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Gillinder Millefiore Paperweights

William Thynne Gillinder was born in 1823 in Gateshead, England. By the age of eight, he began working in glasshouses and at sixteen held the status of gaffer. By 1850, he had settled in the Birmingham area and represented the Birmingham glassmaking district at the National Flint Glass Makers Friendly Society of Great Britain and Ireland. Family history states that Gillinder worked for George Bacchus & Sons, where paperweight production has been attributed to this Birmingham firm around 1849. Times were hard in the glassmaking industry in England in 1852. The society raised money to send member glassblowers to America and Australia to find work. In 1854, Gillinder decided to immigrate to America and published his farewell address to the society, stating he hoped that he had served them well. They held a farewell dinner and gave him an engraved gold watch and 40 guineas.

He sailed with his wife and four children to Boston where a job was promised at the New England Glass Company. Times were also hard at New England. The promised managerial job was not available. Instead, Gillinder worked at the New England factory for about a year and certainly would have seen paperweights in production. For the next six years Gillinder moved his family in search of work numerous times, residing in Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Baltimore and back to Pittsburgh again. It was in Baltimore that Gillinder met and became friendly with noted potter Edwin Bennett.

In 1861, William T. Gillinder established a glass factory called the Philadelphia Flint Glass Works. Almost immediately, he was forced to move the plant because neighbors complained about dirt from the factory. Along with a new location of Howard and Oxford Streets, Gillinder renamed the business to the Franklin Flint Glass Works. The major production of the firm was lighting, especially chimneys required for kerosene, the new popular fuel. Silvered wares of doorknobs, curtain pins, mirrored balls and reflectors, as well as cut and pressed glass were also advertised.

In 1863, uncomfortable with the proximity of the Civil War to Baltimore, Edwin Bennett moved his family to Philadelphia and became Gillinder's partner. The new firm was called Gillinder and Bennett. The company continued to produce the same products, with new additions to their line. Edwin Bennett decided to return to Baltimore in 1867 and sold his interest in the glasshouse to Gillinder's sons, James and Frederick. But the two families were forever joined with the marriage of James Gillinder to Bennett's daughter. Over subsequent years, the Bennett family received gifts of paperweights and glass from the Gillinder factory on important occasions.

Sometime between the founding of the factory and his death in 1871, paperweights were made at the factory by William T. Gillinder. The canes he used in the paperweights were supposedly brought with him from Birmingham, where he may have made weights while he worked at the Bacchus factory. He also would have seen paperweight production while working at the New England Glass Company in 1854.

Today, the knowledge about these attributed Gillinder paperweights is very limited. What evidence is known was recorded in a series of letters by Edwin A. Barber, Director of the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Art and Industry (which became the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1938). Barber, a known glass enthusiast and author, corresponded from November 11, 1911 to January 24, 1913 with the Gillinder firm. He requested borrowing some Gillinder weights to photograph for an upcoming article, specifically requesting a weight with the silhouette of Queen Victoria. William T. Gillinder, the grandson of the founder gathered paperweights from the Gillinder family and the Bennett family and lent them to Barber. He also lent the museum several slices of cane for the exhibit. In July of 1915, the Pennsylvania Museum published an article illustrating the canes set in plaster. The canes were not wanted by the Philadelphia museum and Barber eventually sold the canes to the Toledo Museum of Art.

A small number of Gillinder millefiore paperweights are in museums and private collections. Several still reside with the Gillinder family. Although Gillinder paperweights somewhat resemble Bacchus paperweight in allover color and in some cane designs, the weights are distinctly different. Multi-colored concentric ruffle-like cog with colored central canes, white carpet grounds with a colored central canes (Figure 1) and designs with a "Queen Victoria" center cane were typical motifs. Many of the weights were faceted in the distinctive Gillinder cutting of six deep oval side printies and one top circular printy (Figure 2).

An example from a Bennett descendent that could possibly have been one of the five Bennett weights lent to the Pennsylvania Museum in 1911 is now in the collection of the Museum of American Glass. This paperweight is very striking with its bold colors of a large deep blue and white central cog cane surrounded by pale green and pink cogs (Figure 3). It was also cut with the distinct Gillinder cutting. A precise, uncut white carpet ground weight from the collection of Kenyon and Ann Brown has a deep pink flower-like central cane. This same central cane can be found in several other Gillinder paperweights (Figure 4). The orderly white carpet ground is surrounded with an amethyst basket of canes on the base. Simple uncut weights made up of predominately white canes around a colored complex central cane have also been attributed to Gillinder (Figure 5).

The differences in size and design of the attributed Gillinder paperweights suggest that there may have been others besides William T. Gillinder making paperweights for pleasure at the Gillinder factory. At least one other individual, Charles Challinor, who apprenticed at Gillinder in 1867, has been credited with making paperweights about the same time. James Gillinder, the great-grandson of the founder, wrote to Mrs. Bergstrom in 1948 that the room where the unused canes were stored was destroyed in a fire. In fact, the factory suffered two devastating fires, the first in 1919. The second completely leveled the factory in 1929. All evidence of paperweights has been lost except for Barber's research and Gillinder family history.

Questions still remain about Gillinder millefiori paperweight production. Did William T. Gillinder make all the known attributed examples or did someone else, such as Charles Challinor, also make paperweights? After all, the canes were still stored at the factory in 1911, when Barber requested slices of them 40 years after William T. Gillinder's death. But the evidence is convincing that the highly skilled, Birmingham, England, trained William T. Gillinder made millefiori paperweights in Philadelphia, some time between the founding of his company in 1861 and his death in 1871.

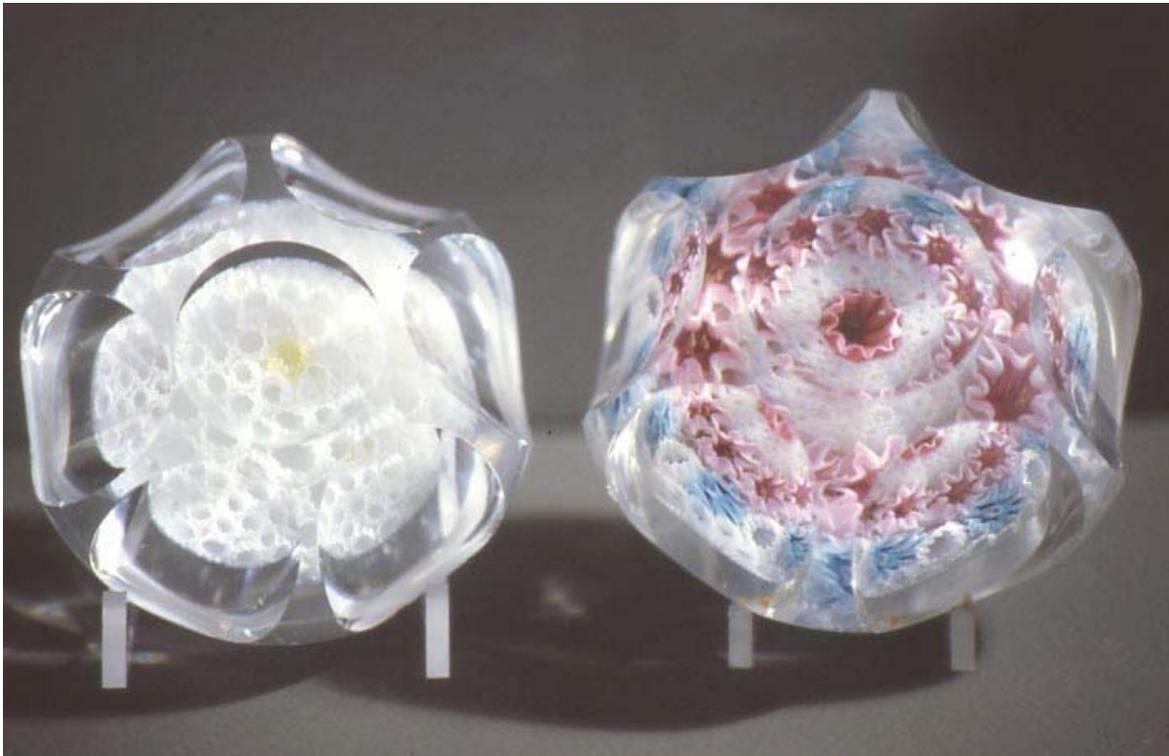


Figure 1. Concentric and Carpet Ground Paperweights



Figure 2. Example of Distinctive Gillinder Cutting



Figure 3. Probable Bennett Descendant Paperweight

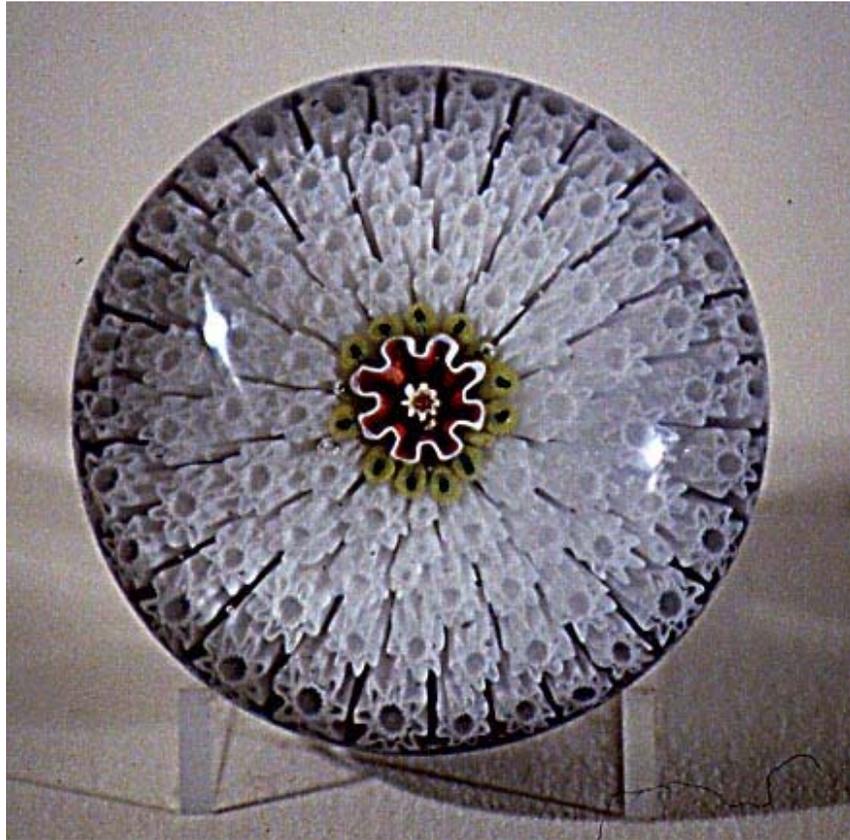


Figure 4. Carpet Ground Paperweight with Central Flower-like Cane



Figure 5. Typical Paperweight Attributed to Gillinder