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Twenty Years to Islington

Twenty years to Islington ... and some other English weights on the way

My collection appeared complete to most people, I had weights from every maker, antique and modern apart from one, the Islington Glass Works. They are so rare with just 5 known to me that I had given up ever owning one, until last year. My patience was eventually rewarded, but it's been a long, long road to get there, and it came at a time when, like many collectors of my age, I was thinking of downsizing my collection, however before I bow out from collecting, here are a few identification tips on English weights.

Nineteenth century English weights are the worst possible items to identify. We have almost nothing concrete on which to base our assumptions, speculations, downright guess work, or just because we think it is.

We have just two snippets of information on English antique weights on which to base the whole of the 19th century's paperweight production:

- George Bacchus and the Islington Glass Works did exhibit at the 1849 Bingley Hall exhibition in Birmingham and their paperweights were mentioned in press reports which said their "*letter weights were the equal of the foreign imports that crowded the stationers and fancy goods shops of the time*"
- There are a few weights signed with an IGW cane which almost certainly refers to the Islington Glass Works

Bacchus and Islington also exhibited at the 1851 Great Exhibition in London, but no mention of paperweights were given in press reports. Both of these two glassworks were large and had a history of producing quality glassware for the table and ornamental ware. Both had been awarded medals at various exhibitions for their wares.

Armed with these two facts, the collector of English paperweights tip toes through a minefield of assumptions.

Living close to the Birmingham and Stourbridge areas my collection contained a fair reflection of the type of English weights produced in this locality over the last 150 years or so. The rarest, was the Islington variety and my collection was devoid of a weight from this glassworks until 2002.



Figure 1. Islington Paperweight with Horses

Until now all the paperweights attributed to Islington were blessed with either an “IGW” signature cane or a “Black horse” silhouette.



Figure 2. Paneled New Islington Paperweight

The canes in this new paperweight discovery contained canes that can be matched directly to “signed” and “black horse” Islington paperweights.



Figure 3. Miniature New Islington Paperweight

Since my article in the Cambridge Newsletter on the new Islington find, another weight with the same canes has turned up, but this time it's a miniature.



Figure 4. Bacchus Paperweight

Bacchus weights are also exceedingly rare but I had managed to acquire six or seven over the years. Quite a few Bacchus contain "Queen Victoria" silhouette canes. The rest of my English weights fall into two categories.

First are the weights that are not Bacchus or Islington but are obviously antiques because of the wear to the basal ring and general condition but differ so much in quality, shape and size that they must originate from a variety of glassworks. There were many operating in the Birmingham area in the 1850-1900 period.

Secondly, there is a range of paperweights that look newer and have been made in the early to mid twentieth century by now defunct glassworks and fortunately, have left behind a little documentation, family weights and aged glassworkers who have been traced to give us clues to the origin of a few paperweights. The four candidates for twentieth century paperweight production are

- H G Richardson of Stourbridge in the period circa 1910.
- Alfred Arculus and company in the period circa 1920.
- The firm of Walsh and Walsh ltd circa 1925, who took over the Arculus company in 1931.
- The Whitefriars Glass Company circa 1930.

The style of the four company's paperweights differ very little. They all made concentric millefiori and all four produced a range of inkwells and other millefiori items such as lamp bases, candle holders, wine and shot glasses.

My method of trying to tell them apart is simple, look at the quality.



Figure 5. Richardson Paperweight

H G Richardson made precisely matched canes and set ups in their products and never used any date canes and is top of the pile for quality.



Figure 6. Arculus Paperweight

The Arculus company sometimes allowed an 8 year old to make up and design the set ups and also place a fake date cane among the rows of millefiori and is bottom of the pile in the quality league.



Figure 7. Arculus Paperweight

The Walsh and Walsh glassworks took over the Arculus company in 1931 and immediately improved on the quality. They carried on placing a fake 1848 date cane and started using a cane that looks loosely like a 7/6 in many of their weights, sometimes as a central feature and sometimes in whole concentric rows.



Figure 8. Whitefriars Paperweight

Whitefriars paperweights and inkwells have been recorded since circa 1930 by photograph and line drawing showing a matched set of two weights and an inkwell that have four concentric rows of canes, the weights have high domes and straight sided walls, the set ups are low down at base level. Whitefriars never dated any weights until 1953 for the Queens Coronation commemorative paperweight and this date was scratch signed through blue onto a white rod. Saying that, I do have a 1935 dated piece from the Coronation series that has been made by mistake, the five and three are in the wrong order.

Walsh Walsh and Whitefriars weights are very similar in quality, both making nice set ups and matched canes so these two are very hard to tell apart, but fortunately many Walsh Walsh weights are dated with fake dates and the 7/6 cane appears very frequently.

Keep this flyer, you never know when it may come in handy, especially if you happen to be in the Birmingham area.