

Factories Connected with Richard Cooper and Thomas Wood at Portobello, Scotland

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Beginning with William Bailey, a series of glass houses existed at Portobello, Scotland. Baily was joined by Richard Cooper in 1856, and Cooper became an important glass maker in the town. Thomas Wood joined Cooper in 1859, but the two parted ways in 1866, dividing the production facility between them. The companies existed side by side and in competition with each other until 1928 when the Wood Bottle Co. purchased Cooper's plant. Several of the plants used distinctive marks on containers.

Histories

Initially, the William Baily factory was the only glass plant in Portobello. That continued until the 1866 breakup of Cooper and Wood, when the factory was divided into east and west halves, the east side going to Cooper and the west to Wood. The twin plants were reunited by Distillers Co., Ltd., ca. 1928.

William Bailey or William & Joseph Bailey (1829-1856)

William Bailey at one time worked at a chemical factory, owned by a Mr. Arkley (or Astley). Arkley was so paranoid about having formulae stolen that he barred visitors, and the place became known as "Arkley's Secret Works." Bailey – who grew up in the "flint glass trade" at Newcastle – acquired the business in 1829 and turned it into glass plant making "flint glassware." He built his residence beside the plant and called it Bailyfield (Baird 1898:448; Toulouse 1971:434).

Bailey's brother, Joseph, joined him in the business from 1830 to 1840, but the two split for unknown reasons. Joseph went on to found what would become Rockware Glass, Ltd. Although little from either glass house appears to have been recorded, William Bailey was active in the community, becoming the first provost (mayor) and the initial chairman of the Portobello Gas Light Co. in 1851. Although none of the source provided an explanation, the flint glass

business was not as profitable as Baily had hoped. In 1848, Baily gave up flint production and converted the factory to green glass bottles. He took Richard Cooper as a partner in 1856 (Toulouse 1971:525). The firm apparently never used a mark.

Bailey & Cooper and Cooper & Wood (1856-1866)

In 1856, Baily took Richard Cooper as his partner in the works.¹ When Bailey died in 1859, Cooper's brother-in-law, Thomas Wood joined him in the business. As with much of the early history, we lack any details about either firm. However, Cooper and Wood had a disagreement in 1866, causing them to divide the property.² Cooper retained the older and larger segment of the property, while Wood gained control of the remaining land to the west – including the old Bailey residence. The two glass houses remained in competition until 1928, when Distillers Co., Ltd. – at that time the owners of Wood's plant – purchased the Cooper property (Baird 1898:448; Toulouse 1971:142-143; von Mechow 2014). See the discussion on Wood below.

Containers and Marks

COOPER & WOOD (1859-1866)

Toulouse (1971:142) noted that “a few ‘Cooper & Wood’ bottles, with and without the added designation ‘Portobello,’ have been found in western mining camps.” He dated the mark as being in use from 1859 to 1868 – the duration of the partnership. The only examples we have seen were English “beer” or “wine” bottles made of “black” glass (Figure 1). Green glass bottles – assuming any were made during this period – were apparently unmarked. These, of course, could have held either substance – or liquor.



Figure 1 – Cooper & Wood base (Tim Ledford)

¹ The source material is completely silent on Cooper's past.

² Toulouse (1971:142) placed the date at 1868, but this may have been a typographic error. Baird (1898) was certainly the source used by Toulouse.

Richard Cooper & Co. (1868-ca. 1928)

When Cooper & Wood dissolved, Cooper retained the larger portion of the glass house property, including the old factory. Toulouse (1971:142) stated that “little is known about the years intervening between 1869 and 1925.” However, he later noted that the firm became a limited company in 1895. By 1898, the plant employed 180 men and 50 boys, making 6,000,000 bottles per year at “one large continuous gas furnace and two intermittent coal furnaces one of them for clear glass.” Richard Cooper & Co., Ltd., was listed in 1925 and 1928.³ The plant used two furnaces in 1928, making bottles by both hand and machine methods. The Wood Bottle Co. – owned at that time by Distillers Co., Ltd. – purchased the Cooper plant about that time (Baird 1898:449-450; Toulouse 1971:142, 526).

Containers and Marks

R^D COOPER / PORTOBELLO (1866-ca. 1885)



Figure 2 – R^D Cooper base (Antique Bottles.net)

Toulouse (1971:141-142) illustrated this mark as “R^D COOPER (arch) / PORTOBELLO (inverted arch)” around the outside of the base – one of three logos used by the Cooper factory. Although Toulouse did not supply this information, we suspect that the mark appeared in a Rickett’s-style plate – as found on the



Figure 3 – Cooper bottles (Antique Bottles.net)

only photos we have seen (Figures 2 & 3). Toulouse noted that bottles with all three logos had been found at “western mining ghost towns.” He noted that this was probably the oldest of the three marks. Although Toulouse very conservatively dated all three logos as “1868 to 1928 or later,” a logo of this style was probably not used later than the late 1880s. Thus, 1866-ca. 1885 is probably a reasonable range.

³ The term “& Co.” generally indicates junior partners. Unfortunately, none of the sources mentioned any.

R. COOPER & Co / PORTOBELLO (1866-ca. 1885)



Figure 4 – R Cooper & Co. base (eBay)

An eBay auction featured a blackglass bottle with a base embossed “R. COOPER & Co (arch) / PORTOBELLO (inverted arch)” in a Rickett’s-style plate on the base of a whiskey bottle with a two-part applied finish (Figures 4 & 5). The bottle appeared to be made in a three-piece mold, with a dip-mold as the lower part. This may



Figure 5 – R Cooper bottle finish (eBay)

have been a variation of the mark described by Toulouse and was probably used during the 1866-ca. 1885 period.

COOPER (ca. 1870s-1890s)

Toulouse (1971:141) illustrated “COOPER” as being horizontal. He gave no other details, although it is probably a good assumption that the logo was embossed on bottle bases. Since he claimed that bottles with this mark were found at “western mining ghost towns,” the logo was probably used during the between the 1870s and 1890s. We have not discovered an example, and this may actually refer to one the more complete names discussed in this section.

PORTOBELLO

This was the third logo illustrated by Toulouse (1971:141) as used by Cooper. He noted that the bottle marks “using ‘Portobello’ alone are presumed to be Cooper’s since the heaviness of the cut is similar to that used for “Cooper” alone or in combination with Portobello.” Again, this was probably used during the 1870s-1890s period when the U.S. mines were booming. This may also refer to one of the more complete names discussed in this section.

RICHD COOPER & CO. LTD (1895-ca. 1920s)

Von Mechow (2014) listed five examples of Codd-stoppered soda bottles that were used in Canada, each embossed “RICHD COOPER & CO. LTD (arch) / MAKERS (horizontal) / PORTOBELLO (inverted arch).” One was reported as “LD” instead of “LTD,” and two others had “SCOTLAND” added below “PORTOBELLO.” All the bottles were aqua in color and the manufacturer’s mark were on the bases (Figure 6).

Wood’s Bottle Works (1866-1920)

After the dissolution of Cooper & Wood in 1866, Thomas Wood built a new business, including furnaces, office, and warehouses adjacent to the old factory, now run by Cooper. Wood was quite progressive. He visited Germany and Sweden to learn their glass techniques and imported skilled blowers from both countries.

Although this caused some hard feelings with the Scottish workers, the newcomers were eventually accepted. Using producer gas as fuel (i.e., gas made from coal), he constructed three regenerative furnaces (also called continuous tanks). In 1898, he employed 200 men and 70 boys to produce 8,000,000 bottles per year (Baird 1898:449-450; Toulouse 1971:526). An 1893 report (Royal Commission of Labour 1893:634) noted that Wood’s Bottle Works had 17 working “glass bottles houses” (probably meaning shops – often two blowers, a finisher, and several boys to help out and carry bottles – plus five others “standing” (probably idle).

On December 4, 1898, the journal, *Capital and Labour* (1878:727), reported on a strike that began the previous Saturday (November 30) when the factory demanded that the journeymen (i.e., union blowers) increase their production the equivalent of four hours per week – for the same pay. The blowers almost immediately went on strike. The firm claimed that low European glass house prices had forced the demand. We have not discovered the outcome, but the strike was certainly resolved. The firm remained in business under the name of Wood’s Bottle Works until 1920.



Figure 6 – Cooper Codd-stopper bottles (John Dufresne)

Containers and Marks

Wood probably did not use a logo on most bottles prior to ca. 1900.

WOOD (ca. 1866-ca. 1880s)



Figure 7 – Wood basemark (eBay)

Although none of the sources reported a mark during this period, an eBay auction offered a dark green bottle, made in a three-part mold – a dip mold with two upper mold pieces (Figure 7). The base was embossed “WOOD (arch) / PORTOBELLO (inverted arch)” in a Rickett’s mold (Figure 8).



Figure 8 – Wood bottle (eBay)

W in a rectangle (ca. 1900-1920)

According to Toulouse (1971:524-525), Wood’s Bottle Works used the W-in-a-rectangle logo from ca. 1900 to 1920. He explained his choice:

Since the letter “W” has been used by a great many bottlemakers over the years, early Wood’s Bottle Works bottles cannot be identified with any certainty before the enclosure of the letter in a rectangle, an event which probably took place about 1900 when other glass companies were beginning to adopt more sure identification means.

The only examples we have seen were on medicine bottles (Figures 9 & 10).

Wood's Bottle Works, Ltd., (1920-1937) and Portobello Works, United Glass, Ltd. (1937-1967)



Figure 9 – Wood's W logo (Mungo)

Distillers Co., Ltd., purchased the Wood business in 1920, renaming the firm as Wood's Bottle Works, Ltd. In 1937, United Glass, Ltd., acquired the firm and operated it as the Portobello unit (Toulouse 1971:526).

Archie Young, a second-generation worker at the United Glass factory wrote his memoirs of his time at the plant. Young (2009) recalled one warehouse:



Figure 10 – Wood's bottles (Mungo)

At the end of the factory, a new large warehouse was built with a sprinkler system fitted in case of fire. However, the problem in the warehouse was pigeons and seagulls: they cast their droppings on the boxes, so the boxes had to be replaced, which cost a lot of money. Someone came up with the idea of getting people in to shoot them with air guns, but every time they missed, they shot holes in the roof. This meant the rain got in and damaged the cardboard boxes, so the cycle of replacing them started again, and then the roof was repaired. It must have involved a lot of cash outlay.

Young (2009) further recalled that:

There were two furnaces, No. 61 and 62. They were nearly square in shape, and were fired by oil burners, I forget how many. At times, the nozzles would choke up and it was the engineers' job to remove the burner unit and clean it out. This was fairly hot work, as we had to go right up to the furnace to remove the unit. No. 62 was green glass I think.

Young (2009) described the bottle machines:

The molten glass came out of what looked like a bath tub. It released what we called a single gob, which eased out of the tub and was cut to length with a set of shears. This then dropped into an initial mould before it was transferred to a final mould. Pincers grabbed the finished bottle and transferred it to a chain conveyor. Then it was slid onto a right angle conveyor via a star wheel. A certain number of bottles was allowed past, and then a stacker bar placed the bottles into a lehr. This was used to anneal the glass; this took hours, about 10 I think, as it was very slow moving.

And the mold shop:

The mould shop was quite big; around 12 men worked there. It was divided into two shops. The damaged moulds went to No. 1 shop to be cast welded. It was normally the corners of the mould that were damaged, and a small weld did the trick. In this shop, two men also engraved the figures on the moulds, depending on the product. Then the moulds were transferred to No. 2 shop. Here, they were checked to see if they were warped, and they also had the cast weld ground down and polished to return the shape of the bottle.

For many more recollections, see Young (2009). On September 9, 1967, the *Glasgow Herald* proclaimed that the United Glass plant at Portobello would close in December, putting about 350 people out of work.

Containers and Marks

WX (1920-1937)

According to Toulouse (1971:525), the “WX” logo was used by the Wood’s Bottle Works, Ltd., from 1920 to 1937. Two eBay auctions offered bottles embossed respectively “WX 53” and “WX 55” on their bases. Although both were made in England, each was embossed with the U.S. federal warning label required between 1934 and 1964. The law also required



Figure 11 – WX logo (eBay)

two-digit date codes, so the “53” and “55” almost certainly indicated 1953 and 1955 (Figures 11 & 12). The “WX” was almost certainly a logo – as required by the same 1934 regulation. Possibly, the mark continued in use on exported liquor bottles until the federal warning law was rescinded. Since the

“WX” logo was already registered in the U.S. system, it may have been easier to continue the logo than to reapply.

UGB / W

Toulouse (1971:525) noted that United Glass, Ltd., used the letter “W” below their company logo “UGB” to designate the Portobello plant after 1937, although the factory designations were often above or to the side (see the section on United Glass Bottle, Ltd., for more information). We have been unable to find an example of the “W” variation of the UGB logo.



Figure 12 – Liquor bottle (eBay)

Discussion and Conclusions

Although the earliest glass house in the town apparently did not use any identifying mark, the history of the Portobello plants is rich in the diversity of marks. Cooper & Wood along with the Richard Cooper firm embossed the name of the operating company on bottle bases. After that, the logos were initials.

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