English and Irish Crystal Drinking Glass, 1640-1702 (London, 6 Oct 22)

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Deadline: Mar 1, 2022

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Celebrating the Birth of English and Irish Crystal Drinking Glass, 1640-1702
UN International Year of Glass and V&A Museum

Writing the translation of Neri's The Art of Glass in 1662 Christopher Merret declared that English glassmakers had 'these twenty years last past much improved themselves'. Similarly, in 1672 the glass-seller John Green claimed that 'we now make very good drinking glasses in England'. Undoubtedly, the latter half of the seventeenth century was a period of material, technical and aesthetic development, which saw the vessel-glass industry in England and Ireland reach maturity. The V&A Museum in partnership with the Association for the History of Glass is delighted to announce a Conference entitled Celebrating the Birth of English and Irish Crystal Drinking Glass, 1640-1702 as part of the UN International Year of Glass to be held at the V&A on Thursday 6 October 2022. This study day aims to explore the evolving story of the birth of these sophisticated products a century before the 'industrial revolution' began. We invite contributions which draw on a range of methodological perspectives including art history, history, archaeology, science technology, conservation, curatorial praxis and historic making practices.

2022 has recently been designated by the United Nations as International Year of Glass. 2022 also marks 125 years since the publication of Albert Harshorne's Old English Glasses, the first serious study of the history of English and Irish glass, and additionally represents 350 years since 1672, a pivotal year in the development of crystal glass. Thirty years earlier had seen the closure of the only crystal glass factory in these isles, but twenty years later there were approximately thirty glasshouses producing flint and crystal glass and the industry was the envy of our continental rivals. Such a growth rate was probably unprecedented, yet it was encouraged by a range of key events including: the publication of Merrett's translation of Neri's Art of Glass at the request of the newly-formed Royal Society (1662); the establishment of The Worshipful Company of Glass Sellers of London, who received their Royal charter which, among other things, enabled them to assume responsibility for drinking glass designs (1664); and the decision taken by the King to allow saltpetre imported from India to be sold at public auctions, removing the last barrier to the economic production of a high-quality British flint glass (1672). By the 1670s, the quality and value of English crystal drinking glass was even acknowledged by the Venetian secretary in London, to have exceeded that from Venice. During this time two significant patents were also given, the first a 7-year patent to George Ravenscroft to produce a 'glass resembling rock crystal', and the second an almost identical patent which was granted in Ireland to the Altarese glassmaker Jon Odacio Formica and two others, but for a duration of 14 years. Odacio had worked previously in

Nijmegen, the Netherlands. It is important to emphasise the European context at play here. For example, we know that many Italian glassmakers played key roles in the development of our industry, and several worked for Ravenscroft in the 1670s.

Frequently, this area of study in historical glass has been dominated by attributions based solely on aesthetic appearance and an overemphasis on the singular figure of Ravenscroft. However, more recent research including that by Mike Noble, Colin Brain, David Dungworth, Peter Francis, Franc Myles has confirmed that the development of lead crystal glass vessels in England and Ireland was a much more multifarious and complex process. Furthermore, there is currently an exciting field of emerging research which brings together documentary and visual evidence, along with non-destructive analysis (XRF, PXRF, UV-Fluorescence, etc). As such, this study day seeks to bring together scholars, curators, makers and collectors to explore crystal glass vessels and review previous historiographical assumptions.

We invite submissions for 20-minute or 30-minute illustrated papers on any aspect of the supply, design, production, consumption, and analysis of British and Irish crystal glass drinking vessels, 1642-1702

Topics could also include:
– Museum display and interpretation
– Documentary evidence of crystal glass vessels
– Studies of non-destructive analysis for crystal drinking vessels
– Influence of alchemy and scientific discovery
– Difference between English and Irish production
– Design, consumption patterns, dining culture
– Influence of the European glass vessel industry
– Historiography of the crystal glass vessel industry, especially how the story of the birth of English and Irish crystal glass has been told previously

Please send your submission, of no more than 300 words, together with a brief biography to: Colin Brain (cjsm132@gmail.com); Reino Liefkes (r.liefkes@vam.ac.uk); Dr Caroline McCaffrey-Howarth (c.mccaffreyhowarth@vam.ac.uk) by 1 March 2022.

Reference:
CFP: English and Irish Crystal Drinking Glass, 1640-1702 (London, 6 Oct 22). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 13, 2021 (accessed Nov 16, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/35330>.