⁵³⁰ Daniels, L., 'Houses as they might be' p.87

⁵³¹ Crawford, E., 'Spirited Women of Gower Street: The Garretts and their Circle'

⁵³² Hyland, P. *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.141

⁵³³ Cohen, D., *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2006) p.90

household was both demanding and filled with drudgery and a continual striving to make ends meet; even the running of a wealthier household was difficult and time consuming and these keepers of house were expected to account for all household expenditure, including personal clothes.⁵³⁴ Despite the ushering in of the age of the 'New Woman'⁵³⁵ that we associate with *fin de siècle*, the pressure to conform to social standards of dress and now of ornamentation of the home often proved an intimidating prospect to the inexperienced new wife and many turned for guidance to the periodicals and newspapers of the day. The housewife of the 1890s would find the columns of new broadsheet weeklies filled with advice that included fashion, décor, poetry and competitions and the creation of the 'House Beautiful';⁵³⁶ a picture of a feminine world of interior decor emerges. This world was underpinned by 'domestic art writers', female journalists who acted as self-appointed mediators between those who defined the demarcations of good and bad taste and the new middle-class consumer. The department store itself soon came to be regarded as a place where women gathered to pursue what came to be self-gratifying acts of consumerism⁵³⁷ and this new demarcation of the store as a feminine space was quickly apparent in both fiction and in life.⁵³⁸ Leora Auslander comments that in France 'married women, in their person and acquisitions, came to hold a critically important role in the social representation of themselves, their husbands and their families',⁵³⁹ echoing Deborah Cohen's argument that by the late 1880s, women in Britain also became the pre-eminent decision maker in terms of taste and interior décor. Home décor had become the province of the women who

⁵³⁴ Benson, J., *The Rise of Consumer Society in Britain, 1880 – 1980* (Longman: London, 1994)

⁵³⁵ 'The new women' is a term that was widely used to describe the unprecedented rise in the number of educated, independent career women with feminist views in the late nineteenth century.

⁵³⁶ Beetham, M, & Boardman, K., *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester University Press, 2012) p.44

⁵³⁷ Cohen, D., *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* (Yale University Press, 2006) p.90

⁵³⁸ In *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883), the French writer Emile Zola (1840-1902) explored the position of women within a

⁵³⁹ Auslander, L., *Taste and Power: Furnishing Modern France* (London: University of California Press, 1996) p.411

surged through the doors of the dazzling new cathedrals of décor, often middle-class women who may have travelled from a provincial city to spend a whole day in a favourite store.

In articles written by women to be read by women, advice is liberally dispensed on all aspects of household management including budgeting, household tasks and the all-important business of display. The *Hearth and Home*, *Myrna's Journal* and the *English Women's Journal* all had regular decorating columns and in this newly feminised world of the home as a site of consumption these domestic art writers held considerable influence over the buying habits of the nation's foremost consumers. Pre-eminent amongst these was the redoubtable Mrs. Charlotte Talbot-Coke, who both owned and contributed to several periodicals, including the weekly *Hearth and Home*. Mrs. Talbot-Coke dismissed the prescriptive dictates of the male designers such as Lewis F. Day ('unco guid') and William Morris ('too severe') and as Day retreated in defeat, she consistently promoted a freedom of creative expression to her readers; paradoxically, the journalist Mrs. Peel⁵⁴⁰ wrote 'wherever Englishwomen were in the world there were decorative schemes chosen for them by Mrs. Talbot-Coke'. Her influence, claims Deborah Cohen, 'measured in terms of contemporary sales, probably far exceeds that of William Morris'.⁵⁴¹ The *Hearth and Home: An Illustrated Weekly Journal for Gentlewomen* was published in London from 1891 until 1914; its contributors also included Louisa May Alcott and Betty Modish. Aiming to help its readers to achieve the 'character and charm which characterised a well-ordered house'⁵⁴², the writers consistently recommended the Della Robbia Pottery to readers and none more so than the editor of the advice column, Mrs. Talbot-Coke.

⁵⁴⁰ Cohen, D., *Household Gods: The British and their Possessions* p.112

⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p.113

⁵⁴² [Anon] 'About Ourselves', *Hearth and Home* (21 May 1891) p.1

The Pottery was first recommended by the *Hearth & Home* in 1896 although Harold Rathbone had attracted favourable comments in the journal in 1893 concerning his exhibition of paintings at the Hogarth Club in Dover Street, London when he was described as a 'thoughtful and gifted artist'.⁵⁴³ In 1896 Mrs. Talbot-Coke described her visit to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society annual exhibition and suggested to her readers that they also visit Liberty & Co., opposite the New Gallery, to find a larger selection of Della Robbia Pottery, including the 'loveliest plaques, lotus jars and an exceptionally lovely jug'.⁵⁴⁴ In her article 'On Success' in 1896, Mrs. Talbot-Coke recommended that her reader based her decorative scheme around an Aubusson carpet and 'hang her windows with electric blue Veronetta velvet, just the shades of the knots in the carpet and, even as in the other room, nothing but Liberty's Della Robbia ware and weird Clutha glass would do'.⁵⁴⁵ From 1895 until 1900, Mrs. Talbot-Coke consistently recommended Della Robbia ware to her readers; to her reader 'Bolero' she advised that there was more choice of Della Robbia ware at Liberty's and to 'Mentor' that despite wanting copper flagons, the writer should ask for Liberty's *Book of the Bazaar* to see the 'Della Robbia ware that would suit your delightful old hall'.⁵⁴⁶ The female domestic art writers of the 1890s were known to have a significant impact on sales; their recommendations were taken by many readers and undoubtedly this commanding woman had a significant impact on sales at the Della Robbia Pottery. Other examples of her advice include to 'Silver J' to choose 'some lovely Della Robbia plaques and jars'⁵⁴⁷ and that

⁵⁴³ Talbot-Coke, C., 'People Places and Things', *Hearth & Home*, (22 June 1893) p.176

⁵⁴⁴ Talbot-Coke, C., 'Home Advice', *Hearth & Home* (31 Dec 1896) p.332

⁵⁴⁵ Talbot-Coke, C., 'On Success' *Hearth & Home* (Nov 1896) p.116

⁵⁴⁶ Talbot-Coke, C., 'Home Advice' *Hearth & Home* (28 Jan 1897) p.110

⁵⁴⁷ Talbot-Coke, C., 'Home Advice' *Hearth & Home* (4 Mar 1897) p.670

'La Signora' should go to Liberty & Co. and ('carefully avoiding anything Oriental') buy some pieces of Della Robbia ware.⁵⁴⁸

In her article of March 1896 'Home Sweet Home', Mrs. Talbot-Coke explores the 'new look' that Liberty's has designed for the library or study, and suggests that for lovers of quaint pottery, Della Robbia, Devon or Barum ware should be purchased.⁵⁴⁹ The study and library had previously been the acknowledged bastion of the machismo and this advice indicates how clearly the entire home was becoming the preserve of female taste. However, Mrs. Talbot-Coke was not the only domestic art writer to recommend the Pottery. In *The Englishwoman's Review*, 'A.M.M.K.' drew the attention of her readers to the exhibition of Della Robbia Pottery at the 1895 Home Arts and Industries Exhibition⁵⁵⁰ and Betty Minder reported in 1897 in her *Fashion and Fancies* column 'a revival of the Della Robbia Pottery is 'another of the great enterprises favoured by Mr. Waring. Some beautiful and modern specimens from the works of the famous company at Birkenhead are on view in his large and palatial premises'.⁵⁵¹

The only contemporary photograph that gives an example of how Della Robbia Pottery was displayed was taken in Elm Park Gardens, Chelsea in 1900. Although the room looks neglected, the image shows a hallway of a house with three, possibly four, Della Robbia plates on the wall (Figure 11).

⁵⁴⁸ Talbot-Coke, C., 'Home Advice' *Hearth & Home* (24 Feb 1898) p.642

⁵⁴⁹ Talbot-Coke, C., 'Home Sweet Home' *Hearth & Home*, (3 Mar 1898) p.669

⁵⁵⁰ A. M. M. K., 'Home Arts and Industries', *The English Woman's Review*. (Jul 15 1895) p.202

⁵⁵¹ Modish, B., 'Fashions and Fancies' *Hearth & Home* (June 1897) p.215



Figure 11: Photographer unknown, 1900, mounted photograph of the hall of 42 Elm Park gardens Chelsea, identified in annotation on the reverse. 82mm x 105mm, RPXXV.7.708, Special Collections and Archive, University of Liverpool Library.

As the nature of consumerism changed and the home became increasingly important as a signifier of good taste, the initial success of the Della Robbia Pottery was established by the benefits that resulted from prominent display in the new department stores and through the worldwide commercial reach presented by a sophisticated consumer culture that had developed across the British Empire. The recognition gained through Rathbone's relationship with new interior designers such as Morris and Garrett, and with the 'domestic art' writers contributed to the success in an exceptional way. However, in the late nineteenth century the most important showcase for the display of Arts and Crafts was the prestigious exhibitions and fairs; it was essential that the Della Robbia Pottery was represented in the all-important business of exhibition display.

Exhibition culture: Showcasing the Della Robbia Pottery

The sale of Della Robbia pottery in prominent department stores was essential to the success of the company but Harold Rathbone also worked hard to ensure that the pottery was widely displayed in the regular programme of exhibitions that were staged throughout the country. Although pre-dating the formation of the Della Robbia Pottery by some years, the Italian Exhibition of 1888⁵⁵² is an example of the popularity of large-scale expositions. A strong exhibition culture had long been embedded into late Victorian commercial practices, due in large part to the legacy of the Great Exhibition in London in 1851; this success was closely followed by the Great London Exposition of 1862⁵⁵³ which was financed by the profits of the former. However, Stephanie Pratt points out that a general reluctance by the specialist art journals such as *The Art Journal* and *The Athenaeum* to review the events such as the Italian exhibition was due in some large part to the siting of the spectacle away from the prestigious venues of the West End of London.⁵⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the art magazines and periodicals were keen to review exhibitions at the most distinguished of those venues, including the Grosvenor Gallery in Bond Street which became synonymous with both the Aesthetic and Arts and Crafts Movements. The chapter will discuss ways in which the exhibitions at the Grosvenor Gallery and its successor, the New Gallery, enabled contemporary art movements of the late nineteenth century to flourish and how this exhibition culture was crucial to the success of the Della Robbia Pottery.

⁵⁵² The Italian exhibition of 1888 is discussed in chapter two, pp.79-81

⁵⁵³ At the 1862 exhibition, amongst the 28,000 exhibitors from over thirty-eight countries was the newly established firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co and a large display of Japanese artifacts that first drew the attention of Arthur Lasenby Liberty.

⁵⁵⁴ Pratt, K., 'National identity on display: The 1888 Italian Exhibition in London and its Critical Reception' *The Italianist* Vol. 20 No.1 (June 2000) pp.292-312, p.303

The Grosvenor Gallery

The Grosvenor Gallery was opened in 1877 to offer an alternative to the intransigence of the Royal Academy. The Gallery was central to the success of the Arts and Crafts Movement, particularly through its championing of individually-made craft pieces of furniture, ceramics, tapestries and silver, gold and glass and was also a prominent champion of the Aesthetic movement. Edward Burne-Jones, John Millais, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Frederick Leighton, George F. Watts, Louise Jopling and William Holman Hunt, all leading artists of the day, added their support to the Gallery. Harold Rathbone had found some success in exhibiting his paintings there and was closely connected to the Grosvenor Gallery 'set', not through aristocratic antecedents but through his friendship with those who made the Gallery their own 'Palace of Aesthetes'. His friends Agnes Garrett, William Rossetti, Dante Gabriel Rossetti (until his death in 1882), Mary Seton Watts and the poet Algernon Swinburne were all part of this social circle.⁵⁵⁵

Opened by Sir Coutts Lindsey and Lady Blanche Lindsey, the building was designed to emulate an English country house, with a sweeping staircase to the upper floors, a billiard and smoking room and large light-filled galleries that permitted a more spacious hanging of art works and which, in 1882, became one of the first to install electric lighting. The Lindsays initiated new practices in display aesthetics that can be recognised today in many modern

⁵⁵⁵ Rathbone himself had exhibited there; in 1885, *The Spectator* commented that that one of his pictures there was 'a fair portrait of the late Postmaster-General, by Mr. Harold Rathbone, shows that that young artist is gaining power as well as knowledge of drawing'. In 1886, his painting *Jeanne of Arc* was exhibited, although to mixed reviews. Rathbone also wrote to Brown in November 1883 concerning one of his paintings at the Grosvenor Gallery and commenting that he was 'pleased with his picture as it was hung on the line'. Rathbone is referring to the height that his painting was displayed at; 'on the line' indicates that the work was displayed at eye level, so was therefore in the most prominent and memorable position.

Rathbone, H.S., (1883) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*, National Art Library Special Collections Ref. MSL/1995/14/86/18.

museums, for example the hanging of the work of a single artist in a chronological layout and the meticulous arrangements of décor, lighting and proportion that contrasted starkly with contemporary practice at the Royal Academy of overcrowding. The Gallery frequently displayed applied or industrial art including pottery, embroideries and metalwork that was repeatedly voted as unacceptable to the Royal Academy, for example, in the winter of 1882, the Gallery staged a large exhibition of decorative arts. The reputation of the Grosvenor Gallery was deeply entwined with that of the Aesthetic movement. This was due in great part to the artists it endorsed who were invariably considered the *avant-garde* of Victorian painting.⁵⁵⁶ Women were encouraged to exhibit, including Maria Spartali and Evelyn Pickering De Morgan, whilst Edward Burne-Jones, J.A. Whistler and G.F. Watts all enjoyed a meteoric rise in popularity after the successful opening of the 1877 opening.⁵⁵⁷ Sir Coutts Lindsay remarked to *The Times* newspaper at the time that his artists were ‘too aesthetic’ for the Royal Academy and of a ‘sensitive fibre that needed treating with indulgence and consideration’.⁵⁵⁸ Subsequently, satirists like George de Maurier in *Punch* magazine delighted in mocking both the world of the Aesthete and of the Grosvenor Gallery in particular.⁵⁵⁹

In 1882 Lady Lindsay left her husband and withdrew both her support and financial capital from the Gallery. Charles Hallé commented later that her departure was the ‘beginning of

⁵⁵⁶ The Grosvenor Gallery was notorious from its opening exhibition, when Whistler’s *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The falling Rocket* was famously derided by John Ruskin as ‘flinging a pot of paint in the public’s face’. Whistler sued Ruskin for libel and the resulting court case provoked a legal debate about the meaning and value of art, questioning whether Whistler’s paintings subverted the moral purpose of art that Ruskin held should be present. Whistler won the case but was awarded one farthing in damages, leading to his bankruptcy. Frankel, N., ‘On the Whistler-Ruskin Trial, 1878’, *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Web. [accessed 30.03.2017]

⁵⁵⁷ Codell, J., ‘On the Grosvenor Gallery, 1877’ *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century History*. Ed. Dino Franco Felluga. Extension of *Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. (accessed 08.07.2016)

⁵⁵⁸ Denney, C., in Casteras, S. (ed.), *The Grosvenor Gallery* p.15

⁵⁵⁹ Arthur Sullivan’s famous description of an aesthete in the operetta *Patience* describes ‘A pallid and thin young man, a haggard and lank young man, a greenery-yallery, Grosvenor Gallery, Foot-in-the-grave young man!’ Gilbert, W.S. & Sullivan, A., *Patience*. First performed 23.04.1881 Opera Comique, London

the end' and that the Gallery become more commercially minded following the appointment of a new business manager.⁵⁶⁰ An article in the *Leeds Mercury* commented that 'it is a pity that private favour and personal consideration should be allowed to play so large a part in the selection of works exhibited at the Grosvenor Gallery'.⁵⁶¹ In 1888 the co-directors Charles Edward Hallé and Joseph Comyns Carr resigned to open the rival New Gallery, situated in nearby Regent Street and the most important artists transferred their allegiance to the New Gallery. By providing a prestigious venue and central exhibition space for the venture (Figure 12), the New Gallery enabled the realisation of the monumental vision of the all-encompassing body known as the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

⁵⁶⁰ Denney, C., in Casteras, S., Denney, C., (eds.), *The Grosvenor Gallery: A Palace of Art in Victorian England*, p.35

⁵⁶¹ [Anon] 'The Grosvenor Gallery, 2nd Notice', *Leeds Mercury* (27 May 1886) p.8



Figure 12: Emery Walker, Fifth Exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society at the New Gallery, Regent Street, 1896, National Portrait Gallery, London.

[The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society](#)

The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society (the Society) arose out of the long-standing intransigence of the Royal Academy which consistently refused to consider the so-called decorative arts for inclusion in its Annual Exhibition. Although a Royal Commission of 1863 had advised the Academy ‘to do more for the workmen of excellence in metal, stone and

other materials', the advice was disregarded⁵⁶² and by the late 1880s it had become clear to English designers and craftsmen and women that few opportunities to participate would be offered to them by the Royal Academy. The Society became a practical expression of concerns about the Royal Academy that had been raised in debates of the Art Workers Guild (1884). The Guild was intended only as a focus for discussions concerning the revival of craftsmanship and had no public face. Alan Crawford describes it as 'a club for like-minded architects, artists and designers, an elite that gave a sense of belonging to the movement'.⁵⁶³

The Society occupied a central position within the decorative arts world of the late nineteenth century and claimed the support and participation of the most important designers and craftsmen of the decade. Peter Stansky describes William Morris as deeply concerned that the relationship between the worker, the object and the public should be a positive one; there should be a vital connection between all three - Arts and Crafts should not be to delight the wealthy but to 'enable the longing of simple people who will take up the chain where it fell from the hands of the crafts-guilds in the fifteenth century'.⁵⁶⁴ This belief underpinned the Society. Opinions concerning the commitment of William Morris to the Society differ, for example, in *On the Arts and Crafts Society*, Imogen Hart posits that William Morris was not a founder of the Society and was far from supportive.⁵⁶⁵ However, the catalogue of the first exhibition confirms that Morris was a committee member from the start and gave the inaugural lecture entitled 'Tapestry and Carpet Weaving' on November 1st 1888.⁵⁶⁶ Morris exhibited numerous pieces at the 1888 exhibition including

⁵⁶² Stansky, P., *Redesigning the World: William Morris, the 1880s and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Princeton University Press, 1985) p.175

⁵⁶³ Crawford, A., *CR Ashbee: Architect, Designer and Romantic Socialist* (Yale University Press, 2005) p.31

⁵⁶⁴ Morris, W., in Morris, M. (ed.), *The Collected Works [1912]* Vol 16 (Cambridge University Press, 2012) p.xij

⁵⁶⁵ Hart, I., 'On the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society' *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century* (accessed 18.03.17)

⁵⁶⁶ Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: catalogue of the first exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St. 1888 by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

tapestries and carpets, as did Jane Morris who displayed a 'portiere worked with silk on linen'.⁵⁶⁷ William Morris did publicly vocalise his initial reservations but after the success of the inaugural event grew more enthusiastic about the proceedings. He was president from 1891 until his death in 1896. An examination of the list of committee members becomes a roll-call of the most illustrious designers and craftsmen of the late nineteenth century and included W. A. S. Benson, Edward Burne-Jones, Somers Clarke, T. J. Cobden-Sanderson, Lewis F. Day, Onslow Ford, W. R. Lethaby, William De Morgan, William Morris, Emery Walker, Heywood Sumner and the first president, Walter Crane.⁵⁶⁸

The first exhibition was held at the New Gallery, Regent Street, in 1888 and was considered both a critical and financial success. An annual exhibition was held from 1888 until 1890, thereafter there was a pause of three years until the next in 1893, thereafter on a triennial basis to retain a high quality of exhibits. Thus, the first exhibition that was open to the Della Robbia Pottery was in 1896. Work intended for submission was scrutinised by a selection panel, and was required to demonstrate contemporary and original decorative design and handicraft. The early exhibitions were often accompanied by a lecture series given by craftsmen of note. The first exhibition was not a selling event but the accompanying catalogue listed both the exhibitors and the makers of individual work; it was not until 1903 that it became possible to buy the goods on display directly.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Walter Crane (1845-1915) was one of first supporters of the Della Robbia Pottery. Born in Liverpool in 1845, he was a hugely prolific artist, producing paintings, bas-relief plaques, tiles, pottery, wallpaper and textiles. He is best known, however, as one of the most influential producers of illustrated children's books in the nineteenth century. Politically a Socialist, Crane joined Morris's Socialist League in 1885; with Morris, he wanted to bring art into the lives of all classes of people.

⁵⁶⁹ Hart, I., 'On the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society' *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century* (accessed 18.03.17)

In his position as President of the Society, Walter Crane wrote in the preface to the inaugural catalogue

If Art is not recognized in the humblest object and material, and felt to be as valuable in its own way as the more highly rewarded pictorial skill—the arts cannot be in a sound condition; and if artists cease to be found among the crafts there is great danger that they will vanish from the arts also, and become manufacturers and salesmen instead. It is with the object of giving some visible expression to these views that the present Exhibition has been organised ⁵⁷⁰

By the mid-1890s the tri-annual Society events had become established as the Arts and Crafts exhibition that really mattered;⁵⁷¹ it was imperative to the success and credibility of the Della Robbia Pottery that Rathbone ensured that the company was selected to participate in The Society exhibitions. The 1896 exhibition was an important undertaking for the Della Robbia Pottery and the Pottery received an invaluable acknowledgement during the series of lectures given in conjunction with the exhibition. Walter Crane commented on the work of Dressler and Rathbone in a keynote lecture ‘Public Buildings and their Decoration’. In his discussion concerning the decoration of the *Duomo* and the hospital in Pistoia by Luca and Andrea della Robbia, Crane pointed to work by Dressler and Rathbone as an effective form of architectural decoration. This, he said, provided the colour that was much needed in British cities and reminding one of ‘sunlight striking upon the pavement illuminating the glazed relief with soft, reflected light’:

⁵⁷⁰ *Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the First Exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St. 1888* by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

⁵⁷¹ Carroll, J. and Sheldon, J., ‘Della Robbia in Regent Street’ in Sheldon, J (ed.) *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* p.91

Mr. Conrad Dressler and Mr. Harold Rathbone are each in different ways, engaged in a notable artistic effort to revive Della Robbia ware and adapt it to modern architectural decoration, and both have done remarkably interesting work in the material. I have seen a charming recessed wall fountain by the former artist which was executed at Mr. Rathbone's works at Birkenhead. The figure panels after Madox Brown by the latter show what delightful colour is possible to be obtained in glazed faience.⁵⁷²

Walter Crane drew together the imagery of a Florentine Street, the work of the *quattrocento* and the practices of the Arts and Crafts Movement in one endorsement. Colin Trodd describes Crane as a galvanic figure in the Arts and Crafts Movement who, like Morris, saw the modern art world as constituting a triumph of calculation over creativity. In 1893, Crane had argued that 'the very producer, the designer and the craftsman, too, has been lost sight of and his personality submerged in that of a business firm';⁵⁷³ he was one of the first to offer his support in a letter to Rathbone, stating 'I wish all success to the Pottery. I was much struck with your show at the Manchester 'Arts and Crafts' Exhibition which gave one a good idea of the range of colour possible and the great variety in design'.⁵⁷⁴

The selection of Della Robbia Pottery for inclusion in the 1896 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society tells us that by then the company was successfully producing work of a standard required by the selection committee.⁵⁷⁵ The Rathbone family was well-represented in this year; Richard Llewellyn Rathbone, first cousin of Harold and a frequent artistic collaborator,

⁵⁷² Crane, W., 'Public Buildings and their Decoration', Lecture to the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, November 19th 1896.

⁵⁷³ Trodd, C., in Sheldon, J in Sheldon J (ed), *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street* p.83

⁵⁷⁴ Crane, Walter, letter to Harold Rathbone. Reprinted in *Catalogue of the Della Robbia Pottery Ltd.* (1896)

⁵⁷⁵ *Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St. 1896* by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

The 1896 exhibition catalogue opened with a tribute to Ford Madox Brown who had died within the three years since the last exhibition and included a display of 'Cartoons and other Decorative work by the late Ford Madox Brown'. Many of these pieces were lent by Harold Rathbone from his private collection, including a pastel portrait, *Mrs. Madox Brown*, a pencil drawing for *The Last of England* and a selection of cartoons for stained glass.

displayed several items of copperware. Edmund Rathbone, architect and brother of Harold, was, it becomes apparent from the exhibition catalogue, working at the Pottery in some capacity from the beginning and is credited with producing pieces of sgraffito ware displayed by the Pottery.

The following extract from the Fifth Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition in 1896 lists the pieces exhibited by The Della Robbia Pottery⁵⁷⁶

- 92B TEA CADDY Designed and executed by MISS G BUCKLER.
Exhibited by the DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO. (sic)
- 275 LARGE VASE Designed (adapted) and executed by H. S. RATHBONE.
Exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.
- 292 DUTCH VASE. Designed by ARTHUR HEELE. Executed by MISS LIZZIE WILKINS.
Exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.⁵⁷⁷
- 478 LARGE VASE.
Designed by WILLIAM WILLIAMS. Executed by HAROLD RATHBONE.
Exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY.
- 479: TWELVE PANELS OF GLAZED POTTERY The figure subjects after FORD MADOX BROWN
Executed by PL S Rathbone. (sic) Exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY
- 48s *'BOY AND GRAPES'' FRIEZE.
Designed by EDMUND RATHBONE Executed by C. MANZONI
Exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY. (sic)

Unlike the Italian Exhibition of 1888, the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibitions were widely reported in specialist art journals and generally, although not wholly, reported in a positive manner. *The Athenaeum* describes the Society as 'somewhat nondescript' and

⁵⁷⁶ Extract from *The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society; Catalogue of the fifth Exhibition, 1896* (www.archive.org, last accessed 22.04.17)

⁵⁷⁷ Arthur Heele is an unknown designer. This may however be a misprint for Arthur Bells who Hyland has

reports that any success of the 1896 exhibition must owe more to the fine arts, in the retrospective exhibition of the work of Ford Madox Brown, rather than to the crafts on display.⁵⁷⁸ In his regular review of the Society's exhibitions for the *Art Journal*, the designer Lewis F. Day questions the originality and influence of the 1896 exhibition, initially considering the threat to British commerce by German manufacturing industries. He asks whether the Arts and Crafts Movement can have a viable impact against this as the Movement is in 'direct antagonism to the spirit of the shop' – that is, division of labour and industrialisation.⁵⁷⁹ Day points out that magazines such as *The Art Journal* had persistently ignored the forms of 'art and workmanship' to be found at the exhibition in the past and asks whether the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society had made a significant impact on the Royal Academy, the conservative institution that the Society aimed to challenge and reform. He concludes that by 1896 the President of the Royal Academy would find it hard to justify the exclusion of the decorative arts from the exhibition programme. Day also argues that the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society 'does what picture galleries cannot do', by allowing the artist to experiment in new areas and by allowing the public to 'sample every two or three years those forms of Art, and especially craftsmanship, which dealers and the picture galleries do not display'.⁵⁸⁰ He reminds us that although enterprises like the Della Robbia Pottery were successful within the sphere of the Arts and Crafts Movement, Rathbone and Dressler may find their work of minor importance elsewhere.

identified as joining the pottery in 1895. (Hyland.P. *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p148) *Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: catalogue of the fifth exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St.*, 1896, by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

⁵⁷⁸ [Anon] *The Athenaeum* (Oct 10th.1896) p.491

⁵⁷⁹ Day's concerns reflect the points made by Greenhalgh in his discussion concerning the impact of a fully-industrialised modern society on design and manufacture. See p.21, this chapter.

⁵⁸⁰ Day, Lewis F., 'Fifth Exhibition of Arts and Crafts' *Art Journal* (November 1896) pp.329-332

The Della Robbia Pottery was selected to exhibit several pieces at 1899 Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society, also held at the New Gallery.⁵⁸¹ Accreditation to the various designers and decorators at the Pottery is much more limited than in the 1896 catalogue, contrary to the regulations of the Society which state that every worker should be identified.⁵⁸² In its review of the 1899 event, *The Studio* praised the work of the Della Robbia Pottery, pointing out that although many of the designs were by Harold Rathbone, he was supported by the work of skilled designers 'whose work has the merit of being very distinctive in quality and character'⁵⁸³ possibly drawing attention to Rathbone's failure to credit every individual worker in the accepted manner. The next Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society event to be held at the New Gallery was in 1903; Conrad Dressler and his Medmenham Pottery had nearly ten pieces selected, including 'a panel of slabbed Medmenham Pottery tiles' and several terracotta plaques. The Della Robbia Pottery was not represented at all, nor in the 1906 exhibition held in the final year of the Pottery. We must assume that this was because of financial pressures because, as Colin Simpson agrees, much of the Pottery's finest work was done during these years.⁵⁸⁴

The following extract from the catalogue lists the works by The Della Robbia Pottery which were exhibited at the fifth Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition in 1899⁵⁸⁵

⁵⁸¹ *Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Sixth Exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St. 1899* by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society.

A headstone panel credited to Conrad Dressler was successfully submitted by the Pottery in 1899. Dressler is reputed to have left pottery under a abrupt and a crimonious circumstances in March 1896 although Hyland is less certain that this was the case, pointing out that Dressler gave notice of one month before leaving Birkenhead with his family. (Hyland, *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.173)

⁵⁸² Extract from the 'Constitution of the Society', 1888:

'Regulations: the name or names of the actual designer and skilled workman of every work intended for Exhibition shall be supplied by the exhibitor... the names of the designer and Executant or Executants shall be published in the Catalogue' Greensted, M., *An Anthology of the Arts and Crafts Movement* (Aldershot: Lund Humphries, 2005) p.14.

⁵⁸³ [Anon] 'Arts and Crafts', *The Studio* (Jan 1900) no.82, p.258

⁵⁸⁴ Interview with Colin Simpson, Director, Williamson Art Gallery, 24.07.16.

⁵⁸⁵ The Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society; *Catalogue of the sixth Exhibition, 1899*, National Art Library, London www.archive.org, (accessed 22.04.17)

- 80 FOUNTAIN. By THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY COMPANY
- 439 VASE. Designed by H. PIERCE (sic) Executed and exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.
- 440 VASE. Designed by ARTHUR BELLS. Executed and exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA TOTTERY COMPNY (sic)
- 442 CIRCULAR PANEL: 'Madonna and Child' By THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO
- 448 THREE VASES by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.
- 475 ST. FRANCIS OF ASSISI. By THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.
- 476 HEADSTONE PANEL. Designed by C. DRESSLER. Executed and exhibited by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO
- 477 PANEL OF PRAYING ANGELS by THE DELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO
- 87c MUSIC. A PANEL by THE BELLA ROBBIA POTTERY CO.(sic)

The Della Robbia Pottery enjoyed great success in its early days with The Society and was associated with the finest design studios at the greatest of Arts and Crafts Exhibitions. The New Gallery itself closed in 1910, becoming first a restaurant and then a cinema. Fittingly, the last exhibition to be held at the New Gallery was the 1910 exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society. The Della Robbia Pottery participated at the height of The Society's success; as this report from *The Studio* observes, by 1906 the glorious heady successes of the early exhibitions had passed:

It is with a certain feeling of melancholy that one views the exhibition of the Arts and Crafts Society for 1906. When one remembers the great promise of an artistic future for the crafts, as exhibited in some previous Exhibitions of this Society, and notably in those of 1893, 1896, and 1899.

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The Della Robbia Pottery and links with Ireland

The Cork International Exhibition in 1902 was the only international show in which the Della Robbia Pottery participated.⁵⁸⁷ In an interview in 1949 Charles Collis recalled Rathbone had been invited to display a working exhibit⁵⁸⁸ but until now the source of the invitation has been elusive.⁵⁸⁹ However, an examination of newspaper and journal articles from 1899 confirm that Rathbone had already established a close connection with the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland and its own temporary exhibition culture, anticipating the selection of the Pottery to participate in the 1902 Cork Exhibition. We know that Rathbone had visited Ireland before 1899; in October 1884, he wrote to Ford Madox Brown that he had been on a sketching holiday to Belfast.⁵⁹⁰

Nicola Gordon Bowe describes the establishment of the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland as a key period in Irish cultural history, which became known as the Celtic Revival.⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁶ [Anon] 'Arts and Crafts at the Grafton Gallery- First Notice' *The Studio* (1906) No.155. p 46.

⁵⁸⁷ In 1900, twenty pieces of the Pottery were selected to decorate the private apartments of The Prince of Wales during the *Paris Exposition Universelle*. Far a way from the British Pavilion, it is unlikely that the pieces would have been seen. Special supplement *The Magazine of Art* 1900 in Hyland, *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.92

⁵⁸⁸ A newspaper account of the 1902 Cork International Exhibition notes that the Della Robbia Pottery was demonstrating the various processes of pottery-making 'The potter's wheel is there at work, and the painting on the clay previous to its being baked is also done before the spectator' (ibid. p.110)

⁵⁸⁹ Collis, C., transcript of interview with *Birkenhead Advertiser*, 1949. Archive of Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

⁵⁹⁰ Rathbone, H.S., (1884) *Letters to Ford Madox Brown and Emma Brown*,. National Art Library Special Collections MSL/1995/14/86/22

⁵⁹¹ Gordon Bowe, N., 'The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925)' *Irish Arts Review Yearbook (1990/1991)*, pp.172-185, p.91

Commercial links were made with Liberty & Co. in London amongst others and an exhibition of Irish carpets opened at the Grafton Gallery, Bond Street, London in 1904.⁵⁹² Stylistically, Liberty's 'Tudric' and 'Cymric' ranges show 'strong Celtic revival and Renaissance influences', as well as the characteristics of Art Nouveau.⁵⁹³ The sgraffito work of the Della Robbia Pottery also show a strong Celtic influence in later years, woven together with the lines of Art Nouveau by artists including Cassandra Walker, Aphra Pearce and Ruth Bare. The arts and crafts of England and Ireland were also connected through a long friendship between William Morris and the Irish poet W. B. Yeats, based on their mutual passion for Celtic myth and legend. The Great Exhibition of 1851 had featured examples of Irish lace making and although Ireland had no industrial base to react against, craft making was seen as a way to provide employment and income to impoverished rural areas. The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland was founded in 1894 and staged its first exhibition in Dublin in 1895. The second exhibition, in 1899, included a small display of twenty-three items from English craft workshops. The English display was organised by Sidney Cockerell (1867-1962)⁵⁹⁴ and included several pieces from the Della Robbia Pottery.

Bowe identifies Harold Rathbone as being commissioned to prepare a substantial report on this exhibition for the *Journal of Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Movement of Ireland* (1901) in which Rathbone praises 'the unique and very great beauty of Irish needlework; we have nothing in England to compare with this'.⁵⁹⁵ In his article 'Donegal Carpets' Paul Larmour describes Harold Rathbone as an experienced critic and art worker and an authority

⁵⁹² Larmour, P., 'Donegal Carpets' Back Matter." *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1991) pp. 210-217

⁵⁹³ Escritt, S., *Art Nouveau (Art and Ideas)* (London: Phaidon Press,2000) p.331

⁵⁹⁴ Sidney Cockerell (1867-1962) was for many years the Director of the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge. He was close to both John Ruskin and William Morris and became secretary to Morris and the Kelmscott Press in 1894.

⁵⁹⁵ Gordon Bowe, N., The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925) *Irish Arts Review Yearbook (1990/1991)*, pp. 172-185, p.176

on the Arts and Crafts Movement; in this particular case, on Donegal carpets. It is interesting that Rathbone was considered an expert on these Irish carpets in the 1901 report as until now there was no suggestion that Rathbone had such a specialty.⁵⁹⁶ Gordon-Bowe and Larmour both confirm that Harold Rathbone made an important contribution to the 1899 Dublin exhibition which surely paved the way for the Della Robbia Pottery to participate in the large and prestigious 1902 Cork International Exhibition.

In the later years of the Pottery, an association between the Irish sculptor and artist Sophia Rosamond Praeger (1867-1954) and the Della Robbia Pottery emerged, linking the Pottery still further with the Celtic revival. Praeger was born in Holywood, County Down, and entered the Slade School in 1888 aged twenty-one. She studied under Alphonse Legros, as Harold Rathbone had done ten years previously and, like Rathbone, went to Paris and continued her training at the Académie Julian. Like many female artists, Praeger, who enjoyed great success during her lifetime, is little known nowadays. Although a sculptor by instinct, Praeger supported herself as a successful book illustrator and children's author, saying 'sculpture itself is not a paying line', although in 1912 she achieved international recognition with her piece *The Philosopher*, displayed at the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition and in the following year at the Royal Academy.⁵⁹⁷ Praeger is possibly linked to the Della Robbia Pottery through her friendship with Ellen Mary Rope.⁵⁹⁸ She is likely to have met Harold Rathbone at the 1899 The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland Exhibition in Dublin where both were exhibiting. An extract from the 1899 Dublin catalogue confirms that Praeger exhibited several plaster bas-reliefs at the exhibition. Details of the pieces are not

⁵⁹⁶ Larmour, P., 'Donegal Carpets' Back Matter." *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1991) pp. 210-217, p.212

⁵⁹⁷ Gaynor, C., 'An Ulster Sculptor: Sophia Rosamond Praeger (1867-1954)' *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, Vol. 16 (2000), pp. 34-43, p.36

⁵⁹⁸ McBriinn, J., 'A Populous Solitude': the life and art of Sophia Rosamond Praeger', *Women's History Review*, 18:4, pp.577-596, p.583

known but Rathbone had several opportunities to encounter Praeger at the exhibition, both in his capacity as an auditor on behalf of the society and as a fellow exhibitor of his own bas-relief work in Cockerell's 'English Crafts' section. Praeger also took part in the Liverpool Autumn Exhibition in 1901, 1903, 1905 and 1906.

Ellen Rope and Harold Rathbone had established a successful working partnership as early as 1895 and although Rope never became an employee of the Pottery, she sent many designs and plaster models for bas-relief panels in her distinctive style for rendering in the Birkenhead architectural workshops from her studio in London. Joseph McBrinn suggests that Praeger also submitted designs to the Della Robbia Pottery in the same way, 'She also produced commercial designs for companies such as Harold Rathbone's Della Robbia Pottery in Birkenhead'.⁵⁹⁹ McBrinn has also identified that Rope and Praeger were friends, and that Praeger was part of Rope's Gower Street set in London.⁶⁰⁰

In 1904 Praeger successfully submitted a piece for inclusion in the Belfast Art Society exhibition listed as 'Della Robbia Pottery, very durable' and entitled 'St Brigid of Kildare', in the style of the architectural ware of Birkenhead, although we do not know if this was a generic reference to the type of pottery or to the fact that it had been manufactured in Birkenhead. In 1904, an unattributed piece entitled *The Blessing of St Bridget* by the Della Robbia Pottery was exhibited at the Walker Art Gallery Autumn Exhibition. At least two more of Praeger's works are categorised in the same style. They are now located in the Ulster Museum.⁶⁰¹

⁵⁹⁹ Although the designs of Ellen Mary Rope can be identified by the painted initials 'EMR', no mark that would indicate a piece by Sophie Rosamond Praeger has been identified.

⁶⁰⁰ McBrinn, J., 'A Populous Solitude': The Life and Art of Sophia Rosamond Praeger', *Women's History Review*, 18:4, pp.577-596, p.582

⁶⁰¹ Gaynor, C., 'An Ulster Sculptor: Sophia Rosamond Praeger (1867-1954)' *Irish Arts Review Yearbook*, Vol. 16 (2000), pp.34-43, p.3

The following works by Praeger were exhibited in The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland exhibition, Dublin in 1899.⁶⁰² At least three of these pieces could be bas-relief panels in the 'Della Robbia style' of Birkenhead.

- 'Design for wall-fountain in plaster, to be carried out in Bronze. By Rosamund Praeger. £15'
- 'Decorative panel in plaster. By Rosamund Praeger. £2 2s'
- 'Sketch-design for horse-trough in plaster, to be carried out in stone or bronze. By Rosamund Praeger'
- 'Decorative panel in plaster. By Rosamund Praeger'
- 'Relief, in plaster. By Rosamund Praeger'
- 'Plaster replica of bronze panel. Part of Memorial Fountain erected at Newtown Breda. By Rosamund Praeger'

The contribution of Harold Rathbone to the success of the 1899 Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland Exhibition in Dublin, the esteem that he was held in as an authority on the Arts and Crafts Movement and the probable links between Praeger and the Della Robbia Pottery, indicate that although many Arts and Crafts studios at the time were looking to Art Nouveau and the continent for inspiration, Rathbone was, like Arthur Liberty, looking towards Ireland and the Celtic Revival. It was these connections that led to the invitation for the Pottery to participate in the Cork International Exhibition of 1902 and to the notable influence of Celtic design at the Pottery. This was also reversed; Charles Collis, who had travelled with the Pottery to Cork in 1902, recalled that 'it was a wonderful six months. Mr. Rathbone had an

⁶⁰² *Catalogue of the Arts & Crafts Society Exhibition 1899* National Library of Ireland. LO 12668

amazing effect on the Irish craftsmen. There are still potters in Cork who design after the Della Robbia style'⁶⁰³

The Della Robbia Pottery at other exhibitions and trade fairs

The Birkenhead pottery exhibited at a wide variety of trade events. These events were often well-established and exhibitors included many of the most illustrious names of the Arts and Crafts Movement. As surviving documentation from the Pottery is scanty and includes no trade records, the participation of the Della Robbia Pottery at these events has been identified once more through reviews of contemporary art journals and reports in regional press newspapers.

As we have seen, sales outlets for the Pottery were either within the newly developing network of department stores, or else in the somewhat short-lived company showrooms in Cook Street, then Berry Street, in Liverpool; advertising was limited to black and white text and line drawings. Participation in a comprehensive range of trade fairs and exhibitions was vital to the commercial success of workshops such as the Della Robbia Pottery. The following overview indicates that the Della Robbia Pottery participated in the fairs and programme of exhibitions of the era in a significant way; it is not intended to be exhaustive but to exemplify the importance of exhibition culture to the small craft studios of the time.

The Della Robbia Pottery is reported as exhibiting at the 1894, 1895 and 1889 Manchester Arts and Crafts Exhibition. Thomas Raffles Davison commented in *The British Architect* in May 1895 that 'we are not sure if this second Arts and Crafts show in Manchester is not

⁶⁰³ Collis, C., transcript of interview with *Birkenhead Advertiser*, 1949. Archive of The Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

better worth going to see than the last held in London' and that 'The Della Robbia Pottery Co. make up a most interesting collection of tile work'.⁶⁰⁴ Three pieces from the company were illustrated with line drawings in *The Studio* and the reviewer noted that 'the Della Robbia Pottery produced from designs by H. Rathbone, assisted by Miss C. A. Walker, and filled two cases which proved to be worthy of prolonged study'.⁶⁰⁵

The business of display was not restricted to the Arts and Crafts shows. The overarching aim of the Pottery was to decorate the grey buildings of Britain in Florentine style with the decorative bas-reliefs inspired by Luca della Robbia and in 1897 Rathbone took a large stand at the Building Trades Exhibition in Islington. Pilkington's Tile and Pottery Company was also present, exhibiting tiles designed by the renowned designers Lewis F. Day and C. F. A. Voysey. Notwithstanding the presence of these illustrious designers, the work of the Della Robbia Pottery received a favourable review:

The Della Robbia Pottery have a fine show of decorative Pottery in the Gallery. The avowed aim of this firm, under the superintending guidance of Mr Harold Rathbone, formerly a pupil of the late Ford Madox Brown, is to produce not so much large quantities or pieces of work, but to concentrate their efforts on the production of 'such artistic and rich accents of colouring that will impart a jewel-like effect into the masonry'...their efforts as in here seen are in themselves worthy of all praise, though the proper relationship of added decoration to a piece of architecture is a point that needs always to be kept thoroughly in mind...it is a very attractive exhibition of genuine artistic excellence⁶⁰⁶

Despite the commendation of the work itself, an underlying reluctance to embrace the principle of adding such decoration to a piece of architecture by the commissioning builders can be detected. We know that Harold Rathbone found it difficult to make the architectural

⁶⁰⁴ Raffles Davison, T., *British Architect* (May 1895) p.307

⁶⁰⁵ White, G., 'Manchester Arts and Crafts', *The Studio* (July 1895) no.28, p.136

⁶⁰⁶ 'Building Trades at Islington II' *British Architect* (Mar 26 1897) p.220

workshop a commercial success; arguably, the appetite for bas-relief decoration was always more muted than he had ever envisaged.

The Della Robbia Pottery was also present at the 2nd Exhibition of Furnishing Trade in London in March 1898; at the Leeds Arts and Crafts Exhibition in November 1900, with a local newspaper commenting on 'Mr Rathbone's Della Robbia and De Morgan's tiles and lustre ware'⁶⁰⁷ and at numerous exhibitions connected with the Home Arts and Industries Association. The final Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society exhibition that the Pottery was reported as attending was in Leeds in September 1904; *The Studio* acknowledged the Birkenhead Pottery with its description of original and interesting work, alongside Doulton, Gibson and Lancastrian ware.⁶⁰⁸ The Pottery also sent a large display to the Pottery and Porcelain Exhibition in Glasgow in 1904. At the close of the exhibition, Glasgow Corporation bought fifteen pieces of Della Robbia Pottery for its permanent collection, firmly negotiating a 20% discount with Rathbone. Hyland points out that by this time the Pottery was experiencing great financial difficulties and that Rathbone was probably pleased to accept the arrangement.⁶⁰⁹

Naturally, Liverpool was of great importance to the commercial success of the Pottery; Harold Rathbone was a member of a prominent Liverpool family and many of his workers, including many of the most important artists, were recruited locally. Cassandra Walker and fellow artist Alice Maud Cunningham were from Liverpool, and Charles Collis, Annie Smith and Liz Wilkins from Birkenhead. Most shareholders were also from Liverpool or Birkenhead.

⁶⁰⁷ [Anon] 'Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Leeds' *Leeds Mercury* (Nov 19 1900) p.5

⁶⁰⁸ [Anon] 'Studio Talk', *The Studio* (Jan 1905) No.142, p.356

⁶⁰⁹ Hyland, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.115

As the only Merseyside pottery of renown at the time, Rathbone took care to promote the company in the rapidly growing city.

The Della Robbia Pottery was shown at the Autumn exhibitions at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool from 1894 until 1905; the Autumn Exhibition was an important part of national cultural life and drew entries from most major artists. Catalogues were published by the Gallery to support each exhibition and show that a large selection of Della Robbia Pottery vases, plates, ceramic panels, statues and bas-reliefs were exhibited. In 1896, for example, work attributed to Cassandra Walker, Ellen Mary Rope, Gwendoline Buckler, Harold Rathbone, Carlo Manzoni and Aphra Peirce was included.⁶¹⁰ Della Robbia Pottery was stocked at Stoniers in Church Street and at the Liverpool branch of Waring's in Bold Street. The Pottery also had its own showroom; firstly, in Cook Street, Liverpool in 1899 and then in spacious showrooms in Berry Street. Both showrooms were short-lived, with high rents cited as the reason for closure.⁶¹¹

The position of the Della Robbia Pottery within the trade fair and exhibition culture of the Arts and Crafts Movement demonstrates that Harold Rathbone worked hard to ensure that the work of the company was highly visible from the beginning and was represented at the prestigious Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society in London, Manchester and Leeds, at important building trade fairs and at the exhibitions at the Walker Art Gallery in Liverpool. The Pottery also exhibited at the Arts and Crafts Exhibitions in Dublin and in Cork. However, it was to the second of the great showcases of the Arts and Crafts Movement that Harold Rathbone was most committed: The Home Arts and Industries Association.

⁶¹⁰ *Arts & Crafts Exhibition Society: Catalogue of the Fifth Exhibition, the New Gallery, 121 Regent St. 1896* by Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

⁶¹¹ Collis, C., Archive of The Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead.

Home Arts and Industries Association

The Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) formed in 1884 as an amalgam of several smaller associations including the most influential, Eglantine Louisa Jebb's Cottage Arts Association. The Association had specific aims: to provide employment in rural areas, to afford 'improving activities' to the working classes and to introduce beauty and good design into run-down cottages. By 1884 a widespread exhibition culture of local hand-crafted work had grown although on a small provincial scale rather than on a national basis. We can see an example of this in the city of Worcester; in 1882, the *Worcester Journal* reported that a large exhibition was proposed in the city in a manner that would repeat the success of those held at Mechanics Institutes across the country. Among the artefacts on show would be 'specimens of the dainty gloves of Worcester and the velvety carpets of Kidderminster'. Captioning the event under the banner of *Home Art and Industries*, the article noted that these exhibitions had done much to 'encourage the toiler in his leisure hours'.⁶¹²

An article in the *North Wales Chronicle* reported the opening of a branch of the Home Arts and Industries Association in Bangor, North Wales, in 1887, gives an insight into the procedures of the Association. The initial programme consisted of woodcarving, clay modelling and stone-carving classes with fees set at 2/6d for men and 1/3d for apprentices and under 16s. But the branch was also appealing for financial support as each branch was obliged to be financially independent. The aim of the classes was to teach form and design and for the students to be shown 'the beautiful in nature and art'.⁶¹³ By 1894, the

⁶¹² [Anon] *Worcester Journal* (4 March 1882) p.4

The connection between the Mechanics Institutes of Britain and the early Arts and Crafts Movement has received little scholarly attention; but as the first Mechanics Institute in England was opened in Liverpool in July 1823, there is a resonance with Arts and Crafts in Liverpool.

⁶¹³ [Anon] 'Opening of the Home arts and Industries Classes' *North Wales Chronicle* (4 June 1887) p.8

campaigner Lady Ishbel Aberdeen could state in a speech to the Congress of Women in Chicago that in the previous few years over five hundred classes in England, Scotland and Wales had been initiated, where woodcarving, metalwork, embossed leather craft and basket work were taught. She noted that 'the Association has done much good, its aims chiefly from the artistic and moral standpoint rather than the commercial' but continued that sales held by the association were notably successful.⁶¹⁴

The first national exhibition of the HAIA was held in July 1885 in London. The event received widespread coverage in the press, encouraged by the presence of the Princess of Wales and Princess Louise on the opening day.⁶¹⁵ Reporting was widespread; the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* noted that the Association already had forty centres in England, Wales and Ireland but only one in Scotland. The subjects taught now included spinning, needlework, knitting and modelling. The newspaper praised the work of the Association for its abilities to channel the energies of mischievous boys, to combat idleness and to 'counteract the hideous travesties of art that were prevalent in cottage homes'.⁶¹⁶ There was also a connection between the HAIA and the Rathbone family in Liverpool; in 1891 Miss Jebb addressed a meeting of the Liverpool Ladies Union on the subject of 'The Home Arts and Industries Association' and 'reconfirmed the aims of the Association'. Mrs. S. G. Rathbone, known as Augusta in the Rathbone family, attended in her role as Vice-president of the Ladies Union.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁴ Gordon, Ishbel, M. M., (1893), "Encouragement of Home Industries." by Ishbel Maria Marjoribanks Gordon, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair (1857-1939) in *The Congress of Women: Held in the Woman's Building, World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago, U. S. A., 1893*. (Chicago: Monarch Book Company, 1894) pp. 743-746, p.744

⁶¹⁵ [Anon] *Morning Post* (8 July 1885)

⁶¹⁶ [Anon] *Dundee Evening Telegraph* (11 February 1885)

⁶¹⁷ *Liverpool Echo* (12 November 1891)

In 2014, a large decorative vase by the Della Robbia Pottery was discovered in a garden shed by a descendant of Mrs S.G. Rathbone. The vase is inscribed with the word 'Augusta' in large letters.

As we will see, newspaper reports in both the *Magazine of Art* and *The Studio* confirm that the Della Robbia Pottery was a significant presence in the HAIA from 1894. This presented an interesting dichotomy for the company; the Della Robbia Pottery was a regular exhibitor at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society with its ethos of craftsmanship as a viable commercial alternative to industrialisation and work shown alongside the finest craftsmen of the day. However, the company was also widely reported as a supporter of the HAIA with references to Rathbone's sgraffito workshop as a training class of the HAIA – in 1906 the *Art Journal* assessed that the Home Arts and Industries classes supplemented a craftsman's skills rather than 'constituting them' but that the Della Robbia Pottery 'had converted industry to art'.⁶¹⁸ The unique structure of the Della Robbia Pottery once again becomes apparent; the architectural workshop was seen as wholly distinct from the activities of the HAIA; it was only in the sgraffito workshop that the apprentices attended 'classes' under Rathbone's direction aiming, as Mabel Cox reminded her readers, 'to teach the minor arts to the working classes, thus spreading knowledge of artistic handiwork amongst people'.⁶¹⁹

The Della Robbia Pottery first exhibited at the HAIA Exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall in 1894 to great acclaim. Although each branch also held its own local event, the Royal Albert Hall exhibition was on a much larger scale, was organised by the national body of the Association and the crafts on display were selected by a team of judges. From 1894, the Pottery exhibited annually and *The Studio* noted the company in each exhibition until 1903. The articles in *The Studio*, often by Henry Bloomfield Bare or by the editor Gleeson White,

⁶¹⁸ [Anon] 'Art Handiwork and Manufacture' *Art Journal*, (Jul 1906) pp.210-216, p.210-11

⁶¹⁹ Cox, M., "The Home Arts and Industries Association" *The Artist: An Illustrated Monthly Record of Arts, Crafts and Industries* (American Edition), (1900) Vol.28. p.145

allow some recovery of the lost histories of the Della Robbia Pottery and we owe much of our knowledge to these reports.⁶²⁰

The articles by the newspapers and periodicals begin with the triumphant debut at the annual HAIA exhibition in 1894 when Princess Louise visited the stand on two occasions.⁶²¹

On her first visit, she purchased 'one of the most beautiful and expensive of pots' returning later to 'secure a green water vase'. The *Liverpool Mercury* noted the special attention paid by the Princess, who encouraged others of the Royal party to make similar purchases 'and following her good example, those well-known supporters of the Pottery, G.F. Watts, Walter Crane and Mr. Collcutt.'⁶²² Aymer Vallance noted in *The Studio* that 'In pottery the artistic standard was scarce as high as it might have been, but the Della Robbia ware, under the management of Messrs. Conrad Dressler and Harold Rathbone has the merit of being quaint in style and of a very distinctive quality'.⁶²³

The importance of the purchase by the Princess is underlined by newspaper accounts from later that year when the *Liverpool Mercury* reported on the Ford Charity bazaar at St George's Hall, Liverpool; 'at the centre of the Della Robbia stall is exhibited a large engraved vase of beautiful design, which greatly resembles the one purchased by Princess Louise'⁶²⁴.

This patronage by the Princess Louise had ensured that the Della Robbia Pottery would not

⁶²⁰ Henry Bloomfield Bare (1849-1912) was a Liverpool architect who subsequently retrained as an artist and metalworker. He became the local correspondent for *The Studio* under the by-line of 'HBB'. Bare was also the father of Ruth Bare, one of the most accomplished of the Della Robbia Pottery artists, and a friend of the Rathbone family.

⁶²¹ As previously discussed on page 14 of this chapter, Princess Louise had a reputation as a sculptor, painter and supporter of the arts. Connections between the Pottery and the Princess and her husband, the Marquis of Lorne, were recorded in newspapers and periodicals on many occasions. Princess Louise made a widely-publicised visit to Harold Rathbone's 'at home' at the reopening of Waring's in Oxford Street and included a visit to the workshops in Birkenhead as part of a visit to Liverpool.

⁶²² [Anon] *Liverpool Mercury* (4 July 1894). Collcutt later commissioned from the Pottery the fountain for the Savoy Hotel (chapter one)

⁶²³ Vallance, A., 'Home Arts and Industries at the Albert Hall' *The Studio*, Vol.III, No.17 (Aug 1894) p.151

⁶²⁴ *Liverpool Mercury* (11 October 1894)

only attract distinguished customers, but would embolden the new middle-class shopper; the Pottery was now a fashionable addition to a tasteful scheme of décor. The support from the Princess was noted in advertisements as late as 1904 when Frayns of Dundee described Della Robbia ware in their Christmas catalogue as ‘under the special patronage of HRH Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll’.⁶²⁵ Consequently, *The Liverpool Mercury* was able to report in June 1895

at the eleventh annual exhibition of the Home Arts and Industries Association, the Della Robbia Pottery showed a very important exhibit, by reason of their recognition in the last season, had a stall some thirty feet in length allotted to their wares, a space considerably larger than that devoted to any other British Industry represented in the circular hall.⁶²⁶

At this 1895 exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall, Gleeson White found ‘much to praise’,⁶²⁷ and in 1896 commented on the large display of Della Robbia Pottery, including ‘new departures’, several in the form of low-relief figure panels and one by Conrad Dressler in high-relief with ‘really beautiful modelling in its figures’.⁶²⁸ The article noted that Gwendoline Buckler was awarded a gold cross – a highly coveted accolade – for her sgraffito jar and Harold Rathbone’s panels ‘after the work of Ford Madox Brown’ were praised. Alexandra, Princess of Wales, also visited the Home Arts and Industries Exhibition in 1896 and purchased several items of Pottery including a ‘very handsome vase and a quaint tea service’ She was reported as ‘genuinely interested in wanting to know how things were

⁶²⁵ *Dundee Evening Post* (5 December 1904)

⁶²⁶ *Liverpool Mercury* (29 June 1895)

⁶²⁷ White, G., ‘The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Albert Hall’ *The Studio*, 40, (July 1896), pp.91-101, p.99

⁶²⁸ In an interesting comment, White challenges our previous understanding of the *quattrocento* protocols of Rathbone. He discusses a ‘novel’ panel displayed at the 1896 HAI A exhibition that had been copied from a colour print by Utamaro. Utamaro was a highly-regarded artist of eighteenth century Japan who had an overarching influence on late nineteenth century art, particularly in France. He also inspired much of the passion for Japanese *objet d’art* popularised by Liberty & Co. in Britain. This is the first indication that the Pottery also referenced far-eastern inspired design and until now it has been assumed that all decoration drew only on Italianate, Islamic or Celtic influences. The whereabouts of this Utamaro panel is presently unknown.

White, G., ‘The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Albert Hall’ *The Studio*, 40, (July 1896) pp.91-101, p.99

made'.⁶²⁹ In 1897, *The Studio* reported that the Pottery concentrated their efforts on a large display of sgraffito ware and only exhibited a few architectural pieces. This may reflect the departure of Conrad Dressler in the previous year. *The Studio* was certainly less enthusiastic about the quality of goods on display, criticising the depth of colour and pointing out that the Pottery had failed to acknowledge the designer and craftsman in several cases.⁶³⁰ The *Magazine of Art* published a three-page article entitled 'The Della Robbia Pottery Industry' at the same time. This article is more enthusiastic in its praise for the company, particularly about the work of the sgraffito workshop which concludes is 'modelled on old Italian workers'. An invitation to recreate a meal with the air 'of a banquet by Botticelli' adds a further identification of the Pottery with *quattrocento* practice. Harold Rathbone is quoted as saying 'it is a source of grief to the manager that the sgraffito ware is used for decorative purposes rather than absolute daily ware'.⁶³¹

In the 1898 HAIA exhibition Rathbone obviously attempted to address the criticism of the 1897 display as *The Studio* reports that 'Mr Rathbone's Della Robbia ware was all slightly better than in previous years'.⁶³² In its review of the 1900 HAIA exhibition *The Studio* noted that 'Mr Harold Rathbone's Della Robbia Pottery had made a marked improvement in design'. The article contained an enthusiastic paragraph devoted to the Pottery, noting the move towards the looser style of Art Nouveau, but also sounded an ominous note of concern:

⁶²⁹ Hyl and, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery* p.88. Alexandra visited the HAIA and the Della Robbia Pottery stall again in 1902. By this time, she was Queen Alexandra.

⁶³⁰ White, G., 'The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Royal Albert Hall, 1897' *The Studio*, 51 (June 1897) pp.109-116

⁶³¹ [Anon] 'The Della Robbia Pottery Industry', *Magazine of Art*, 20, (November 1896-October 1897) pp.6-8

⁶³² 'Studio talk' *The Studio* (July 1898) Vol.14., no.64, p.130

Birkenhead has practically the monopoly of Pottery as far as this exhibition is concerned. In spite of many discouragements in the matter of finding markets for good wares, Mr. Harold Rathbone's experiments in the Della Robbia style are steadily gaining and increasingly meriting the recognition of connoisseurs. In the considerable mass of work exhibited this year there was a noticeable loosening of traditional bonds and an effort towards freer and more modern methods of design.⁶³³

The allusion to financial problems at the Pottery and the struggle to find a market for the architectural pieces strikes a portentous note. As discussed earlier in this chapter, from 1900 Liberty & Co. was developing closer commercial relationships with the large manufacturing firms in the Midlands and was moving away from its links with studio art potteries. The recommendations in the *Hearth and Home* by Mrs. Talbot-Coke and the domestic lady art writers also stopped in 1900 and the Pottery had already exhibited for the last time at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society event at the New Gallery. In 1900, the company merged with a religious statuary firm run by the Belgium sculptor Emile de Caluwe and his wife Marian de Caluwe, a highly talented artist from Liverpool, to form the 'Della Robbia Pottery and Marble Co Ltd.' As no financial accounts have survived, it is impossible to clarify the position of the Pottery at this time. Despite the changes in company structure and financial uncertainty, artists such as Cassandra Walker and Ruth Bare continued to produce some of the company's finest and most innovative work during this period.⁶³⁴

In a review of the 1902 HAIA exhibition at the Royal Albert Hall, *The Studio* noted that for the Della Robbia Pottery 'devotional objects were an increasingly important element of the

⁶³³ Wood, E., 'The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Albert Hall' *The Studio*, 88 (July 1900) p.86.

⁶³⁴ Hyl and, P., *The Della Robbia Pottery Birkenhead 1894-1906*, p.121

work’⁶³⁵ and acknowledged the Della Robbia Pottery display ‘which always shows a considerable amount on these occasions’.⁶³⁶ The HAIA exhibition of 1903 was the final year that *The Studio* included the Pottery in its exhibition review, describing the work as ‘pleasantly conspicuous’. This was probably the last year that Harold Rathbone exhibited at the national event in the Royal Albert Hall.⁶³⁷ The final notice for the Pottery in *The Studio* was in 1904 when Henry Bloomfield Bare complimented Cassandra Walker on her design of Della Robbia-style low-relief panels that had been incorporated into an overmantle of beaten copper by R. P. Roberts. This was displayed at Messrs. Waring’s, probably in the Liverpool store.⁶³⁸ In 1906, *The Art Journal* characterised the HAIA as failing to produce craftsmen who could be considered as artists, although ‘The Della Robbia Pottery, Haslemere weaving [...] and Compton architectural potteries, are industries converted to arts.’ The article concluded that ‘the admirable in the work of the HAIA lay in philanthropy, not in the field of arts’;⁶³⁹ this was one of the last reviews that the Pottery received before announcing its closure.

The Della Robbia Pottery also participated in much smaller HAIA Exhibitions, particularly in Cheltenham. From 1894, when the Pottery exhibited alongside the Aller Vale Pottery, the Pottery was represented until 1901. Reports on the contributions of the Pottery were favourable and enthusiastic until 1901, when a report in the local *Gloucestershire Echo* commented ‘The Della Robbia Pottery industry, though not so well represented as in former years, nevertheless sent some charming work, the least noticeable characteristic of which

⁶³⁵ Wood, J., *The Studio*, 112, (July 1902) Vol 26 No.112, p.113

⁶³⁶ Wood, J., *The Studio*, 112, (July 1902) Vol 26 No.112, p.133

⁶³⁷ [Anon] ‘Studio talk’ *The Studio* (July 1903) Vol.29 no.124, p.126

⁶³⁸ Bare, H. B., ‘Studio talk, Liverpool’ *The Studio* (April 1904) Vol 31, no.133, p.258

⁶³⁹ [Anon] ‘Art handiwork and Manufacture’ *Art Journal* (London: July 1906) p.210

was its cheapness'.⁶⁴⁰ By this time newspaper reports indicate that no other prominent craft workshop was participating in the Cheltenham exhibition. A picture emerges of the triumphant introductory years at the HAIA annual exhibition in 1894 and 1895, the large and successful displays in the following years but then the first suggestion of financial difficulties in 1900. From then onwards the slow decline into closure is recorded, despite Harold Rathbone accepting some degree of change by repositioning the architectural workshop as a manufacturer of ecclesiastical statuary and the sgraffito studio as an articulation of Art Nouveau. The critical reception of the work of the Della Robbia Pottery was generally positive throughout its existence, combined with effusive recommendations from the 'Lady Art Advisors' and even in the last years, the Pottery continued to receive good notices. However, an overview of the press reviews reveal that the Della Robbia Pottery received little critical attention at the more prestigious 1896 and 1899 Arts and Crafts Society Exhibitions; *The Studio* included no reviews of the company. In 1896, *The Magazine of Art* had acknowledged the 'glazed Pottery of Mr Rathbone's 'Della Robbia' company which Liberty's have introduced to London' at The Society exhibition⁶⁴¹ and the *Art Journal* noted that work of the Architectural department had 'been shown to great advantage at the 1899 Arts and Crafts Society exhibition'.⁶⁴²

⁶⁴⁰ *Gloucestershire Echo* (25 November 1901)

⁶⁴¹ [Anon] 'The Arts and Crafts Exhibition II', *Magazine of Art*, (Jan 1897) p. 66. Also referenced on page 7 of this chapter.

⁶⁴² E.F.V. 'Recent Industrial Art', *Art Journal* (May 1900) pp.155-156, p.155

Comparison between HAIA and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society

The Home Arts and Industries Association (HAIA) and the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society were amongst the most significant associations that participated in the Arts and Crafts Movement. However, Hilary Underwood proposes that there was a marked difference in the public perception of the two organisations and argues that the 'Home Arts and Industries Association occupies a more ambivalent place in the wider history of the Arts and Crafts Movement'.⁶⁴³ In contrast, Janice Helland proposes that there was less division between the two bodies and that participation by both professional and amateur artists in both events was common.⁶⁴⁴ We know from newspaper reports that the Della Robbia Pottery was allied to both the HAIA and the Society; if, as Hilary Underwood suggests, there was a difference in perception, was there a significant impact on the Birkenhead company and did this impact resonate on the commercial success of the Pottery?

Both the HAIA and the Society organised large annual exhibitions that attracted a significant number of visitors. However, in *The Artists' Village*, Underwood compares the two events as having a substantial difference in status. The annual national exhibition of the HAIA was held at the Albert Hall which was generally considered a place of entertainment rather than of culture; the exhibition lasted only a few days and regional classes each put on their own displays. The HAIA did not produce a catalogue to identify either the studio or the craftsman; in 1899, *The Studio* commented that there is a tendency to ignore the origin of the design which has become the property of the organisation and is described on the labels as 'HAIA'.

⁶⁴³ Underwood, H., in Bills, M. (ed.), *An Artists Village: G F Watts and Mary Watts at Compton* (London: Philip Wilson Publishers Ltd., 2011) p.60

⁶⁴⁴ Helland, J., 'Good work and Clever design: Early exhibitions and the Home Arts and Industries Association' *The Journal of Modern Craft* Vol.5 Issue 3 (Nov 2012) pp.275-294

This hardly seems an adequate acknowledgement to such helpers as Mr Voysey, Mr Cave, Mr Spooner, Mr Benson and the ladies who have, from time to time, supplied original designs.⁶⁴⁵

In contrast, the Society exhibited at the prestigious New Gallery in Regent Street and the event lasted several weeks. A comprehensive catalogue was published, with a decorative sleeve and a cover price of sixpence. The Society insisted on the names of both the designer and maker being included in the catalogue, aiming to raise the status of the craftsman to that of fine artist. The Society exhibitions were not originally intended as selling events to avoid what Cobden-Sanderson described as ‘the exhibition being turned into a ‘shop for the sale of wares’;⁶⁴⁶ until 1903 the catalogue did not contain prices although from 1893 onwards the Society would collect a twenty-five percent deposit against ordered goods.⁶⁴⁷ In comparison, from the outset the HAIA exhibition was intended as an opportunity for the exhibitors to sell their products.

A significant difference between the two societies can also be found in their underlying principles. Gleeson White ⁶⁴⁸ in *The Studio* reiterated the aims of the HAIA in his review of the 1896 Albert Hall exhibition;

Firstly, making a young man a better citizen by providing him with a worthwhile hobby; second, if he shows ‘latent genius’ to encourage him to develop it; third, to raise the taste of those who patronise the branch schools by the efforts of the better informed.⁶⁴⁹

⁶⁴⁵ Wood, E., ‘Home Arts and Industries’, *The Studio* (July 1899) no.76 p.106

⁶⁴⁶ Hart, I., ‘On the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Society’ *BRANCH: Britain, Representation and Nineteenth-Century* in Felluga, D. F. (ed.), *Extension of Romanticism and Victorianism on the Net*. Web (23.03.17)

⁶⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁸ Joseph Gleeson White (1851-1898) was a respected and influential writer on the arts and a member of the Art Workers’ Guild. The first editor of *The Studio*, he stood down in 1895 but continued to contribute until his death in 1898.

⁶⁴⁹ White, G., ‘The Home Arts and Industries Association at the Albert Hall’ *The Studio*, 29, (Aug 1896) p.84

These objectives had remained unchanged since the society's inception in 1884. In contrast, the stated aims of the Society were to

Hold exhibitions of applied Design and Handicraft as from time to time shall seem desirable and to arrange for the delivery of Lectures whereby the Worker may have an opportunity of demonstrating to the public the Aptitudes and Limitations of his Craft.⁶⁵⁰

In *Good Work and Clever Design*, Janice Helland challenges many of the comparisons made between the participating craftsmen of the Society and the amateur artists of the HAIA as simplistic, arguing that suggestions that the overwhelmingly male professional craftsmen of the Arts and Craft guilds and the generally female amateurs of the HAIA were unable to display in co-operation is inaccurate and that in fact both often sold objects together at the HAIA exhibitions.⁶⁵¹ Helland qualifies her argument by restricting her enquiry to the early years of the HAIA, specifically prior to the mid-1890s and in the early days of both societies this co-operation was widely reported in newspapers and journals. Helland is justified in claiming that in many cases highly regarded craft workers exhibited at both events. However, by the end of the nineteenth century the reviews suggest that the exhibition at the Albert Hall no longer commanded the wholehearted support of eminent craftsmen. An example of this can be found in a newspaper review of the 1900 HAIA exhibition which singled out the work of Mary Seton Watts' Potters Art Guild in Compton and the 'Irish peasant girls under the direction of Mr Morton of Darvel' as highlights of the exhibition.⁶⁵² Mary Seton Watts had remained firmly and publicly committed to the ideals of the HAIA but the craftsmen and women who exhibited beside the Della Robbia Pottery in the same year

⁶⁵⁰ Extract from the Constitution of the Society, 1888, from AAD1/20-1980
In Greensted, M. (ed.), *An Anthology of the Arts and Crafts Movement* p.14

⁶⁵¹ Helland, J., "Good Work and Clever Design": Early Exhibitions and the Home Arts and Industries Association' *The Journal of Modern Craft* Vol.5 Issue 3 (Nov 2012) pp.275-294

⁶⁵² [Anon] *Morning Post* (May 25 1900) This report may be incorrect in places – Darvel, famed for its lacemaking for several decades from 1876 is in East Ayrshire, Scotland.

at the Arts and Crafts Exhibition in Leeds are conspicuously absent from the HAIA event; De Morgan, Voysey, Rope and Dressler. In 1900, the *Art Journal* reported the opening of the sixteenth HAIA exhibition at the Albert Hall, commenting that the exhibition was one that 'should be visited by everybody interested in the real welfare of the country, as represented by industries which give good occupation to those living away from towns',⁶⁵³ rather than as an exhibition of high quality arts and crafts. Underwood's argument that the HAIA was increasingly less important is supported by Ford Madox Hueffer, grandson of Ford Madox Brown. Widespread enthusiasm for the great socialist experiment and utopian vision so passionately espoused by William Morris had quietly waned after his passing; in the words of Hueffer 'during that splendid youth of the world in the 'eighties and 'nineties the words 'the Social Revolution' were forever on our lips. We spoke of it as if it were always just around the corner [...] but the bourgeoisie had triumphed'.⁶⁵⁴ The HAIA had been part of a vision that faded at the turn of the century and Rathbone and the Pottery became associated with a social experiment that was increasingly seen as irrelevant.

It would seem that the Della Robbia Pottery did suffer a diminishing in status and commercial success because of its loyal commitment to the HAIA. In the exhibitions of the Arts and Crafts Exhibition Societies, Della Robbia Pottery was ranged alongside the finest craftsmen in the country including William de Morgan, Walter Crane, Lewis F. Day and work from Morris & Co. When participating in HAIA events, the Della Robbia Pottery was increasingly ranged amongst work from the taught classes and training schools of the association; in 1901 a review of the Cheltenham HAIA exhibition aligned the Pottery with

⁶⁵³ E.F.V., 'Recent Industrial Art', *Art Journal*, (London: May 1900) p.155

⁶⁵⁴ Hueffer, F. M., *Ancient Lights and Certain New Reflections being the Memories of a Young Man* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1911) p.91)

work from the children and old people of the local workhouses in Cheltenham and Gloucester.⁶⁵⁵ The HAIA was a successful association in the early years with a well-supported and popular exhibition programme that attracted the finest craftsmen but one that gradually diminished in stature as the nineteenth century closed. Rathbone's dogged commitment to showing at HAIA exhibitions seems rather perverse but nonetheless he persisted in exhibiting there and it is difficult to interpret this connection in any other way than as having an increasingly negative impact on the commercial success of the Pottery.

We have seen that by 1900 Harold Rathbone was struggling to find a market for his exclusive architectural pieces. In 1897 he had been full of optimism as he compared the architectural bas-relief work of the Pottery to the 'faience of the great Italian family of Della Robbias who flourished in Florence at the time of the Renaissance'.⁶⁵⁶ Rathbone was, as Sheldon and Carroll note, resting his hopes on the tastes of a restricted number of connoisseurs who would be increasingly less likely to patronise the HAIA exhibitions.⁶⁵⁷ The merger of the company in 1900 to form the Della Robbia Pottery and Marble Co Ltd. emphasises that the sales of bas-reliefs were so depressed that Rathbone was forced to abandon his dream of producing costly and more exclusive architectural panels after Luca della Robbia. Crucially, as argued earlier in the chapter, it seems likely that Liberty & Co. had withdrawn their support in 1900; the note of disquiet in the article in *The Studio* and the abrupt cessation of endorsements by *Hearth & Home* and the domestic art writers after 1900 underline a sudden commercial change. The Della Robbia Pottery was unable to survive the first decade of the twentieth century. The challenges of the new age of modernism and the realities of

⁶⁵⁵ [Anon] *Gloucestershire Echo* (25 November 1901)

⁶⁵⁶ [Anon] 'The Della Robbia Pottery Industry', *Magazine of Art*, 20, (November 1896-October 1897) pp.6-8

⁶⁵⁷ Sheldon, J. and Carroll, J., 'Della Robbia in Regent Street' in Sheldon, J. (ed.), *The Della Robbia Pottery: From Renaissance to Regent Street* (Liverpool University Press, 2015) pp. 89-93

full industrialisation that Greenhalgh has argued,⁶⁵⁸ discussed earlier in this chapter, meant that by 1906 closure was inevitable. Rathbone informed the workers that the 'pottery was failing and he was no longer willing to invest his private income into it'.⁶⁵⁹ Charles Collis, by then one of the longest serving of the artists at the Pottery, argued 'The firm went into voluntary liquidation, not because the workmanship was poor, but because it was a commercial age and we were artists not industrialists'.⁶⁶⁰

It is only in recent years that the reputation of the Della Robbia Pottery has been revived. Colin Simpson dates this revivication as slowly gaining momentum from the late 1950s and 1960s when Victoriana began to become fashionable again and articles concerning the Pottery began to appear.⁶⁶¹ As Simpson discusses, more complex and exquisitely crafted pieces of Della Robbia Pottery, especially from the architectural workshop, are now sought after and command high prices.⁶⁶² Although tens of thousands of pieces were produced during the company's thirteen-year history, the nature of production and an ethos that whole-heartedly reflected the aims of Ruskin and Morris ensured an individuality that makes each piece unique. Harold Rathbone's vision has enabled the *quattrocento* aesthetic of the Italian Renaissance to be continually re-articulated in the commercial marketplaces of Regent Street and beyond, the hand of the maker to be found in each individual piece.

⁶⁵⁸ Greenhalgh, P. (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London: Reaktion, 1990) p.5

⁶⁵⁹ Williams, H., 'Recollections of The Della Robbia Pottery' *Northern Ceramics Society Journal* (1978) pp.1-25, p.9

⁶⁶⁰ Charles Collis file, Archive of Williamson Art Gallery, Birkenhead

⁶⁶¹ Specifically, Hughes, T., 'The Della Robbia Pottery of Birkenhead', *Antique Dealer & Collectors Guide*, (February 1972) pp. 85-86 and Tattersall, B., 'The Birkenhead Della Robbia Pottery: Il Progresso Sia Nostro Scorpo', *Apollo Magazine*, Issue 47, 137 (Feb 1973) pp.164-68

⁶⁶² Simpson, C., 'Della Robbia and Birkenhead' in Sheldon, J. (ed), *The Della Robbia Pottery: from Renaissance to Regent Street*, pp.5-24, p.23

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the ways in which Harold Rathbone engaged with early Renaissance ceramics in the last decades of the nineteenth century and how this led to the creation of the Della Robbia Pottery. It connects studies of the Arts and Crafts Movement and of British and Italian history of ceramics with research within the interdisciplinary field of Late Victorian art and cultural tourism. I have identified how Harold Rathbone, along with artists and writers who influenced him, responded to early Renaissance art and how this was disseminated in their work. I argue that travel to Italy in the late nineteenth century was of primary importance to Harold Rathbone and had a profound influence on the way that the Della Robbia Pottery was established.

The thesis sheds new light on the relationship between Rathbone and Ford Madox Brown, contributing to our understanding of the nature of the friendships of Brown and his family. The thesis also adds to current literature concerning Brown and his sometimes-controversial relationship with the poet Mathilde Blind as well as revealing the long-standing friendship between Blind and Rathbone. This broadens our knowledge of Blind who is being reassessed as a writer who has been unfairly neglected or forgotten in literary history; by probing Rathbone's position within artistic circles of the last decades of the nineteenth century, his enduring friendships with notable figures including William Rossetti and Agnes Garrett have also been uncovered. Contrary to popular opinion, Rathbone was not always reliant on his father and family connections for his success, but was a likeable man who was close to the most eminent artists of the day. The friendship between William Holman Hunt and Rathbone has been

scrutinised, particularly Rathbone's extraordinary commitment to finding a buyer for two of the three versions of Hunt's *The Triumph of the Innocents*. I argue that this was driven by the effect on Rathbone of the exile of his mother when Rathbone was an adolescent. The friendship between the two men deepened because of the public subscription to buy Hunt's painting for the Walker Art Gallery and I propose that Hunt introduced Rathbone to the making of bas-relief sculpture in this period as Hunt designed and prepared plaster models to feature in *The Lady of Shalott*. By considering how Rathbone, as both painter and potter, responded to the doctrines that underpinned the Arts and Crafts Movement, the thesis has explored the ways in which both Rathbone's early paintings and the work of the Pottery reflected the convictions of John Ruskin and William Morris. This is gloriously demonstrated in the idiosyncratic nature of production – no two pieces of Della Robbia Pottery are identical and the decorators in the sgraffito workshop followed neither pattern book nor prescribed design but their own creative impulse. Thus, Harold Rathbone remained resolute in his determination to uphold the principles of these two outstanding thinkers, ensuring that the company remained a true Arts and Crafts Pottery.

The research has examined the different ways in which Rathbone may have encountered the work of the *quattrocento* della Robbia; although Rathbone could see the work of the della Robbia in the South Kensington Museum, we now know that he could see the sculptures in the churches and palazzos of Florence. By contrasting production and design in the della Robbia workshop in *quattrocento* Florence with the architectural studio in Birkenhead, some of the lost histories of the Della Robbia Pottery have been recovered. This is the first time that the Anglo-Italian connection has been assessed in detail and the resulting new knowledge prompted the hypothesis that

Rathbone had identified a different source of inspiration for his sgraffito workshop. Previous research failed to find a meaningful connection between the incised motifs and tonal ranges of the Della Robbia Pottery and the stylistic devices of Tuscan and Umbrian maiolica potteries of the *quattrocento*. Thus, the thesis argues that Rathbone turned away from the traditional sites of production in Tuscany and Umbria when he created the sgraffito workshop, and looked to an area in northern Italy. Following his encounter with the work of Carlo Loretz, Rathbone brought a unique creativity to the British Arts and Crafts Movement that was inspired by Loretz's collection of archaic fragments and the production of sgraffito pottery by Loretz and Co. of Milan.

The commercial interactions between the Birkenhead Pottery and the department stores were encouraging in the first six years and the thesis provides new evidence that the company had a positive critical reception and was seen in the early years as a vibrant and successful studio pottery in the tradition of William Morris. I argue that the failure of the architectural workshop to secure a stable market was due in large part to the withdrawal of support by Liberty & Co. and was not entirely due to Rathbone's shortcomings as a businessman. The case study of the art journals, catalogues and periodicals of the day has found that the Della Robbia Pottery successfully promoted itself through a deep commitment to the exhibition culture that underpinned the Arts and Crafts Movement. The study examines the impact of the 'domestic art writers' on the commercial prospects of the Pottery although without the evidence of sales ledgers and receipts, which have not survived, the evidence is circumstantial. But the writers of the advice columns in periodicals and journals were undoubtedly crucial in creating a market for sales. No previous research has investigated how Rathbone positioned the

Pottery as a commercial business and the case study thereby recovers another 'lost history' of the Pottery.

The parameters of the research were defined by the central aim; in what ways did Rathbone engage with *quattrocento* ceramics and to what extent did his experiences in Italy influence his artistic practice. The thesis has not attempted to extend the recently published research undertaken by Hyland but to explore new and significant areas of interest. The missing company records and Rathbone's personal correspondence remain elusive – little has been found that provides firm evidence of the daily management of the company. I speculate that Rathbone, who always anticipated a renewed interest in Della Robbia Pottery, gathered the details of the glaze recipes, the sales and employee records, the glowing reviews and, especially, the replies to his letters from Ford Madox Brown, into a single collection. It is to be hoped that these survived; the prospect of uncovering this is a tantalising, if remote, one. It is only in the last decades that the work of the Della Robbia Pottery has stimulated a sustained interest and at present it is difficult to discern whether the Pottery has been influential or created a meaningful legacy. However, this examination of the artistic responses to the art of Italy in the late nineteenth century offers several opportunities for further research. Italian art potteries, particularly Cantagalli, had a significant commercial presence in Britain in the late-nineteenth century. To date this has received little scholarly attention. The archive of letters between the Rathbone family and Brown have been interrogated only within the context of the thesis, it is almost certain that scholars of Ford Madox Brown will find new and relevant information within the archive of letters. Although many studies have investigated the way that the British travelled in Italy, few have examined how these experiences influenced artistic practice in this

country; many of Rathbone's peers responded to the Early Italian art that had recently been rediscovered in nineteenth century Britain.

An appreciation of the dazzlingly individualistic style of the Della Robbia Pottery has endured; this research has developed important themes that add to previous histories of the pottery and extend our knowledge of the Arts and Crafts Movement. It offers a critical analysis of the ways in which a small studio pottery in Birkenhead engaged with the work of both a *quattrocento* sculptor and with archaic sgraffito pottery and then confidently set up production as a determined, first-rate contributor to the Arts and Crafts Movement. I argue that the idiosyncratic nature of production ensured that the Della Robbia Pottery made a unique contribution to the Arts and Crafts Movement and was an exemplar of the ways in which travel to Italy in the late-nineteenth century shaped many of the characteristics of fin de siècle applied art. As a result the Della Robbia Pottery became a rare conduit between *quattrocento* ceramic design, the revivification of interest in Early Renaissance Art in the nineteenth century and the mercantile activities of Regent Street.

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