



Take five: moments in the history of teapots

WE take teapots for granted, but the array at the Treasure House Fair shows how much the (not so) humble vessels have evolved from their early days in medieval China.

1. Tea drinking precedes teapots by several centuries—initially, tea was boiled and drunk from a bowl. It's only when the Chinese began steeping the leaves in hot water during the Yuan Dynasty

(1279–1368) that the need for a suitable vessel arose. Some of the early teapots, of Yixing clay, were for individual use, with tea drunk straight from the spout

2. As tea spread across Europe in the 17th century, so did teapots. Among the early adopters were Charles II, Catherine of Braganza and Samuel Pepys who, in September 1660, wrote in his diary: 'I did send for a cup of tea

(a China drink) of which I never had drank before'

3. The popularity of teapots exploded in 18th-century Europe. Britain came to dominate production, via makers such as Josiah Wedgwood, whose white Devonshire-clay tea service so pleased Queen Charlotte that she named it Queen's Ware. Although Wedgwood preferred simple designs, he was one of the first to make

novelty teapots shaped as cabbages or pineapples

4. The 19th century saw dozens of makers, models and materials, but, in the 20th, electric kettles and tea bags threatened to consign teapots to history

5. Yet they endure, having evolved into *objets d'art*—such as 'memory vessels' (pictured) made by Bouke de Vries with shards of an 18th-century tea service (with Adrian Sassoon)