

Conference

Scotland's Glass – 400 Years of Glassmaking

Billed as 'UK's Largest ever Glass Conference', the number who actually gathered at the Edinburgh College of Art from 1-3 October last year was sadly disappointing, at best 50 – perhaps the costs of attending the Biennale and Stourbridge Glass Festival had drained enthusiasm for another event. Three streams of lectures

focusing on the themes of glass history, paperweights and modern glass ran concurrently, keeping delegates fit as they sprinted through the labyrinthine corridors, up and down stairs, to find lecture theatres. With my own interest in engraving, my choices of what to attend had a bias in that direction.

Jill Turnbull's talk '400 Years: the rise, shine and decline of the Scottish Glass Industry' outlined some of the conclusions from her book *The*

*Scottish Glass Industry, 1610-1750*, Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2001 (ISBN 0 903903 18 0), bringing them up-to-date with her more recent research. At the same time, Alison Kinnaird described a significant international commission as one of the glass artists involved in the Murano Hotel at Tacoma, on the coast between Seattle and Portland. The hotel was refurbished by Provenance Hotels who invited world class glass artists, Dale Chihuly, Massimo Micheluzzi, Bruno Romanelli, Masayo Odahashi, Orfeo Quagliata, William Morris, Dante Marioni, Bertil Vallien, April Sargent and Alison, among many others, to make work for the public spaces while each artist made a significant piece for a particular floor, bedrooms on that floor being decorated with drawings and photos of the same artist's work. It is worth a visit.

Brian Blench talked about Helen Munro Turner, her role in founding the glass department at the Edinburgh College of Art and some of her students. Shy, retiring and elusive, Munro Turner ordered her personal papers burned on her death, so there is little left to reveal. She had trained in Edinburgh as a book illustrator and designer before turning to glass and her oeuvre is very slight. Her claim to fame is the glass department that struggles on in the hands of another woman, Alison McConachie.

Stephen Pollock-Hill spoke about the Scottish glass industry at the same time as a demonstration of caneworking by Mike Hunter. Simon Cortle gave an excellent talk '18th Century Enamelled Glass: The Scottish Connection', a foretaste of his work on armorial enamels to be published next year, outlining the far wider reach of the Beilby family than was formerly known. John Smith spoke briefly about The Duke of Hamilton Cabinet which is adorned with classic glass reliefs by James Tassie and also reported some fascinating sleuthing conducted around the glass collection at Duff House, the latter proving how much remains to be discovered from these remote old country houses, valuable but neglected

sources of historic glass with better provenance than most.

The talk by Geoffrey Seddon, 'The Jacobite Rebellion and Scottish Glass' was a carefully argued, but not entirely persuasive presentation on the 37 known 'Amen' glasses. Enthusiast Ian McKenzie from Adelaide, a glass merchant and polisher, supports the hypothesis, (as does a handwriting expert) that there was one engraver, probably left-handed, quite possibly Sir Robert Strange, father of line engraving, known to have used both a buron and diamond tool for engraving on metal from the 1720s. However, doubt creeps in that they were all by the same hand if one accepts that on metal the engraver pushes the buron or diamond, while the glass engraver pulls the diamond in gentle strokes, holding it at right angles to the glass surface. The resulting script on glass can be very different both from handwriting and metal engraving and any hand can be copied. Some of the glasses illustrated had been engraved by pulling the line in long strokes, risking splinters and resulting in very thin lines and no thick strokes, while others illustrated used several minute strokes on each line, producing a bolder, whiter line and controlled balance to the letter form (the 'good glasses'). Nobody can really tell when they were engraved. A date on the glass is not evidence. What we do know is that there was a furious demand for such sentimental pieces after 1840. While some are known to be genuine, others are clouded by the market. Nigel Benson's talk on Ysart Glass and its place as a forerunner of studio glass will hopefully be published in *The Glass Cone*. Helen MacDonald, lately designer for Caithness Glass, gave a talk about art and design on the factory floor, demonstrating the sad decline of the industry and its lack of contact with contemporary design and taste.

Julie L Sloan gave an interesting talk contrasting the work of two famous contemporary architectural glass artists and designers, Mackintosh and Frank Lloyd Wright and their influence on



Art for public spaces in the Murano Hotel, Tacoma. ABOVE: Alison Kinnaird, in the Grand Hall; BELOW: Dante Marioni and Bruno Romanelli



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