

**Excerpt from Fairy Lamp Club
Newsletter**

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BRETBY POTTERY – A BRIEF HISTORY¹

Bretby Pottery began operation on October 25, 1883 at Church Gresley Pottery owned by T. G. Green in Derbyshire, UK.

The pottery operation was founded and managed by Henry Tooth, an artist and former manager at Linthorpe Pottery near Middlesborough and William Ault, a former manager at T. G. Green Pottery. Their pottery quickly gained popularity and they received their first gold medal award at the British Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1884.

In the first year of operation they registered the "Sunburst" trademark comprising of a sun rising above the single word "BRETBY."

This signature trademark could have been inspired by Henry Tooth's prior tenure at the Linthorpe Pottery on a site occupied by the Sun Brick Works in Linthorpe Village, Middlesborough.



Bretby products almost always bear the impressed sunburst motif and the word "Bretby." After 1891 the word "England"

was added and after 1900 it was modified to "Made in England."²

Henry Tooth and William Ault parted company on January 1, 1887. William Ault started his own very successful pottery, Ault & Company, which later became known as Ault Tunnicliffe. This connection to the name Tunnicliffe is interesting. Is it the same Tunnicliffe as in Taylor and Tunnicliffe (correctly spelled "Tunnicliff.), maker of several Clarke pottery bases. I suspect so, but that is another story for another time.

The Bretby Pottery of Tooth and Ault continued operation for many years under different names. They experienced periods of success and decline. They closed operation completely for five years during WW II but managed to reopen again in 1947. It continued over several decades under various directors until ceasing operations in 1996.



(Photo by "Dweeb")

While the main production areas have been torn down, the office space still

¹ References: Linthorpe Pottery - Interim Report, www.dormanmuseum.co.uk/documents/Linthorpepotteryabriefhistory.pdf and *Bretby Art Pottery – A Collector's Guide* by Michael David Ash

² www.decorative-antiques.co.uk/histories/bretby.htm

remains. It was toured recently by Industrial Researcher "Dweeb". A following is an excerpt from his report.³

"The administration building had been mind-numbingly lavish. The central room boasted wood paneling (in actual fact it was wood with ceramic decorations) ornate plaster ceiling, finished with painted canvas, and amazing ceramic shelf brackets, fashioned as a floral display.



(Photo by "Dweeb")

The cellar was amazing too. It was still filled with oak barrels filled with glaze colouring. One is filled with the largest copper sulphate crystals I have ever seen! Old bicycles, tiles, pots and god knows what is packed in the rafters!"

With that little history, you may ask: "What has Bretby Pottery contributed to fairy lamps as a collectable?"

Some would argue: "Nothing." Yet, R-378 is included with all the other figural nursery candle lamps in *Fairy Lamps* by Ruf & Ruf. The rationale for including it in this category is clear. It has transparent eyes and can easily accommodate a candle. Yet, the "scary nature" of the design is hardly the best choice for a nursery light.



R-378 — Figural dark brown werewolf, brown transparent glass eyes, four sharp teeth with opening from candle chamber to interior of mouth. Bottom embossed "BRETBY, 1258, England". 3.75"h x 4.5"w.

Ruf has identified this design as a "werewolf" while others have called it a "Hissing Cat." Both names certainly fit the design. However, the March 1904 issue of the *Pottery Gazette* described the design as "...a cat's head hissing its disapproval."⁴ It would seem that a "hissing cat" was the description in use at the time of production.

The embossed Bretby trademark of R-378 includes the word "England." This indicates it was produced between 1891 and 1900. This is consistent with the design number "1258" which was introduced approximately in 1899 or 1900.⁵

In the broad categories of Bretby Pottery ware, the "Hissing Cat" would have been included with their line of Grotesque ware — a collection of novelty animal figures in

³ "Dweeb" is an alias used by the author of this internet article. The complete report along with additional photos is located at: www.28dayslater.co.uk/forums/showthread.php?t=34346

⁴ *Bretby Art Pottery – A Collector's Guide* by Michael David Ash

⁵ Ibid.

comical or unusual designs. Bretby's line of Grotesque ware was probably introduced around 1897 or 1898 and was still being advertised into the mid-1920s.⁶

Some time ago I was able to add the "Hissing Cat" to my collection. It was very similar to R-378 with only a couple noteworthy differences.



The hand-made qualities were quite evident. While the basic design may have been molded, the final product showed the extensive use of an artist tool. In addition, there was no added color as in R-378. The color was natural with little or no glaze added to complete the finish.

This example also had a small opening at the back of the mouth as indicated in R-378. While the purpose of the hole may have been to allow air into the candle chamber, the "scary effect" was even more dramatic when it was lit.



⁶ Ibid.

⁷ *Bretby Art Pottery – A Collector's Guide* by Michael David Ash, "Understanding the Marks", pg. 73

As you can see, the hole, while providing ventilation for the candle, allowed the candle light to illuminate the inside of the mouth. Can you imagine lighting this "nursery lamp" while trying to get your child to go to sleep?

My version of R-378 also was stamped with the Bretby trademark with "England." The design number, however, was somewhat different.



This design number, 1258, included the suffix "A". The capital letter following the design number signifies the size of the product. The designation only appears where different sizes are offered for the same design.⁷

Some time ago, R-378 was offered for auction on eBay. There was nothing unusual about it until you read the description — it was 9 inches wide and 7 inches tall! Twice the size of R-378!



Now, this is a real "monster." When I first read the description of this auction, I did not believe it and assumed the dimensions stated were incorrect. However, with the explanation of the design number code, I think the dimensions are very plausible and probably correct.



This "monster" is stamped "1258 ?". The suffix letter is not very distinct, but it appears to be a "B." In addition, this trademark example does not include the word "England." Does this suggest this larger version was produced before R-378?

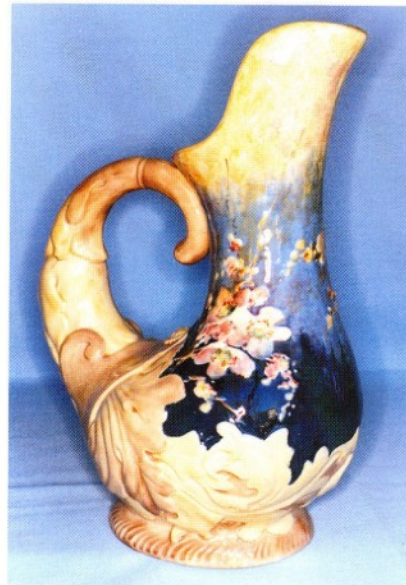
Finally, one last bit of information gleaned from *Bretby Art Pottery – A Collector's Guide* by Michael David Ash. In the chapter "Grotesque Ware" Ash states:

"Research has identified this piece [R-378] as shape 1258 without a lid and 1272 with one."

Now, that is an interesting revelation. If correct, does the version with a lid have a different function? Or, is the lid simply to extinguish the candle? I suspect this design was multi-functional and the owner ultimately decided how it was to be used.

This article, would not have been possible without the dedicated research done by Michael David Ash and published in his book *Bretby Art Pottery – A Collector's Guide*.

BRETBY ART POTTERY



A Collector's Guide

by

Michael David Ash

If you would like to add it to your library, the ISBN is 0-9540613-0-6. It is, however, currently out of print and is difficult to find. You may, however, find a copy in one of the many on-line booksellers or at your local library.