

MUSEUM OF THE ROYAL PHARMACEUTICAL SOCIETY
1 Lambeth High Street, London SE1 7JN

INFORMATION SHEET: 15

DISPLAY GLASSWARE

BEAUTIFULLY SHAPED GLASS VESSELS FILLED WITH COLOURED WATER HAVE BECOME SYMBOLS OF THE PHARMACY BUT OTHER DESIGNS OF GLASSWARE HAVE ALSO BEEN USED FOR DISPLAY.

HISTORY

Information Sheet 12 describes the development of bottles (shop rounds) that were used for practical purposes in the dispensary and their development from *carboys*, large flagons used for wine or rose-water. These vessels were also the influence for the development of glassware for window display, items from which have been used as symbols of the pharmacy. Another development was the advent of rolled glass that could be cut into shelves on which goods for sale could be displayed.

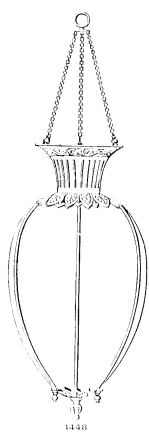
CARBOYS

Shop windows in the 16th and 17th centuries consisted of small panes of glass, usually not exceeding 12" x 14" (30cm x 36cm), often with a "bull nose" where the hand-made glass had been attached to the glassblower's rod. In 1773 polished cast glass was developed and that meant larger panes of clear glass. Shop windows were often glazed with three or more vertical pieces of glass separated by wooden batons. As a result the carboy shape was adapted and enlarged.

The widespread adoption of rolled plate glass in the 19th century allowed for the shop window to be fully glazed with one piece of glass.

The two most popular designs to be accepted were the 'onion' or 'pear' shape and the 'swan neck' carboy. These are shown in the illustration above in the left and right hand bottom corners. Another variation was the hanging carboy. This would be hung from the ceiling of the window.

Display carboys were, and are, filled with coloured water. Many theories have evolved as the reason for the colours such as representing blood and body fluids. The most likely symbolism for the colours was to suggest chemical substances in solution to denote the premises of a chemist and druggist. Original colours of the solutions are hard to replicate as many of the chemicals used were of a hazardous nature. Today, food colourings are the usual choice.



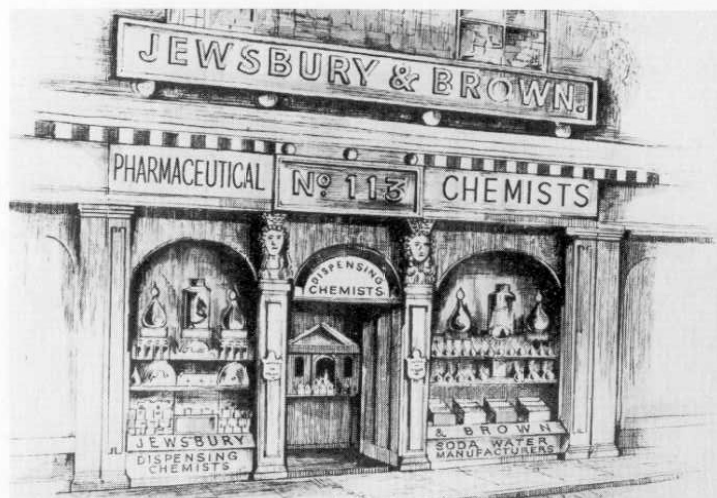
A hanging carboy

SPECIE JARS

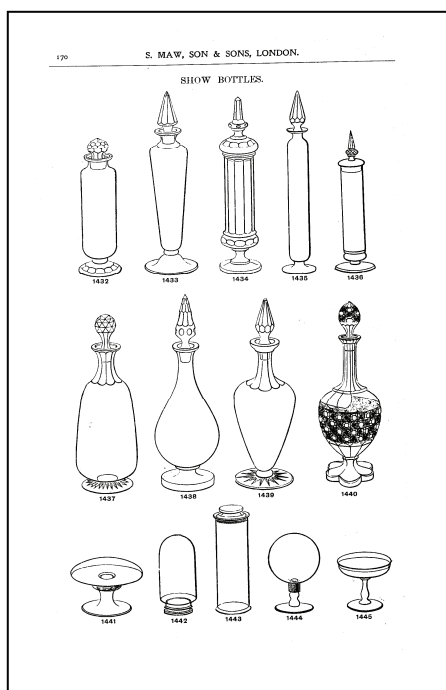
Another example of display glassware is the specie jar. This was a name given to an imitation storage jar of large dimensions, which had no practical function but to look attractive. The design of the label was elaborate and painted on to the inside of the vessel. It would usually bear a coat of arms and the name of a pharmaceutical preparation. The background colour would be adapted to the name on the label, thus MAGNESIA would have a white background, RHUBARB a brown background.

COUNTER DISPLAY

Information Sheet 12 discusses shop rounds which were used for display as well as being of practical use in the dispensary. Glassware was also designed for counter display which would attract customers to items that might be stored in them. Items would include pastilles, bath salts, sponges, oils, herbs and spices.



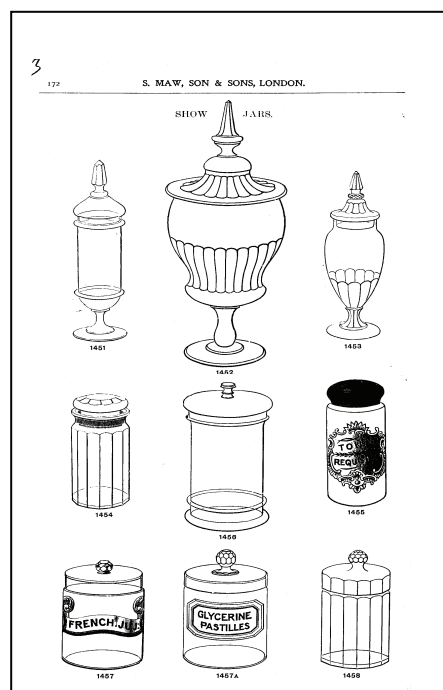
Jewsbury and Brown's shop (late nineteenth century). Each window is a single large sheet of glass and contains goods for sale with the specie jars and display carboys above.



Display Glassware (S Maw, Son & Sons Catalogue 1903)



Specie Jar (Museum of the Royal Pharmaceutical Society)



Display Glassware (S Maw, Son & Sons Catalogue 1903)

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The illustration overleaf shows a selection of display glassware for use in the pharmacy. From S Maw, Son and Thompson's 1882 wholesale catalogue. The illustration of Jewsbury and Brown's shopfront is used courtesy of Manchester Libraries and Information Service.

This information sheet is also available in a large font size. Please contact us on 020 7572 2210 or email museum@rpharms.com