Irish Glass: Beginnings to Mid-Nineteenth Century

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Glass, like the wheel, is one of those ancient inventions which have changed the way of the world. Civilisation would be immeasurably poorer without glass. We need not speculate about this, since for generations before the Christian era glass has been used. It has been recorded and excavated in ancient Egypt, in Phoenicia, Syria, Cyprus, Greece, Rome, Macedonia. There is a story about its discovery recorded by Pliny that certain Phoenician sailors lit a fire on the beach and put their cooking-pots to boil, propping them up on blocks of nacron, which is a carbonate of soda. When the fire had burned itself out, they discovered a new substance lying among the embers: the first piece of glass.

Possibly the legend is true. Most great inventions were accidental. At any rate the anecdote gets its chemistry right, because normally glass is formed by the fusing of silica, an acid substance, with an alkaline oxide.

Most old glass was based on this kind of formula—silica, either flint or iron-free sand—heated to a high temperature with lime and a sodium salt. The results varied in quality, and luck entered very much into what one got.

Towards the end of the seventeenth century there was a revolution in English glass-making. At that time a London maker called George Ravenscroft produced a clear heavy white metal—which is the term used for raw glass. On the whole it was superior to the old soda glass, and it did not suffer so much from the disease of crazling, or breaking down into a white cracked surface.

Ravenscroft achieved this success by introducing a large proportion of oxide of lead. After a period of growing pains between 1674 and 1691, the produce was stabilised. It became typical of English glass. Not that the use of lead was altogether a new invention, but nobody previously had used it quite so successfully. Ravenscroft of the London Glasshouse of the Savoy, and his successor Hawty Bishopp, were the true fathers of English and Irish glass. It was the formula for the London leaden-made metal, together with a lucky and happy conjunction of Acts of Parliament, which cleared the way for the dramatic success of Irish glass in the eighteenth century. We shall read later the exact formula transcribed in the seventeen eighties, by Jonathan Gatchell of Waterford.

The weight and viscosity of this so-called flint glass (though ground flint was soon replaced by white sand) imposed its own forms. Happy indeed is the art form which

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*This article was written shortly before the reverend author’s death. In sending it to me for preliminary perusal he wrote “Would an edited version be of interest to the Journal?” Unfortunately he did not survive to do the necessary editing himself, and so I have, in consequence, undertaken the work myself. I have not, however, cared to add the bibliography or footnotes which, no doubt, the late author would have included, preferring to leave the text substantially as it left his hand. (E.R.—Hon. Editor.)
grows naturally out of its material, as Henry Moore's figures seem to do from ice-age boulders! Irish glass was to do this very thing.

Lead glass was not to adopt the gay fripperies of the Venetian manner, which used glass of a formula amenable to the sleight of hand of the glassblower, and which remained soft and malleable for a long time. The new lead-loaded seventeenth century metal demand heavy stately vessels, dignified in their quick and simple prime creation, distinguished in the quantity and the quality of their metal, and unique in the scope which the optical nature of the glass gave for deep prismatic cutting. And when the opportunity came, a new art form was created in Ireland by the luck of almost fortuitous political happenings.

But here it is necessary to go back to the beginnings of glass in Ireland and to work onward towards the Era of Freedom, the Age of Exuberance, the end of the eighteenth century and the first quarter of the nineteenth. A short enough period this was to be, but for all that, it was an exciting and wonderful half-century of unexampled craftsmanship.

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Is there such a thing at all as a truly Irish style of glass? An Irish writer likes to believe that in fact there is. The difference between Irish and English glass seems at first to be relatively little, but I believe that familiarity shows some subtle distinction, like the difference between a Kerryman and a Corkman speaking the English language. It takes study to know this difference which is mostly one of style—and of a blithe gaiety of style. This difference is also to be seen in Irish silver of the eighteenth century—Irish silver, whatever the English books may say, is not just a poor relation of contemporary English silver; I think, for example of those dish rings and buttercoolers from the second half of the eighteenth century in their exuberant Irish farmyard style: it is the same kind of gay imagination which produced the little animals of the Book of Kells, a warmth of temperament which gives us a silver shepherd saying “Peek-a-boo” at a demure silver Irish shepherdess from behind an unmistakably Irish Round Tower, as we can see in our National Museum in Dublin.

And the Irish glass of the exuberant Era of Freedom seems to this writer to speak also with an Irish accent. Much of it, has a quality of go léir—an open-handedness in its quantity and its quality and in the depth and lowness of its cutting. It would be easy to be misunderstood if one said that the most typical, weighty, deep-cut Irish glass had a civilized Hibernian barbarity, but so it has. It is the kind of excessive brilliance which appeals to the excessive Irishman like Jonah Barrington, or to the abnormally scintillating Irishwoman like Lady Blessington. Nobody would ever have mistaken those two for anything but Irish; they had utter apartness from the English, together with a lightly-worn veneer of anglicisation. Such was much of the glass from the factories of Dublin and Belfast, of Cork and Waterford.

These differences are perhaps more subtle and subjective than those traditionally suggested—the curious legends which have been told about Irish glass and its blueness, its warmth, and its throbbing ring. These, alas, are all nonsense! They do not happen to be true. Waterford glass was not milky-blue. If it happened, by bad luck, to turn out that way, then they smashed the consignment and started again. If it was famous for anything it was for its white transparent crystal clarity.
It is hazardous to try to identify as Irish any glass earlier than the relatively few pieces marked by the Penroses of Waterford and by others of the period from 1786 to about 1820. It is suggested that some pieces engraved with loyal toasts, or with likenesses of King William or Orange, are of Irish origin. If it be true that the shape is also found only in Ireland, the Irish identification becomes a possibility. There is no reason, at least, why they should not have been Irish made—more is hard to say.

Enormous quantities of drinking glasses were being manufactured in Ireland during the first half of the eighteenth century. In 1729 the Round Glass House in St. Mary’s Lane, Dublin, was advertising “all sorts of fine flint drinking glasses”. In 1746 the same firm was selling “single flint” wine glasses at twopence each. On the other hand, between the years of 1734 and 1736, Ireland had imported over three hundred thousand drinking glasses, and rather more than that during the following years. Later in the century Irish factories were exporting large consignments, mostly to the New World. Thus in 1797 exports of drinking glasses alone to America and the West Indies totalled over half a million. Equally certainly, large numbers were being imported, because by the time that the Irish makers had coped with the overseas market not enough stock remained for Irish consumption. All this means that one can do little more than guess at the origin of old glass found in Ireland. Its identification is not a definite affair like the study of hall-marks on Irish silver. Factory warehouses bought from one another’s glasshouses. Plain glass was bought and sold, to be cut by workmen in such places as Limerick, where no raw glass was made. Glass also came ready-cut from England. Probability of origin is the best that can be hoped. Intimacy with styles does go far to form an instinct. Styles of cutting, of course, are of guidance. Tradition of origin is some help also. My great-grandfather bought a decanter in Cork when the Cork Glass Company closed down. The chances are that it is a Cork-made decanter—but it may not necessarily be so. Best of all identification is the mould mark of origin made when the melted glass was blown into a lettered iron mould. This is reasonably convincing, but unfortunately it is also very rare—and the pieces so marked are not always the most beautiful. Also, if the moulded names on the bottom of the piece are too sharp, legible and generally without blemish, there is a chance that the pieces may be forgeries. The quality of the glass itself is something of an indication of age: though the smoky blue, beloved of old-time dealers, is far from being a mark of Waterford, and indeed itself is rare because, as we have said, the Waterford glass-workers hated it and usually smashed examples, the light-weight, flawless crystal whiteness of modern glass should arouse suspicion in all but the most gullible.

The term Waterford seems to have become a generic description for all old Irish glass when it goes on the market. It is certainly not to be trusted as a guarantee of place of origin. There can be relatively little genuine old Waterford glass in the country, and, as we have said, not all of that is in any way identifiable with certainty. Glass suffers breakage more than almost any other manufactured goods. One of my earliest and most traumatic memories, some fifty years ago, was the clash of broken glass as a railway porter hurled a crate containing the family cut glass on the platform of Longford railway station!

The basic ingredient in all Irish glass, both of high and of low degree, is sand. In the oldest surviving figures for the cost of running a glasshouse—the 1622 Marsh’s
Library accounts for Ballynegery in County Waterford—sand comes free: while twenty bushels of ashes cost five shillings, five bushels of sand cost nothing at all.

The purity of the silicious ingredient—the acid sand—is of the greatest importance. The earlier English use of ground flints—giving the name flint glass—was not practised in Ireland. The southern glasshouses used sand imported from Lynn, in Norfolk, and from the Isle of Wight. The common bottle-glass of Dublin, a much cheaper product, was made with sand from the North Bull, outside that city. On the other hand, Belfast and the other northern glasshouses tended to look to Muchish Mountain in County Donegal, a place which had an inexhaustible supply of very good sand—it is said that during the last world war Britain used to make the glass for binoculars and other optical instruments from this sand. Its quality for making a very good clear glass was demonstrated by a selection of first-rate drinking glasses and tankards shown at the Cork Exhibition in 1902.

In the time of the Munster Wars, during the period when thick and tangled forests made English conquest and settlement seem almost an impossibility, the first southern Irish glasshouse was founded.

It was in the year 1589, some months after the Armada had been defeated, that an Englishman called George Longe—or possibly “Stone”—petitioned Lord Burleigh for a patent to make glass, having bought certain rights from a Captain Woodhouse. It seems that he must have been successful, in spite of what one would expect, for nine years later, saying that he had been the first glassmaker in Ireland, he points out to Burleigh that he deserved encouragement and that “trade and civility” would “increase in that rude country” because of his efforts. He adds that the thinning of the woods and thickets ought to diminish the advantage enjoyed by the Irish Kernes in their guerrilla tactics. His request was granted. It is an interesting commentary on the history of the two countries that at much the same period in England prohibitions were being laid against the use of timber for heating glasshouse furnaces—the wood there was needed for shipbuilding. Longe’s factory was at the west end of Drumfennig Woods, which were in the region of Dungarvan and Tallow, in County Waterford.

Nothing more is known about Longe, nor for how many years he continued. In general, Irish glasshouses changed hands quickly. Also, it was a lawless neighbourhood in which to try to plant an industry. However, he may have gone on and prospered, for a little later the Great Earl of Cork’s various projects were successful, with his foundries and smelting eating up the Irish woods to their virtual extinction. One other glass project which may have been under the umbrella of the Great Earl’s activities was the 1621 Ballynegery glass factory, which is described at some length in a manuscript in Marsh’s Library, Dublin. Probably this glasshouse was in County Waterford. The main interest in the document lies in the costing of the project, which is worth quoting. The first item is an estimate weekly budget for the whole working of the glasshouse, including cost of labour, fuel and raw materials.

The project of ye weekly chardge as also ye receypts and profitts per week of ye glass-house to make xviii. case.

25 Corde of small clef wood at XII ye corde XXVs
20 Bushells of ashes at IIId Vs
In the year 1780 capitalists suddenly discovered that glass-making in Ireland had become an opportunity for turning over a great deal of money. There was going to be a big profit in the trade in the future because of a series of Acts of Parliament affecting Britain and Ireland. So the capitalists jumped at the opportunity, and Irish glass-making entered into its opulent, glittering, “Golden Age”.

What in fact happened? This in short was the setting; From the year 1745 the raw material of English glass was charged with a heavy duty; beginning in 1746 at 9s. 4d. per hundredweight on the lead glass used before cutting, it had risen in 1787 to 21s. 5d., a substantial burden, which made for flimsy lightweight glass as the most economically profitable. Irish glass was duty free at the same period, but this was of little economic advantage, since by the same Act, 19 George II, Irish makers were not allowed to export any glass, nor to import glass except from England. However, in 1780, without any imposition of a local excise charge, Free Trade was introduced. Irish glass might go anywhere—as it was to go in enormous quantities to the New World. It only needed the 1781-82 Act, reducing the duty on coal used in glassmaking, to give Irish manufacturers a flying start. Within the next five years glasshouses were built in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Belfast and Newry. The age of Irish glass had begun, and it was to prosper for the best part of half a century until taxation killed the Irish golden goose, which was already dying under the attack of cheap machine-made pressed glass.

It took some time from 1780 for Irish glass to establish itself as anything artistic or memorable. Early work tends to look both amateurish and cheap. Honesty compels one to say this, though the rarity of early marked pieces tends to blind one to the fact that they could be shoddy. Shallow cutting and hackneyed conventional patterns did not produce great works of art. Then, with the inspiration of Regency richness, the thick lead metal proved itself to be a perfect medium for the heavy prismatic cutting and the lush imagination which gave Irish glass its greatness. If any individual artist can be named, perhaps tribute should be paid to Samuel Miller of Waterford.

As one studies the Irish glass industry from the beginning of the age of freedom, it becomes clear that the most (and perhaps only) important period artistically was that when the industry was beginning to decline economically. This was the short period of time from the Act of Union down to the imposition of tax in 1825. During this time it had a glittering and feverish brilliance, like the last bright flickering of a candle, before its extinction in a sad crop of excise-haunted bankruptcies. The Irish glass trade could not carry the new taxes of 1825. Those who tried to pay them could not compete in price with those makers who tried to evade them, and evaders were soon caught, to the extinction of honest and dishonest alike. But meanwhile, adapting
excitingly the lushness of Regency taste, the Irish makers, designers and cutters reached their zenith of achievement at the end of a success story which stopped abruptly.

The sad decline in Irish glass came from several causes. One was the heavy duty imposed by the Excise Act of 1825. Its general financial effect can be shown from figures of 1832-33, which show that £22,394 was collected and that the duty averaged out at about £100 per ton of glassware. Prices after the Act went up about fifty percent. Also damaging to the industry was the frustration of the makers in being watched all the time by excisemen. Prices were reduced in places to meet cut-throat competition, and few firms were able to bear the loss. Thus, in 1829, John Wright spoke about the deplorable state of the glass business, and also complained of the Dublin smuggling and cheating of the excise which made undercutting possible. It was impossible, he said, for honest firms to compete. His own, in Waterford, lasted longer than some, but nevertheless died in 1851. The English Excise Act was finally withdrawn in 1845, and this removed any advantage Ireland might still have had. It also gave a free run to the makers of the newer pressed glass, which, of course, was far cheaper to make than cut glass.

At the twilight period of Irish cut glass, two entries in an English cookery book have a certain relevance. This is “A/New System/of/Domestic Cookery/. . . . Adapted to the/use of Private Families/by a Lady”, published in London in 1843. Writing about household economies, she says “The inducement to care of glass is in some measure removed, by the increased price given for old flint glass”. The high cost of cullet was obviously a factor—perhaps a minor factor—in the difficulties of the glasshouses. Her next paragraph indicates the severe competition, which was helping to close the cut glass firms. “Those who wish for trifle dishes, butter stands, &c., at a lower charge than cut glass, may buy them made in moulds, of which there is great variety that look extremely well, if not placed near more beautiful articles”.

APPENDICES

Waterford Glass

Waterford is an ancient seaport with a good mercantile tradition. It was therefore almost inevitable that when the way opened up to make money out of the new legislation of 1780, someone in Waterford should have seized the opportunity. The local investors were George and William Penrose, who announced their new undertaking with a flourish, advertising in the Dublin Evening Post on the 4th of October, 1783:

George and William Penrose having established an extensive Glass Manufactory in this city, their Friends and the Public may be supplied with all Kinds of plain and cut Flint Glass, useful and ornamental: They hope when the Public know the low Terms they will be supplied at, and consider the vast expense attending this weighty undertaking, they will not take offence at their selling for Ready Money only. They are now ready to receive orders, and intend opening their Warehouse the 1st of next month. Wholesale Dealers and Exporters will meet with proper Encouragement.

Not that George and William were known to be skilled in the craft. They were the investors, the capitalists, and they were employing John Hill of Stourbridge as a
director and technical adviser. He had recently brought a team of skilled tradesmen from Worcestershire, and he had a very high reputation for ability.

Just over a month later, on the 5th of November, the Penroses petitioned Parliament for a grant-in-aid. They said that they had laid out £10,000 in capital and that they were employing between fifty and seventy hands, mostly immigrants from England. Whether a grant was made is not immediately discoverable, but at any rate by 1788 the Penrose business was sufficiently celebrated and adequately competent to produce "a very curious service of glass" for George III.

John Hill lasted only three years, but he seems to have laid the foundation of a really quality product. Just why he left Waterford is one of those insoluble mysteries. Many years later it was said that he had been charged with a crime by the wife of one of the Penroses—what sort of crime is unknown. A last despairing letter from Hill himself admits to difficulty in paying his creditors:

Dr. Jonathan, It is impossible for me to express the feelings of my poor mind when I acq. thee that I am obliged to leave this Kingdom, my reasons I need not tell thee, but I sincerely wish I had been made acquainted with the base ingratitude of the worst of Villians sooner & probably then I might have remedied it, but now tis too late. For heaven's sake don't reproach me but put the best construction on my conduct. I wish it was in my power to pay thee & all my creditors but if ever Fortune should put it in my power depend upon it I will satisfy every one—My mind is so hurt I scarcely know what I write. I sincerely wish thee every success & am thoy the most miserable of mankind thine very sincerely.—J. Hill.

The Jonathan who was addressed was a young Quaker working as a clerk in the Penrose firm. His name was Jonathan Gatchell. To judge from Hill's "thees" and "thous", he also was a Quaker, and clearly Gatchell was his trusted friend. It appears that his friendship gained for Gatchell something much more valuable than the repayment of any sum which he was likely to have been able to lend. Hill gave him the secret formula for the specially clear and abnormally white glass which had been made in the Waterford furnaces. We do not read how Gatchell used his secret, nor what negotiations were made with the Penroses, nor what pressures were applied to them, but at the end of the story young Gatchell had become owner of the business. By 1786 he had reached a working agreement with William Penrose. In 1799 Gatchell entered into partnership with James Ramsey and Ambrose Barcroft, and bought out the Penrose interest. Eleven years later the partnership was dissolved, leaving Gatchell in sole possession.

Gatchell had his success story through the compounding secrets of Hill. It is interesting, therefore, that the recipe should survive in black and white. Nevertheless it does, probably in Gatchell's handwriting. Since the mixtures in that period were still experimental for the majority of glasshouses, and variations were to be expected because of the impurity of such ingredients as were obtainable, it has been thought worth recording just what Hill had used for his glass:

Receipts for Makeing Flint, Enamel, blue & Best Green Glass, always used by John Hill—17th May 1786—
Flint—
4.1.9 Sand
3.0.10 Lead
1.1.0 Ashes
14 lb. Salt Petre
6 oz. Magneze

You will see by the proofe Taken in Melting, if to high
Coloured use a little Arsenick, if to low add more
Magneze—

Enamel—
2.2.20 Sand
3.0.24 Lead
3.14 Salt Petre
24 Arsenick

Put but a small Melting in the pot for the first time,
and so on Every Melting, for if you put too much at a
time it will boil over—

You may use Enamel Cullet if you have it with the batch—

For Blue—
Use the flint batch & any Sort of Cullet & about 8% of Saphora to every 20 of
Cullet or batch, but Saphora differs so much in quality that there is no certain
Rule for Quantity—but Judge of the Colour by the proofs in Melting—

For Green—
Use flint batch & Cullet & to every 20 put 8 oz calcined Copper pounded fine—
if not Dark enough use more Copper.

Old Waterford glass has a reputation for quality which is probably well deserved. Nevertheless it is curious that the term Waterford has come to be used freely for almost every other early Irish glass, and, indeed, for any early glass found in Ireland, whatever its unknown origin may have been. In fact, it has become a generic name, like Staffordshire for pottery of a certain kind.

As we have seen, Waterford glass was more or less indistinguishable from contemporary lead glass made in the furnaces of Cork, Dublin or Belfast. There is no certainty about the colour of its metal; least of all, as has been said, is there any truth whatsoever in the legend about the bluish tinge.

Nor was the quantity of glass made in Waterford relatively large compared with that from other Irish firms. It is also true that a good deal of English-made glass came to Ireland because of the large export trade to the New World. This obviously diminishes the quantity of Waterford left in Ireland.

The relative quantities exported by Waterford as against the other three cities is interesting and instructive. Perhaps it is invidious to pick out special years, but I have chosen two at random, when all the factories were reasonably in action. 1800 and 1801 may be taken as fairly typical. It will appear that in 1800 Waterford was sending out only 5,000 drinking glasses and £113 worth of other kinds of glass to Portugal and the New World, while Dublin, Cork and Belfast were together sending across the Atlantic 42,916 drinking glasses and much more miscellaneous glassware as well. In the following year Cork sent no less than 163,707 drinking glasses to New York, Virginia, Jamaica and the West Indies—an impressive total against Waterford’s 6,600 to Newfoundland.

When we think of the Waterford glasshouse, and make allowances for casualties, we should also remember that Waterford produced a very small proportion of all the
flint glass made in Ireland at the time. An excise return of duty paid in 1832 under the 1825 Act shows that the Gatchell Company in Waterford paid just over three thousand pounds, which was less than that demanded from either the Costello or the Mulvany glasshouses of Dublin. It was, in fact, less than one-seventh of the total duty paid in Ireland for glass that year.

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**Dublin Glass**

It has been pointed out by Westropp, whose exhaustive researches in his book of 1920 can never be superseded, that the Registers of St. Michan’s Parish show that there were glass-makers in the area from the year 1677. And it is known that sometime after 1690 a certain Captain Philip Roche set up a glasshouse in St. Mary’s Lane. At the beginning he was dogged by disaster, and in 1697 no less than seven people died in the fire and collapse of his glasshouse. Nevertheless, he persevered and was successful, and his will on his death in 1713 shows his association with the business. Thus, he left £5 for itinerant hawkers of glass, and various legacies to the FitzSimons family at the Glass House itself. Christopher and Richard FitzSimons had been his partners, and this family carried on the trade until after 1760. Various advertisements in *Faulkner’s Dublin Journal* in 1746 and 1752 assert that St. Mary’s Round Glass House was the only one in Ireland. The list of articles made there is interesting and instructive. In 1713 “the newest fashion drinking glasses . . .”. In 1729 “all sorts of fine flint drinking glasses, salvers, baskets with handles and feet for desserts, fine salts ground and polished, all sorts of decanters lamps &c. . . .”. In January 1746 he was selling dram and whiskey glasses at one shilling and sixpence, for dozens of fourteen. In December of that year the firm advertised a wide variety—thus “all sorts of newest fashion drinking glasses, water bottles, decanters, jugs, water-glasses with saucers plain and moulded, all sorts of jelly glasses, sildybub glasses, sweetmeat glasses for desserts, salvers, orange glasses, covers for torts, bells and shades, hall lanthorns” and many other kinds of glassware including those for medical, electrical, meteorological and philosophical use. Six years later the firm was advertising an even wider variety, with emphasis on its ornamental pieces, on the skill of its workmen imported from England, and on the cheapness of the rates, much below the price of those imported.

Meanwhile, in 1734 a rival firm set up in Fleet Street. It also advertised drinking glasses. It soon went into a decline, and was not heard of after 1741.

About 1785, at the time when the Irish boom was beginning, Charles Mulvaney set up a glasshouse near the North Strand. This, with various turns of fortune, and with the changes of ownership and of partnership which always seems to have befallen Irish glasshouses, continued to live in one form or another, ending with the nineteenth century family of Pugh, which ceased business in 1895.

The Williams family ran another glasshouse, built about 1755 and surviving until 1829. This was at Marlborough Green, and in 1764 Williams and Company were awarded a premium of £1,600 by the Dublin Society. In 1770 they were advertising enamelled, flowered, cut and green glass. Other Dublin names of makers included, Chebsey, Ackbown and Collins.

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Cork Glass

The financial and free trade impetus which started the Waterford company in 1783 also was responsible for the Cork Glass Company which opened in the same year. Early examples of decanters made here can be found with “Cork Glass Co.” moulded on the base, a firm which closed in 1818. Meanwhile, in 1815, the year of Napoleon’s defeat, the Waterloo Glass Company was begun. It continued, with ups and downs, until 1835 when the firm went bankrupt. Decanters with moulded bases are to be found, as from Waterford, but with “Waterloo Co. Cork”.

The third Cork firm was The Terrace Glass Company, which was active from 1819 to 1841.

The question is often asked, “How can one identify Cork glass, as against Waterford or other Irish?” Probably one can not in most instances. Colour of glass has little to do with it, in spite of the tradition that Cork has a blackish tint in contrast to Waterford’s blue. Neither is in fact a firm test, though perhaps it may be argued that Waterford tends to be whiter and purer than others. It is a fact that broken glass for the furnaces came from all parts and was not uniform. Nor did patterns have a very noticeable local idiom. The best tests, again, are the moulding on the base, in the rare examples where they exist, inscriptions giving a local venue, family records, and, in some other instances, probabilities based on style. Thus there was a tendency to use vesica-shaped panels and stars on some Cork pieces, and these give a hint towards an attribution.

There are always possibilities rather than certainties when identifying Cork, or any other Irish glass. That can not be said too often, especially with firms ingenious enough to buy stock from one another! They were, of course, not thinking of future collectors. But one is entitled to expect a Cork manufacture for such pieces as the Cork Corporation service. Another set of glasses which gives its evidence of origin is that which once belonged to the Friendly Brothers’ Knot in Kinsale, and is now kept in the House of the Friendly Brothers of St. Patrick in Dublin. The society preserves among its archives the receipt for this glass, dated 1809, paid to the Cork Glass Company.

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Belfast Glass

During the second half of the eighteenth century Belfast was climbing fast to rival the other industrial cities of Ireland. The town had increased from its 8,549 people in 1757 to 20,000 in 1799, and it more than doubled during the subsequent twenty-two years. Among the new industries was glass-making.

Westropp records that in January 1781 a fullblown advertisement appeared in the Belfast News Letter announcing that Benjamin Edwards (who had come from Bristol originally) was selling all kinds of drinking glasses, decanters, etc., in his Flint Glass Works in Belfast, that he had a cutter whom he had lately imported from England, and that his Belfast products were just as good as anything from across the water. This is the standard of the eighteenth century makers, which perhaps justifies the notion that Irish glass of the period was just a poor relation of that made in England—the Irish great age of exuberance, when Irish cutting surpassed all competitors, was not to come until the nineteenth century.
Edwards was the same man who had been making glass for two years—from 1771 to 1773—at Drumrea, where were situated the Tyrone Collieries, near Dungannon. In spite of the convenient fuel supplies there, the real success of the Edward family was to be in Belfast. With his sons he continued making glass in that city until well on in the nineteenth century. There was a branch at Newry; they also had an iron machinery sideline. The firm passed through the usual Irish complications of floating companies and dissolving partnerships, even before Benjamin Senior died in 1812. His son, Benjamin Junior, carried on until 1826. There were complicated rivalries with other firms, with periodic advertising slanging matches, and after the Edwards family ceased work, various houses carried on the making of flint glass until about 1868.

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_Eighteenth Century Inscribed Drinking Glasses_

There may well be a short section here for glass bearing Williamite inscriptions, celebrating the Battle of the Boyne, or recording the Volunteer movement towards the end of the eighteenth century.

Most of these have patriotic inscriptions like the immortal memory of the ever glorious memory, together with the likeness of King William riding his white horse.

Westropp has pointed out that it is impossible to know for certain whether these political glasses were in fact made and engraved in Ireland. But there is nothing inherently unlikely in it. Drinking glasses were being made in Dublin as early as 1729, or again, in 1734, as is certified by an advertisement in the _Dublin Journal_ of October of that year. “At the new Glass House in Fleet Street, Dublin, the fire being now lighted, there is made all sorts of fine drinking glasses” . . . Whatever about the origin of the glasses themselves, style alone can date the inscriptions, and in this comparison with the current coin of the realm is useful. Probably the best of the engravings come from the 1740s, and other authentic ones from later. No doubt, also, a good many forgeries were engraved later on genuine old glasses; Westropp suggests that authentic ones have a dusty, yellowish quality, while modern fakes are silvery grey.

W. A. Seaby, a modern authority on the subject, in his _Irish Williamite Glass_, is reasonably sure that some pieces from the second quarter of the eighteenth century were made and also engraved in Dublin. That engraving could in fact be done in the capital is shown by an advertisement in the _Dublin Evening Post_ for February 1735 which says that, following complaints by the public that extravagant prices had been charged for engraving “arms, crests, words, letters or figures”, Joseph Martin of Fleet Street, opposite the Golden Ball, was employed by the Fleet Glass House, and would work “at such moderate rates as none hereafter may have reason to complain”. Again, in 1752 the Dublin Round Glass House advertised that it could provide engraving “of any kind or pattern . . . toasts or any flourish whatsoever”.

A good example of eighteenth century engraving is that on the thirteen and a half inch high Cobbe Goblet, now in the Ulster Museum, which was made in about 1743-45. It is inscribed:

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THE GLORIOUS AND IMMORTAL MEMORY OF
KING WILLIAM AND HIS QUEEN MARY
AND PERPETUAL DISAPPOINTMENT TO THE
POPE THE PRETENDER AND ALL THE ENEMIES
OF THE PROTESTANT RELIGION.

Less uncommon, of course, though still rare, are the small thick-sided trumpet-shaped drinking glasses, probably dating from mid-eighteenth century, and on to the Volunteer movement or the foundation of the Orange Institution in 1795—which indeed gave a considerable boost to the engraving of ceremonial glasses for the next decade or so.

All that need be added is that the collector should be very cautious in buying from this specialised group, because forgeries are numerous.