

The Four Lives of William Littler (1724–84): A brief reassessment, by Robin Hildyard

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William Littler's three well-documented porcelain-making ventures – Longton Hall (1750–60), West Pans (1764–77), Baddeley–Littler factory at Shelton (1777–84) – have tended to overshadow his beginnings in the tightly knit community of Staffordshire salt-glazed stoneware potters¹. He was born in 1724, his father died when he was five and he finished his seven-year apprenticeship and took control of the pottery in 1745. Now a free man, and for reasons examined below, he immediately mortgaged the property and in 1748 forfeited it to Thomas Fletcher, leasing it back until 1750. By 1749 he had moved to Hanley Green as 'earth potter', before joining the embryonic Longton Hall porcelain factory in 1751.

Littler's early claim to fame rests upon the famous 'Littler's blue', a misleading term coined by ceramic historians in the early 20C but later given the more correct name 'Littler-Wedgwood blue' by Arnold Mountford. Much was made of this legendary blue coating by the 19C Staffordshire historians Pitt and Shaw². Pitt stated that: 'Aaron Wedgwood ... having married Littlor's [sic] sister, they united their experience, and made repeated attempts to improve the salt glaze. The result ... was the addition of ingredients of easy fusibility with certain proportions of ground zaffre and the flint and clay, of which the



(1) 'Littler-Wedgwood blue' stonewares c1750–65

body was composed. In this compound, when in liquid state, the ware was dipped ... when exposed to the fire in the usual method of glazing with salt, [it] produced a fine smooth glossy surface'. Shaw agreed with this account, saying that, 'Aaron Wedgwood soon joined with him and endeavoured to effect some improvement in the salt glaze ... and repeated endeavours of these persons was attended with success wholly without precedent ... Messrs Littler and Wedgwood first introduced a compound of very fusible materials — of certain proportions of ground zaffre with the flint and the clay that composed the body of the pottery ... Into this liquid the vessels were dipped ... when dried and fired in the

salt glaze oven, appeared of a fine glossy surface...'. Despite the unreliability of some of Shaw's history, this method of dipping the leather-hard stoneware before its single salt-glaze firing has since been proved entirely feasible after experiments conducted by the British Ceramic Research Association at the request of Arnold Mountford. The deep even blue coating, brilliantly glossy and free from the 'orange-peel' surface of salt-glazed wares, does indeed represent a technical and aesthetic *tour de force*, the overall effect of which is emphasised rather than lessened on angular moulded stonewares by the crawl-back that lightens the edges and defines the shape (1).

As for the date of this collaboration between Littler and his brother-in-law Aaron Wedgwood – representing perhaps little more than day-to-day experiments running in parallel with the normal working cycle of a thriving stoneware factory – ceramic historians have divided themselves between the two sparsely documented periods of Littler's career: 1745–50 when he was operating his father's pottery at Brownhills, and 1760–64 after the closure of Longton Hall and the loss of his own pottery, but before he had moved to West Pans. The historian Pitt implies that the invention was before the Longton Hall venture: 'About this time, an improvement was made in the salt glaze by the united efforts of William Littlor [sic] and Aaron Wedgwood ... about the year 1750 he left Burslem, and commenced a Porcelain manufactory at Longton, near Stoke.' Some recent writers have supported the later date 1760–64, although Edwards & Hampson carefully consider the matter and agree with Mountford that the development must have taken place by 1749, when Jonah Malkin was supplied with 'Japand flowred new Coller from Aaron Wedgwd' (the term *Japanning* indicating solid colour, most easily achieved by dipping). Whatever the ambiguities of this reference, it must be said that the technique of mixing raw cobalt with other clay ingredients to make it manageable for decorating purposes was already known by 1742, as shown by the earliest dated piece of scratch-blue stoneware³. Certainly it was common knowledge by 1754 when the industrial spy Angerstein, referring to salt-glazed stoneware, noted 'the blue colour, or enamel, that, as I was told, is mixed with clay'⁴.

Thereafter, apart from Littler's own five blue stoneware wasters excavated at Longton Hall, it was the name of Aaron Wedgwood (1717–82), Littler's brother-in-law and nephew of the major stoneware potters



(2) 'Littler-Wedgwood blue' stoneware
c1750–65

John and Thomas Wedgwood of the Big House, Burslem, that was noted as the maker of blue-dipped stonewares. They were offered for sale in London in 1753⁵ at twelve shillings per dozen, a huge price, which may indicate that they were decorated with white enamel (2) or with the unfired oil-gilding that has so rarely survived the passage of time. Aaron Wedgwood supplied 'Gilded blue' in 1759, his uncles John and Thomas bought 'Blue Ware Aaron's' in 1760 on behalf of a Newcastle-upon-Tyne customer William Hilcoat (whose kinsman Anthony Hilcoat operated a pottery at West Pans, providing a tenuous link between the circle of potters in Staffordshire and Musselburgh), and various 'Blew flower'd' articles 1760–1763. Blue-coated wasters c1760–65 were excavated on the site of Thomas Whieldon's pottery, and another rival maker Anthony Keeling supplied various sizes of 'Blue teapots' to Josiah Wedgwood in 1765, this perhaps representing the tail end of the fashion. With a Staffordshire potter's success or failure always hanging in the

balance, by 1767–78 Aaron Wedgwood found himself forced into debt by defaulting creditors, dying four years later.

Until the excavation in 1969–71 of the Pomona porcelain factory, which had a few experimental firings in the latter half of the 1740s⁶, and the discovery of another more shadowy experimental factory at Fenton, the Longton Hall factory was considered the earliest to produce porcelain in Staffordshire. Traditionally, the story was thought to have begun on 7 October 1751, when William Jenkinson, a 'gentleman' and inventor with interests in the mining industry, who had leased the Longton Hall premises from Obadiah Lane at £25 per annum in 1749 or 1750 (the relevant deed is missing), took into a fourteen-year partnership William Nicklin, a lawyer from Newcastle-under-Lyme, and William Littler, who was to act as factory manager, bringing with him not only experience of high temperature firing using coal but also a lifelong preference for the shapes and forms of his native Staffordshire earthenware and stoneware. The company's capital was divided into twelve shares: five each for the two investors and two for Littler as manager. By this time Jenkinson was credited with having 'Obtained the Art Secret or Mystery of making a Certain porcelain Ware in Imitation of China Ware And was then carrying a work for making the Same...' and needed 'Co-Partners and Joint Dealers in Making, burning and Selling the said porcelain Ware and All Other Sorts of wares ... and in the painting Japanning Gilding and Enamelling thereof'.

Recent discoveries, however, by Miranda Goodby⁷ among the papers held by the old-established Burslem solicitors, Ellis Moxon, have led to a significant reassessment of Littler's early career and the circumstances surrounding his involvement with Jenkinson and Nicklin. These legal documents show that when William Littler Snr married Sarah Shaw in 1718, his kinsman John Cartlich built a pottery for him at Brownhills, which, after suitable provision for his daughters, was bequeathed to his eldest son. William Littler Snr died in 1729 leaving a son William born in 1724 and three daughters, one of whom, Sarah, married Aaron Wedgwood in 1738. The mother Sarah remarried in 1738 but died the following year, and it may be assumed that in due course William Littler Jnr finished his apprenticeship and took possession of the family pottery in 1745, by which time he was married to Jane.

The Ellis Moxon documents then show that Littler, despite having his own pottery with excellent prospects, immediately began in 1745 to raise money by mortgaging his estate to persons that turned out to be the future founding partners of the Longton Hall porcelain factory: William Jenkinson (now shown to be a lawyer, of Furnivalls Inn Court, Middlesex, gentleman), William Nicklin (also a lawyer, of Newcastle-under-Lyme, gentleman), together with William Hulme (of Talk of the Hill, Staffordshire, gentleman). According to Miranda Goodby, the simple explanation was that he sought out Jenkinson, an experienced lawyer from London, in order to break the Trust on his estate so that he could raise mortgages. Having done that, he was able to borrow from wealthy local grocer John Burrows in 1746, and yet more from another grocer R Mountford in 1747, by which time he had raised the large sums of £350 and £250. In 1748 two of his creditors, Samuel Boyer and Thomas Fletcher, foreclosed and forced him to surrender his potteries – one at Brownhills and another recently acquired at Burslem – and to take a two-year lease on the family pottery at Brownhills. Thereafter, in 1750 he moved to Hanley Green and, as far as we know, formally joined the Longton Hall partnership as manager in 1751.

Faced with the obvious question as to why Littler needed huge sums of money, the answer must be in order to fund some kind of research that required capital investment but provided no income: that is, perhaps, the making of porcelain. Here Miranda Goodby relies heavily on Pitt and Shaw, where Pitt states that, 'about the year 1750 he left Burslem, and commenced a Porcelain manufactory at Longton, near Stoke ... Littlor [sic] sustained some heavy losses, and sold his estate at Brownhills...', and Shaw (if we ignore the obviously incorrect date 1765) says that the similarity of thin stoneware to foreign porcelain 'excited the ingenuity of Mr William Littler, of Brownhills, (about 1765) to attempt the manufacture of porcelain; and he removed to Longton Hall, near Lane End ... where he *continued* his experiments, until his success surpassed all the expectations of his contemporaries: but there being not much demand for this kind of ware, he sacrificed his estate at Brownhills, near Burslem, and then discontinued manufacturing porcelain'. Both these accounts infer that Littler was experimenting with making porcelain before he joined Longton Hall in 1751, and both agree that his involvement with porcelain was directly responsible for the loss of his Brownhills pottery in 1748. Indeed the evidence, though circumstantial, is convincing, and it would explain why Littler gambled away everything he owned, only to come to Longton Hall as a working partner, bankrupt and without capital to invest, not even credited with the valuable secret of porcelain-making, for which presumably he was hired.

Lest there be any doubt about Miranda Goodby's conclusions, an overlooked account⁸ in John Ward's *History of the Borough of Stoke-on-Trent* (1843) is unequivocal: 'Mr Wm Littler, of Brownhills, near Burslem, whose father had carried on business there as a potter, and left to his son a small landed estate, embarked in some expensive attempts to produce an article resembling Oriental china. He commenced business about the year 1745, when he attained his majority, and in a few years afterwards removed the seat of his manufacture to Longton Hall, where he prosecuted his experiments with very good success, as regards the beauty and delicacy of his china, but with disastrous results to himself, for he soon sacrificed his patrimony in the speculation, and was obliged to abandon it. The specimens we have seen of Mr Littler's china exhibit great lightness and beauty, and would certainly have won their way in after times'.

The basic history of the Longton Hall factory and many of its products had long been known when Bernard Watney took up the cause⁹. Working without dated examples but using the partnership agreements as a measure of the factory's financial viability, matching them where possible with the hiring of skilled painters and with the wide variations and improvements in technique, style and quality, Watney laid down a succession of three phases in the factory's life that – despite the re-attribution of about a third of his 1957 illustrations to Vauxhall, West Pans and elsewhere – are still broadly accepted:

First Period 1749–53 (then Transitional)

Middle Period 1754–October 1757

Late Period 1757–60



(3) Longton Hall c1750 H15cm

Study and excavation¹⁰ have shown that the First Period products made under William Jenkinson, and after 1751 with funding from Nicklin and expertise from Littler as manager, were mainly the distinctive white figures. Heavily press-moulded and covered with a thick glassy glaze, these have aptly been called the Snowman Group¹¹. Over thirty different models are known, copied from Meissen of the 1740s, Chinese Dehua of around 1700, some of which had also been copied in white salt-glaze (3), and even contemporary Chelsea originals: many of these early figures have characteristic rosettes attached to the base like the figure of Ceres and Cupid symbolising Summer (4). In confirmation of an early date for the group, a single figure of a pug (formerly Rous Lench collection) is incised 1750 on the base, and there is also



(4) Longton Hall c1750–52 H11cm

RR Angerstein's recently published travel diary where he records in 1754 that Longton Hall 'has not progressed further than to the making of figures after patterns from Saxony, which have not been equalled, either in respect of body, modelling or painting. Nevertheless, they

were afraid of showing what they were doing, as if they were the foremost porcelain factory in existence...'



(5) Longton Hall 1752–54 *Two Quail* pattern

It does seem that initially the factory was aiming at ornamental rather than functional wares, as advertised in 1752: 'A Large Quantity, and great Variety, of very good and fine ornamental Porcelain or China Ware, in the most fashionable and genteel taste'¹². Early teawares displayed enamelling in soft colours combined with shapes borrowed from Meissen (5). As regards the paste, unlike at other early factories such as Chelsea, apart from subtle changes in translucency, the basic formula seems to have differed little throughout the factory's existence. The frit porcelain body contained lead and glass (large quantities of broken glass or *cullet*

were bought by the factory in 1755), and proved easily mouldable but difficult to throw or turn, and with a narrow maturing temperature range that could cause massive kiln losses. Watney states that 'snowman' figures were high in lead and gypsum, after which the paste was rendered more plastic by replacing the gypsum with lime, and adding small quantities of bone-ash, reducing the lead and adding more ground flint – technology well within the grasp of any enterprising Staffordshire stoneware potter. Some months after the Second Longton Hall Agreement of 25 August 1753, whereby Jenkinson sold his shares and left the company, to



(6) Longton hall sugar bowl 1755-60

be replaced by Nathaniel

Firmin and his son Samuel, button-makers from London, the factory entered what Watney designated its most successful Middle Period. But more importantly, with the Third Agreement of 1 December 1755 came a major new investor, the Rev Robert Charlesworth, whose contribution at this time probably saved the company and, in the opinion of the authority Nick Brankin-Frisby, heralded Longton Hall's golden age, the peak of achievement in terms of output, commercial viability and artistic merit. Certainly, from this time variety increased while technical ability improved, aided no doubt by the hiring in 1754 of the London decorator William Duesbury, who had had previous dealings with 'Littler & Co' supplying metal 'branches' for candelabra and enamelling figures. Also, by the terms of the 1755 Agreement, the painter John Hayfield – plausibly identified by Watney as the prolific 'Castle Painter', whose distinctive style is to be found on much locally made enamelled stoneware – was employed, together with Littler's wife Jane, both to be paid one guinea per week. By this time, the glaze was thinner, the gilding was properly fired and burnished, but the characteristic traits of a scum-line around the bottom of



(7) Longton Hall c1755–60 H43cm

the glaze, and radiating knife-edge stilt marks, continued as before.

Products now included wares moulded with strawberries and lettuce leaves with parallels in Staffordshire earthenware and stoneware, open-work leaf stands, and vegetable forms such as melons (6) and cos-lettuce sauceboats, both enamelled with a distinctive yellow-green. Wild Rococo vases encrusted with applied flowers, some on a magnificent scale (7), were inspired by Meissen and were well suited to the fragile appearance of Littler's frit-porcelain. The *famille rose*



(8) Longton Hall

style with blobby enamels was successfully reproduced (8), contrasting with delicate patterns of exotic Ho Ho birds in muted colours (9) and the sensitive flower painting known as *Trembly Rose* (10). Bold architectural vignettes and panoramas in puce with yellow and green highlights by the Castle Painter or his assistants were even strangely combined with cabbage forms (11). An increasing emphasis on



(9) Longton Hall 1755–57



(10) Longton Hall 1755–60



(11) Longton Hall 1755–58

utilitarian porcelain after about 1755 included coffee, tea and chocolate cups and saucers: over forty blue and white patterns¹³ are known, inspired by Chinese Export porcelain and painted with a freedom reminiscent of contemporary delftwares. Popular patterns included the *Zigzag Fence* (12) and *Windswept*



(12) Longton Hall 1755–60



(13) Longton Hall 1755–60



(14) Longton Hall 1755–60

Islands (13) patterns much like those at Worcester, and a particular type of pyramidal obelisk peculiar to Longton Hall (14). As for the delightful figures of this period, now with a thinner glaze, crisper modelling and delicate enamel decoration as typified by Columbine and Harlequin from the *Commedia dell'arte* (15), they, at their best, might stand comparison with the German and English models from which they were copied.



(15) Longton Hall 1755-60

There were, however, continuing problems at the factory. In October 1756 a cash-flow crisis was averted by an appeal to Charlesworth for further funding, known as the First Supplemental Agreement, after which a major sale was arranged in London in April 1757, a further sale direct from the factory was advertised in June of that year, followed by the Second Supplemental Agreement of October, which signalled Watney's Late Period and, despite all Littler's efforts, the inexorable decline of the factory. Another major sale took place in June 1758, when it was claimed that, 'The LONGTON porcelain is vastly improved, and is now allow'd by all Judges, to be the best made in England', followed in September by the opening of the Longton Hall China Warehouse in St Paul's Churchyard. As this desperate venture brought the provincial Longton Hall into the heart of the London china



(16) Longton Hall c1757–60 D33cm

trade, in direct competition with Chelsea, Bow and Vauxhall, it is not surprising that the warehouse lasted a mere nine months, despite offering 'great variety of fine china both useful and ornamental, both blue and white, and finely enamelled, viz Cups and Saucers, Coffee Cups, Cream Jugs, Tea Pots, Bowls, Basons, Mugs, Decanters, Sauce Boats, compleat Tea and Coffee Sets, Chocolate Cups and saucers ribbed, fluted, panelled and plain, with fine enamelled China Dishes and Plates, oval and round Leaf and fancy Patterns, curious Perfume Pots, Vauses, Figures and Flowers etc'. Increasingly the factory simplified its domestic wares (16), while at the same time improving and enlarging its figures, typified by the Four Continents: it is noteworthy that after the factory's demise at least one modeller moved to Derby, whence of course Duesbury had emigrated in 1756.

A last attempt at having blanks printed by Sadler & Green at Liverpool must have occurred either in the final year 1759, or even shortly after the partnership was dissolved and the factory officially closed – against Littler's wishes – by the major shareholder, Robert Charlesworth, in June 1760. Print subjects included heroes of the Seven Years War (1757–63) such as William Pitt, Britain's ally Frederick of Prussia, who was effectively fighting a proxy war against the French in Europe, and General Wolfe, the hero of Louisbourg and Quebec in 1759 (17). Enough time had elapsed since the battle of Culloden in 1746 to legitimise a mug printed with a portrait of Prince Charles Edward Stuart, after Philippe Mercier, with the Jacobite motto 'AB OBICE MAJOR', meaning 'greater because of the opposition'.



(17) Longton Hall 1759–60 H9cm

Thereafter, for reasons unclear, Charlesworth chose Salisbury as the venue for the final sale, to be conducted by an exchange-broker from London, Samuel Clarke, and consisting of the 'large and valuable stock of the Longton Porcelaine China Factory ... containing upwards of ninety thousand pieces of the greatest variety of Dresden Patterns in rich enamel'd, pencil'd, Blues and Gold; as Figures and Flowers, mounted in Chandeliers, Essence Jars, Beakers, Vases and Perfume Pots, magnificent Dessert Services, sets of Bowls, Mugs, Dishes and Plates, ornamental with Columbines and Central Groups, Tea Coffee and Toilet Equipages, of elegant patterns superbly finished, equal to a national Factory, so eminently distinguish'd with a profusion of useful and ornamental articles'¹⁴. It is remarkable that no catalogue of this important sale has survived, but presumably all the porcelains seized by Charlesworth were finished articles and were quickly dispersed, leaving behind at the factory any biscuit-fired wares that

could have been rescued by Littler for his future use. The final sale did not satisfy the creditors, who pursued the ruined Nicklin, by this time living at Longton Hall, and had him imprisoned for debt in Stafford gaol. After his release in 1762, he disappeared from history.

Littler, however, was a tenacious survivor. We next hear of him and his wife Jane appearing in Scotland in 1764, having founded a porcelain factory at West Pans near Musselburgh, the existence of which was first published by Arthur Lane in 1961¹⁵, when it was assumed that the 'factory' was established purely for glazing and enamelling redundant stock rescued from Longton Hall. The choice of West Pans (so-called because of its main role as producer of salt) may be partly explained by its advantageous position, with abundant local coal and fireclay as well as its own harbour, Morrison's Haven. Forbes & Haggarty have suggested that Thomas Shelley, a potter at West Pans and dealer in Staffordshire earthenware, might have alerted Littler to the vacant pottery built by James Thomson in 1750, which Littler rented first from James Gray, and after 1766 from its new owner David Dalrymple, Lord Hailes. Another possible link between the potting communities of West Pans and Staffordshire is through Anthony Hilcoat, a potter married to the daughter of a major landowner at West Pans but kinsman to the Newcastle-upon-Tyne potter and dealer William Hilcoat, who in 1760 had been supplied by John and Thomas Wedgwood with 'Blue Ware Aaron's'. Laurie's *Plan of Edinburgh and Places Adjacent* of 1766

shows Littler's pottery having two kilns, the minimum requirement of a biscuit and glost oven with smaller enamel 'muffle' kilns inside the factory.

Littler himself was made an Honorary Burgess of Musselburgh on 30 October 1764, along with another Staffordshire man, William Dallaway 'Painter at West Pans'; but as early as 1761 two other Staffordshire men, Edward Ackers, china painter, and the potter and evidently entrepreneurial dealer Thomas Shelley, had been admitted to the Musselburgh Freemasons' Lodge. Whether these men had been recruited by Littler to convert his earthenware pottery into a porcelain factory, two or three years before he himself arrived, is a matter for speculation; but certainly production was already well under way by April 1764 when Thomas Shelley advertised 'ORNAMENTAL and USEFUL CHINA and enamelled creamcolour, as is now made at the West Pans...'¹⁶. By February 1765 Littler was selling at the highly prestigious venue of Holyrood Palace 'fine mazarine blue jars and beakers, neatly enamelled and gilded, great variety of figures, candlesticks, flowers mounted in flower pots ... beautiful leaves richly enameled ... tea pots, cups and sawcers, milk jugs, sugar cups, and coffee cans; quart jugs and mugs, potting pots, and sundry sorts of sauce boats'¹⁷. A further six-day sale was recorded at Aberdeen in July 1766, and later that year he announced¹⁸ that, 'William Littler China-maker at West Pans, near Musselburgh, opens his warehouse, on Thursday, the 27th day of November, 1766, at a convenient room, with an easy entrance from the street, at the foot of Canongate, within the Abbey Strand, Edinburgh', where were sold all kinds of useful ware decorated with fine mazarine blue and gold or neatly enameled, as well as 'good blue and white cups and saucers as any made in Britain, at three shillings and sixpence per set'. A further twelve-day sale at Aberdeen was held in October 1767.

The paste at West Pans was Littler's familiar frit porcelain body, with poor translucency and a heavy glutinous glaze that usually needed to be ground flat at the base. From the beginning he concentrated on making mazarine and gold, for which he could take advantage of cobalt that, as George Haggarty has concluded from a letter written by Littler, probably came from Lord Alva's silver mines at Dollar in Clackmannanshire. As for technique, the solid areas of cobalt decoration could be applied in liquid form by brush, or by pouring or dipping (the method that defines so-called Littler-Wedgwood blue), or 'powder blue' using the Chinese technique that involves sprinkling or blowing the dry powdered cobalt around masked reserve areas that would remain white for subsequent enamel decoration. To judge by appearances, most of the streaky blue at West Pans, distinctive perhaps because it was the locally sourced cobalt, was probably applied by brush. The fluxing tendency of cobalt makes it difficult to avoid ragged edges surrounding the white reserve areas, but these were always intended to be neatly hidden behind the gilt borders that so often have now been lost.



(18) West Pans c1765–70 H25cm

A billhead of 1766 from Blair Atholl also mentions 'all kinds of Stone Ware such as fine Gilded and Japannd Black and Tortoise Shell Ware', and by offering in 1767 'Crest of Arms put on china, either in mazarine and gilt or enamel colours, whose beauty and colour never fades'¹⁹, Littler was aiming to supply the local, possibly less discriminating, Scottish aristocracy with armorial porcelain considerably cheaper, and more readily available, than the Chinese Export ordered through the East India Company in London that took twelve months to arrive. These customers included: the Duke of Atholl; John Manners 3rd Duke of Rutland, for whom a tea service with moulded lily pattern (marked with crossed Ls, or perhaps J and L for Jane Littler) was made²⁰; Lord Hailes; the Duchess of Buccleuch, for whom a mixed porcelain and earthenware 'mazarine blue and gold' dessert service of dipped 'Littler-Wedgwood blue' was made for Dalkeith House (18); the Duke of Gordon, the Earl of Hyndford and John, 11th Baron Gray, whose G under coronet adorns a delicately

painted jug (19). Popular products continued the Longton Hall tradition, such as wares moulded with strawberry (20) and lettuce leaves, leaf-shaped sauce boats, mugs, six-lobed tea and coffee wares, sometimes with a Kakiemon pattern using a faded salmon-pink ground (21), and blue and white and enamelled teawares, often with a characteristic bright orange enamel copying the Imari style. Excavated



(19) West Pans 1764–70 H23cm



(20) West Pans 1764–70 D21cm



(21) West Pans 1764–77 D14cm

fragments, many with traces of cobalt blue decoration, include bowls, bottles, chamber candlesticks, figures, knife handles, tea bowls and saucers, cups, mugs, teapots, dishes and plates.

By 1773 the factory was in serious financial difficulties, partly brought on by the failing health of Littler, who petitioned for the business to be wound up. Despite the creditors' meeting the following year, when also his last surviving child died, Littler managed to carry on, announcing a new line in purple and sky-coloured porcelain – emulating, perhaps, the *bleu céleste* of Sèvres – with an appeal for a partner. Despite the copious documentation that has been unearthed in Scotland, little more is known about the factory's history until another desperate and fruitless appeal for a partner in June 1777 heralded the final closure and Littler's return to Staffordshire. Considering the factory's thirteen years of production, surprisingly few examples of West Pans porcelain have survived, and their variable quality has earned them some harsh judgements by ceramic historians.



(22) Baddeley-Littler c1780

The complicated story of Littler's last venture has been pieced together by Geoffrey Godden and given the name Baddeley-Littler²¹. The key documentary piece is a tea caddy in the Potteries Museum (22), soft-paste and enamelled in polychrome in the manner of Chinese Export, which came originally from Enoch Wood's Museum and still bore his fragmentary label (23) stating that, 'William Littler ... once more tried to make china but did not succeed better. This was before Cornish Clay and Stone was used ... EW'. This does imply a date for Littler's venture before 1781 when New Hall started to produce hard paste, but another related document, quoted by Jewitt (1878) but now lost, claimed that the caddy was 'given to E Wood by William Fletcher in January 1809. He informs me he remembers it being made by Mr Littler at Longton near Stoke, about 55 years ago – say in the year 1754'. Unfortunately the garbled message and obvious disparity in dates merely served to discredit any possible connection with Littler, so that initially the group of porcelains that formed the so-called 'Caddy Class' were dismissed as products of Thomas Wolfe & Co of Liverpool in the 1790s.

However, when excavations on Wolfe's factory site produced no matching material, the group's attribution once more swung towards Staffordshire²². At this point, Geoffrey Godden, who assembled a large personal collection, finally made the leap to solve the riddle by realising that the label on the caddy must have been written in the 1820s rather than in 1809, referring therefore to Littler's activities during the 1770s. In support of this, Godden also discovered that in one of the factory's versions of the ubiquitous printed *Tea Party*, the lady's hairstyle had been raised to conform

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(23) label on base of (22)

with fashions prevalent in the period 1775–85. This new dating now gave credence to Simeon Shaw's disputed claim that, 'Mr Littler ... was manager of a porcelain manufactory in Shelton for Messrs Baddeley & Fletcher...', introducing into the equation the important Baddeley potting family, which happily had been comprehensively researched by John Mallet²³. Further confirmation of Baddeley's manufacture of porcelain came with the discovery that in 1786 Josiah Wedgwood represented 'the proprietors of Mr Champion's Patent and also in the names of Messrs Baddeley Booth and Company, China Manufacturers...'²⁴

As for John Baddeley, after a brief partnership with William Reid in a porcelain-making venture 1759–61 (as confirmed by several London dealers buying 'China' from Baddeley during this period), he had entered into a highly successful partnership with Thomas Fletcher²⁵ until his death in 1771, when he was succeeded by his son Ralph Baddeley, who carried on until the fourteen-year partnership with Fletcher ended in 1775. Thereafter he worked alone until, as now seems irrefutable, he hired William Littler as



(24) Baddeley-Littler c1777–85 W11cm

manager soon after his return to Staffordshire from West Pans in 1777, adding porcelain to the factory's staple output of earthenware and stoneware. Littler then carried on until his death at Shelton in 1784, shortly after which porcelain production at the factory is presumed to have ended.

Unsurprisingly, the proportions of silica, lime and lead oxide in the Baddeley-Littler paste almost exactly matched Longton Hall, and diagnostic features include poor glazing, the familiar scum-line, misshapen bodies, and discolouration, combined with a greenish-white translucency. No gilding was used, shapes were limited and enamel painting in harsh colours copied

contemporary Chinese Export wares, with diaper and feather borders (24), floral designs and Chinese figures not unlike New Hall and Lowestoft. Underglaze blue printing was rare and tended to bleed into the glaze, while the few overglaze prints (25) were ill-defined versions of popular prints such as the Tea Party. These may possibly have been reworked by a certain William Smith, engraver from Liverpool, said by Shaw to have been employed by Ralph Baddeley.

It says much for Littler's perseverance that for some thirty-three years he was able to manufacture and sell a type of frit porcelain, which has been likened to Chelsea of the incised triangle period, and which was not only expensive to make but also better suited to ornamental rather than functional wares. Longton Hall at its best aspired to be the equal of the better-funded London porcelain factories, West Pans never quite lived up to its expectations as the only Scottish porcelain factory, and the timing of the Baddeley-Littler period was a mere four years before the founding of New Hall in 1781. Here the mass production of thinly potted, mechanically perfect hard-paste tablewares must have made Littler's glassy tactile porcelain even more outmoded. Nevertheless, we might well concede that William Littler's considerable talent as a dedicated pioneer in the tortuous world of 18C British porcelain manufacture was greater than the sum of his four near-miss ventures.



(25) Baddeley-Littler c1777–85

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3. In a letter to Bernard Rackham of 20 October 1923, Gordon Forsyth (formerly art director at Pilkington's Royal Lancastrian pottery but from 1920 acting chief curator of the Public Museums and Art Galleries of Stoke-on-Trent) said, 'I have been making some experiments on the lines of the old "scratch-blue" ware, and it may interest you to know that the blue that is rubbed into the incisions is a powdered blue slip and not the pure cobalt. It is quite impossible to dust in pure cobalt without seriously staining the places that are not incised' (Literary Material No41 V&A Ceramics Dept). A white salt-glazed barber's bowl at Williamsburg has an incised name on the rim painted over with blue slip but, by accident, not scraped off to reveal the inscription before firing.
4. Angerstein, RR *Angerstein's Travel Diary 1752–1755 Industry in England and Wales from a Swedish Perspective* published by the Science Museum 2001
5. *Daily Advertiser* 30 August 1753 'To be sold under prime cost. The stock of a person leaving off business next door to the Blue Ball & Stag, in King Street, Bloomsbury, consisting of all sorts of Glass, Earthenware, Haberdashery & Grocery. Staffordshire White Ware at 1/6 per dozen. Ditto Black Ware at 2/- per doz. Red China at 5/- per doz. Tortoiseshell at 6/- per doz. Blue at 12/- per doz.'
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12. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* 27 July 1752
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16. *Edinburgh Advertiser* 3 April 1764
17. *Caledonian Mercury* 4 February 1765. Bimson, Ainslie and Watney (1966) suggest that this was facilitated by a wealthy patron.
18. *Caledonian Mercury* 22 November 1766
19. *Caledonian Mercury* 30 September 1767
20. At least two battered cups and saucers with blue ground survive, lacking their gilding, in a private collection and the V&A Museum C.41 & A–1959
21. Godden, GA (ed) *Staffordshire Porcelain* 1983 chapter 5; Godden, GA *Eighteenth Century English Porcelains* 1985
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24. Wedgwood's evidence to the Committee dealing with the proposed trade treaty with France in 1786, quoted by Murray (note 22, above).
25. This was the same Thomas Fletcher to whom Littler had forfeited his pottery in 1748. He married an heiress, and later his son Thomas was knighted and became High Sheriff for Staffordshire.