

# CONCENTRATION CAMP MEMORYWARE

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## INTRODUCTION

Even though the mosaic art form is centuries old it had a revival of interest during the last decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Victorian ladies often practiced various handcrafts as part of their parlour pastimes such as beadwork, embroidery, scrapbooking etc. and *shard art*, a type of mosaic tile technique, also became popular on a domestic scale. Small fragments of broken ceramics and glass as well as other found objects such as jewellery, buttons, toy figures etc. were collected and used as mosaic materials. These pieces were stuck onto urn-shaped vessels or other suitable objects in various patterns with linseed putty thus creating new decorative objects such as vases, flower pots and tables. It was a laborious task but in the end the overall effect was quite handsome in appearance.

These decorative pieces were often called Victorian “putty pots”. The name is derived from the use of putty to affix the found fragments onto vessels and surfaces. This style of mosaic collage is also referred to as *memoryware* because it often contained fragments of personal objects with sentimental value or connections to everyday life. The contemporary term for this style of mosaic work is *pique assiette* or *picassiette* and is derived from the French expression meaning “scrounger” or “stealer from plates” which refers to the nickname given to Raymonde Isidore who covered his entire house and garden (La Maison Picassiette) with mosaic designs of broken glass and pottery from 1938 to 1964 in Chartres, France.

## NORVALSPONT CONCENTRATION CAMP MEMORYWARE

The use of fragments of objects with a personal or sentimental nature could trigger vivid memories and their significance highlights associations with people, places or events. This is the case with two memoryware pots in the collection of War Museum in Bloemfontein. Both of these pots were made from ceramic fragments and other objects found at the Norvalspont Concentration Camp. The two memoryware pots were probably created to honour, revere and bring in remembrance the collective memory of all the women and children that endured immense suffering in the Concentration Camps during the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, especially those poor unfortunate souls in the Norvalspont Concentration Camp.

Due to the scorched earth policy implemented by the British during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) Boer farms were destroyed, livestock were killed and the women and children were removed from their homesteads and sent to Concentration Camps. To relieve the overcrowded Bloemfontein Concentration Camp, women and children were sent to the

Norvalspont Concentration Camp that was established on the southern banks of the Orange River by the British in November 1900. By 4 April 1901 the Superintendent Mr Cole-Bowen stated in his report that 3 215 people were in the camp of which 517 were men, 1 022 were women and 303 children (between 12-16) and 1 373 (under the age of 12). Conditions in most of the Concentration Camps were dire due to bad administration. The lack of bare necessities such as food, water, wood, clothes, blankets, sanitation and medical supplies etc. contributed to the awful conditions that the people were living in. Due to insufficient food supply and meagre rations, malnutrition was at the order of the day combining this with the lack of medical staff and supplies, sickness and epidemics spread like wildfires through the camps. Although the Norvalspont Concentration Camp was perceived to be one of the better camps, the death rate was still high with a total of 366 people dying of which 267 were children.



**A Boer family in the Norvalspont Concentration Camp (*War Museum Collection 02785*)**

## **MEMORYWARE FLOWER POT 1**

Flower pot number 1 was made by Mrs L. Olwage from ceramic and glass fragments retrieved from the Norvalspont Concentration Camp middens. Mrs L. Olwage donated the pot to the War Museum in 1966.

Although most of the fragments used on this pot cannot be identified without their manufacturer marks some of the designs and styles are clearly distinguishable such as the popular Willow Pattern and Flow Blue designs.



**Flower pot 1 made from ceramic and glass fragments retrieved from the Norvalspont Concentration Camp middens. (*War Museum Collection 03779/00001*)**



**Blue and white porcelain fragments with the Willow Pattern design as well as the Flow Blue feature were used to form an interesting mosaic pattern on this pot. (*War Museum Collection 03779/00001*)**

### Willow Pattern design

The famous Willow Pattern is usually associated with a picture of two birds flying towards each other, three Chinese figures crossing a bridge under a willow tree and an island with a Chinese building and a tree with characteristic round leaves or apples. It is not sure whether the story connected to the Willow pattern originated in China or England. The story itself is an old Chinese legend but the connection with the design presumably originated in England

since the original Chinese Willow that was copied had no apple tree, people crossing over a bridge or the two doves. However, the Willow Pattern legend of the Mandarin's daughter that was betrothed to a noble warrior and instead fell in love and eloped with the poor secretary but was tracked down and killed being immortalised as doves eternally flying together, remains the romantic reason why the Willow Pattern design is so popular and sought after even till today.

The Willow Pattern is a pseudo-Chinese design originating from the blue-and-white porcelain imported into England from China during the last half of the last half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The original design as well as the colours has evolved over the years depending on the different manufacturers thereof.

The Willow Pattern design originated in England during the 1760's when Thomas Turner of Caughley used the original copper plates for this design in cobalt blue underglaze on earthenware. In this particular design the pagoda was placed on the right surrounded by six types of trees namely a willow, beach, fir, plum, an unknown tree and a tall tree with thirty-two apples. There were no figures on the bridge or doves and the zig-zag fence extended to the right-hand edge of the design. However on Caughley porcelain the pagoda was on the left.

Thomas Minton was an apprentice engraver at Caughley and when he started his own business he also used the main Willow Pattern design but altered the fence patterns, the number of apples on the tree as well as the rim designs.

Josiah Spode used the popular Willow Pattern design from 1785. It was very similar to the one on Caughley porcelain although Spode's earlier designs had one figure on the bridge and no birds as well as a less common design with two figures on the bridge and the birds in the air. From 1800 the pattern slightly differed again and thirty-two apples were shown on the tree.

Wedgwood also issued the Willow Pattern design from 1795 with the pagoda on the right, different fretwork on the fence and used thirty-five apples or sometimes even more in the design. In 1830 Wedgwood also produced black printed Willow Pattern earthenware.

William Adams and Stoke-on-Trent also produced large quantities of Willow Pattern bearing thirty-two and after 1830 fifty apples. Between 1793 and 1839 John Davenport's trees bore twenty-five apples. Davenport also used a variation of designs ranging from two figures on the bridge and two birds swimming in the water to three figures on the bridge and flying birds. Swansea used thirty apples in their Willow Pattern version and was printed in dark and light blues and sometimes even in black and brown.

By 1830 there were almost two hundred makers of the Willow Pattern in a blue underglaze. Various companies still manufacture Willow Pattern reproductions till today therefore a piece can only be accurately identified by the official manufacturers mark or by comparing it with a marked piece.



**A small side-plate depicting the well-known Willow Pattern design. Even though this plate has no distinctive mark it shows the typical design by Spode, Minton etc. (*War Museum Collection 05252/00001*)**

### Flow Blue design

Flow Blue ceramics are flowing dark blue underglazed transfer printed designs on white earthenware bodies that originated in England during the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, made by Minton, Wedgwood, Davenport, Burgess & Leigh and other firms. Although initially criticized in Britain within the potting industry the design became quite popular overseas in the European and especially the American markets used by the wealthy as well as the burgeoning Victorian middle classes since it was affordable and durable. Other countries such as France, Germany and Holland also produced flowing wares and after 1875 American potters such as Wheeling, Wharwick and Mercer started to compete with European production.

First the transfer print designs were applied on the hard white earthenware and then caused to “flow” into the undecorated parts of the wares. The desired “flowing” effect was created by adding lime or ammonia chloride into the fire-clay sagger or kiln creating a chlorinated atmosphere while firing the glaze. The vapour then causes the cobalt oxide in the glaze to spread and blur into hazy flowing blue tones. As underglazing techniques improved other colours were also used such as mulberry and sepia however blue remained the most popular.

Flow Blue designs can be categorized in three general periods of production: early Victorian (1835-1860), middle Victorian (1860’s – 1870’s) and late Victorian (1880’s – early 1900’s). Pattern designs and themes changed throughout each period. During the early Victorian period oriental patterns flourished. Throughout the middle Victorian period floral patterns became popular. By late Victorian period Japanese, Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau designs were in demand.

More than 1500 Flow Blue patterns were produced during this time. There were two distinctive types of Flow Blue patterns. The most common pattern is that of a central image and a separate border design completely covering the rim leaving a white space between the border and the centre which varied between the different patterns. The other type was sheet patterns that had no separate centres or borders but a single pattern covering the entire object. Sheet patterns varieties were either floral or marble.

Flow Blue manufacturers can often be identified by printed or impressed manufacturers' marks on the bottoms or undersides of the object usually containing the firm's name, initials, symbol and location. Often the pattern name is supplied as well. However smaller firms used no marks or marks were used that have never been identified due to the short life-span of the firm. Flow Blue designs was stopped being manufactured early in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century however, reproductions appear on the market today and is very popular to collect.



**Flow Blue saucer with a dainty floral design with beading or embossing added to the rim with an unidentifiable manufacturers mark at the bottom of the saucer. (*War Museum Collection 00964/00001*)**

## **MEMORYWARE FLOWER POT 2**

Flower pot number 2 was made from ceramic fragments, many bearing the well-known spongeware patterns and other found objects such as porcelain dolls retrieved from the Norvalspont Concentration Camp middens which were affixed on a blue enamel kettle. This pot was made by a resident Norvalspont teacher Miss PJ Rholandt and her school pupils and was donated by her to the War Museum in 1950.



**Flower pot 2 made from ceramic fragments and other found objects retrieved from the Norvalspont Concentration Camp middens. (*War Museum Collection 01060/00001*)**



**Pieces from porcelain dolls were incorporated to form a unique and sentimental mosaic pattern on this pot. (*War Museum Collection 03779/00001*)**

### Spongeware design

Spongeware, also known as spatterware, is 19<sup>th</sup> Century stoneware and earthenware decorated with brightly coloured stamped or spattered designs such as flowers and other shapes. Quite often spongeware had a sponged border with a hand painted central design. Original spongeware usually have stamped designs that are unevenly spaced or a bit blurry, colour smudges may occur or it may even look like a smeared design.

Spongeware was produced by potteries in Glasgow, Scotland that wanted to produce utilitarian ware for people with limited means. These ceramic pieces gained in popularity and manufacturing soon spread to Staffordshire England and other countries in Europe as well as America and production gained momentum in the period between 1830 and 1880.

Spongeware was decorated by one or a combination of four methods:

- Patterns were hand painted or applied by brushstroke;
- Colour splattering patterns were achieved by blowing liquid powder onto the ceramic body with a pipe;
- Colour was dabbed on in various patterns by using a sponge or a cloth;
- A method known as stick spatter or sponge printing was used which involved stamping on a pattern with a piece of cut-out sponge on a stick.

Various colours were used in these simple but striking designs. The most commonly used colours were blue, red and green while purple and brown became popular in Scotland. Although yellow, pink and other shades were not that popular black seemed to gain in popularity.

Unfortunately not much is known about these pieces of folk art because the potters did not always add identifying marks and few records concerning detail about the decoration of their spongeware were kept. Nowadays spongeware is highly collectable and sought after by collectors.



**A large bowl with a colourful floral spongeware pattern. (*War Museum Collection*  
*03816/00001*)**

## Victorian porcelain dolls

Victorian porcelain dolls can be classified into four different categories based on their manufacturing processes namely china, pink lustre, parian and bisque. China dolls are moulded, glazed white porcelain dolls while bisque dolls are unglazed porcelain dolls.

The manufacturing of porcelain dolls was established from the 1850's and reached a peak in the 1860's although manufacturing continued till much later in the early 1900's. They were mainly manufactured in Germany. Most of these dolls have no identifying marks but some have registered porcelain marks on their shoulders or backs by which the manufacturer could be identified.

Glazed porcelain dolls moulded hair styles and other features such as their eyes and lips were usually painted after the final firing of the glaze. They could just have dots for eyes or had detailed painted lids, lashes, eyebrows, pupils etc. This colouring could easily wear off as time passed. However glazed colour does not deteriorate therefore the pink cheeks often remained because a blush of glaze was probably applied before the final firing. Most of these dolls had black hair thus those with blonde hair are very rare while dolls with brown eyes were more desirable than those with blue eyes.

There were two types of porcelain dolls. The one was porcelain shoulder heads usually attached to a fabric or leather body that was stiffened with sawdust and fabric, leather or porcelain limbs were attached to the body. The other type was the solid, stiff one-piece porcelain figures without any movable parts with their arms at their sides or sometimes free from their bodies. They varied in different sizes from 13mm to 360mm.

They were also known as penny dolls or pillar dolls. Another fond nick name for the female dolls is a "Frozen Charlotte" referring to the lady "fair Charlotte" in an American folklore ballad. According to the story she went to a ball by sledge in mid-winter but her pride prevented her to wrap herself in a warm blanket and arrived as "a stiffened corps". The male dolls identified by their boyish hairstyles are called "Frozen Charlies".

These small solid porcelain dolls were produced as bathing dolls but they were also put in birthday cakes or Christmas puddings as good luck charms. They were lovely toys that provided a delightful and imaginative play-time for any Victorian child.



**Small Victorian solid glazed porcelain dolls also known as “Frozen Charlottes”. (*War Museum Collection 04882/00038 and 04882/00039*)**

## **CONCLUSION**

The found fragments retrieved from the Norvalspont Concentration Camp site that were used as mosaic material gives a clear indication of what types of ceramics were available to the South African market. The use of the ever popular Blue-and-White porcelain and the more utilitarian spongeware in the Concentration Camps during the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century is clearly evident.

However, the use of pieces from small bisque and glazed porcelain doll relics on these memoryware pots brings forth the emotional side, reflecting on a lost childhood of many of the young children that died in the Concentration Camps.

These mosaic flower pots are thus more than just pretty decorations, they are symbolic vessels highlighting the futility of war and the devastating impact it had on the innocent women and children who endured immense suffering in the Concentration Camps, immortalising their memories forever.

## SOURCES

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### Three-dimensional objects and photographs

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Photograph 02785

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Flower pot 01060/00001

Flower pot 03779/00001

Saucer 00964/00001

Side-plate 05252/00001