

## ELEANOR COADE

1733 -1821

Eleanor Coade was born in Exeter on 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1733. Very little is known about her private life except that she never married. She used 'Mrs' as a courtesy title as was customary for unmarried women in business at that time. Her father, George, was a wool merchant originally from Lyme Regis and she had one younger sister, Elizabeth.

Eleanor became a successful business woman known for the manufacture of Neo-classical statues, architectural decorations and garden ornaments made from a ceramic based artificial stone. This stone, which she called 'Lithodipyra' (from Ancient Greek meaning 'stone-fired-twice') had the strength to outlast real stone and could be moulded in many ways to look like marble. Lithodipyra was a high quality, durable moulded weather resistant, ceramic stoneware. Statues and decorative features from this still look new today. Coade did not invent 'artificial stone' as various inferior quality precursors had been both patented and manufactured over the previous 40 years, but she likely perfected both the clay recipe and the firing. Contrary to popular belief the recipe for Coadestone still exists and can still be produced. The formula is:-

10% grog (alcoholic liquor)  
5-10% crushed flint  
5-10% fine quartz  
10% crushed soda lime glass  
60-70% ball clay from Dorset and Devon

About 1760 the Coade family moved from Exeter to London and around 1769 Eleanor bought a factory in which to manufacture her artificial stone. This factory is now the site of The Royal Festival Hall. As ceramic moulds could be re-used, some had a working life of over 50 years, leading to high efficiency in production. She cultivated strong business relationships with respected architects and designers as she could produce multiple copies of their designs.

Renowned architects Robert Adam and Thomas Nash used Coadestone on many of their buildings as the demand by the prosperous middle classes grew. As the clay could be easily moulded it was used to decorate the porches and keystones over doors and windows to transform plain fronted houses.



Grave of William Bligh,  
Lambeth, London

It now became produced by appointment to King George III and the Prince Regent who used Coadestone in St. George's Chapel, Windsor, the Royal Pavilion Brighton, Carlton House, London, The Royal Naval College, Greenwich and a large quantity was used in the refurbishment of Buckingham Palace in the 1820's.

One of the lions produced by her for the Lion Brewery in London is now on permanent loan, at the request of King George VI, standing at The All England Rugby Club, Twickenham (Gate 3).





Home of Eleanor Coade, Belmont House, in Lyme Regis, Dorset, with Coade stone ornamental facade

She also developed her own talent as a modeller, exhibiting at the Society of Artists between 1773 and 1780. In 1784 Eleanor was given Belmont House in Lyme Regis by her uncle to use as a holiday home. It later became the home of the 20<sup>th</sup> century writer John Fowles, the author of "The French Lieutenant's Woman." It is now in the hands of The Landmark Trust and is a Grade Two listed building. It stands overlooking the water in Lyme and is splendidly enhanced with examples of her products on its façade.

She was the first and only person to succeed in the artificial stone business, thanks to a combination of managerial skills, entrepreneurial flair and a talent for marketing and public relations.

Most of the examples of her work shown below are in Lyme. See if you can find some of them on Belmont House and Marine Parade.



In 1813 she recruited William Croggon as manager and the business continued to be successful long after Coade's death. Eleanor Coade was a devout Baptist. She died 16<sup>th</sup> November 1821 in Camberwell, London. Her obituary notice declared her to be "The sole inventor and proprietor of an art which deserved considerable notice." She left most of her fortune to charity schools and clergymen in Lyme Regis, some to be distributed to the poor and to her own family. She also left money to a few married women friends, stating that their husbands were to have no control over the funds!!

She is commemorated by the Coade Stone placed under Westminster Bridge by the Royal Festival Hall. Her body is buried in an unmarked grave at Bunhill Field Cemetery in Islington, London but it is understood that the tombstone was obliterated during the bombing in World War Two.

Coadestone appears to have been largely phased out by the 1840s and replaced by Portland cement as a form of artificial stone.