

The Ricketts Family Glass Firms

Bill Lockhart, Bill Lindsey, Beau Schriever, and Carol Serr

The Ricketts family was involved in the glass business for almost a century, beginning in 1789, when Jacob Ricketts and his brother, Richard, operated the Phoenix Glass Works at Temple Gate, Bristol, England. After a few changes, the firm became Henry Ricketts & Co., probably to celebrate the invention of a mechanical mold system that used three-piece mold and had a “washer” baseplate allowing embossing on the bases – by Jacob’s son, Henry, although son, Richard (not to be confused with his uncle, Richard, Jacob’s brother), took over the business, soon partnering with William Powell, who continued to run the operation after Richard’s death in 1856 – producing Codd-stoppered bottles until 1923.

Histories

Although they were deeply involved in the tobacco trade (a subject not relevant to this research area), the Ricketts family glass holdings began and remained in Bristol, England, centered during the entire period on three glass houses along Cheese Lane (later Avon St.). The firm expanded several times, eventually becoming the only glass house in Bristol. See Table 1 at the end of the history section for a full chronology. As is often the case in glass history, several researchers from 1876 to 2015 have presented confused (and confusing) portrayals of the relationships between these plants, none with a full understanding of the early conditions – which set the stage for all the subsequent changes – until the most recent study by Gregory et al. (2019).

Phoenix Glass Works, Bristol, England (1785-1811)

A group of local businessmen, composed primarily of soap manufacturers, built the first glass house along Cheese Lane ca. 1715 to produce bottles – frequently called the Soap Boilers’ glass factory. A few years later, the same group constructed a second, nearby plant to create crown window glass – a second Soap Boilers’ plant. Robert Hixon assembled another group of businessmen, including hoop-makers, merchants, and other investors, to open a third plant – another bottle house – often known as the Hoopers glass house – in 1720 (Gregory et al. 2019:5). This set the stage for local glass production.

Gregory et al. (2019:5) reported that the partners involved in the ownership of the three factories changed repeatedly during the 18th century, although he provided no details. At some point, the crown window glass factory evolved into a flint (colorless) plant, producing tableware. This became the Phoenix Glass Works. According to Champion (1876:382), James and George Taylor constructed the Phoenix Glass Works at Temple Gate (Bristol) in 1785, “on premises which were previously the Phoenix Inn and from that circumstance it was called the Phoenix glass works” (although they actually moved into the former Soap Boilers window-glass house). The Taylors were “flint glass makers” according to Powell (1923:99), suggesting that window glass production ceased prior to 1785.

Kaiser (2009:20), however, placed the opening of the Phoenix Glass Works by Wadham, Ricketts & Co. at August 22, 1789, although this almost certainly indicates a change in management rather than a new factory. The firm consisted of Jacob Wilcox Ricketts, John Wadham, and Richard Ricketts (the brother of Jacob). In contrast, Alford (1973:67) claimed that the firm “acquired the Phoenix Glass Works, commonly acknowledged to be the largest flint-glass-works in the city” – acknowledging that it was already in operation. Powell (1923:99) added that the second firm “made flint-glass, coloured glass and bottles.”

Apparently, David Evans purchased the Wadham share in 1794. According to Powell (1923:99), the operating firm became Ricketts, Evans, and Ricketts that year. Kaiser (2009:20), however, called the firm Ricketts, Evans & Co. but included no date. Powell added that “Ricketts, Evans and the Phoenix Glass-works” took over the operation in 1797. Burton (2015:191) disagreed with the date but explained the strange name for the operating firm:

A merger of the Redcliff Backs [only about a mile west of the Phoenix; only mentioned by this source] and the Phoenix Glass Works was completed in 1802 to become Ricketts, Evans and the Ricketts Glass Company. Henry Ricketts replaced Richard Ricketts as a partner, Richard, brother of Jacob and father of Henry’s wife, Elizabeth, having retired in 1801.

Henry’s wife was also his cousin. Jacob presented Henry with £500 when he married Elizabeth in 1805 as well as £1,000 as Henry became a partner in the business (Burton 2015:191). The firm became Henry Ricketts & Co. in 1811.

Henry Ricketts & Co., Bristol, England (ca. 1811-1851)

The partnership reorganized as Henry Ricketts & Co. in 1811, with Jacob W. Ricketts, his son Henry Ricketts, David Evans and John Cave as partners, also acquiring a lease on “the Soapboilers’ Glass-house on Avon Street, formerly Cheese Lane,” St. Philips, at the same time (Burton 2015:191). The Soapboilers’ Glass-house” referred to by Burton was the older unit, producing bottles. Prior to this time, the firms only made tableware at the Phoenix Glass Works. The acquisition of Soapboilers allowed the Ricketts family entry into bottle production – notably beer and wine bottles (Alford 1973:67; Powell 1923:99; von Mechow 2018). Burton (2015:191) added that “Jacob’s share in the Bristol Porter Brewing Company [gave the firm] effective control of the market in glass bottle production.”

Although virtually all sources date the bottles embossed “H. Ricketts & Co.” between 1811 and 1851, this was a partnership of four men, with Henry Ricketts as probably the junior member (in both age and financial contribution). Therefore, a reason for the firm name must exist. Connected with this situation, most sources (e.g., Lindsey 2018) dated the first use of the three-piece mold at ca. 1814; however, the 1811 reorganization – using the name Henry Ricketts – must have centered around Henry’s mold invention – even though he did not patent the process until 1821 (see the Patent section below). The plant continued in operation under the same name – with no apparent alterations or issues – until the next reorganization in 1851. It seems odd that we have found no historical references to the plant for the entire forty-year span of this period.

The February 28, 1852, dissolution of Henry Ricketts & Co. in the *London Gazette* listed the partners as Henry Ricketts, William Cave, Henry Glascodine, and Richard Ricketts. This indicates at least one major restructuring of the operating firm, although we have not found a way to determine whether this was a single reorganization or more. Jacob Ricketts was no longer present, and Henry had probably received Jacob’s share upon his retirement or death, probably the latter. Since Jacob had been a partner in Wadham, Ricketts & Co. in 1789, 63 years earlier, and assuming that he was at least 20 by the time of his first involvement, he would have been 83 or older in 1852 – a *very* long life for that time period. He was certainly still alive in 1834, when he retired from the tobacco business – and he may have retired from the glass trade at the same time (Alford 1973:70).

As John Cave was one of the original partners, William Cave may have been a son who replaced John upon his death or retirement. Glascodine seems to have replaced David Evans, and Richard Ricketts seems to have returned. However, this was not the same Richard Ricketts. Richard, the brother of Jacob had perished in 1818. The Richard Ricketts of the 1852 dissolution was Henry's younger son, who had joined the firm in 1845.¹ Upon the retirement of Henry Ricketts in 1852, all production ceased at the Phoenix Glass Works (Alford 1973:65; Burton 2015:192).

Later Firms (1851-1923)

The *Belfast News-Letter* (10/27/1851) posted a notice that Richard Ricketts & Co. (Henry's son and associates) had formed on October 21, 1851, to take control of "the Soapboilers' bottle house in Avon Street," although the older firm (Henry Ricketts & Co.) did not publish its dissolution until four months later, February 28, 1852 (see the section above). Unfortunately, the *News-Letter* did not list the firm's members. However, the addition of "& Co." suggests that Richard was not alone in the enterprise.

Richard formed a partnership with William Powell, Thomas Powell, and Richard Filer in 1853, styling the firm Powell, Ricketts & Filer. Powell and Filer were the owners of the Hoopers glass works, adding a second factory to the enterprise. When Filer died in 1856, the firm reorganized as Powell & Ricketts² (Burton 2015:195; Jones 1986:99; von Mechow 2018).

The 1853 merger brought Powell's business into the new firm. Powell's interest began in 1786 as Lawson, Fry, Frampton & Co., Glass bottle makers (the Hoopers glass house). In, 1809,³ Joseph and Septimus Cookson purchased the factory, renaming the plant as the Cooksons' Bottle Works, reorganizing as Cooksons and Powell, when the brothers, William and Thomas Powell,

¹ The elder son apparently enjoyed other pursuits. He was never involved in the glass business.

² All sources except Burton (2015) date the beginning of Powell & Ricketts at 1857, probably because directories did not list the firm until that year. The 1856 directories would already have been in print by the time of Filer's death in 1856.

³ Powell (1923) placed the date at 1812.

bought into the firm in 1824. In 1831, the Cooksons apparently withdrew, and the operating company became Powell Bros. & Co. or, possibly just Powell & Co. Burton (2015:196) illustrated and discussed blackglass bottles embossed “POWELL / & CO / BRISTOL” – almost certainly from this firm. At some point (date currently unknown to us), Richard Filer joined the firm, making it Powell & Filer, leading to the merger that created Powell, Ricketts & Filer (Burton 2015:195; Gregory et al. 2019:6; Powell 1923:99-100).

When Richard Ricketts died in late 1856, William Powell gained complete control of the factories, although he retained the Powell & Ricketts name. During the 1860s, Powell installed Siemens furnaces, improving the quality of the glass and the speed of manufacture. In fact, by the 1880s, the plant had expanded so much that it covered the area of the old Phoenix Glass Works as well as the other Soap Boilers factory, and the Powell & Ricketts plant was the only remaining glass house in Bristol by 1885. William Powell’s nephew, Arthur Powell had taken the helm by 1896, probably a few years earlier. For unexplained reasons, the Powell family never invested in automatic machinery – which had taken over the market by 1919, when Arthur Powell sold the business to a limited company (unnamed in the sources). Because of the high cost of installing new machinery and the depression following World War I, the new firm liquidated the business in 1923 (Burton 2015:192; Gregory et al. 2019:9-10; von Mechow 2018). For an excellent study of the excavation and archaeology of the Cheese Lane glass houses, see Gregory et al. 2019).

Table 1 – Ricketts Firms at Bristol

Firm	Dates
James and George Taylor	1785-1789
Wadham, Ricketts & Co.	1789-1794
Ricketts, Evans & Ricketts	1794-1797
Ricketts, Evans & Co.	1797-1811
Henry Ricketts & Co.	1811-1852
Richard Ricketts & Co.	1851-1853
Powell, Ricketts & Filer	1853-1857
Powell & Ricketts	1857-1923

The 1821 Henry Ricketts Patent and Its Consequences

Toulouse (1971:441) noted that the design of both the three-piece mold (dip mold for body and base, hinged, two-part shoulder mold) and the ringed plate for the base were made to Henry Ricketts' British Patent No. 4623 of December 3, 1821. He also warned that patent numbers during that period began anew with No. 1 each year, so the year is essential in citation. Toulouse illustrated the original base-plate embossing described as the first variation of the "H. RICKETTS & Co" marks discussed above. McKearin & Wilson (1978:217-218) also noted these bottles, agreeing on the basal embossing but adding that almost all examples were also embossed "PATENT" on the shoulder. Jones (1986:75) provided a trade card that illustrated "two bottle styles – tall slender one for wine and cider, and short wide one for beer and porter."

The Ricketts patent is best remembered as the first actual patent for the three-piece mold that used a dip mold for a base and two hinged molds to make the shoulders and the base of the neck and for the washer-shaped plate around the outer edge of the base to form embossing while still leaving room for the pontil to hold the bottle.

To review, bottles were made during the H. Ricketts & Co. period and earlier by two methods. The oldest was a free-blown bottle, where the blower blew a bubble of glass and manipulated it on a "table" to form the body, base, and neck then attached a rod called a punty to the base to hold the bottle while he formed the finish by hand. In the second method, he blew the bottle into a dip mold – little more than a cylindrical shape with a flat bottom – that formed the body and base. Then he finished the bottle the same way that it was done in the first method.

Ricketts' patent actually added three new dimensions to the work. First, as mentioned above, the patent provided hinged shoulder molds that created more of the bottle with the mold, leaving less to be made by hand. Jones (1986:89) noted that "there is still some suggestion that the three-piece mold may have been in production before the Ricketts' patent in 1821, either by Ricketts himself or by some other glassmaking firm." Jones (1986:90) further explained that "other types of three-piece moulds, less mechanically sophisticated, were in use in English factories in the 1820s." Other sources (e.g., Lindsey 2018) place the first use of the three-piece molds ca. 1814, and our speculation (above) about the reason for naming the firm after Henry Ricketts would bring the date down to 1811.

Second, Ricketts is generally credited with the earliest basal embossing on the ring (Jones called it a washer) around the edge of the base. McKearin and Wilson (1978:216) dispelled this claim, noting that embossed company names on the bases of decanters and other tableware items in Ireland as early as the late 18th century. Jones (1986:96) added: “As long as the base was included in the mould and the base indentation was shallow, it was technically feasible to emboss the bases of vessels blown in dip moulds.”

However, the Ricketts patent was the first *practical* method for basal embossing, using the “washer.” The patent was also the first instance for the use of an interchangeable plate and was therefore the ancestor to the baseplate as well as the round and oval plates used as early as the 1850s on soda, beer, and (later) milk bottles and rectangular plates used in prescription bottles beginning in the 1870s. While the molds allowed basal embossing, the quality was generally poor. Whether that was caused by crude engraving of the molds or by the formula of the glass, the embossing on Ricketts molds – from Ricketts or from other users – was almost always indistinct on the bases of actual bottles.

The final apparent innovation of the Ricketts patent was the creation of the push-up or kick-up by the mold. Typically, the push-up – a conical and often deep depression in the base – was created when the bottle was transferred from the blowpipe to the pontil. As the pontil was attached, it was pushed in to create the depression. The reason for this depression was at least two-fold. The bottle appeared to hold much more liquid than it actually contained, creating an increased market for vintners and brewers. More importantly, it created a more stable base for the bottle. A flat base, typical of either a dip-mold or free-blown bottle (or even a slightly rounded one), could not be made perfectly flat and was therefore unstable. The push-up formed a resting point, allowing much greater stability.

A push-up as an integral part of a dip mold also may not have been original. What Ricketts claimed as his

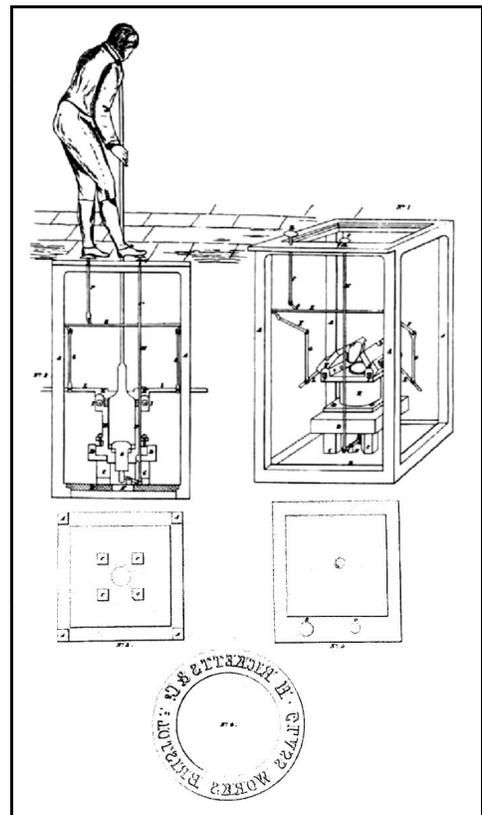


Figure 1 – Ricketts 1821 patent

own was “the mechanical movement of the mould and the moveable base part” (Jones 1986:90). The patent drawing clearly shows a mechanical operation of the mold, powered by foot pedals that were completely controlled by the blower (Figure 1). Burton (2015:190) discovered that John Cave wrote to one of the Ricketts (probably Henry) on November 6, 1821, saying that he was not opposed to spending the £135 patent cost but said that he doubted “the propriety of granting a Patent for *so trifling an improvement*, yet if it is to our interest to obtain it, You certainly have my consent” (our emphasis). Burton (2015:191) noted that Cave apparently hinted that “perhaps this new mould was not new at all, and may already have been in use.”

Burton (2015:191) added that “a few three-piece (or three-part) mould bottles exist (c. 1810-1811) but have no base markings to indicate their place of manufacture. It is thought, however, that they were early Ricketts bottles made before the advent of the company’s policy of mould-marking the base.” However, he discovered no historical confirmation, but he found one three-piece-mold bottle in his sample that he dated ca. 1810-1820.

For our dating of the Ricketts markings, we have elected to accept ca. 1811 as the initial date based on the idea that the naming of the company after the younger Ricketts must have been selected because of his invention – even though that was ten years prior to the patent. It seems relatively certain, however, that none of those bottles bore the Ricketts embossed name. Unfortunately, the date when Ricketts *applied* for the patent has never been recorded (at least that we could discover). Lindsey (2018) added that Rickett’s molds probably came into use in the U.S. ca. 1830s.

The Snap Case Transition

Because of its importance in certain aspects of the dating to follow, a discussion of the snap case is important before we assess individual bottle embossing.⁴ According to Lindsey (2018), the use of the snap case – replacing the pontil – began in the U.S. during the late 1840s but was not common until the late 1850s; however, Toulouse (1968:204) cited the use of the snap case in England as early as the 1830s. Where the pontil was a rod that had been attached to base of a bottle to hold it while the gaffer applied the finish, the snap case consisted of a cup at the end

⁴ The earlier and simpler sabot was much less effective and was little used – especially in England. It is thus hardly relevant to this discussion.

of a rod with two curved arms that held the bottle in place to fulfill the same purpose. See Lindsey (2018) and/or Toulouse (1968) for a more complete discussion about pontils, snap cases, and other related devices.

Although Jones (1968:105) refuted the Toulouse evidence as inaccurate, she nonetheless confirmed the early date – at least in part:

The date of the introduction of the snap to replace the pontil can definitely be placed in the 1840s and possibly as early as the late 1830s, although the latter date is based solely on the evidence of one bottle. The introduction of the snap did not immediately replace the pontil. The pontil continued to be used into the second half of the 19th century, but for a gradually diminishing range of wares.

The use of the pontil continued to at least to 1883. Based on Jones and Lindsey, a date of ca. 1840 is a reasonable choice for the adoption of full, replaceable baseplates by Ricketts. According to Jones (1986:99), however, Ricketts began experimenting with embossing in the center of the base, possibly by 1825 – or even earlier.

Containers and Marks

With the possible exception of the short-lived Richard Ricketts & Co., each of the other operating firms after 1810, embossed its marks on the bottles it produced – or at least some of them. We present these below by company followed by variation. Note that we have left the original British/Canadian spelling of “centre” (center) and “mould” (mold) within quotes.

Henry Ricketts & Co. (ca. 1811-1851)

Henry Ricketts & Co. identified its bottles by three different marks, all but one with variations. Thanks to Jones (1986:98-99), we have much better tools for dating the entire line of Ricketts embossing. We have discussed and illustrated all of the variations noted by Jones, her discussions about each, and our own interpretations – augmented by bottles and logos discussed by Burton (2015) and Gregory et al. (2019).

H. RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 1 (ca. 1820-1830s)

On this earliest variation, the “washer” was embossed “H • RICKETTS & C^o (arch) / :: GLASS WORKS. BRISTOL. (inverted arch)” or what Jones (1986:99) described as “embossing occurs in two rows, as in the patent specification and in bottles dating to the 1820s and possibly into the 1830s.” The

underlined “o” in “C^o” represents a dot below the “o” on the actual bottle. Her illustration is, indeed, a very close match for the patent drawing – which is shown in mirror,



Figure 2 – H. Ricketts & Co, V1 (Jones 1986:99; patent; Toulouse 1971:441)

way it was engraved into the ring (Figure 2). Toulouse (1971:441) also illustrated this variation. The shoulder was embossed “PATENT.” She added that she had not found any examples of this variation in her dated bottles. In developing her chronology for English “wine” bottles, Jones (1986:29-32) observed more than 200 of those containers, many of them with “seals” on their shoulders that included dates. Fortunately, a number of those “dated” bottles were made by Ricketts.

Burton (2015:194) dated this mark as the earliest with a possible example dated to 1820. However, he suggested that earlier bottles may have been made with three-piece molds, but they were *not* embossed with the Ricketts name. Since he found no sealed (and dated) bottles with Ricketts embossing, he was likely correct.

H. RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 2 (ca. early 1820s)

A third variation from Jones (1986:99) again had an almost identical “washer” embossing, only lacking the final colon this time. The center, however, was embossed “PATENT” (Figure 3). Jones observed that these “probably date close to the patent date,” so we have suggested ca. 1820s for them. This was Jones’ third variation, but it fits better in the second position. Her second variation is our third. Since

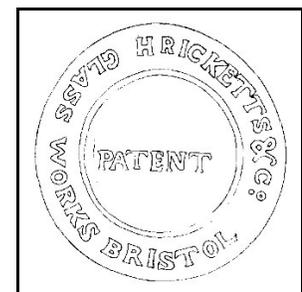


Figure 3 – H. Ricketts & Co, V2 (Jones 1986:99)

Burton (2015) did *not* mention this variation, it was probably limited to a few years (or only one) of production.

H. RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 3 (1825-late 1830s)

This variation contains essentially the same embossing as the first one minus one colon (:), and two periods (Figure 4). The major change is the embossing of a crown design in the center. Jones (1986:99) explained that “the embossed crown in the centre seems to occur on bottles with IMPERIAL embossed on the shoulder. These date after 1 May 1825 when the imperial system came into effect.” This suggests that Ricketts was one of early experimenters with embossing in the center of the base – methods that led to adaptation of the full baseplate. Jones (1986:96) further commented that “In the early years Ricketts attempted to emboss the centre of the base as well . . . but with mixed success. The embossing is faint, partly from the application of the pontil and partly because the mould part moved during the blowing process.”



Figure 4 – H. Ricketts & Co, V3 (Jones 1986:99)

Burton (2015:194) noted that these bottles were created by the “Weights and Measures act of 1824, enacted in 1826, which established the British Imperial System.” These included both the two-line (Variation 1) and one-line (Variation 4 below) embossed “washers” from 1825 to ca. 1837. Burton claimed that the bottles were embossed “PATENT IMPERIAL” or “IMPERIAL PATENT” on the shoulders. Based on Burton’s research, we have dated this variation 1825-1830s.

H. RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 4 (ca. 1830-1840s)

The final variation of the name on the “washer” was embossed “H. RICKETTS & C^o. GLASSMAKERS • BRISTOL ::” in a single line around the circle (Figure 5). This time, the “^o” in “C^o” lacked the underlining dot. Jones (1986:99) claimed that “the style was used by American firms imitating Ricketts’ bottles” by at least the 1830s – although she did not explain her reasons for



Figure 5 – H. Ricketts & Co, V4 (eBay; Jones 1986:99)

making the statement, nor did she provide any hint as to how long these bottles may have been produced. We found an example on eBay, but it lacked the “PATENT” embossing on the shoulders found on most bottles (Figure 6). Burton (2015:194) clearly demonstrated that bases with the single-line variation (#4) were used in England during the 1830s, dismissing the idea of an American imitation.

H. RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 5 (1840s)



Figure 7 – H. Ricketts & Co, V5 (eBay; Jones 1986:99)

This variation demonstrated a major shift from the initial four – a true post baseplate. The base was embossed “H. RICKETTS (arch) / & C^o (horizontal straddling a dot or mamelon in the center) / BRISTOL (inverted arch)” (Figure 7). Examples on eBay had the word “PATENT” embossed on the shoulder, and one of them was the only Ricketts bottle we have seen that was neither beer nor wine (Figure 8). Jones (1968:99) noted that “the embossing was moved to the centre of the base when the firm stopped using pontils, probably in the late 1840s” – although we feel that this change could have taken place as early as

1840, a few years prior to Jones’ dating.



Figure 6 – Bottle - no Patent (eBay)



Figure 8 – Patent (eBay)

There is some debate about whether the dot in the center of the base should be called a mamelon. Jones & Sullivan (1989:87) defined the mamelon as “a rounded emanence, a small, circular protrusion found on the basal surface, usually in the tip of the pushup. These may be a type of vent mark. . . . On champagne bottles the mamelon is large and protuberant.” Based on this definition, the dots on these bottles deserve the term, mamelon (Figure 9; also see Figure 7). Burton (2015:194-195) missed this variation but noted that “the earliest reference to a central base pimple . . . is seen on half and full size three-part moulded Cylinder bottles” in 1825 – by far the earliest reference to a dot or mamelon we have found.

Regardless of size, all of these appear to be circular and rounded on bases, and such a formation could have been caused by drilling a shallow hole in the center of the base. Possibly, the same effect could have been created – as Jones & Sullivan seem to be suggesting – by drilling that hole all the way through the

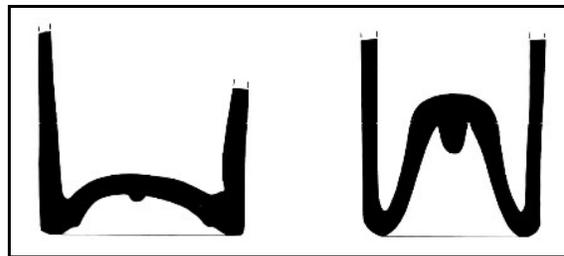


Figure 9 – Mamelons (Jones & Sullivan 1989:87)

baseplate, the rounding occurring as the glass congealed. It seems to us as if the glass would have dripped all the way through the very large mamelons in champagne and some wine bottles. However, we have no better explanation for mamelons – and they remained commonplace until about the time that “dot” vent marks began appearing on bottle bases and shoulders.

RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 1 (late 1840s)

These were embossed “• RICKETTS • (arch) / & C^o (horizontal straddling a dot or mamelon in the center) / BRISTOL (inverted arch)” (Figure 10). Except for the lack of the “H” and the dots surrounding “RICKETTS,” the base was virtually identical to Variation 5 of the previous set. Jones (1986:99) suggested that this variation preceded the one with only initials (see below) “as the trend was to increased simplicity in the embossed company marks.”

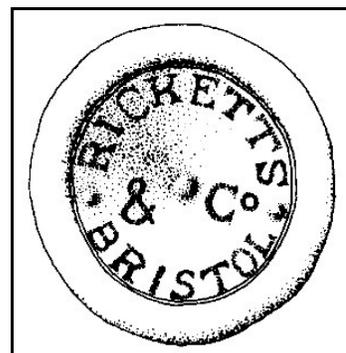


Figure 10 – Ricketts & Co, V1 (Jones 1986:99)

RICKETTS & C^o – Variation 2 (late 1840s)

This variation was virtually identical with Variation 1 – including the mamelon in the center and the two dots separating “RICKETTS” from “BRISTOL” – but “& C^o” was entirely missing (Figure 11). Jones had not included this example and probably had not seen one. Ours came from an eBay auction. Following her analysis of the simplicity trend, this was probably the final bottle from Henry Ricketts & Co. embossed with the name “RICKETTS.” Like the first variation, this was probably made during the late 1840s.



Figure 11 – Ricketts & Co, V2 (eBay)

Burton (2015:195), however, suggested that this variation might have been used during the very brief Richard Ricketts period, an idea we had also considered. However, these all fit very well into the Jones simplicity hypothesis.

H•R (1850-1851)

McKearin & Wilson (1978:217) noted that some bases were embossed “‘H.R. BRISTOL’ around a nipple at center of a conical kick-up.” This was the final mark used by Henry Ricketts & Co., even more simple, almost as McKearin & Wilson had described it – “H•R (arch) / BRISTOL (inverted arch)” around a mamelon (Figure 12). Jones



Figure 12 – HR (eBay; Jones 1986:99)

(1986:99) stated that “the name of the firm has been reduced to initials, a style favored in the 1850s. This marking pre-dated 1852, the year Henry Ricketts retired. Burton (2015:195) suggested a date range of 1845-ca. 1851 for this variation, but he missed the preceding two.

Richard Ricketts & Co. (1851-1853)

The only blackglass bottles we have found embossed with “RR” were of the “Saratoga” style from New York. These lacked “BRISTOL” and had the initials on the shoulder – very unlikely from Richard Ricketts (Figure 13). It may be that few if any bottles with “RR Bristol” embossing have survived, since the firm was only in business for three years. However, one or both of the bottles embossed “RICKETTS” (without the “H”) *could* have been made during this period. It is also possible (probable?) that Richard Ricketts just continued to use the old molds from the previous firm and had reorganized before any of them wore out.



Figure 13 – RR (eBay)

Powell, Ricketts & Filer (1853-1857)

This firm used only a single mark during its four years in business. Prior to joining with Filer, Powell embossed his own name, “PB,” or just “P” on bottle bases.

P or PB (1831-1856)

Gregory et al. (2019:29-30) illustrated and discussed bottles embossed “P,” “P / B,” or “PG” on bases (Figure 14). Although the researchers suggested a date range of 1824-1856, that includes the tenure of the Cooksons in the firm as well. We suggest 1831 (after the withdrawal of the Cooksons) to 1856, instead. It is unclear whether the researchers felt that the “B” indicated “Brothers” – as in Powell Brothers – or the location, Bristol, as on the later “P&R / B” containers. In the illustrations, the “B” can either be below or following the “P.”

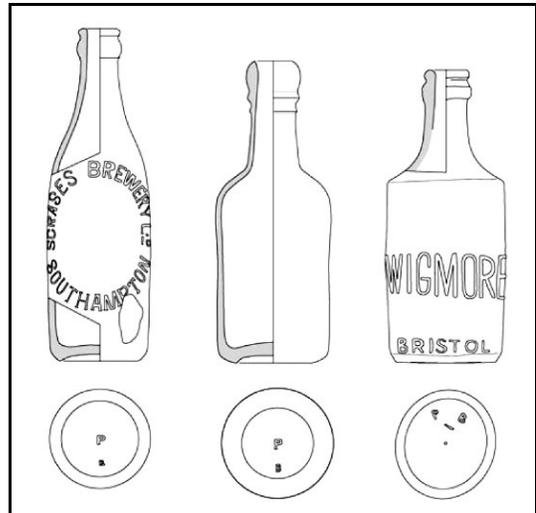


Figure 14 – P & PB (Gregory 2019:29)

POWELL / & Co / BRISTOL (ca. 1840-ca. 1850)

The dating of these bottles is confused. Burton (2015:195) noted that “the early bottles were simply embossed • POWELL • / BRISTOL (2 lines) encircling & Co flanking a central pimple (Figure 15). Edward Filer joined the partnership which became Powell & Filer” – although we have no date for Filer’s involvement. These were probably in use during the 1840s to 1850.



Figure 15 – Powell & Co. (Burton 2015:196)

PR&F (1853-1857)

Bottles from Powell, Ricketts & Filer were embossed “• P.R&F • (arch) / BRISTOL (inverted arch) around a mamelon (Figure 16). Jones (1986:99) agreed with this firm identification but added no other information. An example from eBay still included the “PATENT” embossing on the shoulder.

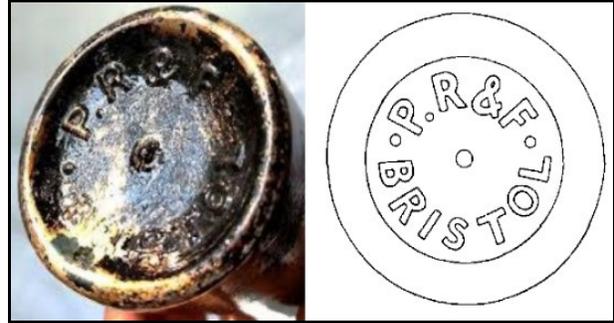


Figure 16 – PR&F (eBay; Jones 1986:99)

Powell & Ricketts (1857-1923)

Despite the long term in business, we have only discovered two marks for Powell & Ricketts, although there were variations of the first one.



Figure 17 – P&R B (eBay; Jones 1986:99)

P&R (1857-ca. 1880s or later)

Powell & Ricketts produced at least three variations of “P&R” logo.

The most common format was the typical slightly convex base with a small mamelon in the center. Jones (1986:98-99) included a drawing of a base embossed “• P&R • (arch) / BRISTOL (inverted arch)” around the eternal mamelon (Figure 17). Once again, her discussion was limited to the dates for the firm. The only example we have seen of this mark – again from eBay – was made of light aqua glass, and was embossed “• P&R • (arch) / B (inverted arch)” around the mamelon (see Figure 17). The shoulder, however, was embossed “MEASURE” with a round plate on the front embossed “J.W. WATTS, (arch) / WINE / MERCHANT (both horizontal) / COLEFORD (inverted arch)” (Figure 18). Powell & Ricketts probably manufactured containers with these initials until the late 1880s.



Figure 18 – Measure (eBay)

Burton (2015:196) illustrated and discussed the variation noted above and two others. One was embossed “• P&R • (arch) / BRISTOL (inverted arch)” around a larger mamelon on a much more deeply concave base. The embossing was on a “washer-like” Ricketts plate, sloped to be part of the concavity (Figure 19).



Figure 19 – P&R Bristol (Burton (2015:196))



Figure 20 – P&R B (Burton (2015:196))

Burton’s final variation (2015:196) was embossed “• P&R • (arch) / B (inverted arch)” around the mamelon in a smaller baseplate – with the initials in an apparent Ricketts mold or

possibly just embossed circles (Figure 20). This one was embossed “JUBILEE / 1887” in a shoulder seal, the latest of the dark amber “blackglass” bottles that Burton had discovered.

The initials also appeared on other bottles that seem

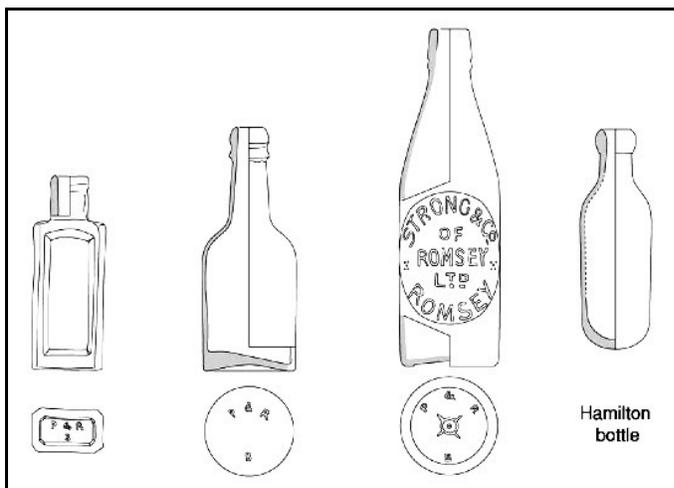


Figure 22 – P&R (Gregory 2019:29)

to have been made later than

the blackglass examples noted above.

Gregory et al. (2019:29) illustrated a variety of bottles, all with variations of “P&R / B” logos (Figures 21 & 22).



Figure 21 – P&R (Gregory 2019:29)

POWELL & RICKETTS (ca. 1880s-1923)



Figure 23 – Powell & Ricketts (eBay)

Around the early 1880s, the firm apparently concentrated on numerous Codd-stoppered bottles, embossed “POWELL & RICKETTS (slight arch) / MAKERS / BRISTOL (both horizontal)” on the lower reverse, following the use of the full firm name that had become popular

on beverage containers (Figures 23 & 24). There may have been slight variations during this 40-year period, although we have seen very few examples on eBay or other online sources. The firm may have phased out bottles at some point and continued to produce tableware.

Discussion and Conclusions

The histories of the various firms are reasonably clear, with few of the typical confusion between researchers. Unfortunately, the dating of the variations of the Henry Ricketts marks are much less distinct, and we have relied heavily on Jones (1968), Burton (2015), and Gregory et al. (2019) for our chronology – along with best guesses for some parts. As usual, some of the examples from all three sources have been difficult or impossible for us to locate; hence, the use of their drawings alone for several variations.

Although not fully relevant to this study – but interesting – many of the U.S. firms continued to use Ricketts plates after they discarded pontils in favor of snap cases. Several of the glass houses noted above made bottles with the Ricketts “washer” on the base but also a mamelon in the center and no pontil scar. These may reflect the use of old molds until they wore out – the most likely explanation, since the literature repeatedly stated that molds were the most expensive item in the manufacturing process.



Figure 24 – Codd bottles (eBay)

Table 2 – Chronology of Ricketts Marks

Mark	Mold*	Firm	Dates
H. RICKETTS & C ^o	Washer (pontil in center)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	1811-ca. 1825 or later
H. RICKETTS & C ^o	Washer (PATENT ctr)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	ca. 1820s
H. RICKETTS & C ^o	Washer (crown center)**	Henry Ricketts & Co.	1825-1840s
H. RICKETTS & C ^o	Washer (pontil in center)	American Imitation	1830s-1850s?
H. RICKETTS	Plate (& C ^o in center)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	1840s
RICKETTS	Plate (& C ^o in center)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	late 1840s
RICKETTS	Plate (dot in center)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	late 1840s
HR	Plate (dot in center)	Henry Ricketts & Co.	1850-1851?
P.R&F	Plate (dot in center)	Powell, Ricketts & Filer	1853-1857
P&R	Plate (center)	Powell & Ricketts	1857-1880s
POWELL & RICKETTS	Reverse Heel	Powell & Ricketts	ca. 1880-1923

* Typical bottles had “PATENT” embossed on the shoulder.

** This variation had “IMPERIAL” embossed on the shoulder.

Acknowledgments

Our gratitude to Wanda Wakkinen for her continued proofreading of these studies and providing the impetus that sparked the transition of this entry from a short piece in the Other R section to this much improved version.

Sources

Alford, W.E.

1973 [2006] *W.D. and H.O. Wills and the Development of the UK Tobacco Industry, 1786-1985*. Routledge, London.

Burton, David

2015 *Antique Sealed Bottles – 1640-1900 – and the Families Who Owned Them*. Antique Collectors Club Ltd., Woodbridge, Suffolk, England. [with research by Christopher Mortimer]

Champion, Richard

1873 *Two Centuries of Ceramic Art in Bristol Being a History of the Manufacture Os the True Porcelain*. John Bellows, Gloucester.

Gregory, Richard A., David Dungworth, Chris Wild, and Vix Hughes

2019 “Exploring Bristol’s historic glass industry: archaeological investigation at the Soap Boilers’ and Hoopers’ glasshouses, and the Powell & Ricketts’ Bottle Works, Avon Street, Glass Wharf, Bristol, Post-Medieval Archaeology, DOI: 10.1080/00794236.2018.1515403

Jones, Olive R.

1986 “Cylindrical English Wine and Beer Bottles 1735-1850.” *Studies in Archaeology, Architecture and History*, Parks Canada.

Kaiser, Joan E.

2009 *The Glass Industry in South Boston*. University Press of New England.

McKearin, Helen and Kenneth M. Wilson

1978 *American Bottles & Flasks and Their Ancestry*. Crown Publishers, New York.

Powell, Harry J.

1923 *Glass-Making in England*. Cambridge University Press.

Toulouse, Julian Harrison

1971 *Bottle Makers and Their Marks*. Thomas Nelson, New York.

Last updated 1/29/2019