



## Showcasing Exceptional British Art Pottery

From the Arts and Crafts, Art Nouveau and Art Deco Movements

### News

#### Another First From AD antiques

If a first newsletter in over 20 years wasn't enough, then we are pleased to announce that, for the first time in our history, we are launching our gift vouchers... just in time for Christmas. Do you have a friend or family member who is tricky to buy for but loves British Art Pottery? This may be perfect for you! (And of course there are hints that can be dropped to your nearest and dearest too) These come in denominations of £20 and £50 and can be posted to you or directly to the lucky recipient.



## A spotlight on...

### Sgraffito decoration

Ceramics have been used for thousands of years as functional vessels but almost as soon as the practicalities of clay were discovered so the evolution of decoration and design began. Over the years with the invention of skilled crafts people, many decorative and firing techniques have been developed which have created a beautiful and versatile medium.

There are many different genres of decoration, ranging from sgraffito, tubelining, decoupage, hand painting to transfer printing and there are a number of principle glaze processes such as raku, flambe, salt glazing and transmutation firing. Each newsletter I will focus on a particular style and look to how the Decorative Arts Movement employed these so successfully in their production.



## Sgraffito decoration

Sgraffito decoration is one of the oldest forms of ceramic decoration. It is achieved by scratching or carving decoration into the clay when in its "leather" stage. The leather stage is after the natural drying process prior to firing. The clay is sufficiently malleable to tool decoration onto the clay but suitably stable to hold its form. Striking effects can be achieved when the clay has had several glazes where the sgraffito cuts through the top glaze to reveal the initial slip glaze.

Numerous Art pottery studios used this technique very successfully. Artists such as Hannah Barlow, who became one of the principle artists for [Doulton Lambeth](#), employed great dexterity in this style, creating animal scenes ranging from domestic creatures (from her sizeable farm) to more exotic examples featuring giraffes and lions. She suffered the misfortune of having paralysis of her right hand - likely the result of over-exposure to wet clay - but undeterred she developed considerable skills after transferring to her left hand.

Other Studios also used the technique superbly. The [Martin Brothers](#) were supremely skilled in this style and employed it extensively from the early formal fauna and flora representations to the grotesque fish and bird designs where these animals were represented in an anthropomorphic, comic fashion.

Another studio who used sgraffito decoration as their principle method of decoration was the Della Robbia Factory. Based in Birkenhead the philanthropic owners, the Rathbones, were leading advocates of the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement. To this end they employed a paraplegic, John Cecil Shirley to work in the Studio. Shirley (as he signed his work) was a very able painter and also was a sgraffito artist using his two "stumps" to grip the tool. He was described as "an accomplished worker with a good supply of self-confidence and assurance"

## The modern tradition of sgraffito decoration

The sgraffito tradition is still celebrated by contemporary ceramicists. Heidi Warr is accomplished in a number of techniques and uses sgraffito decoration to produce stunning designs, several forming optical illusions in clay. Her "Cafe Wall" design is created using horizontal and vertical lines of sgraffito but the mastery of the the contrast of the light and shade and the precision of the tool work has created a design that challenges the visual sense. Heidi's work can be seen on her website, [Heidi Warr](#).

