

# MALING

COLLECTORS' SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

Issue 36 September 2007

## Billy had a knock-out job

Born in 1909, Billy Milsom began working at Maling's Pottery in 1924, at the age of fourteen and a half years. His occupation at that time was firing the Hoffman kiln - a continuous operation kiln which was originally developed for the use in brick making and first patented in Germany in 1858 by its inventor, the engineer Friedrich Hoffman.

For six months Billy would work at the Hoffman kiln firing bricks and saggars for the sum of 9 shillings per week. From here he was transferred to the Saggar House where he became known as a "saggar maker's bottom knocker" for the sum of 10 shillings per week.

A saggar maker is simply a man who makes saggars, which are oval or round fire clay containers used to hold ceramic items in the kiln whilst firing. A saggar maker's bottom knocker is the saggar maker's assistant. Billy in his new occupation was responsible for knocking fire clay into a large metal ring approximately 1 inch thick, using a huge flat mallet called a mawl, to form the bottom of the saggar.

The saggar maker would then remove the ring and form the sides of the saggar onto that bottom. A frame filler who did a very similar job to the bottom knocker prepared the clay to make the sides of the saggar, rather than the bottom.

At the tender age of 16, Billy was promoted from bottom knocking and became the youngest of Maling's four skilled saggar makers at that time. He reckoned that with the correct preparation and support in place, it took only 4-5 minutes to make a saggar and that up to 70 saggars per day were possible - this is truly "saggaring" - sorry couldn't resist that one!

Saggar making would continue to be Billy's occupation for several years through the highs and lows of the pottery, but during peak periods of production, according to orders, he would be needed as an extra man when drawing (emptying) a biscuit kiln.



Photograph taken in August 1948 (courtesy of Les Dixon). Back row L-R: Billy Young, Billy Smith, Les Dixon and Joe Lant. Front row L-R: Jim Smith, Billy Milsom and Jack Carr.



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A peak period of production would be when the firm received orders from the likes of Ringtons Tea Merchants or the Co-operative Society. As an extra man he gained much experience and, in 1934, he was asked by Mr. Bates (biscuit kilns' foreman) if he would like to take a permanent job within the biscuit kilns.

Billy didn't hesitate and welcomed this opportunity to further his career and salary. Working within the biscuit kilns meant that you were paid not by the hourly rate, but on piece work, which was much preferred within this part of the pottery.

Seven coal fired biscuit kilns were in full operation including one called "Big Paddy", because it had been first fired on St. Patrick's Day. It took nine tons of coal for one firing within a biscuit kiln, but "Big Paddy" lived up to his name with eighteen tons of coal being needed.

Each saggar would be filled to its capacity with objects and stacked in the kiln - each kiln holding some 1,400 saggars, with the exception of "Big Paddy" which had a much greater capacity. Biscuit firing took about fifty-six hours at a maximum temperature of between 1200 and 1300 degrees centigrade.

Temperature control was essential and this was achieved by the use of "Bullers Rings" within the kiln. The shrinkage of the ring, measured by means of a simple gauge with a direct number reading, was visible from spy holes around the kiln.

In 1938, Billy was put in charge of the biscuit kilns and remained in charge until they ceased operation. The late 1940s saw the new owners, Houltts, modernise and improve the pottery by installing new equipment and by the early 1950s Billy found himself working on a new type of kiln, a "Birlec" electric tunnel kiln. He preferred the new electric kiln which was much easier to load and use. The use of saggars was eliminated, as they were not necessary when firing by electricity.

Remaining until the firm's closure in 1963, Billy Milsom served a total of thirty-nine and a half hard-working, but happy years with C. T. Maling & Sons Ltd.

Author David Johnson sends his sincere thanks to Sally Madge who interviewed Billy in 1980.

*David H adds: These anecdotes and photographs bring Maling to life for me and, I hope, for you. Collecting isn't just about pounds and pence. Please send in any stories you may have.*

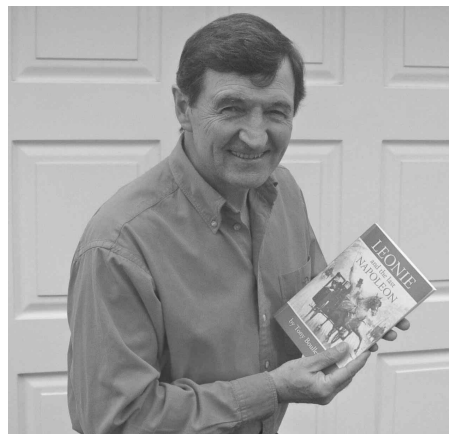
# The French Connection

**A novel has just been published featuring the ancestors of Maling designers Lucien Emile and Lucien George Boullemier.**

Entitled "Leonie and the last Napoleon", it is based on the escapades in Paris of Léonie and her husband Anton Boullemier, the famed Minton's designer and father of LEB.

The author is society patron Tony Boullemier, son of LGB. Tony talked to the society in 2005 and told us there were Boullemier's working as gilders and designers at Sevres since before the 1789 revolution.

When LGB died in 1993, he left a diary to Tony written by his great grandmother Léonie. "The story was electrifying and just had to be told," says Tony. "Léonie was born in Paris in 1848 and she and Anton lived through incredible times. They knew amazing people including Napoleon III and his family and Léonie's father successfully treated the Emperor for skin cancer.



"They survived the Franco-Prussian War and the Siege of Paris and when the Commune took control of the city after the Empire's collapse, her brother Georges helped the Empress Eugénie escape from the mob and flee to England. Léonie soon followed when Anton discovered he was on the Commune's death list."

Tony has borrowed characters from history and his family but he's added many more of his own plus further adventures for Léonie, Anton and Georges. "The book has something for everyone," he says. "Love and romance for the ladies, lust and warfare for the men. And plenty of political intrigue."

Tony was born in Newcastle, educated at the Royal Grammar School and trained as a reporter at The Journal where he covered Newcastle United's 1969 Fairs Cup triumph in Budapest (his front page report still hangs prominently in St James's Park press room). He then joined the Daily Express in Fleet Street, leaving at the age of 29 to set up his own newspaper group in Northampton. He built this into a chain of titles circulating nearly 400,000 copies a week before selling to the company that owned The Journal.

Since then he has freelanced as a magazine editor, studied history and turned to writing. His wife, son and daughter are all journalists and they live near Northampton.

"Léonie and the last Napoleon" is published by Trafford, price £12.95. You can get it straight from the author (postage free) by phoning 01604 842357 or download an order form from [www.leonieandthelastnapoleon.com](http://www.leonieandthelastnapoleon.com)

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## Maling makes headlines

**Maling seems to be in the doldrums at the moment with eBayers generally looking to pay no more than "bargain basement" prices. And it has to be said that most pieces on eBay are not particularly exciting. Tennis sets and sundae dishes don't do a lot for me.**

However, there was more encouraging news when "Antiques Info" magazine published a four-page article on Maling in its July/August edition. Although the emphasis was mainly on price, the quality and desirability of Maling was also stressed

The author, Roland Head, wrote: "This combination of glamorous and even decadent designs, luxurious hand-painted decoration and fine detailing meant that, in the late 1920s, Maling's decorative output compared very favourably with that of the top Staffordshire potteries of the time."

He concluded: "It is hard to predict whether Maling's popularity will increase in the future, but the best pieces should always make sound investments simply because they represent some of the most finely-decorated examples of 1920s and 1930s British pottery. There probably won't be a better time to start investing in Maling."



# Is this a Jock joke?

Have a look at this and tell me if you think it's a joke or serious. Ignore the decoration for the moment and check out the shape. It's a typical Maling block handled mug, a shape introduced around 1930 and typically associated with the pottery's wartime "utility" production. It's also factory marked.

Now we turn to the decoration, which includes the Scottish saltire and the words: "E I R - Queen of Scots". So it's a Scottish commemorative from the 1953 coronation.

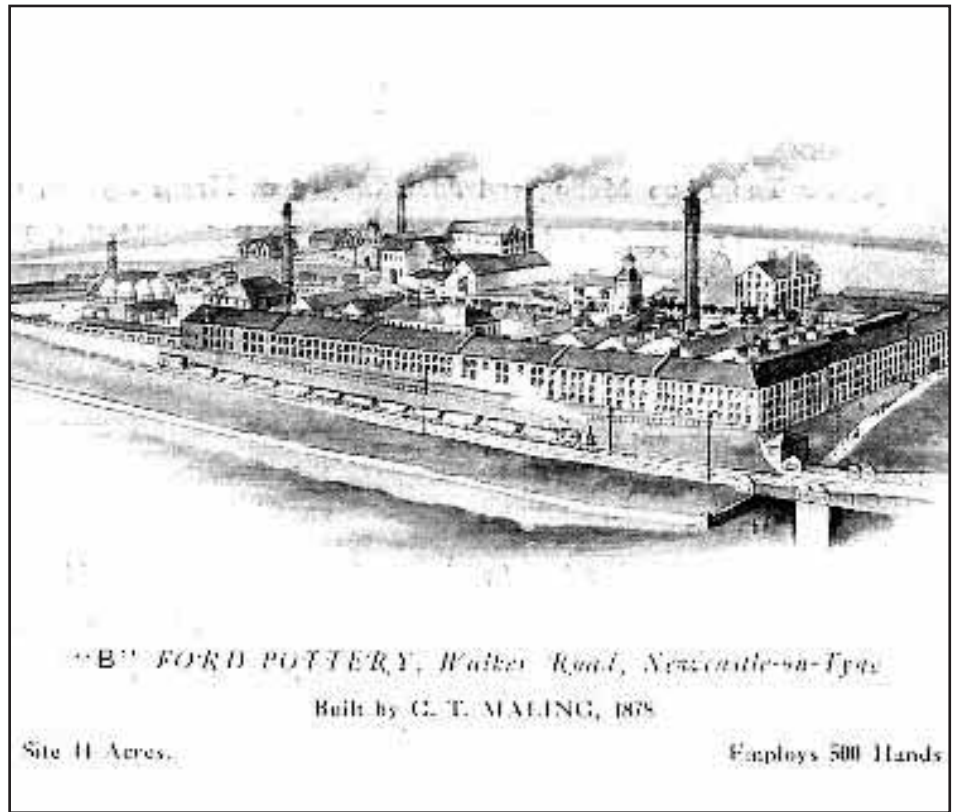
Whoever chose the design knew their history, as our present Queen is, technically Elizabeth I of Scotland. ("Good Queen Bess" didn't rule over Scotland, and the two kingdoms weren't united till the reign of her successor King James.)

A typical mug for the 1953 coronation would have been a miniature "Poor Richard" shape, as shown in contemporary photos taken in the pottery. The paintresses recollect being rushed off their feet with the demand for these and other souvenirs. So who would have had the time to create this novelty?

And was it a novelty? The piece carries a price tag of two shillings which the vendor of the piece believes is original. That suggests it must have been on sale somewhere. Then there's the tie between the Maling family and Scotland, as CTM's wife, Mary Ford, came from Edinburgh. So is it a genuine tribute?

It's not often I'm baffled by a piece of Maling, but this one has me stumped. Have any of our members north of the border seen anything similar, either by Maling or another pottery?

*(NB. Chambers Dictionary, which is published in Edinburgh, lists "Jock" as an informal term for a Scotsman, but not as derogatory or offensive. So no letters please!)*

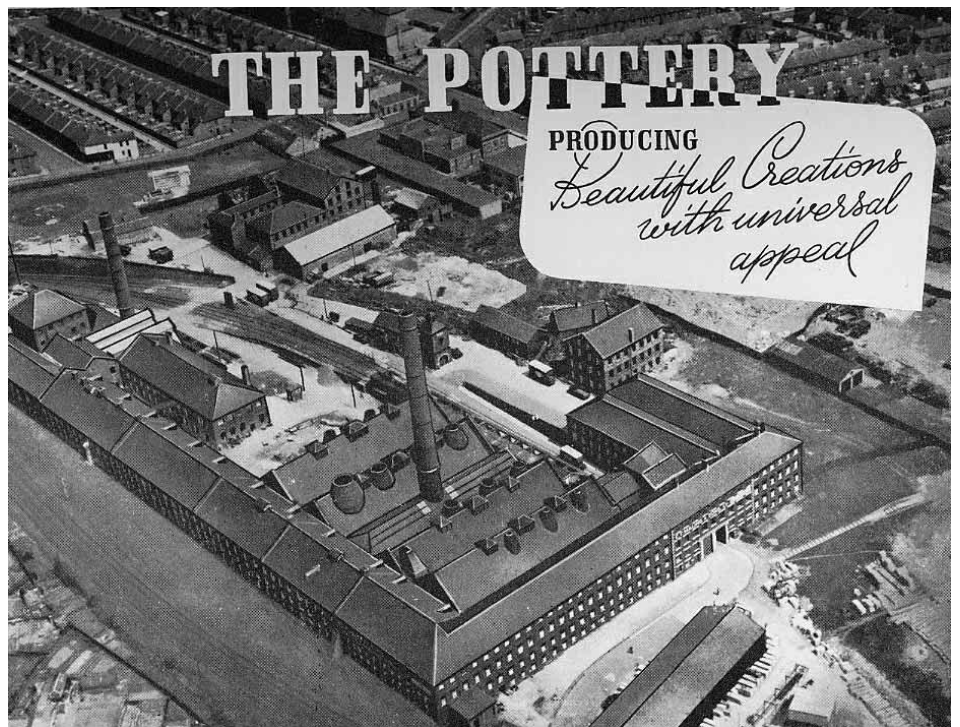


## Spot the differences

These two views show some of the changes to the Ford B pottery over a period of around forty years.

The line drawing is thought to come from a catalogue produced to mark the introduction of Cetem Ware in 1908. It may of course be an older illustration which was re-used for reasons of economy.

The advertisement is dated by RC Bell at 1951. We can see furniture vans parked at the top of the yard, so it is after the takeover by Hoult's. The boiler house chimney (to the left) still stands, even though the factory had converted to electric power. However, the reservoir (beyond the clock tower) which fed water to the boiler house looks to have been filled in.

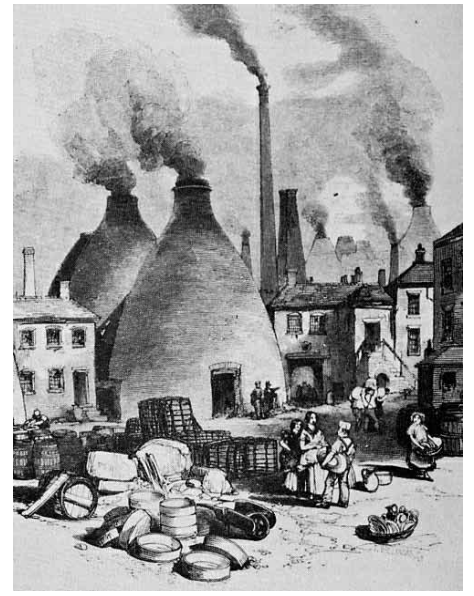




# A saga of saggars

To supplement David Johnson's article on Billy Milsom, we offer a couple of illustrations from the invaluable "Tyneside Pottery" by RC Bell (Studio Vista). Neither can be said to have been based on the Maling site, but they show the general principle of biscuit firing.

The first shows a kiln being loaded, with saggars being carried on a worker's head in a process called "nobbing". The second appears to be the drawing (or emptying) of a kiln, with fired pieces being transferred to wicker baskets for easier handling.



## Led up the garden path

**Enquiries received via the website from non-members range from the sublime to the ridiculous. Here, we examine both ends of the spectrum.**

For a start, what do you make of this? "I have in my possession a pair of maling plates depicting the emerald castle and yellow brick road from the wizard of oz both are mint and unmarked, any info please"

My first bit of info is that attention to punctuation and spelling costs very little time and is a courtesy to your recipient. Putting pedantry aside, I turn to the plates (no pics were supplied, so I have to rely on telepathy). Do we see a lion, tin man or scarecrow? I think not.

What Maling pattern could be seen as having a "yellow brick road"? Possibly "Cottage Garden"? A yellow crazy paving path which leads the eye to a vista of trees which are indistinct enough to be mistaken for the Emerald City if you've forgotten to take your medication for a while. (Or taken some not entirely legal pharmaceuticals.)

The sender didn't reply, despite being mailed the pic below. Fortunately, the interesting puzzles are still out there. Like this one:

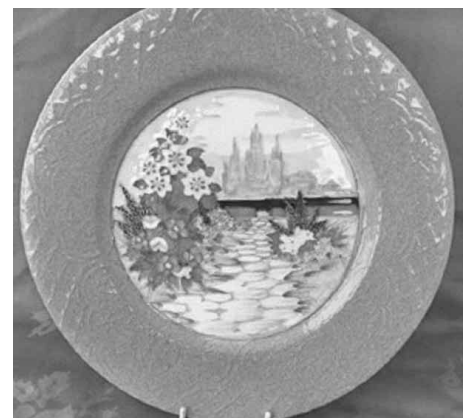
"I have a 1920s Maling jug with a signature on the base. The signature is C.C. Canham. Is this person known as a Maling artist? It is a very unusual piece and the painting is to a very high standard. I have not seen a piece of Maling like it."

From the information (again with no pic) one suspects this is a "night school" piece. We know that between 1930 and 1936 Miss Theo Maling ran a local night school class in pottery decoration. Three guesses where she obtained the pots for her students to work on!

The students would often sign their names (a privilege which Maling hardly ever allowed to their designers) and the pots would go back to Maling for glazing and firing. Then they were returned to their proud owners. So the probability is that it's a Maling pot, but not by a Maling artist.

Then the pic arrived and confounded all my confident predictions!

You can see that it's a bit of "Voluta" dating from circa 1960. So I'm some 30 years out in my guess and have absolutely no idea what this is. I don't think I've ever seen such a late piece of Maling decorated outside the pottery.



  
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Secretary: David Holmes  
 Patrons: Roger Allan,  
 Tony Boullemier, Fred Houtl, Caroline  
 Kirkhope, Heather Maling  
 Dr John Maling,  
 Steven Moore

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 Renewals: £10 p.a. (worldwide)