

Rare Aqua London Warner's Rocks Collecting World

By John Savastio

Social media has connected many communities across the globe, including the world of bottle diggers and collectors. I am now excited on an almost daily basis by the discoveries of my digging brethren worldwide. A recent case in point occurred on October 22, 2019, when the world of Warner's collectors was rocked by news on Facebook's Bottle Digger & Collectors of a fantastic find from northwest England. Les Fitton, a passionate darts player and avid digger of Victorian English ash tips, had the day before unearthed an extraordinarily rare and beautiful aqua London Warner's, and provided the following account of the dig:

"This adventure started with my friend Stuart and I checking out a site another mate had told me about. We entered the tip site and I went right to work and dug a test hole. The ash looked good to me, but Stuart decided we should dig elsewhere. However, the second hole we dug only delivered run of the mill stuff, so I said to Stu, "Let's go back to the first hole I started!" After about an hour of digging in the first spot, out popped the aqua Warner's, full of bubbles! (see **Figure 1**) We will make loads more trips to this site to hopefully dig a few more of these treasures!"

The bottle is listed as 3WLEVar5 in Michael Seeliger's book, *H. H. Warner His Company and his Bottles*, and is described as follows: "WARNER'S / "SAFE" CURE (on same line); (safe logo); LONDON;

Blob top; ½ Pint; Aqua greenish clear color." Besides being a lovely shade of aqua, Les' bottle is also wonderfully loaded with bubbles. Les next posted pictures of the bottle on Facebook's Warner's Safe Cure – H.H. Warner page. These postings generated several questions and comments from enthusiastic Warner's collectors.

Just how rare are these half pint aqua London Warner's?

British Warner's authority Mike Sheridan made this observation regarding the bottle's rarity: "There are other aqua pint Safe Cures. They are, however, very rare. I would say there are less than six known. My example was dug on the Makro tip and I sold it to U.S. cure collector John Wolf. With Les' one just unearthed, that's two definite half pints. Where are the others?" To this Colin Savage replied, "I believe Rich Tucker dug one from a small cottage tip in Devizes, Wiltshire a couple or so years ago and sold it via Chris Bultitude." Colin's account would make three, but Michael Seeliger, who has insight into Warner's collections worldwide, believes there may be as many as ten (he said that Mike and Kathie Craig have two of them, one clear and the other greenish aqua).

Are they the oldest of the London Warner's?

The incredible crudeness of this bottle has led to speculation that these are

among the oldest of the London Warner's bottles, going well back into the 1880s or early 1890s. Mike confidently squelched such conjecture with the following statement, which is based on years of careful observation and research:

"I know there has been a debate among Warner's collectors about the age of these London aquas. Some believe they are the earliest London Warner's due to their crude lips. Let's put that argument to bed now. London Warner's in aqua have only been dug in modern dumps in the UK (i.e. post 1910 at least). Now look very carefully at the embossing of "SAFE" CURE all on one line and note the word "SAFE" in speech marks. That's the same embossing on the Warner's green Londons, and those bottles also only come from post-1900 dumps that can go into the 1920s. The very earliest London Warner's come in brown or amber glass in varying shades and NEVER with the lip you see on this aqua. They (the amber ones) are circa 1890-1900."

Michael Seeliger, who literally wrote the book on Warner's, concurs with Mike Sheridan's assessment on the age of these odd-colored Warner's. Michael also pointed out another peculiarity of these highly prized bottles: "These aqua Warner's are very crude and really stand out with their odd squarish blob tops. I love these bottles."

How can the most recently made London Warner's bottles be the crudest?

While I'm certainly not going to disagree with two of the world's leading authorities about the age of these oddly colored Warner's, I did have to ask, how is it that these newer bottles are the crudest? Furthermore, why would the company have let the amber color standards slide in the later years? Michael Seeliger attempted to answer these questions for me: "Warner owned several future options on the company stock and decided to purchase all the stock he could get his hands on, driving up the price. When the price was sufficiently high, he called in his options. Unfortunately, the panic of 1893 had set in and he could no longer cash in. He was also investigated for stock manipulation and mismanagement of the business. The British directors of the H. H. Warner & Co. LTD voted that his stock should be forfeited as a penalty for his mismanagement. With his last asset stripped away, Warner filed for bankruptcy and spent the remaining years of his life attempting to regain his business prominence. Although he was out as the owner of the company, it continued to exist without him. However, without Warner around to enforce standards, the 'trade mark' brown bottle eventually went by the wayside in Britain and Europe. The LTD used various glass makers and this is where the green and other colored versions came from."

Are there other London Warner's that come in aqua?

Michael also related his knowledge of the odd-colored London Warner's other than the Cure. "There are large and small safe cures, a large Nervine and a large Rheumatic Cure in clear or aqua glass from London. I'm not sure about the Diabetes Cure yet but I imagine there was one. Now if they only could find an "animal cure" in clear over there, that would really be something. However, I think they quit making the "mammoth" cure size when

the LTD took over." Michael then encouraged our English Warner's enthusiasts "to start digging later dumps around the 1910 to 1920s era. I think this is where you may find these. Despite their newer age, the London Warner's from this era are rather crude. Also note that the small 4 oz. London samples (which come in light honey amber and green) aren't found in the older dumps either." Incidentally, these exquisite little 4 oz. London samples, 5WLEVar1 and 5WLEVar1, are the smallest Warner's bottles with the safe embossed on them.

What about American Warner's in odd colors?

I next asked Michael about the American Rochester bottles. Do any of them come in off colors? Michael replied: "Around 1909 Warner's Cure was changed to Warner's Remedy after the FDA enforcement of the Pure Food and Drug Act of 1906. It was with the introduction of the remedy bottles that the amber glass standard was no longer as strictly enforced and there are Remedy versions that appear in green and clear. We even have some mixed green aqua colors (see Figure 4). I think the clear run were a small batch that was used for a brief time." Regarding the evolution of American Warner's bottles from this period, Michael adds the following in his book: "A new twist in bottles appears around 1910. Instead of the specific bottle for each cure formula, a single bottle was produced bearing the embossing "Warner's Safe Remedies Co. (embossed safe) Rochester NY." Bottles came in 12 ½ oz. and 6 oz. size. The larger bottles were made in amber, blue aqua, green aqua (rare) and clear. The smaller version is only in amber and clear. An error can be found in these bottles also: versions where the word safe is omitted."

Where the heck were these odd colored London Warner's bottles made?

The Facebook conversation focused next on the incongruity of the crudity of the aqua half pint London Warner's bottles with their relatively recent age. What glass house could be responsible for making such rudimentary, bubble-loaded glass in the 1910-1920s era? Mike Sheridan replied that "It's still a mystery where the London and other European Warner's were made. The late Rob Goodacre claimed it was Sweden, but I have seen no evidence for this." Steve Jackson responded that he had "never heard of Sweden as the source of the European Warner's before. I suspect it was a variety of sources depending on who was the low bidder. After all these years, I have not seen any paper to support the source of the bottles." Aussie Andrew Alsop pointed out that "These aqua Warner's all have a base mark of an "N" in a circle (see Figure 5). Does anyone know which glasshouse this was?"

Mike answered that, "This aqua Warner's base has a stretched ovoid basal shape depression. I think all other London Warner's have a circular basal kick up. That could mean the aquas had a different maker. A number of glassworks used "N" as a symbol, one being the York Glass company." Andrew added that "Obear-Nester Glass Co USA used this N in a circle (*info courtesy Britishbottleforum*)."

To this Mike rejoined, "It is a mystery where the European Warner's were made but I do think we can rule out U.S. manufacture. I had a number of Rochester Warner's in my old collection and they lack the crudity of the Europeans (though many do have air bubbles). I think all the European Warner's were all made by one glassworks and have that characteristic kick up on the base."

I have seven European Warner's in my collection, consisting of three London pints cures (see Figure 6) and three London half pints, (each set with a green, yellow amber and red amber example), and a green Frankfurt pint cure. Of all these, only the green pint London example has



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4



Figure 6



Figure 5

Figure 1: Les Fitton, proudly holding the freshly dug, very rare and highly coveted half pint London Warner's, 3WLEVar5. He knew he had a good one!

Figure 2: Close up of the freshly dug 3WLEVar5, highlighting its abundance of bubbles and its unusual squarish blob top.

Figure 3: Les' 3WLEVar5 cleaned up and sparkling.

Figure 4: A rare, possibly unique, two-tone aqua-green Warner's Safe Diabetes Remedy, Rochester, N.Y. (19WRVar4).

Figure 5: The N in circle mark is on the bottom of all 3WLEVar5 bottles. We are asking Warner's collectors to report any European Warner's with this mark.

Figure 6: A sample of the diversity of color in the London Warner's bottles from my collection. Now I just need to add an aqua one!

the “N” in circle mark on the base. While a beautiful olive green, it does not have the incredible super bubble-loaded glass of the half pint aqua London 3WLEVar5s. However, if the “N” in circle mark does indeed indicate the glasshouse where the bottle was made, then it does prove that their Warner’s line extended beyond the 3WLEVar5. Andrew said one of his half pint green London cures also has the same “N” in a circle base mark. So that makes at least three European Warner’s molds with the “N” mark the base. Perhaps Warner’s collectors could report their “N” in circle basemarks to this magazine, or to the Facebook’s Warner’s Safe Cure – H.H. Warner public group page. The others in my European grouping are either the stretched ovoid, or circular kick up. My half pint yellow-amber London cure has a stretched ovoid with “2233” embossed in the middle. Perhaps with more research, someone could track down the European glasshouses that made these Warner’s and categorize them. Regardless of the glasshouse that made them, this aqua 3WLEVar5 group may have been a one-time fluke batch with a mysterious (and fascinating) story that we will never know: a tale that explains their color, crudity, mega-bubbles, and rarity.

Before closing, there are a few other points I’d like to make. First, there is one other Warner’s I’m aware of that may come loaded with bubbles, and that is the New Zealand four cities pint (1WNZVar1). All these super-bubbly 1WNZVar1s I’ve seen are a honey-straw amber in color with a double-applied collar. Once again, we can only speculate about the glasshouse and number of batches that produced these beauties. Modesty aside, the example I own is simply stunning (see Figure 7). These are far more common and obtainable than the 3WLEVar5.

Secondly, as an avid bottle digger of 50 years, I am very envious of my British tip digging friends I’ve become acquainted with through Facebook. For reasons I do not yet understand, the American glass industry was very quick to adapt to the

automatic bottle machine, screw caps and colorless glass in the early 1900s, while in this same era (up to the 1930), the Brits were still making these beautifully colored and crude Warner’s. Not only that, while our American ammonia, bleach and cleaning products came in bland, blank, colorless (or aqua) flask shaped bottles, the British were making gorgeous amber, blue and green heavily embossed corker Poison bottles. The Brits dig these little lovelies like we dig Bromos. And where we dig colorless milk bottles, my English pals find superb, intricately stenciled pottery creamers. They also dig an amazing variety of pottery ginger beer bottles with intricate transfer designs, which are virtually non-existent here in the U.S. after 1900. They seem to find pot lids on every dig, again in an incredible number of variations, and only get excited when finding a rare one. In 50 years of digging, I have found four pot lids, and I’ve kept every one of them! Then there are the whiskey flagons. These are attractive, two-tone jugs with double collar or glob tops that are heavily incised on the top and attractively stenciled with information about the vendor and liquor on the body. Most astonishing of all, the dates emblazoned on these flagons go from the late 1800s right into the 1960s! While I love our pre-1910 American bottles (and especially the 1840-1880 era), it sure would be wonderful to have this plethora of post-1900 quality bottles and jugs to dig. This topic is worthy of its own article.

The cyber friendships developed on Facebook and other social media, and the stories we exchange, enrich our knowledge of our hobby, and inspire me to continue digging in search of the next great find. So, keep on digging those tips Les Fitton, and we’ll look forward to your next discovery that will rock the bottle world!

REFERENCES:

- Facebook: Bottle Digger & Collectors, Private Group.
- Seeliger, Michael William. H. H. Warner His Company and His Bottles 2.0. Brooklyn, Wisconsin. Self-Published. 2016. Digital.
- Facebook: Warner’s Safe Cure – H.H. Warner, Public Group.



Figure 7: My New Zealand pint 1WNZVar1. A more available Warner’s than the 3WLEVar5 that can also be found loaded with beautiful bubbles.

Michael also pointed out another peculiarity of these highly prized bottles: “These aqua Warner’s are very crude and really stand out with their odd squarish blob tops. I love these bottles.”
