

SIR HENRY & DOULTON: CERAMIC ROYALTY OF ENGLAND

by Jack Sullivan

Special to Bottles and Extras

When the Queen of England recently knighted Mick Jagger, many people wondered about the appropriateness of her thus anointing a rock star. We can imagine eyebrows similarly might have been raised in 1887 when Queen Victoria knighted a man noted for, among other things, commodes, sinks and -- important here -- whiskey jugs.

That man was Henry Doulton, the guiding genius of the world's most successful stoneware pottery ever, Royal Doulton. Even today, it is England's foremost manufacturer of ceramic products whose decorative ceramic items are avidly collected worldwide.

Sir Henry's story begins with his illustrious (but un-knighted) father, John Doulton. John began life as apprentice in the highly skilled Fulham Manufactory that had been founded in the 17th Century by the genius potter, John Dwight. Until Dwight all stoneware in England was being imported from Germany. But his Fulham pottery proved that the home folks could turn out quality ceramic goods equaling anything on the Continent.

John Doulton barely had completed his apprenticeship when in 1815 he became a partner of the widow, Martha Jones, who had inherited a pottery at Lambeth, England, on the banks of the Thames River. She also brought her foreman, John Watts, into the new company, called Jones, Watts & Doulton -- later changed to Doulton & Watts.

John's son Henry was born in 1820 and from early on was plunged into the family business. His father insisted he start from the bottom and so he advanced from potter's apprentice until at the age of 15 he was creating 20 gallon chemical vessels on the potter's wheel, thereby showing his mastery of the potter's craft.

During the early 19th Century, the firm continued to prosper. In the early years of Queen Victoria's reign, far-sighted reformers had begun to move for drastic improvements in English sanitation. Doulton pottery answered the need for more easily cleaned facilities by producing vitrified (glass-like) stoneware for sanitary uses, including drain pipes, sinks, and commodes. Doulton production both benefited and prospered from those initiatives. Some historians believe that the firm's capabilities significantly advanced sanitation in England. Doulton also was quick to respond to the invention of the telegraph by being among the first to mold ceramic insulators.

Following the deaths of his father and John Watts, in 1854, Henry Doulton led merger of three family-owned firms -- including one he had founded at the age of 26, into a new partnership known as Doulton & Company, located at Lambeth. He proved to be a shrewd and able businessman. In 1887 Doulton took over the Burslem Pottery of Pinder Bourne where tablewares and art pottery were being produced alongside industrial ceramics. This helped launch Doulton into more sophisticated wares. The talented staff of artisans and potters hired by Sir

Henry in both its Burslem and Lambeth facilities sought to work with more sophisticated shapes and glazes, including an effort to make true china-- a challenging task. By 1882, however, Doulton's Burslem factory was making high quality bone china.

Although Sir Henry at first was reluctant about moving in new directions he gave way to his staff and eventually became an enthusiast. As one writer has put it: "Soon they were surrounded by one of the most outstanding teams of modelers, decorators and painters in the world of ceramics. The fame of the company and of its products became truly international..."

Doulton had the unusual work policy that artisans could work according to their own desires. There was no set factory style which everyone needed to follow. Sir Henry came to believe that artistic designers should be given freedom of expression and the ability to take their thought processes wherever they led. The policy clearly bore big dividends as Doulton not only found favor with the English public but also with the artistic community and royalty.

The British crown and others showered recognition on Doulton. In 1885 the Edward, the Prince of Wales, awarded the company the Albert Medal of the British Society of Arts, a singular honor. Doulton subsequently won seven "highest awards" at the 1893 Chicago Exposition, the most granted to any pottery in the world. And Henry was awarded his knighthood.

Sir Henry died in 1897 and was succeeded by his son, Henry Lewis Doulton. Henry L. also proved to be an able businessman. He turned the company into a limited corporation, and guided it into the 20th Century. In 1902 Edward -- now King Edward VII -- conferred on the

Fig. 1



Fig. 2

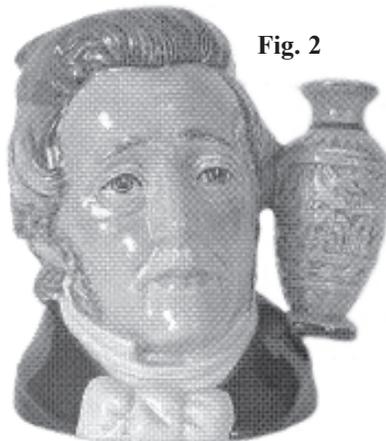


Fig. 3

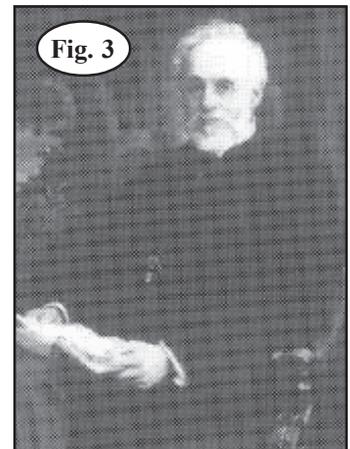


Fig. 4



Fig. 6



Fig. 7



company the double honor of a royal warrant and the explicit right to use the title "Royal." Henceforth the Sir Henry's firm became Royal Doulton, the name by which it continues to be known today.

As can be seen from the illustrations here, even so potentially mundane items as whiskey jugs were treated as if they were works of art. Even Charles J. Noke, the highly regarded artistic director who joined Doulton in 1899, is said to have paid particular attention to the creation of a number of whiskey ceramics. This includes both the jugs in which the liquor was sold and water jugs, often called "pub jugs," that advertised many of the same distillers and brands.

The rise of Doulton fortuitously

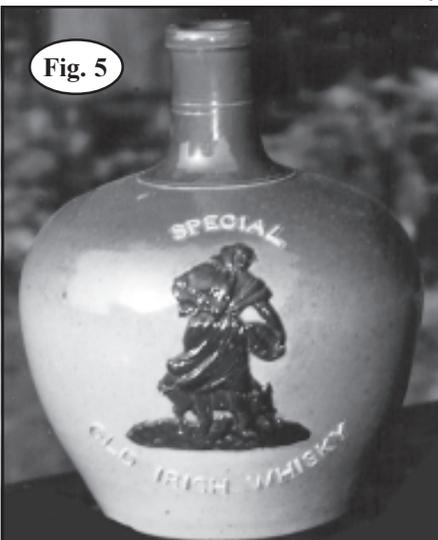


Fig. 5

paralleled the expansion of the Scotch and Irish whiskey industries. During the late 1800s the great whiskey "barons" had decided that the British Isles were much too small a market for their products. They followed the British flag to all parts of the world in their sales efforts, with special attention to English-speaking colonies and former colonies like Australia, India, Canada and the United States.

In marketing and displaying their products, the whiskey firms often sought interesting and colorful packaging. Often they preferred themes that conjured up "the old country." Scotch ceramics often featured in their design thistles, dancing highlanders, antlered deer and sometimes even royalty. Irish whiskey sold flagons that featured shamrocks, harps, and wolfhounds. Doulton was ever ready to provide the ceramics whatever the theme -- as is demonstrated by the photos shown here.

Because many of these containers were made for export, new examples come to light outside Britain even today that harken back to the late 1800s or early 1900s. Many Doulton whiskeys can be distinguished by the pink-brown underlying tones on which elaborate transfer-printed drawings are imposed. Others have "sprigged" designs in which bas relief figures are laid upon the stoneware base. Moreover, it is rare to find one without an elaborate Doulton pottery mark.

During the peak period of its manufacturing whiskey ceramics, roughly the 60 years from 1880 to 1940, Doulton developed a number of unique glazes for its whiskey jugs. Among them were "kingsware," "queensware" and "silicon" finishes. Even after U.S. prohibition, one

World War and the Great Depression, Doulton continued to produce well-designed and decorative items for the whiskey trade. However, it ceased creating whiskey jugs during World War II and has never resumed the trade.

Royal Doulton, however, has continued to grow and prosper. Through constant experimentation with a range of clays, glazes and other materials its has developed a product it calls Royal Doulton Fine China. That porcelain offers many of the qualities of the best bone china but can be sold at reasonably modest prices. With its line of Fine China and other



Fig. 8

Fig. 9



decorative and useful products, Doulton is today a model of worldwide commercial prosperity and fame.

The knighthood conferred by Queen Victoria on a potter 117 years ago has been richly rewarded by the success of Sir Henry Doulton's company. As to the effects of knighthood on Sir Mick Jagger, only time will tell.

Material for this article was drawn from a number of sources, including Doulton-related websites. Jocelyn Lukins is the author of a series of illustrated booklets showing the range of Doulton advertising items, with a strong emphasis on the firm's

Fig. 10



whiskey ceramics. Doulton's own "official" internet site is www.royal-doulton.com.

Photos:

Fig. 1: John Doulton as depicted on a company "character jug" with "Big Ben."

Fig. 2: A young Sir Henry Doulton in a character jug with a Doulton vase.

Fig. 3: A portrait of Sir Henry in later years by Ellis Roberts.

Fig. 4: "Whiskey of His Forefathers" jug done in typical Doulton style for Dewars Whisky.

Fig. 5: "Old Irish Whisky" features an applied figure of a woman feeding a pig.

Fig. 6: A "silicon" glaze jug for Dewars based on a Greek vase design.

Fig. 7: An elaborately "sprigged" jug made for Greenlees Bros.

Fig. 8: A "Kingsware" glaze jug that was issued in 1916 for Dewars.

Fig. 9: This rare light-bodied Kingsware depicts Dicken's Mr. Pickwick.

Fig. 10: A Doulton jug, dated 1886, showing Queen Victoria aboard a camel as "empress" of Africa.

Fig. 11: Dated 1908, this jug depicts an American Indian and held Greenlees Whisky.

Fig. 12: A double "gemel" jug made by Doulton for Dewars Scotch.

Fig. 13: This unusual looking flagon of Doulton artistry held cognac.

Fig. 14: [Header photo] A typical Doulton pottery mark.

Fig. 12

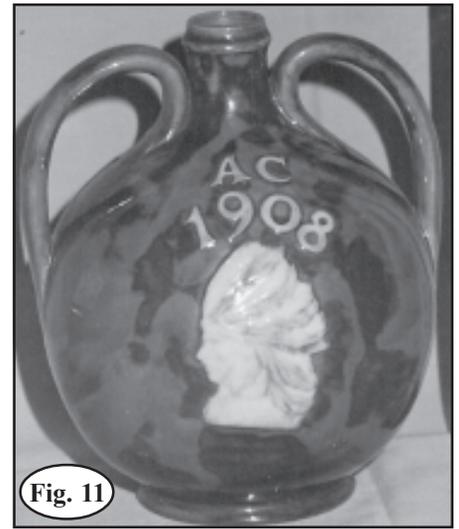
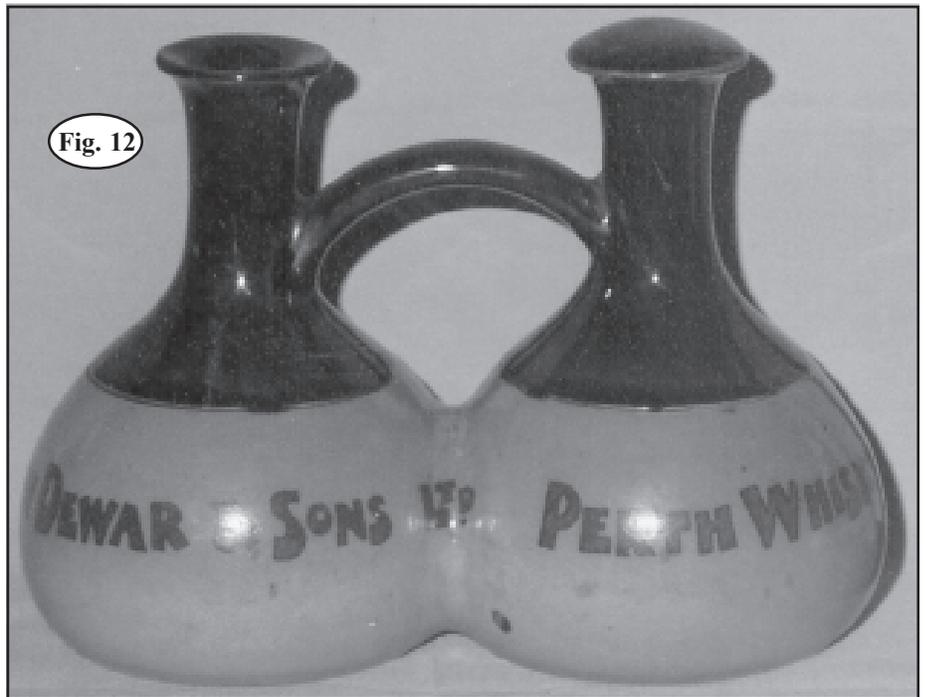


Fig. 11

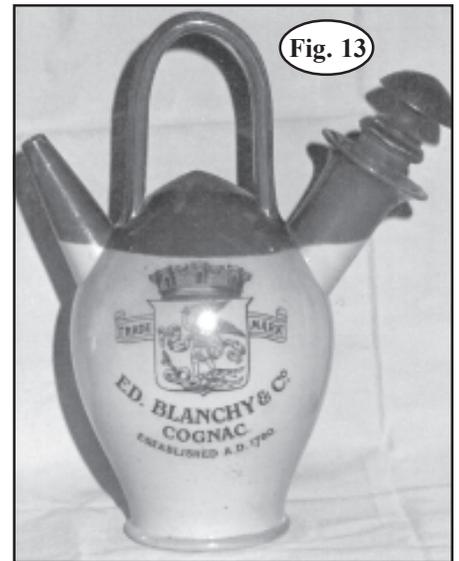


Fig. 13