

MINING SCENES ENGRAVED ON A GLASS VASE

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Abstract: A description is presented of mining scenes engraved on a German glass vase of the mid 18th century.

In February 1997 one of the antiques presented to the experts on the BBC's TV programme *Going for a Song* for their comments was a glass vase engraved with mining scenes, said to be from Saxony and probably mid to late 18th century. Through the courtesy of the BBC's consultant Adam Schoon, the vase was located in the collections of Lord Zetland at Aske Hall, near Richmond, North Yorkshire. With his Lordship's permission, and with the help of his Administrator, Ms M. Mercer, it has recently been possible to examine the vase and to photograph the engraved scenes. This article records a very unusual means of illustrating mining activities.

The clear glass vase is about 30 cm tall, with half of that made up of the base and stem, and the lips of both vase and lid are gilded. Both vase and lid are engraved with mining scenes. There is no text and no indication of what was being mined, though the scenes suggest metal-mining rather than coal.

On the cup part of the vase the engravings form a frieze about 6 cm high composed of ten scenes, some in groups placed one above the other. Each scene is about 4-5 cm wide and 2-3 cm high, i.e. not much larger than a postage stamp. Being on a curved glass surface with high reflectivity and with the scenes

on the opposite side tending to show through, they were far from easy to photograph as the accompanying illustrations show. Putting matt black paper inside the vase helped to reduce reflections.

The miners all appear to be wearing something like a tail coat, as seen in many early mid-European mining illustrations. Less clearly, they seem to be wearing round "pork-pie" hats. Several scenes have hand-barrows without legs on which to rest the load, possibly to discourage them from resting too often.

No date or source for the vase appears to be on record, as it appears to have been passed down through the present owner's family for several generations. The experts on BBC TV's *Going for a Song* said it was 18th century and that it might be from Saxony: a house inventory by Sotheby's suggested that it was made at Lauenstein about 1750. Lauenstein is a small town in southern Saxony close to the border of Brunswick. It is not far from Hamelin (of Pied Piper fame) and was well-known in the 18th century for its lead-crystal and gilded glassware. The mid-European appearance of the miners tends to confirm this central German origin. A suggestion that they were coal miners is not borne out by the style of the illustrations.

There were two other vases of the same size and style in the same room at Aske Hall: one simply had floral engraving whilst the other had an inscription in English wishing their Majesties' good health. This might suggest an English origin or perhaps just that the inscription was added later.



Fig. 1.
The whole vase.

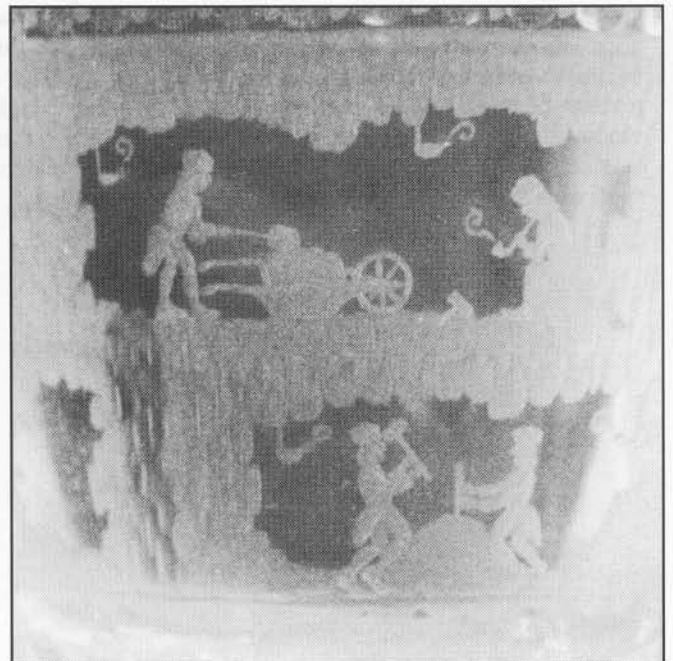




Fig. 2 (opposite page, below right). The upper scene shows a miner shovelling ore into a hand-barrow on the left, whilst another on the right appears to be sitting down having a smoke! Two stylized lamps with curly wicks or flames hang from the roof.

In the lower scene two miners are attacking a large boulder, one on the right holding a drill while the man on the left has a hammer raised ready to strike it. Two lamps hang from the roof. A possible winze lies to the left of both scenes.



Fig. 3 (top left. Three scenes together: the upper left has arcs of markings above which looks rather like a firework display, but which may represent blasting. A lamp hangs at the left. The right-hand scene shows a miner with a drill or chisel in his left hand and a hammer raised in his right. Another lamp hangs above.

The lower scene shows a miner pushing a wheelbarrow.



Fig. 4 (top right). The scene here shows a miner climbing a ladder on the right, with a shaft containing a double-bucket system on the left. The engraving is not very clear and the buckets may in fact be wicker baskets.

Fig. 5 (opposite, centre). The upper scene shows a miner using a pick on the lefthand wall, whilst two others to the right appear to be using a sieve over a small pile of ore. Two lamps hang above them.

The lower scene shows a miner using a rake (or is it a shovel) on a heap of crushed ore.

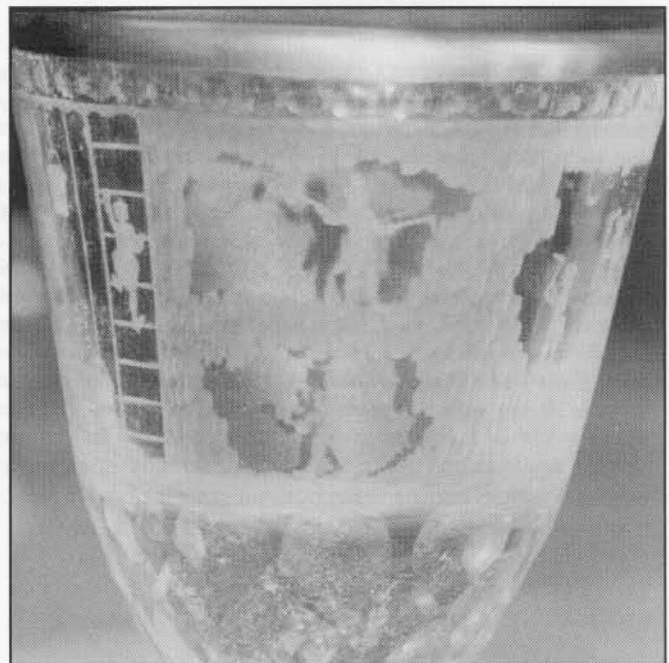
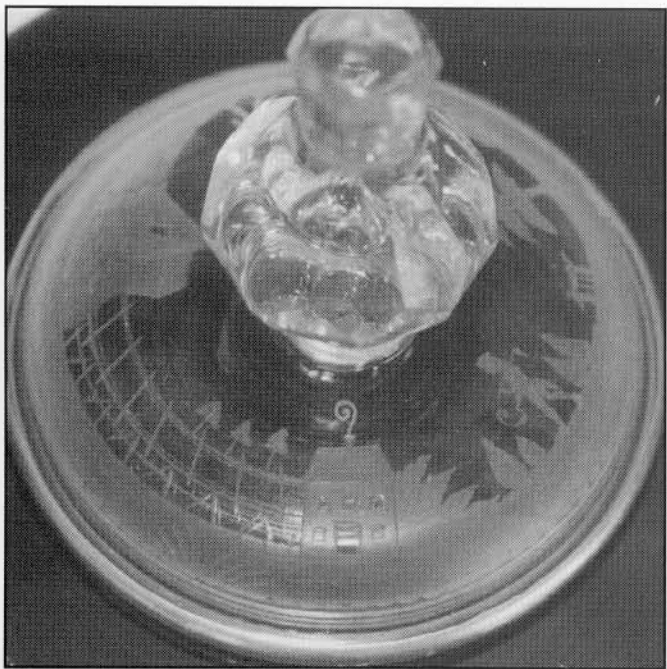


Fig. 6 (below right). The miner in the upper scene holds a pick on the rock in one hand whilst raising a hammer ready to strike it in the other.

The lower scene shows a miner going to or from his workplace holding a lamp in one hand and a pick over his shoulder.



Figs. 7 and 8 (above). The vase lid shows a continuous frieze, difficult to photograph on the doubly curved glass surface. A suitable starting point shows a building like a doll's house which has no obvious connection with mining. A curl of smoke rises from the chimney. Moving to the right, there is a miner with a lamp and a pick over his shoulder. Immediately afterwards there is a windlass like the traditional Derbyshire stows, then a man with a hand-barrow. Next there is a large building with a triangular frontage tapering to a point with a flag, and a barn-like side block. Together the triangle and the barn may represent a church, or they may be an ore house. Between this building and the house at the start of the frieze is a long trellis-like structure with no obvious purpose. It may represent some sort of transport system. The idea that it might be a flat-rod system is negated by the lack of any obvious power source. Aske Hall is not normally open to the public, but visits may be made by appointment.