

**W**ade Ceramics, which supplies ceramic containers to the drinks industry, marked its 200th anniversary last year by moving into a new purpose-built factory at Etruria Valley in Stoke-on-Trent.

The company is a market leader in the design and production of high quality porcelain flagons and decanters for the international distilling business, chiefly in Scotland and Ireland.

Ranging in capacity from 5cl to 3 litres and produced in a range of designs, they are chosen to add value and distinction to many of the world's prestige brands including Chivas, Bells and Tullamore Dew.

In 1999 the company was bought by Edward Duke, its Chairman, and Managing Director Paul Farmer, who have overseen a resurgence in the business's fortunes.

### Growing

"Trading has been tough since the buy-out," said Mr Farmer. "The business was then in distress and we have done a lot of work to turn it around. There was really no potential where we were in Burslem, housed in a building dating back to 1814.

"Annual turnover was down to £7m. It is now around £12m and growing year-on-year, with exports accounting for about 10% of turnover."

The move from Burslem was the culmination of a £7.5 million investment programme,

including the introduction of state-of-art high pressure hollowware casting with robotic handling equipment.

Having updated the manufacturing process, the company has increased its workforce by around 70 this year.

Although decanters and flagons accounts for 90% of the company's turnover, it's perhaps most famous for

the Wade Whimsie, a small, solid, pressed ceramic animal, collected by generations of children. Whimsie production is now outsourced and, sadly, they are now only available in the United States where they are used to promote a brand of tea. Other out-

sourced products include Dignity, an award-winning range of eating and drinking products designed for use by people suffering from dementia and Alzheimer's, as well as the physically disabled. Wades also markets the Gluggle Jug, a fully glazed water jug which has its own sound effects!

"We have decided to go down the niche market route," said Mr Farmer. "We can't compete with cheap overseas labour so we follow a business model in which we concentrate on what we are best at, and do it as efficiently as possible. We intend to stay lean and mean."

In a departure from supplying distilleries, earlier this year Wades designed and produced a souvenir ceramic bottle for Burslem brewer Titanic Brewery. It was for a limited edition beer, named Titanic

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# ETRURIA COMPANY DRINKS TO SUCCESS!



**Unity's Learning Representative Anthea Bloor, right, with fettler/sponger Pat Dudley.**