



## POOR MAN'S PICTURES

### Part II: Non-Religious Subjects

Dick Henrywood

In the first article of this two-part series (Vol 39 No 6, November 2004), I described lustre wall plaques decorated with religious subjects, and in my notes covering nearly 200 different designs found on plaques, around 45% of them are religious. In view of the fact that the religious subjects appear also to have been produced in much greater quantities, secular subjects are inevitably less common.

By far the largest proportion, about one third, show maritime themes, particularly ships, but also sailors, verses or related subjects. Perhaps the most common of the ships is an untitled sailing ship together with a short verse:

May Peace & plenty on our  
nation smile  
And trade with commerce bless  
the British Isle.

The example shown here (figure 2) is clearly marked by Dixon & Co of the Garrison Pottery, but the print was also used by the Albion Pottery of Newcastle and probably others. Other unnamed ship designs are found, one of which is titled 'A Frigate in Full Sail', but there is a strong market amongst collectors for portraits of named ships. The most common of these is probably the 'Northumberland 74' (by Dixon again), closely followed by the 'Duke of Wellington - 131 Guns', shown here on

a later plaque with orange lustre border (figure 3), although earlier pink examples are quite common. Another plaque (figure 4) depicts the 'Retribution Steamer' on a shape often linked with John Carr of Newcastle. As can be seen, this plaque has suffered over the years and collectors are warned to look out for restoration on rarer designs such as this. An odd chip can be quite acceptable, but major restoration does significantly reduce the value.

Other ships to be found include the

*Above. Figure 1. Five assorted non-religious plaques. (Front row) A pink lustre plaque with a 'Success to the Farmer' verse, width 8 3/4 in.; a circular plaque hand-painted with a portrait of the boxer 'Tom Spring', diameter 8 3/4 in.; and an orange lustre plaque with a print from the 'Our Early Days' series, normally found on children's plates, width 9 in. (Back row) A non-lustre Boer War period plaque with a portrait of 'General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum', width 8 3/4 in.; and a pink lustre plaque depicting panning for gold titled 'California' by Samuel Moore & Co, width 8 3/4 in.*



Figure 2. Possibly the most common of all the maritime subjects, this plaque with its patriotic verse was made by Dixon & Co at Sunderland, width 8½in., impressed mark.



Figure 3. An orange-bordered plaque depicting the man-of-war 'Duke of Wellington - 131 Guns', possibly made at Ball's Deptford Pottery, width 9in., unmarked.



Figure 4. An ornate picture-frame shape, decorated with a print of the 'Retribution Steamer', width 9¼in., unmarked.



Figure 5. An orange-bordered plaque of the common picture-frame shape decorated with a maritime verse beginning 'Thou noble bark of brightest fame...', width 8¼in., unmarked.

'Gauntlet Clipper Ship', the 'Great Eastern Steam Ship' (launched in 1857), 'La Bretagne - 140 Guns', the 'Truelove from Hull', 'The Unfortunate London' (so titled to record the ship's demise in the Bay of Biscay in 1866), 'The Star of Tasmania', the 'Union' (possibly by Moore & Co), and the 'Gudrun' (on a rare circular plaque by the Albion Pottery of Newcastle). There is also an untitled print of the General Steam Navigation

Company's ship *Trident* which has the ship's name on one of the masthead flags. Two other plaques depict the *Flying Cloud of Boston* and the *Agamemnon*, but be warned that these are reproductions and not 19th century originals.

In the same way that religious plaques were made with verses, so the same is true of the maritime plaques. The verses tend to be naive and folksy rather than great poetry and a good example shown

here (figure 5) bears the verse:

Thou noble bark of brightest fame,  
That bear'st proud England's honour'd name,  
Right welcome home once more!  
Welcome, thou gallant little sail  
In England's name I bid the [sic] hail!  
And welcome to her shore.



Figure 6. Another plaque of the common shape but slightly smaller than usual in size, printed with one version of the 'Mariner's Compass', width 8½in., unmarked but note the initials JH at the bottom of the print.



Figure 7. A typical Garrison Pottery plaque made by Dixon, Phillips & Co with a pseudo-armorial design for the Ancient Order of Foresters, width 8½in., impressed maker's name around an anchor.



Figure 8. A brown-edged plaque of the common shape printed in black with a Masonic design, made at Sunderland by Dixon & Co, width 8½in., impressed mark.



Figure 9. A small rectangular plaque printed with a portrait of Richard Cobden, an MP famous for his work towards the repeal of the Corn Laws in 1846, width 7¾in., unmarked.

In John Baker's *Sunderland Pottery* this verse is recorded as being used at Dixon's Garrison Pottery, Scott's Southwick Pottery and Moore's Wear Pottery, although the example here is a later product with orange border, possibly from Ball's Deptford Pottery. My own favourite maritime verse is 'Mate sound the pump, morning, noon and night'.

Other maritime subjects include the

Eddystone lighthouse, the sailor's farewell and sailor's return, and various versions of the 'Mariner's Compass'. The example shown here is by some unidentified maker, although the printed design does include the initials JH (figure 6). Despite research, I have been unable to find the significance of these initials and I would be delighted to hear from anyone who can identify them.

Another interesting group of designs

shows pseudo-armorials, one of which is 'The Mariner's Arms' and another 'The Farmer's Arms'. The example shown here has the 'Ancient Order of Foresters' on a typical plaque by Dixon, Phillips & Co (figure 7). The Ancient Order of Foresters was founded in 1834 from the earlier Royal Foresters and is a fraternal organization of friendly society type, rather similar to the Freemasons.

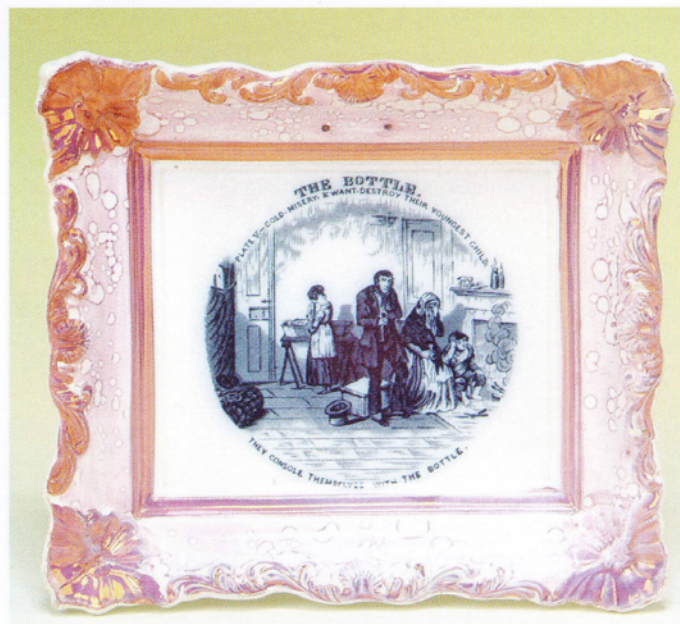


Figure 10. Another typical Sunderland plaque, 'May They Ever Be United', dating from the Crimean War with sailors holding British and French flags, width 9in., unmarked. (Dreweatt Neate)

Figure 11. Number 5 from a series of eight temperance designs titled 'The Bottle' made by Samuel Moore & Co at Sunderland, width 9¼in., printed mark with title and maker's initials.

Branches still exist throughout Britain and in various other corners of the world, as does a related insurance company.

While not actually armorial, a similar type of design for the Freemasons (figure 8) features various Masonic symbols such as the sun, moon and stars, keys, and square and compasses, along with a figure of Justice, a hive representing industry, and a book emblematic of learning. At the base is a small verse:

The world is in pain our secrets  
to gain

But still let them wonder &  
gaze on

They ne'er can divine the word  
nor the sign

Of a free & an accepted Mason.

As with many other designs found on plaques, this was also used on jugs, bowls and other pottery wares.

Although relatively few in number, some of the most interesting designs are commemorative in nature. The first part of this article illustrated plaques showing the preachers John Wesley and Adam Clarke, and various other personalities can be found. A representative example shows Richard Cobden (figure 9), an MP who came to prominence through his fight to repeal the Corn Laws, finally achieved in 1846. One of the earliest commemorative plaques shows Queen Caroline,

and other early examples feature King William IV and Queen Adelaide (a pair by Cornfoot, Colville & Co) and Earl Grey (by the same firm). Other politicians include Sir Robert Peel, a Prime Minister remembered for his earlier work with the police and his death in a riding accident in 1850, and George Kinloch, an exiled Scottish radical reformer elected to Parliament for Dundee in 1832. There is also a rare commemorative plaque, probably from Staffordshire, which depicts the famous bare-knuckle boxer Jack Langan who fought Tom Spring twice in 1824 for the heavyweight championship of England.

The period of the Crimean War (1854-56) produced various commemorative plaques, at least three of which feature the patriotic inscription 'May They Ever be United'. The example shown here (figure 10) is unattributed but another, which features portraits of Victoria and Napoleon III, is by Dixon & Co, and the third design, in the form of a pseudo-armorial with Crimea on a shield and the inscription 'God Save the Queen', is by Samuel Moore & Co.

The Moore firm produced a good selection of plaques which, apart from those already mentioned, include a design titled 'Waverley' (from the Walter Scott novel), a similar Chantry pattern, two different hunting scenes

titled 'Sporting', at least one general romantic scene, and, perhaps most significantly, a set of eight scenes under the title 'The Bottle' (figure 11). These were derived from designs by the caricaturist George Cruickshank which he produced in 1847 in aid of the temperance movement. They depict the decline and fall of a family caused by the demon drink, leaving the father 'a hopeless maniac'!

The Dixon firm also produced a wide range of more general designs, represented here by one of a pair of romantic scenes (figure 13). Others from the factory included a different romantic scene with prominent vases, a floral design, and at least one view of the famous iron bridge over the River Wear at Sunderland. Several views of this bridge are known on plaques, but it is strange that other views appear to be so rare, the only other significant example of which I am aware shows a print of All Saints Church at Newcastle (just possibly made by Thomas Fell).

Several other designs are worthy of mention, including an early railway train with the locomotive named *Express*, a couple dancing 'La Polka' (by an unidentified maker with initials B & Co), a cock-fighting scene titled 'Set Too' [*sic*], a politically incorrect print of a 'Negro Family', and a genre scene titled 'Old Jack the Donkey and his

Master Joe'. And just to show that the finer arts were not entirely neglected, I have selected one early plaque with a print depicting a fair lady harpist emblematic of Music (figure 12). This black-bordered plaque is one of four similar designs, the other three showing the boxer Jack Langan (mentioned above) and portraits of both John Wesley and Adam Clarke. They are markedly different from examples known to be potted in the North East, and I suspect they are from Staffordshire.

But to conclude this rather random survey, I must mention a series of plaques, in this case almost certainly from Staffordshire, which date from the very end of the 19th century and into the 1900s. They are usually decorated with green borders flecked with gilding and the subjects include various Boer War leaders, a selection of Victorian and Edwardian royal commemoratives, and a few more general scenes such as a group of horses. The quality is none too high and except where the subject matter dictates otherwise, they do not, as yet, command very high prices.



Figure 12. A black-bordered rectangular plaque by an unknown maker of unusual portrait form, printed in black with a lady and harp emblematic of Music, height 8½in., unmarked.

I can't resist finishing this article with one of my own personal favourites, a replica plaque made in the 20th century as part of the famous Guinness advertising campaigns (figure 14). It was made by Carlton Ware and is

decorated with the typical splash lustre border surrounding a verse:

O Lovely Guinness!  
O Guinness my Love,  
What a wonderful  
Guinness you are.

This is, of course, a pastiche on Edward Lear's popular nonsense poem 'The Owl and the Pussycat'. The plaque is quite simply great fun, and I always enjoy seeing it nestling amongst my 19th century originals.

I hope you, too, have enjoyed this two-part survey of these decorative plaques and, once again, I would be delighted to hear from fellow collectors or anyone who might be able to add any snippets to our knowledge.

Unless otherwise stated the plaques illustrated are from the author's collection, with photographs mostly supplied by the auctioneers Dreweatt Neate of Newbury.

Dick Henrywood is the consultant responsible for toys, collectors' items and blue-printed pottery at the auctioneers Dreweatt Neate of Newbury.



Figure 13. Another of the Sunderland plaques by Dixon & Co, one of a pair produced with slightly different romantic scenes, width 8½in., impressed mark.



Figure 14. A circular advertising plaque commissioned by Guinness from Carlton Ware in the 20th century, printed in black with a verse based on 'The Owl and the Pussycat', diameter 7¼in., black-printed mark.