



Silver anniversary

Looking through past issues of DHW there have been many times when the work of Karen Griffiths and Peter Armstrong has been featured. They are the people behind the world renowned name of Stokesay Ware, and this year they are celebrating twenty-five years of producing some of the finest miniature china available in the dolls house market.

For this special anniversary Karen and Peter were asked by Charlotte Stokoe to mount a small retrospective display of our work at the 2007 Kensington Dollshouse Festival. A trawl through the attic unearthed treasures that they had not seen for decades – a little display box of the first pieces of Stokesay Ware, their first invoices and souvenirs from the many shows they have attended in the UK, Europe, America and New Zealand.

Twenty-five years of fine china in miniature – we look back over the years with Stokesay Ware

During that time as Karen says: “We have appreciated the support of our customers, marvelled at the ingenuity of our peers and made friends all over the world. It has been a fantastic life.”

Stokesay Ware

Karen originally studied graphic design at Harrow School of Art and returned to college after three years working as a designer to study ceramics at Hornsey, graduating in 1978 with a First Class degree. Three years post graduate study at the Royal college of Art culminated with a Master’s degree in 1981. This unique combination of a background in both graphic design and ceramics has resulted in the finely detailed designs of

Stokesay Ware.

Karen started Stokesay Ware in 1981 whilst she was working as a part time visiting lecturer teaching both ceramics and drawing at Hornsey, Eastbourne and Farnham Colleges of Art. She left teaching to give Stokesay Ware her full attention in 1986.

It was in that year that Karen and Peter joined forces, Karen taking responsibility for the creative side of the business with Peter looking after business matters.

Right: Retrospective display 2007 Kensington Dollshouse Festival.





Above: Royal College of Art Degree show 1981.

Peter takes up the story: Stokesay Ware was named after the tiny village of Stokesay which is near Ludlow in Shropshire. It is where Karen's grandparents and great-grandparents are buried. Her parents were born locally and married in the Norman church and it is where she was christened.

First range

The first small range of pieces were made in terracotta and displayed in a cigar box. It included a teapot, casserole and jugs. This set was used as samples and resulted in several orders, the first from Michael Morse at The Dolls House Toys Ltd.

Ranges in white earthenware, stoneware and bone china followed. We discontinued



Above: First range of Stokesay Ware.

the stoneware due to difficulties obtaining the clay and in latter years have concentrated mostly on the decorated bone china, reintroducing the white kitchenware after an absence of several years.



Above: Christening certificate Stokesay Parish Church.

First invoice 14 October 1983

Our first customer was Michal Morse (Hunt) whose shop, The Dolls House Toys Ltd in Lisson Grove, later moved to Covent Garden. The trade price of four mugs was indeed just £1, although to put it



Above: First and second invoices to Michal Morse and The Singing Tree



Above: First stand built by George Griffiths.

into context, 25 years ago the weekly rent on the one bed flat in Cecile Park shown on the invoice was £7.50 a week. Today the same flat would rent out at over £150 a week.

Other early customers included The Singing Tree, Tiger Tiger, Polly Flinders, Kristin Baybars, The Mulberry Bush and Liberty of London.

First exhibition

We first exhibited our work at Dorking in 1983 which was run by Mary Churchill. Pre-dating Miniatura and the London Dollhouse Festival it was at that time the most important show in the country as it was dedicated to dolls houses and miniatures and excluded the broader category of full sized dolls and teddy bears.



Above: First advert in The Home Miniaturist June 1983.

Our first display stand was made by Karen's late father, George Griffiths, from sanded and varnished type trays supported at the back by two wooden boxes made from an old wardrobe and referred to as 'the coffins'.

At that first Dorking show we met Muriel Hopwood, another potter, who invited us to the first Miniatura, and later Caroline Hamilton who invited us to the first London Dollhouse Festival. Great timing!

Large display case

Below is an early display case made to transport and exhibit the work at shows.

On it are many items which have since been discontinued.

In the early 90s we took the decision to stop using commercially available prints after we saw



our bird prints used on truly dreadful souvenir ceramics in the gift shop at Caracas airport. The only way to have designs that were exclusive to Stokesay Ware was to make them ourselves.

The first print we made was an early Willow dinner plate. On firing we discovered that the pattern was not dense enough, so a hand tinted blue enamel wash was added in an additional firing. Learning from this we made our first Willow meat plate followed by the Sovereign Red and Blue services.



Above: Original Willow plate.

to be considered for Fellow Status together with supporting material in 1996. The drawings are the preliminary stage for the decoration designs and

show the patterns enlarged four times and drawn in pencil. The next stage would be to work these up in ink and then reduce them again to the actual size. The patterns are tailored and drawn for each individual piece and printed by silk screen in ceramic

enamels to make water slide transfer prints.

Tools of the trade

Below is a small selection of painting, drawing, modelling and fettling tools. The best fettling knives, used to trim the new cast from the mould, are traditionally hand made from hack saw blades. The steel is flexible and causes less damage to the mould than a rigid blade. Shown here at the bottom is a 30 year old example and a rough cut blade ready to have the edge ground by hand.



Above: Original Willow meat plate.

Guild submission 1996 for Fellow status

Our Asiatic Pheasant wash service was made and submitted to the International Guild of Miniature Artisans

Below: Asiatic Pheasant wash service submitted to IGMA with preliminary pencil drawings for the decoration.



Above: Kiln shelf loaded with a decoration firing

Willow pattern

This is the latest and most comprehensive service we have produced to date. Comprising of a dinner, tea and wash service, it also includes many more unusual pieces like the asparagus dish and leaf plate.

Stages in making

Original models are turned on the lathe from high density plaster or carved by hand from plastics.



Working piece-mould made from high density plaster together with a finished jug which has been cast, assembled, fettled, biscuit fired, glazed and fired again



The finished decoration drawings are copied onto paper, cut out and applied to the pieces to check that the pattern fits





Above: The finished Willow Pattern dinner service.

From our archive
Cancer Research

For five years from 1994 - 1998 we made a limited edition of 48 plates each year in different colours dated on the back in gold. They were sold by Pat Cutforth at the Marlborough Fair with the entire proceeds donated to the charity.

The Garrick Club

We were pleased to be asked by David Kilpatrick to reproduce the tableware at the Garrick Club for his miniature dining room setting for his museum 'A World in Miniature'. Its logo is a symbol of the globe with the motto 'All the world's a stage'.



Above: Limited edition Marlborough Fair plates.



Above: 1994 NAME (National Association of Miniature Enthusiasts) Convention California souvenirs.



Above: A discontinued Victorian water filter.



Above: The Garrick Club china.
Below: Willow Pattern tea set.



Above: 2002 London Dollshouse Festival veterans rosette.

Emails we have enjoyed

Re: Asiatic pheasant dinner plates

I am interested in acquiring ten Asiatic Pheasant dinner plates. How much would it cost to ship these to Johannesburg, South Africa and how long will it take? I will be in London shortly. How much notice to you require to deliver to my hotel? Am I correct in assuming this is dishwasher proof?

Re: Belfast sink

Thank you for you message. May I politely point out that the sizes you quote would suit only a remarkably small Belfast sink. I also believe that your website shows odd sizes. ie. 21mm height by 52mm width, and very attractive total price of £30 for the sink, brackets and plumbing kit.

I'm not one of these people who insist on claiming products for the advertised price, but if you think for my trouble warning you of these errors, you can offer me the whole package at £30, I would be pleased to purchase one immediately. Otherwise, good look with your enterprise.

Current ranges

The entire Stokesay Ware collection can be found at our website

www.stokesayware.com

Ed: I am sure that readers will join me and the team here at Dolls House World, in congratulating Karen and Peter on their past achievements and wish them many more years of producing some of the most beautiful miniature china pieces we could ever wish to collect. Best wishes Joyce.