

Doulton descendant promotes family heritage, china on tour

By DONNA OLENDORF

Judging from appearances, Englishman Michael Doulton has it made. As a fifth-generation descendant of the founder of the Royal Doulton Company, and the only family member still involved in the ceramics firm, he is treated royally wherever he goes.

But Doulton, who is in the area to open an exhibit of 285 figurines from the Royal Doulton archives, is not the carefree bachelor he seems. Instead, he is an unhappy victim of English taxation and, like the Americans of 200 years before him, he is on the verge of a revolt.

"Whether or not I'll stay in England is really the hundred-dollar question right now," Doulton said in his British accent. "I really like America tremendously. I like what people do here."

"I find it very stimulating," he commented. "There's such a tremendous mix in America. I just think the stimulus is much greater. And the incentives have been taken away from the people of England."

Doulton's duties as traveling ambassador for Royal Doulton Company make him more acutely aware of his predicament. He crisscrosses the U.S. and Canada to promote the china and ceramics that bear his family name.

This week, for instance, he will be at Hudson's Northland store to introduce a new book on the figurines that made his company famous. During his appearance from July 8-15, he is talking with hundreds of Doulton customers and autographing figurines purchased in the store.

Although trips like this leave him politically dissatisfied, they afford him a great deal of personal delight.

"I'm 100 percent behind what I'm doing, and I'm behind the company as well," Doulton asserted. "I think we produce a really superb product. We probably manufacture the best tableware in the world."

"It's nice to work for something that's aesthetically pleasing and that people really enjoy. It's not like selling tractors. It's an industry that still has a lot of art left in it."

PROOF OF HIGH ARTISTIC quality of Doulton ceramics is the number of honors awarded to the firm. The company, which was founded by potter John Doulton in 1815, won the Grand Prix at the Paris Exhibition in 1887. That same year, John's son, Henry, was knighted by Queen Victoria in appreciation of his service to the art of ceramics.

In 1901, the royal warrant was given to the Doulton firm. And as recently as 1968, a Doulton sculpture entitled "Married Art and Industry" was awarded the grand prize at the Brussels International Exhibition.

Because his younger brother is a farmer and his family is quite small, Michael will probably be the last Doulton affiliated with the company, which was purchased by a large corporation several years ago. Even though he no longer controls the business, he is confident about the continued quality of the Doulton lines.

"This was one of the things that was set down when the merger took place," he explained. "My father, especially, was very keen that the company wouldn't change drastically."

"After all, we as a company were merged with this other company because of our expertise. And when you consider that every single figurine is hand-painted, and that it takes two

years to train an artist to paint a face on a figurine, that in itself is a good control over quality. Each piece is also individually checked before it leaves the factory," he added.

But the most effective regulation of quality is the public's all-knowing eye

"There's no way you can sell products like this without keeping the quality high. If you don't, people simply won't buy them," Doulton said. "People are very much aware of the quality of a product."



Michael Doulton, fifth-generation descendant of the founder of the Royal Doulton China Co., will autograph any Doulton merchandise purchased during the exhibition of figures at Northland this week. He also will autograph copies of the new collectors' book, "Royal Doulton Figures."

Thursday, July 13, 1978

(F13A)

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