

The “Rhodes vases”

A MYSTERY SOLVED



Te Toi Uku Crown Lynn & Clayworks Museum

8 Ambrico Place, New Lynn



Photo supplied by Val Monk

A Crown Lynn Arthur and Olive Rhodes hand potted vase, the...



Visually similar items

A Crown Lynn Arthur and Olive Rhodes hand potted vase, the terracotta angular baluster body with clear glaze to the textured neck ring, similar to above.

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ANTIQU & ART AUCTION

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Lot 0079

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Crown Lynn Arthur Rhodes terracotta vase

Estimate: \$160

Wish List

Lot Description

Crown Lynn Arthur Rhodes terracotta vase, glazed, textured and matt banded decoration, printed tiki mark, small rubs to rim. Height 240.

'Rhodes' hand potted vases

MADE BY A SKILLED POTTER, NO TWO WERE THE SAME, LIMITED COLOUR PALETTE, SOME TEXTURED, ALSO ASH TRAYS



Ev Williams did a LOT of research into Olive and Arthur Rhodes

She went through street and business directories, electoral rolls looking for people with those names and contacted pottery groups to see if there were members called Rhodes.

There was one person called Olive Rhodes in South Auckland who was a teacher but it seemed unlikely she worked for Crown Lynn.

Olive and Arthur Rhodes did not seem to be real people.....

The backstamp was
one used in the
period 1945-1955



Researchers Val Monk & Ev Williams

Having given up on Olive and Arthur Rhodes, Val and Ev did a lot of research to work out who the vases and ash trays were really made by.

There were two main hand potters at Crown Lynn: Daniel Steenstra and Ernest Shufflebotham.

Daniel Steenstra worked there from 1953 until 1972.

Ernest from 1948 to 1957 which fit better with the backstamp.

Both have since died.



Daniel Steenstra
usually made
pieces like this

His son Dominicus said his
father would not have made
the clay vases as they weren't
his style.



Photo from Te Papa collections online

Ernest
Shufflebotham
usually made
pieces like this



Various people

Including some who worked at Crown Lynn, have said that brick clay would never have been allowed in the factory as it could contaminate the white clay.



On starting at Te Toi Uku...

I was obsessed with finding out who made the vases and embarked on research to track down the Rhodes. Of course this was unsuccessful.

I contacted a person who donated one of our vases and he said he bought it from the Crown Lynn shop in Takapuna in the late 1960s.

This meant they were not made during the period of the backstamp's normal use.

So I decided to contact every person I knew who worked at Crown Lynn in the 1960s.



Luckily the first person I asked was John Heap

John was the Assistant Factory Manager at Crown Lynn from 1966 and he instigated the making of these items by **Daniel Steenstra**.

John would collect a pallet of extruded pipe clay from the Amalgamated pipeworks and take it to Daniel to whom he gave “free reign” to create whatever he wanted. Hence the range of shapes and sizes. They were then fired in the tunnel kiln at Crown Lynn, clear glazed inside and perhaps part of the outside and fired again in the Prouty glost kiln.

Re the contamination of the white clay, John said the pipe clay was extruded on another site and wrapped in plastic for Daniel to use so there was no risk of contamination despite the same kilns being used.

Re the backstamp, he said “Danny had the backstamp, he stamped them with all sorts of things”.

Daniel Steenstra

Daniel Steenstra was recruited by Tom Clark on a trip to Holland and emigrated to New Zealand with his brother Thijs in 1953.

He was highly talented and could produce consistent shapes and sizes at high speed.

The man
machinery
can't
replace



"... when souls can be built into a machine, the art of the potter will die. But since the fabrication of souls seems unlikely to become the province of mortal manufacture, it is reasonably supposed that the potter and his clay-wet wheel will flourish forever."

This age old craft gives a man's mind aesthetic scope and gainful employment; offers the public the pride of ownership a hand-made article alone can engender. CROWN LYNN, one of the world's most modern potteries, reaping the very real benefits of mass production and automation, foster such skill and talents here in New Zealand and, are proud to make a place for men like this . . . They can offer connoisseurs hand-made pottery from New Zealand's own clays, displaying classical beauty and individuality of colour, texture, and form in the highest degree. Such artisanship emphasises CROWN LYNN'S contribution to the culture and economy of New Zealand, producing ceramic pieces equal to the finest in their field.

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LIMITED



A VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO NEW ZEALAND'S ECONOMY

Daniel Steenstra



According to Tom Clark Daniel was “the sharpest, smartest thrower you ever saw in your life” (Monk, 2006, p.51). He was extremely skilful and was known to be able to make lids to match his pieces without measuring them. He could also roll a cigarette one handed in his pocket.

Daniel’s white clay vases were decorated by other Crown Lynn artists such as Frank Carpay, Eileen Machin and Doris Bird. He, along with decorators such as Eileen Machin, would travel around New Zealand demonstrating at industrial exhibitions and shows as well as Auckland shops. Some of his shapes were put into mass production by slipcasting.

So how did the Rhodes myth start?

I have not spent too much time thinking about this, but it seems like there was one of these vases with "O. Rhodes" written underneath. This was in a private collection seen by Finn McCahon-Jones the first Director of Te Toi Uku in 2016.

It is thought it might have been the name of the owner who was going into a retirement village and wanted to keep track of their belongings.

Or, because it was written in the same glaze as used for the backstamp, perhaps written by Daniel on the base for a recipient.



Lessons

What can we learn from this?

Don't make assumptions

Don't perpetuate myths

That our contact with people like John Heap are important otherwise stories can become lost

The value of oral history

