

*ETRUSCAN VASES*, by Robin Hildyard

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Needless to say, unravelling the intricacies of 19C transfer-printed tableware patterns was never given high priority amongst curators in the Ceramics Department during my early days at the V&A. In fact, the lingering stigma of 'Victorian' and 'industrial' had ensured that there was practically no reference collection amongst the 80,000 objects in our care. Yet regular enquiries from the public about one oddly striking pattern could not fail to pique our curiosity: *ETRUSCAN VASES*. As the gradual accumulation of loose photographs, copies of letters and scribbled reminder notes eventually graduated to the status of a small file, so began a kind of passive intelligence gathering that, though in itself a useful case-study, never offered the prospect of coagulating into a nugget worthy of publication. In these dark days, however, much against the



(1) *Etruscan Vases*. Mayer & Elliot 1858–61

*Etruscan Ware* made at Swansea 1848-50 and the neat polychrome-printed red stonewares mass-produced by F & R Pratt of Fenton, who also made the *Old Greek* pattern black stonewares with white prints 1851–1878. Marked examples of *Etruscan Vases* tableware and hot water jugs, often with Britannia metal mounts, all pointed to a single maker, albeit one that enjoyed a confusing number of different partnerships: the Dale Hall Pottery at Longton. This pottery began under T & J Mayer (1838–42), followed by Mayer Bros (1843–55), Mayer Bros & Elliot (1855–58), Mayer & Elliot (1858–61), the jug (1), Liddle, Elliot & Son (1862–71), the plate (2), Bates, Elliot & Co (1870-75), Bates, Walker & Co (1875-78), Gildea & Walker (1878-81), and James Gildea (1885-88) after which the factory was taken over by Keeling & Co. The *Etruscan Vases* pattern with slight variations had continued to be made by all these partnerships, even

odds and with thanks to the Oxford Ceramics Group, the opportunity to record this interesting and long-lived printed pattern has now presented itself.

The pattern itself definitely had style, displaying an infinitely variable group of familiar and correctly-shaped Greek vases – Amphora for wine, Krater for mixing wine and water, Hydria for water, Kylix as wide shallow drinking bowl on high foot, and Lekythos for funerary oil – posed with one or two incongruous metal candelabra on a shelf supported by a wide scroll or a pair of corbels. Evoking the hallowed name Etruria, well known from Wedgwood's factory name and the fine Black and Red Figure vases produced there in parallel with those of Greece until the end of the 4C BC, the distinctive slightly austere pattern possessed an integrity and purity which harked back to the Greek Revival of the early 19C<sup>1</sup>. This had survived swings of taste between Revived Rococo and Gothic during the 1820s–40s period and resurfaced in the years leading up to the Great Exhibition, typified by the superb *Dillwyn's*



(2) *Etruscan Vases*. Liddle, Elliot & Son 1862-71



(3) *Key Border*. Moore & Co Wear Pottery Sunderland c1860–82

appearing as the firm's letter heading which has misled ceramic historians into suggesting that the firm were makers of black basalt<sup>2</sup>.

As the beginnings of this highly popular pattern just preceded the introduction of the Class IV Diamond Mark registrations in 1842, other potteries were free to produce copies, of which the closest was later made by Moore & Co of the Wear Pottery, Sunderland operating c1860–82 (3). This used the grouped vases but differed from the Dale Hall version in replacing the guilloche border with a Greek key, giving its pattern name *Key Border*. A much bolder blue version of the grouped vases used on jugs, coffee pots and cups and saucers was

produced by EF Bodley of Scotia Works, Burslem, the Class IV design registered on 29 August 1866 and, according to the backstamp found on examples in Halifax Museum, Nova Scotia, was 'Manufactured Expressly for I R Jennett & Co. Halifax, N.S.'. Also seen in Nova Scotia was a plate with a sepia version of the vases and delicate Greek fret border, marked *PANTHES* in a wreath with indistinct factory initials below. The firm Hancock & Whittingham of Stoke-on-Trent, operating 1873–79, also made a version called *Etruscan* depicting three large vases on a shaped plinth, crudely washed with vertical brush strokes in subdued inky colours, surrounded by a smudgy key border. Another distantly related pattern was Class IV registered on 14 September 1868 by Thomas Booth & Co of Hanley, showing a trio of wildly fanciful vases and a jug on a straight shelf with an anthemion border containing cartouches, the inky blue print curiously highlighted in bright green and red. In Scotland, several versions appeared, notably the *Athens* pattern made by J & M P Bell & Co of Glasgow, which shows three large crisply profiled Greek vases decorated with stylised anthemions and closed buds, one vase having square Dresser-esque handles, on a shaped plinth<sup>3</sup>. Finally, an improbable venture by the stoneware potter James Powell of Bristol around 1850 produced a Bristol-glazed carafe with overglaze black print showing an elaborate group of Greek vases on a shelf supported by a scroll: probably a unique piece, which is now in Bristol Museum & Art Gallery.



(4) *Ischia*. Petrus Regout Maastricht 1881

Over the years, correspondence with museums in Amsterdam and Karlsruhe also revealed a flourishing export trade in the Dale Hall Pottery's *Etruscan Vases* pattern, to which can now be added a large number of examples offered on eBay in America, which, as original exports, were often marked 'England' some years before the protectionist McKinley Tariff Act of 1891 made it compulsory to declare the country of origin. Perhaps inevitably, the pattern was also reproduced by at least three potteries on the Continent, details of which were included in booklets kindly supplied to the library of the V&A Ceramics Department. In Holland, Petrus Regout at Maastricht produced his *Ischia* pattern (4), noted in their pattern book as by an English engraver and clearly taken directly from an original Dale Hall engraved plate, though married to a very late 19C border with three

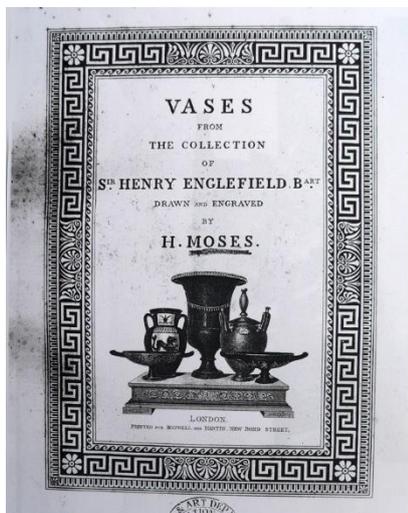
cartouches showing vases in a romantic landscape above Neo-Classical swags and husks (5)<sup>4</sup>. The German factory Witteburg, near Bremen, also used an identical Dale Hall copper plate for their version, shown in their pattern book complete with guilloche and dentillated borders and dated 1894 – that is, six years after the pattern had ceased to be made at the Dale Hall Pottery<sup>5</sup>. Lastly, the Swedish pottery at Rörstrand made their own version titled *Etruriske Vaser* in the period 1858-80, with a solid coloured or key border surrounding accurately-drawn but variously grouped Greek vases on a shelf supported by a scroll<sup>6</sup>.

The original source of all these *Etruscan Vases* patterns remained elusive until, as occasionally happens in the world of research, the answer suddenly came looking for the question. When in



(5) *Ischia*. Petrus Regout Maastricht c1880

1977 Roy Strong closed the Circulation Department – one of the earliest departments at South Kensington Museum, charged with circulating pre-assembled exhibitions to provincial libraries and museums – its collections, notably in our case almost all of the V&A holdings of studio pottery, were transferred to the relevant Departments. Its library was also divided up, with duplicates and books of no interest gathering dust for some years, until eventually it was decided



(6) *Vases from the Collection of Sir Henry Englefield Bt.* Title page



(7) *Vases from the Collection of Sir Henry Englefield Bt.* Plate 36

to offer them around the staff. My share consisted of a magnificent book on Folk Art and a well-used volume *Vases from the Collection of Sir Henry Englefield Bt, drawn and engraved by H. Moses*, printed in London and generally dated as 1819 or 1820 (6). Besides copious stamps for the Science & Art Department and the National Art Library, pasted inside this serious and evidently influential book was a circulation ticket recording its travel, as late as 1896–1902, between the Art Schools at Dover, Liscard, Dundee, Oldham and Redhill. The vases themselves



(8) *Vases from the Collection of Sir Henry Englefield Bt.* Plate 35

were engraved with an almost mechanical precision which provided a strong image but gave scant regard to the spirit of the original, while the subjects of these painted vases in their *tableaux* were viewed not as art objects but discussed in a didactic way as historical scenes in need of correct interpretation in the context of Greek life and mythology. Such pedantic treatment, however, could all be forgiven after the discovery, at the back of the book, of two *tableaux* on scroll bases (7, 8) which were surely the original inspiration for *Etruscan Vases*.

#### Notes and References

1. Compare the clustered Oriental vases on shelves supported by corbels shown in the 1816 watercolour by John Buckler of the drawing room at Bromley Hill, illustrated by Davis, Diana Selling Porcelain, Shaping Taste: Ceramic dealers in Britain 1785–1885 *French Porcelain Society Living Room Lecture* 18 July 2020
  2. Dale Hall Pottery letter heading dated 7 April 7 1851 (Wedgwood MS 36–27842) reproduced by Edwards, Diana *Black Basalt: Wedgwood and contemporary manufacturers* 1994 p18
  3. See *Scottish Pottery Historical Review* no13
  4. See Bogaers, R *Drukdecors op Maastrichts aardewerke 1850-1910* 1992
  5. See Gnettner, Horst *Steingutfabrik Witteburg in Farge bei Bremen* nd
  6. See Lagercrantz, Bo *Iris, Vineta och Gröna Anna. Rörstrandsserviser 1850–85* ICA bokförlag Västerås nd
- The Ceramics department library at the V&A hold copies of the publications cited under references 4–6.