

Object in Focus: South Asian Pottery and Kipling connections at the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Samantha Howard

Collection: Potteries Museum and Art Gallery

Curator of Arts Samantha Howard explores connections between the museum's collection of South Asian pottery, India and Stoke-on-Trent through these objects' association with the architectural sculptor and art school administrator, John Lockwood Kipling (1837-1911).

Keywords: John Lockwood Kipling; Bombay School of Art; Pottery; decorative arts; Stoke on Trent

John Lockwood Kipling spent much of his career in India. He was the head of the sculpture workshop at the Sir Jamsetjee Jeejeebhoy School of Art and Industry in Bombay from 1865 to 1875, teaching students to model terra-cotta and architectural sculpture. Kipling served a further eighteen years as Principal of the new Mayo School of Art, now known as the National College of Arts, in Lahore. He was also the curator of its museum from 1875-1893. Kipling donated the pots discussed in this article to the Wedgwood Institute in Burslem (one of the six towns of Stoke-on-Trent, collectively known as the 'Potteries') in 1879.¹ These pots were eventually relocated, along with all the disparate museum collections of the six towns into the permanent collection of the largest museum in the service, the Hanley Museum & Art Gallery, which became the Stoke-on-Trent City Museum & Art Gallery when it moved to new premises in 1956, the first post-war museum built by a local authority; the museum was rebranded as The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery (PMAG) in 1998.

Kipling had earlier ties with the Potteries. As a young student he went to Burslem in 1852 to take up an apprenticeship with the earthenware manufacturers, Pinder, Bourne & Hope. He probably attended classes at the Burslem School of Design and at the neighbouring Hanley School of Design; in 1854 he progressed to more advanced classes held at Stoke Town Hall.² Whilst there he won an architectural competition in partnership with the Scottish architect, Robert Edgar with their revised design for the proposed façade of the Wedgwood Memorial Institute in Burslem; the main architecture of the building, inspired by the Venetian Gothic popularised by the leading art critic of the period, John Ruskin (1819–1900), was designed by local Staffordshire architect, George Benjamin Nichols.

In 1859 Kipling left for London where he worked on various architectural projects which included the modelling of the exterior terracotta decoration of the new museum buildings of the South Kensington Museum (today the V&A); before he emigrated to India in 1865, he selected modellers for the elaborate terracotta decorations on the facade of the Wedgwood Institute building from among the students in the Potteries.³

We know that Kipling made at least one trip back to Britain and the Potteries during his time in India. His attendance at the 9th Annual Meeting and distribution of prizes to the Burslem and Tunstall Schools of Art and Science was reported in a detailed article in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* dated Saturday 2 November 1878. Several of the speeches at the meeting

highlight the sense of importance of the Schools' continuing development of science and art education for the individual manufacturers of the district, and the potteries industry at large: 'Would indeed that every centre of manufacture could show that same continuity of work, the same combination of scientific thought, of artistic taste, and of constructive skill as Burslem and its neighbours'.⁴

The Schools' ambitions to raise the status of the arts and culture in the region underline the influence of the Arts and Crafts movement in the period. The movement, inspired by the ideas and writings of leading figures such as Ruskin and the celebrated designer and artist William Morris (1834-1896), sought to encourage changes in the methods in which goods were manufactured by moving away from intensive industrial mass production, to more autonomous creative processes resulting in wider social and intellectual benefits.

As an advocate of the movement's anti-industrial ideals, Kipling's brief speech at the meeting touches upon these concerns. He makes his point with the offer of his gift of Indian pottery, by othering Indian artisanal practice with his description of the 'untrained but naturally refined eye of the Oriental...':

MR JOHN KIPLING, formerly a student at the Burslem School of Art, now principal of a school of art in Lahore in India...[he] assured them that there was a reaction to mechanically-produced objects and a growing desire for works of art, and he urged the importance of schools of art not only to the manufacturers, but the potters themselves. He was glad to learn that through the munificence of Mr Woodall they were about to have a museum built in connection with the Wedgwood Institute [...] On his return to India he would send for the museum a collection of India pottery to show how the untrained but naturally refined eye of the Oriental nearly always secured beautiful form.⁵

Kipling's gift included a nineteenth-century earthenware covered ewer (fig.1a and 1.b) and other earthenware vessels (figs. 2 and 3), in addition to a small number (figs. 4 and 5) made by The Wonderland Pottery, the trading name of the ceramics produced at the Bombay School of Art under the direction of George Wilkins Terry, who had been appointed the school's first drawing master. The Wonderland wares enjoyed commercial success from the mid-1870s until around 1890, during which time Liberty & Co imported the wares to sell in its Regent Street department store in London.⁶ Kipling's donation of the pots to the Wedgwood Institute suggests that he hoped that they would provide a valuable resource of inspiration for its students, demonstrating how modern Western industrial standards could be combined with Indian techniques and skills of artisanal work.

It is likely that the red earthenware vase with four circular panels on its body (fig. 6) is also part of the Kipling gift; it is very similar stylistically to the other examples of Wonderland wares, and its accession number is very close to the other Kipling pots' sequence documentation inherited from the former Hanley Museum & Art Gallery.

However, the museum's Kipling connections do not end with pots. There is a further, albeit indirect, connection to the museums' fine art collections through Kipling's son, the writer and poet, Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), who was named after Rudyard Lake in the

Staffordshire Moorlands where his parents first met. Through the bequest of Dr. W. D. Wilkins in 1964, the museum acquired over 100 prints and drawings by twin brothers Charles Maurice (1883-1908) and Edward Julius Detmold (1883-1957). These works on paper cover a diverse range of animals, birds and insects which demonstrate the Detmolds' brilliant virtuosity in the representation of the natural world. Artistically precocious from a young age, the brothers were self-taught artists. They had developed a passion for natural history and often made sketching trips to Regents Park Zoo and the Natural History Museum, London. By the age of 13 they were exhibiting watercolours at the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Painters in Water Colours which drew widespread acclaim.

Between 1898 and 1905 the brothers produced together prints, book illustrations, and a large number of drawings and paintings, which included the publication of a set of 16 illustrations to Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book* in 1903; the watercolour originals were later included in the first colour edition published in 1908 (see fig.7).⁷ Following the death of Charles in 1908, his brother Edward continued to produce prints and book illustrations (see figs.8–10) including those for Kipling's sequel, *The Second Jungle Book*.

The illustrations – like the pots – highlight the ways in which art and design were used to translate an idea of India to British consumers: the exoticisation of India expressed through the imaginations of the Detmolds is echoed in the ceramics made for British audiences by Indian students at the Wonderland Pottery, and its close associations with the Arts and Crafts movement in Britain.

The Kipling pots and the original prints by Edward Julius Detmold are currently on public display in the *Commonwealth Connections* exhibition at the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery (from 9th April until 11th September 2022). The exhibition, inspired by, and based around objects in the museum's diverse ceramic, art, natural science and local history collections, is part of the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery's activities to celebrate the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games and the arrival of the Queen's Baton Relay in Stoke-on Trent before it travels onwards to Birmingham for the Opening Ceremony on 28 July 2022. Please visit the website for details: <https://www.stokemuseums.org.uk/pmag/whats-on/events/>

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Images

Fig.1a/1b Unknown Indian artist, Earthenware ewer and cover; black slip and incised and painted silver decoration of intricate floral and geometric patterns (19th century). The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, STKMG:CER2534 Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

Fig.2 Unknown Indian artist, Red earthenware vase with floral and other designs in white slip with coating of blue glaze (19th century) The Potteries Museum &

Art Gallery STKMG:CER2527. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery

- Fig.3 Unknown Indian artist, Red earthenware bottle with scale design inlaid with silver (19th century), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery STKMG:CER2528. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Fig.4 Wonderland Art Pottery (Bombay School of Art) India, Earthenware vase; scrolling floral all-over decoration painted in white slip and covered in a green glaze (c.1880-90), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery STKMG:CER2539. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Fig.5 Wonderland Art Pottery (Bombay School of Art) India, Earthenware water bottle; thin cobalt blue glaze over slip-painting and scrolling lines (c.1880-90), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery: STKMG:CER2518. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Fig.6 Unknown Indian artist, Red earthenware vase with four circular panels on body and formal and leaf borders in cream and dark brown slip (19th century), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery STKMG:CER2533. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Fig.7 C. M. Detmold and E. J. Detmold, *Shere Khan*, illustration from Rudyard Kipling, *The Jungle Book*, first colour edition (Macmillan and Co: London, 1908), The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery
- Fig.8 E. J. Detmold, *The Jungle King* (c.1924-5), etching and coloured aquatint. The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.
- Fig.9 E. J. Detmold, *At the Edge of the Lotus Pool* (1923), etching and dry point on vellum, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.
- Fig.10 E. J. Detmold, *Pets of the Court* (c.1924), etching and dry point on vellum, The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery. Photo Credit: The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery.

¹ The six towns, Stoke, Hanley, Burslem, Longton, Tunstall and Fenton were amalgamated in 1910 into the single county borough of Stoke-on-Trent, and in 1925 became the City of Stoke-on-Trent.

² Christopher Marsden, 'Ceramics and Sculpture, Staffordshire and London, 1852-65', in Julius Bryant and Susan Weber (eds), *John Lockwood Kipling: Arts and Crafts in the Punjab and*

London, exhibition catalogue, Bard Graduate Center for Studies in the Decorative Arts (New Haven, 2017), pp.61–64.

³ *Ibid.*, p.74. Kipling and Edgar's design for the façade was completed in 1871.

⁴ 'Burslem and Tunstall Schools of Art and Science', *Staffordshire Advertiser* (2 November 1878), p.6.

⁵ *Ibid.*; Deborah Swallow, 'A Post-Postcolonial Perspective' in Bryant and Weber (2017), pp.xiii–xviii.

⁶ Julius Bryant, 'India in South Kensington, South Kensington in India: Kipling in Context', in Bryant and Weber (2017), p.18.

⁷ Nicholas Alfrey and Richard Verdi, *Charles Maurice (1883–1908) and Edward Julius Detmold (1883–1957): A Centenary Exhibition*, exhibition catalogue, Universities of York and Nottingham and Natural History Museum (London, 1983), p.5.