

CARNIVAL GLASS SOCIETY – CONCISE GUIDE TO CARNIVAL GLASS

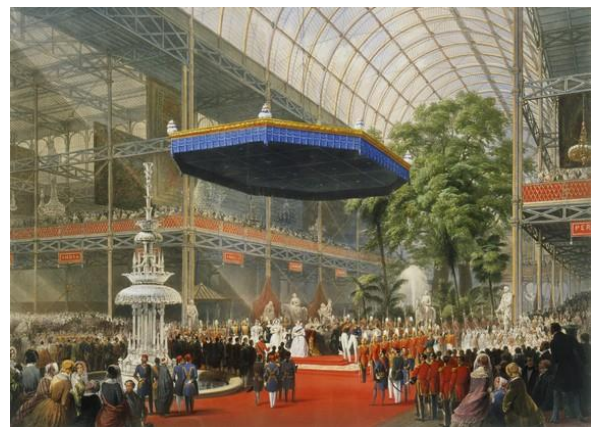
SECTION 1: CARNIVAL GLASS - THE INSPIRATION

What Inspired Carnival Glass? Where, in a world without the internet and without instant 'round the clock' access to information, did ideas and inspiration for new products come from?

The simple answer to this is '**The Great Exhibitions**' which had a huge influence on the development of all products including glass - because at that time **physically** seeing items 'in the flesh' was the main catalyst for new ideas, new designs and new products.

By the mid 19th Century steam travel, by ship and rail, had facilitated the globalisation of ideas with world trade fairs, such as the Great Exhibition of 1851 in Hyde Park, London, playing a major role.

The Great Exhibition of 1851, Crystal Palace, Hyde Park, London



L: The Crystal Palace R: Queen Victoria Opens the Great Exhibition (Dickinson's Comprehensive Pictures, Wiki Commons, public domain)

Named '**The Great Exhibition of the Works and Industries of all Nations**' it was the first 'International Trade Show' of its kind – visited by over 6 million people whose journeys had been facilitated by steam railways and steam ships which could now bring people to such an event 'en masse'. One hundred and fifty seven glass companies exhibited there including well known manufacturers from the Stourbridge area such as Thomas Webb and Richardson.

From this one exhibition came a number of legacies that were to ultimately feed into the development of Carnival Glass, including:

Albertopolis and the South Kensington Museum (now the V&A). The first of these is Albertopolis, the area of museums and institutes that were built on land to the South of Hyde Park that was purchased from the proceeds of the Great Exhibition – the aim of this development being to realise Prince Albert's dream of '*increasing the means of industrial education and extending the influence of science and art upon productive industry*'.



This included the South Kensington Museum that opened in 1857 and which housed a number of Roman and Syrian glass objects that had been naturally iridised as a result of being buried in the ground for many years. The museum was visited by one Louis Comfort Tiffany in 1865 and it is said that it was this ancient glass which first inspired him to develop iridised glass some years later.

(Photograph, left, of iridised Roman bowl made in 1st C AD, taken on CGS trip to the V&A Museum in 2018)

Stourbridge School of Art – South Kensington Curriculum

Secondly, the Exhibition stimulated a project to build schools of Art and Design around the UK including the Stourbridge School of Art where Harry Northwood studied and who went on to become one of the major manufacturers of Carnival Glass in America after 1907.

There Harry Northwood studied the 'South Kensington Curriculum' which had a strong focus on flora, fauna and classical themes which no doubt influenced the glass he designed and made after he crossed the Atlantic to America, including his richly decorated Carnival Glass patterns (*Photograph right: Northwood Three Fruits Carnival Glass plate from the Carnival Glass Society's Anthony and Maureen Ward Collection*)



So, these were two threads from the Great Exhibition that would ultimately lead to the development of Carnival Glass. Following on from this were other events which led to the craze for iridised Art glass in the European 'Art Nouveau' style with various Exhibitions fuelling developments on both sides of the Atlantic.

Key Dates in the Development of Iridised Glass

- In 1856, Leo Pantocsek developed the technique to iridise blown glass vessels, producing a range of glass for the Zahn factory based in modern day Slovakia. This glass was first shown at the 1862 World Fair in London where it must have stimulated the interest of those crossing the Atlantic for this event.
- In 1865 Tiffany visits the South Kensington Museum and is inspired by its collection of naturally iridised Roman and Syrian glass.
- In the meantime, Austrian, Josef Lobmeyr, and his brother who saw a future in Pantocsek's iridised glass lured away one of the glass makers from Zahn and thus learned how to make iridised glass. The Lobmeyr brothers passed this information to their brother-in-law, Wilhelm Kralik, who produced glass for them at his factory.
- In 1873 Lobmeyr displayed a huge range of iridised glass at the World Fair in Vienna to great international acclaim. The fair was visited by Tiffany who, once again, had crossed the Atlantic in the pursuit of ideas and was said to have been blown away by what he saw at this exhibition.



L: Thomas Webb Charger in iridised Bronze range. R: Northwood Peacock and Urn Bowl, both including birds, foliage and insects

- Around the same time, companies in the UK were also experimenting with iridised glass. Thomas Webb, for example, introduced its 'Bronze' range in around 1877 and this spectacular charger was made around that time (*Above photograph of charger taken on CGS trip to V&A museum in 2018*).
The size of it and the quality of decoration suggests that it must surely have been made for an exhibition. The themes of birds, reeds, flowers – even a dragonfly and a bee - seem to have made their way across the Atlantic as they are all reminiscent of the early Carnival Glass patterns.
- In the late 1880s companies such as Loetz in Austria were making spectacular iridised hand crafted Art Glass items (*photograph of Loetz Phaenomen Bowl taken at CGS visit to V&A in 2018*).



- In America, the Philadelphia World Trade fair of 1876 was the first major international trade fair to have been held in the United States. It was significant in glass terms because Lobmeyr took his range of iridised glass to America and exhibited at this fair where it again inspired local manufacturers.
- It was only a matter of time before this exotic glass craze was taken up by American glassmakers such as Tiffany who, in 1894, patented a method of iridising glass that he called Favrilite which he used to create high quality Art glass in the 'European Art Nouveau' style



His products were expensive and eagerly sought by a wealthy clientele that was eager to buy into the latest fashions in art and design emanating from Europe.

It was made at his aptly named 'Stourbridge Glass Works' – so we can see that, not only did designs and products cross the Atlantic from Europe to America but even the name of Tiffany's factory had made the journey all the way from the Midlands in UK to New York, USA.

Photograph Left: VA webteam at Wikipedia [CC BY-SA 3.0 (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>)]

- Iridised Art glass was also made by Steuben, Tiffany's major competitor in America, and by the early 1900s the story of Prime Carnival Glass, made in quantity, was about to emerge.

How did the development of expensive, handcrafted iridised Art Glass items result in the production of pressed iridised Carnival Glass? Find out by reading Section 2 'Carnival Glass – The Early Years'.