

# IN THE PINK

*Beguiled by its rosy hue and fuelled by clever marketing, the Victorians fell for cranberry glass in a big way. And who can blame them, asks Sue Herdman*

PHOTOGRAPHS **RACHEL WHITING** STYLING **KIERA BUCKLEY-JONES**

*Glassware, from left: White overlay-cut tazza with hollow facet-cut stem, c1900, £265; sugar cube dish in metal holder, c1910, £95; ribbed sugar sifter, c1900, £65; overlay-cut tazza bowl, c1890, £85; facet-cut salt and pepper shakers, c1930, £65; Thomas Webb petal-top specimen vase, c1895, £155; white overlay plate, c1890, £45; 7in tazza compot, c1890, £120; bonbon dishes on stems with crystal-frilled edge (front), c1920, £85; bonbon dishes with solid stems (back), c1895, £68; pierced silver-plated bowl with cranberry liner, c1910, £95; heart-shaped preserve dish, 1900-20, £90, all Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art*

*Accessories, from left: Woven bag, find similar at vintage market. Wooden chair, £65, Phoenix on Golborne. Pink linen tablecloth, find similar at The Linen Works. Bunting, find similar at Bunting Boutique. Silver forks, find similar at Vintage-Kitsch. Vintage cake stand (under white overlay-tazza), find similar at Lakeland. Pink runner, find similar at Williams-Sonoma. Vintage white teapot, find similar at Wedgwood. Bottle of cordial, from a selection at Marks & Spencer. Grosgrain pink ribbon (around bottle neck), £1.66 per m, VV Rouleaux. Pink napkins, £19.99 for four, Zara Home. Vintage pink plates, find similar at Everything Stops For Tea. Silver spoon, find similar at Vintage-Kitsch. 'Arsenic' estate emulsion paint, £34.50 per 2.5l, Farrow & Ball*











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crystal glass that have been wound around the body of a bowl or vase. Many makers used rotating wheels to carve vines laden with fat grapes on drinking glasses or sinuous flowers on scent bottles. Designs aside, though, it was the chemistry and craft that went into the making of cranberry glass (along with a little mystery) that has captivated buyers of the past and present.

#### ALL IN THE MAKING

There's folklore attached to the process by which cranberry glass is made. Some speak of a gold sovereign being dropped into the molten mix of glass, so forming a rich gold ruby hue. Many of the Victorian manufacturers were happy to perpetuate such myths – after all, it was canny marketing. In reality, red is a notoriously difficult colour to produce. 'It's all about the chemistry,' says Andy McConnell. Looking to the brilliant Bohemian glassmakers, the British – who were mainly based at Stourbridge in the West Midlands, the centre for glass at that time – experimented with verve.

Different recipes using various metal oxides were created. Some used minute quantities of gold added to sand and potash. If this produced too deep a red, cheaper copper was substituted for the gold, resulting in a lighter red or pink. 'The deeper red,' says Andy, 'could be so dense that it appeared almost black. Light won't pass through glass like that. To get a lighter colour, makers only needed the thinnest layer of red on clear glass. So the clear would be dipped into a pot of molten red. Imagine making a toffee apple: you dip the apple into hot toffee to glean a skim. It's more apple than toffee. This is how the cranberry glass was made. Then it was blown. It was brilliant to cut, as the contrast between the pink or red and the clear underneath was sharp.'

The English Victorian makers all had their versions of cranberry, as glass dealer Mark West attests. 'At the cheaper end you'll often find the fussier pieces in a pale pink. At the more expensive end the items are better made, have a more solid colour and are beautifully engraved.' Among the factories furiously keeping up with demand – particularly fervent in the late Victorian period – were Boulton & Mills, Thomas Webb & Sons, Stevens & Williams and John Walsh in Birmingham. Their pattern books alone were works of art, ►

**ABOVE** Tray with enamel decoration, c1900, £75; lidded **decanter** with gilt bird decoration, c1890, £195; lidded **pot** with gilt bird decoration, c1890, £125; 'Mary Gregory' lidded **pot**, c1910, £295, all Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art. Gold **necklace**, find similar at John Lewis. **Curtain**, French toile in 'Raspberry', £38, Cabbages & Roses. Velvet **ribbon** (curtain tie) £1.70 per m, VV Rouleaux. Grey **chest**, find similar at Sweetpea & Willow



**RIGHT** Tray with enamel decoration; 'Mary Gregory' lidded **pot**; gold **necklace**; grey **chest**, all as before

#### MYSTERIOUS MARY

Cranberry is often associated with 'Mary Gregory' glass. The name denotes a style where a design in white enamel – often whimsical, usually romantic – has been fired on to the glass. 'Sometimes known as the poor man's cameo glass,' says Stephen Farnsworth, 'it was popular between 1885 and the 1920s and is another area of cranberry that comes with myths.' Andy McConnell adds: 'Although there was a woman named Mary Gregory working in the glass industry at the Boston and Sandwich factory in America from 1880-84, no one knows why it is called "Mary Gregory" glass.' The style actually originated, as with so many things to do with glass, in Bohemia.

*From left:* Pink napkin, £19.99, Zara Home. Cut wine glass, c1910, £85; optic decanter £420 for two; hobnail-cut wine glass, c1890, £85; bulbous claret decanter with metal top, c1890, £195; quilted flask, c1880, £125; dimpled liqueur decanter with reeded handle and hollow stopper, c1890, £125; hobnail-cut scent bottle, c1900, £165; foliate enamelled decanter c1905, £235, all Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art. Wooden tray, find similar at vintage market. Pink velvet ribbon (on flask), £1.70 per m, VV Rouleaux. Vintage frame, find similar at Dassie. Pink velvet ribbon, £1.96 per m, VV Rouleaux. Grey chest as before. 'Arsenic' estate emulsion paint, as before







Filled **carafe**, c1900, £115; **bowl**, c1900, £110, both Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art. Green velvet **ribbon**, £2.30 per m, VV Rouleaux. Zinc **table** and vintage **door** (background), find similar at The French House

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with pages of exquisite drawings showing the range of goods available. And what a range. Even 'spill holders' – containers for kindling for fires – were produced. Every home, it seems, had to have a piece of 'pink'. Something that Marian Wood, coloured-glass collector of 15 years, understands. She keeps blue in the kitchen, amethyst in the bathroom and cranberry in the sitting room, where it adds warmth. 'I can well imagine why the Victorians went for it,' she says. 'It looks beautiful by candlelight. It sparkles. It's delicate. I have candle holders and 'peg lamps' (lamps made with pegs at the bottom, so they would fit into a candlestick). When friends come I serve liqueurs (best to use clear ones, darker drinks look like ink in cranberry glass) in a harlequin set of differently designed glasses. As a collection, it has echoes of the past and is also very affordable.'

This is particularly true at the moment. 'Cranberry has been in and out of fashion,' says Andy McConnell, 'and currently much of it is half the value it was 20 years ago.' When seeking older pieces, Andy advises that a good way to age the piece is to look for wear on the foot. 'Sometimes the wear has been faked by rubbing the piece on a hard surface but you can tell real wear.' Mark West adds: 'Wear will look matt, just as it should if the piece has been used for 50, 60 or 100 years. The colour, too, in a good piece, will be uniform.' Look out too, Andy continues, for a little dirt. 'Examine the handle-to-body junction on a piece. The old ones always have a little bit of grubbiness in the difficult-to-get-to spots. The important thing with cranberry is to really get your eye in. As with anything that has been the height of fashion at one time, you'll find a lot of reproduction.'

Steve Farnsworth of Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art confirms that prices are accessible at entry level. 'Little champagne glasses were made in their thousands, so you can buy one for as little as £12 and a simple wine glass for around £20. A really fine example may be as much as £200. I currently have a Stevens & Williams wheel-engraved hock glass, made in 1920, that's worth £150. And there's a perfect little perfume bottle, very finely engraved, for £800. At the top of the range, you'll be looking at £2,000 for a pair of lustres. Each piece, as with all antique glass, is made by hand and completely individual.' Who wouldn't want to take one home? ■

## FIND OUT MORE

### WHERE TO SEE

• **Broadfield House Glass Museum**, Compton Drive, Kingswinford, West Midlands (01384 812745; glassmuseum.org.uk). One of the best glass collections in the world. Open Tuesday to Sunday

• **Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art**, High Street, Moreton-in-Marsh, Gloucestershire (01608 651029; cranberryglass.co.uk). Stephen and Val Farnsworth, specialist dealers in antique cranberry glass, have some 200 pieces for sale. Their next Glass Collectors' Week will be in June

### WHERE TO BUY

• **Glass Etc.**, 18-22 Rope Walk, Rye, East Sussex (01797 226600; decanterman.com). Glass specialist and Roadshow expert Andy McConnell and his wife Helen's glass shop features a collection of 30,000 pieces, from c1750-2000, including cranberry ware

• **Mark J West** (01737 643646; markwest-glass.com). A dealer in glass for 42 years, Mark J West specialises in 18th and 19th-century glass, 20th-century art glass and art deco glass of English and European origin



From left: Tall slender vase with frill, c1895, £175; small 'Mary Gregory' posy vase, c1990, £110; ruffle-top 'Mary Gregory' vase, c1900, £495; 'Mary Gregory' posy vase, £135; tall vase with gilt decoration, c1885, £225. Engraved spill vase, c1890, £110 for pair; tall 'Mary Gregory' posy vase, c1900, £145, all Grimes House Antiques & Fine Art. Pink runner, as before. Door (background) and table, find similar at The French House