

What of the artists whom the Bramelds employed?

The journeyman element was always a feature of this period, although there is ample evidence to show that in certain works a family tradition obtained—men who trained sons and nephews. Apprenticeship to the “art of painting upon china and porcelain ware” was a common condition, the binding period one of seven years. In some cases boys began working at the age of eleven, taking up apprenticeship later.

Painters passed from one pottery to another, particularly as the reputation of certain works developed. A painter might send a specimen of his work to a new place and await the response. The reputation of painters like the Steels and William Billingsley went before them, so that they had no difficulty in finding employment; though in the case of Billingsley, a rolling stone if ever there was one, tenure was likely to be uncertain.

Sometimes painters would engage for a very limited term. There is on record the curious case of a Chelsea pensioner who obtained furlough from the Hospital in order to spend a few months working at Derby. One painter stipulated for one month’s clear holiday in the year. A few turned to more formal painting, and left canvases of no mean order. William Cowen, the Rockingham artist is a case in point. Some were addicted to the bottle—Edwin Steel, for example, though preoccupation with refreshment of that kind, does not seem to have impaired the quality of his work.

They were on the whole versatile workmen, capable of turning with equal ease from flower, fruit and butterfly studies, to landscapes and marine views. Their rural scenes tend to formalisation—a cottage or a classical pavilion, a vista of lake water overhung by trees, or a country seat set in its own parklands. There were times when the customer objected to the vagueness of this treatment, and requested “real views”, interiors, “after the style of the original”, so that guests might, when dining, be treated to a miniature picture gallery. Thus, many Rockingham plates and dishes were decorated with the noble houses of the north of England—Chatsworth and Wentworth; ruined abbeys like Roche, Norman keeps like Conisborough, castle heights like that of Scarborough, all in the romantic style of the period.

Certain painters specialised in insect, fruit or flower pieces. Collinson, two of whose expert flower paintings (seen to advantage on plates now in the Victoria and Albert Museum) bear the authentic stamp.

Payment seems to have varied according to talent, ranging from £1.5.0 to £3.0.0 per week. Contracts of service ran to increasing levels of remuneration from say, three to five years. At times a bonus was added. When John Cresswell was engaged at Swinton in 1826 on a five years contract, for the first three years he was paid at the rate of 7s. 6d. a day; the fourth year at 9s. 3d.; and the fifth year at 10s. 6d. a day.

Some painters combined brush work with an expert knowledge of