

# **RUSKIN POTTERY CENTENARY EXHIBITION**

**13 April – 27 June 1999**

1998 marked the centenary of the founding of Ruskin Pottery by Edward Richard Taylor and his son, William Howson Taylor. Ruskin Pottery was named after the writer and artist John Ruskin and its aims, according to Howson Taylor, were "good pottery, beauty of form, and rich or tender colouring". This special exhibition, devised by the Royal Cornwall Museum, will bring together the different glaze styles and shapes used by this unique Pottery during its 35-year existence and put them into historic context.

Ruskin Pottery was the fulfilment of a lifelong ambition on the part of Edward Taylor, the first Headmaster of the Birmingham Municipal School of Art, to create a new kind of pottery. Together, with his youngest son, Howson Taylor, he first established a small kiln in the garden of his house in Edgbaston in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The results obtained were successful enough to encourage them to establish a pottery on a commercial basis.

In December 1898 the Taylors established the Ruskin Pottery at Oldbury Road, West Smethwick. The first three years of the Pottery was an experimental period in which Howson Taylor sought to master the secrets of the application of glazes. Purity of the shape, beauty of the colour and the life of the glaze were his absorbing aims. In an interview with the Birmingham Gazette, Howson Taylor stated that during those three years he had worked and experimented at a cost of over £10,000 before he allowed even one piece out of his Pottery.

By 1901 financial pressures forced a more commercial attitude toward production and William Nixon was recruited from Wedgwood as head turner. It is said that Ruskin products owed much of their technical excellence to his skill. The Taylors added vases, bowls, tableware and other domestic wares to their range of products and began to promote them through the media and exhibitions.

Cont'd/...

The Pottery's first major exhibition success was at the London Arts and Crafts Society Exhibition in January 1903 where *The Art Journal* noted 'a few tiles and a quantity of pottery altogether admirable for the broken quality of its glaze'. In June 1903, Edward Taylor retired from the Birmingham Municipal School of Art to devote his time to promoting the Pottery and from this point onwards Ruskin pottery was shown at most major exhibitions around the country and internationally. During this period, the Pottery won several prestigious awards, establishing a world-wide reputation and trade.

Unlike many small potteries, Ruskin Pottery survived the First World War and re-established its position and markets by the middle of the 1920s. Throughout the rest of the decade, the Pottery developed a new range of matt and crystalline glazes and a broader manner of potting to meet changing fashions. However, a combination of increasingly difficult trading conditions and Howson Taylor's failing health caused the closure of the factory in December 1933.

The exhibition and accompanying catalogue include the latest research on the Pottery by Courtenay Smale and John Henson, along with archive photographs.

- ends -

22 January 1999

