

'Does exactly what it says on the tin'

Tucked away in the kitchen cupboards of the David Parr House are 5 small tins of RONUK Sanitary Polish and Cleanser.



These are now filled with assorted hooks, screws and fixings used by David Parr or Alfred Palmer. However it seems that the original contents were popular at No 186 for there to be a number of them retained.

What is the connection between these small tins to the advertising slogan, 'Does exactly what it says on the tin', devised in 1994, and now used widely to convey 'does what it promises'?

RONUK was a company established by T Horace Fowler who registered the name as a trademark under Polishing Preparations on 23 January 1896. The RONUK Factory, previously in Brighton was established in nearby Portslade in 1902. The name RONUK is recorded to be an Anglicised version suggested by an ex Indian Army Officer signifying brilliance¹. Through a number of acquisitions it is part of a large UK Company one of whose products is Ronseal, the brand so well known for its clear marketing slogan.

The RONUK company were good at advertising their products too, though these may not entirely conform to today's Advertising Standards. They did focus on the 'Sanitary', 'Polish' and 'Cleanser' of the name seemingly using them for the different markets of Institutions, such as hospitals and children's homes, and the domestic market.

In the early 1900s RONUK regularly attended *The Exhibition Of Foods, Drugs, Instruments, Books, And Sanitary, Appliances* that was a adjunct of the British Medical Association Annual meetings. In the 1912 Journal report of the Exhibition RONUK detail,

'Ill-kept floors are certainly likely to harbour germs, and we know no preparation which is of more assistance than RONUK to hospital sisters and others who take a pride in the appearance of their floors'.ⁱⁱ

They also note that the firm manufactures

'a sanitary polish for application to linoleum, which keeps it bright without slipperiness and tends to prolong its life'.

Was it this that Mary Jane Parr used on her linos and has preserved them so well?

This is an advert placed in the *Geographical Journal* of 1915ⁱⁱⁱ

NOTICE.

**STEWARDS AND MATRONS OF HOSPITALS, ASYLUMS,
WORKHOUSES, &c.,**

ARE STRONGLY RECOMMENDED TO USE THE

"RONUK" POLISHES

FOR FLOORS, FURNITURE, &c.

They give a brilliant polish with the minimum of labour. Possess valuable Sanitary and Preservative Properties, and impart an agreeable freshness to the atmosphere.

NOW EXTENSIVELY USED IN METROPOLITAN & PROVINCIAL HOSPITALS, &c.

The Royal Alexandra Hospital for Sick Children, Brighton.

I have much pleasure in stating that I consider the Sanitary Polish "RONUK" an excellent composition. I have used it in the Wards of this Hospital for some time. It cleanses the floors thoroughly, and gives them a high polish.

(Signed) EMMELINE B. FRASER, Matron.

Workhouse and Infirmarys, Brighton.

I have used the Sanitary Polish, "RONUK," for some time in our New Infirmarys, Wards and Day Rooms, and consider it the best in the market. As a cleanser and preservative it does its work admirably; it is easy to use and most economical. I have no hesitation in recommending it to institutions in which Wood Block Flooring is in use, as it not only cleanses and preserves, but also improves them in appearance.

(Signed) VALENTINE W. BURDEN, Master.

SUPPLIED IN 14 LB. TINS.

A sample will be sent free to any Institution on application to

**"RONUK," LTD.,
83, UPPER THAMES STREET, LONDON.**

Other institutions used RONUK polishes. There are reports from Children's Homes; in most cases the children doing the work, flicking the polish at each other and using their feet to polish. An oral history of Oxford College Servants^{iv} lists the household stores issued to Corpus Christi scouts (housekeeping staff) in 1929 that included '... Enameline, Vim, RONUK, Brasso ...'

RONUK advertisements detail that it 'Polishes, Preserves and Purifies', that it is highly concentrated and to 'Use little and rub lightly'. It was available in 1908 in tins 3d, 6d, 1s and 2s. Large tins were available for commercial use as the 1915 advert shows.

On the domestic market their advertising was, as was much the case at the time, directed to the lady of the house. But both David and Mary would surely agree with the sentiment here "Cleanliness and Beauty should be apparent in every home"



"Your house always seems so fresh and healthy, my dear, as well as spick and span. How do you manage it?"

"Sunlight, air, and no dusty carpets. Ronuk gives fragrance to the floor."

RONUK

SANITARY FLOOR POLISH.

Cleanliness and Beauty should be apparent in every home. Ronuk ensures them. Whether your floor be parquet, boards or linoleum, Ronuk is the means to endow it with beauty and

keep it free from dust and dirt. The pleasant, fragrant aroma of Ronuk is derived from its definite antiseptic properties. Every doctor approves a 'ronuked' floor.

RONUK, LTD., PORTSLADE, SUSSEX.

The apparent 10 minutes it takes to polish the floors in this household seems a winning product.

With "RONUK" I polish the floors with such speed,

That baby and I get the outings we need.

RONUK
(REGD. TRADE MARK)
**SANITARY
FLOOR POLISH**

By Appointment
to H.M. The King

2½d., 4½d., 6½d., 10d., 1½ and 1/6 per tin.
RONUK, LTD., PORTSLADE, SUSSEX.

copyright © J. Middleton These charming drawings appeared in an advertisement from 1926.^v

The Company success is indicated by the development of its own railway sidings in 1919/20, the opening of RONUK Hall and Welfare Institute in 1928, Royal recognition with the award of 4 Royal Warrants and, in 1924 the factory received a visit from the Duke and Duchess of York.

RONUK also promoted themselves through popular competitions and giveaways



Are YOU
trying to
solve the
RONUK
PUZZLE?

A pleasant and profitable pastime for every member of the family. Ask your dealer for leaflet descriptive of the

RONUK

FLOOR POLISH

GREAT PUZZLE COMPETITION
1,000 PRIZES
—total value £500.

This leaflet contains a "RONUK" advertisement which has been cut up and the pieces wrongly arranged. All you have to do is to cut out the pieces, arrange them to form the original advertisement, and send your solution to the address given below.

OBTAIN A FORM AT ONCE
from your grocer, stores, or ironmonger, or send a 2d. stamp to cover postage (do not omit to give your name and address) to:

RONUK, LTD. (Dept. I.L.) Portslade, Brighton.

N.B.—Envelopes must be plainly marked "COMPETITION" in the top left-hand corner. (No correspondence regarding the competition can be entertained in any circumstances whatever.)

IMPORTANT!

The
LATEST DATE

*for receipt of
solutions is*

MARCH 31st,
1922.

**A FREE GIFT for
BOYS and GIRLS**

The Proprietors of

RONUK (Sanitary)
Polish

will be pleased to send free
on receipt of a penny stamp
for postage, the

'RONUK' PANTOMIME

consisting of Complete Stage and Fourteen
Characters, produced in a number of
beautiful colours, to play

'SNOW WHITE,' 'CINDERELLA,'
'RED RIDING HOOD,' and 'PUSS-IN-BOOTS'

Write now to **RONUK, LTD.**, Portslade, Brighton, Sussex



Did any of the Parr Family enter RONUK competitions? If the 5 retained tins are anything to go by it was certainly a popular household product in the David Parr House.

Afternote: a favourite maxim of those who work or volunteer at the David Parr House is 'We are always learning'. It was with great delight that, on checking the kitchen cupboards for the number of RONUK tins, I found the one on the top shelf had a label in David Parr's handwriting showing it stored 'Keyhole Escutcheons'. An escutcheon, in this context, is the name for a flat piece of metal used for protection and often ornamentation around a keyhole. I haven't as yet managed to open this RONUK tin, though there is something inside it, is it an escutcheon? If you have the chance to visit us seek out the board of escutcheons rescued from the F R Leach workshop and displayed in our Visitor Centre.



Particular thanks to Judy Middleton for use of details from her RONUK of Portslade blog

ⁱ <http://portsladehistory.blogspot.com/2016/02/ronuk-of-portslade.html>

ⁱⁱ Eightieth Annual Meeting Of The British Medical Association." *The British Medical Journal*, vol. 2, no. 2691, 1912, pp. 176–178. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/25298051. Accessed 8 Sept. 2021.

ⁱⁱⁱ "Front Matter." *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 46, no. 1, 1915, pp. iii-iv. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/1779955. Accessed 8 Sept. 2021.

^{iv} Harrison, Brian. "College Servants in an Oxford College Forty Years Ago." *Oral History*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2012, pp. 40–58. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/41806356. Accessed 8 Sept. 2021.

^v <http://portsladehistory.blogspot.com/2016/02/ronuk-of-portslade.html>

^{vi} 'Grace's Guide to British Industrial History' <https://www.gracesguide.co.uk>

^{vii} @HarperCollinsUK Twitter 28 Sept 2017