

## Novelty Pottery Wares

by Jack Tempest



19thC West Yorkshire 'puzzle jug'. Its ornamental design makes the jug hopeless to drink from. The secret of by-passing the perforated ornamentation is to drink the contents by using the handle as a drinking straw! (Private collection).



This crudely made slipware 'frog mug' bears the date '1889' on one side and the name 'John Lightowler' on the other. Possibly from the Eccleshill Pottery - a foreman named 'Lightowler' was employed there around that time but 'Lightowler' was not an uncommon family name in that district. (Private collection).



The drinker's view of the crudely created frog in the base of the above frog jug.

The sale of a set of three novelty pottery items made in the Sunderland area at a local auction for £4,000 at the beginning of the twenty-first century helped signal a general increase in values of these simple rustic products. These fascinating domestic wares, known as 'frog mugs', were produced wherever suitable clay deposits existed, mainly in the North of England and into the Midlands during the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. It was a business that offered locals a range of necessary everyday useful pottery at affordable prices.

Most of these smaller potteries found their trade increased as the expanding local cities created more wealth after the mechanisation of the Victorian Industrial Revolution. Many potteries also found a good market in creating chimney pots for the thousands of houses being built for the modestly appearing nouveau-riche of the now emerging ever-expanding suburbia. More work for these workers also came with the need for sanitary-ware and drain-pipes demanded by the great building expansion resulting from increasing industrialisation and creating accommodation for the growing population of factory workers.

Curiously, with the demolition of many of our old city streets the chimney pots recovered are now of some value as relics of a bygone age and are finding use as garden ornaments for housing floral displays! Many stoneware potters originally depended upon the sale of small useful everyday household items ranging from crockery to baking bowls, dishes to drinking vessels, and even ornamental flower-pots. This was their everyday source of income which was often subsidised by the manufacture of novelty items bought by wealthier members of the community as well as visiting travellers.

Their main novelty products were the so-called puzzle jugs and the frog mugs, items that are still amusing the collectors of such rural pottery. The jugs would have been real enigmas when they first made their appearance. The puzzle was how to drink beer from a receptacle that had a perforated neck without letting the liquid leak out over their shirtfronts! Easy if you knew how: the jug was designed to allow the liquid content to be sucked up through a secret straw, namely the hollow jug handle! This was a novelty jug that was widely appreciated and replicas are still produced today by modern arty-crafty potteries around the country.

Frog mugs were also popular creators of public house hilarity because a full mug would hide the ceramic frog seated at the base beneath the foaming ale. The idea was to scare the drinker who would suddenly see the froggy shape. Some jugs held two or three mock ceramic frogs to offer the imbiber a real scare! Inevitably the chances of being 'caught out' by such trickery must have steadily diminished across the years. Usually the moulded frog was placed at the base of the mug so that the imbiber would not see it through his beer but I have noted that many jugs had their frogs placed just by the rim; surely these would have been spotted straight away? Modern copies are also possible to find today, although the collector naturally prefers the real thing. Most of these mugs were originally made in the north, at the potteries of Sunderland and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Stoneware garden ornaments, including many weighty figures, were available, as well as floor tiles, all made water-resistant for outdoor use by salt-glazing. The clay in this case had to be a special fireclay because the process calls for much higher tempera-

Below are two of the most valuable examples of novelty ceramics from our online Price Guide database. Visit [www.antiques-info.co.uk](http://www.antiques-info.co.uk) to see more.



Rare Delftware 'Fazackerly' palette puzzle jug, Bristol or Liverpool, c1760, 20cm Sotheby's, Billingshurst. Nov 00. HP: £10,000. ABP: £11,762.



Early 19thC Sunderland pink lustre frog mug with a view of the Sunderland Iron Bridge in black, frog within, 4.75in. Gorrings, Lewes. Jun 03. HP: £360. ABP: £423.

tures in manufacture. On the fringe of Bradford in West Yorkshire a leading stoneware pottery existed at the Eccleshill Manor House Pottery (locally known as 'Eccleshill Delf'. A 'Delf' in this area was the dialect name for a stone quarry, not necessarily related to the famous ceramic producing town of Delft in Holland, only perhaps via Anglo-Saxon dialect association related to the English verb 'to delve'). This pottery was first established in the 1830s and employed potters brought from the Staffordshire Potteries. Top quality salt-glazed wares were favoured here and one relic, a fine large statuette of the Duke of Wellington made at Eccleshill, is displayed amongst many fine examples of local pottery products at the Cliff Castle Museum at Keighley, West Yorkshire.

A switch in fashion came with the growth of the white-ware pottery industry in Staffordshire. Improving standards of industry led to increased cheaper forms of transport necessary for bringing in materials to the pottery and speeding product deliveries. Few of the other more isolated smaller businesses were to remain in operation after a brief post-1920s boom that followed the end of the First World War. Some managed to survive a few more years by producing bricks, chimney pots, and drain-pipes but suffered in the 1960s with the disappearance of home coal fires, thanks to the Clean Air Bill. The easier manufacture of sanitary pipes from concrete or plastic materials was less labour-intensive. The newer production processes offered better wages and less demanding work. Such stoneware, slipwares, and similar farm-wares are still produced from an 'art-ware' point of view. These are not intended to deceive, but it might be possible that some examples seen at collectors' fairs and car-boot sales may not be exactly as old as they appear to be and a study of the subject would be advisable.

The best way to do this is to read books on the subject and visit museums where such items are likely to be displayed. One of the best of these is the Cliff Castle Museum at Keighley, West Yorkshire. Here are splendid exhibits of the products of Eccleshill and other long gone local potteries, and where there is present a welcoming staff ready to answer visitors' questions.

I took some of the photographs to illustrate this article at Cliff Castle (with the museum's kind permission of course!) This is a first-class museum and is based in a palatial nineteenth century mansion that was once the home of a local Victorian textile magnate and his family. It is open every day excepting Mondays (Open Bank Holiday Mondays however) and is well signposted from the centre of Keighley.



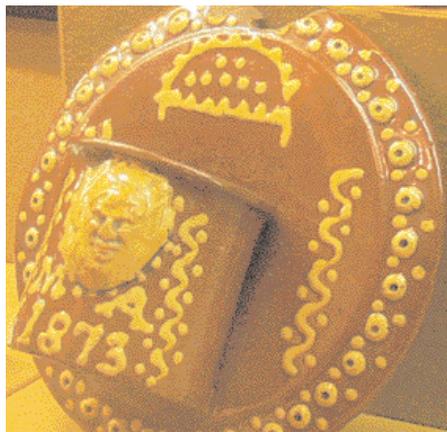
*Large 18-19thC beer jug from the Eccleshill Pottery. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*



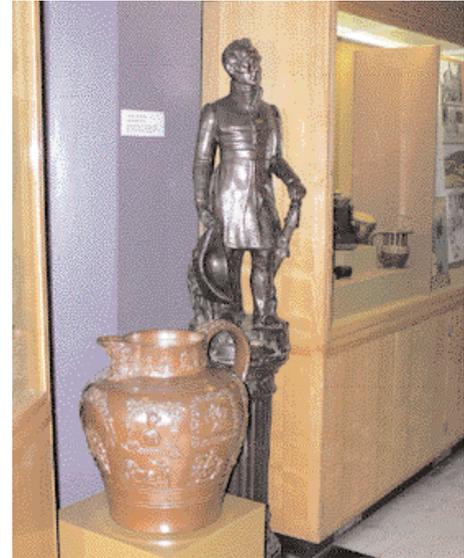
*From a local pottery, name unknown, came this rare early colourful slipware wall plaque. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*



*Selection of novelty ornaments including money boxes from Eccleshill Potteries. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*



*Another slipware plaque dated 1873, source unknown. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*



*Another beer jug and a figure of the Duke of Wellington from Eccleshill Pottery. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*



*19thC garden ornament for growing small plants or strawberries, probably from Clayton Pottery. (Private collection).*



*Stoneware busts came in all shapes and sizes, subjects known and unknown. (Cliffe Castle Museum).*