



An attractive 'Old English' weight, probably made in the Birmingham/Stourbridge area. Although often very fine, they have not increased in value as much as those made by named manufacturers, and a good example might cost £250-£350. Photo courtesy Sweetbriar Gallery.



Paul Ysart paperweights are highly prized and usually snapped up as soon as they appear on the market. This is a very desirable butterfly with a PY cane in the garland and would sell for about £800. Photo courtesy Sweetbriar Gallery.



This is a fine example of a large concentric paperweight made at Richardsons of Stourbridge, probably round about 1912. The canes of Richardsons weights are finer than those of Arculus and Walsh-Walsh (who also worked in the Stourbridge area). Photo courtesy Sweetbriar Gallery.

## An introduction to Paperweights and their values

by Brenda Greysmith



A rare Clichy pedestal paperweight c1850. Sold for £1,292 at Bonhams' sale in May. (Includes buyer's premium)



A Bacchus paperweight, c1850. Sold for £1,115 at Bonhams' sale in May. (Includes buyer's premium)

It's not always easy to differentiate between antique paperweights and modern ones, but for many collectors learning to spot subtle clues is part of the appeal. Although the paperweight is thought to have originated on the island of Murano, near Venice, it is the glassmakers of mid nineteenth France who created the highly prized examples of what today's collectors call the 'classic period'. Work from the French companies Baccarat, Saint Louis and Clichy remains the most highly sought after, but there are plenty of other attractive vintage examples from makers in Britain, the United States and Bohemia. In addition, many limited edition paperweights have been made by talented glassmakers over the last 25 years or so and are already showing increasing value.

Two techniques appear in antique glass paperweights - millefiori and lampwork. In millefiori, rods of glass (called canes) have designs running through them (like lettering in a stick of rock) and when viewed end-on look rather like tiny flowers - in fact 'millefiori' means 1,000 flowers. The canes are sometime set in an apparently random manner (called 'Scrambled') or in circles ('Concentrics') or against a ground of milky white threads ('Latticino'). In the lampwork technique, shapes such as flowers, fruit, animals and insects are painstakingly pieced together and then covered with clear glass. Sometimes both millefiori and lampwork techniques are combined in the same paperweight.

While these are the main techniques to look for other vintage examples can be both interesting and relatively inexpensive. 'Dump' weights, for example, were made by bottle-factory workers utilising the glass that would have been dumped at the end of the day. There are also advertising paperweights which display the name and products of a company but may otherwise be quite plain and souvenir weights which incorporate pictures (prints or photos) of places. More recent paperweights have used abstract designs.

Prices for vintage paperweights can vary from a few pounds up to many thousands. In the early 1990s a rare Clichy sold by Sotheby's in New York for \$250,000. But many antique weights are valued at under £1,000 (for perfect condition) and interesting examples can be found for much less. However, the non-specialist may find it difficult to distinguish between the valuable and the inexpensive, the genuine and the fake. There are some general guidelines. An old weight may show wear on the base, for example, and a vintage French one will probably have a slightly concave base. A good millefiori weight will have a covering of clear glass, fine even canes and a central cane that is really central. On reproductions wear is often simulated. You really need to examine paperweights in daylight, not in the relative darkness of a shop.

Few weights were signed or dated but information can sometimes be found in the canes of millefiori designs: within these, some manufacturers incorporated the date (and sometimes their initial) while in other cases the characteristics of the rods themselves will provide vital clues. Dealer Anne Metcalfe, who owns Sweetbriar Gallery in Cheshire (and is the author of the Miller's Guide on the subject), stresses that often the only certain way to differentiate between an antique and a modern weight is to learn about the different cane designs.

So what companies should the novice paperweight collector be researching? Of the three best-known French companies, Baccarat and Saint Louis worked with lead crystal and enjoyed their heyday during the classic period of 1840-80. Both still produce top-end, limited edition paperweights today. The Saint Louis designs are particularly innovative. Clichy, the third great French weight-making name in the mid nineteenth century, is possibly the most popular with today's collectors, perhaps because of the soft colours it used and the number of miniatures it produced.

Paperweight makers also worked in southern Germany or Czechoslovakia in the nineteenth century (and their weights are now called 'Bohemian'). Their products rarely rivalled French weights but they did create some interesting examples which are less expensive. Bohemian (and British) glassworkers emigrated to the US in the nineteenth century. Their influence combined with that of France to shape production there among companies based on the East Coast.

The history of vintage British paperweights is not generally well documented. It used to be thought that Whitefriars made paperweights in the nineteenth century, but now it seems that the date of 1848 appeared on the weights they made in the 1930s. The company started making dated advertising weights in 1951 and produced weights to mark the coronation in 1953. Its best paperweights were made from 1970 to 1980, when the company suddenly closed. One manufacturer

with better records is George Bacchus or Birmingham, which made large, mainly concentric millefiori designs in the 1850s. Other vintage British makers tend to be grouped together under the name 'Stourbridge'. Among the better known companies are Arculus, Richardsons and Walsh-Walsh.

Scotland has had a particularly prominent role in paperweight making. It began when Paul Ysart moved there from Spain and started making weights during the 1930s. A great paperweight maker, Paul was mainly employed by Moncrieffs to make Monart art glass. His father Salvador and brothers Vincent and Augustine were also glassmakers at Moncrieffs but left to start up on their own as Ysart Brothers Glass (producing Vasart glass). More recently, fine quality weights have come from Perthshire, Selkirk and Caithness the latter particularly known for their abstract designs.

While identification may not always be straightforward, checking condition is relatively easy. Cracked paperweights have little or no value. Chipped ones may be re-polishable although some collectors dislike re-polished examples. Care is largely common sense. Do not keep you weight on a sunny wooden windowsill as the heat may crack the glass and even scorch the woodwork. When washing paperweights, use tepid water only. Sudden changes in temperature could cause them to crack.



*A Baccarat garlanded flower paperweight, mid 19th century. Sold for £1,762 (against an estimate of £500-£700) at Bonhams' sale in November 2002. (Includes buyer's premium)*



*A St Louis dahlia paperweight, mid 19th century. Sold for £1,762 at Bonhams' sale last November. (Includes buyer's premium)*



*A St Louis miniature crown paperweight, mid-19th century. Sold for £235 at Bonhams' sale in November 2002. (Includes buyer's premium)*



*A Baccarat patterned millefiori paperweight, mid-19th century. Sold for £564 at Bonhams' sale in November 2002. (Includes buyer's premium)*



*An English Advertising Weight. This is an interesting area of collecting as, although not so easy to find, they are relatively inexpensive at about £20-£35. The most sought after are those with some colour and engraved script on the base. Photo courtesy Sweetbriar Gallery.*



*A Clichy miniature carpet ground paperweight, mid-19th century. Sold for £4,000 (against an estimate of £300-£400) at Bonhams' sale in November 2002. (Includes buyer's premium)*



*George Bacchus paperweights are usually magnums (i.e. over 3 inches). This one typically features hollow canes and ruffle canes. About six years ago, they were selling for about £500 but now they go for a basic £2,000, often fetching double that price if they are good examples or rare. Photo courtesy Sweetbriar Gallery.*