

The Magazine
ANTIQUES

FEBRUARY 1974 TWO DOLLARS



James and Ralph Clews, nineteenth-century potters

Part I: *The English experience*

BY FRANK STEFANO JR.

ONLY CONFLICTING OR incomplete accounts have appeared about James and Ralph Clews, makers of Staffordshire ware from 1815 to 1834. Very little has been published at all about the pottery James Clews managed near Louisville, Kentucky, from 1837 to 1842. The present articles, the first about the Clews brothers in England and the second about James Clews in America, are an attempt to clarify and expand the record.

James Clews was born on September 2, 1790, one of six children of John and Ann Clews of Newcastle under Lyme. His father was at first a hatter and later a malt manufacturer. His older brother Ralph (born 1788) first entered the father's malt business, but by November 1815¹ had joined James in the pottery business, as a handbill of that date indicates (Fig. 1).

Many new potteries sprang up in Staffordshire at this time but few firms committed themselves so completely to the export, and especially the American, market as did the Clews brothers.² For this reason, even today marked pieces of Clews ware are relatively rare in England.

The brothers appear never to have operated separately nor to have taken in other partners during the nineteen-year life of the firm. It appears too that they always rented their potting works and that they were located at at least two potteries in Cobridge. On September 29, 1817, William Adams rented to the brothers "a potworks and other buildings at Cobridge for 15 years starting 11 November 1817 for 130 pounds annually due the first of November and May, free and clear of and from all taxes and deductions."³

Sometime after this the brothers appear to have rented a larger potting works from Andrew Stevenson⁴ called the Cobridge Works, where they remained until their bankruptcy in 1834.⁵

It is possible that the Clews brothers lacked capital to buy their own potting works, for when their father died in 1819 they were already in debt to his estate £938/7/11, not including interest.⁶

Although many other potters produced historical views as well as English and decorative designs, only the Clewses offered the three so-called literary series consisting of engravings after Thomas Rowlandson's Dr. Syntax drawings (Fig. 2), illustrations from Don Quixote after paintings by Robert Smirke (Fig. 3), and a series of engravings after paintings of domestic scenes by Sir David Wilkie, R.A. (Fig. 4). The Clews brothers also produced the beautiful Indian Sport series which hitherto has been said to be exclusively Spode (Pl. II, Fig. 5). Perhaps Clews wares in this series were made for export and Spode's for the domestic market. Figure 6 shows another example of the Indian Sport series made by Clews. On the back it bears

CAUTION TO PERSONS TIPLING, AND TO PUBLICANS.

THE UNDERSIGNED MANUFACTURERS of Earthen-Ware within the parish of BURSLEM, sustaining the most serious loss and inconvenience, by daily interruptions to their business, in consequence of the habits of idleness and tippling which many of their workmen indulge in, during the regular hours of work, and in which they find encouragement by the very CULPABLE CONDUCT OF MANY PUBLICANS within this parish; Do hereby make known, that from the publication of this Notice, they are resolved to give every protection and support to such persons as will lay complaints before the Magistrates, against any workmen for the offence of tippling; and the undersigned Manufacturers have also resolved,

Individually to notice and to report to the Magistrates

The conduct of all such Publicans as shall from henceforth suffer any workmen to remain tippling in their houses during the regular working hours, or at any other improper time.

THE PUBLICANS ARE HEREBY INFORMED,

That on conviction of the offence of suffering tippling, or unlawful Games in their houses, they are liable to forfeit their recognizances, and to have their licenses suspended for the space of three years, besides being subject to a penalty of ten shillings for every offence by tippling; and that the Magistrates acting for this Hundred have come to the resolution of putting these laws strictly in force for the future.

Any person found tippling in a Public-house is liable to a penalty of three shillings and four-pence, to the use of the Poor, besides the costs of the information.

Burslem, November, 1815.

Wood & Caldwell
Henshall & Williamsons
Jno. & Jas. Davenport
Thomas Heath
Samuel Tomkinson
Ralph Johnson
Thomas Bathwell
Edward Bourne
John & Christ. Robinson
John Hall

Jno. & Rich. Riley
Jno. & Benj. Godwin
William Stanley
John Brettell
William Moseley
Stevenson and Bucknall
Wm. Walsh
John Haywood
John Wood
Lindop & Taylor

Jno. Rogers
Rhead & Goodfellow
Mackin & Co.
Wm. Bourne & Co.
James Cartledge
J. and R. Blackwell
Benj. Godwin and Sons
F. and N. Dillon
Ralph Stevenson
R. and J. Clews

* * Every Publican within this parish will be expected to keep one of these Notices conspicuously posted up in his house, as a proof he is determined to maintain good order therein.

TREGORTHA, PRINTER

Fig. 1. This handbill of November 1815 issued in Burslem warns publicans not to serve pottery workers drinks during working hours. As the usual workday extended from 6 A.M. to 9 P.M. with one and one-half hours off for meals, this was a severe deprivation (*The Victoria History of the County of Stafford*, ed. J. G. Jenkins, London, 1963, Vol. 2, p. 52). *City Museum, Stoke on Trent.*

the same impressed mark of Clews as the soup plate shown in Figure 5, but also the circular impressed inscription *John Greenfield, Importer of China & Earthenware, No 77, Pearl Street, New York*. The latter firm was in business at that address from 1817 to 1843⁷ and was probably large enough to import exclusive patterns and designs.

One reason for the lack of a thriving domestic white earthenware industry in the United States until about the middle of the century was the low price of Staffordshire wares. The wholesale price asked by the American importer of the Clews teapot in Plate III, for example, was probably about 50¢, to judge by the wholesale prices for teapots of \$6.00 a dozen which was quoted in 1833 by the American importers Rudd and Martin of Louisville, Kentucky.⁸

Although much Clews pottery survives today, no complete record remains of the series, patterns, and forms that the brothers produced.⁹ Thus, for example, no marked piece from the dark-blue Cities series has been found, although the series has been attributed to Clews on the basis of a bowl with a print from the Cities series at the center and a border known to have been used by Clews on the Don Quixote series. Since Staffordshire potters rarely pirated each others borders, it seems reasonable to believe that the bowl was made by the Clews brothers.¹⁰

The three Clews teapots in Plate IV show the wide range of styles and shapes of hollow ware produced by Clews. Further classification of their wares could be made on the basis of the molds used to produce the hollow ware.

In 1827 James and Ralph Clews were forced to declare bankruptcy when Job Meigh of Shelton, "Manufacturer of China," and other creditors called the brothers' debt of £13,419/4/0. By an indenture of bankruptcy dated January 29, 1827, the Clewses were forced to relinquish their entire stock of "Glass, China and Earthenware," from their pottery at Cobridge, their London showroom and warehouse at 111 Holborn Hill, and their two warehouses in Liverpool at 52 Castle Street and on Pool Lane. The agreement was sealed not only with the signatures of all parties but by "the delivery of one Tea Cup in the name of and in lieu of" the delivery of the entire inventory.¹¹

However, the Clews brothers overcame this financial crisis, continued to manufacture transfer-printed earthenware, and ventured into other businesses as well. Besides continuing to operate a brewery they had inherited from their father, they acquired a flint mill and a colliery to supply raw materials they needed at their pottery. In the early 1830's they built the Waterloo and American Hotel on Waterloo Road, Cobridge, the main route between Burslem and Hanley. The building is now a pub called the American.

The notice of the Clewses' second and final bankruptcy was carried in the *Staffordshire Advertiser* on November 22, 1834. It may have been precipitated by the first major strike at the potteries which had begun on Martinmas (November 11). Workers at the potteries were hired only on that date for wages that remained fixed for the next twelve months. However, in 1834 they refused to sign the agreement and struck the potteries for four months.¹² The brothers' assets¹³ were dispersed at a series of sales over the next six months. The two-week-long sale of the potting fixtures in February 1835 comprised:

All the potters fixtures, stock of materials and utensils; Consisting of block and working moulds, of the most approved shapes and

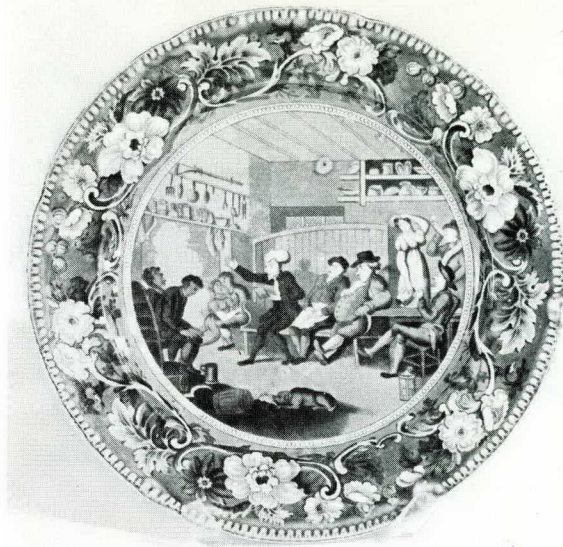


Fig. 2. *Dr. Syntax Reading his Tour*, from the Dr. Syntax series. Dark-blue transfer-printed plate by James and Ralph Clews. This is one of the thirty-one designs in the Dr. Syntax series after drawings by Thomas Rowlandson (1756-1827) originally made to illustrate William Combe's three-volume satire on the published tours of William Gilpin (1724-1804). (Another plate from this series appeared in *ANTIQUES* for January 1974, p. 170.) Diameter 8½ inches. Collection of Robert Scanaff.



Fig. 3. *Sancho Panza at the Boar Hunt*, from the Don Quixote series. Dark-blue transfer-printed soup plate by James and Ralph Clews. This is one of twenty-one designs in the series after paintings by Robert Smirke (1752-1845) which were engraved and then used to illustrate a translation made by his daughter, Mary, of Cervantes' *Don Quixote*. Diameter 9¼ inches. Photograph by courtesy of Garry Stradling.



Fig. 4. *The Escape of the Mouse*, from the Wilkie series. Dark-blue transfer-printed plate by James and Ralph Clews. This is one of seven designs done after paintings of English cottage life by Sir David Wilkie, R.A. (1785-1841). Diameter 10¼ inches.



Pl. I. *Landing of Gen. LaFayette at Castle Garden, New York, 16th August 1824.* Transfer-printed platter by James and Ralph Clews. The engraving was done by Samuel Maverick of New York. Length 19 inches. *National Museum of History and Technology.*

Pl. II. *Chase After a Wolf*, from the Indian Sport series. Transfer-printed soup plates, the one at the left by Spode; the one at the right by James and Ralph Clews. Diameter of each, 9¾ inches. *Photograph by Helga Photo Studio.*





Pl. III. *Christmas Eve*, from the Wilkie series. Transfer-printed teapot by James and Ralph Clews. This is one of seven designs in that series (see caption to Fig. 4). Height 7½ inches. Helga photograph.

Pl. IV. Transfer-printed teapots by James and Ralph Clews. The one at the left, showing children playing with a dog, has on the bottom the blue printed mark CLEWS in a Chinese-style seal; the one at the center has on the bottom the pattern name, *Summer Rose* in a blue cartouche and the impressed words CLEWS WARRANTED STAFFORDSHIRE in a circular mark surrounding a crown; the one at the right is the so-called Neptune pattern. The first two teapot patterns have not previously been classified as being made by Clews; the Neptune pattern appears in Laidacker, *Anglo-American China*, Part 2, p. 36. Height of tallest pot, 7½ inches. Helga photograph.





Fig. 5. Reverse of the soup plates shown in Pl. II. The plate at the left bears both the printed and impressed name SPODE as well as the printed name of the design, *Chase After a Wolf*. The plate at the right has impressed at the center beneath a crown CLEWS/WARRANTED/STAFFORDSHIRE. The G at the edge is printed in blue.

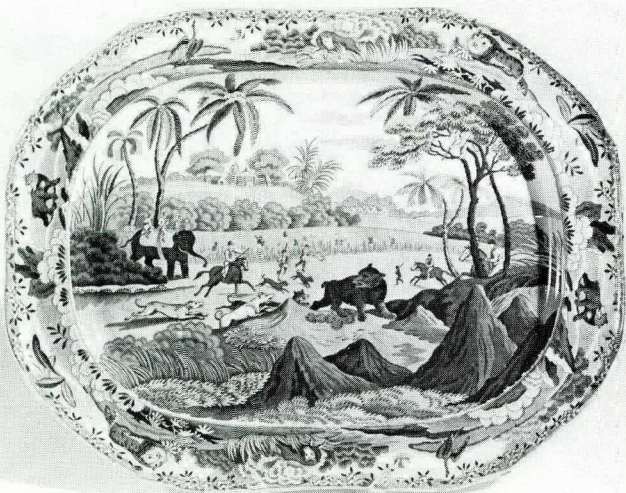
patterns, adopted for the home trade and American Markets. With most extensive and valuable sets of copper plate engravings, in table, desert, toilet, jug and tea services, many of which are quite new, and the production of some of the most approved artists in the trade; also an extensive stock of Blue and Black Ball Clay, China Clay and other materials. Throwing wheels, lathes, benches, headpoles, pegposts, stillages and stovepots. About 30 printing presses, printing stoves, bakeplates. Upwards of 2000 work boards, lead and colour mills, buckets and wheelbarrows. About 6000 biscuit and gloss saggars. 300 saggerboards and drums. Large and small mortars and pestles, crane weighting machine, dropping tubs, washing out tubs, beating flags, stove flags, plater do, and frames and a great number of other utensils requisite for that line of business. Also a general and large assortment of colour, cobalt and zaffre calx; cording, printers flannel, soda borax, etc; 4 tons of cullet, nearly 1 ton of old copper; counting house desks and cupboards, copying machine, iron chests, valuable iron door and door case and frame, several sets of scales, etc.¹⁴

The inventory of earthenware was sold on March 27, 1835. The advertisement for that sale reads in part:

Manufactured Earthenware—on the premises at the Large and Small Manufactories, at Cobridge, on Friday 27 March 1835, in one or more lots. The entire manufactured stock of Earthenware consisting of a general assortment of Blue and Coloured Printed Table Ware, Tea Service, Ewers and basins, Jugs, Toilet, and Desert Sets. Edged, Painted, Cream Color and a great variety of other articles of Earthenware.¹⁵

Thus ended the partnership of the Clews brothers and the production of Staffordshire ware at their works in Cobridge. Ralph was content to remain in Newcastle under Lyme, but James, who had been the driving force in the firm, emigrated with his family to America in 1836 to superintend a potting venture near Louisville, Kentucky. Part two of this article, to appear in *ANTIQUES* in March, will relate the history of that venture.

Fig. 6. *Driving a Bear out of the Sugar Cane*, from the Indian Sport series, based on drawings by Samuel Howitt (1765?-1822). The reverse bears the same impressed Clews mark as the soup plate shown in Fig. 5 (right). It also has the circular impressed inscription *John Greenfield, Importer of China & Earthenware, No 77, Pearl Street, New York*. Length 17 inches.



¹The partnership did not begin in 1818 as maintained in W. E. Little, *Staffordshire Blue* (New York, 1969, p. 56); or 1819 as maintained in E. B. Larsen, *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China* (New York, 1950, p. 53).

²The firm also exported to Russia and printed on their billhead "Potters to Her Imperial Majesty, the Empress of all the Russians" (Geoffrey A. Godden, *Encyclopaedia of British Pottery and Porcelain Marks*, New York, 1964, p. 152).

³The lease is preserved in the archives of the Stoke City Library, Stoke on Trent, Staffordshire.

⁴There is no evidence to support the suggestion that the Clews brothers bought Stevenson's pottery works as implied in Llewellyn Jewitt's *Ceramic Art in Great Britain* (London, 1878, Vol. 2, p. 290) and stated in Larsen, *American Historical Views* (p. 44). Neither of the two bankruptcy proceedings against the Clews brothers mentions their owning the facilities for manufacturing earthenware.

⁵In 1836 these works were taken over by the firm of Robinson, Wood and Brownfield.

⁶When John Clews died on October 31, 1819, his will placed his estate in trust for his six children. One of the provisions of the will, which was dated October 23, 1819, was that advances made to James and Ralph Clews "at diverse times . . . to enable them the better to carry on their trade and partnership in the Earthenware Manufactory . . . now indebted to 938 pounds 7 shillings and 11 pence be repaid, with interest into the estate." (The will is filed among the Bishops' Transcripts, Litchfield, Staffordshire.)

⁷New York City directories.

⁸The Rudd and Martin daybook entry of March 30, 1833, quotes the following wholesale prices for Staffordshire in Louisville, Kentucky.

Edged Twifflers	.50	per dozen
" Plates	.70	" "
" Muffins	.40	" "
" Cup Plates	.30	" "
Printed Hollow-ware		
Pitchers	4.00	per dozen
" "	7.50	" "
Tea Pots	6.00	" "
Creamers	2.75	" "
Sugars	4.00	" "

"Twifflers" and "muffins" correspond to today's salad and bread-and-butter plates. The daybook is preserved in The Filson Club, Louisville, Kentucky.

⁹The first research into Staffordshire patterns was Edwin Atlee Barber's *Anglo-American Pottery* (Indianapolis, 1899). A much more complete and detailed study was E. B. Larsen's *American Historical Views on Staffordshire China*. There is also Sam Laidecker's *Anglo-American China* (Bristol, Pennsylvania; Part 1 [revised 1954]. Part 2 [1951]).

¹⁰*ANTIQUES*, March 1954, p. 238.

¹¹The indenture of bankruptcy is preserved in the William Salt Library, Stafford, England.

¹²Harold Owen, *The Staffordshire Potter* (Bath, 1970, p. 29).

¹³These assets were their brewery at Shelton, carried on in the name of Clews and Malkin; their interest in the estate of their late father, John Clews of Newcastle under Lyme; their flint mill at Tunstall; their colliery called the Jackfield Colliery in Burslem; settlement of a suit against Joseph Heath for rent on the flint mill; the Waterloo and American Hotel and its contents; all potters' fixtures, materials, and utensils; James Clews' newly erected dwelling, called Oxleasows, near Cobridge, plus 110 acres of land, nearly all of it in turf; cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, and other livestock, wheat, oats, straw, and other feed at Spot Farm near Hilderstone; two dwellings in "The Twenty Row," Burslem; two freehold houses in Merrill Street, Newcastle; and (subject to a mortgage of £1000) the dwelling and malthouse, Marsh Street, Newcastle, belonging to Ralph Clews. (The above is a digest of the information contained in the *North Staffordshire Mercury*, *Pottery Gazette & Newcastle Express*, December 20, 1834.)

¹⁴*North Staffordshire Mercury*, January 24, 1835.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, March 14, 1835.

The ArtNews, Art in America and The Magazine Antiques database is made up of indexing and full text. The copyright of the indexing is owned by ArtNews Media, LLC. This database is intended solely for the use of the individual patron of the licensing party.