



*Cry me a river? *No, silly, Crimea-a-flask!*

Historical and off-the-wall notes by **Ralph Finch**

Beat the drums and wave the victory flags as we salute collector John Ault, a happy warrior. John of Gravesend, England, is one of Europe's major collectors of historic bottles. Always on the alert for a great find (or a new auction skirmish), in late November (a year or two ago), he claimed a new battle-field souvenir—with the only damage to his checking account. He sent this spirited report and photos from the front:

“Another item ticked off my ‘wanted’ list, a Crimea War flask made at one of the London potteries and supplied by William Wenham, landlord of The Gun Tavern, 37 (now 83) Church Street, Croydon, Surrey, circa 1857.

“The Gun Tavern pub is now a restaurant, but in the past lived up to its name with several firearm-related incidents involving gangs. These spirit flasks were produced to mark the beginning and end of hostilities in the Crimean War and rarely appear on the open market. In fact, I’ve only seen three for sale in the last 30-plus years. This example is in superb condition, with clearly-struck lettering and deep moulding. Both sides depict soldiers of the alliance formed by the United Kingdom, France, Ottoman Empire, and Sardinia to defeat Russia.”

Then, John said: *“The immediate cause of the war involved the rights of Christian minorities in Palestine, which was part of the Ottoman Empire. The French promoted the rights of Roman Catholics, and Russia promoted those of the Eastern Orthodox Church. Longer-term causes involved the decline of the Ottoman Empire, the expansion of the Russian Empire in the preceding Russo-Turkish Wars, and the British and French preference to preserve the Ottoman Empire to maintain the balance of power in Europe and consolidate borders.”*

“Sadly, right up to the present time, the Crimean peninsula on the Black Sea is still subject to political tensions. The war was the first major conflict recorded by photography; probably the best known of the photographers was Roger Fenton, whose images are well documented and can be accessed on Google.”

Later, John kindly added this information: *“I knew it would*

be expensive, £3,214 including add-ons (\$4,003 in U.S.), but cheaper than the last example that sold for £3,600 back in 2003. It is probably the UK’s most desirable stoneware flask, appeals to both bottle and militaria collectors.”

***Cry Me a River** was written by Arthur Hamilton in 1953, popularized by Julie London in 1955, and recorded by many performers. And for Americans, a bit light in Crimea's violent history: Florence Nightingale made her mark serving in this battle. And in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, a 1936 film, Errol Flynn and Olivia de Havilland battled for fame.

