

Jugs and their place in social history have always fascinated me. Just think, 200 years ago there were no plastic bottles, cardboard containers or cans to hold milk, juice, beer, fizzy drinks, soups, sauces and delicate spring waters. Just what did our ancestors do to carry things home from their shopping trips? The answer is, of course, that virtually all liquids were stored and transported in jugs, so the potters had a huge market for these utilitarian vessels.

Today the serving jug is almost extinct. We still use small jugs for milk or cream when serving tea or coffee, but the larger serving jug, holding a pint or more, has almost disappeared from our lives. Sadly, this seems to coincide with the lingering demise of good old British custard, virtually extinct from today's so-called restaurants, and the most common use for an old jug is to display a bunch of flowers, all too rarely brought home by errant husbands.

The result of all these changing times is that old jugs hold a fascination much greater than their simple purpose. The potters were supplying a competitive market on both price and design, so the range of jugs is vast, from hugely expensive hand-painted fine porcelain, down to the coarsest stoneware and humblest cheap earthenware. Quality jugs were reviewed in publications such as the *Art Journal* and the *Journal of Design & Manufactures*, and the latest wares were exhibited on trade stands at the great 19th century exhibitions.

The first of these exhibitions was held in London in 1851, encouraged by Prince Albert, and located in the amazing Crystal Palace building, erected specially for the occasion in Hyde Park. It was rather like the Millennium Dome of its day, but was hugely successful and was later relocated to Sydenham in South London. Despite the building itself being destroyed by fire in 1936, the name survives for the area.

This first international exhibition was followed by similar events in Dublin and New York in 1853, Paris in 1855, another in London



What a Whopper!

Dick Henrywood admires a large exhibition jug



in 1862, and then a string of others around the world.

Generally, these exhibitions displayed great works of art and manufacture, but utilitarian objects such as jugs did creep in. The small Staffordshire firm of Cork & Edge exhibited a range of relief-moulded jugs on their stand at Paris in 1855, and an unknown manufacturer created a special design for the same exhibition. It is moulded overall with the coats-of-arms of the 19 exhibiting nations, and although quite rare, examples are occasionally found in plain white stoneware (see left) or green stoneware with added gilding. Neither of these is very impressive, but a third variant is known which is ostentatious in the extreme, with the surface moulding extensively decorated with coloured enamels and flamboyant gilding.

I know of only two examples of this variant, both nearly 15 inches tall. One passed through

Sothebys some years ago and the other (illustrated above) was sold more recently by Dreweatt Neate in Newbury. Although no documentation has yet been found, it appears likely that these two jugs, which vary in the gilt detailing, were made for display at the exhibition. The maker remains unknown, although Samuel Alcock has been mentioned, and he was certainly capable of producing such quality wares.

Relief-moulded jugs are fascinating for their subject matter but are rather an acquired taste. They can seem rather dull and are not normally held in high regard for their decorative merit but this coloured exhibition jug is hugely impressive. I know which variant I would prefer to feature on my mantelpiece!

Dick Henrywood is a consultant specialising in collectors' items and collectable British pottery. We are grateful to Dreweatt Neate of Donnington Priory for supplying the images.