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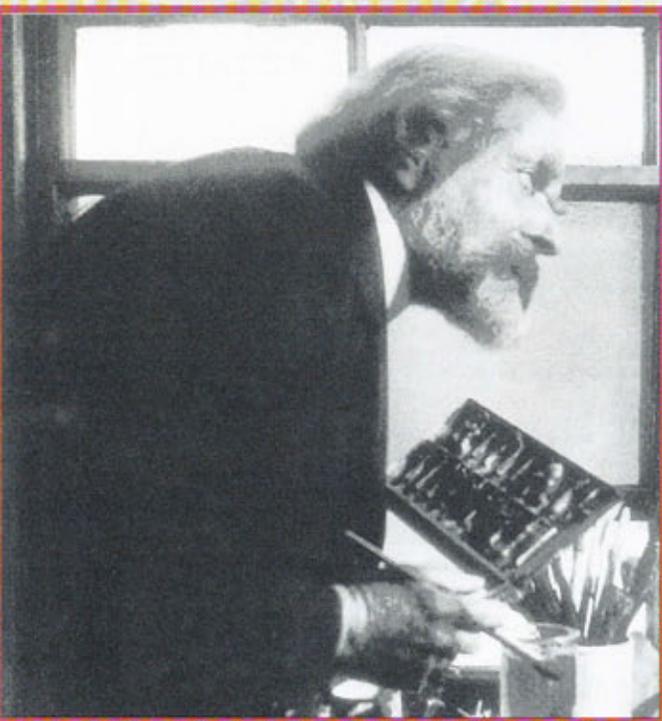
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Garden Pottery by Archibald Knox

By Dr. Stephen A. Martin

At the turn of the twentieth century, well-heeled London was as style-conscious as ever and Arthur Lasenby Liberty, an active part of the home furnishings community, knew how to reach his market. Indeed, he had been supplying his upper middle class clientele with beautiful objects from his retail emporium, Liberty & Co., for almost twenty years when, in 1899, influenced by ethnic trends in the decorative arts, he introduced *Cymric Silverwork*, part of his Celtic program. Named for *Cymru* (ancient Wales), the line was accompanied by a sumptuous catalogue that included an essay by Liberty, proclaiming the beginning of a new age of design. The line was a huge commercial success and the man behind it was Archibald Knox.



Archibald Knox in his studio on the Isle of Man, date unknown. Photograph courtesy Manx National Heritage.

"LIBERTY" YULE-TIDE GIFTS. [Basar.]

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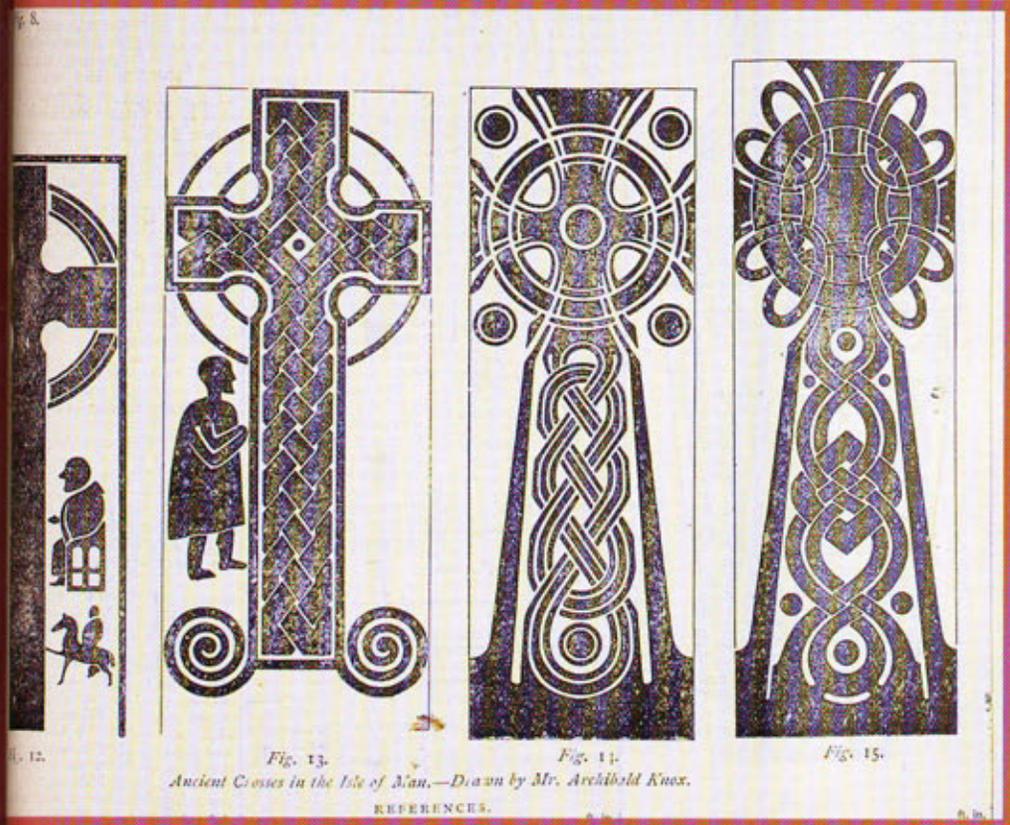
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LIBERTY & CO. LTD. [Basar.]

Page from *Liberty & Co Yule-Tide Gift Catalogue*, ca. 1900, demonstrates the "ethnic" aspect of Liberty's inventory.



Left: Knox's illustrations for an article on Celtic Crosses from *The Builder*, 1898.

Below: Vase in the Cymric line, 1904, h 19.5 cm., Birmingham, Liberty & Co., silver, enamel, turquoise. Photograph courtesy Dr. S. A. Martin.

Enter Archibald Knox

Archibald Knox was the ideal candidate to help further Liberty's Celtic program. Steeped in the culture of the Isle of Man (his home) and Ireland, Knox was thoroughly familiar with the elegant, complicated knotting found on illuminated manuscripts, such as the *Books of Kells*, and on the stone monuments (seventh to tenth centuries A.D.) that dotted the countryside. He reinterpreted them according to Arts & Crafts principles learned, in part, from architect M. H. Baillie Scott. Relocating to London in the late 1890s, Knox found his way to Liberty & Co. in 1898 and by 1906, he had provided more than 5,000 designs. His silver and gold objects are tours de force: it is as if he adapted the Celtic knotting he so loved to these media in particular. Knox's versatility was Liberty's greatest asset during this period. Ultimately, the firm's reach extended to almost every aspect of the British home and, Britain being a land of gardeners, the garden.

Knox and Garden Pottery

For centuries, the British upper classes had adorned their gardens with marble statues and fountains. Aiming as always at the middle class customer, Liberty recognized a need for affordable garden pottery. He put Knox on the case and between 1903 and 1904 Knox registered some fourteen garden pottery designs. By 1905, likely the last year that Liberty marketed Knox's garden pottery, it had won a gold medal from the Royal Botanical Society and a silver medal from the Royal Horticultural Society.



Knox was not the only pot designer working for Liberty. Mary Seton Watts, symbolist craftswoman and wife of artist Sir George Frederic Watts, shared the responsibility. Watts produced her wares at Compton Pottery in Limnerslease, Compton. Contrary to persistent popular belief, Knox's work was not produced there, but at Carter & Co.'s East Quay works in Poole, Dorset, with clay mined from their beds.

Materials and Methods

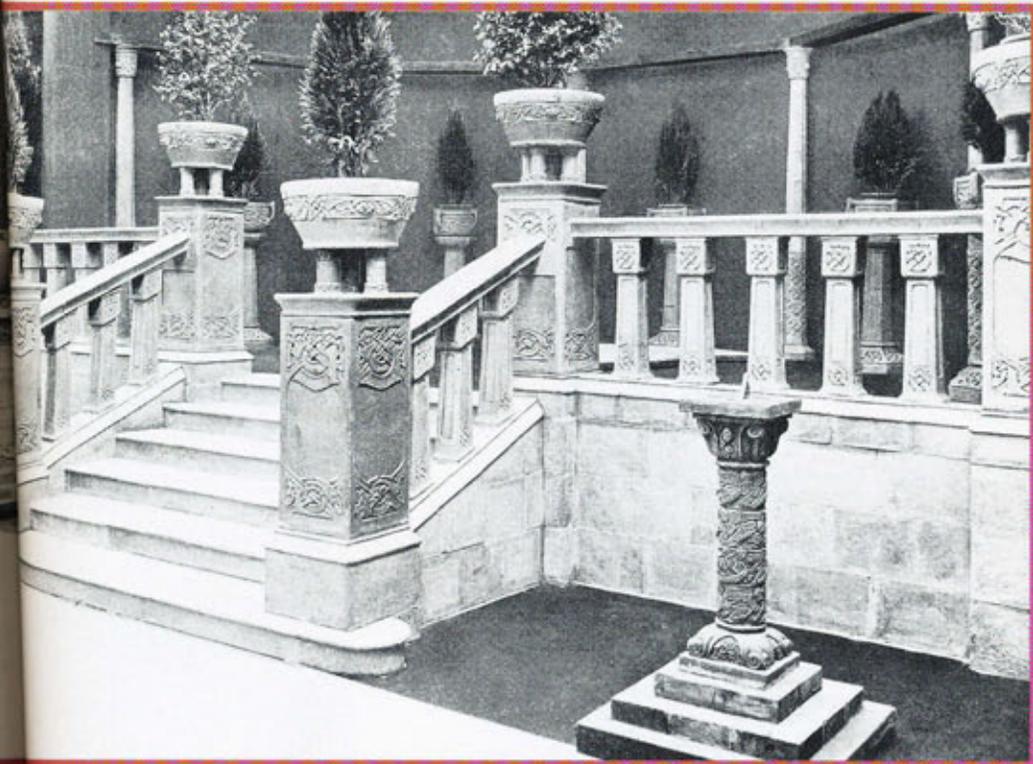
According to the most recent research, James Radley Young initially modeled Knox's designs in terra cotta at the Hammer Vale Pottery in Haslemere, Surrey. Production proceeded at Carter & Co., where terra cotta clay was pressed into the molds to form jardinières, pedestals, balustrades and other objects. The Liberty & Co. mark was impressed on each piece before firing. In one known instance, there is an example of both the Liberty & Co. mark and the Carter & Co. mark appearing on the bottom of a small glazed jardinière. This rare object proves conclusively that Carter & Co. were the manufacturers for Liberty garden ware and not Compton Pottery.

Terra cotta is the ideal material for garden pottery. Because it is a fireclay, it can withstand higher kiln temperatures. Its open grain permits more effective drying, resulting in less distortion and breakage, while its larger particle size make it sturdy enough to withstand outdoor use. The pots themselves vary in color from salmon to grayish pink, depending on normal variations in the clay body and the proximity of the pot to the fuel, in Knox's case either wood or coal. Other pieces are glazed in a variety of translucent shades ranging from forest green to teal. The glazes appear to have been brushed on and allowed to drip, giving a mottled and variable appearance to the surface. Glazed pieces tend to be the smaller versions of the unglazed jardinières and were obtainable in three sizes ranging from 9" to 15" tall, and 9" to 16" in diameter. For the most part, pedestals, garden seats, pool surrounds and sundials came in only one size and were unglazed. The only known large glazed pieces are seats or stands that were probably intended for use in a sunroom or on a verandah.

In terms of style, the physical nature of terra cotta demanded a new approach. When creatively freed by the extreme malleability of gold, silver, or pewter, Knox's use of his design vocabulary was at its most delicate. Challenged by the limitations of coarse terra cotta, his designs became bolder and more robust. Overall Knox's garden pottery relies on powerful line and silhouette, much like the familiar Celtic crosses of Man. In instances of larger, more sculptural pieces, such as garden fountains and surrounds, garden seats, and the great balustrade of Marylebone Station, his decorative knotting punctuates and adorns, rather than defines the objects. The visual impact of these pieces depends on their size, complexity, and the surface color of the weathered clay. Stylistically, the birdbaths or font-like jardinières on pedestals can appear neo-Gothic with their pilaster or columnar stems. As such they are not unlike the

Necklace, 1900-04, gold, plique-à-jour enamel, opal. Photograph courtesy of Michael Bruce.





Marylebone Station, pictured in *The New Garden Pottery*, a Liberty & Co. catalogue, 1905.

Jardinière, ca. 1903-04, glazed terra cotta, h 37.2 cm., Carter & Co. for Liberty & Co. Photograph courtesy of Dr. S. A. Martin.





Right: Jardinière and pedestal pair, c. 1903-05, h 107 cm., terra cotta. Photograph courtesy of John Alexander Gallery.

Below: Thrym and Gnomme from Garden Pottery Catalogue, Liberty & Co. ca. 1905.

GARDEN POTS AND SUNDIALS



PEDESTAL AND POT.
THE "THRYM" AND "GNOMME" DESIGNS.

Frost Proof.

Height
3 ft. 7 in.

Price
£3-13-6

Regd. Design.

decorative work of A. W. N. Pugin, the champion of Gothic revival in 19th century England. Despite Knox's reliance on these architectural elements the surface decoration of these objects remains distinctly Celtic in inspiration.

Marketing

Probably because many of the items were too large and unwieldy to be stocked in the London shop, Liberty & Co marketed Knox garden pottery in a series of trade catalogues, each titled *A New Garden Pottery*, published between 1903 and 1905. Garden benches, for example, were often 6' long with pedestal supports 16" high. Pots on pedestals could easily exceed 4' in height. Knox's garden fountain and surround topped 5' in height and had a diameter of approximately 7'.

Pricing is best illustrated by one of Knox's most successful designs, "The Brunhild." The smaller version (9 1/2" high) was priced at 12 shillings (or \$1.80 in equivalent currency value), while the larger one (14" high and having interior walls nearly 3" thick) at £1 10s (\$6.00 at the time), an affordable sum for the discerning gardener. It was Liberty who chose Viking-like or Teutonic names, perhaps to expand the apparent scope of his revivalist repertoire.

Diverse Influences

The jardinières can be placed in stylistic groups that reveal Knox's sources of inspiration. As familiar as he was with Celtic Christian design, the principle vision behind his silver and pewter ware, he was equally well versed in Neolithic forms. Knox had collected ancient shards found on newly plowed fields of Man for a number of years, and was well acquainted with the many pottery shapes. Several of his jardinière designs, including the *Beowulf*, *Balder*, *Olaf*, *Sigurd*, and *Regin*, show Neolithic influence combined with Celtic elements. In such cases, pots with muscular knotting on the surface are punctuated with spiraled shapes, extruding knobs, and lug handles that resemble items found in grave tumuli in England and Ireland. This effect can shift subtly back to the Celtic-Christian when the jardinières are coupled with pedestals because, when viewed frontally, there is a distinct visual resonance to the large standing Celtic crosses.

Modernism also comes to the fore in two jardinières, the *Brunhild* and *Thrym*, particularly when they are coupled with the pedestal known as the *Gnomme*. With these particular combinations of vessel and pedestal, Knox streamlines. These simplified forms share design elements with some of his finest metalwork. The sinuous, flowing Celtic knots surround the pots, interweaving with their lug handles. Rivaling his best silver or pewter hollowware, these jardinières represent Knox at his most lyrical and modernist.

The *Gnomme* is Knox's most adventurously designed pedestal, its swelling conical shape incised with complex repeating interlaces that emerge from beneath a tapered horizontal shelf upon which the pots rest. When married to his two most successful jardinières, the *Brunhild* and *Thrym*, Knox creates monumental ceramic art as good as any of his greatest Tudric or Cymric designs. When liberated from their more quotidian role as "plant holder", this particular pedestal and jardinière combination show that even in the more difficult medium of clay Knox could envision audacious, dramatic, modern objects with enormous presence. At 3'4" they become sculptural which he might have enjoyed in their equivalent size and presence to his beloved Celtic crosses.

Finally

Liberty & Co.'s garden pottery may seem like a footnote to Knox's body of work. Coming relatively late in his active career with this patron, and continuing as a factor in his work for only a few years, they are easy to underestimate. Nevertheless, as Knox's design genius continues to be reassessed and its influence better understood, connoisseurs and scholars have begun to take these magnificent objects more seriously. To my mind, they constitute one of the most moving and dramatic genres of Knox's work. Nowhere else is he allowed to express himself as freely, and on as grand a scale as the deeply admired carvers of the Celtic crosses of Man. As such, Knox's ceramics need to be rescued from the overgrowth of the back garden and placed squarely amidst his other great achievements as quiet emissaries of his vast creativity.

Acknowledgement: I am grateful to art historian Veronica Franklin Gould for her groundbreaking research on the ceramic work of Archibald Knox and Mary Seton Watts.

About the author: Dr. Stephen A. Martin, a certified Jungian analyst and clinical psychologist in Ardmore, Pennsylvania, is the editor of *Archibald Knox* (London: Art Media Press; October, 2001; 304 pages, 19 essays; more than 850 illustrations, mostly color; \$90/£55 plus s/h). It can be ordered at www.ArchibaldKnox.net, from Dr. Martin personally at 119 Coulter Ave., Ardmore, PA 19003 (610-896-7536) or through the publisher, at Culvert House, Culvert Road, London, SW11 5AP. Telephone: 011-44-20-978-2011; fax: 011-44-20-79782033. Dr. Martin can be reached at DrSAMartin@aol.com.

Font or Jardinière, 1903-05, h 109 cm., terra cotta. Illustration courtesy of Sotheby's.

