

LATER, IN THE LAB

Greatly enlarged on this screen...

MAJOLICA MENAGERIE

Minton's display of their new majolica pieces was one of the triumphs of the 1851 Great Exhibition in London. The richly modelled and brilliantly coloured glazed earthenware, in the style of the original 15th-century majolica, was soon produced by other manufacturers and rapidly became the most popular ceramic in the mid-Victorian home.

Some of the first Minton designs were inspired by Classical and Renaissance motifs, such as dolphins, conch shells, ram and lion heads, and cherubs, who often appeared on the dinner table as the coy bearers of sweetmeats. But the majority were 19th-century innovations, creating and reflecting the wonderful gamut of contemporary decorative tastes.

An exhibition of over 150 pieces of Minton majolica, ranging in height from a few inches to

around 5ft, can be seen in London at Jeremy Cooper, 9 Galen Place, Bury Place, London WC1, until 26 June.

Many of the larger items were made for the garden and conservatory - vases, jardinières and even seats - and are often exuberantly decorated with stylised flowers and foliage. The passion-

flower, a favourite subject, recurs in different combinations of the intense colours characteristic of majolica.

Grotesque pieces, which appealed to the Victorian sense of humour, include the 1878 Fish Teapot (below left) from a range of 'fanciful' teapots, and some bizarre, almost surreal, objects, like spoon warmers in the form of shells on coral supports, which look like sinister little claws, and tree-trunk boxes, smothered with ivy and wood-beetles, rolling along on tiny logs.

Fun and function are often combined very successfully, if not sensitively, in dishes where the ornament indicates the contents. Below, hare and duck heads adorn the 1877 Game Dish and graceful birds surround the 1864 Pigeon Pie - intricate basketwork was a popular majolica theme. Left, even the simple sardine had its own box.

CARYLL FARALDI

