

# The KÖNIGSBERG KANT GLASS

*Simon Wain-Hobson*

Decoration of the bowl can transform an ordinary drinking glass into something unique. Jacobite Amen glasses c1745 are the ultimate examples of diamond point engraving. While these plain stemmed and air twist glasses don't say much per se, their inscriptions transport us to another time and place, notably the 1745 uprising led by Bonnie Prince Charlie, that has kept many a collector and researcher busy for years.<sup>1</sup> In 1937 Arthur Churchill Ltd devoted a catalogue to decorated Georgian glass, mainly those with engraving. Its title, *History in Glass*, says it all.<sup>2</sup>

While researching an engraved baluster glass c1730, recently acquired from Peter Adamson, I crossed email paths with David Neave, the noted historian, particularly to do with anything linked to Yorkshire. He asked me if I knew the Kant glass, an opaque twist glass with diamond point engraving, (Fig.1). I did not. It seems to have gone little noticed, perhaps because it has been in private hands in Germany since 1763,<sup>3</sup> while its history takes place in Königsberg - way to the east of England; for all this, it has strong connections with Hull.

The Königsberg Kant glass is typical for a tall opaque twist stemmed ale glass c1760, although it could have been used for champagne or wine. It is 21.6 cm high with a long ogee bowl over a triple series opaque twist stem: that is to say, an inner opaque white core surrounded by an opaque gauze with two outer opaque threads, set on a conical foot. The stem was broken and repaired using a soldered tin collar. About the stem is a gold plaid ribbon, knotted, the significance of which has been lost. It is the diamond point inscription (Fig.2) that brings



ABOVE Fig. 1  
The Kant glass, a tall triple series opaque twist glass with diamond point engraving. 21.6 cm.  
© Ralf Kranert

BELOW Fig. 2  
Inscription on the glass. The quality of the engraving is varied, suggesting several hands. The C of Chappoll is particularly badly executed

<p>Secrecy in love and sincerity in Friendship</p>	<p>Emanuel Kant M. A. Anthony Schorn Joseph Green Robert Motherby.</p>
<p>all Happy together notwithstanding what happend in the World</p> <p>=</p> <p>August of 30<sup>th</sup> 1763</p>	
	<p>Joseph P... [?] John Chappoll Charles Staniforth</p>

it alive and, like the Tardis, teleports us to Königsberg, 30th August, 1763. There are three parts to the engraving: the names, the text and the date.

## THE NAMES

Of the seven, the first, the renowned philosopher **Emanuel Kant MA** (1724-1804), stands out among all the others - he was born and died in Königsberg at the easterly reaches of eighteenth-century Prussia. It is now Kaliningrad and home to a naval air base in the Russian exclave between Poland and Lithuania. Kant changed his first name to Immanuel in 1746 believing that this spelling was closer to its original meaning in Hebrew<sup>4</sup>. Although Kant started his life lecturing on mathematics, physics, logic and metaphysics, by 1763 he had turned to philosophical issues. **Anthony Schorn** is probably Anton Schorn, the son of a wine merchant who lived in the nearby town of Braunsberg, just southwest of Königsberg, now Braniewo in today's Poland. The father, Michael Schorn, was an extremely wealthy art collector and merchant who had a wine company with reaches to Bordeaux, Burgundy, Champagne and the Rhineland.



Fig. 3  
*The south east prospect of Kingston upon Hull by Samuel and Nathan Buck 1745.*  
 © David and Susan Neave

His ships carried 'salt, limes, sugar, coffee, window glass, exported, in particular, Warmian yarn, flax, canvases and grain'<sup>5</sup>. Kant once visited the Schorn family in Braunsberg<sup>6</sup>. **Joseph Green** (1727-86) and **Robert Motherby** (1736-1801) were merchant partners who hailed from Hull. The parents of Robert Motherby and Joseph Green were close associates from the 1720s. Green was looking for an enterprising young man to help with running his affairs abroad. As Robert was only 12 when his father died in 1748, it is probable that the Greens took Robert on to help the family. Robert probably set up shop in Königsberg between 1751-55. As his older brother George (1731-93) had come to Königsberg before him, it was not the end of the world. George became a leading physician there at the 'court of Prussia' and has an entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. He is buried at Beverley Minster<sup>7</sup>. The younger Robert 'had the good sense to marry into one of the prominent commercial families of Königsberg'<sup>8</sup>.

Green and the younger Motherby got on so well that Robert eventually took over Green, Motherby & Co. A successful Hull merchant meant

an owner of ships. Drawings of the day depict the port of Hull with scores of masts running as far as the eye can see (Fig.3). Boats from Hull, Newcastle and London plied the North Sea, passed through the Skagerrak and Kattegat to the Baltic, and onwards to Stockholm and St. Petersburg. Some 15-20 boats alone did the Hull to Königsberg route<sup>7</sup>.

A range of goods, including West Riding cloth and Derbyshire lead, was carried to the Baltic and Scandinavia, while timber, iron ore, tar and linseed were imported. Spruce linen yarn and linseed were the most important goods imported into Hull from Königsberg. Initially the English linen industry depended on Dutch yarn, but by the mid-18th century the import of Spruce linen yarn from Prussia had overtaken that from the Dutch. By the end of the century over 90% of the linen yarn imported into England from Prussia landed in Hull, on its way to the mills in Lancashire and West Riding<sup>7,9</sup>. 'The ships that crowded the harbour at Königsberg loaded with yarn worth – ship-ton for ship-ton - five times as much as tobacco, four times as much as sugar and three times as much as pepper'<sup>10</sup>. The fifth name on the glass is

**Joseph P-I**, which doesn't enlighten us, while the sixth is **John Chappell** (1739-1776), no doubt *Chappell*, who was about 24 years old at the time. His father, Benjamin, was master of a ship that plied the Hull to Königsberg route. Later, John became known as 'the Gentleman Captain. ...John Chappelle so loved books and poetry that he never put out to sea without his much-read copy of *Paradise Lost* or the pensive wanderings of Edward Young's *Night-Thoughts on Life, Death & Immortality*. From these he drew solace on the long evenings in his cabin away from his wife and only child'<sup>11</sup>. John's grandfather was a Huguenot ship-owner who fled France for Hull following the revocation in 1685 of the Edict of Nantes by Louis XIV<sup>7</sup>. At the helm we have **Charles Staniforth** (1731-97), an influential merchant from Hull and later, London. Charles Staniforth's niece Mary married Joseph Beckett who is credited with setting up the linen industry in Barnsley. Green and Staniforth were brothers-in-law by

August 1763. Both were older and better established than Motherby who was not from a wealthy family. Joseph Green and Robert Motherby were known to have been close friends of Kant for many years up to the end of the eighteenth century. 'Green's effect upon Kant cannot be overestimated'<sup>4,12</sup>; indeed, he became Kant's 'best friend'<sup>8</sup>. Kant was a regular Sunday guest at Motherby's house. This glass shows that they were at least acquaintances by 1763, something that has so far escaped Kant scholars<sup>8</sup>. Incidentally, it was Robert Motherby who accompanied Kant on his visit to the Schorn family<sup>6</sup>.

#### THE TEXT

*Secrecy in love and sincerity in Friendship and all Happy together notwithstanding what happend in the World (Fig.2).* Christine Battersby, Emeritus Professor at the University

of Warwick, speculated "that 'secrecy in love' is probably taken from Samuel Butler's 'Hudibras', a seventeenth-century satirical text which had been translated into German and which Kant refers to"<sup>13</sup>. Who can quibble with 'sincerity in Friendship'?

#### THE DATE

*August of 30th 1763.* While this is a decidedly un-English way of writing the date, the latter part of the inscription, *all Happy...* is best understood in conjunction with the date. The Seven Years War (1756-63) had seen a long series of conflicts between the European powers around the globe. Winston Churchill described it as the first world war. It pitted Great Britain, Hanover, Portugal and emerging Prussia under Frederick the Great against France - unusually aligned with Austria-Hungary - along with Spain, Sweden and Russia. Russia

invaded East Prussia in early 1758 and then evacuated it after the accession to the throne of the pro-Prussian Peter III in 1762.

At the outset of the war the French attacked Menorca in 1756. Admiral John Byng (1704-57), a Royal Naval officer and MP, was sent to relieve the besieged garrison at Minorca. He failed and the island was captured. On his return to Britain, he was court-martialled for failing to 'do his utmost'. He was executed by firing squad on 14th March 1757 despite appeals to King George II for clemency. Byng was seen by many as a scapegoat for the Admiralty's inefficiency and the execution in this way of such a high-ranking officer divided the country. His descendants today continue to campaign for a posthumous pardon. Macabre Byng glasses have become collectable items (Fig.4).

The Duke of Newcastle (1693-1768), of Kneller Kit-Cat portrait

Fig. 4  
An Admiral Byng air twist wine glass, engraved with him hanging from a gibbet flanked by the initials AB, the reverse inscribed JUSTICE, 15.3 cm. © Woolley and Wallis Salisbury Salerooms



Fig. 5  
A King of Prussia goblet with a portrait of Frederick the Great on horseback, after an engraving by Daniel-Nicolas Chodowiecki, the reverse side with a shield cartouche of the Prussian Eagle, flanked by 'FREDERIC.REX. AGED.47:1757' & 'GOD.BLESS.THE.KING.OF.PRUSSIA.' 20.6 cm (18,19). © Bonhams



fame <sup>14</sup>, was Prime Minister for the best part of the Seven Years War. The British alignment with Prussia, the attraction of Frederick the Great (1712-86) and his successes saw numerous Georgian drinking glasses of the day engraved with *Success to the King of Prussia*. A superbly engraved King of Prussia glass dated 1757 is shown in Fig.5. By contrast, Frederick's defeats - and there were several: he fled the field at the Battle of Lobositz in 1756 - were passed over.

The Treaty of Paris, signed 10 February 1763, ended the hostilities between a strengthened Great Britain and a weakened France, which ceded Canada. The treaty of Hubertusburg, signed five days later, concluded the peace between Austria, Prussia and Saxony. At the opening of Parliament on 23 April 1763, King George III spoke in favour of the Treaty of Paris. John Wilkes MP (1725-97), member of the Royal Society, violently attacked the King's speech in issue number 45 of *The North Briton*. This led to attempts to silence him, which ultimately failed. It saw *Liberty and Wilkes* or *Success to Liberty and Wilkes*, engraved on more than one opaque twist drinking glass (Fig.6). With strong public support, Wilkes was cleared by the Lord Chief Justice; he was remembered as the father of the British free press, defender of civil and political liberties and hero to American colonists, who closely followed his outspoken endorsements of liberty <sup>20</sup>. It is accepted that the outcome of the Seven Years War set the stage for the American War of Independence that started a mere 12 years after the Königsberg gathering.

As always, wars took their toll on state coffers. Currency depreciation across northern Europe led to inflation and all its attendant evils. Currency, commodity and land speculation were the main causes of the commercial crisis that struck in the summer of 1763. It started with



the de Neufville bank in Amsterdam – almost half as large as the Bank of Amsterdam - which suspended payments on 27th July. The crisis quickly spread to Hamburg, Berlin and Stockholm. There were 30 failures in Amsterdam, 95 in Hamburg <sup>15</sup>. Berlin was anything but spared; crucially, Johann Ernst Gotzkowsky (1710-75), one of the most important financial figures of the day in Berlin, was in great difficulty. He had neglected his factories to make quick profits by financial speculation. Throughout August, Frederick II was trying to save the situation and even offered to buy his factories. It was not to be, for Gotzkowsky had made many enemies, and his difficulties rumbled on into the next year <sup>15</sup>. Green and Motherby would have had debts as well as being creditors. Everything would have been called in. By 30th August

Fig. 6  
Wilkes and Liberty double series opaque twist ale glass, 18 cm. © Woolley and Wallis Salisbury Salesroom

the text, *all Happy together notwithstanding...*, suggests that Kant's friends knew that they had been spared financial ruin. Furthermore, Königsberg was recovering from the Russian retreat of 1762. That said, Kant prospered through the presence of the Russians who attended his lectures and paid him as a tutor..

#### THE GATHERING

The Kant glass could have been made anywhere in England, for merchants like Green and Staniforth not only had the financial clout to buy the glasses, but they also had the means of shipping them from anywhere to

Königsberg. Staniforth and Green had London connections and would have known the fashions of the day. As both were established merchants by 1763, one of the two was the most probable buyer and shipper.

Where was the glass inscribed and by whom? The quality of the diamond point engraving is varied, from so-so to poor. There are spelling mistakes, for example *Chappoll*, although such errors do occur with top quality engravers as evidenced by *Succefs to the ENTERPPIZE on a Privateer glass*<sup>16,17</sup>.

Anthony suggests an English corruption of Anton. As mentioned, the inscription refers to Emanuel Kant as opposed to the later Immanuel. As Kant claimed that he had Scottish ancestors, something that has never been clearly established, it is possible he used Emanuel with his English friends. Likewise, Anton. Yet given the wealth of these merchants, if the engraving had been commissioned, they would have found someone good - after all, Dutch and Bohemian engravers were capable of magnificent feats circa 1763.

Possibly these seven men found themselves at dinner in one of their Königsberg houses *all Happy together* where they exchanged horror stories of close shaves, bankruptcy and ruin. No doubt they toasted their lucky escape. Maybe a member of the party took one of the glasses and started to inscribe it. Others, added their lines and names, with more or less success, perhaps depending on blood alcohol levels. Maybe the glass was broken that evening, which for some was a lucky omen: remember the eighteenth-century custom of breaking slender stemmed toasting glasses. As the Kant glass was handed down directly within the Motherby family from 1763 to 2008, Robert Motherby was probably the main culprit! The present owner is a relative through marriage seven generations down.

It would have been good if the narrative ended here. Unfortunately, all Happy together... was not to last long for one. The economic and financial consequences of the Seven Years War rumbled on. "On July 10, 1765 the councilor Schorn announced 'against all suspicions' in front of the mayor" the collapse of his company - "The great house he ran, furniture, silverware, servants and lackeys, his hunting passion, gave the impression of immense wealth, and yet suddenly everything collapsed like a house of cards. ...The Schorn bankruptcy also led to that of his son Anton"<sup>5</sup>.

'To see a World in a Grain of Sand' is the opening line of William Blake's poem *Auguries of Innocence* first published in 1863. A tall opaque twist glass, engraved exactly a century earlier, has allowed us to do just this.

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