LIMERICK DELFTWARE (reprinted with illustration by kind permission of the English Ceramic Circle, from their Transactions, Vol. II. p. 156, 1940).

The potteries of Ireland have been exhaustively studied from the documents by Mr. Dudley Westropp, (1) but relatively few actual pieces made at them in the eighteenth century have hitherto been certainly identified. The best-known Irish productions are the delftwares made by Henry Delamain at Dublin, which were sometimes marked with the name of the city; and a delftware shoe is known to bear the name ‘Belfast.’ But nothing at all has been attributed to the eighteenth-century manufactures which appear to have existed at Limerick, Rostrevor, Waterford and Wexford. Considerable interest, therefore, attaches to three plates, recently brought to my notice by Mr. H. E. Bäcker, bearing inscriptions and arms associating them with the Limerick factory.

It is recorded (2) that in 1762 the Dublin Society awarded a premium of £30 to John Stritch and Christopher Bridson of Limerick for erecting a manufactory of earthenware in imitation of delft or white ware. Christopher Bridson died in 1768, but apart from this nothing further has been known of the potters and their productions. The plates now discovered were bought by Mr. Bäcker at a sale of the property of Mrs. Wilson Fitzgerald, of 42, Wilton Crescent, London, S.W.; I am informed by Mr. Aubrey J. Toppin, York Herald, that the Wilson Fitzgerald family had connections with County Clare. The plates are inscribed in blue, Made by John Stritch Limerick 1761 (PLATE III, a and b); on one the full date 4 June 1761 (PLATE III, c and d) was added. They belong to two armorial services of the same pattern. One (PLATE III, d) bears the arms and name of ‘Edmond Sex. Pery,’ that is, Edmond Sexton Pery, later (1735) Viscount Pery (born 1719, died 1806), who was prominent in the Irish House of Commons, to which he was elected member for Limerick in 1760. The other (PLATE LVIII, d) bears the arms of Burton (azure, a cross engrailed or between four roses argent). The Burton in question has been identified by Mr. Toppin as Francis Pierpoint Burton of Buncraggy, Co. Clare, who was also elected to the Irish House of Commons in 1760, as member for County Clare. Mr. Toppin informs me that the Irish Parliament was summoned to meet on 19th May, 1761, but was prorogued several times before meeting in October, 1761. Both services were thus evidently made and marked with a view to securing, through the persons whose arms they bear, who were members of the Parliament for the City of Limerick and the adjoining county, the support of the Irish House of Commons and the Dublin Society, whose premium Stritch in fact obtained in the following year.

The plates are 8½ in. in diameter, of tin-glazed buff earthenware ('delftware'), the white glaze being of a bluish tone of varying depth; they have the edges painted with a strong reddish brown line; each shows traces underneath of four or more radial spur-marks. They are transfer-printed from an engraving, in soft purple-brown overglaze line, with other colours added with the brush; the tinctures of the arms (azure, sable, or) are painted in blue, purplish black, and dull yellow, while the flowers and foliage on the rims and the mantling of the arms are touched with turquoise green and the same rather muddy yellow.

The technique employed in the decoration of these plates, though familiar in modern pottery, is comparatively rare in eighteenth-century wares. But it is in essentials the same as that used in the earliest of all transfer printing—that practised from 1753 at the Battersea enamel-factory, where it was introduced by one who was in fact an Irishman.

It was for long claimed from the Irish side that John Brooks, the Irish engraver, was the inventor of transfer printing, but his reputed association with the enamel-factory at York House, Battersea, was not established until ten years ago, when an examination of the Battersea rate books showed that the proprietors there in 1753 and 1754 were ‘Jansen, Delamain and Brooks.’ (3)

Much of the contemporary fame of the Battersea factory was due to its use of copper-plate engraving; this was specifically mentioned in 1756 by Horace Walpole and by the French traveller Rouquet. Brooks was presumably responsible for it; and the identity of the Delamain in question with the Henry Delamain of the Dublin delftware-factory seems probable, from the fact that the latter claimed in 1753 that he had purchased the art of printing earthenware with as much beauty, strong impression and despatch as can be done on paper. (4)

Now the decoration on the newly discovered Limerick plates resembles in style and technique some of the Battersea printed and painted pieces (5) as well as some of the similar decoration on Bow porcelain believed to have been done by one of the engravers from the Battersea factory shortly after its closing in 1758; (6) and though it is eight years later in
date than the earliest Battersea it is tempting to conjecture that the Limerick engraving was the work of one of Delamain's associates. It is unrecorded and unlikely that Brooks ever returned to Ireland after the closing of the Battersea factory. But a possible engraver is Michael Hanbury, of Dublin, who in 1758 is recorded as 'having exhibited several specimens of his performance before the Dublin Society of a new invention for ornamenting with great despatch, china and earthenware, etc., from copperplate engraving on the unburnt glaze,' the Society ordering him as a result 'twenty guineas towards carrying on the business.' It is not recorded that Hanbury was ever in Limerick; it is possible, however, that the engraved designs did not work actually in that city but merely supplied the copper plates engraved to the order of the factory.

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2. Westropp, op. cit., p. 35.


5. Compare, for example, the early figure-subjects with swans, Schreiber Collection, III, Nos. 23 and 64 ('Success to the British Fishery') and Nos. 24 and 65. The 'armorial' badge of the Anti-Gallican Society and the Masonic 'arms' (Schreiber No. 319, and Egan Mew, Battersea Enamels, Fig. 19) show engraving of scrollwork similar to that on the Limerick plates.

6. Such as the egg-shaped vases, printed with Chinese figure-subjects, in brown outline painted over with the brush, in Broderip Gift at the Victoria and Albert Museum; compare W. B. Honey, English Pottery and Porcelain (1933), p. 141.