

**R**EMEMBER that last bunch of flowers you had? Did you put them in a modern vase or did you dig out that old jug kept at the back of the cupboard for just such an occasion? Nowadays, we make relatively little use of jugs. We still serve milk or cream in small jugs for tea and coffee but with the possible exception of serving custard (which is fast becoming an endangered species along with the English pudding), larger jugs are rarely needed.

In Victorian times the situation was very different. There were no glass or plastic bottles, no cans, and no supermarkets. Jugs were an essential part of everyday life, used for fetching, storing, and serving liquids of all kinds. Ale or cider would be brought from the local inn, milk had to be fetched from the farm, dairy or carrier, and hot water was not available on tap but had to be carried from the stove or fire.

The demand for jugs was huge and they were made in all shapes and sizes, ranging from a quarter of a pint right up to half a gallon. Sets of three, holding approximately a quart, a pint, and half a pint, were common, and sets of four and even five were not unusual. Such utilitarian wares were a staple product of the Victorian potteries, but competition was fierce and the potters were always striving to produce cheaper and more attractive designs.

As production techniques developed, one process became dominant, and throughout the Victorian era the market was flooded with relief-moulded jugs. These were made in a mould and the decoration is in relief on the surface. The complete design would first be carved in alabaster by a highly-skilled modeller, and his master model was then used to cast plaster of Paris moulds.

Thereafter, the potter could produce thousands of jugs very simply by pressing or casting clay into the mould and firing the resulting vessels in the kiln. This two-stage process was quick and cheap: as a great deal of detail could be reproduced via the mould, new and attractive designs could be introduced very quickly.

**T**HE MODELLERS were not short of inspiration. In the 1830s hunting scenes were common. The 1840s saw some magnificent Gothic designs of which Charles Meigh's Apostle jug was pre-eminent. This was made in two versions, one with saintly figures in niches around the body, the other with Gothic windows. It has light-heartedly been suggested that one was intended for High-Church goers and the other for lesser mortals; in any event, the jug with the figures must have been produced in huge quantities because many have survived.

**C**OMMEMORATIVE jugs were made by many small potteries in an attempt to attract custom but as they were normally rushed into production the quality is generally poor. However, examples tend to be scarce and the most interesting subjects are highly prized. Jugs were made to commemorate royal events such as the death of Prince Albert, the marriage of the then Prince of Wales, Queen Victoria's golden jubilee and even Queen Victoria's two reviews of the newly reformed Volunteers, London and Edinburgh. This last was produced by the little-known Sandford

## Jugs in General

and  
*Dick Henrywood*  
explains how  
even a modest  
vessel can leave the  
kitchen for the saleroom

Pottery near Wareham in Dorset, but most jugs originated from Staffordshire.

Other events and people celebrated include the Eglinton tournament, the Crimean War, the London International Exhibition, politicians such as Richard Cobden and Sir Robert Peel, military leaders such as Nelson and Wellington, and visiting personalities such as Garibaldi and the American evangelists Sankey and Moody.

Public interest was also aroused by contemporary books, a good example of which would be the novel *Paul and Virginia*. This was written by Bernadin de St Pierre and published in French in 1788, but British translations soon followed and the story became very popular. One jug has a scene copied from a group by the sculptor Cumberworth intended for the Royal Academy exhibition. Other literary subjects portrayed include scenes from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *Tam O'Shanter*, *John Gilpin*, and the *Merry Wives of Windsor*, also busts of Shakespeare, Burns and Sir Walter Scott.

**W**HILE THE JUGS illustrated may be considered typical, they represent only a tiny proportion of the designs produced. Some of the most attractive feature genre scenes



Author's  
pictures



above: two Apostle jugs  
by Charles Weigh, 1842.



right: Paul  
and Virginia,  
1850 – maker  
unknown.

below:  
Volunteer jug,  
1860: from  
Sandford  
Pottery.

such as a gipsy encampment, boys birds-nesting, wine makers, a gleaner, and hop pickers. Biblical scenes were popular in the 1840s and 50s and recorded examples include Samuel and Eli, Cain and Abel, Ruth, Naomi and her daughters-in-law, the Good Samaritan, Moses at the Rock of Horeb, and the Prodigal Son. An equally wide range of jugs was based on classical subjects, gods and goddesses such as Bacchus, Silenus, Diana, Ariadne, Amphitrite, and Pan.

I have described jugs with figures or scenes of some sort, but by far the largest group show botanical specimens or generalized floral patterns. Some of the botanical examples are quite magnificent, particularly those moulded in shapes such as a pineapple, corn on the cob, or a pine-cone; many of the floral patterns are rather nondescript. They would have been the quickest and easiest to design and were obviously attractive to the smaller potteries trying to produce utilitarian wares at the lowest possible price for the mass market. Nevertheless, they are representative of their time and can be decorative.

These jugs have begun to attract the interest of collectors, and while lesser examples are still inexpensive, some of the very best designs now fetch well over a hundred pounds. Why not have another look at that old jug you use for flowers or the one that sits on the mantelpiece as an ornament? You may be in possession of a valuable heirloom. 