Bristol Hunting Jugs: A Marked Piece by Robin Hildyard

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Robin Hildyard

Inevitably in the field of ceramics, even the smallest speck of gold laboriously panned by researchers from the mountains of irrelevant rubble must be weighed and its value for publication carefully assessed. Even though in some cases the very absence of a find can be claimed as a positive rather than a negative, these occasions are necessarily qualified by the possibility, however remote, of some contradictory find made in the future. Ultimately, however, the validity of any attempt to create a reliable attribution, an infallible precedent upon which others may build, must depend upon the balance of probabilities, which in turn may reflect the

judgement, the patience and the attitude of the researcher. Those who rush into publication soon acquire a shifty reputation, while those who apply a forensic eye and assemble unquestionable groups of related pots tend to earn respect. Bernard Watney's reputation, for example, was in no way lessened when subsequent excavations caused his grouping of Newcastle-under-Lyme porcelain to become Limehouse, and his William Ball of Liverpool to become Vauxhall.

Back in the 1970s, when deciding to tackle the vast quantity of anonymous salt-glazed stoneware hunting jugs that had proliferated after their invention at the Mortlake potteries around 1800, my chosen method involved isolating the details of every jug, then seeking a match, with a distant prospect of linking it to a marked example. Windmills and handle terminals were often attributable to individual factories, but were not infallible, and the standard sprigged decoration of huntsmen and topers had to be considered in relation to variations of body colour and potting. As a starting point here, it was apparent that the highly productive London factories shared the same clay, coal and firing techniques, so that the often-marked jugs produced by the major Lambeth factories of Doulton, Stiff and Smith shared a grey stoneware body, dull repetitive hunting and drinking sprigs on a drab brown surface, whereas upriver from Lambeth the Fulham Pottery excavations yielded diagnostic hunting jug fragments of the 1830s–40s with distinctive sprigs. In Derbyshire, the widely spread potteries that included the Bourne factory at Denby and a cluster of factories at Brampton, notably Briddon and Oldfield, all used local coal and local differing clays. Here, marked differences in colour as well as individual variations of the traditional hunting and Toby Philpot sprigs enabled definite attributions to be made. Even the less common hunting jugs made in Scotland could be singled out through occasional marked examples, showing notable differences in sprigging from those made in London and Derbyshire; but jugs made in Yorkshire and particularly Liverpool proved more difficult to isolate.

As for Bristol, not a single brown stoneware hunting jug made by the many prolific factories had been identified. Sprigged stonewares attributable to known Bristol potters were confined to several giant mugs made in the mid-18C by John Harwell and huge ceremonial jugs completely covered with sprigs made by the Powell factory in the 1830s–40s. A breakthrough came during a visit to the packed stores of the Brighton Museum, which included a dark and rouletted mug impressed 'JONAS OLD HANHAM 1840' (**1**), Hanham being then a village on the outskirts of

1. Hunting mug dated 1840 H10.5cm

2. Group *c*1825 max H19cm

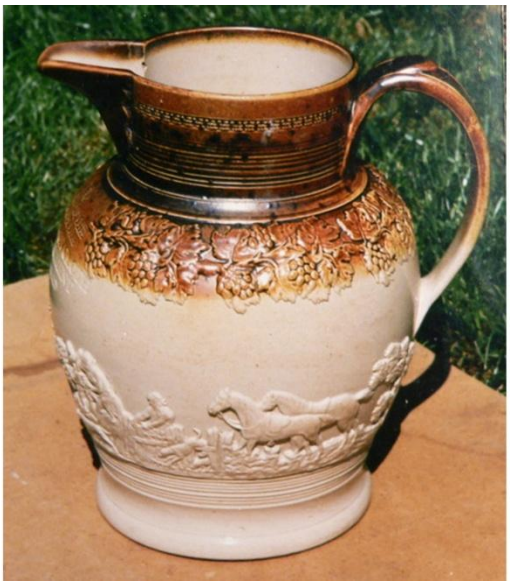
Bristol. This mug was accompanied by numerous unidentified hunting jugs and mugs, with a similar slightly matt dark brown colour, all of which had come from the collection formed by Struan Robertson and given to Brighton Museum. When it was discovered that Robertson had lived and collected at Batheaston not far from Bristol, it seemed well worth noting the shared characteristics of his pots to form a cohesive group with a probable Bristol origin (**2**). When assembled, the resulting group was found to include several neatly potted gallon jugs intended for the hunt supper or celebrating the harvest (**3**), traditions associated with the West Country

3. Gallon jug *c*1825 H23cm

and celebrated by local slipware potters. Happily, the Bristol attribution for these handsome jugs was affirmed by the impressed inscription on one huge jug in private ownership (**4,5**): 'STINGO FOR THE USE OF THE FRIENDS OF THE NORTH DEVON CLOTH ESTABLISHMENT, ESTABLISHED 1762'[1].

Yet the search for a marked example of the common hunting jug supposedly made at Bristol seemed fruitless until recently when a two-handled cylindrical loving cup with typical matt glaze and dark colour, bands of rouletting and sprigged figures of Toby Philpot and topers (**6**) was noted as having passed through the auctions of the British Bottle Review at Elsecar[2], impressed on the body, 'W.LAWS 1837' and impressed on the base 'MADE BY J MILSOM

4. Gallon 'Stingo' jug H28cm



5. Gallon 'Stingo' jug H28cm

6. John Milsom 1837 loving cup H14cm

BRISTOL'. Crucially, this does appear to be the only marked piece to survive and fits neatly into the whole class of anonymous stonewares attributed to Bristol.

After the Slave Trade was abolished in 1807, Bristol had even more reason to pursue its worldwide trading links, including its important role in the sugar and rum trade and the export of bottles, both stoneware and glass. Thus, in the early 19C the clustered Bristol potteries and glasshouses formed a thriving commercial hub, recorded in great detail by historians and researchers[3]. For example, the leading pottery of William & Thomas Powell is recorded as exporting stoneware during the period 1816–30 to Guernsey, Jersey, Dublin, Waterford, Cork, Youghal, Belfast, Limerick, Newry, Londonderry, New York,

Leghorn, Genoa, Naples, Sicily, Jamaica and Nevis, and in 1833–55 this list was extended to include Madeira, Lisbon, Barbados, Demerara, Philadelphia, Montreal, Quebec, Bombay, Port Philip and Melbourne. The Powells also owned a glasshouse, benefitting hugely from the introduction in 1821 of the Henry Ricketts Patent bottle mould, which enabled bottles to be blown into a mould on the floor and this mould could be opened by foot-pedal to release the fully formed bottle. A Stourbridge Glass Warehouse at Bath Parade, Temple Gate was also maintained by the Powells during the period 1821–25 and in 1828 they invented and patented machinery for making sugar moulds. A reliable indication of the size of the Powell's stoneware bottle trade is demonstrated by the huge sum of £80 3s 9d paid in 1833 for the recently introduced duty[4]. But it was the invention in 1835 of the liquid 'Bristol Glaze'[5] for stoneware by Anthony Amatt, manager of Powell's stoneware factory, that transformed the entire bottle trade, enabling Bristol to supply 'Improved Stoneware' bottles 'glazed inside and out'. These were hygienic, reusable and, unlike salt-glaze, required only a single firing. The patented glaze was manufactured by J & J White at Baptist Mills, who supplied potters in London until Doultons invented their own version later in the 19C.

Into this context may be placed the potter John Milsom, who was clearly a talented potter and an important producer, though overshadowed by more ambitious competitors Charles Price and the Powells, whose potteries merged in 1906, only to be totally destroyed by bombing in 1940. Born in 1791, son of Samuel and Christian Milsom, John Milsom was baptised at St George and in 1805 apprenticed to the potter James Alsop with a £15 premium. Discharged in 1807 to become a burgess, he completed his apprenticeship and obtained his freedom in 1812, when he most probably joined the newly formed partnership of John Hope and John Bright at 131 Temple Street. His name next appeared at the Court of King's Bench on 3 December 1818, when W & T Powell prosecuted eight journeyman potters, namely Joseph Bright the younger, William Elbury, John Richmond, John Milsom, Edward Melsom[6], Joseph Appleford, Thomas Love, Nathaniel Bailey and Joseph Hazard, for entering into an unlawful agreement for 'controlling and affecting Messrs Wm & Thos Powell, being persons carrying on the manufacture trade or business of a potter'. This court case was the culmination of a dispute in early October 1818 with one of the Powells' employees, William Elbury, who was dismissed, causing his fellow potters John Richmond and Charles Morgan to come out on strike until such time as Elbury would be reinstated. They were soon joined in their protest by other journeyman potters, including John Milsom, and on 26 October they signed an agreement prepared by Joseph Hazard, clerk to the pottery of Hope & Bright at 131 Temple Street, whereby none of them would work for the prosecutors until the three men were reinstated. At the trial, Charles Morgan opted to become a witness for the prosecution and the other accused were all found guilty and sentenced to one month at the House of Correction at Bridewell. This event was immortalized by the production of a large stoneware goblet at Bristol Museum (**7**)[7] inscribed 'J BRIGHT J HAZZARD J MILSOM E MELSOM IN COMMEMORATION OF THE POTTERS WHO RESISTED THE TYRANICAL CONDUCT OF W AND T POW**LL, DECEMBER 4 1818. GOD SAVE THE KING'.

7. 'The Bright Goblet' 1818 H35.6cm

Given that Joseph Bright, John Hazard and John Milsom were all employed by Hope & Bright, it would seem likely that the goblet was made at their Temple Street pottery, in which case the skilled potter could have been John Milsom. Against this theory, it must be said that the goblet was dated 4 December, the day

after the trial when the defendants should already have been incarcerated at Bridewell, although conceivably the goblet could have been made before the trial and post-dated, or made to celebrate their release from prison a month later.

Whether or not the Bright goblet was made by the hand of John Milsom, solid evidence of his potting skills appears on a giant mug (**8**)[8], presumably made to commemorate some special occasion and covered with sprigged bands of cavorting cherubs, topers and huntsmen, impressed 'HOPE & BRIGHT 1820' on the front and signed under the handle terminal 'J.MILSOM MAKER July 1820'. The next recorded stage in Milsom's career came in the same year, when he began paying rates on a long-established pottery at 124 Temple Street, previously occupied by John Duffet. From 1822 Milsom was listed by trade directories as a potter at this address, and in 1823 he took as partner Edward Melsom (probably also previously employed by Hope & Bright), trading as Milsom & Melsom until 1825, when the partnership was dissolved. Understandably, the similarity of the partners' names has led to confusion and a number of misleading entries in contemporary records, but these have all been resolved. John Milsom continued to be listed as a stoneware potter and patent water pipe manufacturer at 124 Temple Street until 1836, when the Melsoms bought his pottery and he moved his business to 56 Redcliff Street. In 1833 he had paid the small duty of £1 15s 0d for the recently-created tax on stone bottles, which might indicate that bottles were not his main product. His son Samuel, also a potter, was married in 1839, after which his burial is recorded at Temple Church on 25 July 1841, leaving five sons and five daughters.

8. Hope & Bright, John Milsom jug 1820

In conclusion, it must be said that although the recently discovered marked John Milsom loving cup has no specific features that might link other pots to his name, in the wider context its significance lies in finally confirming a Bristol attribution for a large body of brown stoneware hunting mugs and jugs that exhibit a Bristol 'house style' originally suggested[9] by the JONAS OLD HANHAM 1840 mug at Brighton Museum, *quod erat demonstrandum.*

Notes

1. Stingo, a slang term for strong or old ale, in use from around 1625, which may have been consumed at gatherings of the Guild of Weavers, Fullers and Shearmen based in Exeter. This had assumed a charitable and social function after the decline of the Devon textile industry during the 18C.
2. British Bottle Review Winter National Sale 13 January–1 February 2015, Lot 120. Unfortunately records of the purchaser no longer survive.
3. Owen H *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol* 1873; Pountney WJ *Old Bristol Potteries*, 1920; Jackson R & P, Price R 'Bristol Potters and Potteries 1600–1800', *Journal of Ceramic History* No.12 1982; Witt C, Weeden C, Schwind, Arlene Palmer, *Bristol Glass* City of Bristol Museum & Art Gallery 1984; Henrywood RK *Bristol Potters 1775–1906*, 1992; Jackson R *Bristol Potters and Potteries*, online website
4. *Fifth Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the Management and Collection of the Excise Revenue (on) Stone Bottles and Sweets*, London, 1834
5. Bristol glaze was composed of zinc oxide, potash of lime, silica and alumina. Anthony Amatt's notebook with recipes is held by Bristol Reference Library.

6. Misspelled Milsom in the Report of the trial
7. Museum No. 2225
8. Acquired in 2001, Museum No. Na 2231
9. Oswald A, Hildyard RJC, Hughes RG *English Brown Stoneware 1670–-1900*, Faber & Faber 1982; Hildyard R *Browne Muggs,* V&A exhibition catalogue 1985; Hildyard R *The Loan Collection of Brown Stoneware at Bristol Museum & Art Gallery: a very personal account*, OCG Newsletter No. 43 January 2019