



A Shaft and Globe Wine/Utility Bottle

English Bottle, c. 1660-75. Lower neck glass thickness 5 mm. Glass-tipped pontil scar 3 cm diameter. Height 8 ¼ inches. Weight 740 gm. Private Collection.

TECHNOLOGY AND TERMINOLOGY: Derived from an 11th-12th century Persian form, the shaft and globe bottle epitomizes the 17th century European and English utility bottle. The French and Belgian examples are characterised by a wood-fired lighter green color, thin 2mm walls, overall lightness in weight, and a small 2-3cm blow-pipe pontil scar; while the English examples are coal-fired darker green (“black glass”), thick 5-7mm walls, heavier in weight, and glass-tipped pontil scars.

The earliest shaft and globe bottles had globular bodies, and tall cylindrical necks with an applied string-rim well below the rim. As the century progressed the necks became shorter and tapered, with a string-rim applied closer to the rim edge. Stylistically the string-rim might be rounded or beveled, which resembled a ring of Saturn. From 1650 to 1690 the bodies became tapered in the lower half, either by rolling and shaping hot glass on a flat metal or graphite surface, which is known as marvering, or by using a half-body mold. Prior to 1660 the base was quite narrow, but then became progressively wider developing into the “onion” form, which dominated from c. 1690-1710. Sealed shaft and globe bottles survived in England and on the Continent, but are rather rare with a colonial history.

The 17th century wine/utility bottles surviving with a Colonial history are mostly English with a few of continental origin, mostly Belgian. The tantalizing exception is the possibility that some could have been made between 1639-42, or possibly 1660, at the Glass House Field, located at Salem Village, MA. There is documentation of three English glass-makers involved at the site, yet there is no documentation of glass made there. If glass had been produced, then most likely it would have been window and/or bottles in the English tradition. There is evidence that within 2-3 years of the initial date of 1639, these three glass-makers had been hounded out of Salem for their religious beliefs. A few shaft and globe bottles have been found associated with Native American grave sites, particularly in Rhode Island and Connecticut.

THE OBJECT: The illustrated example is a c. 1660-75 English bottle displaying the dark green or “black glass” of the coal fired kiln. The earlier globular, free-blown body has now been blown into an open tapered mold in an apparent effort to standardize volume. Features dating it to c. 1660 are a low string-rim, narrow base and relatively elongated neck.

Although often referred to as wine bottles, these vessels had much greater utility and might be utilized for the shipping, storing and serving of any potable liquid, even oil or vinegar. In the second half of the 17th century, notably in France and Belgium, dedicated clear glass serving decanters were made. Surviving examples of late 17th Century clear glass decanters are extremely rare and even more rare are those with any sort of colonial history. No doubt, wine was usually served directly from the bottle.

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