

From a tin shed in Perth an industry has expanded into an exporter to other States

From the Maker to the Shaker

by E.P.J.

TWO years ago in a little tin shed in Perth, a formula was discovered and while the busy traffic of Wellington Street swept by, the way became clear for the development of an industry. The Darbyshire Pottery Works which began in April, 1948, is now known Australia-wide and is praised by experts from overseas. With no previous experience other than a keen eye for design and colour, Mrs. Jean Darbyshire gradually developed her own methods through experiment. Some 4,000 pottery animals are made each week, but demands for Darbyshire pepper and salt shakers are well ahead of production.

Perhaps you have noticed a garden of rambling roses, lawn and a line of trees leading up to a green building in Wellington-street. If you have wondered, as I did, whose artistic hand set this little oasis in a drab manufacturing area, come with me past the wrought-iron fence and up the garden path. At the green front door I met the proprietor, Mrs. Jean Darbyshire, looking neat and professional in a white dust coat. She greeted me with a smile and we went into her office.

Continuous Demand

10 fine wood cuts hung on the walls. English

VO fine wood cuts hung on the walls, English magazines on pottery and design were scattered on the desk. We brushed the clay dust off leather shoes and sat down. She explained how it all came in a little tin shed nearby, where she learnt



Myrtle Anderson removing a herd of elephants from the drying rack to place them in the biscuit kiln, where they will be dried off for easier handling.



Chris. Wintle casting and letting horses and foals.

by experience—months and months of designing, modelling and baking with one kiln. Then she discovered the formula for the special glaze and the Darbyshire Pottery Works began with Mr. Darbyshire as managing director and herself as production manager. At first they made plaques and miniature Greek vases, but now they concentrate on pepper and salt shakers in the form of animals. The demand for these is so great, that with a staff of twenty-two making 4,000 animals a week, they still cannot keep up with the orders. Most of their work goes to the Eastern States where, in spite of competition from the local potters, the Darbyshire ware sells readily.

We went out into the works where the colour scheme varied only in degrees of white and grey, according to how dry or how damp things were.

... ..
according to how dry or how damp things were. The wireless was turned off and the muted sounds of work fell in line with the colouring—the hiss of a spray gun, the swish of sand-papering and the slow chug of an engine. From a labyrinth of shelves small animals peeped down—quizzical bunnies, dour looking fish, chirpy birds, fat pigs, ducks and chooks—and all were pepper and salt shakers! Mrs. Darbyshire does all the designing and modelling of the animals and her interpretations are most appealing.

For each model, a plaster of paris mould must be made and as this mould is used again and again for casting, great care and skill is demanded of the mould maker. To do this work, they are most fortunate in having Mr. Gough, who originally worked for the Royal Doulton Works in England. These plaster moulds are made in several pieces, which fit together to form a cube with a small hole at one end and a hollow centre shaped in the form of the animal.

Churning the Clay

GETTING down to earth—here is the clay in its rough state, just as it came in from the local supplier. It is placed in a revolving barrel, the Rumbler, and after chemicals and water are churned in with it, out comes the richest cream-like liquid. This “slip cream” is then poured into bins and is ready for casting. The moulds are assembled and held together by rubber bands, then the slip is poured in through the small





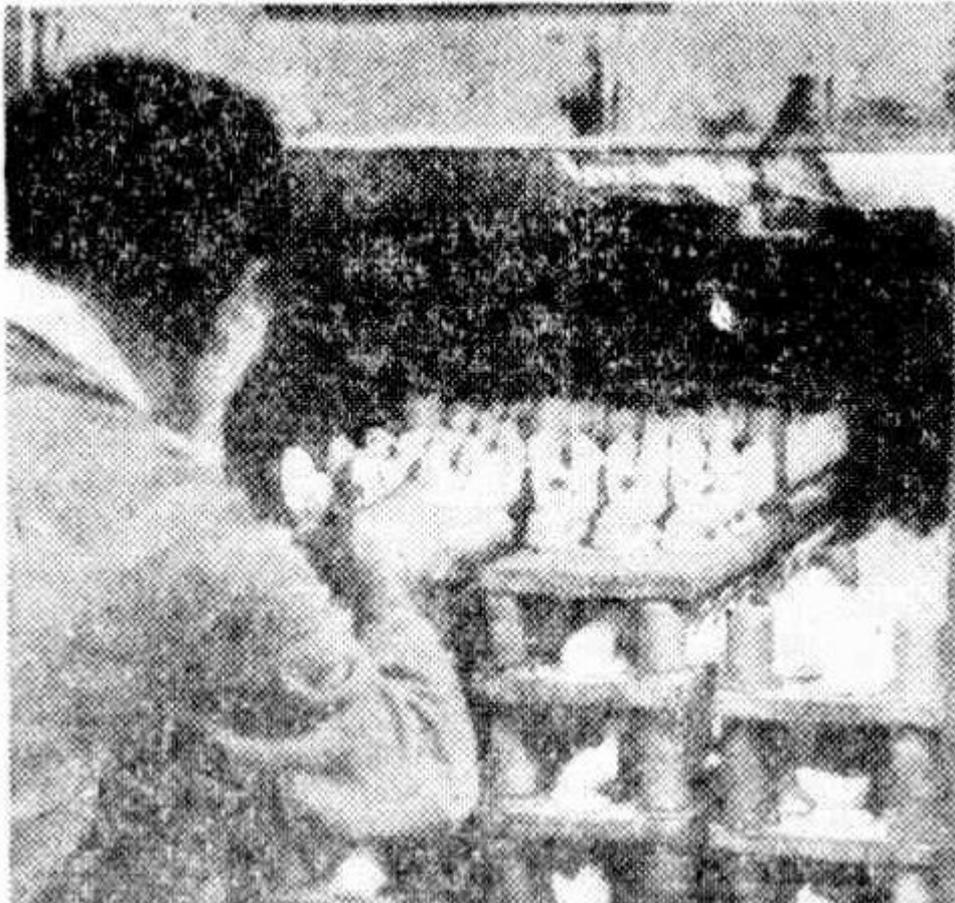
This flock of geese is being sprayed with coloured glaze by Olive Smith. They will next be dipped in a glazing solution and baked.

holes, until the hollow centres are completely filled. The moulds stand for 15 to 20 minutes while moisture from the slip evaporates through the plaster-of-paris walls. They are then inverted and the liquid slip drains out. Left attached to

the plaster-of-paris walls. They are then inverted and the liquid slip drains out. Left attached to the pattern inside is a hardened coating with a hollow centre. The moulds stand a further five minutes, then the rubber bands are removed and out come the animal shapes.

These grey shapes are passed on to the fettlers, who carefully remove all surplus clay at the joints with sponges, water and knives. The fettler's skill lies in her care not to alter the design and shape while tidying up. The cleaned shapes are set on shelves in an open stand, which is about nine feet high and six feet square. Its close shelves were teeming with white and grey animals in varying stages of drying which takes from one to three days according to the season. The Perth climate is of the high humidity for even drying under natural conditions.

The dried shapes pass on to the first firing which takes nine hours. There was no "biscuit" bake





V. Ratas filling a glass kiln with dipped articles.



Alexander Berezowski, a sculptor from the Ukraine, making a new elephant design out of plastic clay.

Alexander Berezowski, a sculptor from the Ukraine, making a new elephant design out of plastic clay

in process so I had a look at the cold electric kiln. It stood about 6ft. high by 4ft. square, with a good-sized front door in which there was a peep hole for testing. Then I saw the hard, firm, pottery shapes, that had recently come from the first firing, being examined and smoothed with sandpaper where necessary, before passing on to be glazed.

Putting on the Colour

THE subdued tones of the previous sections threw into sharp relief the hiss of the spray guns and the wealth of colour of the glazing section. Girls, with hair enveloped in scarves, were using spray-guns filled with coloured glazes and in a twinkling, rows of white shapes were suffused with life by a flush of pink, blue, green or other lovely shades mixed in the section. When this dries the eyes and feet are touched up with a brush and dark enamel.

Then the lid is removed from the special glaze and the shapes, held between tongs, are wholly submerged, so that the insides as well as the outsides are coated with glaze. From this the animals emerge completely white, the glaze not becoming shiny and transparent until baked. About this secret glaze—all ingredients are Australian except one chemical, and that is English. In fact everything used in the works is either Australian or British.

The white shapes are now packed into the glaze kiln and fired from 14 to 16 hours at 1,120 degrees centigrade. The building-in of the kiln is done with great care—the shapes are placed on refractory clay shelves about 9in. by 2ft. 6in. long, one on top of the other on little stilts. No shapes must touch and nothing must be knocked over. It is all so quietly and precisely done

over. It is all so quietly and precisely done that I found it fascinating to watch.

This "building-in" was being done by a New Australian, who is fulfilling his two years directed work. He is Vaclava Ratas, who is internationally famous for his woodcuts and has recently held his fortieth exhibition. This was in Newspaper House, Perth.

From the state of rough clay, it takes two weeks for the animals to get to the last section. Here they were heaped on benches for final inspection and packing. It is no wonder that these pepper and salt shakers have found such a ready market. Delightfully blended colourings showed through an even, shiny, glaze. The animals had a humorous touch with accentuated characteristics and varied expressions. I asked if designs and colourings were tried on paper first, but Mrs. Darbyshire laughed and said that she thought of them as she worked.





Lorraine Wishart painting eyes on turkey gobbler

Plans for Expansion

SHE spoke of future plans and showed me a dog and a horse—remarkably lifelike and fine, sensitive modelling. They hope to go on production of these figures soon. There was also the four-piece canine family—a comfortable-looking mother with her three pups in different puppyish attitudes. “I am always experimenting,” said Mrs. Darbyshire, and held out a small sphere of the loveliest royal blue. This was the result of mixing colour in the clay as she worked.

Although the pottery works has made such rapid growth in two years, the continuity and artistry of the product has not been lost. Mrs. Darbyshire has achieved this by training the staff herself and keeping alertly aware of all that is going on about her. Her advice was often sought as we walked through the sections.

There is a saying “A river begins with a drop of water.” It seems an apt thought if you let your mind dwell a moment on a little tin shop with one worker, then pass to today’s scene—a large building in a main street. Not only Mrs. Darbyshire ware taken such a prominent place in Australian pottery, but in the opinion of overseas experts it is equal to the English produ-