

MISS DOROTHY DOUGHTY

1892 - 1962



Dorothy Doughty was born in San Remo, Italy in 1892. Her father was the explorer and poet, Charles Doughty. Dorothy studied at Eastbourne School of Art and became a keen naturalist and ornithologist. In 1933 the American publisher, Alex Dickens, encouraged Royal Worcester to make large, bone china models of birds to sell in limited numbers. Dorothy Doughty designed a series of birds for the American market working from the studio in Cornwall, which she shared with her sister, Freda. Dorothy had never worked in clay before, but was determined to make the birds as life-like as possible.

She wrote, "My work with the birds has been a joyful thing. In this tortured world one of the happiest ways of spending a life is to work closely with nature. Although the miraculous perfection of birds and flowers, and indeed all wild things, is beyond the power of man to portray in any medium, he or she who strives towards it, learns to see even more deeply, to glimpse something of the Infinite, and to feel a privileged and very humble person."

In the 1930's, china models of this complexity had never been made before. Technical innovations and new skills were developed in mould-making, casting, propping and decorating to reproduce the birds. Special mat colours were developed to give the birds a life-like appearance. Flower making was supervised by Antonio Vassallo and after 1938, by Mary Leigh. Bob Bradley was in charge of casting and fitting up the first standard models, which were painted by George Evans and Harry Davis. On her visits to the Worcester factory to keep an eye on the production of her models, Dorothy made a deep impression on the staff. She was very firm about what she wanted and highly critical of anything she didn't like, but she always insisted that the birds were the result of a team effort. Dorothy was ultimately dependent on the many anonymous craftsmen and women who translated her models into permanent ceramic form and she never tired of paying tribute to their skill and patience.

During the War years production of the Doughty Birds continued (alongside resistors and spark plugs), as it was vital for Britain to earn dollars through the sale of luxury goods to the American market. After the war Dorothy and her sister moved to Falmouth to a cliff-top house with a garden studio, whose walls were lined with birdcages.

Dorothy made two visits to America, in 1953 and 1956, to study birds in their natural habitat, making sketch models in paper, wire and twigs, to spontaneously capture their character. In 1957 the Queen presented a pair of Parula Warblers to President Eisenhower and Dorothy was greatly honoured at this Royal seal of approval.

Thirty-six pairs and three individual models of American Birds were designed between 1933 and 1960. A full account of the production of the birds is given in the book by George Savage, *The American Birds of Dorothy Doughty*, which was published by Royal Worcester as a limited edition of 1500 copies in 1962.

Towards the end of her life Dorothy also designed a series of twenty-one British birds, which were not

put into production until after her death in 1962, and a set of twelve collector's plates that were modelled in relief.

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**The Worcester Porcelain Museum
Severn Street, Worcester WR1 2NE
Registered Charity No.223753
Telephone +44 (0)1905 746000
E-mail: museum@royal-worcester.co.uk**