

HENRY WILLETT

A celebration of the man, his life and his ceramics collection

NATURE OF INVESTIGATION

I will be building on my previous research into Henry Willett and his Ceramics Collection at Brighton Museum to enable me to expand on my investigation to look into further suitable forms representing Henry Willett's life



Examples of the diversity of form within the Collection



RELEVANT ARTIST
Christie Brown – particularly her work in respect of Sir John Soane and his collection

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Henry Willett was an important local figure, supporting the community in many ways. A passionate collector throughout his life, his expansive and historically important Ceramics Collection represents much of the social history of his time and it would seem fitting that a piece(s) be created to celebrate all that he accomplished

IN WHAT WAY IS IT 'NEW'?

Many artists respond to collections in a broad sense, I will be focusing entirely on Henry Willett, the man behind the Collection, and all he achieved, looking for suitable representations that will sit comfortably alongside the Collection

INITIAL INVESTIGATIONS

My initial research led to the "Henry Willett Vessel" – inspiration primarily transpired after studying the terracotta wine cooler resulting in a porcelain vessel with classical dolphin handles, a portrait of Henry Willett on the front and items representing his collections on the back



METHODS

I will be studying a wide range of forms within the Collection to establish suitability for key aspects of Henry Willett's life, which I will then interpret in maquette form to determine feasibility

MATERIAL AND TECHNICAL EXPERIMENTS

Look into suitability of clay for various forms following maquette stage. Potential of continued use of mouldmaking and/or whether other methods of construction (handbuilding, sculpting, throwing etc) may be more appropriate

PROBLEMS

- Endeavour to experiment with various forms whilst showing either a continuity between the forms (clay type, colour palette etc) and/or with the Collection
- Ensuring the most significant and locally relevant aspects of Henry Willett's life are represented

CURRENT INVESTIGATIONS

I am currently looking at some of the simpler forms; a small yellow cup (c 1800) displayed within the "Philanthropy" theme in the Collection, which is where I chose to display my Henry Willett Vessel for assessment. The cup is small with a diameter of only 5.7 cm but catches your eye due to the vibrancy of colour and style of decoration depicting a small girl making a donation to an old man with a stick. I am researching glazes and looking at suitable illustrations of Willett. I am also considering the form of "loving cups", there are many in the Collection and the use of the loving cups at banquets fulfils the need for a "celebratory" feel to the objects.

I am continuing to consider types of vessel and have initially returned to throwing on the wheel to consider whether this would be a suitable process depending on the complexity of form. I have spent the last week practising my throwing in porcelain which is a material I would consider appropriate to "celebrate" Henry and his life. I am still considering whether it will be feasible for some or all of my pieces to be thrown and currently have a small collection of pots, one of which I have attached two handles to enable me to judge pot to handle ratio and to start my initial experiments into shape.

Illustrations appropriate to the key elements of Henry's life are still being researched and considered depending on how I wish to represent them. At this stage I visualise a set of vessels, varied in form with the portrait of Henry in sprig form and an element of his life in transfer form. My primary inspiration for colour and decoration has continued to be the small yellow cup which I feel may also influence the scale of my final pieces. I am continuing to consider which elements of Henry's life I feel should be represented: Childhood: Bishopstone Tidemills, fanned pear trees, collecting, cricket; Adulthood: businessman, entertained large social group, married to Frances Coombe (3 sons and 4 daughters), tolerant of different religions, Sussex Cricket Club, Sussex Volunteer Artillery Corps, Brighton Liberal Association, education of the poor, collections, Brighton Museum, gallery and library; Death: funeral in St Helen's, Hangleton.

I am also contemplating whether my work will ultimately be considered a "collectible" and whether Henry would have felt it worthy of his Collection. If I continue to work on a collection of "one off" pieces, is this appropriate and do I consider it preferable to creating multiples?

Lastly, presuming that my work continues as discussed above, I hope to give careful consideration to display and currently take my inspiration from the illustration shown of a group of Henry's pieces published in 1878.

