



From left:
Hand painted and lettered
personalised ten inch plate in
Danson Floral

Hand made and painted figure
of a Pastry Cook

William the Conqueror from the
1066 Bayeux Tapestry inspired
series

Cottage Stripes hand-made
and painted little bowls in new
colours for autumn 2014

For sister and brother Tabby and Josh Cole the decision to take over family business Rye Pottery was not really part of their plan.

"We thought that perhaps magically our parents would go on forever, but our father had a heart scare two years ago which forced a fairly rapid rethink," Tabby explains.

"The thought of the Cole family not owning and running Rye Pottery was too much for either of us, it was unthinkable and tugged at our heart and soul. From that moment it was a question of how not if."

Producing English Delftware, a technique in ceramics also called Faience or Majolica, Rye Pottery stems from an 18th century brickworks.

In 1869 a second county pottery was opened called Belle Vue Pottery. This continued successfully until the Second World War when it was forced to shut because the kilns fired for several days and broke blackout regulations.

In 1947 Tabby and Josh's grandfather Wally Cole and his brother Jack bought and reopened the Belle Vue and renamed it Rye Pottery.

"Wally had trained as a sculptor and potter and had focussed, before the war, on creating one-off pieces for smart London galleries.

"They set about turning the company into a fashionable production pottery, exhibiting at the Festival of Britain in 1951 and supplying the likes of Tiffany's in New York and Heals and Primavera in the UK," Josh reveals.

"Our dad Quin trained in ceramics and industrial design at the Royal College of Art and was already an award-winning consultant working with architects and interior designers.

"With our mum, Biddy, he also ran a successful tile decorating company," Tabby adds. "So when our grandparents wanted to retire our parents took on the pottery too.

"About 18 months ago, Josh and I became the third generation to take the helm."

Based in Wish Ward, Rye, it is a production place not a studio.



Tabby and Josh Cole

"We have pieces that are conceived and created by designers, ceramicists and sculptors and once we decide a piece will enter production, we have a highly-skilled team who reproduce each and every piece individually by hand," Josh says.

Each piece goes through a minimum of eight hand processes before it is finished.

"We have three main types of production to transform the raw clay - traditional slip casting working with liquid clay, then there's hand-throwing and we also use a small number of Victorian shaping machines," Tabby explains.

"One of the hardest parts of the process is that we decorate directly on to unfired glaze using free-hand brushwork and sponging techniques.

"The second a brush or sponge hits the surface it's soaked-up, like blotting paper, which means our painters and decorators have to be decisive, swift and delicate all at the same time.

"There's no room for error; it's hugely skilled work."

Alongside freelancers and designers at the heart of the team of eight are the painters.

"Josh does much of the clay work,

including all the slip-casting and fettling and he also packs and fires the kilns, which is a whole art in itself," says Tabby. "I do all the screen printing by hand.

"Our parents Biddy and Quin are always on hand. Quin still paints and designs, and they're only semi-retired despite being 76 and 80 respectively."

And the family are proud at what they have achieved.

"We're really proud to have several pieces of Rye Pottery in the V&A. They also have a number of studio pieces by our grandfather as well as tableware designs by Quin.

Some pieces were gifted by ceramics collectors and design institutions, some were commissioned directly by the V&A's ceramics curator," Tabby says.

"The V&A buys or accepts gifts for the National Ceramics Collection because they're considered to be important or ground-breaking designs."

Their designs include the Cottage Stripe Range and Sussex Pigs.

"They are a traditional Sussex wedding present for toasting the bride and groom. They have been made in Sussex for more than 150 years," Tabby reveals.

"We both love the fifties and sixties shapes and patterns.

"We're reworking some of those at the moment so that we can keep their essence but give them a contemporary twist."

And it seems there is one collection in particular they are excited about.

"The 1066 Bayeux Tapestry Collection," Josh enthuses. "We've developed a new piece to add to the series this autumn, so there will be five different characters in total.

"It's the first figure we've developed together so its release will be an exciting moment for us both.

"We've also created a new three-way colour scheme for our famous Cottage Stripes to compliment the look of the 1066 range for autumn 2014."

For more information, visit
www.ryepottery.co.uk