

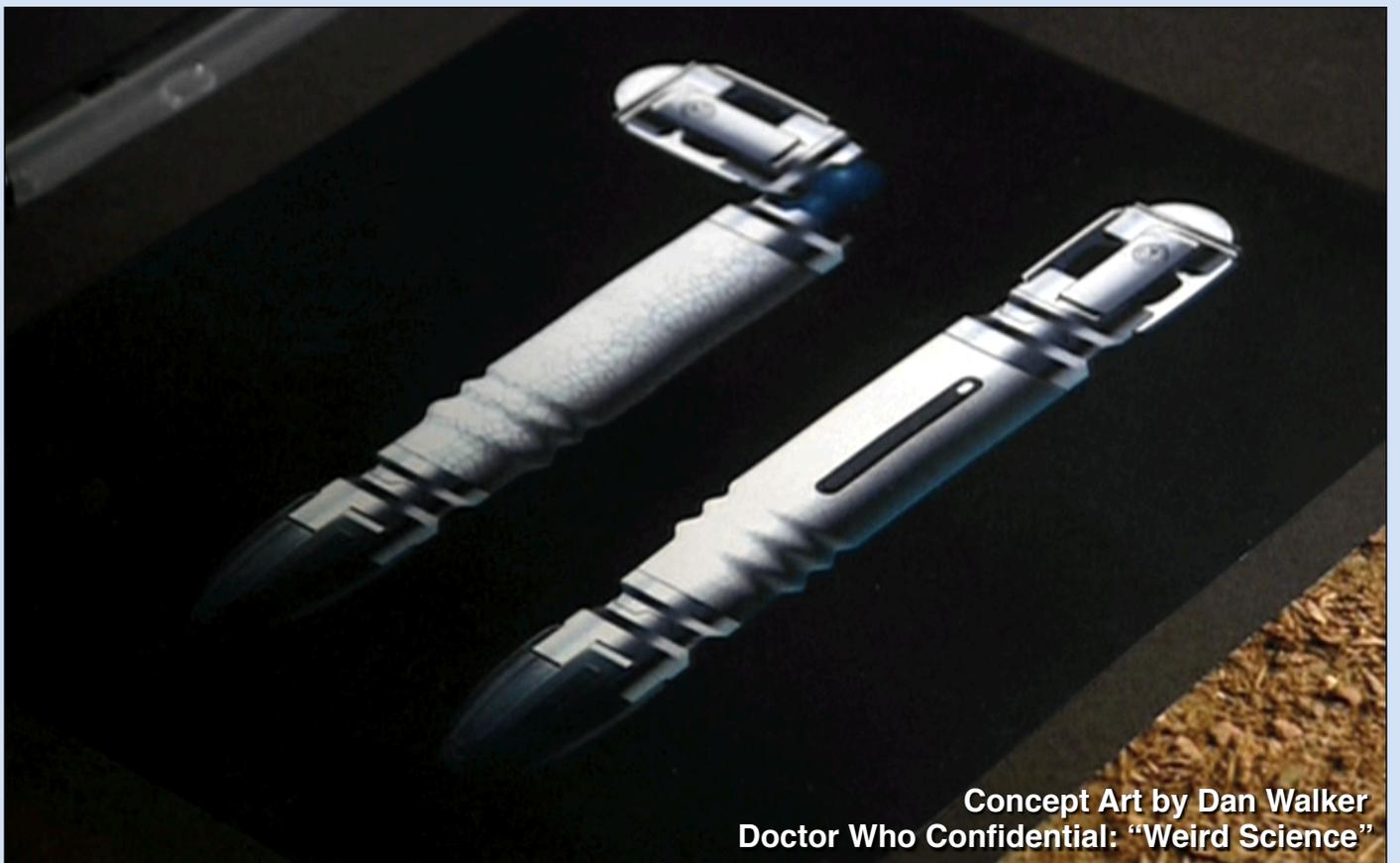
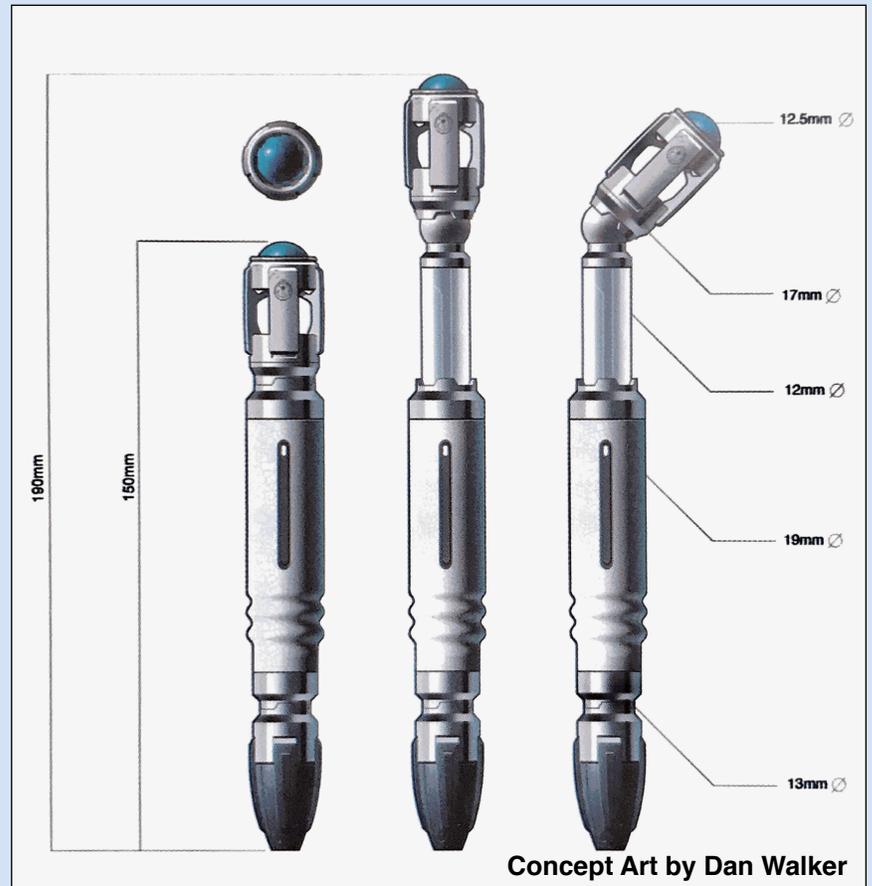
DOCTOR • WHO

THE RTD ERA SONIC SCREWDRIVERS A Compiled History

by Brian A Terranova

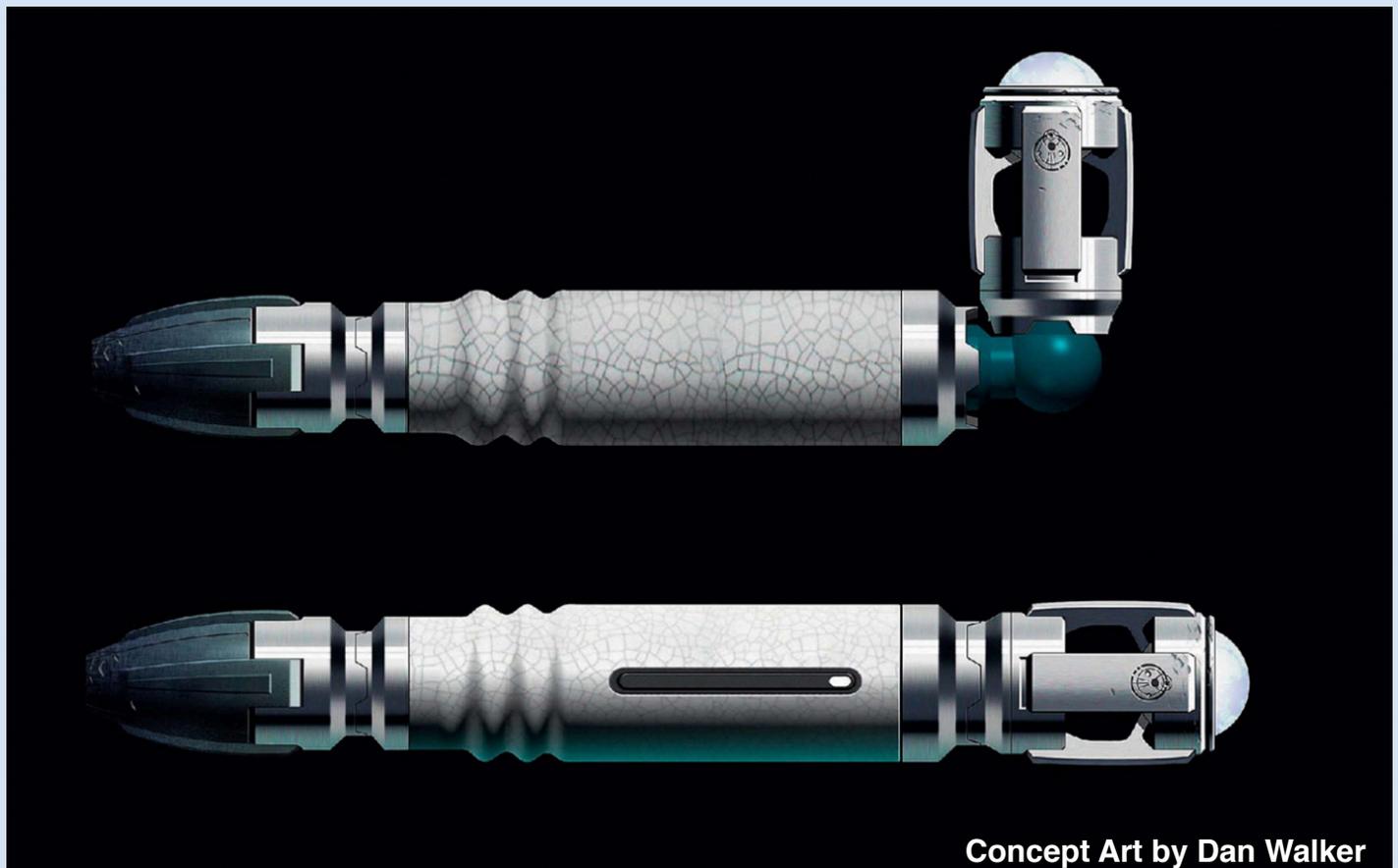
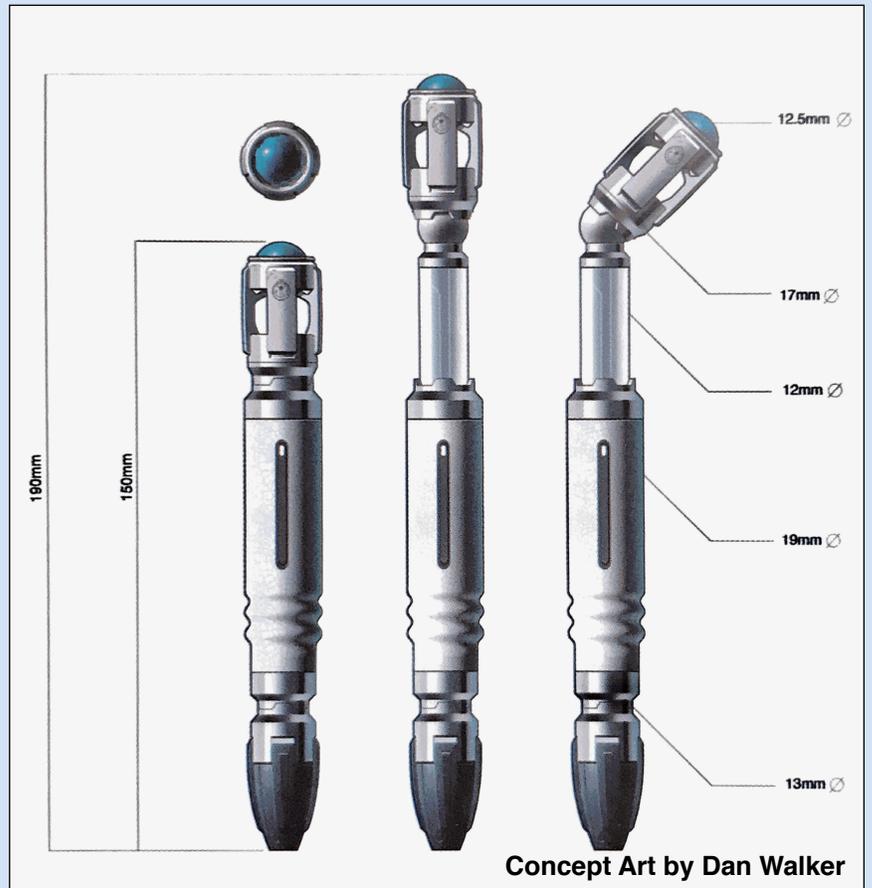
The purpose of this write-up is to catalogue the introductions and changes to all versions of the Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver Hero Props, as seen in Series 1 through Series 4/The Specials, as well as briefly cover the alterations made for "The Eleventh Hour" in Series 5.

This file will also cover the replicas used for The 50th Anniversary Special; "The Day of the Doctor" (Series 7), as well as the Series 10 episode, "The Pilot", which were also variations of Dan Walker's original design for the 2005 revival of Doctor Who.



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The Colony Cream Aztec

Series 1, Recording block 1



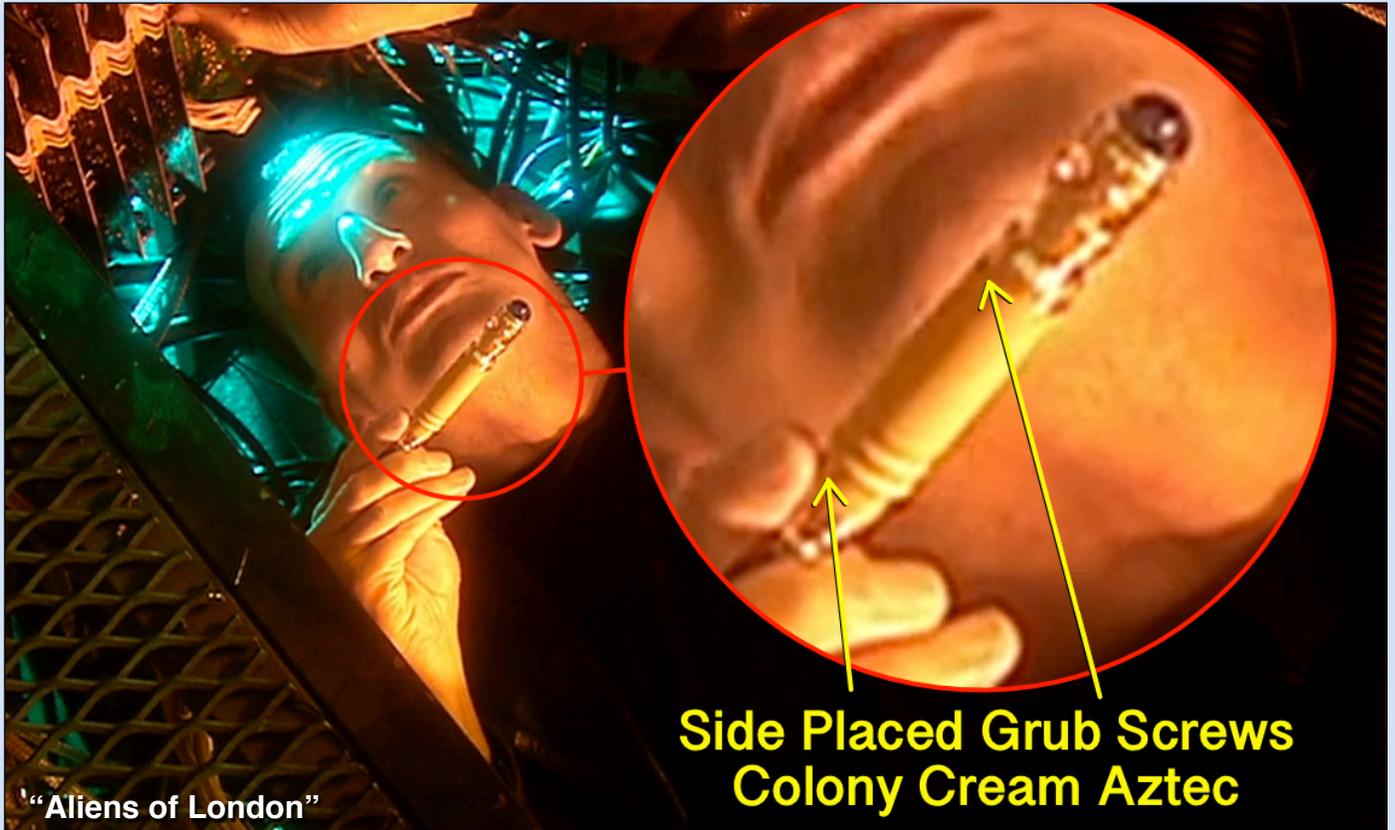
As previously stated, Aztec Modelmakers machined two Sonic Screwdriver props for Series 1, based off of Dan Walker's concept art. The two Aztec props were very similar in design, however they weren't exactly identical to each other. Because of this, each version of the Aztec will get its own section in this write-up in order to better illustrate the differences between them.

The first Aztec prop to be used in Series 1 was the Colony Cream Aztec; a name derived from the color of its handle. The color itself being a combination of the Colony Cream Plastikote crackle finish top layer, and the gold base coat underneath, giving the handle a beige or cream colored finish. This paint finish was designed to make the Sonic Screwdriver feel like it was part of the TARDIS, matching the coral/crackle finish of the TARDIS console. Although the Plastikote is a crackle finish paint, the crackle effect is more vein-like than the cracked porcelain look we would later see on many of the Tennant era props.

Interestingly, the Colony Cream Aztec is never seen with the emitter section extended. All of its screen time and BTS photographs, show the emitter head in the closed position; although in both cases the emitter teeth are separated by a small gap, suggesting that the prop could extend, but that the head and collar section couldn't seat fully closed.



The collar and aluminum end-piece were held onto the body by two retention grub screws located on the side of the prop, directly opposite of the blue strip. These side grub screws are most clearly seen in “Aliens of London” when the Doctor is repairing the TARDIS console from underneath. The way Christopher Eccleston held the prop is very revealing; showing both grub screws, but not the blue strip, which would have been visible from this angle had the grub screws been placed on the back of the prop.



Interestingly, it would seem that the side grub screws were added to the prop sometime during Recording Block 1, since they appear on the prop in “Aliens of London”, but are not visible within scenes for “Rose”.



One of the original concept features of the Aztec Sonic Screwdriver saw the black end cap opening up and fanning out as legs for the prop to function as a tripod/stand for hands free functioning. The same end piece was also originally intended to plug into the TARDIS console to recharge the sonic between adventures. While the tripod legs were dropped, due to difficulty in realizing the function on the actual filming prop, the 'plug in' feature was used at least once during the RTD era in "Aliens of London". The Sonic Screwdriver can be seen plugged into the TARDIS console just behind the monitor, soon after the Doctor returns from Albion Hospital, when Jackie, Mickey, and Rose join him in the TARDIS.



"Aliens of London"



"Aliens of London"

The Colony Cream Aztec was used throughout Recording Block 1 of Series 1, which consisted of "Rose", "Aliens of London", and "World War Three"; episodes 1, 4, and 5 respectively. After the recording of these three stories, the Colony Cream Aztec was never again used in its original configuration.

For Recording Block 2 of Series 1, there were extensive modifications made to the Colony Cream Aztec. These alterations initially lead fans to believe that there was a third filming prop for Series 1, when in fact it was actually just the revamped Colony Cream Aztec prop all along. The modified Aztec prop became known to fans as "The Wide Slider" Sonic Screwdriver. Although, given this information, it should more accurately be named "The Wide Slider Aztec".

The Wide Slider Aztec

Series 1-2 (aka The Colony Cream Aztec Alterations)



Doctor Who “The Vault”

The Wide Slider Aztec started out as the Colony Cream Aztec sonic, which was later modified with a wide channel cut into the body, allowing the prop to be extended by thumb, via the sliding microswitch. The wide channel running most of the length of the body is what earned this prop its fan given nickname. It first appeared in this new form in Series 1, Episode 2, “The End of the World, which was the fourth episode of Series 1 to be filmed.

With no official word from Aztec Modelmakers, it has been difficult to get confirmation as to how exactly this prop conversion came to be, or whether or not Aztec Modelmakers did the alterations themselves, or if it was done in house at the BBC. Whatever the case, it appears as though the Wide Slider Aztec was made to give Christopher Eccleston more versatility with the prop by allowing him to manually control the emitter length, at will, within a scene.

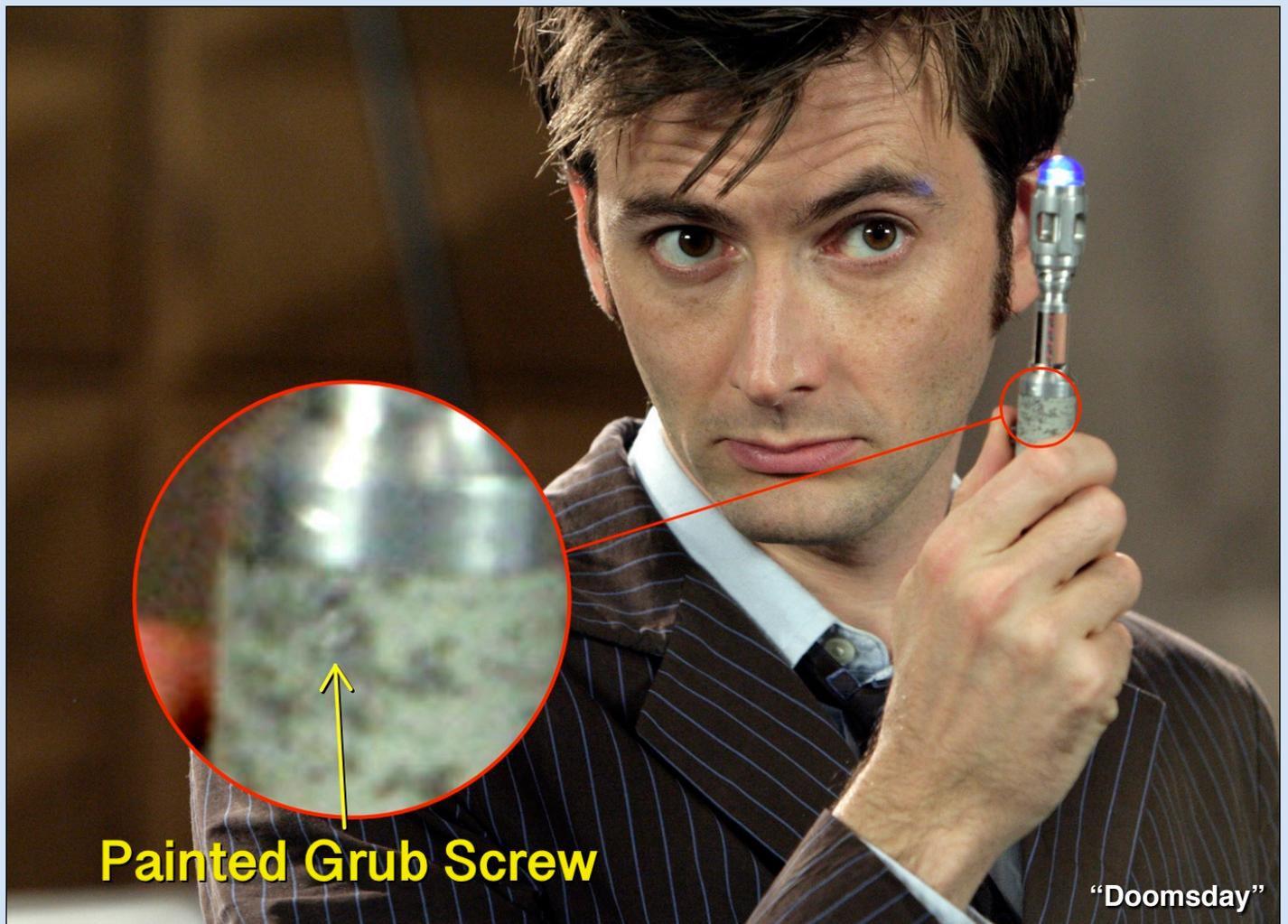


Doctor Who Confidential
“Weird Science”

Although the prop was repainted after its conversion, the body dings and the side placed grub screws give away the prop's true origin, not to mention the fact that the Colony Cream Aztec was never seen again after "World War Three".

The Wide Slider handle was repainted with the same Colony Cream Plastikote crackle finish, only this time with a brown base coat, rather than gold. This combination of paints and the clear coat process, as well as various lighting conditions often gave the appearance of a grey finish. This new paint finish wasn't as even as the original cream finish. Instead, it was a mix of vein-like cracks towards the bottom half of the handle, and scuffed paint throughout the top half. The Wide Slider would retain this new paint application all the way through to its final use in "Doomsday" for Series 2.

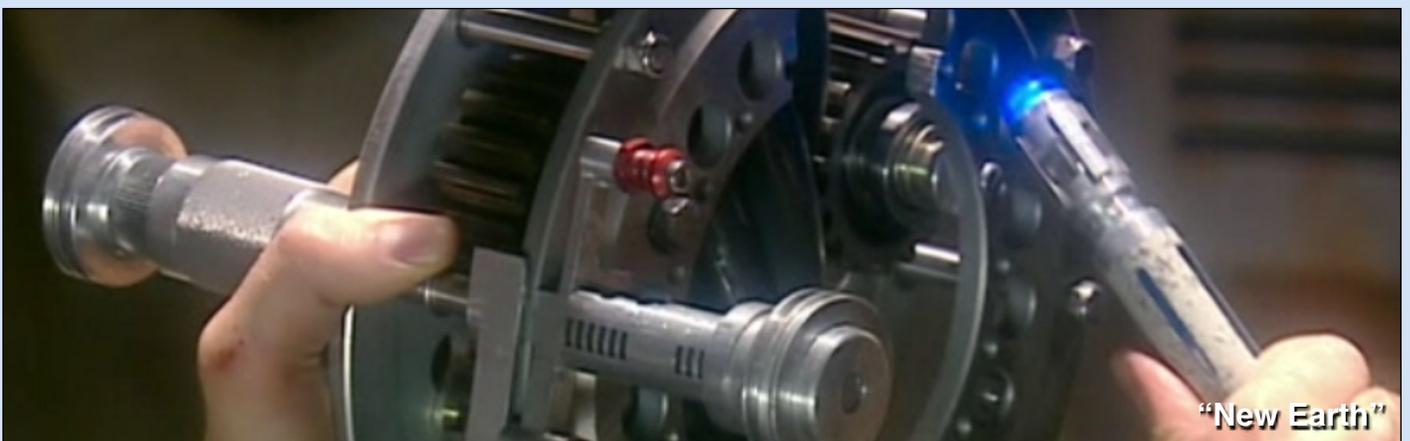
There is one notable paint change that took place by "Bad Wolf" in Series 1; the two side retention grub screws were painted to blend in with the body paint of the sonic, while earlier in Series 1, they were black.





Although Christopher Eccleston and David Tennant both used the Grey Aztec fairly often throughout Series 1 & 2, the Wide Slider Aztec appears to have been the favored prop during that time, presumably due to its functionality.

While the Colony Cream Aztec was given a new lease on life when it became the Wide Slider, it seems that this was not to be its final form. For Series 3 the prop would undergo another major change when parts of it were repurposed to make a new prop; The Intermediate Sonic for “The Runaway Bride”.



The Grey Aztec

Series 1-3



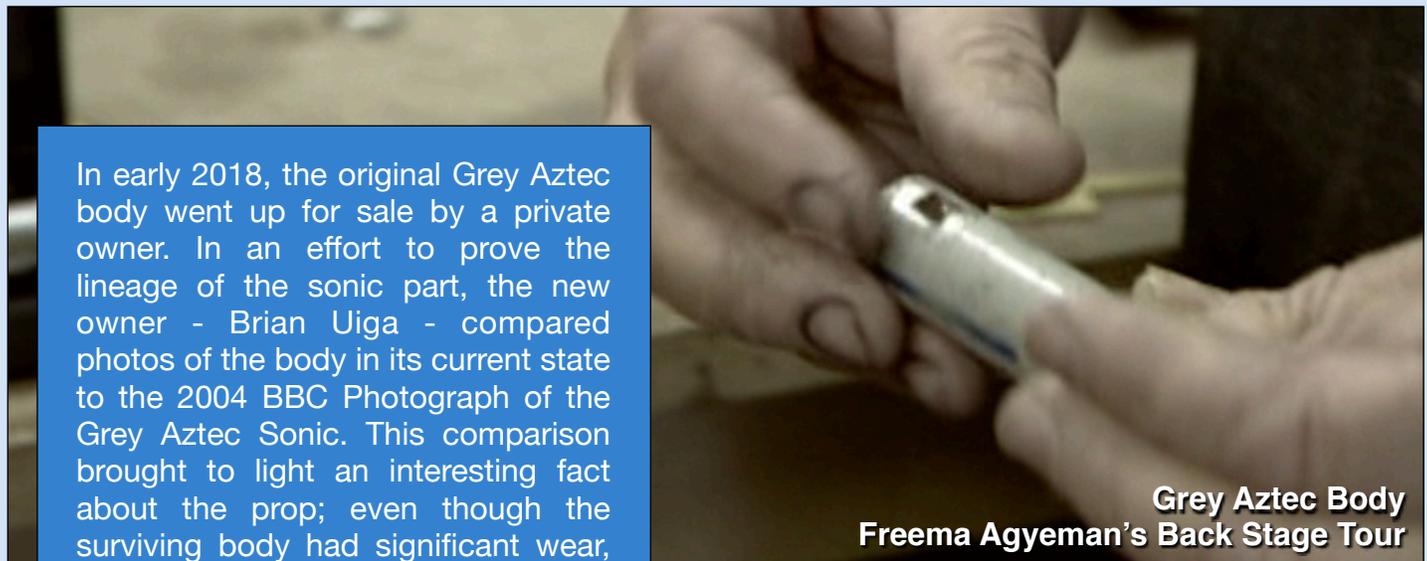
The second Aztec prop - known as The Grey Aztec - differed from its counterpart in three noticeable ways; First, the frame around the microswitch was much softer in shape, with a wider, rounded edge boxed shape. Second, the body was painted the same as the Wide Slider Aztec, with the vein like Colony Cream Plastikote top layer, and the brown base coat giving the sonic a grey appearance when clear coated. However, unlike the Wide Slider Aztec, the paint finish was very evenly cracked all over. Lastly, instead of having two retention grub screws on the side of the prop, the Grey Aztec had two slotted screws on the back of the body; which were used to set the emitter length at various levels, simply by loosening or tightening the top slotted screw, just below the collar.



The Grey Aztec first appeared in “The End of the World” which of course was the second episode aired, but the fourth episode filmed. Unlike the Colony Cream Aztec, this version of the Sonic Screwdriver was used throughout the first three series of the Doctor Who revival, with only a couple small modifications made to it for Series 3; as well as some heavy wear and tear due to years of use.

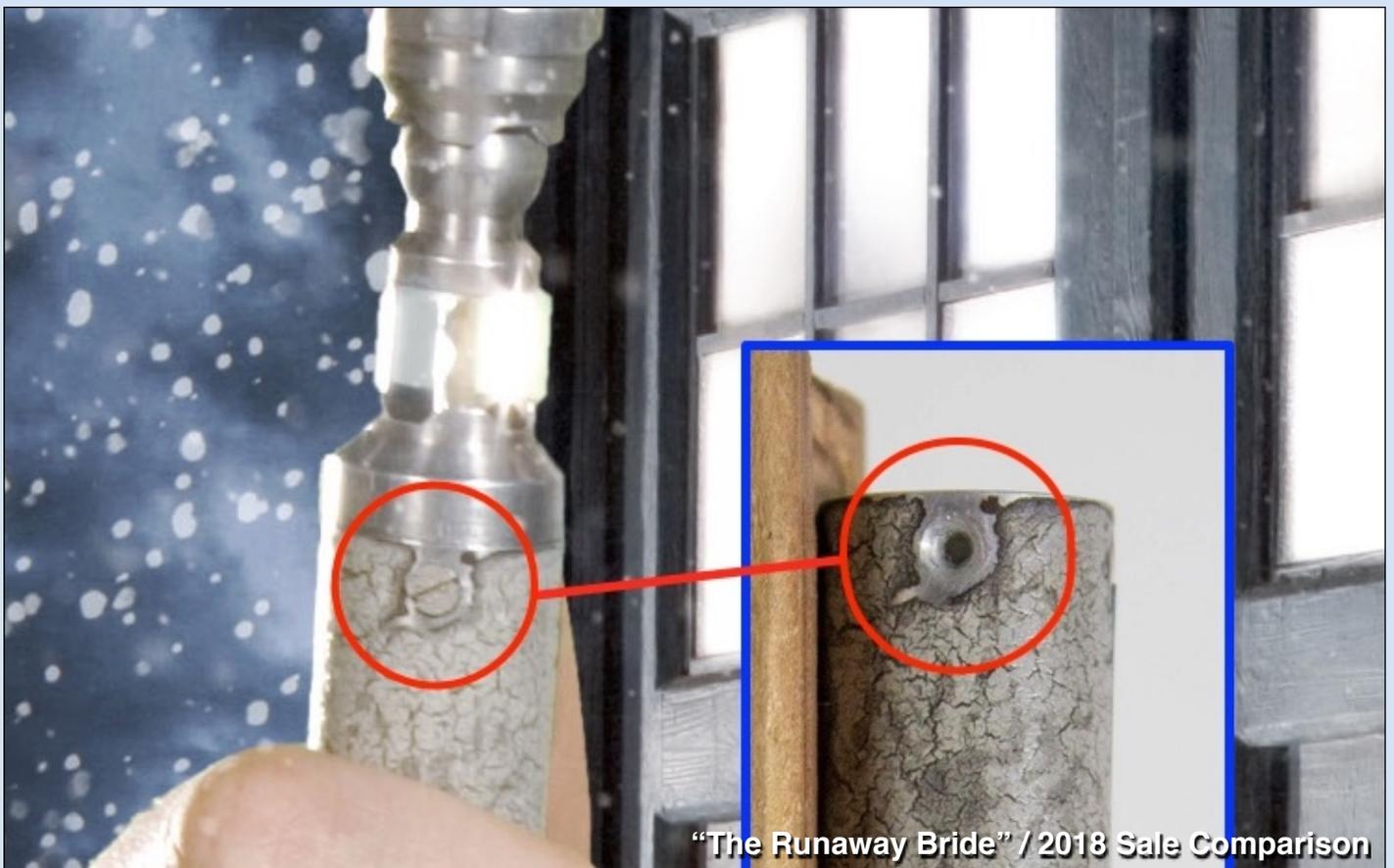
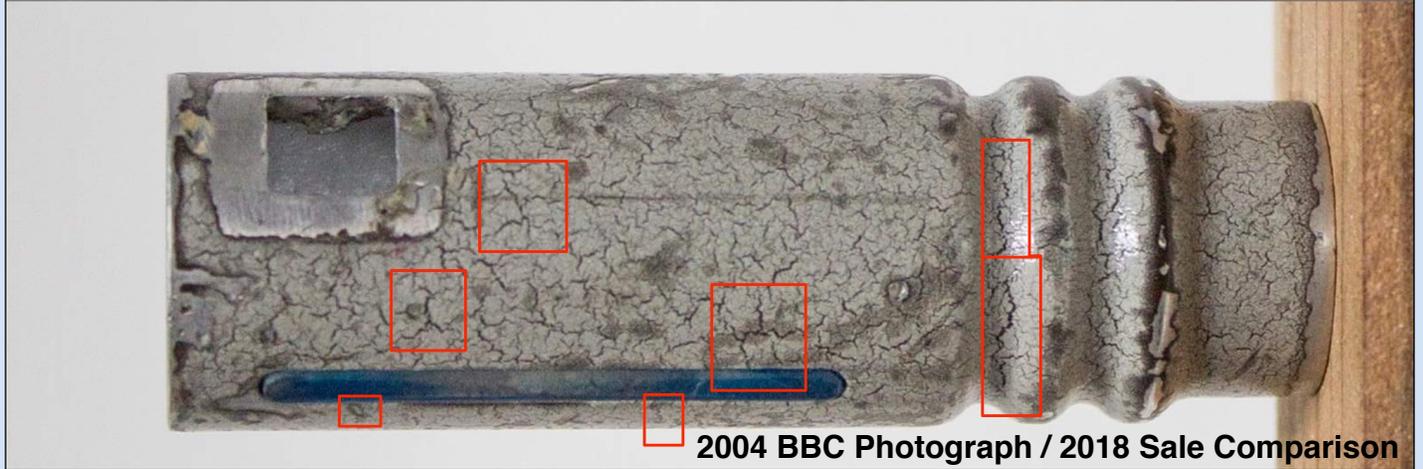
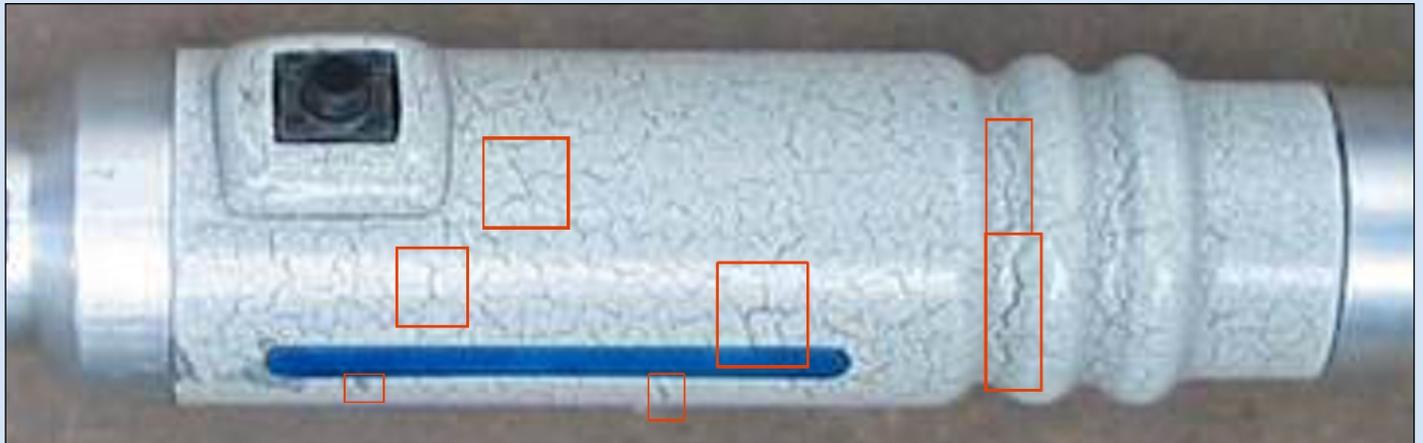
It should be noted that both Aztec props (Colony Cream/Wide Slider & Grey) had the emitter head aligned so that the space between the struts was centered with the activation button, although at a first glance of a 2004 production photo of the grey prop, it appeared as though it could have been aligned differently, however this was actually not the case. A closer look reveals that the collar is set for an alignment with the space between the struts, which means that the Aztec props did not have a design element in place to stop the

emitter heads from spinning while being set to the desired lengths. This is also evident in various episodes from Series 1 through 3 where the Grey Aztec emitter head is offset from the collar alignment, which always stays true to the space between the struts.



In early 2018, the original Grey Aztec body went up for sale by a private owner. In an effort to prove the lineage of the sonic part, the new owner - Brian Uiga - compared photos of the body in its current state to the 2004 BBC Photograph of the Grey Aztec Sonic. This comparison brought to light an interesting fact about the prop; even though the surviving body had significant wear, such as bare metal areas, black grime from hand oils and use, and the missing button frame, the aged Aztec body matched perfectly with the 2004 photo - crackle line, for crackle line. This side by side comparison proved that the Grey Aztec prop had never been repainted during its three years of use, from its introduction in Series 1 through to its final use in the end of Series 3.







Since we now know that the Grey Aztec was never repainted, the only intentional alterations took place for the filming of the Series 3. The first changes were seen in the Christmas Special; “The Runaway Bride”, and were retained throughout the filming of Series 3. The clear acrylic rod had been replaced with a new one that had begun to frost on the inner canal, and the black & red wires were swapped out for two yellow wires instead. The second alteration can first be seen in “Daleks In Manhattan” and involved the end aluminum section being shortened on the top where it meets the handle; clearly seen in the still from “Human Nature” above. It is unclear whether the part was altered or replaced, however.



In Series 3 it's clear to see how significant the wear on the prop truly became, aside from the paint wear previously mentioned; the emitter head appears to have been hot glued in place with the teeth misaligned; from "Human Nature" through to the end of the Series, the emitter cage had large nicks on two of the struts, and the micro switch frame had fallen off by the recording of "The Lazarus Experiment", which was the fifth episode filmed, leaving the space it used to be attached, as bare metal. The button frame was also missing in "The Runaway Bride" promotional photos; however these images project a false timeline, according to Will Brooks, who was able to track down the original photographs. Will discovered that Catherine Tate was photographed separately just two weeks prior to David Tennant, whose shots were taken during the filming "Daleks In Manhattan". Of course, "Daleks in Manhattan" aired prior to "The Lazarus Experiment", so the frame can be seen missing just a couple episode prior to Lazarus, however the two part story was recored after "The Lazarus Experiment" was filmed.



Despite its battered appearance, the Grey Aztec was still used as the main sonic prop for David Tennant in Series 3, sharing some screen time with the Intermediate sonic.

Although the Grey Aztec was last used in Series 3 story "Last of the Time Lords", parts of it were later harvested by Nick Robatto to make one the Tennant Props for Series 4.

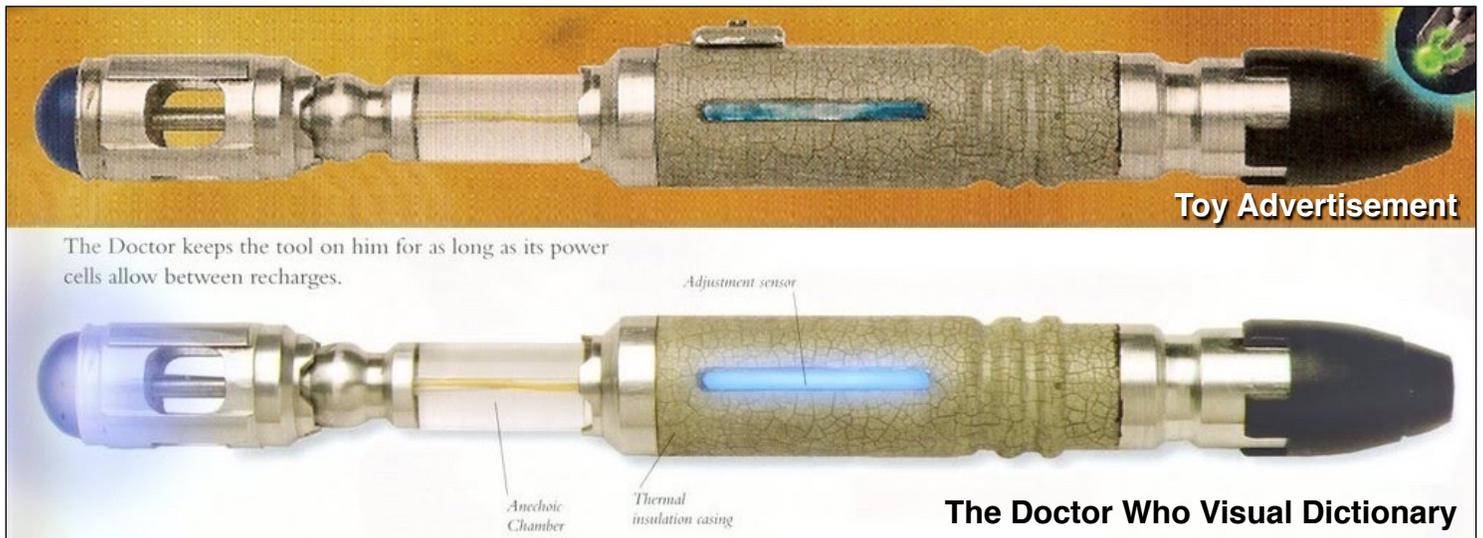
Before moving onto the next sonic, here's a fun fact:

It appears as though Christopher Eccleston had a bit of a Tom Baker moment during "Bad Wolf" with either the Grey Aztec or the Wide Slider Aztec; unfortunately it's not clear which prop was in the scene due to how it was held. Many may recall the famous story from Tom Baker's first episode - "Robot" - where he pulled the sonic out of his jacket, and the emitter ring assembly had fallen off inside his pocket, which forced him to use the prop without it, in order to save them the trouble of reshooting the scene. Similarly, "In Bad Wolf" after the Doctor, Jack, and Lynda are arrested, an officer pulls the Sonic Screwdriver from the Doctor's pocket and asks "What is the purpose of this device, sir?", as he does this it's clear to see that the emitter bulb is missing, presumably having fallen off in Eccleston's pocket, with the LED seen sticking out of the emitter head. While no ad-libbing was needed in this case, the similarities were too fun not to mention, and with the wonder of editing, the bulb was back on the prop in the very next shot.



The Intermediate Sonic

Series 3 (aka The Temp Sonic)



The Intermediate sonic, as it has become known to fans, was first used by David Tennant as the main sonic prop for the 2006 Christmas Special; “The Runaway Bride”, with the grey Aztec as the secondary prop. Little is known of the exact origin of this prop unfortunately, although the handle was still in Nick Robatto’s workshop as of January 2013, with what appears to be a resin emitter head and collar attached. Nick, of course, has worked on the series since 2004 as a prop maker, and has been responsible for making all of the Sonic Screwdrivers since “Voyage of the Damned” through to the currently filming Series 12; “currently” as of the time of writing this piece.

Since Nick had the body in his possession, I reached out to him to see what he could tell me. According to him, the Intermediate sonic was made by Mark Cordory, who also worked on the show as a prop/set maker since 2004. However, when I contacted Mark, recalled making resin stunt props of the Sonic Screwdriver - one of which can clearly be seen

in “The Lazarus Experiment” - but had no recollection of working on the Intermediate prop. That said, I was recently able to piece together more history on this prop.



Photograph by Nick Robatto

After going over each episode of Series 3 again, it became clear that the two scenes previously thought to use the Wide Slider prop, had actually turned out to have been the Intermediate and the Grey Aztec instead. This finally explained where the emitter head, collar, and black end cap came from to make the Intermediate prop. The Colony Cream/Wide Slider Aztec was once again repurposed and given new parts to make the Intermediate sonic for “The Runaway Bride”.

The Intermediate’s design differed from the Aztecs in a few ways; the handle ridges were more squared, rather than the rounded ridges of the Aztecs. The Intermediate also had a much slimmer slider channel when compared with the Wide Slider Aztec, and it had a unique square/rectangular slider plate with two embedded slotted screw heads on either side of the activation button; which itself was also a slotted screw. The end aluminum section had a much wider diameter for its narrowest area, when compared with the Aztec sonics. It was

also painted with a lighter grey crackle finish, this time looking more liked cracked porcelain than the vein-like pattern seen on the previous three variations of the prop. Interestingly, the emitter cage doesn’t seat all the way down on the ball joint, as we can see a of couple millimeters of the base on the top of the ball joint. Lastly, unlike the Aztecs, the Intermediate Sonic only ever had yellow wires within a frosted canal acrylic rod.



“The Runaway Bride”



“The Runaway Bride”



Photograph by Nick Robatto

It should be noted that the Intermediate sonic prop, as well as a couple of scenes in the Series 3 opener; “Smith and Jones”, had caused some confusion as to when the two Tennant props were actually first used in the show. The two scenes in question involve the in story destruction of the Doctor’s Sonic Screwdriver, where the sonic - represented by the Grey Aztec - was destroyed after the Doctor used it to enhance the radiation output of a medical x-ray unit in order to stop a Slab from attacking him and Martha. Of course the “destroyed” sonic in the scene was only a resin stand-in made with battle damage, and not the real Aztec prop.

The second scene takes place at the end of the same episode where the Doctor tells Martha that he has made himself a new Sonic Screwdriver, and then causally flips the prop in

the air. Because of the “destruction” of the sonic, and the Doctor’s declaration of making himself a “new” sonic, many believed that the Nick Robatto made Tennant props were introduced in Series 3 for “Smith and Jones”, however this is not the case. When the Doctor show’s off his new sonic to Martha, three screw heads on the boxy slider plate can just be made out as he flips it in the air, indicating that the “new” sonic was actually the Intermediate Sonic prop, which was used for the first time just one episode before.

In fact, when taking a closer look at the individual scenes, it’s apparent that the most used sonic prop for Series 3 was actually the Grey Aztec; looking the worse for wear, with the Intermediate prop appearing a handful of times as a secondary prop.



The Intermediate Sonic “Smith and Jones”

Given that the Grey Aztec was the main sonic for Series 3, it becomes evident that scenes in “Smith and Jones” were never intended to explain any change in appearance of the sonic prop. These scenes couldn’t even have been meant to explain the yellow wires, as they were very visibly seen on the Grey Aztec prior to the sonic’s “destruction” as well.

**The Grey Aztec
“Smith and Jones”**

The final appearance of the Intermediate prop was in “Utopia” when the Doctor used it to fuse the coordinates of the TARDIS, locking them permanently so that the Master could only travel between the year one hundred trillion and the last place the Tardis landed; present day Earth. While the front of the prop is not visible within the scene, it is still easy to tell which prop was used; since David extends the emitter head within the scene, this tells us that the prop used could only have been the Intermediate prop. Of course it should go without saying that these couldn't have been the Tennant props, simply because they didn't exist yet.

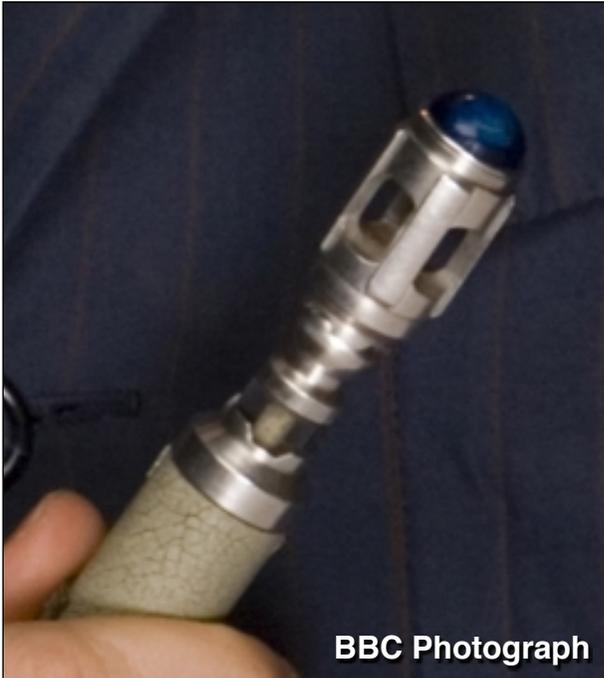


Of course, it could be argued that the final appearance of the Intermediate sonic was actually in “The Sound of Drums”, however these shots were flashback sequences from a scene in “Utopia”. That said, while we have established the final use of this prop as a whole, a few parts of the Intermediate (once known as the Colony Cream Aztec and Wide Slider Aztec) were later used to make the second Series 4 Tennant hero props.

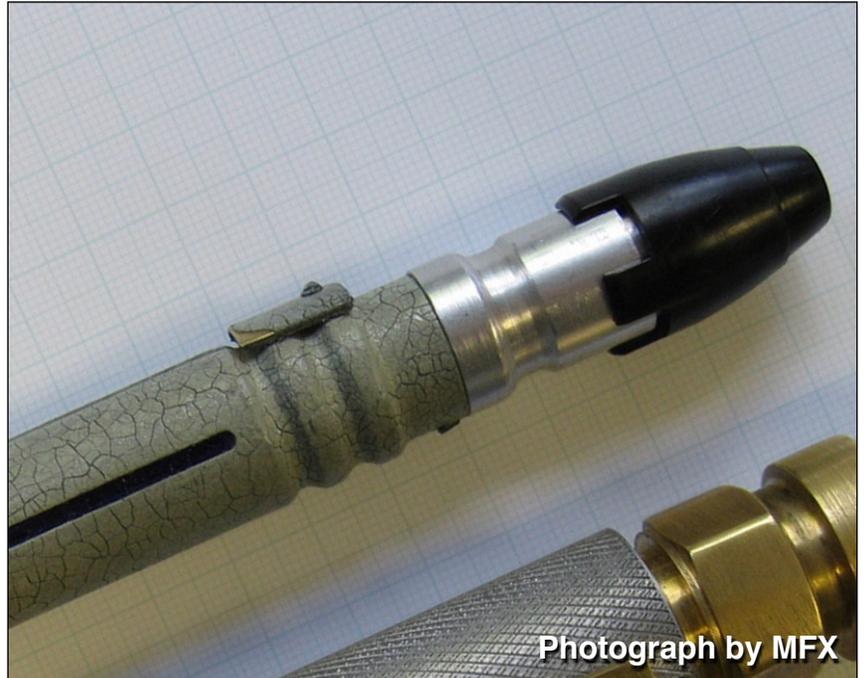


The Tennant Props

Series 4 - The Specials



BBC Photograph



Photograph by MFX

Thanks to a special feature on the Series 3 DVD/Blu-ray boxset, the timeline for the creation of the two Tennant Sonic Screwdriver Props is very easy to pinpoint. The special feature in question is Freema Agyeman's Back Stage Tour, where she takes us on a tour of the BBC studios and props department. This is significant because the feature was filmed during preproduction for the 2007 Christmas Special, "Voyage of the Damned", four months after Series 3 had wrapped.

In the tour Freema is excited to speak with Barry Jones, the Props Fabrication Manager, and says to him "You're revamping the Sonic or something, are you? I've heard.", to which Barry replies; "Yeah, um, Nick's (Robatto) been re-machining it." We then see a close up of one of the new Tennant sonics in its case, disassembled, and painted only in grey primer. Barry continues saying; "Its got an old body

there" then he picks up the old grey Aztec body - the same one that surfaced for sale in 2018 - which is very worn and battered, "You know, it's all got a little bit dog-eared where David's been throwing it around", followed by a montage of David Tennant using all the various Aztec props around from Series 3.

After the montage Barry continues again; "We are just in the process of just revamping it" and then he shows Freema the second new sonic from another case. This one is fully assembled, minus the blue bulb and still only painted with a grey primer, aside from the slider plate which is bare brass, and the emitter cage is fitted with a blue light LED. He continues one last time; "and it's this little LED in there. And uh, so that's just gotta be painted now and the crackle grey put on it and what have you."

With the creation timeline so clearly pinned down, I decided to reach out to Nick Robatto again to see what he could tell me about when he worked on these props. Nick said that he made the two new Tennant props by reusing the Aztec (Grey Aztec, and the Colony Cream Aztec/Wide Slider Aztec/Intermediate conversions) emitter heads, collars, and black end caps, and then machining all new parts for the rest of it.



Freema Agyeman's Back Stage Tour

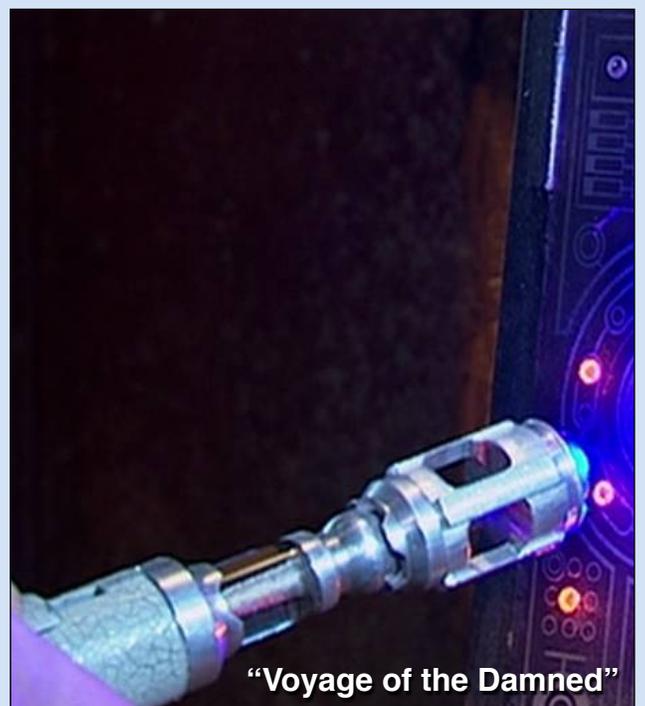


Freema Agyeman's Back Stage Tour

The Tennant props present a third ridge shape for the handle; this time they are a bit more bell shaped with flat edges, and since they were hand milled, one of them has softer flat edges. They have an even slimmer slider channel than the Intermediate, and a simple flat/curved slider plate with a small peg for an activation button. The Tennant props started out with yellow wires and the frosted canal acrylic rod look that was first used on Grey Aztec and Intermediate sonic for Series 3. The emitter bulbs were also replaced with new ones that had more domed tops, and both props were painted with a grey crackle finish that once again looked like cracked porcelain. The two props differed did have one visible difference pertaining to the head alignment. One prop had the slider channel aligned with an emitter strut, while the other prop had the channel aligned with the space between the struts.



Freema Agyeman's Back Stage Tour



"Voyage of the Damned"

The two new Robatto props remained largely unchanged from their first use in "Voyage of the Damned" all the way through to Tennant's swan song – "The End of Time" - with only two notable alterations made for the Series 4 Specials; first a small slotted screw was added just below the slider channel of both props, by the time of the Christmas Special, "The Next Doctor". The second change involved the grub screws on the back, prior to "The Next Doctor" they were black hex head grub screws, however as can be seen in "The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith", they were later replaced with slotted grub screws that were painted to match the grey body.



"Voyage of the Damned"



SJA: "The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith"



"Turn Left"



"The Next Doctor" BTS Photograph



Photograph by MFX 2009



Photograph by MFX 2009



BBC Photograph 2009
(Possibly photoshopped or in need of repair)

The last on screen appearance for one of the Tennant sonics was in “The End of Time”, David’s final story from his era. While the last scenes that Tennant had filmed with his props were for the “The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith” from Series 3 of “The Sarah Jane Adventures”; although this story aired before “The End of Time”.

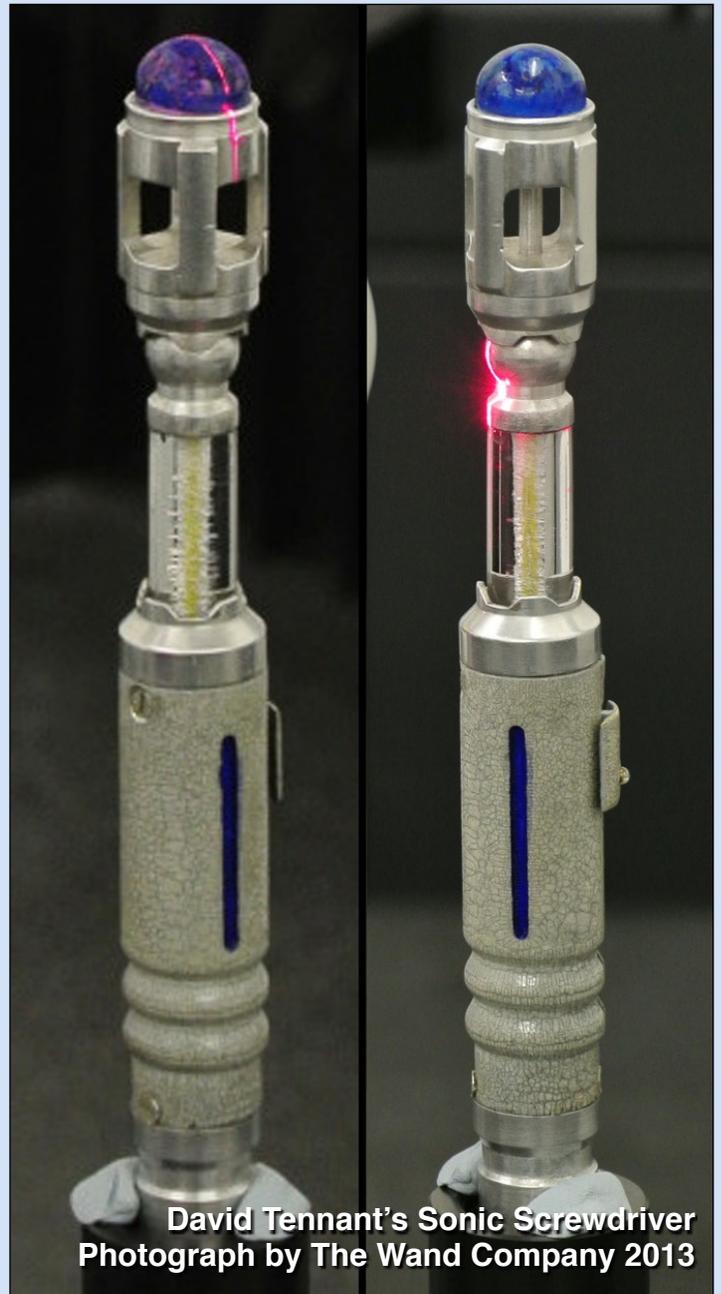


“The End of Time” Part 2

When David left the show in 2010, the Tennant Prop 1 was given to him as a keepsake from his era. In 2013 David lent this sonic to The Wand Company, to be 3D scanned, in order to make the officially licensed Tenth Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver Universal Remote Control.

The Wand Co. shared four high resolution pictures of this prop, where the alterations made to it for the Specials Year can be seen. The top back grub screw had been replaced with a slotted grub screw, as seen in "The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith", while the lower grub screw appears to have been swapped with a regular slotted screw; like the one used on the front of the prop, below the slider. The crackle finish appears to be fully grey, again like "The Wedding of Sarah Jane Smith", rather than the yellowed tone seen in the 2009 photos by Millennium FX. It is unclear whether or not the prop was repainted or cleaned for the Specials Year, as the previous photos of the Tennant Prop 1 are not detailed enough to compare the cracks.

The Wand Company's picture also confirmed Nick Robatto's recollection of reusing Aztec parts for the Tennant props, since the photo shows a clear view of two nicks in the emitter head struts. These nicks can be seen on the Grey Aztec in Series 3 while the Doctor makes the Perception Filter TARDIS keys in Episode 12, "The Sound of Drums", and when Martha presents John Smith with the Grey Aztec in Episode 8, "Human Nature".



David Tennant's Sonic Screwdriver
Photograph by The Wand Company 2013



The Grey Aztec "The Sound of Drums" from Series 3

The Tennant Props (Redux)

Series 5: "The Eleventh Hour"



"The Eleventh Hour" Prop BTS Photograph

The final on screen appearance for the second Tennant prop was in Matt Smith's debut story, "The Eleventh Hour" for Series 5. Here it had two more alterations made to it since its use in the Series 4 Specials. The first change involved adding two Philips head screws in place of both of the retention grub screws on the back of the prop, although these must have been added during the filming of the story because they do not appear in all the scenes showing the back of the prop. The second alteration was that the main body was repainted with a blue hued crackle finish, rather than the usual grey. Since we know that David's own personal sonic was repainted with the a grey crackle paint after The Series 4 Specials, it would seem likely that the blue tone for Series 5 was a deliberate choice, although there is no official word on why.

Also of note is that the Tennant prop used in "The Eleventh Hour" was the one with the emitter strut lined up with the slider channel, while the one given to David had the space between the struts aligned with the channel. Although it doesn't appear to be a perfect alignment on David's prop.

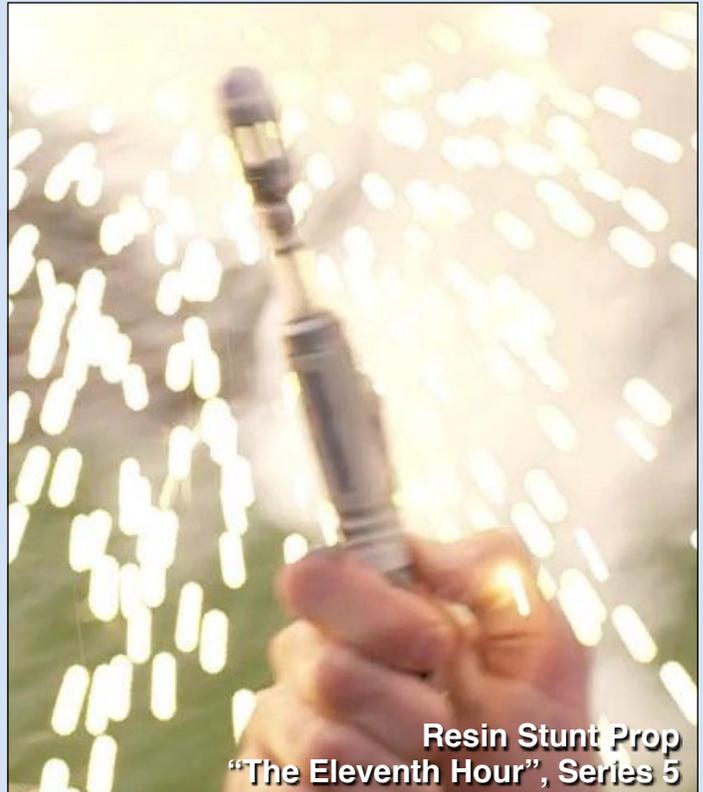


"The Eleventh Hour", Series 5

The regular usage of the Dan Walker designed RTD era Sonic Screwdriver came to an end in “The Eleventh Hour” after the Doctor’s sonic was destroyed - in story, that is - while using it to try to gain the attention of the Atraxi. Of course, the destroyed sonic was just a resin prop made to look destroyed, as well as one that could hand pyrotechnics. As for the actual second Tennant prop itself, as of early 2018 it had been confirmed to be in a private collection, although the owner is anonymous.



“The Eleventh Hour”, Series 5



Resin Stunt Prop
“The Eleventh Hour”, Series 5



“The Eleventh Hour”, Series 5



“The Eleventh Hour” Prop BTS Photograph

The MFX Replica

Series 7 & 10



The MFX Prototypes

In 2009 Millennium FX released the first officially licensed replica of the Tenth Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver, with a limited run of 500. Neill Gorton, owner of Millennium FX, and his team have worked on the show since 2004, although their department was usually in charge of the makeup, special effects, and robot suits. However, neither he or anyone on his team had ever made a Sonic Screwdriver prop for use in the show, prior to making their replica.

When the MFX sonic was first released, it unfortunately led to heated debates among fans about the screen accuracy of the replica. In fairness to the fans, the handle body was made of brass, whereas the real handle was aluminum. The crackle paint was not the grey

cracked porcelain used in Series 4, but instead a yellow vein-like crackle finish, with a brown base coat; a color chosen because the paint on the original props had yellowed by the time MFX was able to measure them. There were also various differences in dimensions when compared to the original props.



Despite the screen accuracy debate, many fans were thrilled to finally have a replica of the Tenth Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver in their collections. Something that wouldn't happen again until The Wand Company released their the Universal Remote Control Sonic Screwdriver Replica in 2013, however, even though that was made from a 3D scan of an original prop, it still came with its own set of inaccuracies.



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The Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver

Designed as an exact replica of the Doctor's Sonic Screwdriver used during filming. All the materials, measurements and finishes have been referenced from the actual filming prop.

This Sonic features the thumb slider of the original hero filming prop and is made from aluminium, brass and acrylic just like the original.

Just like the prop this replica has a working LED in the tip which is illuminated by a switch mounted on the slider.

There will be **only 500** of these replicas made and they will be sold on a strictly first come first served basis. **NEVER AGAIN WILL WE MAKE A REPLICA OF THIS SONIC SCREWDRIVER** so this is your one and only chance to own the most authentic and accurate replica of the Doctor's Sonic.

The Sonics will be made individually by the team at Millennium FX, but differ from our 'Authentic' range because we did not make the original prop. That was created by the BBC art department, who kindly allowed us to use their screen-used prop for reference.

Price: £219 + VAT

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The MFX Email Flyer



The MFX Replica

The Wand Company remote wasn't the only notable moment for an official replica in 2013; For the 50th Anniversary Special of Doctor Who, the production team was in need of Sonic Screwdriver props for David Tennant's return to the show, and rather than risk damaging David's original, the team made other plans. Which brings things back to Neill Gorton, who had lent the production four of his own personal MFX replicas for David to use in "The Day of the Doctor". After filming, all four of Neill's replicas were returned to him, however, sometime after the airing of the 50th Anniversary Special, three of the four have been sold into private collections.

The inclusion of the MFX sonics in "The Day of the Doctor" has retroactively made these replicas a perfect screen match to a screen used Sonic Screwdriver, which was pretty great to see for those of us who own one, and who stuck by Neill through the debates. It also gave us a piece of the 50th Anniversary of Doctor Who in our very own hands.



"The Day of the Doctor"



"The Day of the Doctor" Photoshoot

There was one more curtain call in the show for an MFX replica, just four years after the 50th Anniversary Special.

For the Series 10 opener, “The Pilot”, a fan owned MFX replica was used as part of the set dressing for the Doctor’s office. The replica was arranged, with other versions of the Sonic Screwdriver, sitting atop the Doctor’s desk within a mid 19th century lignum vitae string pot.

Rhys Purton had sent his MFX replica to Nick Robatto for repairs to have the nonfunctioning blue LED replaced, and the replica was still in Nick’s care during the filming of Series 10. Nick had already used the replica in various photos of his own while it was in his possession, so when he got a call from the BBC saying that they were in need of a Tenth Doctor version of the Sonic Screwdriver to accompany the other past versions for the Series 10 episode, “The Pilot”, Nick took it upon himself to add the Rhys Purton’s MFX into the string pot. This not only fulfilled a need for the production team, but it also made

Rhys’ MFX replica a screen used Sonic Screwdriver prop.



Photo from Rhys Purton’s Instagram

And there you have it, that’s the history of the Doctor’s RTD Era Sonic Screwdriver props, so far as we currently know it.



“The Pilot”

The Hero Props

A Side By Side Comparison

The Colony Cream Aztec /
Wide Slider Aztec / Intermediate Sonic

The Grey
Aztec

The Tennant Props:
Prop 1 & Prop 2

The MFX
Replica*



*The MFX Replica pictured in this comparison is from my own replica Sonic Screwdriver collection.