

Anthony Amatt – Potter and Entrepreneur

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Dumbarton is a Scottish town downriver from Glasgow on the north bank of the river Clyde and in his 1923 book on Scottish pottery, Arnold Fleming notes that ‘tradition and familiar rumour has always associated this historic town, with having a china work’. He could find no evidence except that some say, ‘Anthony Ammatt from the Derby China Works, and who worked in Bristol as well as Champion Bristol Porcelain Factory, erected a small porcelain works in 1760’. He also notes that in 1777 the Dumbarton Glass Company ‘Dixons’ is said to have purchased a pottery and on its site erected an extensive glass-works.’ Provost Dixon came from the Sunderland family of Dixon, Austin & Co., the Sunderland potters (Fleming 1923. 212-3).

However, the more reliable Llewellynn Jewitt, writing in the last quarter of the 19th century stated that ‘there were pot-works at Dumbarton in the later part of last and beginning of the present century. About 1800 or thereabout Anthony Ammatt originally from Derby and afterword's with Champion of Bristol, worked at Dumbarton. He afterword’s returned to Bristol and died there in 1851 aged ninety-two’(Jewitt 1883, 623).

Anthony Ammatt or Amatt is mentioned numerous time by Hugh Owen in his book on the potteries of Bristol. ‘Anthony Amatt who had been a thrower and painter at CHAMPION’S factory, and who died in Bristol on the third May 1851 at the age of 92 ¹ was permitted by the late Mr GABRIEL GOLDNEY, of the firm POULTNEY and GOLDNEY, [1836-49] potters, to exercise, for his amusement the skill in painting he had acquired in Castle Green [Champion’s pottery]. Mr Goldney who had gone into the potting business late in life, took great interest in the details of Champions manufacture, related by AMATT, who once contemptuously observed, that ‘CHAMPION’S best modeller was a mountebank of a Frenchman, picked up at his father’s show’ (Owen 1873, 88).

Owen also tells us that ‘the life of Amatt was sufficiently eventful to deserve a more detailed notice. He was born in the year 1759 [? At Derby] and died at Bristol on the 3rd April 1851 aged ninety-two’. He was in fact born in Wirksworth in the Derbyshire dales,² and it has been noted that an Anthony Ammat worked as a china enameller at the Cockpit Hill Pottery, (Anderson 2000, 45).

By 1795 some Derby white wares were being sent to Bath. Egan’s [Richard Egan, a china and glass retailer of Bath], order from Lygo [London Warehouse Manager], ‘white tea ware etc. will be sent by the wagon’. Egan used an ex-Cockpit Hill decorator, Anthony Amatt, who completed special orders including crests; material for gilding was sent too, (Anderson 2000). On the 15 Jul 1794, Richard Egan, china and glass retailer of Bath, wrote to his brother-in-law saying that he had ‘a man that lives 1 mile and a half out of Bath that formerly worked at Cockpit Hill who enamels for me’. This letter along with a number of accounts from Anthony Amatt to Egan dated 22 August, 18 September and 21 October of that year and which are now in Derby Bourgh Library, refer to Amatt painting various crests and borders on earthenware which have been published in the (Trans English Ceramic Circle Vol 6 Part 2 1966, 56). If by Amatt a plate detail in the collection of Franklin Barrett (*ibid* fig 59b), suggests he was a painter of some skill. The Cockpit Hill pottery Derby is thought to have commenced in 1750 and closed in 1779, when the failure of the banks made brothers John and Christopher Heath partners and bankers bankrupt (Towner 1978, 90).

‘A man of vigorous frame and energetic habits, his life was one of activity and change. He was first engaged as a thrower and worked at Champions for the whole period the works were open: his standing wages were thirty-six shillings per week’.³ Although the lease was not given up until 1871 it’s unlikely that new wares were fired after 1779 (Mackenna 1947, 27).⁴ That said there is some suggestion that despite being in Administration, Champion managed to buy back into the china works (Panes 2016, 65). Amatt lodged and boarded with a widow in Castle Green, where at first he paid six shillings per week! But considering the sum too little he voluntarily raised the amount to seven shillings! Although by trade only a thrower, he learned china-painting, and was often employed as a decorator. He was once a state prisoner, owing to his trying to leave for France as an artisan. This being contrary to an Act of George 1, a criminal information was laid against them; their letters were intercepted by the postmaster general; and the whole party arrested and imprisoned’ AMATT always believed that that the criminal interest was lodged by WEDGWOOD’ (Owen 1873, 290).⁵ After about six months’ detention they

were released and the exact period when this happened is not known. 'It was probably whilst he was at ['Stoak'] Stoke, where he went after leaving Bristol. After living at Dumbarton, Scotland for some time'. On the 14th September 1795, he and Peggy were witness at a marriage between Joseph Rins ⁶ and Sarah Wallis in Bath Abbey (Jewers 1900, 321).

At Twerton in the neighbourhood of Bristol Ammat established a yarn mill probably for the purpose of making wool to be used at his stocking factory (Pountney 1920, 253) and its where in 1795 he patented a wool combing machine (Burnley 1869, 138). ⁷

He was still in Twerton on the 1st January 1808 where his wife Peggy aged 47 died and was buried in the Local church yard and where he erected a tomb and 18 feet high obelisk surrounded with an iron railing (Owen 1873, 291-2). ⁸ Now aged 46 he had been married for 27 years 3 months and 19 days according to a ceramic plaque he made and inserted into the obelisk. The records show that he was married on the 12th Sep 1780 to Peggy Johnson at Wirksworth and his abode is given as (STOKE STS), the witness being John Johnson and Thomas Amatt. ⁹

Next Ammat is said to have used sand from the Isle of Wight and clay from Poole to make iron stoneware in his pottery in Crew's Hole an area in east Bristol near St George and next to the River Avon. He was a tenant in 1813, as shown in his notebook which is in Bristol Museum (Pountney 1920, 18 & 254), and is listed in the St. George rate book for 1819. ¹⁰ Later in September 1827, at the age of 66, he advertised his pottery for sale in the Bristol Mercury.

Lot 1 'an excellent newly built dwelling house, comprising a kitchen, arched cellar, larder, washhouse, dining room, with a veranda fronting the River Avon, a parlour behind, china pantry, three good bedrooms and two attics. Also *an extensive manufactory adjoining, and measuring 204 feet in length, and of an irregular depth throughout from 42 feet east to 17 feet west, consisting of a ground-floor and two stories, three large burning kilns, slip kilns, stoves, clay-house, drying-rooms, warehouse, lathes and wheels, pot-boards, squeezing-box, plaster-moulds, colour-mill, crane, and every other convenience necessary for carrying on an extensive trade in the manufacture of earthenware. A never-failing stream of excellent clear water runs through the manufactory. The premises have been substantially built within the last 8 years... The whole ranges in front of the River Avon.... for which there are every facility for loading and unloading goods, and there is also a constant communication by canal boats and barges passing to and from Bristol, Bath, London, and all the towns*

upon the lines of the Kennet and Avon, and the Wilts and Berks, canals. There is an abundance of coal within three quarters of a mile'--- Lot 2 'a coal yard adjoining Lot 1 and extending 112 feet in length by 54 feet in depth at the west and 32 feet at the east end--- Also, a capital newly erected warehouse thereon, 55 feet long and 17 feet wide, with a stable and slip-kiln'-- Lot 3 'a large and productive garden opposite Lot 1, and fronting the south, containing about half an acre, and well stocked with fruit trees in full bearing' (Bristol Mercury). Reg Jackson

<https://www.bristolpottersandpotteries.org.uk/potters-list/amatt-anthony/>

We get more information on this from The London Gazette, July 13th, 1827.

NOTICE is hereby given, that Anthony Amatt of Crew's Hole in the County of Gloucester, Potter, hath by indentures of lease and release, bearing date respectively the 16thth & 17th of May 1827, such release being made between the said Anthony Amatt of the first part, Amos Greenslade Corn-Merchant and William Powell, Glass-Manufacturer both of the City of Bristol, of the second part and all other the creditors of the said Anthony Amatt of the third part, conveyed and assigned, in manner therein mentioned, all his estate and effects for the benefit of the Creditors of him the said Anthony Amatt; and such deed was duly executed by the said Anthony Amatt, on the 17th of May 1827, and attested by Mr Wintour Harris and Mr James Harris, Solicitor Bristol and was executed by the said Amos Greenslade and William Powell on the 21st day of May 1827, and attested by the said James Harris.

Archaeological excavations have been carried out on the site of Amatt's pottery by Bristol West Archaeology and according to them it seems to have produced mainly Mocha ware, generally a buff glazed earthenware decorated with fern like patterns (Marochan 1962, 191-192). It also produced ironstone, an early form of baking ware which was still innovative at that time (*ibid*, 192-193).¹¹

Amatt must have had fingers in a number of pies as three years later he is noted as a partner in the firm of Goldney & Amatt, Worsted & Yarn Manufactures Cheese Lane Bristol (Pigot's 1830),¹² and was also landlord of the 'King's Arms' tavern in Narrow Wine Street, from 1828 to 1830.¹³ 'He was also in Leeds on the 13th May 1829, where he saw Mr. WHITEHEAD of the firm TAILOR WARNSWORTH and Co. Machine Makers' probably for the purpose of buying machinery probably for his stocking making business (Owen 1973, 291).

Back in 1798 Amatt had purchased the remainder of the lease of the crown and flint glass manufactory situated at the corner of Thomas Street and Portwall Lane along with other adjoining premises from the representatives of the Redcliff Churchland's. It must have been doing well as a year later on the 3rd September 1799, Amatt purchased for it a Boulton & Watt Sun & Planet steam engine.¹⁴ In 1801 the firm was named in Matthews Directory as 'Amatt Harris Watts and Peall worsted manufactures. From 1807 until 1817 it was 'Amatt, Harris and Co,'

14 Jun 1817 'To manufacturers of porcelain. To be sold by Private Contract, a capital factory and premises, in Saint Thomas Street, Bristol, lately occupied by Amatt Harris, and Co., consisting of the very extensive factory, containing four floors each 140 feet long and 20 feet wide, with the engine house, warehouse, smiths' shops, stable, stove, spacious yards in front of and behind the same, and great variety of other buildings; the whole occupying an acre and three-quarters of ground, and most commodiously arranged and well adapted for any trade requiring considerable space. There is also a very large cone affording amply conveniences for four spacious stoves. Also, a capital steam engine on the principle of Bolton and Watt, of 16 horsepower, and a very capacious reservoir for soft water. Also, an excellent family house for a resident partner or manager, adjoining the factory, and eight tenements contiguous, for workmen. The factory, etc., may be viewed by application on the premises and further particulars may be known by applying to Mr. Charles Lawrence, Solicitor, Cirencester, or to Mr. Wintour Harris, Solicitor, (Rodney Hampson pers comm to Reg Jackson).

By 1818, it was only 'Anthony Amatt'.¹⁵ On the 20th November 1816 Amatt's affairs had been placed in the hands of trustees, following the death of his co-partner Wintour Harris an attorney, who died a bankrupt. The principal creditors were Stephen Wilkins, Francis Hoare, Thomas Slater, William Reynolds, and John Pitt. The total amount owed was £7,642 9 10½. Amatt was called a worsted spinner of Bristol and the agreement protected him against debts exceeding £20. Around 1820, he surrendered the lease to the Vestry for £1,260, about one hundred and twenty thousand pounds in today's money. After which he became kiln man at Messrs. Powell's stone-ware pottery, where he remained, first as an employee and later as a pensioner, until his death. This was in Chatterton Square, Temple Meads, with Mr. W. Powell sole executor.

When Amatt joined Powell's, stoneware was generally salt glazed which produced a finely pitted surface. Bristol Glaze, a form of Feldspathic coating is thought to have been developed by experiments carried out by Amatt and Powell's and first used at Powell's stoneware manufacture in 1835. The firm never patented the discovery but some of their adverts include the wording 'inventor and sole manufacturer of the improved stone ware, which is glazed inside and out with a glaze warranted to resist acids and will not absorb'. The recipes in Amatt's book for making earthenware, stoneware, glazes, colours, Egyptian black, saggars, glass etc., etc., number from twelve to thirteen hundred and many bear the names of potteries where he was allowed to go and make trials, composing the mixture of the ingredients himself and the results are marked as good, bad, blistered etc, (Pountney 1920, 253-4). Owen notes some thousands of experiments in porcelain making and 849 trials of different mixtures appear to have been made by him while at Stoke (Owen 1873, 293). Unsigned but with a trade card of Anthony Amatt, it is in the collections of Bristol Central Library B.21056. It was the gift of Septimius Powel and probably ends about 1832.

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¹ He was in fact only 90 when he died on the 3rd April 1851; Retired potter 90 born in Wirksworth, Derbyshire. Living at 3 Chatterton Square, St Mary Redcliffe parish.

² He was baptised at Wirksworth on the 13th November 1761; Wirksworth Parish Records 1600-1900. www.wirksworth.org.uk/MW01.htm

³ This is unlikely as he would have only been 16 when the factory opened and if he was an apprentice at Cockpit Hill, he would have had to begin this aged 9.

⁴ A piece dated October 1779 in the form of a figure 'Grief, leaning upon an urn' is known, and which was produced to commemorate the death of his eldest daughter.

⁵ Wedgewood was active in preventing English potters emigrating whom he declared were being lured by French and German agents (Meteyard 1866 ii 475).

⁶ A Quaker family with links to Champion.

⁷ In 1799, John and Charles Cartwright took Amatt to court for infringement of their patent on a wool-combing machine. The case was heard before Justice Rooke, and he maintained that there was no cause for action. Later heard by Lord Chief Justice Eldon in the Court of Common Pleas and this time the plaintiffs were awarded damages of £1,000 against Amatt and his co-defendants.

⁸ Pountney gives a completely different description.

⁹ Amatt married again to a Jane Moss both of Bristol Redcliff on Sep. 8th, 1817; Jane was later buried on the 28th March 1832.

¹⁰ Raymond Holland (2002) had access to documents and notes which show that Amatt produced pottery at Crew's Hole from 1812-19.

¹¹ [https://www.academia.edu/31949358/Etheridge D. 2012 land off Crews Hole Road Bristol Archaeological Desk-Based Assessment Report](https://www.academia.edu/31949358/Etheridge_D._2012_land_off_Crews_Hole_Road_Bristol_Archaeological_Desk-Based_Assessment_Report). Also, a unique two handled cup which by repute was produced by Amatt at Crews Hole to commemorate the opening of William Rogers boiler manufactory in Moorfields Bristol in 1819, has been illustrate in (Rickard 2006, 71-2 fig 101 also p. 137).

¹² This partnership was dissolved a year later; The Law Advisor Vol 9- No 37 Sep 15, 1831, p.325 – E Y Thomas & Anthony Amatt Cheese Lane St Philips & Jacobs Gloucestershire worsted spinners... March 25.

¹³ bristolstlostopubs.eu/page7.html

¹⁴ https://www.b-i-a-s.org.uk/BIAS_Journal_28_BOULTON_AND_WATT.pdf

¹⁵ 14 Feb 1818 Amatt, Harris & Co. advertised their woollen manufactory for sale and this included a glass cone.

Summary and Questions

Anthony Amatt pottery, inventor, and businessman, born in 1759, could not as stated by Owen, have been engaged as a thrower and worked at Champions for the whole period the works were open. It is much more likely that he worked there for a period after time at Cockpit Hill. He almost certainly went to Stoke after the Closure of Champions, as he was working there when he married in Wirksworth aged 19, on the 12th Sep 1790.¹⁵ At present we have no idea how long he was in Staffordshire or the six-month period he was in jail, and indeed if and when he was in Dumbarton Scotland. He was probably back in the Bristol Area by 1794, or a little earlier and certainly by 1795. One thing for sure, we can discount Fleming's account of events and research will go on when the Scottish archives open to try and trace Amatt's movements for the years 1780 – c.1794.

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1. Did Amatt serve an apprenticeship at Cockpit Hill
 2. How long was Amatt at Champions
 3. Who was Amatt working for in Stoke
 4. How long was Amatt in Stoke
 5. When was Amatt jailed and when was he released
 6. Was Wedgwood responsible for the jailing of Amatt and the rest of the potters going to France
 7. How long was Amatt in Scotland
 8. Where did he work while in Scotland