

## **CARLTON WARE NEWSLETTER #45**

from

**Ian Harwood & Jerome Wilson**

At long last, we have a Newsletter for you and, once again, we are delighted to bring you another excellent article from Barry & Elaine Girling who have been continuing their research on Violet Elmer. We had intended that we would bring you a review of our 3½ months winter holiday in England but it is taking longer than we thought to put it all together, so we will get that to you next month. In the mean time, our thanks to Barry & Elaine for all their time and effort in providing us with the following material.

### **Violet Elmer and Ruby Moss**

#### **An Appreciation by Barry and Elaine Girling**

A distinctive late Victorian suburb of Oxford is to be found south of the river and west of Abingdon Road. Hibbert's Encyclopaedia of Oxford records that Grandpont took its name from a causeway that once stood in this area and consisted of a series of stone bridges across the low lying lands and river. The more extensive development of this area and the subsequent estate, was stimulated by the coming of the railway in the mid century.

Built c1893, one particular street would become the location of two meaningful events, not only for the first occupants of the new houses but also the wider world.

Firstly, 1<sup>st</sup> August 1906 marked the birth of Ruby Annie Lily, the penultimate child of Ben and Annie Moss's expansive family. Secondly, residing in the same street and but a few doors away, Thomas and Jane Elmer's family was made complete by the arrival of Violet Irene Ellen, 29th March 1907. This was the beginning of what would become a lifelong friendship.

In their formative years, they both attended nearby New Hinksey School, in Vicarage Road [formerly Church Street]. The young Miss Elmer continued her education at the Central Girls School in New Inn Hall Street, [now part of St Peter's College, University]. Employment in the City of Oxford followed, with Ruby using her creative skills as a milliner at the High Street Department Store of Webbers. At the same time, Violet was already pursuing a possible career in the Arts.

In the early to mid 1920's the pair seemed inseparable, their prospering friendship leading to holidays at fashionable English resorts. The photographs illustrate those happy occasions and are evocative of the times.



**Aberystwyth 1925**



**Cowes 1926**

During this period Violet's love of drawing and painting continued, as shown in the 1926 study of her great friend. The setting and style is a little reminiscent of American illustrator, Jessie Wilcox Smith and "Summer Day".

In 1927 Violet produced a series of four paintings. The subject matter is very 'of its time'; featuring fairies; pixies and ethereal creatures set in a floral landscape. The pictures bring to mind the work of illustrators such as Edmund Dulac, "The Tempest from *Elves and Fairies*", and Arthur Rackham "Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens" [J.M. Barrie].

The paintings were professionally framed and numbered by Hills and Rowney Ltd, George Street Oxford. As they were marked for each address, it is conceivable that two of them may have been a present from Violet to Ruby.



The late nineteen twenties brought about a change in the dynamics of their friendship when Miss Elmer moved away from home. She would later embark on what would become an illustrious career as designer at Messrs Wiltshaw and Robinson's Carlton Ware Pottery, Stoke-on-Trent. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April 1932 a further variation to their relationship occurred when Ruby married Arthur Russell of Oxford, at St Matthews, Grandpont - the same Parish Church in which, a few years later, Violet herself would take her wedding vows.



This excellent photograph recalls the special day in twenty five-year old Ruby's life. The beautiful skullcaps were designed and made by the bride and in all probability, her own veil and bridesmaids dresses. One of the bridesmaids can still recall the splendid event. Violet can be seen as chief bridesmaid. At this time, Miss Elmer would have been at the peak of her powers at Carlton Ware, producing many remarkable designs.

Violet's initial involvement was with the production of Carlton China. Wiltshaw and Robinson acquired the china manufacturer, Birks Rawlins, in the late nineteen twenties, but the arrangement would not last. However, one of the many patterns accredited to the young designer was **Clematis** c1931 (pattern **5000**) as shown below. This service still exists today and was given to Ruby from her friend as a wedding present. In all probability, this would have been painted by the designer herself.



Violet was in her early twenties when she contributed to the 'Handcraft' range. This freehand painted experiment was in response to evolving trends and competition from more innovative potteries. A palette of just a few colours was used on early examples of this mat finished marquee. Later examples were more flamboyant.

'Handcraft' formed the link between Carlton's more traditional patterns and what would become their renowned 'best ware' products. This was an interesting period in the development of the Companies' 'new age' ceramics. For example, the transformation of **Scimitar** from early 'Handcraft' prototype, to ultimate lustre masterpiece [pattern **3651**], showed the rapid progress that was made.

A considerable number of these 'top of the range' lustre pieces featured the influential artist's work. Stunning art deco and fantasy patterns were particularly prominent. For the greater part of a decade, Violet Elmer pursued her craft at the Copeland Street Works, making an outstanding contribution to the arts.

#### **Examples of Miss Elmer's designs 1928 – 37**



**BELL** (pattern **3774**) gloss yellow (front)  
**ANEMONE** (pattern **3694**) ORANGE LUSTRE  
**BELL** (pattern **3774**) gloss yellow (reverse)

Although Violet had moved to The Potteries, the alliance continued. The focus was again Oxford on the 25<sup>th</sup> June 1938 when the two friends were once again united at St Matthews Church. The occasion was Violet's marriage to Arthur Lawton. Their professions, as described on the marriage certificate, were "teacher" and in Violet Elmer's case, simply as "designer". However, it was at this time that Violet's professional design career would come to an end. Following marriage, Mrs. Lawton would spend the major part of her life at Newcastle-under-Lyme. Mrs. Russell, however, would remain in the City of her birth.

Their friendship would endure for the rest of their lives until sadly, in 1988, their long association would come to an end. Ruby died 27<sup>th</sup> February and Violet, having attended her friend's funeral, passed away a few days later on the 8<sup>th</sup> March.

Their significant close arrival was mirrored in departure.

Celebrate Grandpont - the joy and achievement of your daughters.



Very special thanks to Colin Russell, for permission to use photographs and for making this possible. Also thanks to Garry Strachan and Liz Woolley for their kind assistance and to Ian and Jerome for their input and valued support.



**Miss Ruby Moss Sheringham 1927**

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Once again, thanks to Barry & Elaine for their time and effort in researching this article. Here are some additional pictures of the wonderful patterns produced by Violet Elmer at the Carlton Ware factory between 1928 and 1937:



**Nightingale (pattern 3562) GREEN LUSTRE**  
**Rosetta (pattern 3505) matt orange**



**PERSIAN GARDEN** (pattern 3893) gloss black  
**Dahlia & Butterfly** (pattern 3606) gloss green



**FAIRY** (pattern 3576) gloss orange



**GARDEN GATE** (pattern 3863) matt green  
**HERBACEOUS BORDER** (pattern 3801) gloss black & grey



**VICTORIAN LADY** (pattern 3451) matt  
**Summer Medley** (pattern 3663) matt black



**Geometrica** (pattern 3566) matt blue  
**Mandarin Tree** (pattern 3719) gloss yellow & green





**Mandarins Chatting** (pattern 3653) gloss black & red  
**Hedgerow** (pattern 3862) RUBY LUSTRE  
**Tendrillon** (pattern 3858) gloss black



**AUTUMN DAISY** (pattern 3802) gloss orange  
**DAISY** (pattern 3693) matt blue  
**MODERN CROCUS** (pattern 3803) gloss green

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