

# RELIEF- MOULDED JUGS

A very collectable and distinctive art-form, fine relief-moulded jugs were produced in great quantities during the Victorian period. This article examines recently identified and very diverse design sources for their moulded decoration. By DICK HENRYWOOD

It is only relatively recently that relief-moulded jugs have become seriously collectable. A decade ago they aroused little interest and could be bought for trifling sums. Since then four specialised books have appeared, many collectors have emerged, and price tags found on the most desirable jugs have soared. Even more established attitudes have changed. One conservative collector friend of the author who specialised in earlier earthenwares and stonewares commented that he used to think these jugs were just Victorian tat. He went on to admit, rather grudgingly, that at least we now know they are *interesting* Victorian art.

The reasons for the latter comment are not

hard to find. While many of the jugs are utilitarian both in appearance and purpose,

the best can be superb. In addition, the designers cast their net widely for appropriate, or in some cases notably inappropriate, subject matter. Indeed, the very wide range of subjects depicted makes these jugs quite fascinating. While both design and quality deteriorated lamentably in the later years after about 1860, when rather undistinguished decorative and flowery patterns became the norm, earlier jugs exhibit an eclecticism in design which can be quite breathtaking.

It is fair to say that the modellers of these jugs could best be described as artisans rather than artists. While they cast their net wide for inspiration, their designs were rarely, if ever, wholly original. Most were copied from engravings of the day, and documentary evidence shows that specialist printsellers supplied the pottery manufacturers in Staffordshire and probably elsewhere. There was little protection against this plagiarism, which became widespread for relief-moulded jugs and transfer-printed wares, both manufactured in vast quantities throughout most of the nineteenth century. Although we would never condone such design piracy today, it has left a fascinating legacy. Hunting for source prints has become almost as much fun as hunting for the wares themselves, and many collectors derive considerable satisfaction from their discoveries.

Although these utilitarian wares could never, in themselves, be considered high art, some of the sources were certainly quite cultural. The potters worked from engravings, mostly found in contemporary books or periodicals, many of them illustrations of works by important artists. It is quite fascinating to find that paintings by Rubens and Poussin, for example, found their way on jugs into many lowly homes around the country.

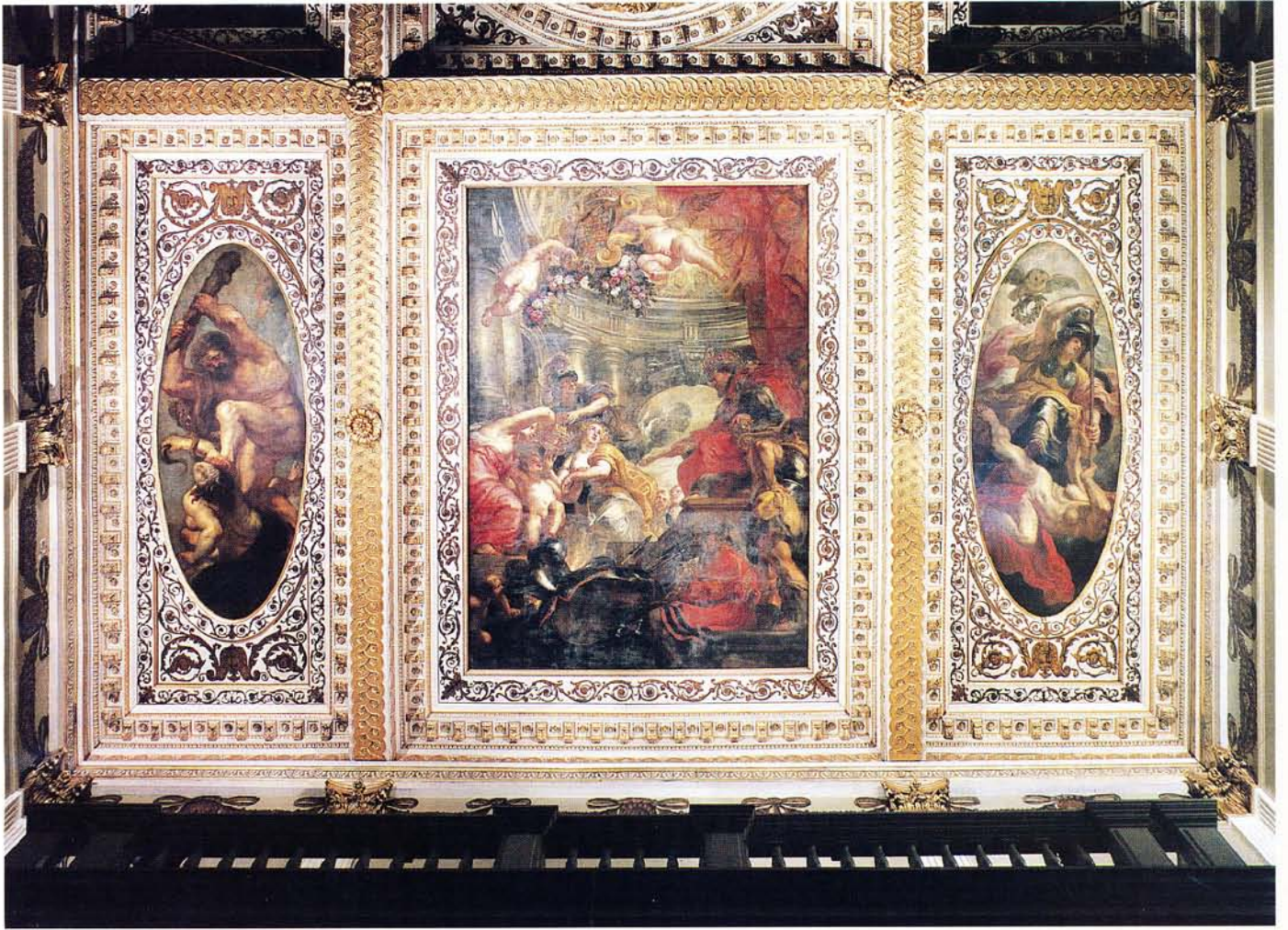
Perhaps one of the best examples is a painting by Rubens (figure 3), the original source for a jug published in 1841 by Wood & Brownfield of Cobridge (figure 9). Until recently it was thought that William Brownfield started to produce moulded jugs after his two partnerships as Robinson, Wood & Brownfield, and Wood & Brownfield had ended, but it is now known that the latter produced at least two impressive moulded jugs, of which this is perhaps the best.

The design, showing King James I in an allegorical scene representing the union of England and Scotland is one of nine panels by Rubens (1577-1640) commissioned in 1629 for the ceiling of the Banqueting House in

Above left, Fig. 1. Lavender and white Parian jug by Samuel Alcock & Co. Printed Royal Arms mark with model number 116. Height 19cms.

Left, fig. 2. Engraving inscribed "Sir S. Smith Defending the Breach of D'Acre Against Bonaparte" after a painting by William Hamilton. Opposite page, above, fig. 3. Three of the nine panels by Rubens which form the ceiling of the Banqueting House in Whitehall. (Crown copyright, Historic Royal Palaces).

Below, fig. 4. Two more lavender and white Parian jugs by Samuel Alcock & Co. Printed Royal Arms marks with model numbers 101 and 114. Height 22 and 14cms.

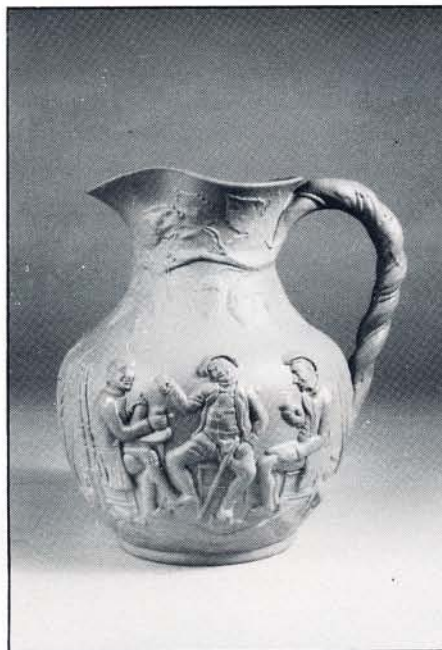




Whitehall. This panel is based on the story of Solomon, King of Israel from 1015 to 977 B.C., and renowned for his wisdom. Once, being called upon to judge between two harlots disputing ownership of a baby, Solomon decreed that the child should be cut in two and shared. The real mother identified herself by abandoning her claim, to save the child's life. The story (1 Kings 3, 16-28) gives rise to the phrase "a judgement of Solomon", or a difficult decision.

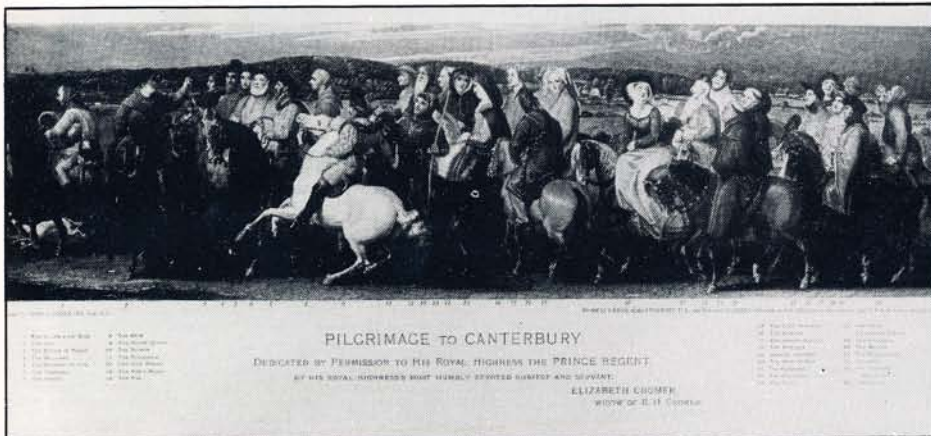
The incident was adapted by Rubens to depict James as a wise king. The naked child, supported by figures representing England and Scotland, symbolises the newly-formed union of his two kingdoms. Above the child's head, Britannia holds the joined crowns, while winged cherubs bear the joint arms aloft. The jug is a faithful copy, although Wood & Brownfield would, of course, have worked from an engraving and not the painting itself.

While Rubens needs no introduction, the artist William Hamilton (c.1750-1801) is not widely known to jug collectors. He specialised in narrative scenes, one of which was used by Samuel Alcock & Co. at Burslem (figure 1). The scene has been described in error as either the Indian mutiny or the Battle of Plassey, but it is clearly based on Hamilton's painting of Sidney Smith fighting at Acre in 1799 (figure 2). The unsigned print shown here, titled "Sir S. Smith Defending



the Breach of D'Acre against Bonaparte", is taken from an unidentified book of Napoleon's battles.

Napoleon pushed into Syria on 6th February 1799, and arrived at Acre "the key of Palestine" on 18th March. The city was



defended by Djezzar-Pasha ("the Butcher"), with the assistance of a small British task force led by Smith. British naval landing parties fought alongside the Turks and the French made a final unsuccessful attempt to storm the battlements on 10th May. This was the turning point of the siege, and ten days later, having lost over 2000 troops, half decimated by bubonic plague, Napoleon withdrew towards Egypt.

The print shown here may not be the one used by the jug designer since others are known, notably a colour engraving by A. Fogg, published in 1802 shortly after Hamilton's death. The design on the jug is a simplified but otherwise faithful copy, with the addition on one side only of a flag featuring the French Imperial eagle. Although the Alcock jugs are relatively common, another rare version is known in blue stoneware marked "H. MILLS", probably the Henry Mills who worked at Shelton between about 1830 and 1850.

This Battle of Acre design is one of a series of jugs produced by Samuel Alcock & Co., mainly in white Parian decorated with an attractive shade of lavender. Another shown here (figure 4) had previously been known by some collectors as the Arabian Nights jug, but the recently discovered source engravings make this title inappropriate. The two scenes on the jug are taken from *Sketches in India* by Captain Luard, and show "The Sonah Wallah, or Itinerant Goldsmith of India" on one side and "Itinerant Musicians of India" on the reverse. These particular prints were engraved for title pages of *The Saturday Magazine* dated 1st November 1834 (figure 10) and 13th December 1834 (figure 11), which would probably have been the sources used by Alcock's designer. In view of this discovery, perhaps a new title of Indian Groups would be appropriate.

An interesting aside concerns the sequence in which these Alcock jugs were issued. They usually bear a model number identifying the design and colour combination. The Indian Groups design was the first to be numbered, examples being marked 101 in white with lavender figures, and 102 in white with lavender ground. Number 114 is a slight variant of the latter. The Battle of Acre design is numbered 115 in white with lavender figures and 116 with the colours reversed. Model numbers 156 and 162 were registered during April 1847, so these earlier designs probably date about 1844 or 1845. The author has records of nearly eighty Alcock model numbers, and would be delighted to hear from collectors who may be able to contribute others.

Many high quality jugs are unmarked, an excellent example being the design showing

Above left, fig. 5. Illustration for "Willie Brew'd a Peck O' Maut" engraved by John Rogers after a watercolour by John Masey Wright.

Above centre, fig. 6. Green stoneware jug by J. W. Pankhurst & Co., the scene inscribed "Willie Brew'd a Peck O' Maut". Applied mark with title "WILLIE" and makers' initials. Height 18cms.

Left, fig. 7. Engraving of the "Pilgrimage to Canterbury" by Lewis Schiavonetti and James Heath after a painting by Thomas Stothard.

pilgrims from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (figure 8). This is based on a painting by Thomas Stothard (1755-1834), almost certainly copied from the engraving shown here titled "Pilgrimage to Canterbury" (figure 7). It is dedicated "by permission to His Royal Highness the Prince Regent, by His Royal Highness's most humbly devoted subject and servant, Elizabeth Cromek, widow of R. H. Cromek". Apart from identifying Stothard as the artist, the print is inscribed "Etched by Lewis Schiavonetti, V. A., and finished by James Heath, A.R.A., Engraver to His Majesty, and to H.R.H Prince Regent."

Lewis Schiavonetti died in 1810, and the engraving was presumably completed by James Heath (1757-1834) shortly afterwards. George IV was Prince Regent from 1811 until he succeeded to the throne in 1820, so the engraving may well mark his appointment as Regent in 1811. Details beneath the engraving identify all the characters, but even without this aid the Wife of Bath can easily be recognised.

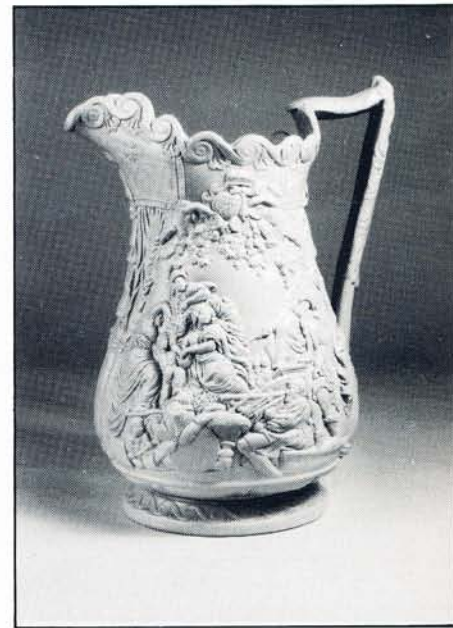
One of the most important manufacturers of moulded jugs was William Ridgway who was succeeded by his son Edward J. Ridgway and partner Leonard James Abington. After he retired, one further jug design was registered in his name on 21st October 1851. This is the "Willie" jug (figure 6), based on a watercolour by John Masey Wright (1777-1866) illustrating a scene from the Robert Burns' poem "Willie Brew's a Peck o' Maut". The potter would probably have worked from a print engraved by John Rogers for a book of illustrations to Burns' works (figure 5). Although registered by Ridgway, the design must have been either sold or licensed to J. W. Pankhurst & Co. since all the jugs appear to be marked with their initials rather than the expected registration diamond.

The poem is autobiographical and describes a convivial meeting at Moffat between Burns and his two friends William Nicol and Allan Masterton. They had such a good time that Burns and Masterton celebrated by writing a short song together. The scene is based on Burns' words:

*Here we are met three merry boys,  
Three merry boys I trow are we,  
And monie a night we've merry been,  
And monie mae we hope to be!*

Strangely enough, although it is best known on this Pankhurst jug, exactly the same scene appears on a rare jug of different shape published by Wood & Brownfield some ten years earlier, on 1st January 1841.

The examples shown in this short article are only a selection of sources which have recently been identified. Other discoveries include two more paintings by Thomas



Stothard, one used by William Ridgway & Co. for their John Gilpin jug, and the other by their successors Ridgway & Abington for a jug showing the ceremony of the Dunmow Flitch. Also two singeries scenes painted by Teniers were used by an unknown maker for a common jug showing monkeys at a "Card Party" and a "Smoking Part". Several other sources are illustrated in the author's *Relief-Moulded Jugs 1820-1900* (Antique

Collectors' Club, 1984). I would be delighted to hear from any other collectors with interesting jugs, even if the scenes are as yet unidentified ▲

#### Acknowledgements

I would like to express my thanks to Clare Murphy, photographic librarian for the Historic Royal Palaces, and particularly to Jim McAuliffe and Ron Lintott for much help and encouragement.



Above left, fig. 8. Buff-coloured stoneware jug by an unknown maker. Unmarked. Height 26cms.  
Above right, fig. 9. Buff-coloured stoneware jug by Wood & Brownfield. Impressed publication mark dated 30 September 1841. Height 23cms.  
Centre right, fig. 10. Engraving showing "The Sonah Wallah, or Itinerant Goldsmith of India" from *The Saturday Magazine*, 1st November 1834.  
Right, fig. 11. Engraving showing "Itinerant Musicians of India" from *The Saturday Magazine*, 13th December 1834.