

THREE months ago, the production of Royal Worcester porcelain was moved out of the city, marking the end of a 250-year era.

However, now the company has kept its skilled hand painters at the Worcester factory and has the Worcester Porcelain Museum to attract tourists, could the historical porcelain business have a new role to play in the city's future?

Royal Worcester and Spode's personnel director

Gordon Hay was cautious but said more skilled workers could be employed if the demand was there.

He said: "If the city attracts more people who visit the centre we will be busier.

"We have retained the hand painters and there is still a very strong market for it throughout this year and next year."

However, he added: "I think it's still early days yet for Worcester's growth and we may have to go through

an unsettling period first."

From the museum's point of view, manager Amanda Savidge confirmed a change of emphasis was already under way.

She said: "We are still looking after the historical side but also looking to work more with contemporary artists and crafts people from the region."

As part of the plans, local artist Sara Hayward has been appointed as an artist-in-residence for 10 months

and staff at the Severn Street museum intend to keep some of the factory's old skills alive by inviting people to run courses.

The museum has also successfully branched out into the services industry, hosting wedding receptions, banquets and other functions.

Mrs Savidge said she hoped when the nearby riverside development was completed, the entire area would become a magnet for tourists.