

L O S T



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HISTORIC COALBROOKDALE

**FOUNTAINS, BENCHES & MORE
RESTORATION, REIMAGINING, REINSTATEMENT**

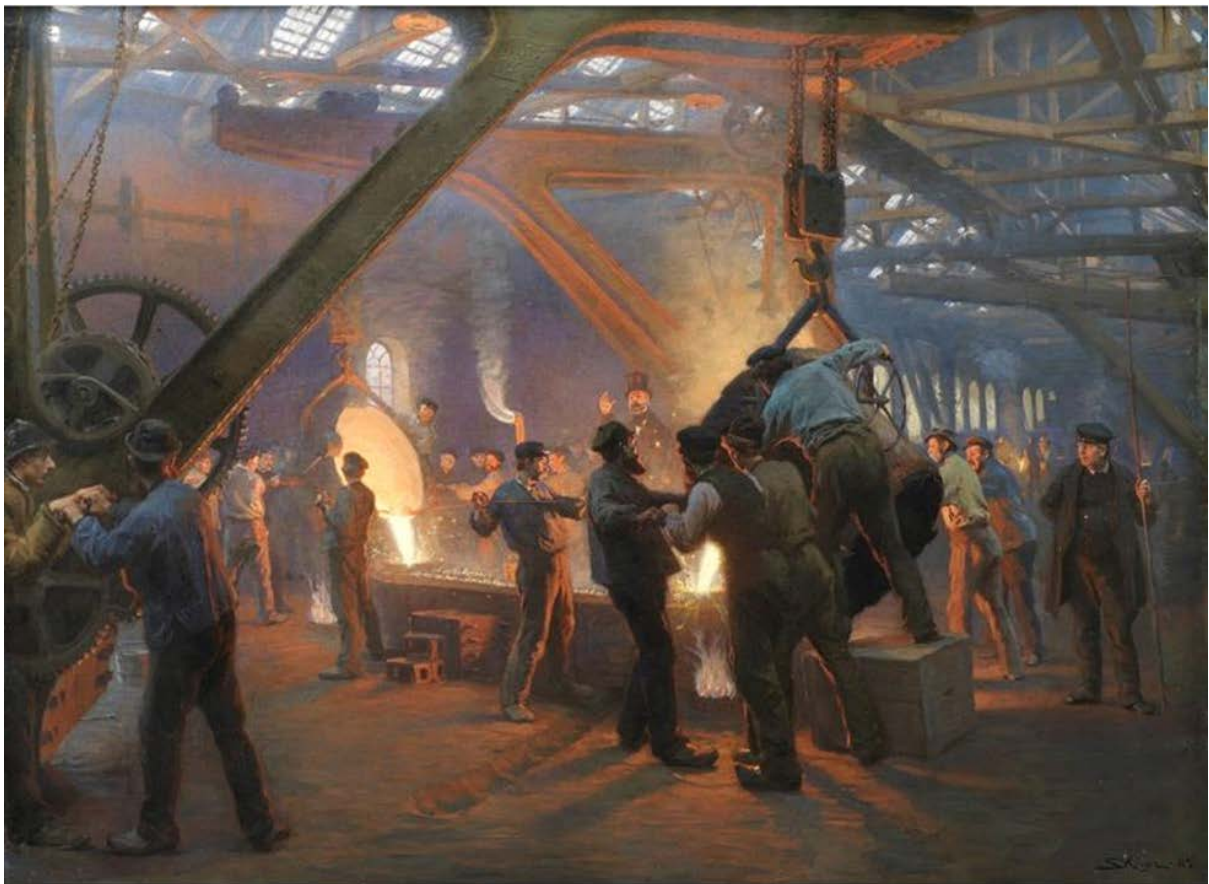
Coalbrookdale

A little history:

Perhaps the most famous of all the foundries producing decorative cast iron goods, Coalbrookdale has a long and distinctive history, including considerable innovation within the manufacturing processes as well as true excellence in design.

The Coalbrookdale Foundry was initially established by Abraham Darby of Shropshire in 1709 and run by successive members of the Darby family through most of the 18th Century. The area had previously hosted an earlier foundry but the furnace had exploded and then allowed to become derelict.

Darby rebuilt the Coalbrookdale Furnace, using coke as the fuel and this enabled him to produce simple cast iron goods such as pots and pans more cheaply than his competitors, allowing him to prosper.



The process of using coke as fuel was further refined as the foundry expanded, enabling the company to expand and to make further impacts on history.

They became an early supplier of steam engine cylinders and also the first cast iron rails for the emerging railways. In 1778, the foundry, undertook the work that would ensure a lasting legacy to the world, building the first cast-iron bridge, Iron Bridge, taking two years to complete and still standing today. The foundry had to be further extended in order to cast the bridge.



At the beginning of the nineteenth century, with the spread of wealth within society to include the middle classes, Coalbrookdale developed a wide range of decorative goods, including garden furniture, with the foundry producing vast numbers of benches, chairs, fountains and other goods, such as gates and railings. Many of the original works still exist today and Lost Art Limited have a history of both repairing originals, as well as offering high quality reproductions, that are to all intents and purposes identical to the 19th century versions.



The image above shows a reproduction Nasturtium bench produced by Lost Art and currently residing in a tranquil corner of the garden of a stately home. The bench is available from Lost Art in the same lengths originally offered by Coalbrookdale and we also offer the option of a timber back, rather than the detailed cast iron panel.

The popularity of Coalbrookdale designs and the weakness of the copyright laws of the time (lasting only for 3 years) meant that many of their designs were soon copied by other foundries and care should be taken in selecting original benches.

Such was the reputation of Coalbrookdale that, following the Great Exhibition in London, where the foundry were awarded a council medal in recognition of the remarkable originality of their work, the company were commissioned to construct the impressive and iconic entrance gates to Hyde Park in London.

As with many others of the great decorative foundries, their fortunes were greatly affected by the World Wars. For Coalbrookdale the situation was further complicated by the fact that the owning family, The Darbys, were also Quakers and so until 1917 they would not involve themselves in the manufacture of weapons and munitions.

Following the World Wars of the 20th Century, the foundry, like many others, found the economic conditions very difficult and a series of mergers and takeovers followed which ultimately has seen what remains of the Coalbrookdale Company continue to exist as part of the AGA heating and cooking range manufacturers

Lost Art and Coalbrookdale:

Our first encounter with their work beyond our collection of benches came when we were commissioned to restore a major Coalbrookdale Fountain for Albert Park in Middlesbrough. All but the lowest level of the fountain had been lost and therefore this represented a major challenge. However, as was the case with many of the foundry's products, the same components were used in other locations but in different configurations, essentially producing unique designs from the same elements, a tradition that Lost Art are now happy to continue. Having identified another fountain in St Stephen's Square in Redditch as containing many of the same elements, we then undertook to restore that fountain in return for taking patterns from the required parts, including Temperance, the statue atop the fountain, but more of her later.

Thus, from two, apparently dissimilar fountains, we were able to recreate a missing fountain and return another original to its former glory.



The fountain on the left is the restored fountain in Redditch and on the right, Albert Park, Middlesbrough, recently voted one of the top 10 fountains in the UK. The similarities are not necessarily obvious, but a large number of components, such as the herons, bullrush plaques, lily leaves, swags and top bowl are common to both fountains.

Although Lost Art strive to fulfill our mission of ‘providing for the future from the lessons of the past’, whilst we recognise the need to maintain authenticity in materials, style and methods, we may occasionally make use of more modern techniques.

We do maintain an archive of Coalbrookdale catalogues and a variety of other documents and sources that allow us to recreate missing elements of structures, often by hand carving pieces from illustrations, prior to converting these into patterns for foundry casting. However, sometimes we can make use of existing evidence in 21st century ways. The impressive Victorian Coalbrookdale Fountain that provided a centre-piece to Mesnes Park, Wigan had been removed in the 1930’s and when we were commissioned to recreate it, we used the tried and trusted source of old documents, such as postcards along with the high-tech option of the 3D scanning of an existing ‘sister’ fountain that remained in Northern Ireland.



From the top:
a 1920's postcard of the fountain,
a 3D scan of the existing fountain in Lurgan, Northern Ireland,
an image of the fully recreated fountain, fully flowing in Wigan.

Having worked on projects involving a number of Coalbrookdale fountains, Lost Art Limited now have full sets of patterns that allow for the restoration or recreation of original fountains or to engage in the Victorian practice of creating a unique fountain by combining elements of already existing examples.

The 'Cherub Fountain', as seen in the Coalbrookdale catalogue:

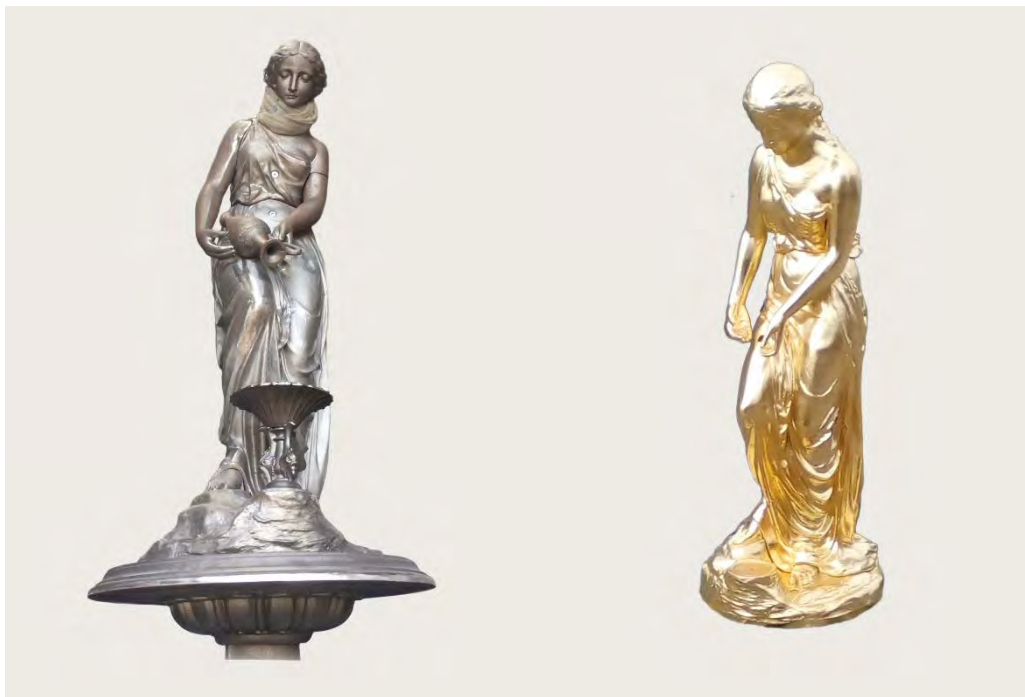


'Temperance', as seen on the Redditch fountain shown earlier, produced from an original statue attributed to the Wills Brothers of London and illustrated in Coalbrookdale's own catalogue:



The statue in iron, highly finished and bronzed
Do. real bronze, chased and stained

Temperance at the Lost Art workshops, produced in cast iron from a pattern and then gilded using 24 carat gold leaf (awaiting her cornucopia and bowl).



As we now have a wide range of patterns for components of Coalbrookdale fountains, we can now offer our own unique designs following the Victorian mix and match technique. The following is a creation illustrated by Lost Art in the Coalbrookdale style, to show just one possibility for a new fountain, incorporating a range of traditional Coalbrookdale elements, surmounted by Temperance herself. We are happy to discuss alternative and individual designs incorporating different components.



Continuing the variation on a theme – the image below shows a fountain created in the Coalbrookdale style and exhibited for the first time (following decorative painting) at the ASLA conference in Los Angeles.



We are, of course, happy to continue to offer reproductions of original Coalbrookdale products, be they fountains, such as the illustration below taken from their catalogue, or the stunning Lily of the Valley bench, which was also displayed at the ASLA conference.



Our team are constantly working on new ideas and options for our clients. This mock up at the workshop combines the iconic 'Boy with Oar' figure which is associated with the Saracen Foundry of the MacFarlane Company, with a base made up from Coalbrookdale components.



The eclectic approach to fountain design has also been adopted for a number of our commissions and projects. Hesketh Park in Southport used to feature a fountain during its Victorian heyday, but like many classic landscape features, time and budgets cuts had meant that it had been lost. Lost Art designed, produced and reinstated a fountain that was true to the spirit of the original, combining elements from a number of prestigious foundries of the Victorian era, all noted for the quality of their decorative ironwork, producing a classic yet original design that has been much admired since its installation.





WINNER of Conservation award for our work in conjunction with Renfrewshire Council on The Grand Fountain, Paisley



Winner of the Institution of Mechanical Engineers Award for Conservation of an Industrial Heritage Artefact.



WINNER: MONUMENTS AND PUBLIC SCULPTURE ASSOCIATION Marsh Award for Excellence in Conservation of a Public Sculpture or Fountain 2015.



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