

JOSHUA POOLE – Pottery Manager

By Paul Tubb

Following the deaths of Armstrong and McBirney, in quick succession, the pottery at Belleek was sold in February 1884 as advertised in the Fermanagh Times of February 14th that year. The new buyers had, by the following September, found themselves in the happy position of being able to re-open the works and get production started again. The Donegal Independent, as noted in the Impartial Reporter of September 18th 1884, records that:-

“...the Directors have arranged to open the works on Monday next. The gentleman whom they have selected as manager is, we understand, of high repute, with high recommendations for capability and efficiency to direct the business in all its stages from the slip house to the gilding shop.”

This paragon is, later in the same column, identified as Mr Poole. The Impartial Reporter records the re-opening in the same edition of September 18th 1884.

“On Monday morning, at about half-past five o'clock, Mr Robert Sweeney, C.T.C., Ballyshannon, Chairman of the Belleek Pottery Company, formally opened the concern under the auspices of the new company. He was accompanied to the works by the newly appointed manager, Mr Poole, and was met at the entrance by a large number of skilled potters and others lately employed at the business.”

The account goes on to record Mr Sweeney's speech that finishes with

“And now, in conclusion, I have to say a word on the regulations of the place. First – You will be paid fortnightly. Second – You will get a fair day's work. In connection with this subject I am instructed to say some changes may become necessary, but before making a change we will see what the services are worth. Third – Talking, gossiping, reading during working hours are strictly prohibited. Fourth – Punctuality, together with courtesy and civility towards each other, will I trust, grow with you as some of your guiding rules in the place.”

It is recorded by the paper that these regulations met with general approval and that several times the employees present expressed their interest by applause and that, eventually, one of their number came forward to express their willingness to work with the directors to promote the success of the undertaking.

Which, if any, of these regulations became the catalyst for Mr Poole's ceasing to be the manager of the pottery less than two years later I do not know, but his subsequent career at the Ohio factories in East Liverpool of Knowles, Taylor & Knowles and, later, the Homer Laughlin China Company was one of great success and achievement.

At the time of his appointment as manager of the Belleek factory he was still a relatively young man, only 29 years of age, having been born at 2 St Mark's Street, Shelton on February 19th 1855. He was the youngest child and only son of Joshua and Delilah Poole, both of whom were themselves employed in the pottery industry. Joshua had married Delilah Boote in the parish church of St James, Longton on November 11th 1850. Why Longton, when the families had been living in Penkhull and Shelton respectively, is not known to me at present but both Joshua and Delilah give their address at the time of the marriage as Waterloo Road. Joshua is called a Potter, as is his father Hamlet and Delilah's father John Boote. Delilah herself is simply noted as a spinster and each gives their age as 21.

That may, of course, provide a clue to the reason for the Longton marriage since Joshua gives his age as just 20 in the 1851 census the following year and the young couple may well have found a compliant vicar in Longton who did not know them nor their real ages nor was he prepared to go to the lengths of making enquiries. The birth record of Margaret Pool (sic) in the indexes for the early months of 1851 may well support the idea of a marriage in a hurry done quietly away from friends and acquaintances.



St Mark Street, Shelton and on the left, Sheaf Street. The house where Joshua lived in 1861 would have been behind the camera position and no longer exists.

In the 1851 census return the family were living in Sheaf Street, Shelton, a road off St Mark's Street, roughly parallel to Broad Street and Margaret was just 3 months old. Next door was the family of Hamlet and Sarah Poole, father Joshua's parents, with his brothers and sisters John, Eliza, Hamlet and Sarah. Most of the adults in both households were employed in the pottery industry, Joshua as a Potters (sic) Handler, his wife, Delilah, as a China Paintress, his father, Hamlet, a Potter Thrower, brother John as a Warehouseman and sister Eliza as a Transferer. The exception, apart from his sister Sarah who is said to be 'employed at home', is brother Hamlet who is a journeyman Shoe Maker.

Our Joshua, then, grew up in Shelton and the family, which included his two older sisters Margaret and Mary, born in 1853, were living across the street at 3 St Mark's Street in Shelton at the time of the 1861 census. Joshua, the father, is noted as a Potter on the census return and Delilah as a China Painter whilst the three children are all down as Scholars. The houses in St Mark's Street no longer exist, indeed St Mark's Street itself is only half the length it was when it went all the way from the church on Broad Street to Sun Street.

By 1861 Hamlet and Sarah, our Joshua's grandparents, still with children John, Hamlet and Sarah, had moved to 1 Wharf Lane in Shelton and Hamlet had left the pottery industry to become a Grocer. John was an unemployed labourer but Hamlet junior was still a shoemaker. I would imagine that the eldest daughter, Eliza, had married by then but I have been unable to establish to whom with any certainty.



Park Terrace, Penkhull (Nowadays called "Spark Terrace") Joshua lived in the end house at the extreme left in 1871.

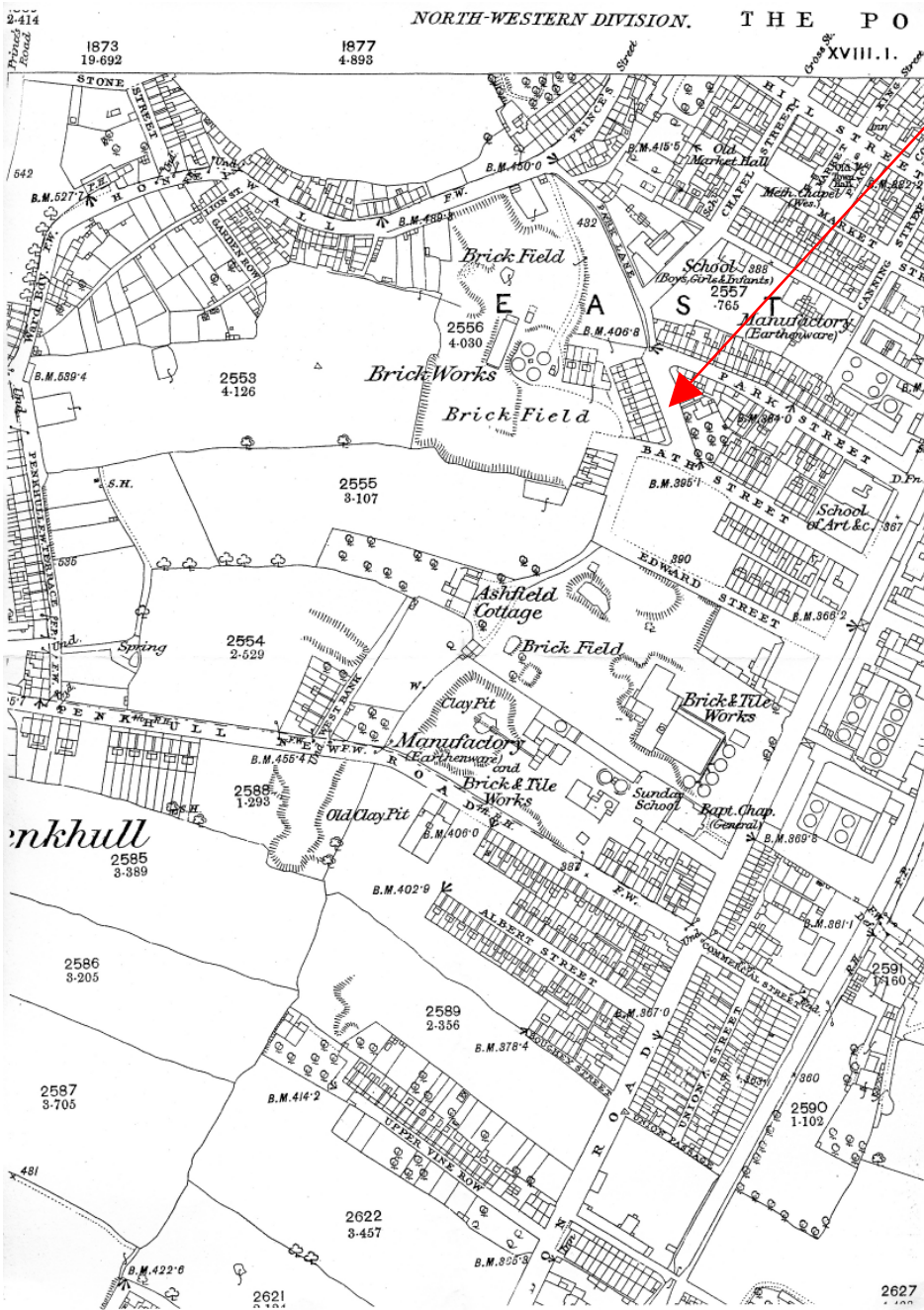
By 1871 our Joshua's father and mother with their children are living at 2 Park Terrace, Penkhull and he is now a China Manufacturer with the son, our Joshua, a Writing Clerk. It would seem that the elder Joshua had improved his and his family's lot enough for Delilah to cease work and for the younger daughter, Mary, also to not have an occupation.

Precisely what a 'writing clerk' did is not known to me but it must have been within the pottery industry if, just thirteen years later, Joshua Junior was able to be presented to the Belleek workforce as having the skills to be an effective manager of that concern. Which particular pottery it was that his father was running in his role as a 'pottery manufacturer' is not stated on the census but it seems fair to assume that it was under his father's



tutelage that the young Joshua learnt the skills he could present to Mr Sweeney and others to persuade them to take him on as their pottery manager in 1884.

A Closer view of 1 and 2 Spark Terrace, Penkhull – Now combined into an advertising agency office. Joshua lived in the left hand house in 1871.



The 1883 Ordnance Survey map of the London Road area of Stoke showing Park Terrace, which connects Park Street to Bath Street and it's proximity to W.H. Goss' house – Ashfield Cottage

Interestingly, given its links with the Belleek pottery, the factory and home of W H Goss was situated very close to Park Terrace. However so too are three other Earthenware manufactories and two Brick and Tile works according to the 1883 map. The chance that young Joshua might know, from very local knowledge, of the existence of the Irish factory and perhaps have met some of the workers who had been over to Fermanagh and returned to Stoke is not at all fanciful in such a closely knit society.

By the time of the 1881 census, now living at 20 James Street, Stoke on Trent the elder Joshua is recorded as a manufacturer employing 18 male and 8 female workers. The son, our Joshua, is simply noted as a manufacturer's son and the implication is most likely to be that he is working with the father. The whole family is together and Margaret is stated to be a

schoolmistress – again with no indication of which school she was teaching at – and Mary is now noted to be paralysed. I have not tried to find out in what manner this befell her but I think, from the death indexes, that Mary died in early 1887 and it is difficult not to conclude that whatever accident she suffered between the census returns of 1871 and 1881 eventually resulted in her death at the relatively early age of 33.



Left: The view down James Street towards London Road, Stoke. The Poole family lived at 20 and 46 James Street (at different times)



Left: The gap between 16 and 22 James Street, Stoke where 20 James Street would have been in 1881.

The older Joshua died, aged 59, on February 27th 1890 at the family home in James Street, Stoke on Trent and his son, Joshua, registered the death. It would therefore appear that he had returned from America, perhaps indicating that the illness preceding death had been a long and painful one thereby giving the family time to contact the son and him time to make the crossing. The father's occupation is recorded as 'Majolica Manufacturer' and the cause of death is Chronic Bronchitis and Heart Disease – on how many death certificates in the Potteries area is that, known locally as Potter's Rot, given as the cause of death?

At the time of the 1891 census Delilah was living with her daughter Margaret, still teaching but now head of household, at 111 West End View, Penkhull which is just a stone's throw from the house in James Street. The Penkhull area is elevated above the London Road and, indeed, James Street rises up to the higher level, and this elevation gave the area a much healthier atmosphere. Some recent work by historians has revealed a significantly lower death rate in this much more pastoral community. The move up to Penkhull would seem to indicate that Margaret and her mother did not wish to give up their lives in Stoke to accompany Joshua back to East Liverpool, assuming of course that Joshua had tried to persuade them to do so.

West End Hotel, at the corner of London Road and James Street. Delilah and Margaret lived in houses to the left of this in 1901 (155 London Road)



Margaret and Delilah are still together, but now down off the hill at 155 London Road, Stoke upon Trent, very close to their former residence in James Street, in the 1901 census but Delilah dies in the spring of 1906 aged 80. It would seem therefore that Margaret did not marry but lived the life of spinster schoolteacher looking after her widowed mother whilst her brother went off first to Ireland and then America in pursuit of his pottery ambitions. I would like to think that Margaret was happy with her life and was pleased with what she and her brother accomplished even on different sides of the world. The district in which she lived was known as the West End and was the abode of many '2nd tier' manufacturer's houses. Up to the middle of the twentieth century it was looked upon as a desirable location.

I have no knowledge of whether Joshua ever returned to England again after his visit in 1890 and it would seem that he made an irrevocable decision quite early during his time in Ohio to apply for American citizenship which he achieved in 1892 according to the American census returns of 1900 and thereafter.

His life in America is chronicled in the census returns, although the 1890 census is largely 'lost' and, as noted above, he may still have been in England following the death of his father at the point in the year when it was taken. The 1900 census return shows him living in East Liverpool, Ohio and married to Elta – I think her maiden name was King –with their son Allen King Poole. According to the census Joshua and Elta had been married for six years and Elta is ten years younger than her husband. She was a 'local' girl since the census records her as being born in Ohio. Joshua is listed as a Pottery Manager and is said to have entered the USA in 1888 and was, by 1900, a Naturalised citizen of that country.

Ten years later the major change to the family unit is the presence of another son, yet another Joshua, who had been born in 1905 and a servant, Beth Mimsit, which would seem to indicate that the family were quite well off and comfortable. Our Joshua is still a Pottery Manager and 17 out of 24 occupations recorded on this page of the census are jobs within the pottery industry. We know, from other evidence that we shall look at later, that Joshua was employed at the works of Knowles, Taylor and Knowles and it may well be that all these 17 people are also employed there.

The 1920 census return shows the family still in East Liverpool and Joshua is now recorded as the Superintendent of a Pottery Works. Their neighbours are no longer largely pottery folk but include the editor of a daily newspaper, two general practice Lawyers and the proprietor and manager of a Dry Goods Store. There is no servant recorded in the household and the eldest son, Allen K, is aged 24 but has no occupation listed. Both Joshua and Elta have by now 'lost' two years from their recorded ages which are given as 63 and 53 respectively. This census gives us the information that Joshua became a naturalised American citizen in 1892.

By 1930 Joshua is dead and Elta, now aged 64, is the head of a household in East Liverpool which comprises just herself and her son Joshua with his wife Gretchen who had been married for about a year, and a servant, Julia Banks. The young Joshua is employed as a Clay Merchant but no one else in the household is working apart, of course, from the servant who says she is married and comes from Alabama.

The elder son, Allen King Poole is also married by the time of the 1930 census but is living in Hamden township, New Haven, Connecticut with his wife of seven years, Charlotte, and a son Allen King Pole Junior aged three. He is occupied as a Physician working at the Medical School of Yale University – not bad for the son of a Stoke on Trent Potter. Given this, it would seem that the lack of an occupation in the 1920 census, which was taken in January that year, is explained by Allen being at College, making his way in the studies needed to enter the medical profession, but at home for the Christmas and New Year vacation at the time of the census being taken.

There is an excellent article about Lotus Ware, written by Catherine S Vodrey of the Museum of Ceramics in East Liverpool, available on the internet and from that and other web sites we can piece together Joshua's career in the USA. All accounts seem to indicate that he was recruited by Isaac Knowles, founder of the pottery firm of Knowles Taylor and Knowles [KT&K] who had changed the pottery's direction from producing Rockingham and yellow ware to white ware in 1872. In succeeding years the firm had grown by new building and some acquisitions and was producing fine bone china pieces from what is said to be the largest pottery in America. Even though the plant burnt down in 1889 it was rebuilt and from there was produced Lotus Ware which first appeared in 1892, the year that Joshua was granted his naturalisation.

In her article,[5], Catherine Vodrey talks of Lotus Ware as being “*essentially the brainchild of two men. The first, an English pottery technician named Joshua Poole, was well-versed in clay chemistry and arrived in East Liverpool fresh from the Belleek pottery in western Ireland.....Poole's considerable experience was invaluable; he knew just how far KT&K could push the envelope of making Lotus as delicate as possible, while maintaining its structural integrity. With this background, he was in charge of designing the bodies of many Lotus Ware pieces.*”

The other man involved was a pottery designer and decorator Heinrich Schmidt who had worked in the famous Meissen factory in his native Germany. As Catherine Vodrey tells us “*Isaac Knowles' faith in Schmidt and Poole was well-placed: Lotus Ware was an immediate sensation. At the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago, Lotus Ware swept the competition, earning every single award in the fine porcelain categories.*” However, this very success included the seeds of the demise of Lotus Ware. KT&K felt obliged to continue producing Lotus Ware even though only about one in twelve pieces came unscathed from the kilns. The company could not sustain such losses and in 1896 had to cease production of Lotus Ware. The pottery continued to prosper for a while but in the mid 1920s began to struggle and eventually ceased to trade in 1931.

Joshua, however, seems to have prospered in East Liverpool, remaining with Knowles Taylor & Knowles for eighteen years before moving on to the Homer Laughlin China Company as general manager for 16 years.

There is no doubt that Joshua, like his father before him, was a craftsman of the highest calibre and found his true metier in East Liverpool under the strong management of the Knowles family. It is probably the case that the challenges he faced in Belleek between 1884 and 1886 were beyond the resources of such a young man. The existence of an increasing tide of nationalist fervour at the time, fanned by the debates surrounding The Land League, Parnellism and Home Rule has caused at least one historian to consider the 1880s as the crucial years in Irish history under the Union. [6]. It was on April 8th 1886 that Gladstone rose in the House of Commons to present what is known as the First Home Rule Bill. Against such a background it was probably inevitable that the young Joshua Poole's task as an English manager of the pottery in Belleek would become untenable. John Cunningham tells us [7] of a movement among the men working at Belleek for a local, Irish manager to be appointed. The new owners had, as reported by John Cunningham again, instituted a regime that put the emphasis on profitability at the expense of luxury items. In the light of Joshua's success in Ohio this policy, too, may well have rested uneasily on his shoulders during his brief tenure of the manager's chair.

The East Liverpool Review [8] records Joshua's death on its front page of Monday March 26th 1928 as follows:-

JOSHUA POOLE, CLAY BROKER, DIES IN PENN AVENUE HOME

Former Pottery Plant Executive Succumbs to Heart Attack.

73 YEARS OLD.

Funeral Services to be held at 2 p.m. Wednesday.

“Joshua Poole, 73, clay broker and former pottery executive, died at his home, 215 Pennsylvania Avenue, at 7.30 o’clock this morning following an 11 day illness of heart disease. He became ill while attending the luncheon meeting of the Kiwanis club, at the Taverner’s Hotel, March 15th

Mr Poole was born at Stoke-on-Trent in the Staffordshire pottery district of England, and for more than 40 years had been closely identified with the pottery industry in East Liverpool district. He became interested in the ceramic industry in early life and was an authority in the manufacture of chinaware and semi-porcelain. For five years before coming to the United States he was manager for the famous Belleek China works at Belleek, Ireland. Upon his arrival here he became associated with Knowles, Taylor & Knowles company as general manager which place he held for 18 years. He later became general manager of the Homer Laughlin China company, a position he held for 16 years. He was also interested in the Edwin M Knowles China company of which he was vice president.

Member of Episcopal Church.

He was a member of the St Stephen’s Episcopal Church, Riddle Lodge No 315, F & A Mason, Pilgrim Commandery No 55 and of Al Koran Temple, Cleveland. He was also a member of the Kiwanis club.

He is survived by his widow, Mrs Elta King Poole; two sons, Dr Allan K Poole, assistant professor at Yale University, at New Haven, Conn. And Joshua Poole Jr. at home; also one grandson, Allan K Poole, Jr. and a sister Miss Margaret Poole, Stoke on Trent, England.

Funeral Services will be conducted in the home at 2.30 o’clock Wednesday afternoon, in charge of Rev. Russell K. Cauik, rector of the St Stephen’s Church. Interment will be made in Riverview cemetery”.

This obituary clearly underscores his standing in East Liverpool and the pottery community there. His later years of managing the works of Knowles, Taylor & Knowles and then the Homer Laughlin China company must have been in sharp contrast to his troubled tenure of office at Belleek. As noted earlier, the circumstances of the mid 1880s in Ireland would not have helped him in any way so it is good to know that he survived with his interest in ceramics intact and went on to make a significant contribution to the development of the ceramic trade in America.

My work has been aided by my contact, Nan Brennan, in Chicago who has access to American records; by the Vodrey sisters, one of whom wrote the article on the East Liverpool Museum of Ceramics and their collection of Lotus Ware, and the other who works at the museum. Once again Kevin Salt of the Wedgwood Museum has provided invaluable detail of the city of Stoke on Trent at the times we have been talking about and the obituary from the East Liverpool Review was sent to me by Opal of the Genealogy Pit Stop website. My thanks to them for their help and, if errors still exist, they are all mine.

The references I have used for this article are as follows.

- [1] ‘The Impartial Reporter’ newspaper of Enniskillen
- [2] UK and USA census returns courtesy of ancestry.co.uk and ancestry.com
- [3] OS map of Stoke on Trent, 1883 courtesy of Hanley Public Library
- [4] UK Birth, Marriage and Death certificates courtesy of ONS, Southport
- [5] “The Museum of Ceramics – Lotus Ware” by Catherine S Vodrey (2002-04)
- [6] “The English Face of Irish Nationalism” by Alan O’Day, published by Gill & Macmillan 1977
- [7] “The Story of Belleek” by John B. Cunningham, published by St Davog’s Press, Belleek 1992
- [8] “East Liverpool Review” of March 26th 1928, courtesy of genealogypitstop.com