

# WILKINSON LEAVES - AN EVOLUTIONARY PERSPECTIVE.

Evolution often moves from the simple to the complex. Such is the case with leaf patterns produced by the Wilkinson paintshop from the late 1920's to 1940.

To match a "folksy" European decorating style that was starting to pervade in the 1920's, a number of British potteries adopted the colourful "folk art" style and subjects of continental potteries. Common subjects for "folk art" pottery painting are flowers and leaves hand painted in a naïve fashion with little regard to botanical accuracy. Significant English forerunners in this style of decoration were Adams and Sons and A.E. Gray.

Wilkinson's started producing this style of "folk art" ware in about mid 1928 about the same time that Clarice Cliff producing what is known nowadays as Original Bizarre – her very own "folk art" style.

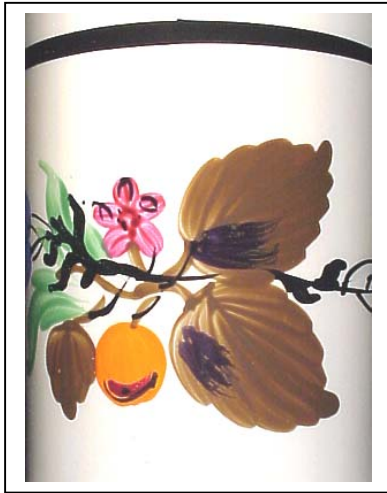
Judging by the quality of its pre 1928 studio ware, Wilkinson's obviously had a body of skilled operatives. What is significant about the Wilkinson handpainted designs that followed this studio ware is that they are fully freehand designs. To paint a freehand pattern time and time again without the benefit of outlines demanded an above average skill or the design would vary in both composition and scale. This is where the principal difference lay between the Wilkinson handpainting paintshop workshop and the Bizarre paintshop. In the latter, a small group of skilled individuals outlined patterns in either paint or Indian ink, leaving the enamelling to lesser skilled operatives. This is not to say that there were no freehand patterns decorated in the Bizarre shop. On the contrary, there are many. However, the vast majority of Miss Cliff's patterns were not painted freehand.

Sometimes, these Wilkinson patterns are seen carrying a Bizarre backstamp. To explain this, it has been suggested that sometimes, during a lull in orders, these patterns were painted in the Bizarre paintshop. It is the experience of the author that the few examples carrying a Bizarre stamp are not painted with any more skill than the ones carrying only a Wilkinson backstamp.

It is clear that the skill level in the Wilkinson paintshop grew rapidly and was maintained at a very high level. Examples of 'Maple Leaf' in the author's collection separated by two or three years show an enviable consistency in execution.

This article selects a few examples from the Wilkinson pattern book to examine the evolution of one particular pattern subject – the leaf.

**PATTERN NUMBER 8808 'OAK LEAF'<sup>1</sup> MARCH 1930**



This pattern dates from September 1929 and shows in the execution of the brown leaves, the brush style that is to be used in later leaf patterns. The brush direction is from the outer part of the leaf towards the centre. Unlike later leaf patterns there is only a small attempt at layering a colour (in this instance, black) over the brown.

**PATTERN NUMBER 8927 'CHESTNUT LEAVES'.<sup>2</sup> JUNE 1930**



This pattern shows a marked development in painting and design techniques. The structure of the leaf still depends upon careful brush strokes however colour has been overlaid to add more interest to the pattern. Fine lines defining veins have been added.

**8928 BEECH LEAVES<sup>3</sup> JUNE 1930**



This pattern which has the next number to 'Chestnut Leaf' shows development of the etching process. The round orange and green leaves (often mistaken for fruit) have been developed from a build-up of colour. This adds texture and interest to the pattern. The long green leaves have has a

<sup>1</sup> See Wilkinson Patter Update [The Agora](#) Vol 3 No 5 page 82

<sup>2</sup> See Wilkinson and Newport Pattern Update [The Agora](#) Vol 2 No 6 page 113

<sup>3</sup> See 'Clarice Cliff Dubia' [The Agora](#) Vol 1 No 3 page 8

touch of yellow added to enhance their colour. The brown leaves have had veins overpainted in dark brown.

**8929 VIRGINIA CREEPER<sup>4</sup>. JUNE 1930**



The pattern named 'Virginia Creeper' in the pattern book, demonstrates a greater usage of etching than previously seen. The single, large leaf has been made multicoloured by layering of yellow and brown over the tangerine base shape. This technique has been carried on to lesser extent in the smaller tangerine leaf. The

resultant effect is one of texture and depth. Incidentally, the factory name is inapposite.

**9038 'MAPLE LEAF'<sup>5</sup> SEPTEMBER 1930**



This pattern shows a marked and dramatic development over the previous pattern. 'Maple Leaf' probably represents the highpoint in the painting technique of the Wilkinson works during the 1930's . The leaves have first been laid down in

Yellow and green. Then, the larger leaf was delineated with tangerine followed by the addition of coral highlights. The smaller leaf was developed by overpainting the yellow base with brown paint on one side followed by tangerine. Fine brown lines then complete the veins in the leaves.

**9657 CARNIVAL LEAVES (WORKING NAME) MARCH 1934.**



Although the green colour in the example shown has been etched by food acids, enough of the pattern has remained to indicate that each leaf is the opposite in colour arrangement to each other. Until this pattern, this particular series of leaves was depicted in autumnal colours close to those found in nature. However, this pattern heralds a more fantastic approach. The leaves have become

<sup>4</sup> See Wilkinson Pattern Update [The Agora](#) Vol 4 5&6 page 75

<sup>5</sup> See Wilkinson and Newport Pattern Update [The Agora](#) Vol 2 No 6 page 113

“two dimensional” as no appreciable layering of colour has taken place. Still, the structure of the leaf has been achieved by careful brush strokes, including venation.

**9658 ‘IRENE’ (WORKING NAME) MARCH 1934**



This pattern continues the more fantastic colouration. Readers will note that a kind of “fore-runner” of this leaf pattern appeared in the previously shown pattern. With its minimal etching and colour build up, this pattern looks backward in its decoration technique to pattern number 8927 (‘Chestnut Leaves’).<sup>6</sup>

**9908 ‘AUTUMN TINTS’. DECEMBER 1935**



With this pattern we revisit pattern 9038 (‘Maple Leaf’). Now reduced to one leaf, this pattern shows the same careful brush strokes and naturalistic colour build up. The leaf is similar in shape to ‘Maple Leaf’ but is drawn in much bolder strokes.

**540 VIBURNUM (WORKING NAME)<sup>7</sup> FEBRUARY 1937**



This pattern dates from early 1937 and is possibly the last pattern commonly seen based on autumnal leaves. As in pattern 9908, the design has been reduced to a single leaf. The same basic colours have been used, applied with the same careful brush strokes but with coloured highlights

applied to the yellow portions of the leaf.

There are many other leaf patterns from the Wilkinson paintshop, often simple in their execution. However, the above examples have been chosen to demonstrate the development of a common theme by improvements in painting technique and application.

Greg Slater ACT

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<sup>7</sup> See “Wilkinson Pattern Update” The Agora Vol 3 No 4 page 66.

