

# Who is John Ault?

*Get to know this United Kingdom collector thanks to this interview with Ralph Finch, and learn about a great flask as well*

Let's let John start it off with some history. "Here's the bio of how I got into the hobby. I'm 68 years old, Gravesend, Kent, U.K. born and bred. Back in 1984 I was into customized cars, no interest in bottle collecting at all. As it approached my mother's seventieth birthday I started to research my maternal great-grandfather, Charles Henry Perry, whose mineral water company was based in Manor Road, Gravesend.

"Then one night, while having a few beers with my brother in a local pub, he said there was a housing estate being built on adjoining land, which was a former Victorian rubbish dump. So we wandered over, and there were bottles everywhere. While digging we met some pioneers of the bottle scene, including Jim Bell, who told about the Hollingbourne auctions, Invicta Kent club, and various shows.

"I did a swap with Brian Thatcher for a unique brown Haig Brothers Gravesend Codd. He showed me his amazing bottle room. Eventually the car went, and the rest is history. After a while my brother and his wife dropped out of the hobby, but only after amassing a great inks collection, the best of which I purchased.

"I enjoy composing articles for the two bottle collecting magazines and social networks. I've been on TV several times, and met loads of wonderful people (and a tiny minority of not-so-wonderful



The old Queen's Head in Islington, a district of London, as shown in a drawing from around 1800. Ralph Finch says: "So many old pubs look similar. Has your editor been here? Oh, no, it was the King's Head in Islington, where — on a stage about the size of my kitchen — I watched author Eve Ensler perform the London premier of her *Vagina Monologues*."

people). I have made friends and traded with everyone from former armed bank robbers (at least I hope they are reformed!) to multi-millionaires. What a great hobby!"

## **A great flask from the Mother Land by way of Bismark, North Dakota?**

Ralph Finch continues: Those of us Yanks who have been fortunate enough to have returned to the mother country will ap-

preciate the following story. I somehow have made the visit to England twenty times, sometimes to the West End theaters, sometimes to visit English friends, and often to wander through the many incredible antiques markets.

Also, many of us owe lots to Jim Hagenbuch for his great trips, taking us to England, France, and the Netherlands (home of many 1700s bottles and a few billion tulip bulbs).



John Ault wrote to us recently about this item: “A very rare flask supplied to customers by Charles Browne, landlord of The Old Queen Elizabeth’s Head, 44 Essex Road, Islington. Made by the elusive Lambeth potter F. Wetherill on 17th July 1836, which is indistinctly inscribed under the base. It was acquired from a deceased’s estate sale of antiques in Bismarck, North Dakota!

The original imposing Tudor-style building was constructed in the 17th century and demolished in 1829, when the existing Grade II listed Old Queen’s Head was built. The Queen’s Head still retains some of the imposing features from the interior of the original building, including an early moulded plaster ceiling decorated with ornamental bands, panels and various emblems. There is also an intricate

wood and stone chimneypiece featuring carved scenes and figures on either side of the hearth.

The pub is said to be connected with Sir Walter Raleigh, and it has been claimed that he once owned the pub. Walter Thornbury, writing in 1878, mentions this possible link: “Tradition had long connected this house with the name of Sir Walter Raleigh, though with no sufficient reason. In the thirtieth year of Elizabeth, Sir Walter obtained a patent ‘to make licences for keeping of taverns and retailing of wines throughout England’.”

This house may be one of those to which Raleigh granted licences, and the sign then marked the reign in which it was granted. Another story is that Queen Elizabeth’s saddler resided here, while others assert that it was the summer residence of the Earl of Essex and the resort of Elizabeth. It’s also said to be haunted by the figures of a woman and child dressed in Tudor clothing, but not sure what they would make of the pub now that it’s a well-known hip-hop and R&B music venue.”



*Editor’s note:* Regarding John Ault’s home town, Wikipedia reveals that Gravesend is an ancient town in northwest Kent, England, situated 21 miles east-southeast of Charing Cross (central London) on the south bank of the Thames Estuary. Extensive Roman remains have been found nearby, and Gravesend lies immediately to the north of the Roman road connecting London with the Kent coast. The *Domesday Book* recorded mills, small ports and fisheries here.

The Milton Chantry is Gravesend’s oldest surviving building and dates from the early 14th century. It was refounded as a chapel in the years 1320 and 1321 on the original site of a former leper hospital founded in 1189.

**TOP:** The Queen’s Head, Essex Road, Islington, as it appeared around 1680.

**BOTTOM:** John Ault, left, enjoys talking bottles with other collectors.





**ABOVE:** The rare flask supplied to customers by Charles Browne, landlord of The Old Queen's Head. It was acquired from an estate sale in Bismark, North Dakota!

**TOP RIGHT:** The Old Queen's Head as it looked in 2019.

**BOTTOM RIGHT:** Base of the flask, inscribed by Lambeth potter F. Wetherill on July 17, 1836.



On March 21, 1617, John Rolfe and his Native American wife Rebecca (Pocahontas), with their two-year-old son, Thomas, boarded a ship in London bound for the Commonwealth of Virginia. The ship had only sailed as far as Gravesend before Rebecca fell ill, and she died shortly after she was taken ashore. The site of her grave was underneath the church's chancel, though since the previous church was destroyed by fire in 1727 her exact resting place is unknown.

So, how does that compare with your American town's history? Do you live near the oldest known Wendy's?

*Editor's note:* John Ault can be emailed at [maryault59@hotmail.com](mailto:maryault59@hotmail.com).

**ALSO:** In a future issue of *AB&GC* we will have more photos from John's collections, including Victorian inhalers.