

The Royal Doulton story

Ceramic tiles originally made for the children's wards at St Thomas' Hospital more than 100 years ago can still be enjoyed by visitors today, as **Hamza Omaar** explains.

If you have walked along the South Wing corridor of St Thomas' Hospital towards Evelina London Children's Hospital you may have noticed a superb collection of nursery rhyme and fairy tale tiled panels that guide you along the way.

The series of fairy tale tiles that include Cinderella, Puss in Boots, Little Bo Peep and Sleeping Beauty originally covered the walls of two St Thomas' children's wards, Lilian and Seymour, which opened in 1901 and 1903 respectively. The tiles were commissioned for both hygiene reasons and to decorate the wards for the amusement and pleasure of the young patients.

The tiled panels were produced by one of the great Victorian ceramics factories, Royal Doulton of Lambeth, which was active in the local area between 1815 and 1956.

John Doulton established the original pottery and porcelain business – a house with a small factory, one kiln and a large garden – on Lambeth High Street. His son, Sir Henry Doulton, who built on this business and was instrumental in developing the firm of Royal Doulton, is now widely regarded as one of the leading figures of 19th century British manufacturing. The former Doulton factory still stands on the corner of Lambeth High Street and Black Prince Road.

Henry went on to become a Governor and an almoner of St Thomas' Hospital where he distributed alms to those in need. Doulton Ward at St Thomas' was named after the Doulton family – the ward can still be found in East Wing of the hospital today, specialising in the care of heart surgery patients.

Sir Henry Doulton's interests, outside his pottery business, were in the social development of Victorian society and in the arts. In 1849 he was elected permanent chair of the Lambeth Debating



Left, Royal Doulton,
Jack and the Giant Beanstalk
Below, Little Red Riding Hood



Society and in 1887 he received the honour of a knighthood from HRH Queen Victoria. A few years later he was awarded the Albert Medal by the Royal Society of Arts.

The tiles for St Thomas' Hospital were designed by Margaret Thompson and William Rowe, in-house designers who worked alongside leading ceramic artists of the day including George Tinworth and Hannah Barlow. Together these ceramic artists left an artistic legacy that the Royal Doulton brand is famous for. The Royal Doulton Group is now the largest manufacturer of ceramics in Britain.

The original children's wards were damaged during World War II but some of the tiles survived. They were extensively restored in 2008 and displayed in their



Doulton Tiles in the
children's ward in 1900

current locations for patients, staff and visitors to enjoy.

The Royal Doulton tiles are part of Guy's and St Thomas' Charity fine art and heritage collection, one of the largest art collections belonging to a health charity in the UK, with artefacts dating back to the 1500s. It is a unique resource that the Charity uses to enhance the environment for patients, staff and visitors to Guy's and St Thomas'.