

## **CARLTON WARE NEWSLETTER #50**

**from**

**Ian Harwood & Jerome Wilson**

August 2010 – Higher resolution version.

### **Violet Elmer and Olive Kew – The Trilogy - Part Three**

**By Barry and Elaine Girling**

The County of Suffolk is not unknown for being at the forefront of the Arts and has produced many figures of renown. Architects, artists, choreographers, composers, designers and sculptors of the highest order abound either by birth or association. Constable, Gainsborough and Munnings found their way from England's most easterly county, as did Peter Hall and Trevor Nunn. Frederick Ashton lived there for many years whilst Charles Rennie Mackintosh and John Piper stayed but briefly. Henry Moore, John Nash, and Stanley Spencer left their own legacy. Amongst composers and musicians the most prominent was Benjamin Britten, the catalyst of an iconic group.

Surprisingly there are strong connections to the world of ceramics.

Firstly the celebrated Lowestoft Porcelain works [c1757–1802] was located on the county's northern seaboard.

Secondly, Ipswich born Reginald Haggard [1905–1988] attended the local School of Art as well as the Royal College. The charismatic figure, ceramic designer, accomplished artist, and lecturer moved to Mintons in 1929 and soon established himself as Art Director, a position he held for a decade. He was Master in Charge at both Stoke and Burslem Schools of Art during the period 1935 – 1945. Later he devoted his time to the painting of watercolours, writing and giving lectures. Perhaps as a contemporary of Violet Elmer he may have made her acquaintance as they enjoyed a shared love of Art Deco and the two Factories were in close proximity.

Finally, the Suffolk connection continued in that famed Carlton Ware designer Enoch Boulton originally served his apprenticeship at Messrs Grimwades. This enterprising Pottery, under the trade name of Royal Winton, became famous in 1928 for the introduction of the design known as chintz. Leonard Lumsden Grimwade, born into a prominent Ipswich family about 1864 began his business life as a dry-salter in the Town. He relocated to the Potteries as a modeller but soon moved into manufacturing. He was joined by his elder brother Sidney in 1885 and together worked the Winton pottery, to be known as Grimwades, c1890. Leonard experimented with new methods of manufacture and developed several revolutionary techniques. By the time of the First World War, his five factories employed a thousand people. Leonard Grimwade was called to 'higher service' in 1931 unfortunately due to a road accident.

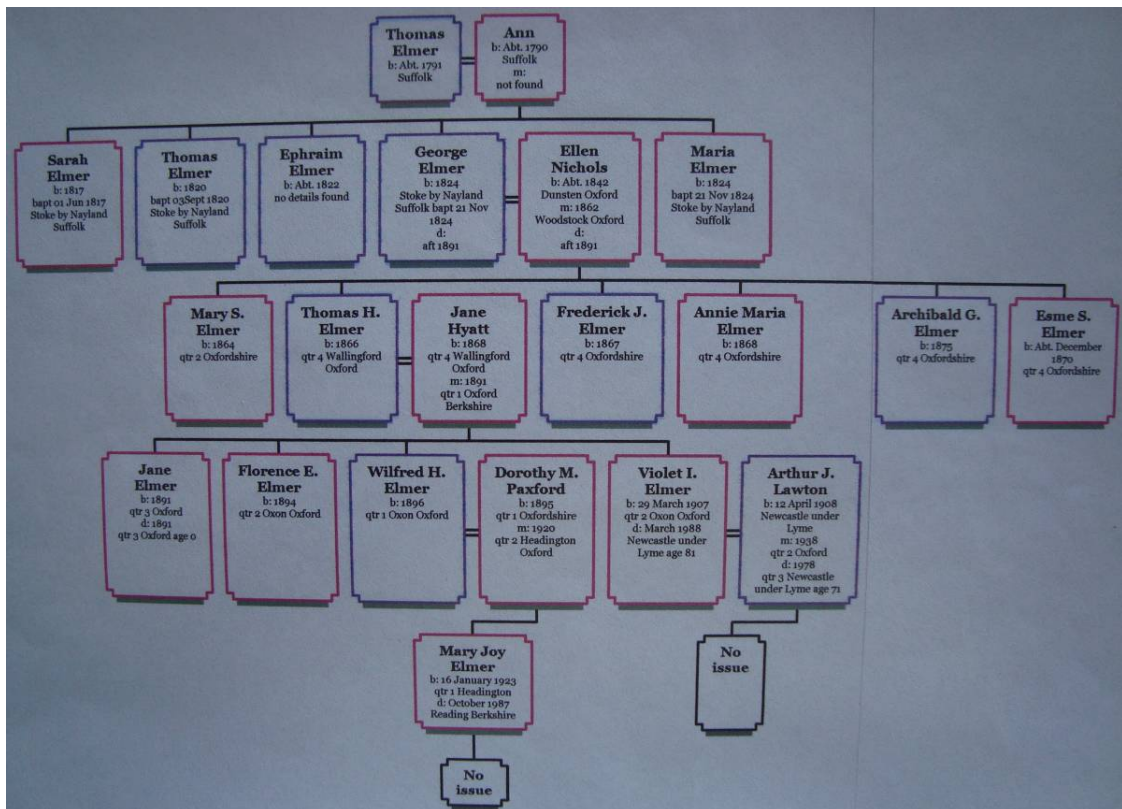
Suffolk is also well represented by poets and literary figures, no more so in recent times than Frank Grace's tome dealing with housing and the procurement of labour to feed Robert Ransome's great industrial enterprise of the Orwell Works.

Pre dating Mr Grace's wonderful social history, lifelong resident and farmer, Adrian Bell, chronicled in his series of books the changing life of the County's yeoman farmers prior to the introduction of mechanisation. In the 1920's power was provided by the heavy [Suffolk] horse and intensive use of manual labour.

In times past the local economy of Stoke-by-Nayland, a village bearing all the attractiveness of the early wool trade would have relied on agriculture. In such introverted communities life was

harsh for the working man. Success could be construed as employment and accommodation in a tied cottage. The tenant however, would be beholden to the local farmer or landowner.

One such agricultural worker was Thomas Elmer born there in Scotland Street in 1791. This was Violet Elmer's great grandfather. Although perhaps far removed from Suffolk's luminaries this was no less a profession skilled in the way of the land. The surname Elmer is local and found in that County more than any other. The male line continued following a pattern of work that led to Oxfordshire and the meeting with Violet's mother, Jane Hyatt who came from Wallingford. According to the family tree shown, it would appear that the branch Violet descended from has died out.



The difficulty in finding accommodation was reflected rather differently many years later after Violet Elmer had left her Oxford home to become a designer at Messrs Wiltshaw and Robinson's Copeland Street premises. The problem was resolved at Newcastle-under-Lyme in the form of a large late Victorian house c1895 situated at the end of a terrace in Friars Wood Road, [now known as Friarswood Road]. She lodged there for many years, possibly from 1928 until the time of her marriage in 1938. The house is located some two miles from the Factory at Stoke-on-Trent and within half a mile of her ultimate home at Westlands. The property had occupants of some interest as detailed in the 1933 Newcastle-under-Lyme Electoral Register. The owner is listed as Maria, known as Bia, Scott who had connections in the Potteries and thrived in artistic company. Also living at the premises, was one Albert Simmonds believed to be a relative of Bia. Aside from Violet the remaining occupant also lodging at the premises was Olive Kew, a design assistant to Violet whilst at Carlton Ware. The register states that Maria and Albert both lived and worked in Newcastle, but that Violet and Olive lived in Newcastle but neither worked there. Olive continued to lodge at Friarswood until Violet married in 1938.

At this time in the early 1930's, Miss Elmer would have been at the height of her powers. The following are fine examples of her work during this period.

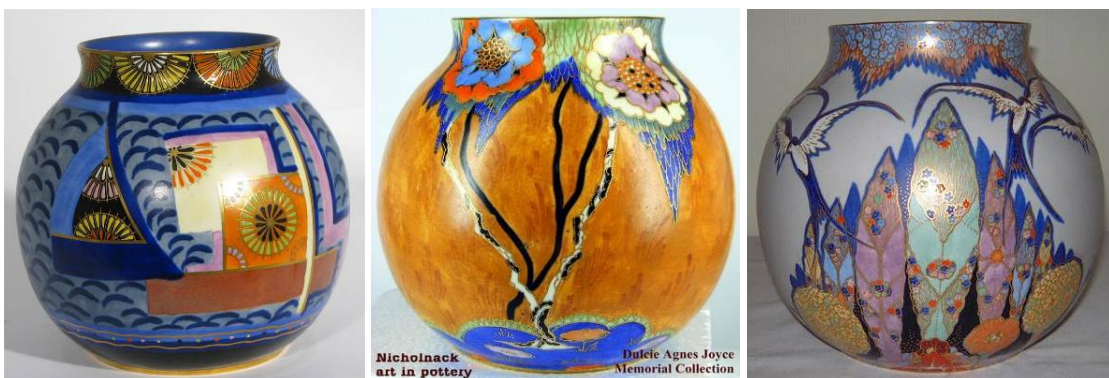
**Best Ware** and **HANDCRAFT** patterns designed by **Violet Elmer** on the **442** shape vase



**Awakening** on Ruby Lustre pattern number **3497**  
**FLOWER & FALLING LEAF** on Ruby Lustre pattern number **3949**  
**WAGON WHEELS** on Ruby Lustre pattern number **3814**



**Egyptian Fan** on Powder Blue pattern number **3696**  
**Bell** on gloss yellow, pattern number **3774**  
**Crested Bird & Water Lily** on Powder Blue pattern number **3521**



**Geometrica** on matt blue **HANDCRAFT** pattern number **3566**  
**Rosetta** on matt orange pattern number **3505**  
**Fantasia** on matt pale blue pattern number **3388**



Olive Kew, known generally by the nickname of Wink, was born at Tottenham, London, 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1902 and moved with her parents to Northampton a few years later.

In September 1916 she attended the Notre Dame High School where she stayed until July 1920. In September of that year, Wink enrolled as Art pupil teacher at Northampton School of Arts and Crafts. There she taught youngsters and otherwise studied. Olive worked there for six years until she had passed all her examinations. As a result of this, Miss Kew was awarded a studentship to the Royal College of Art in 1927 but did not take this up as she was reluctant to impose a further financial burden on her parents. In January 1928 she gained a position teaching art and needlework at Highfield College, Bispham, Blackpool but left in December 1929.

Following a recommendation by a family member who was a friend of Mr L O Smith, a manager at the Pottery, she began work at Carlton Ware in February 1930. At Copeland Street Olive shared a 'long narrow office' with Violet Elmer who became a great friend. However, in March 1931, Olive's services had to be terminated as the Company was about to go into Receivership.

Later that year Miss Kew joined the Howard Pottery, Shelton, Stoke-on-Trent, maker of Brentleigh Ware, where she enjoyed considerable success as a designer and stayed until 1957. She remained in employment until retirement in 1962. The designer continued to live for many years at the Westlands, Newcastle-under-Lyme until returning to Northampton in 1976.

Olive Kew, who never married, died at Springfield Nursing Home, Northampton aged 89 on the 14<sup>th</sup> March 1991.

Owing to the lack of records and the passage of time, it is difficult to establish attribution of Olive's work with any real certainty. However, it is thought that **Jagged Bouquet** should be accredited. Other designs must surely exist and a case for **Prickly Pansy** and **Towering Castle**, which both show similarities and fall within the same numbering range, could perhaps be made.



**Jagged Bouquet** on matt green pattern number **3457**  
**Prickly Pansy** on Ruby Lustre pattern number **3455**



**Towering Castle on matt brown pattern number 3458**

There is no doubt that Olive Kew was a talented designer who served several companies with distinction. Much of her work remains unrecorded and patience will be needed until such time as the result of further research is known.

In the photographs below, the two Carlton Ware designers can be seen together with friends, having fun at Blackpool probably during the 1930's, and another taking tea with a difference!





Pictures of Olive at different times in her life.

With grateful thanks to Mr E G Richards for generously allowing access to the Kew Family History, including a biography written by Harvey Pettit following several interviews with Olive in the 1980s. The kind assistance of Mrs J Bebbington, Mrs R Endacott and Nicholas Howell is also acknowledged.

Finally special thanks to Ian Harwood and Jerome Wilson for their production expertise, unfailing support and enthusiasm for all things Carlton Ware.

The featured pictures of Carlton Ware are from the collections of Barry & Elaine Girling, Ian Harwood & Jerome Wilson and Martin & Jane Hedger, as well as from the The Dulcie Agnes Joyce Memorial Collection and the Parnell Collection, courtesy of Bruce Nichol's Nicholnack art in pottery website <http://nicholnack.com.au/>.



**ANEMONE** charger on Orange Lustre **HANDCRAFT** pattern number **3694**  
**ANEMONE** charger on Matt Black **HANDCRAFT** pattern number unknown



**Best Ware patterns designed by Violet Elmer on the 443 shape vase**



**Needlepoint on Ruby Lustre pattern number 3816**  
**WAGON WHEELS on mottled pink pattern number 3814**  
**Egyptian Fan on Ruby Lustre pattern number 3695**



**Dahlia & Butterfly on mottled green pattern number 3606**  
**Mandarin Tree on gloss Ruby Lustre & cream pattern number 3703**  
**Devil's Copse on matt blue-green pattern number 3817**

Best Ware patterns designed by Violet Elmer on the 456 shape vase



**SKETCHING BIRD** on matt buff pattern number **3890**  
**FAN** on Ruby Lustre pattern number **3558**  
**Iceland Poppy** on gloss cream pattern number **3503**



**WAGON WHEELS** on matt green pattern number **3812**  
**Rainbow Fan** on gloss green pattern number **3700**  
**Devil's Cove** on gloss blue-green pattern number **3765A**

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Our sincere thanks to Barry & Elaine for their time and effort in their research for this article.

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