

1180 TREFOIL ASH TRAY

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Just about the time you think you have Heisey's numbering system figured out, you discover that, well, you don't. That was brought to mind yet again when I decided to write about the 1180 Trefoil ash tray. This pattern number, 1180, is a peculiar one. It is applied to several incidental items, all sharing a certain simplicity which indicates they were conceived about the same time. But they never seemed to congeal into a unified pattern as far as A. H. Heisey & Co. was concerned. There was the sugar, cream, and marmalade, which I dealt with in a separate piece as 1180 Debra. Then there was the simple little nut dish called 1180 Brazil. And here is the ash tray, 1180 Trefoil. Heisey never put them on the same pages of catalogs or price lists, even though they had more or less overlapping periods of production. If it weren't for the fact that researchers have given the pieces different pattern names already, it would be conceivable to extend the Revere pattern name to include 1180, much as 1181 and 1182 share the name with 1183 now. That, of course, would upset a few collectors' apple carts. Since Heisey didn't feel compelled to put them together, there is no need for us to do otherwise. Why Heisey didn't number Trefoil as part of another series of ash trays, such as, for example, the late 1920's group that started with 357, is a mystery.

As for the name itself, some people will say TREF-oil, and others will say TREE-foil. My limited, informal sampling suggests some people, particularly students of art history, prefer the first pronunciation and others the second. Some dictionaries only give one of these pronunciations and some give both. In case one of those prim Prunella Thistlebottom types challenges you on how you say it, just be sure you have the right dictionary at hand. A nice, heavy one.

Let alone pronouncing the researcher-given name, we're just lucky we even know the correct pattern number for this ash tray. Judging from the price lists, the Trefoil ash tray was put on the market shortly after Catalog 102 was put together. It is not illustrated in that catalog, but a supplemental price list includes a listing for the piece. An early edition of Cat. 109 includes an illustration which was reproduced both in Vogel's Book 3 and in the Bredehoft book, Heisey Glass 1925-1938. That was on the page I've mentioned before that got dropped from later editions of that catalog. 1180 Trefoil doesn't appear in lists after that, at least not any of the ones I have available right now. That puts production from around 1924 to around 1927, give or take a year or two on either end. In the Bredehoft book, Neila notes that the information is fragmentary during much of this period, so it is difficult to be exact with dates and colors. Even though she was writing more than 25 years ago (can it really be that long?) our information is still incomplete, so there will be a certain amount of guesswork. When it comes down to it, anyway, what's a year or two difference between friends?

One of the first unusual things I noticed about the Trefoil ash tray was its weight. After an afternoon spent schlepping various Heisey ash trays around — I was trying to cover a lot of photographic territory quickly — this one felt surprisingly light. Not as in fragile, be-careful-when-you-wash-this kind of light, but as in svelte, you-certainly-have-lost-weight kind of light. The thinner glass in the bowl of the Trefoil ash tray accounts for most of that. The

stem and handle are of fairly standard thickness for a piece this size. I don't have a good rationale for this lightness. Heisey ash trays tended to be a lot thicker and heavier than pieces of comparable size made for other purposes. Maybe they were trying to appeal to smokers who wanted a lighter, more feminine, look. Trefoil is more Gloria Swanson than Francis X. Bushman. When you really get to looking at this ash tray, though, the weight isn't the only thing that sets it apart.

Design-wise, 1180 Trefoil straddles two styles. It is mainly in the softly curved style epitomized by Revere and Yeoman. Yet Trefoil also has elements of the colonial tradition that was waning by then. The Trefoil ash receptacle is a simply shaped, smooth bowl, very Reverish. Meanwhile, the center of the bowl thickens and rises up to become the stem of the handle. Here the designer falls back on the paneling one sees on the older colonial patterns. Some habits are just hard to break. In another holdover from the older tradition, a six-sided band wraps around the panels, tying them together into the stem that will hold the handle itself. Then, atop the stem, the designer moves back into the more modern style with an unusual shape. Not really fancy, but a little more detailed than we'd expect of the time. The effect is something like a window set into a Gothic arch. While the pattern name is Trefoil, neither the handle nor the pierced "window" within it is truly three-lobed, as an architecture student might be quick to point out. Instead, the piercing is really a smaller lobe placed over a larger, wider one below it. Recognizing this can put you ahead of our dear Miss Thistlebottom if she is also versed in architecture. Regardless of the correctness of the name, the effect is Gothic Revival.

Even more unusual, perhaps, is that there is a handle at all. Unless you count some of the later horse-headed ash trays, there aren't any other Heisey ash trays that are center-handled. In fact, if you stumbled across Trefoil in one of your favorite antique haunts, you might not feel sure this is an ash tray at all. There is no cigarette rest to clue you in. The piece looks

more like a small bon bon. But an ash tray it is, as we know by where Heisey chose to place the illustration in the catalog.

Yet one more surprising aspect is the bottom of the Trefoil ash tray. The entire piece is fire-polished. With the shape of the bowl and the hollowed center on the underside beneath the stem, I expected to find a ground and polished rim on the bottom of the receptacle. The example I show in the photograph, at least, sits on a rim shaped only by the way the piece was molded without any post-cooling alteration.

Besides the unusual features of 1180 Trefoil, it is just plain unusual, as in not especially easy to find. When you do find it, as you would expect for a piece produced in the late 1920's, 1180 Trefoil will often be in Moongleam or Flamingo. As sometimes happens with items from this color era, crystal seems to be harder to find than the colors. If it is to be found in any other color, I am not aware of it. (Just in, one in Marigold has been spotted,)

As for decorations, I doubt there is much, if any, available with Heisey's own factory design. I haven't found any published reports of them, at any rate. Some of the decorating companies could be quite inventive, so you may well have an example of their own work, but I'm guessing that is sparse, too. Trefoil the ash tray shouldn't be confused with Trefoil the needle etching which was applied to stemware, sodas, and a few other pieces of various patterns in the late 1910's and early 1920's.

Vital Statistics

1180 Trefoil ash tray: Diameter, 4¼". Height, ½" to rim of receptacle, 2½" to top of handle. Fire-polished. Marked on stem. Moongleam, Flamingo, or crystal.

Tom Jones only sang about it if it wasn't unusual. If you're like many Heisey collectors, it's the unusual pieces that make you sing out. Let me hear a tune or two about your unusual pieces, at heisey@embarqmail.com.