

WOODHAMS
—STONE—
COLLECTION

Woodhams Stone Collection

Corkscrew & Champagne Tap

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The history of man's production (and consumption) of wine goes back many thousands of years. The history of the corkscrew, however, stretches back barely 400 years.

The production of wine probably began in the East; the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans all produced wine in significant quantities. The earliest wines were stored in animal skins, wooden barrels and earthenware jars. These would have had bungs or stoppers of wood or cork. The stoppers stood higher than the neck of the vessels and were easily removed. The use of cork stoppers, however, disappeared from use with the fall of Rome in the fifth century. They only began to be used again in England in the 1500s. By the 1600s blown glass bottles were replacing other types of containers for storing wine. They were sealed with tapered corks which were wrapped in waxed linen. These corks again stood proud of the bottle neck and did not require any specialist implement to remove them.

As bottles moved from being hand blown individually to being moulded in large numbers, they became more uniform in shape and size. They became more cylindrical and could be stored on their sides. Corks, therefore, had to fit tighter, and were compressed before being inserted into the bottle neck. As a result they were more difficult to remove. The 'bottle screw', as the corkscrew were first known, appeared in England in the 1600s. It was almost certainly modelled on the 'worm' or 'screw', an implement used for cleaning gun barrels.



Early corkscrews were simple in design with a basic screw or helix with a crossbar or ring handle. Throughout the 18th century corkscrews became more decorative, but they all relied on brute strength to draw the cork out of the bottle. 19th century designers turned their attentions to devising ways of extracting the cork more easily. Levers, ratchets and springs were all added to ease the process of opening a wine

bottle. One example in the Woodhams Stone Collection dates from the late 1800s and is based on a design known as the 'King's Pattern'. The corkscrew is inserted into the cork by turning the crossbar handle. The cork is then drawn out of the bottle neck by turning the smaller handle on the side, which engages a cogged ratchet which raises the cork.



Another more unusual item in the Collection is the champagne tap. Also known as a soda tap, it was first patented in France in 1828. It is unusual, as it is designed not to remove the cork. The corkscrew mechanism penetrates the cork, but the inner core is then removed leaving a hollow tube behind. This tube can then be opened and closed by means of the valve on the side. This allows the champagne to be drawn off a single glass at a time, and the bottle effectively resealed, so that none of the fizz is lost. Taken in small quantities, champagne was thought to have many medicinal qualities, and was recommended to people such as invalids and nursing mothers.