

WELLINGTON AND WATERLOO IN COMMEMORATIVE CERAMICS

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The Napoleonic Wars spawned a prolific industry in commemorative ceramics and other artefacts. While manufacturers often sought to mock Napoleon, they also afforded a special place to the Duke of Wellington, depicting him both as the hero of Waterloo and later as a distinguished politician and national leader.



'Up guards and at them'. The Duke of Wellington on his bay horse, Copenhagen, pointing towards the enemy. Possibly produced to mark the Duke's death in 1852, the figure was still in production a century later.

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The early nineteenth century saw British potters producing a wide variety of commemorative ceramics. Jugs, bowls, teapots, figures and plaques were all produced to ridicule Napoleon, mourn the death of Nelson, celebrate victories or short-lived peace treaties, and encourage patriotism in the face of threatened invasion.

By the time of Waterloo the British had been fighting the French for over twenty years, firstly in the Revolutionary Wars, and then after the failed Peace of Amiens, in the Napoleonic Wars. The successes of Wellington and his generals in the Peninsula were widely celebrated at the time, but curiously very few pottery commemoratives can be firmly shown to have been made specifically to mark this particular victory.

Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington (1769-1852), was during his lifetime the subject of many commemorative tributes in pottery, prints and other materials. A large number were made during the Napoleonic Wars while others were produced during his later career as a politician, Prime Minister and Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. Many of the later commemorative pieces refer back to Waterloo.

Wellington's successes in the Peninsula Campaign had led to him being ennobled in 1809 and he became an increasingly popular hero at home. In response the potters produced a variety of commemorative pieces, mostly printed or moulded jugs. These can often be dated by the inscription showing the name of the battle or the title that Wellington bears.

Wellington commemoratives and the Potteries

In the collection of the Potteries Museum & Art Gallery, Stoke-on-Trent, there are a number of pieces commemorating Wellington and his victories. The majority are unmarked and the pottery firms that produced them are unknown. The potters would have used the inexpensive popular prints that were widely available from specialist print shops or stationers as the source of their designs and in some instances these sources can be closely dated.

One such piece, a pearlware jug, bears a printed and enamelled image of a mounted Wellington, urging on his troops with the battle raging in the background. This subject was taken from an engraving of Wellington at the Battle of Salamanca, published in 1812. The same image was re-used by the potters the following year, suitably titled, to commemorate the victory at Vitoria. Thereafter it was used, either untitled, simply inscribed with the word 'Wellington', or titled 'Marquis Wellington in the Field of



Inexpensive popular prints were widely used by potters as a source for their designs. Although this image originally depicted Wellington at the Battle of Salamanca, it was turned to use again on this pearlware jug to commemorate victory at Waterloo.

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Reverse of the pearlware jug depicts Bonaparte escaping the Russians carried on the back of a French soldier.

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Battle' - and therefore suitable to commemorate the next of the General's victories.

This print was also the source of the design of a moulded and painted jug. One side depicts Wellington as shown in the print of 1812, and the other shows military trophies, including weapons, flags and drums. This example also bears the owner's monogram and the date: 'WN 1815'.

Another popular subject, known in various sizes, was a moulded jug with boldly coloured bust portraits of both Wellington and General Hill. Wellington is described as 'Marquess' on the majority of these jugs but Hill is always 'General Hill' which must date their initial production to between 1812 and 1814.

These pieces would have been relatively inexpensive: mass-produced in earthenware and comparatively crudely coloured, they were made to record events at the time and could be reissued quickly each time there was a demand for images of the victorious generals.

More expensive pieces were also produced. The Staffordshire firm of Wood & Caldwell reproduced, in enamelled earthenware, the marble bust of Wellington originally produced by the sculptor Joseph Nollekens in 1813. The majority of these reproductions bear the mark of Wood & Caldwell, whose partnership ended in 1818. However, some examples date from the 1820s, when they were produced by Enoch Wood & Sons, the firm which succeeded Wood & Caldwell. These life-size busts were aimed at a very different market from the mass-produced, cheaply coloured jugs and were intended for middle-class consumers.

A political figure

Wellington's long career as a politician and, from 1842 until his death, as Commander-in-Chief of the British Army meant that many other commemorative pieces were produced. Many show him in civilian dress, as a politician, or as a very aged man, but others show him on horseback as the victor of Waterloo.

In 1824 Astley's Amphitheatre in London produced a spectacular re-enactment of the battle with over one hundred horses. It was revived at times throughout the nineteenth century and may have contributed to the

popularity of the equestrian figures of Wellington. The song 'Buy my Images' published in 1842, and supposed to be sung by an Italian 'image seller', refers to these figures:

*"Look a dis Images dis nex' one
Capitano Generale de LORD WELLINGTON
Him fight Buonoparte beat him too
And make fas' run 'way from Waterloo.
Great as a Roman was he to de foes
Every bodys knows him well by's nose
Every body trues what every body says
De greatest man living alive dis days.
Buy my Images!"*

One of the most widely known equestrian figures shows the Duke on his bay horse, Copenhagen, pointing forward towards the enemy and titled 'Up guards and at them'. Despite the subject matter this figure was not produced until the mid-nineteenth century. Although unmarked, it is believed to be by the Burslem-based factory of Thomas Parr. This firm was in operation from around 1852-1870 and this subject was probably produced to mark the death of the Duke in 1852. Thomas Parr's pottery - and his moulds - changed hands and were acquired by the firm of William Kent, which continued producing figures until 1962. These later figures showed the Duke, incorrectly, on a white horse and were available from the manufacturer at 53 shillings per dozen in the late 1930s. Such was the enduring interest in Wellington and Waterloo that this figure was in production by William Kent until at least 1955. For more than a century after the Napoleonic Wars, the potteries of Stoke-on-Trent continued to draw steady income from the popularity of these commemorative pieces, which today serve as a precious record of this defining period in British history.

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Further reading:

The website of The Potteries Museum & Art Gallery can be found by visiting Stoke-on-Trent Museums at www.stokemuseums.org.uk.