

An Introduction to Georgian Drinking Glasses Part I

with Price Guide

by John Ainsley

A Brief History of Glass

Glass is eminently functional and today remains one of the few essential materials superseded. When molten it may be manipulated to any desired state, when cool it can be subjected to almost any process; such a nature offers considerable aesthetic potency.

In its natural state it exists only rarely as obsidian, a dark vitreous lava, or as rock crystal, a clear form of quartz. In manufacture it is made from one of the various forms of silica such as sand, quartz or flint. In practice and in tradition, fluxes of carbonate of potash acquired from burnt vegetation or carbonate of soda acquired from natural mineral deposits were added. As a generalisation potash glass was manufactured in Northern Europe where there were abundant forests. Potash glass has a greenish tint. Soda glass usually came from the Mediterranean, for example Venetian, a fine clear glass which was called *crystallo*. The manufacture of glass began in the Middle East more than 3,500 years ago and all of the basic manufacturing techniques that we know of today have been in existence since then with the exception of blowing, which appears to have been invented in Syria in the first century AD.

Glass in England

The earliest manufacture in England can be traced to French immigrants starting with *Lawrence Vitrearius* in 1226 at Chiddingfold. Production up to the fifteenth century was mainly of window glass for churches and monasteries with some vessel glass for medical or chemical use. The manufacture of urinals is also recorded.

In 1567 *John Le Carré*, a gentleman glassmaker, arrived in London. He obtained a license to make the Venetian *crystallo*, now popular amongst the nobility of Europe. After his death in 1572 his expert glassmaker *Jacob Verzelini* revived the lapsed patent and established quality glassmaking in England. He is buried in Downes Church in Kent. Glassmaking began to spread both north and west. By 1615 *Sir Robert Mansell* had gained control of the patent. He made *crystal* in the *façon de Venise* using soda derived from barilla imported since Le Carré's days.

Under Mansell the industry became structured. He offered manufacturers licenses based on loyalties and market restrictions. Now with coal-fired furnaces, production settled into those areas where fuel was available and the sea offered cheap transport to the markets for the finished products, namely London, Bristol and Newcastle.

Soon the retailers began to organise themselves, gaining a Charter in 1635 for the incorporation of the Glass Sellers Company which was to become a Guild in 1664. This Charter gave them sole rights to sell vessel glass and mirrors.

Glasses bearing engravings with English names and dates are attributable to the Verzelini period but none can be attributed to Mansell. Hence they are known as *façon de Venise*; that is a Northern European style derived from Venice. The mid seventeenth century saw a hiatus in its production as Puritanism gripped the nation, relieved by the Restoration of Charles II. Earlier in 1612 *Antonio Neri* had published his treatise *L'Arte Vitrearia*. Its translation into English in 1662 by *Dr Christopher Merrett*, a member of the Royal Society, was significant for the history of English glass.

From the 1670s the term *flint* (clearly associated with quality) begins to appear in invoices. Merrett's translation mentions *flint* as being associated with an 'incomparable pure and white crystal metal'. And *flint* was the term used to describe Ravenscroft's new 'glass of lead' resembling 'rock crystal' and perfected by 1676, representing the most important invention in the entire history of English glassmaking.



A good *Façon de Venise* goblet, honeycomb moulded knob, flared folded foot, probably Hall in Tyrol, 2nd half 16thC, 21.5cm high, 13.5cm wide. Woolley & Wallis, Salisbury. May 02. HP: £10,000. ABP: £11,500.



Dutch-engraved light baluster goblet, bobbin knopped stem, conical foot, 19cm high, c1750. (Minute foot rim chip). Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 02. HP: £1,850. ABP: £2,127.



A baluster wine glass, c1730. Sotheby's, B'shurst. Oct 99. HP: £650. ABP: £747.



A wine glass, with bell shaped bowl, on multi-spiral air twist stem with shoulder central knobs, 16cm high, c1750. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Apr 00. HP: £400. ABP: £460.



A baluster wine glass, c1750. Sotheby's, Billingshurst. Oct 99. HP: £380. ABP: £437.



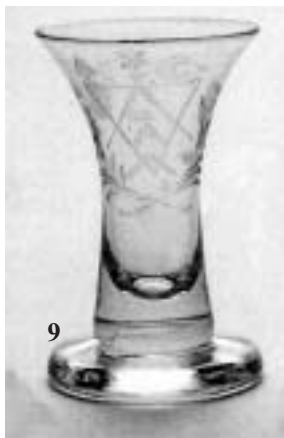
A large wine glass, with ogée shaped bowl, on multi-spiral opaque twist stem with ply bands outside gauze, 19.5cm high, c1770. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Apr 00. HP: £350. ABP: £402.



Engraved opaque twist cordial glass, perhaps Jacobite, bowl engraved with a moth and rosebud, supported on a double series stem and conical foot, 16cm high, the glass c1770. (Small footrim chip). Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £550. ABP: £632.



An engraved plain stemmed firing glass, ogée bowl with a band of stylised flowers, terraced foot, 9cm high, mid 18thC. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £160. ABP: £184.

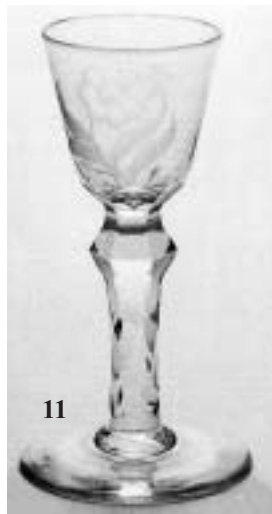


A jelly or firing glass, knop stem and substantial circular foot, 10.5cm high, mid 18thC. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £45. ABP: £51.

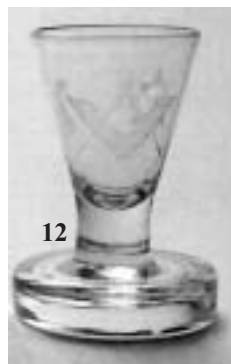


A plain stemmed firing glass, the drawn trumpet bowl with initials JW, 10cm high, mid 18thC. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £95. ABP: £109.

To contact John Ainsley, please e-mail: enquiries@georgianglass.com. Please try to include images where possible.



Engraved facet stemmed wine glass, conical foot, 14.3cm high, c1790. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £280. ABP: £322.



Pair Masonic firing glasses, conical bowls, 9.5cm high, 19thC. Dreweatt Neate, Newbury. Jun 01. HP: £220. ABP: £253.

Calcined flint was used as an alternative form of silica to the Spanish barilla. As the introduction of lead oxide was initially a commercial secret, Ravenscroft's new glass could be described as improved flint. The benefits were a glass of greater transparency, whiter colour and greater refractive properties than the Venetian *cristallo*. Now, glass of considerable thickness could be made which retained the transparency of the thinly blown *cristallo*, and its softness was a considerable attraction for the decorators. By about 1690 lead glass was being widely used, fashion finally turned away from Venice. The different handling properties of lead glass brought it to the tables and the taverns of England, an ever-increasing market promoting a truly English style, in antique terms now known as Georgian glass.

Summary of Types

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries glasses were manufactured in a type known as *façon de Venise*, meaning literally 'in the style of Venice' (see 1). After Ravenscroft's 'glass of lead' the last thirty years of the seventeenth century saw an increasingly English style develop, particularly after 1685 through to 1710 characterised by the heavy baluster. These glasses today only rarely fetch less than one thousand pounds and are much more likely to fetch several thousand pounds or more (see 2).

The period from 1710-15 to about 1750 is that of lighter glasses called balusters which copied all of the complex stem formations of the heavy balusters, followed by the balustroids, typified by kit kat glasses which always included a baluster in the stem. The latter part of this period saw moulded pedestal stems and two and three-piece plain stemmed glasses (see 3 and 4).

Air twist and incised twist stems follow from the 1740s to 1760s which also saw composite stems introduced. Opaque twist stems follow from c1755-1780 with mixed and colour twist stems also produced during this period. Most Georgian drinking glasses sell in the hundreds of pounds. Colour twists, being much rarer fetch thousands of pounds. Glasses of all types, engraved with the symbolism of the Scottish Jacobite movement are also expensive. The most expensive glasses of all are usually enamelled and traceable to the Billby output of Newcastle upon Tyne in the eighteenth century (see 5, 6 and 7).

Finally faceted stems follow from about 1770-1810 (see 11). During this period, with the opportunity for stem ingenuity exhausted many glasses, with only very poor, rudimentary stems were produced (see 8, 9, 10 and 12). This group includes the common rummer (see 13 and 14). By about 1830 the greatest period in the history of English glass was coming to an end. New methods of manufacture which compromised the skilled craftsmen were in place. The industrial revolution in England was in full flow. Georgian glass had however now assured its place in history.



Pair of Regency rummers, c1810, lemon squeezer base. Rosebery's London. Sep 03. HP: £200. ABP: £230.



19thC rummer engraved with Masonic symbols 'J.A.G.', bulbous knopped stem and star cut base, 5.75in high. Canterbury Auction Galleries. Aug 03. HP: £360. ABP: £414.