

Get the Lead In!



From left to right.

- 1. Handled pitcher, c. 1760, H. 7" English. Blown colorless lead glass of baluster form with tooled spout and applied solid handle. The lower half gadrooned with a second gather of pattern-molded glass. Fine threading about the rim. A wafer joins the body to a compressed hollow globular knopped stem containing a 1723 George I shilling. Plain circular foot with 1.5cm plain "glass-tipped" pontil scar.*
- 2. Candlestick, c.1810-25, H11½", Pittsburgh. Free-blown colorless lead glass with a distinct smoky tinge. The bellied holder joined to a large hollow truncated cone by a solid compressed knop, the cone joined to the foot via a large compressed knop surmounting a smaller compressed knop, and hence to a plain foot with 2.5 cm plain "glass-tipped" pontil scar. The smoky tinge, typical of Pittsburgh, may relate to the use of coal, as opposed to wood, to fire the ovens. See Lowell Innes, Pittsburgh Glass 1791-1891, Houghton Mifflin Company, p.91, Fig.34 for an almost identical pair.*

- 3. Decanter, c. 1815-35, HOA 10⁷/₈"/8, attributed to Thomas Cains, South Boston Flint Glass Works or Phoenix Glass Works, South Boston. Free-blown colorless lead glass bottle of beehive form with two trailed bands of tooled chain decoration about the body, two triple bands about the neck, a wide flat rim flange and the neck interior ground. Low kick-up with 2.2 cm plain "glass-tipped" pontil scar. The hollow globe stopper is probably not original.*
- 4. Handled pitcher, c. 1815-35, H 7", attributed to Thomas Cains, South Boston Flint Glass Works or Phoenix Glass Works, South Boston. Free-blown colorless lead glass modified barrel-shaped body with two trailed bands of tooled chain decoration about the body, a wide slightly everted mouth with pulled spout, applied solid handle with tooled terminal, low kick-up with 2.2 cm plain "glass-tipped" pontil scar.*

During the second half of the seventeenth century glassmakers on the Continent and in England secretly worked to develop a clear, colorless glass suitable for fine table wares. The addition of lead into the formula proved to be the crucial missing element. Foremost among these experimental glassmakers was George Ravenscroft of London, who, around 1675, began producing fine leaded wares, largely in the Venetian fashion. His early works were complexly decorated, but subject to crizzling—a slow deterioration of the surface causing an unsightly cloudiness. By the turn of the 17th century the problem was largely overcome and glassware with a very high lead content of up to 30%, was produced. In both Britain and the Netherlands, the beginning of the 18th century saw a transition from baroque to classical styling. The highly ornate, complex and fragile Venetian forms of the baroque were replaced by a simplified, heavier, robust classical style; some so iconic they still influence modern design.

Typical of the classical style from the mid-18th century is a British gadrooned footed pitcher (Object 1). The stem contains a 1723 King George I shilling within its hollow knop. This fairly common practice of inserting a coin into the glass extended into 19th century American wares. The date of the coin may bear little relationship to the date of glass manufacture except to confirm that the glass post-dates the coin. Leaded (also termed "flint") wares were introduced almost simultaneously into American glass-making by Benjamin Bakewell in Pittsburgh, and Thomas Cains in Boston, around 1810. The illustrated candlestick with its colorless, but slightly smoky glass is typical of Pittsburgh and is so attributed (Object 2).

The decanter and pitcher, each with chain decoration, are attributed to Thomas Cains, Boston (Objects 3 & 4). The decoration is formed by the application of two thick parallel threads of glass which are then nipped together at intervals to simulate a chain. The technique is found in ancient Roman, Venetian and late 17th century English glass. It was revived in late 18th century in Bristol, England where Cains apprenticed prior to emigrating to America. At table the decanter was probably used largely for wines and the pitcher for water, beer, ale, cider or perry. Leaded glass lent itself well to both cutting and molding and most of the subsequent Sandwich-type table glass of the second quarter of the 19th century was lead based, while the common black wine/utility bottles and cylinder window glass continued to be made of less costly green non-leaded soda formula.

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