



AMERICAN TOBY JUG MUSEUM

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THE TOBY JUG'S ORIGINS AND DEVELOPMENT

The American Toby Jug Museum is arranged chronologically, with the five cabinets in this first corridor featuring the oldest Toby Jugs, most over two centuries old, and a few dating back 250 years. This distinct type of jug in human form was created by an unknown Staffordshire potter during the middle of the 18th century. Within a few years the Toby Jug became one of the most popular jugs using the human form ever produced. Its popularity spread quickly throughout England and then to the European continent and abroad.

Though born in the 18th century, the Toby Jug is descended from a long line of anthropomorphic vessels from ancient times. Figural jugs over 4,000 years old have been discovered in Crete. Numerous examples of ancient jugs, cups, pots and other vessels made in the likeness of humans and mythical beings have been unearthed in Greece and Italy and other parts of the Roman Empire, including Britain. Over the same period, ancient Peruvian and other South American civilizations produced a wide range of hand molded figural jugs and vessels. In North America as well, many examples of jugs and bottles made in human likeness have been discovered. Copies of some of these early vessels may be viewed in the cabinet to your right.

The first Toby creator is not conclusively known. Some date Toby's creation to be 1750, but most believe it to be a slight bit later - between 1760 and 1770. Various historians have bestowed the honor of Toby's creator on several well known potters of that time, including John Astbury, Thomas Whieldon, Ralph Wood, Aaron Wood and John Voyez. We tend to favor Astbury or Whieldon as Toby's creator. Although Astbury's tobies are more primitive in design, and might appear to be earlier, it is quite possible they were developed after Whieldon produced his first Toby around 1765. Original Tobies produced by these two potters may be found on your right.

By far the most common and well-known early Toby is the "Ordinary" one, a jovial drinking man sitting on a chair, holding a jug of ale in his left hand balanced on his knee, and sporting the common costume of the day. Numerous late 18th and early 19th century Ordinary Tobies may be viewed in the cabinets to your left across the aisle and straight ahead. Rare variations of the Ordinary Toby include the "Shield", "Long-Face", "Sharp-Face" and "Hook-Nose" Tobies, all displayed on your right. The original name "Toby" is somewhat obscure, but most likely comes from the, possibly apocryphal, legendary boozier Henry Ewles, nicknamed "Toby Philpot" for his enormous consumption of stingo (as detailed in the panel to the left of the mezzotint print at the entrance to the Museum).

Toby would become the most famous character throughout the British Empire. In the later 1700s Toby Jugs became common pouring vessels (i.e. pitchers) at local pubs and taverns. His tri-corn hat spout was perfect for pouring, and most often Toby had a hollow crown that fit into the hat, creating a cup for drinking. Two hundred years later, due to loss and breakage, a Toby still sporting his crown is a rare find. Toby Jug production grew through the late 18th and early 19th century with the creation of many new eccentric and historical figures. Besides the Ordinary Toby, other best known Toby Jugs of the 18th and early 19th centuries include the Thin Man, Squire, Hearty Good Fellow, Snufftaker, Sailor, Drunken Parson, Lord Howe, Sinner, Gin Woman, Drunken Sal and Martha Gunn. Examples of all these early Toby types may be found here in this first corridor.

The 19th century added new characters such as the Cross-Legged Toby, Punch and Judy and Sir John Falstaff. By the end of that century, the popularity of the Toby Jug had risen such that Tobies were being produced in France, Germany, America and other parts of the world. During the 20th Century more than 175 different companies partook in the manufacture of Toby Jugs, creating all sorts of characters from Shakespeare to Dickens to Churchill and into the 21st century. The most prolific of these has been Royal Doulton, with the introduction of the Character (or face) Jug in the 1930s. You may view complete collections from all of these makers as you wander through the various aisles, culminating in the spectacular display of more than 1500 Royal Doulton Character and Toby jugs at the rear of the Museum.

With more than 8000 pieces on display in 100 cabinets, your journey through the American Toby Jug Museum takes you on a trip through time and place. It begins here at the city of Stoke-on-Trent, England, the birthplace of Toby and Character Jugs, and leads you over 250 years through twenty countries around the World to the latest 21st Century productions.