

Identifying Georgian Drinking Glasses

An Introduction to Georgian Drinking Glasses. Part II

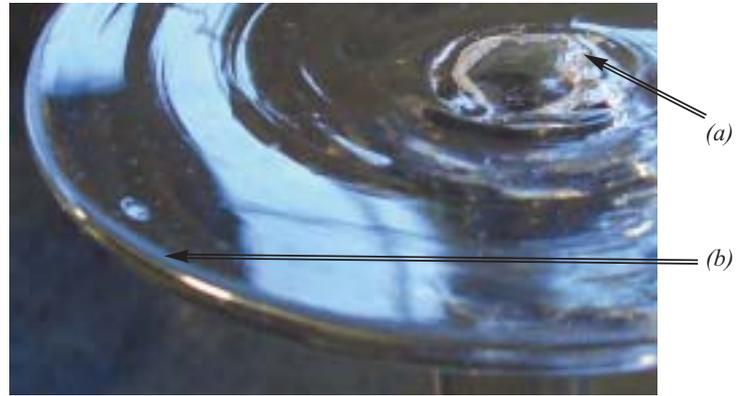
By John Ainsley



Left: wheel engraved vines from a large goblet dating from c1740-50: good, genuine period engraving.



Left: Magnified view showing the wear and tear - the nicks and knocks of centuries. This does not detract from the value of the glass.



Above: fig. 1. Note in the centre of the foot the clear pontil mark (a) made as the pontil rod was snapped from the glass. Note the extensive wear at the edge of the foot (b). A magnifying glass and good lighting are essential for spotting such fine detail.

In my *Introduction to Georgian Drinking Glasses Part I* in the November/December 2005 edition of *Antiques Info*, I covered a brief history of glass, a longer survey of glass in England from the middle ages and finally a summary of all of the types and when they developed between the end of the seventeenth and the start of the nineteenth century. Here the story continues with a broad look at the current market including pitfalls, plus a point by point recognition analysis which should seriously help the reader to enter the market and begin to form a collection with confidence. Both the positive recognition factors at each stage and the pitfalls and problems associated with the analysis will be integrated, exposing the reader to a balanced discussion which should help prevent misleading assumptions being formed.

The hunt for Georgian drinking glasses isn't quite like hunting for the more common collectibles. You could trawl around the more common antiques and collectables fairs and centres for months and not even find one good specimen. If you do there is usually only the very odd one in the ownership of a dealer who may know only very little about it. As a consequence prices can be inflated, or you take the risk of buying a glass that is misdescribed, has hidden damage, is a nineteenth or twentieth century reproduction or is a downright fake. At one recent fair I attended, an exhibitor was displaying several dozen Georgian drinking glasses. Every one of them had had their feet or rims ground down with no mention of this on the labels and all at the full prices of good, undamaged glasses. At another fair a dealer carried a similar number of glasses, all marked up as Georgian and all at the full price, yet every glass was brand spanking

new! The general market is not the place for the novice to begin to buy Georgian drinking glasses!

Start by buying 'the Bible' on the subject. *Eighteenth Century English Drinking Glasses, An Illustrated Guide* by L M Bickerton, published by the Antique Collectors Club at £49.50 (available from the AIS Bookshop. Call 0870 3506096). It contains over 1200 illustrations featuring every type of glass. It will be the best buy you will ever make. Never skimp on books. Every book I have ever purchased has repaid itself over and over again. Study the text and familiarise yourself with the shapes and the forms of Georgian drinking glasses. Here is the starting point, recognising shapes at a distance. With practice Georgian drinking glasses can be spotted a hundred feet and more away, drawing collectors across rooms and open spaces.

One of the best hunting grounds is the twice yearly glass fair, now held at The Heritage Motor Centre at Gaydon, Warwickshire, in May and November. There is always one or more specialist dealers at most antiques and fine art fairs around the UK. Here you will get what you pay for: the real thing, fully described on an invoice and guaranteed by a specialist dealer. Never buy an antique glass or, for that matter, any antique unless you get an invoice which fully describes your purchase, its condition and approximate age. And don't ignore fine art auctions. Many contain a few examples and quite frequently whole collections. Again there is usually some consumer protection relating to the lot description. Check the terms and conditions of sale in the catalogue and check with the auctioneer if you require any further clarification.

Now for my ABC of recognition from a distance. Study the forms. These are unique. Later copies, reproductions or fakes, or doctored glasses are rarely quite right. The particular nuances of history are gone, along with the craftsmen, the tools, and the material. Beware, however, as there are always exceptions to any rule. Glasses have been reproduced which are very close to the originals. Others have been reproduced by craftsmen using original tools and methods and chemically accurate material. These can be testing and even threatening to experts. Luckily most are awful and represent no threat to anybody with knowledge of the subject. At a distance genuine Georgian drinking glasses have a grey appearance - the colour is darker than modern glass which is much brighter and whiter. There are exceptions: nineteenth and even early twentieth century glass, up to about George V, may still have a grey appearance.

Finally, still without handling the glass, note the much wider feet on most eighteenth century glasses. When placed together, feet touch first. In modern glasses the bowls always touch first. Press the rim of a Georgian glass into your palm to leave a white mark. Reverse the glass and note that the foot nearly always extends beyond the mark made by the rim.

Now pick up your glass. The most important part for recognition purposes is the foot. Underneath in the centre is usually a pontil mark, that is a snapped off scar of glass where the foot was held by a pontil rod (see fig. 1), enabling the gaffer of the team to work on the bowl after it was cut from the blowing iron. Such feet are usually domed (see fig. 2 and 4) thus ensuring that the rough pontil cannot touch and damage the surface it stands on.

Late in the eighteenth century it became the practice to ground out pontils, giving a hollowed appearance to the centre of the foot. As the late eighteenth century progressed, ground out pontils became more common and feet gradually flattened as the need to protect surfaces disappeared. Note that in the first half of the eighteenth century folded feet were common but began to give way to the plain foot around 1750. Note the handmade feel of the foot, and the concentric striations and for the first time apply a magnifying glass to the bottom edge where the glass would meet surfaces. There should be heavy 'moss' wear which will extend over a greater area of the foot if it is flattened (see fig. 2). All genuine Georgian drinking glasses, having survived for 200-300, years have this and other wear unless the foot rim has been ground away to hide any chipping.

Check the edge of the foot very closely as you rotate the glass. It should be as shiny and fire polished as the rest of the glass and there will be very tiny nicks here and there where it has come into contact with other glasses over the centuries (see fig. 1 and 4). Apart from tumblers and other smaller dram type glasses, many Georgian glasses were made in either two, three and even four parts. Feet were welded into stems and

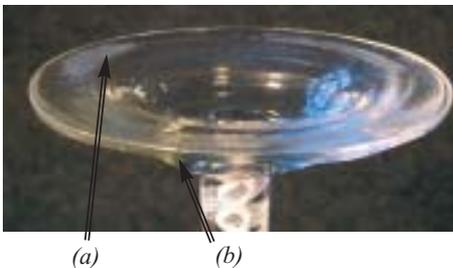


Fig. 2. This double series opaque twist glass with a domed foot shows intensive 'moss-like' wear (a) on the flat areas of the glass which would make contact with surfaces. Note also the nicks and wear on the edge of the foot (b), none of these being large enough to detract from the value in any way. All of this wear is a desirable feature of a genuine Georgian drinking glass.

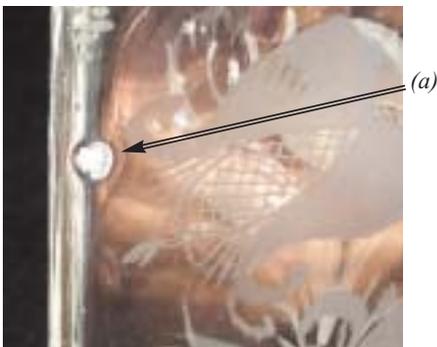


Fig. 5. A larger than average stone in a Low Countries decanter from the second half of the 18thC.

stems welded into bowls, except in drawn trumpet type glasses where the stem is an extension of the bowl. Sometimes stems are made in two parts called composites, and together make up a four part glass.

Check the bowl. Most eighteenth century glasses should have horizontal striations made by contact with the tool as the glass was spun. Look through the bowl towards a light source. There should be tool marks - near vertical 'folds' where the tool first touched the glass as it was spun (see fig. 3). These marks are an important indication of eighteenth century manufacture. From about 1780 the striations and the tool marks begin to disappear as wooden inserts were applied to the tool and the resultant contact enabled much clearer bowls to be made. Later Georgian glasses, particularly after 1800, have very clear bowls. Where the bowl was cut off the blowing iron, sometimes a small hump was left on the rim. Check with your fingers that the edge is perfectly rounded and has not been ground.

Beware of faked wear, usually produced on a grind stone. It shouldn't fool anybody familiar with the real thing. Reproductions frequently have hand made pontil marks and sometimes they are even moulded! Check the glass for imperfections such as stones, seeds and air bubbles. They are usu-

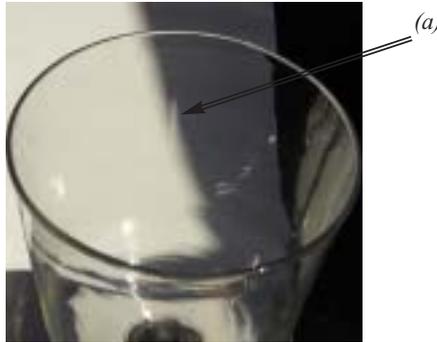


Fig. 3. Tool marks (a), near vertical lines or folds appearing near the rim, are caused by contact with the tool as the gaffer shaped the bowl. These tool marks and the horizontal striations disappear towards the end of the eighteenth century. See text for an explanation. Dating on one or two features only is risky - every feature described here must be present to ensure authenticity.

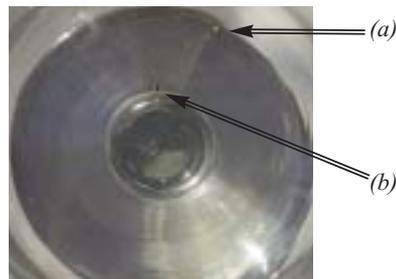


Fig. 6. The bowl of a Georgian drinking glass, c1750, showing stones (a) and seeds (b) both impurities in the glass mixture.

ally present in genuine glasses. Stones are usually whitish foreign bodies which have fallen into the batch and seeds are blackish, foreign objects from the glass mix (see fig. 5 and 6). Finally, hold the foot or stem and tap your fingernail against the rim. Lead glass will ring clearly for some time, non-lead glasses will not.

Many of the features discussed can appear on nineteenth and even early twentieth century glasses: a darker colour, hand made features, striations, stones, seeds, air bubbles can indicate glasses up to George V, but never later. English lead crystal has been continuously made since its invention by Ravenscroft in the late seventeenth century. But all of the features previously described can only occur for all practical purposes on genuine period drinking glasses. Above all, study the forms of eighteenth century glasses. Only then check out all of the other features. Make friends with specialist dealers, generally a fraternity willing to discuss their subject and share their knowledge with a cordiality rarely matched in other fields. John Ainsley is always willing to receive enquiries on Georgian drinking glasses. Please e-mail enquiries@georgianglass.com and include pictures where possible.

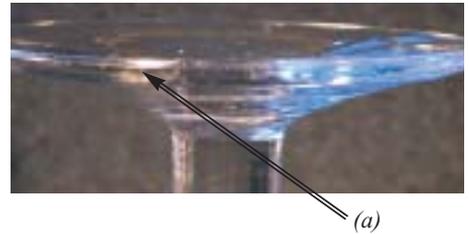


Fig. 4. The outside rim of the foot of a genuine Georgian drinking glass will usually show nicks and wear marks from several centuries of contact with other glasses. Their presence against the fire-polished finish indicates not only genuine age, but also that the foot has not been ground down.



Fig. 7. A close up of genuine wheel engraving on a Georgian drinking glass from c1750. Note the presence of an impurity in the mix just above the bird's head. Note all over the surface minute nicks and scratches associated with 250 years of age and use. These elements are present in almost all genuine Georgian drinking glasses.