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Original article

Coade, Blashfield or Doulton? The in situ identification of ceramic garden statuary and ornament from three eighteenth and nineteenth century manufacturers

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ABSTRACT

In the eighteenth century, the emergence of a neoclassical style in architecture created a growing demand for a range of classically-inspired products – not only for architectural decoration but also for ornamentation of the garden. Producing individual items in stone, however, was time-consuming and expensive, so cheaper clay-based alternatives were adopted, most notably from manufacturers such as Coade (1769–1830), Blashfield (1840s–1875) and Doulton (1854–1890s). The artefacts of these manufacturers are now considered of high historic value and significance and their identification is important, not only for the historical record, but also for provision of the evidence necessary to carry out informed conservation. As the sale and copy of moulds was common practice during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, stylistic considerations do not provide reliable identification. Through the analysis of 24 historic objects of garden statuary and ornamentation, this research evaluates the use of portable X-ray fluorescence spectroscopy (pXRF), and more specifically element profiles, in identifying, and differentiating between the products of Coade, Blashfield and Doulton. Key questions around heterogeneity and representative material analysis are addressed. Despite the inherent heterogeneity of these materials, it is shown that discrimination is nevertheless possible using pXRF, primarily due to the significant differences observed across a range of elements at both macro- and trace-level. Objects of known provenance from Coade, Blashfield and Doulton produced three distinct and statistically significant groups demonstrating that the data reflect the composition of the bulk material — rather than surface characteristics. Through identifying the main discriminators for the Coade, Blashfield and Doulton materials, a simple presumptive test is proposed that can be used in an initial evaluation of any unsigned works. Analysis of a selection of unsigned objects with a probable Coade, Blashfield or Doulton provenance was in many cases successful in confirming the documentary evidence. A few objects, however, presented anomalous element profiles. These most likely result from past conservation treatments or polychromy – the two major limitations of the technique.

1. Research aims

This research aims to evaluate the use of pXRF, and more specifically element profiles, in identifying, and differentiating between, the products of three key manufacturers of ceramic garden statuary and ornament during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. As the sale and copy of moulds was common practice during this time, stylistic considerations cannot be reliably used to identify the manufacturer. It is presumed, however, that the manufacturers adopted different recipes, leading to unique element profiles for their wares.

The research aims to establish the reliability of the portable technique in establishing truly representative element profiles of the bulk material in large statuary and urns through routine spot analyses (50.3 mm^2) of the surface layer only, thus determining whether a simple, widely accessible, noninvasive methodology can provide useful information in cases where the manufacturer is unknown.

2. Introduction

In the eighteenth century, the emergence of a neoclassical style in architecture created a growing demand for a range of classically-inspired products–not only for architectural decoration but also

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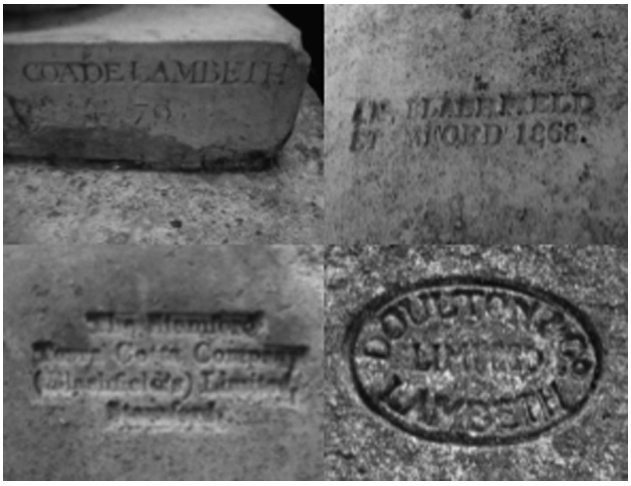

Fig. 1. Examples of manufacturer's stamps on ceramic objects. Clockwise from the top left: Coade Lambeth 1779 (AACA, AACB, AACC); J.M. Blashfield Stamford 1868 (CABA, CABB, CABC); The Stamford Terra Cotta Company (Blashfield) Limited, Stamford (1872-5) (BA, BC); Doulton & Co Ltd Lambeth (1890–1902) (CADA, CADB, CADC, CADD).

for ornamentation of the garden [1]. Producing individual items in stone, however, was time-consuming and expensive, so the advantages of finding a cheaper alternative were rapidly recognised.

The possibility of using a clay-based material – which could be moulded and fired in a kiln and easily replicated – was a natural development of the efforts being made throughout Europe to reproduce the imported Chinese porcelains. John Dwight of Fulham, for example, had taken out a patent in 1672 for a material which he claimed to be porcelain although documentary evidence and later analysis now show it to have been 'a white stoneware based upon ball clay, sand and an alkaline glass frit' [2]. Dwight's material was commercially unsuccessful but, by the early eighteenth century, the potential of combining clay with a glass flux to create an 'artificial stone' was recognised by manufacturers such as Richard Holt. His production of a vitrified ceramic body was documented in 1732 and the process was successfully developed by Mrs Eleanor Coade in the later part of the eighteenth century.

The stoneware ceramic introduced by Eleanor Coade in 1769 was called Coade stone [3]. Using a ball clay from Dorset, the material produced at her Lambeth factory varied in colour between a pale greyish-white and a light yellow or beige and was identifiable by the presence of a 'Coade, London' or 'Coade, Lambeth' stamp (up to 1799), and a 'Coade & Sealy' stamp (1799–1830) [4].

It was the popularity of the Coade product which resulted in a number of other manufacturers employing clay-based materials in a similar way. John Marriott Blashfield initially owned a manufactory at Millwall where, like Eleanor Coade, he used a ball clay from Dorset, but by 1858 he had moved to Stamford to make use of the good ball clay there [5]. He patented the addition of coprolites and fossil bone to his clays to improve the quality of his products [6], which ranged in colour from light yellow or beige to a dull orange. Up to 1872, his works were identified by the indentations 'Blashfield, Stamford' or 'J.M. Blashfield, Stamford'. At this time, the firm was declared bankrupt but was resurrected as 'The Stamford Terra

Table 1
The twenty-four historic objects chosen for analysis.

Sample	*n*	Object	Location (UK)	Manufacturer's indentation	Additional information
AACA 1–7	7	Caryatid (statue)	Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire	Coade Lambeth 1793	–
AACB 1–6	6	Caryatid (statue)			
AACC 1–6	6	Caryatid (statue)			
CD 1–6	6	Druid (statue)	Croome Park, Worcestershire	Coade London 1793	–
BEA 1–7	7	Egyptian (statue)	Buscot Park, Oxfordshire	Coade & Sealy 1800	–
BEB 1–7	7	Egyptian (statue)			
BA 1–6	6	Garden urn	Burghley House, Lincolnshire	The Stamford Terra Cotta Company (Blashfield's) Limited, Stamford	Estimated date: 1872–1875
BC 1–6	6	Garden urn			
CABA 1–6	6	Garden urn	Castle Ashby Northamptonshire	J.M. Blashfield Stamford 1868	–
CABB 1–6	6	Garden urn			
CABC 1–6	6	Garden urn			
CADA 1–6	6	Garden urn		Doulton & Co Lambeth London	Estimated date: 1854–1890
CADB 1–6	6	Garden urn			
CADC 1–6	6	Garden urn		Doulton & Co Limited Lambeth	Estimated date: 1890–1902
CADD 1–6	6	Garden urn			
ASL 1–8	8	Lion (statue)	Temple Gardens Lincoln	Austin & Seeley London	Estimated date: 1870
GP 1–9	9	Gate Pier	Mrs Coade's Villa Lyme Regis	Not present	Assumed Coade
CSp 1–6	6	Sphinx (statue)	Croome Park, Worcestershire	Not present	Assumed Coade Documentary Evidence [8]
GIII 1–6	6	George III (Bust)	Lincoln Castle (garden) Lincoln	Not present	Assumed Coade & Sealy, 1810 Documentary Evidence [8]
GC 1–12	12	George III (Legs)	Lincoln Castle (cellar) Lincoln	Not present	Assumed Coade & Sealy, 1810 Documentary Evidence [8]
CAuD 1–6	6	Garden urn	Castle Ashby Northamptonshire	Not present	One of a group of four urns. The other three were all signed Blashfield products
BB 1–6	6	Garden urn (copy of Warwick vase)	Burghley, Lincolnshire	Not present	Believed to be a Blashfield product (Burghley Estate)
AAU 1–10	10	Garden urn	Anglesey Abbey, Cambridgeshire	Not present	'Stamford' indentation suggests a Blashfield product
P1–12	12	Nymph	Dunorlan Park, Kent	Not present	Pulham product, 1862 Documentary Evidence [5]