



Annie Bonas, Measham Ware and the Boating Community

Judy Berry writes

For over 50 years a lady called Annie Bonas sold Measham Ware pottery to the working boatmen and boatwomen whose cargo-carrying took them along the Ashby Canal. Such was the popularity of Measham Ware amongst the boating community that it was often called 'Barge Ware' - a name it retains in many auction houses and antique shops today. From the last quarter of the nineteenth century the name Annie Bonas was as familiar with local boaters as were Ribbon Plates, Roses and Castles and Measham Ware itself.

I recently saw Annie's name mentioned in a couple of articles on Measham Ware and I decided to try to uncover the link between Annie, Measham Ware and the Boating Community. This is the result.

The Ashby Canal was opened in 1804 and ran from its junction with the Coventry Canal at Marston in Warwickshire to the coal mining area of Moira in North West Leicestershire. Originally commissioned to transport local coal and limestone, the canal passed through several villages including Measham which, although the pots were never produced there, gave its name to a range of flamboyant ornamental earthenware – especially spectacular teapots.

From the 1870's most Measham Ware was produced in the Church Gresley and Woodville areas on the Derbyshire Leicestershire border just a few miles from the Ashby Canal. The pots were generally characterised by a dark brown Rockingham



Val Roberts Collection

glaze which was then garishly hand-decorated with shiny blue, pink and green moulded flowers and birds. Each pot had a whitish plaque, perhaps two, and these were stamped with mottos - examples being 'a Present to a Friend' and 'Home Sweet Home' - and some were specifically commissioned with the impressed name of the person who was to receive the pot. Although the range of Measham Ware increased to include jugs, bowls, chamber pots, money boxes and tobacco jars, it was the large teapots which became so highly prized and featured in homes across the country with some of the larger teapots having elaborate lid knobs in the form of miniature teapots.

Annie Bonas (nee Taylor) was born in Measham on 29th May 1859, the eldest daughter of Robert and Emma Taylor and grand-daughter of Thomas Taylor - both Robert and Thomas were boatmen working on the Ashby Canal as were other members of Annie's family. Annie lived all her life in Measham but, despite her family's background, she became not a boatwoman but a tailoress. However, on 26th September 1886 she married Thomas Bonas - a widower some 30 years her senior. Thomas was a licensed hawker of china, earthenware and haberdashery, a trade he had been engaged in from an early age and he had a shop on



Judy Berry Collection



Measham High Street. Annie had married into the china selling business.

Measham Ware teapots were not cheap and cost far more than an ordinary but equivalent-sized teapot. The specially commissioned pots with mottos were even more expensive and yet they became widely purchased and used by boaters. There were a few distributors of Measham Ware, but seemingly it was Annie Bonas, perhaps because of her boating family background, who became well known as trading with the boaters. On their way up the Ashby Canal, the boaters probably commissioned a piece of Measham Ware through Annie, perhaps leaving a small deposit with her, and would then collect the item when they next passed through.

Annie had a lot of sadness in her life. Her younger sister Georgiana died when she was but a child and Thomas, Annie's own child, died in 1891 from enteritis just 10 months old. Her father died in 1895 from cholera aged 58 years and her mother only 7 years later. When Annie's own husband died in 1907 at the age of 79 Annie did not cease trading - she continued selling china at the Measham shop. Kelly's Trade Directory records her as a Measham china dealer in her own right as late as 1928 and so she was until her death in 1933 when, at the age of 73, she succumbed to heart failure and bronchitis.

It seems the second World War spelled the end of Measham Ware production when potteries were required to concentrate on



making essential items rather than fancy goods. With the death of Annie and the cessation of Measham Ware production, the connection between Annie Bonas, Measham Ware and the Boating Community could have been lost forever but it hasn't. Her name lives on in various records and Measham Museum has a photo of her sitting outside her double-fronted shop with its china-filled shelves and there are many of today's boaters who collect the wonderfully showy antique Measham Ware teapots.

*Ed's Note: there is a small booklet called **Measham Ware** by Margaret Beadmore, which contains the photo of Annie and her assistant standing in the doorway of their shop on Measham Bridge and an extensive display of Measham Ware in the Measham Museum.*

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The Mystery of Vanguard

Michael Pinnock writes:

The **Vanguard** was based on the Lee at Stanstead Abbots before it went to Warwickshire Fly for hull works. I believe it was still composite, well I know it was pre 2006 as I had enquired about buying it well before I got **Clover**. I think it had a steel bottom fitted at the Fly. The last time I saw it, was on road transport at either Watford Gap services or Newport Pagnell. I think this was a year ago or 18 months ago. It may well be back on the Lee, but I haven't been past Stanstead Abbots lately to confirm this. Sorry it's a bit sketchy but maybe it will jog someone's memory.