

Isle of Wight Glass Museum

Richard M Giles



fig.1: The entrance to the Glass Museum

Two years after our visit to Isle Of Wight Studio Glass in its new location within the Arreton Barns Craft Village, we returned in August 2016 to see the revised studio layout that now incorporates the Isle Of Wight Glass Museum. Before I go any further, I should point out that although the museum is located alongside the glass studio which has obviously involved co-operation between the parties, it has no direct association with Isle of Wight Studio Glass. The man behind the museum and owner of most of the glass on

fig.2: (far right) Michael Harris designs from the 1950's and 1960's

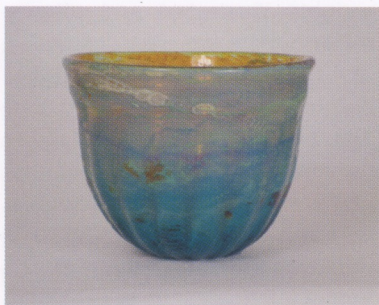
display is glass collector Anton Doroszenko, with the museum being set up to display his vast collection of studio glass, the majority of which has been made on the Isle of Wight over the past forty-plus years, or in some way has associations with the island. The original studio building now has a two-storey extension on one side which has created a new and larger ground floor display area/shop that is separate from the working studio. Behind this new shop area and accessed through it is the Glass Museum (fig.1), for which there is a small admission charge. On the first floor are some further display cases plus an open space which could be used to host talks and workshops by visiting artists or glass experts. As you approach the museum area there is a large black and photograph showing the Isle of Wight Glass team in the early days, which includes both Timothy and Jonathan Harris, then inside the museum is a large panel detailing the history of the company.

The museum area walls are lined with display cases, with a central island formed of back-to-back display cases. As one would expect from the name, the bulk of the glass on display relates to the Harris family and is laid out in chronological order, starting with Michael Harris designs from the 1950's and 1960's (fig.2). The small bowl (fig.3) is a rare early piece by Michael Harris, dating from the

genesis of studio glass in the UK. Now on loan from Mark Hill, it originally came from the collection of Ronald Stennett-Willson; Mark believes that Michael gave it to him before he left for Malta in late 1967. This is followed by examples of Mdina Glass from 1968 to 1972 (fig's.4 & 5) and then a couple of cases showing the glass made on the Isle of Wight in the 1970's following their arrival from Malta (figs.6 & 7). General production items made in the 1980's fills the next case, followed by two cases of more special pieces of glass designed by Michael and made by



fig.3: (left) Small bowl signed 'Michael Harris RCA 1967' on loan from the Mark Hill collection



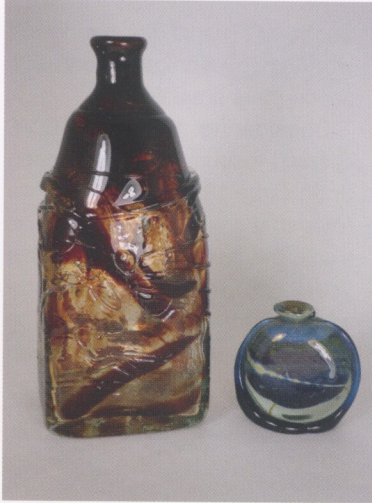


fig.4: (left)
Mdina Glass
1968 to 1972.
Designed and
made by
Michael Harris

Timothy Harris during the same period. More glass from this collaboration of designer/maker made during the 1990's fills the next case and then finally there are three cases full of glass made by Timothy Harris since the start of the 21st century.

Other cases display some of the glass made by Jonathan Harris while working on the island and then items made by him after his departure from the family business to set up his own studio in Ironbridge where he could concentrate on making the wonderful hand-carved cameo glass that you will see if you visit the National Glass Fairs. The final case associated with Isle of Wight Studio Glass displays pieces of glass made by people such as Chris Lucas and Pippa d'Arcy. Chris learnt his glassmaking skills with the studio and later went on to



fig.5: (left)
Mdina Glass
1968 to
1972.
Designed
and made by
Michael
Harris

set up a short-lived enterprise called Touch of Glass which I can remember visiting during one of my trips to visit relatives on the Isle of Wight. Pippa d'Arcy worked as an independent glassmaker on the island.

The remaining displays cover the early days of glassmaker Michael Rayner when he traded as Island Glass in Totland before relocating to the Needles Pleasure Park and changing the name to Alum Bay Glass, this is where the company still operates but under different ownership. Also represented are the glassmaking skills of Martin Evans, who formed the Glory Art Glass Studio in Sandown and passed his skills and enthusiasm for glass on to his son Ed who now runs the studio with Martin in semi-retirement. Last but by no means least is a cabinet full of the clever and exuberant molten glass creations from Paul Critchley of Diamond Isle Sculptured Glass which can also be found within the Arreton Barns Craft Village.

On the first floor are a few more display cases containing examples of continental studio glass from well-known makers and this area is obviously a work in progress with room for expanding the exhibits. Our overall impression was very favourable: there was a helpful lady on hand in the shop who, although not a glass expert, could give more information about the museum and its contents. From a personal point of view, the areas we found most interesting and informative were the displays of Isle of Wight Studio Glass from the 1970's to the 1990's. Over our years of collecting we have picked up various odd pieces of good quality glass that caught our attention but were without any identifying marks or labels and visiting the museum helped identify several of those pieces.

The Challenge of Setting up a new Glass Museum

Anton Doroszenko, the creator of the Isle of Wight Glass Museum, has added a post-script to Richard Giles's article. He says that ...

"Richard has highlighted the growth of the museum in pointing out that it is a 'work in progress'. It applies particularly to the first floor, where we are building a wide ranging collection of French, German, British Art Deco and Victorian glass." The museum is entirely funded by Anton, so he needs to grow slowly, buying the better quality items that he expects to see in the museum. This is, as he acknowledges, an expensive endeavour.

The museum has three part-time staff, two on the retail side to cover seven day-a-week opening and one managing the educational programme. Though early days, the enthusiasm of two students, taken on for work experience has been heartening. The remaining management of the organisation - obtaining new exhibits and sales stock, building the museum web site, organizing events, creating publicity materials and dealing with the accounts is totally administered by Anton. He confesses 'that it is quite a challenge for me, since I have a full-time day job on top of all the museum work and I live in Oxfordshire not on the Isle of

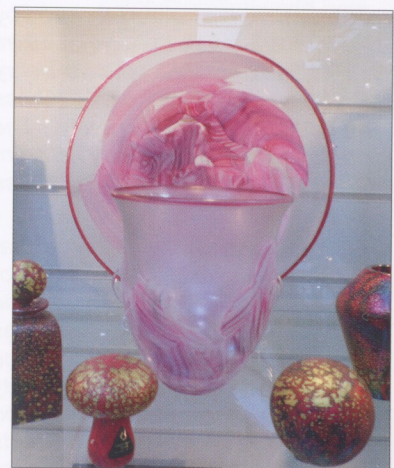


fig.6: Bon Bon 'Candyfloss' plate and vase, both very rare, surrounded by pieces of Firecracker glass



Wight. It's usual for me to be working to midnight every day, seven days a week!

Considering that the I.O.W. Glass Museum has only been open since 19th March 2016, he feels that the plans are well on track, but it will take at least five years to become properly established and put onto the tourist map. Watch his museum web site for developments!

isleofwightglassmuseum.org.uk

The GA wishes him well.

fig.7: Glass designed by Michael Harris and made by Timothy Harris, 1980's and 1990's