

THE PRINCE OF ORANGE ...and his bottle,

a crown jewel for collectors; for now, we will ‘unseal’ some of his history

By Ralph Finch

Dear Readers, this is a great story, but before I tell it, allow me to meander back, then work my way up to the present.

First, I often search for a needle in a haystack. (Spoiler alert: I may find one in 10,000 haystacks.)

Second, I like stuff. Silly stuff and serious stuff, like painted 1600s-1700s demijohns showing ship-related scenes. (Spoiler alert: We have a few, but this story is about a museum-quality bottle we tried for and got blown out of the water; we didn’t even come within hailing distance.)

One morning I came across an auction offering a demijohn described (edited) as:

“a large Dutch, paint-decorated olive-green sealed bottle. The bottle late 17th century, the decoration probably later.

The seal with the motto VIVAT DE PRINCE VAN ORANGIEN (Long live the Prince of Orange), the reverse paint decorated with ships at sea below a portrait of the seated prince.

Condition: Heavy wear overall, including abrasions and areas of paint loss. Interior of bottle with dirt and liquid staining/residue. Air bubble inclusions overall and air bubble striations to neck and popped air bubbles throughout. Some roughness to interior rim.

Buyer’s premium: 30 percent. Estimated at \$600-\$800” (and was that a joke?)

The opening minimum bid was \$300, and before I could hit the “bid” button, the price took off with a bang, like a big bang, like warships at sea.

And in a few moments, after the smoke had cleared, the hammer had exploded to \$10,500 plus tax, shipping, etc. And the real issue is that this turned out to be a bargain!

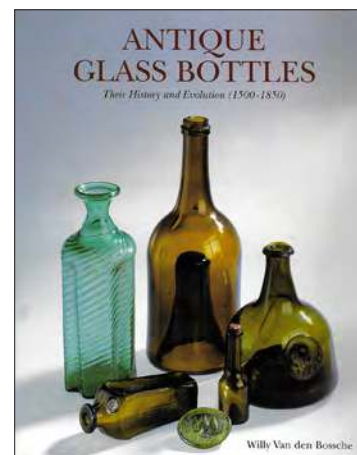
Soon after, and the final echo of the hammer was still being heard

around the world, I was getting messages from collectors in Europe asking me if I could track down the buyer. (I did, and he wasn’t selling!)

I found the happy warrior in a bottle collector website called “Hardcore Bottle Collectors,” where proud new owner Robert Girouard wrote:

“Here is a big one. A 17th-century painted seal bottle that stands 16 inches tall. Circa 1672. The black and white picture shows one in the Historical Collections Museum in Amsterdam. The paint on mine may be later, from the 18th century. The seal itself is over 2 inches in diameter.”

Now, note that: The seal is two inches high, and that’s just part of why it is amazing!



Antique Glass Bottles: Their History and Evolution, 1500-1850, Willy Van den Bossche

[Right Page Images]
Both sides of the Prince of Orange bottle. Exterior setting.

Belgium’s Willy Van den Bossche (wvdbossche@telenet.be) wrote: “The seal is completely described in my book, page 113.”

The book? *Antique Glass Bottles: Their History and Evolution, 1500-1850* (440 pages) and priced by used booksellers for \$65 (damaged) to \$286, plus postage.

In his book, Willy reveals: “A very rare forest green ‘shaft and globe’ produced in Holstein (Germany) for the Dutch market.

Antique Bottle & Glass Collector



Sealed with the portrait of Prince William III of Orange (1650-1702) and surrounded by the device 'VIVAT DE PRINCE VON ORANGE (Long live the Prince of Orange)', referring to his appointment as *Stadholder of Holland and Zeeland in 1672, known in Holland as the disastrous year. William III, or 'Dutch William,' married Mary II and was king of England from 1689 until 1702. This (type of) bottle was blown at the glasshouses in Wittmoldt, Perdoel, and Lanmershagen in Holstein (North Germany). Other than Belgium, Holstein was one of the main suppliers of bottles to Holland in the 17th century. This bottle was produced from 1672 until c. 1690."

*Google says of the Stadholder: "From the 15th century to the late 18th century (it was) the chief magistrate of the United Provinces of the Netherlands."

FYI 1: I asked Willy about his book, and he noted: "We sold nearly all the printed 10,000 copies the publication year 2001-2002."

FYI 2: A hard-to-find book, but during my research, I did wade into the "Bottle-ship Museum, called in Enkhuizen, Netherlands, "The world's largest collection of ships in bottles." (There are 750 on exhibit, showing "an incredible variety of miniature boats: rescue boats, whaling ships, steamships and modern dredgers stuffed into every variety of bottle, from the tiniest light bulb to a 30-liter wine jug. Magnifying glasses are available where needed.")



Exterior of the Bottle Ship Museum, Enkhuizen, Netherlands

The bottleship museum (edited) is "housed in the 17th-century 'spuihuisje'; a small house built on top of a sluice" (a water gate).

The museum is within walking distance of the train station, which likely means it is next to the red light District. (How do I know that? As a bottle collector, I've been to Amsterdam to attend a major antique show.

Also: I recently came across these European museums:

"Lady of Stavoren: This Dutch statue is a monument to the fictional shrew who brought doom to the city of Stavoren.

"Nice, Calif.: Clarkes Collectibles & Lunchbox Museum; An ever-updating collection of retro Americana.

"Enumclaw, Wash.: Thunder Dome Car Museum; A sun-filled museum featuring an ever-rotating collection of classic and exotic cars.

"Vitoria, Brazil: Brazil Telephone Museum; An emporium of communication in Vitória's Old City. ..."

Continued...



[Above] Both sides of the large Dutch, paint-decorated, olive-green seal bottle. The top image (obverse side) shows the Prince of Orange seal. The reverse depicts the point decorated with ships at sea below a portrait of the seated prince. Interior studio setting.

[Above] Two detail close-ups of the Prince of Orange seal. The seal with the motto VIVAT DE PRINCE VAN ORANGIEN (Long live the Prince of Orange).