

Notes compiled in 2012 by former Whitehaven Museum Curator Mr Harry Fancy

Beilby produced several "Royal" goblets, of which seven are known to survive. They all bear the arms of George 3rd on the obverse (hence "Royal") and six have the Prince of Wales feathers and his motto on the reverse. They were almost certainly produced to commemorate the birth on 12th August 1762, or the christening of the future George 4th.

The Whitehaven specimen is unique, being a little taller than the others, and instead of the Prince of Wales feathers, it features a painting of a sailing ship and the legend "Success to the African Trade of Whitehaven". This can only refer to the custom-built slave ship "King George", launched in the following year – 1763. The goblet would almost certainly have been used by the owners and officers of the ship to drink to the success of the venture before the start of her maiden voyage. Normally a porcelain or earthenware "ship's bowl" would have been used for this purpose, punch being ladled from it into drinking glasses, but it seems probable that the goblet would have been passed around like a chalice. The Third Mate of this ship was none other than John Paul, destined to support America in the War of Independence. Adding Jones to his name, he is renowned as "The Father of the American Navy". Having been trained as a seaman in Whitehaven, he was to raid the port *in what remains the last invasion of the English mainland by an enemy power.*

No other case is known of a very expensive glass goblet being used before the commencement of a maiden voyage – so how did it come about that a glass decorator in Newcastle was commissioned to produce a unique item for a ceremony in Whitehaven? The answer seems to be because of a direct connection between the Lowther family, owners of the Whitehaven estate, and the Beilby family: William Beilby's great-great grandfather had married Dorothy Lowther, daughter of Sir John Lowther, one of the richest men in the country.

The slave-ship King George was the second of only two actually built at Whitehaven for this odious trade. A number of other Whitehaven vessels participated in the slave trade, but these were simply collier brigs modified for the purpose.

The Slave-trade goblet was auctioned at Christies, London on 4th June 1985. Knowing that the auction price would be astronomical, the curator of Whitehaven Museum Harry Fancy had undertaken an epic fund-raising exercise in advance. Copeland refused to add anything to the museum's miniscule purchase fund, so every conceivable grant-making body was approached, and the curator, through an agent, was able to bid up to £40,000. However the Corning Museum of America, the world's leading museum of historic glass, eventually purchased the goblet for the world record price of £59,000.

Whitehaven museum launched an objection to the exportation the goblet on the grounds that it is not merely a local history specimen but a superb item of national significance - arguably the finest piece of English enamelled glass in existence. Our objection was upheld and if we could raise a sum equal to the American bid, it would be allocated to Whitehaven. Taking into account Buyers Premium and other charges

the total cost was £62,462 – considerably more than the £40,000 we had already secured. Fund-raising was resumed and dozens of letters were sent to possible donors. Knowing that the Queen Mother was then President of the Museums Association, and that she had previously contributed towards the purchase of other “Royal Commemoratives” we invited her to support our cause. She did so, but we were never to reveal the actual amount of her gift.

Within six months of the date of the auction we were able to purchase the goblet – a quirk of the British Law had allowed us to deprive the Corning Museum of an outstanding exhibit.

Copeland Borough Council agreed to Harry Fancy’s suggestion that we loan the goblet to the Corning Museum for one year – invaluable publicity for Whitehaven. On the day it returned to London Harry met the courier at Heathrow airport, then took a taxi to the British Museum and was allowed to place it in a showcase as a prize exhibit in an exhibition called “Treasures for the Nation”. This was staged by the National Heritage Memorial Fund, one of the many grant-making bodies who had helped us to purchase the goblet. A photograph of the goblet formed the frontispiece of the lavish half-inch thick exhibition catalogue.