

Chapter X — The Pottery, John Bell, Land Sales and Shipping in the Sixties.

On 6 July 1864 John and Matthew Perston Bell feued land in Lanark St. and Kyle St. to James Couper. This can only have been an extension to the City Glassworks since both it and the City Pottery had been in operation in the area since the early 1850s (63)

On the 28 April 1865 John and Matthew Perston Bell signed a contract of ground annual with John Norman and James Copeland, engineers and partners in Norman & Copeland renting 7289 square yards of land to them at an annual rental of £24816.2. (64) The ground bordered on Pulteney Street and the firm had actually occupied the area since Martinmas 1862; it had taken three years to get around to signing the contract. This delay seems not to have been uncommon at this period, the buying of the land for the pottery had been recorded two years after it was an accomplished fact.

The main subject of this chapter can be divided into three parts: the export of pottery overseas, the supply of pottery for use on shipping vessels and the ownership of steamers and other ships.

The Journals of the Donaldson Brothers, a Glasgow shipping firm, for the second half of the 1860s and patchily for some of the 1870s have survived (65) and we find in them mention of several Glasgow potteries as well as pottery dealers. The first entry of interest to us shows J. & M. P. Bell & Co. paying tonnage dues in June 1866, as are the Port Dundas Pottery Company and Robert Cochran & Co.

The Donaldson Brothers ran ships very regularly to Trinidad, Monte Video, Valparaiso, Iquique, Yokohama, Melbourne, Penang, Mauritius, Ascension as well as other places and Bells and Verreville and Britannia seem to have exported with them regularly. The Port Dundas Pottery Company used their ships less frequently. As a preliminary to the main journey or as a finale it was not uncommon for the same ships to call at Antwerp, Queenstown or Liverpool which could also have been taken advantage of by the potterles. The ships in the sixties include the Barque Mary Falconer and the Margaret Falconer, the ship Glenbervie and the ship Albion and the Barques Uruguay, Colorado and Parana and many others.

There seem to have been two sorts of pottery cargo; those which were sent by the Works as any other cargo would be and those which went simply to fill in any holes left in the cargo in the hold. This probably reflected two different qualities of ware. This trade continued all through the second half of the 1860s and all through the 1870s and must have begun before this period but the journals for the earlier period have not survived. There is a gap in the surviving journals until later in the 1880s and by that time there is no sign of any pottery being carried by the Donaldsons at all.

This is the first evidence we have that the Glasgow Pottery had a wide export trade but it is noticeable that the export business that we know of (and it should be emphasised that here we are at the mercy of which documents have survived and the trade may be much bigger) is already large and widespread. Whether it was the work of John Bell or Matthew or even of Charles Arthur we will probably never know. There remains the question of what exactly was being exported. We can assume that the finer wares were identical with the finer wares that were being sold at home since they were aimed at an identical middle class market. The coarser wares, however, had to be very durable to survive the voyage and whatever journeying they had overland. We know well the export pieces of Britannia Pottery to Canada and at least one similar

piece has turned up recently with a Bell's mark on it. It is a plain white jug in hard earthenware with moulded leaves and wheat-ears etc (fig.10.1). The mark is even similar to Britannia's mark for this kind of ware, displaying the royal coat of arms (for England) with lion and unicorn and words:

ROYAL STONE CHINA
J. & M.P.BELL & Co.
GLASGOW

It is noticeably whiter than the corresponding wares from Britannia Pottery. A sherd with this mark was found in a deposit of the 1850s during the excavations at the Pottery site (vide supra chap.vii), so the export trade must have commenced long before we have any documentary evidence of it, early in the life of the Pottery.



fig 10.1 Ceres – white ironstone jug

An interesting sidelight is thrown onto the trade with South America by an article in the Glasgow News which dates from 1885 but must apply equally to this time. Bone china, it points out, was so-called because it contained a lot of calcined bone which gave whiteness and translucency. According to the anonymous author of the article the preferred bone was that from cattle raised on the banks of the River Plate. He himself is at a loss to account for any difference but speculates that it may be due to the peculiar saltiness of the herbage in that area. (56)

On the 25 September 1866, the Donaldson Brothers paid £1.7.6. to John Baxter for earthenware for an unnamed ship but on the 20 November in the same year they pay John Bell £1.6.0. for "plates, etc" for the Barque Margaret Falconer, setting off on its 8th voyage; on 25 December 1866 they pay £2,17.0 for "dishes" for the Barque Colorado and from then on we hear no more of their buying dishes from anyone but J. & M.P. Bell & Co. The biggest order comes on the 26 August 1867 when they pay £27.7.5. for "Dishes" for the Barque Rudolph. In September 1867 they do, however, buy some glass from John Baxter but after that the poor man seems to lose that custom too and they buy all their glass from the Kidstons or from one William Meikie. This trade obviously did not bring much profit to the Pottery but it certainly cemented John Bell's relationship with the Donaldson Brothers.

On 23 August 1870 they take £312. 10.0 from John Bell as his share of the "5th instalment of steamer" - John has definitely by now started on his career as a ship owner. There are possible indications of John owning shares in ships earlier. In the Lloyd's Register for 1859 a John Bell of Glasgow owns the ship 'Amethyst'. There is no proof that this is our John Bell and again it should be realised that there are several John Bells around in the world of Glasgow trade at this time. There is also an iron steamer called 'John Bell' and owned by a Bell & Co., though this is unlikely to be our Pottery. But more likely is a John Bell, ship-owner in Glasgow who was eligible to vote in 1859 to elect Trustees for the Clyde Trust; Matthew Perston Bell was eligible as a member of Merchants' House and is described as a potter. Both were eligible to be elected as Trustees. (67) Even more likely is an entry in the Register of British Shipping for the Port of Glasgow where a John Bell is registered as taking 12/64 of the ship 'United Kingdom' as a mortgage from John Athya, a timber merchant in Glasgow for £3000 with interest at 5%. (68)

The likelihood of John Bell owning shipping in the 1850s gains credence from the fact that Robert Cochran undoubtedly did. On 25 March 1863 he bought 16/64th shares in the sailing ship John Phillips built at Hylton in Co. Durham (69) and in 1869, on his death, this share is divided equally between Agnes Cochran, 216, Bath St., Glasgow, widow; Alexander Cochran, manufacturer, Robert Cochran, manufacturer, Archibald Cochran, glass manufacturer, James Fleming, manufacturer, Robert Denniston, Holyrood Crescent, merchant and David Auchinvole, Uddingston, banker who are the Trustees on a Trust he had set up for his wife and children. (70)

By January 1871 John Bell owns 4/64 of SS Astarte and James Murdoch, his “managing clerk” owns 2/64 of the same ship. James Murdoch’s status was obviously very high; he must have had a fair amount of capital behind him. John Bell had eventually paid over £4000 for his share in the ship so Murdoch’s share must have been at least £2000, a not inconsiderable sum in 1870.

On the 21 February 1871 J. & M. P. Bell & Co were paid £29.1.0 for “Crockery” for the SS Astarte, obviously the cost of fitting the new ship out. By the mid 1870s however, a depression was to set in and profits from shipping were to be low or non-existent, a situation that did not improve much until after John Bell’s death.

Donaldson Brothers was not, however, the Glasgow Pottery’s only connection with the supply of crockery to shipping. On 11 April 1868 J. & M. P. Bell & Co. supply Willam Denny & Brothers of Dunbarton with marble wash stands to the value of £7. 6. 0. and in June with £32 worth of cabinet stands. (71) Denny’s were obviously pleased with the goods since from then on Bell’s becomes their regular supplier of cabinet stands with the occasional order for electro-plated plugs and chains for the basins and even, on one occasion, for urinals. This is the first indication we have, apart from the excavation, that Bell’s are making sanitary ware of any kind and that they have the means of supplying complete cabinet stands with woodwork and metalwork. The Glasgow Pottery also supplied the crockery for Denny’s working yacht, the “Snark”, some of which is still extant (fig 10.2).



fig. 10.2 “Snark” crockery

It was some time in 1868 that John Bell began to be troubled by the disease of the bladder which killed him twelve years later. In 1869 the Post Office Directory does not give St Vincent St as the address at which to leave letters for John Bell which it has done heretofore. This would seem to imply that the house in St Vincent St was uninhabited which in turn would imply that Matthew had become an invalid and, indeed, we know that he had taken up residence in Bridge of Allan at this time.

In a series of articles published in the *Scotsman* in 1868 and subsequently republished in 1869 in book form as *The Industries of Scotland*, David Bremner includes a description of the ware and processes of the Glasgow Pottery. (72) He describes it as the most extensive of the Scottish potteries, occupying upwards of 3 acres and employing 800 persons which is an increase in one third since the beginning of the decade. Wages paid are upwards of £20,000 a year. This would give an average of £25 a year but since the management would earn greatly above the average,

the child workers equally would earn considerable under. The wages of men employed in the higher branches of the potter's trade are said to range from 25s. to 30s. a week. Women get "about the average" for factory hands. Post the factory laws the increase in expense has led to considerable mechanisation and indeed some stress is laid on the description of machinery in the works. Unions of both masters and workmen are mentioned but are said to have acted in harmony.

The wares described are principally those in porcelain or parian. The manufacture of the latter is particularly stressed as though the Pottery were making it in great quantities, especially parian statuary. It should be stressed that this is a type of ware very seldom to be seen in collections or in the market, so presumably either a great many pieces were unmarked or much work has still to be done on identifying these pieces. The show-room is singled out as being outstanding, particularly with regard to "porcelain table, tea, and toilet ware".

The description of the processes is fairly detailed but is not greatly different from that of any other pottery of the period. It is implied that the flint is ground on the premises – in fact that every process is carried out on site.



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