

Nelson's Visit to Worcester



In the late summer of 1802, Admiral Nelson took advantage of the brief pause in the wars with France, and took a tour of Wales and the West Country with Emma and Sir William Hamilton. On the way back they stayed with their friend Richard Payne Knight at Downton Castle near Ludlow and on the afternoon of Sunday 26th August they set off for Worcester.

The local paper reported, 'The intention of the illustrious hero to visit the city, being known a few hours previous to his arrival, a great concourse of people assembled, who hailed his approach with heartfelt acclamation; and taking the horses from his carriage, drew it to the Hop-Pole Inn, amidst the grateful plaudits of the numerous admiring spectators who lined the streets and the windows of the houses. The brave avenger of his country's wrongs was also greeted by the joyous peels of the different church bells, and several discharges of cannon, and the various testimonies of esteem and respect continued till night had completely drawn her sable mantle o'er the scene. The gallant Admiral was in good health and spirits; he wore on his breast the insignia of the several orders with which he had been honoured for his glorious achievements, and granted the exulting crowd by repeatedly appearing at the window and bowing to them with the most graceful condescension.'

The next morning Nelson, Emma and Sir William Hamilton, accompanied by Robert and Humphrey Chamberlain, the Rev. William Nelson (Horatio's brother) and a musical band, set off along the High Street to Diglis and Chamberlain's China Works in Severn Street. A triumphal arch of laurel with a blue flag had been quickly erected over the factory entrance.

They spent more than an hour touring all the factory departments, In the painting room they met James Plant

" A battered looking gentleman made his appearance. He had lost an arm and an eye. Leaning on his left and only arm was the beautiful Lady Hamilton, evidently pleased at the interest excited by her companion: and then amongst the general company came a very infirm old gentlemen. This was Sir William Hamilton."



They then processed back to Mr.Chamberlain's china shop at 33, High Street, opposite the Guildhall. Nelson was full of admiration and placed a large order for a breakfast, dinner and dessert service to be decorated in the Fine Old Japan pattern, number 240 "with the arms of several orders conferred" , two vases, two cups and saucers and an inkstand, to be sent to "No.23 Piccadilly, opposite the Green Park."

Nelson then crossed the road to the Assembly room in the Guildhall where he was entertained by the Mayor and Corporation and The Earl of Coventry, Lord Lieutenant of Worcestershire, presented him with the Freedom of the City in a Chamberlain vase. In Nelson's honour the Street next to the Guildhall was renamed Copenhagen Street and a mosaic of stones in front of the building was relayed to mark the visit. The group completed their day in Worcester with a tour of the Cathedral.

Three years later, when Nelson died at Trafalgar (October 31st 1805), Chamberlain had only delivered part of the order. Nelson left the breakfast service in his will to his beloved Emma Hamilton. It must have been a blow to her to receive the bill from Chamberlains for the breakfast service, plus four 10 inch dishes and one 12 inch dish at a total cost of 120 pounds 10 shillings and sixpence, only one week after Nelson's state funeral in January 1806.

Following Nelson's death, Emma's extravagant lifestyle soon whittled away her fortune. She was imprisoned for debt by 1813 and died in poverty two years later, aged 50. The Worcester breakfast service was sold and is now scattered in both public and private collections all over the world.



The wonderful extravagant teapot from the Horatia service was purchased for the museum of Worcester porcelain with help from the National Art Collections Fund and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund.

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