

## **Portland Glass Co.**

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The history of the Portland Glass Co. is confused with no corroboration for the Toulouse rendition that posits a location at Greenford, Middlesex, England. However, a Portland Glass Co. was formed at Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland in 1920 and produced liquor flasks and bottles until it became part of Rockware Glass, Ltd., in 1958. This firm used both “PGC” and “PGC<sup>0</sup>” basemarks to identify its products.

### **Histories**

#### **Portland Glass Co., Greenford, Middlesex, England (1922-1956)**

According to (Toulouse 1971:421), General G.W. Walker opened the Portland Glass Co. in 1922, but the plant had only limited success. Sir Harry McGowan gained control of the firm in 1932, and it was later operated by International Chemicals, Inc. White Horse Distillers was one of the firm’s major customers. Rockware Glass, Ltd., purchased the factory in 1956. Although Toulouse listed Adrian Bailey, Rockware Glass, as his source for the Portland Glass Co. information, we have been unable to find a single confirmation for any of this information – with the exception that White Horse Distillers was a customer of Portland Glass. The information Toulouse received from Bailey may have been based on faulty memory. See the next entry and the Discussion and Conclusions section for resolution.

#### **Portland Glass Co., Irvine, Ayrshire, Scotland (1920-1958)**

The December 16, 1920, issue of *Pottery, Glass & Brass Salesman* announced that “plans for the new Portland Glass Company have been passed and construction at Irvine, Ayrshire, of the first unit of the works which will cost about £10,000 is to be commenced immediately. It is anticipated that this unit will on completion give employment to about 150 persons.” Portland Glass Co., Ltd., had its factory on Galles Rd. with its office at Kilwinning Rd., Irvine. General G.W. Walker, mentioned by Toulouse in connection with Greenford, was actually the founder of the Irvine operation (North Ayrshire Directory 1935; Society of Glass Technology 1963, n.d.).

A glass technology student, identified only as Adam (Angela Bowey's Glass Museum 2004), recalled from his days at Portland Glass that his

report on Portland has survived (there's not much else from those days) and I see that they had six Lynch Model R machines, three O'Neill models 42 and 44, three Roirants and two Forster hand-operated machines (these latter noted as out of use). I only saw Lynch and O'Neill machines working. One of the O'Neills was brand new but, in industry terms, the Model R Lynchs were obsolescent.

The North Ayershire Directory listed the Scottish plant in 1935, and bottles from the Garsoppa – a British shipwreck – were almost certainly produced during the early 1940s. A 1951 directory placed the plant on Portland Rd., using “four regenerative continuous furnaces” to make beer, mineral, wine and spirit bottles as well as medical and pharmaceutical ware. The chairman was A.G. White with W.H. Whitfield as secretary and R. Millar as manager. L. Hall, O.R. Lineham, and G.H. McKenzie were additional directors (Grace's Guide 2017). The Grace's Guide (2016) noted that Rockware Glass, Ltd., acquired Portland Glass in 1958 – but the site failed to note Portland's location.

## **Containers and Marks**

Both logos used by the Portland Glass Co. were also embossed by glass firms in the U.S. The “PGC” mark was also used by the Peerless Glass Co., and “PGCo” was embossed on at least one liquor flask by the Poughkeepsie Glass Co. The user of “PGCo” on a medicinal bottle is currently unknown. See the sections of Peerless and Poughkeepsie for more information.

### **PGC**

Toulouse (1971:421) attributed the “PGC” mark to the Portland Glass Co., Greenford, Middlesex, England, and dated its use at 1922-1956, the entire tenure of the company. He discussed the “PGC” logo on a whiskey bottle with the federal warning (1934-1964) and an embossed figure of a horse on the side – noting no other initials – then stated that “the bulk of Portland's business was in beer bottles, many of which were used for products coming to the United States. They also made bottles to be shipped to Canada for Canadian filling.”

A letter to Digger O'Dell (2003) asked for information about a liquor bottle embossed "Federal Law Forbids Sale or Reuse of this Bottle." The heel was embossed "Exporters White Horse Distillers LTD.



Figure 1 – PGC Scotland (Ellen Gerth)

Glasgow Scotland" with "P.G.C. 45" embossed on the base. This suggests that Toulouse was correct about the use of the mark by Portland, and the "45" may have been a date code.



Figure 2 – Beer bottle (Ellen Gerth)

Ellen Gerth (personal communication, 2/26/2018) added that "PGC" stamped on at least one base is similar to the mark applied to a few of the [Raj] shipwreck's champagne-style beer bottles and this class of container was probably turned out in the Portland Glass Co., originally of Greenford in Middlesex. The company was in business from at least 1922 to 1956 and also ran a plant in Irvine, Scotland. See Kingsley (2018) for more information about the Raj.



Figure 3 – PGC flask (eBay)

Gerth supplied photos of bottle bases from World War II shipwrecks:

1. "BOTTLE MADE IN SCOTLAND" in an arch around a large "P" with "PGC" in an arch beside the "P"
2. "PGC" (arch) / 9 (to the left) / I 8F D" with three dots near the center
3. Two bases embossed "THIS BOTTLE MADE IN SCOTLAND" in a circle around the outside edge – but with no manufacturer's initials (Figure 1)

All of these were on champagne beer bottles with crown finishes, each in a typical “British green” color (Figure 2). An eBay auction added an amber flask with a paper label for White Horse Blended Scotch Whiskey that was embossed “PGC / 3•” on the base (Figure 3). A 1951 directory noted the “Trade Name” for Portland Glass as “P.G.C.” (Grace’s Guide 2017).

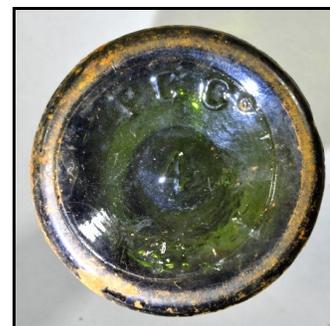


Figure 4 – PGC<sup>0</sup> (Ellen Gerth)

## PGC<sup>0</sup>

A photo from Ellen Gerth showed a “British green” base embossed “PGC<sup>0</sup>” (arch) / 4 (center) / {illegible letters and/or numbers} (inverted arch)” (Figure 4). Similar markings from eBay auctions were found on what were probably beer bottles with crown or two-part cork finishes, embossed on their bases with “PGC<sup>0</sup>” (arch) / 1 (center) / 6DE (inverted arch)” and “PGC<sup>0</sup>” (arch) / 2 (center) / 6GC (inverted arch)” (Figure 5). All examples of both logos were on machine-made bottles, and all were almost certainly made by the Portland Glass Co.



Figure 5 – PGC<sup>0</sup> (eBay)

## Discussion and Conclusions

Current research leaves several issues connected to the Portland Glass Co. unclear, incomplete, and/or confused. The most glaring example was the contention by Toulouse (1971:421) that Portland Glass was founded by General G.W. Walker at Greenford, Middlesex, England. Although references to Walker’s military career were easy to locate online, we could find no connection with Portland Glass at Greenford. Toulouse further claimed that “Sir Harry McGowan . . . took it [i.e., Portland Glass] over, in 1932. The factory was then operated by International Chemicals, Inc.” Sir Harry McGowan was actually the Chairman of Imperial Chemical Industries, but we found no connection with McGowan and Portland Glass or Greenford. All of the Toulouse history was furnished by Adrian Bailey of Rockware Glass, but Toulouse gave no hint as to Bailey’s position (he was a marketing director) or where Bailey received his information.

It seems likely that “International Chemicals” was a confusion of “Imperial Chemicals,” but the remaining information may have been all based on faulty memories. Rockware, itself, was opened at Greenford in 1920 (or, possibly, 1900), and that may have created the idea that Portland Glass, purchased by Rockware in 1958, had previously been at that location. Our tentative conclusion – until or unless additional evidence surfaces – is that the Greenford location for the Portland Glass Co. was incorrect.

However, Portland Glass used *two* logos. In many cases, glass houses with two locations used different marks, so the dual logos *could* be evidence for the existence of the Greenford location. In this scenario, however, the Greenford plant would probably have been open for a much shorter time period and may have used the “C<sup>o</sup>” logo. Toulouse (1971:421) noted that, under the direction of Walker, the firm “did not prosper” causing the sale to Sir Harry McGowan. This *may* have indicated that the Greenford factory, then, *may* have closed only a few years after its inception. Of course, this is entirely speculation based solely on the presence of Portland’s use of two logos. Hopefully, future research will unsnarl the confusion.

The manufacturer’s marks are easier to discuss. Although both Portland Glass and the Peerless Glass Co. used the “PGC” logo during the same 1920s-early 1930s period (longer for Portland), Peerless used the mark primarily on soda bottles, possibly on a few milk bottles. Portland Glass made neither product, focusing its production on beer and liquor containers. In addition, there was a major color difference between British “green” glass and “green” glass produced in the U.S. American “green” glass was (and is) aqua in color – VERY different from distinctly green color of glass from the British Isles. Because of these differences, there is little chance of confusion between the products of these glass houses despite the similarity of logos.

Similarly, the Poughkeepsie Glass Co. also joined Portland Glass in using the “PGCo” marks. In this case, however, there were three differences in the logos that appear to have been consistent. First, the “o” in “Co” is superscripted in the Portland mark but is a simple capital “CO” from Poughkeepsie. Second, the Poughkeepsie examples had punctuation – “P.G.CO.” – where there was none from Portland. Finally, Poughkeepsie added “UNION MADE” to its logo. As with the simpler mark, glass colors also aid in separating the two. Containers from Portland were made in “British green” and amber colors, where Poughkeepsie produced colorless flasks and jars. Once again, there should be no confusion in identification for the “PGCo” logo.

One final consideration was a single colorless, glass medicinal bottle embossed “P.G.Co.” (possibly P.C.Co.) on the base. We addressed this bottle in the Peerless Glass Co. section, although the manufacturer remains unknown. Like the Poughkeepsie marks, this logo used punctuation – “P.G.Co.” – although the “o” in “Co.” was lower case. The bottle could have been made by Poughkeepsie, but it was almost certainly not produced by Portland Glass.

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