

## BLACK GLASS BUTTONS – CLASS 6

I often wonder what makes me a black glass button fanatic.... Maybe it's because these buttons were the "plebians" of the button world? But while many were the cheap buttons for people in the 1800 and 1900's there was always some workman somewhere trying something different and producing something quite wonderful (bizarre, sometimes, but wonderful nonetheless!). There is always something to marvel at with these buttons. This is the oddest black glass button I have...



It was a fun learning experience to put together the black glass worksheets. For example, I hadn't thought that there would be a "threadback" black glass! But old articles did refer to them and I was lucky enough to actually see one in Arizona this past February. It does exist... and has a "true" threadback which looks just like the old metal, etc. threadbacks.

While I know that many people's eyes start to glaze over when we talk about black glass classification, the NBS classification guide really is useful for at least 2 reasons: one, all those piles of black glass would be overwhelming if there wasn't some way of organizing them (oh, the thought is horrifying!) and two, the classification does help to learn all about black glass. While it seems to be a picky business for some, I do find it endlessly fascinating (I know, I know.... time to get a life...).

Since I'm not ready to write a book yet, this article is just going to skim the black glass classification... my favourite parts, of course!

### All Black Class 6-1

Last year, there was a National award for pictorial summary specialized "all black" – no decorative finishes, no "other material embellishments"... just black glass. It was an interesting tray to put together! There are basically three variations: matte, shiny, combinations of matte and shiny.



### Back types Class 6-2

I confess that generally I can't get excited about back types even though there are some interesting ones..like sew-throughs and rosette shank buttons. But I adore swirlbacks - my very favourite "back type"! There must be at least a visible swirl emanating from the shank (not concentric circles!) and a wire loop shank or a loop and plate shank. Here are some of my favourite black glass swirlbacks:



### Construction Assorted Class 6-3

One of the most confusing things to learn about black glass is how to distinguish between "construction" and "mechanical make-up". It really isn't too difficult. "Construction" includes all buttons **formed while the glass is warm or hot**. This include those made from particular types of glass canes to produce a special effect (moonglows and intermixed) as well as the ones hand manipulated with torchwork (blown and lampworked). Others in this category include buttons that use heat to add glass or other embellishments such as tiles, overlays, paperweights, impression inlays, and foil embedded. All of these types involve the use of heat in their formation. "Mechanical make-up" buttons have the components of the button assembled when the glass (or metal, etc.) is in a cold or solid, formed state. The component parts are held together using metal pins, glue, etc.

Here's an example of the difference:

**Tile** buttons (construction) start off as a black glass base with a cavity or hole forming a pattern. Then hot glass (usually of a different color) is poured into that cavity, forming the inlay. These buttons could also be made by pouring glass powder into the cavity and then heating the button to a melting point of the glass powder. The button surface is then ground smooth. Now compare that with a "**precision inlay**"(mechanical make-up)... Same starting point – a black glass base with a cavity or hole. But then another piece of already formed, and now cold, glass is glued into that hole. You'll see that the "fit" is not as tight as the tile types. Time to get out that magnifier glass!



There are all kinds of fabulous types of buttons in the construction class: the rare painted black glass with a very thin layer of clear glass (attached with heat, of course), all the lovely types of overlay like sheet overlay, salt, etc.; paperweights, foil embedded and more. There are also the “impression inlays” which is the new term for “metal embedded” (I’m still struggling to get that term straight in my head!) which are under “construction” because the metal is pressed into the glass while the glass is still soft. My current “search for the holy button grail” is to find that elusive pictorial impression inlay... preferably on a swirlback!



#### Decorative Finishes Class 6- 4

This is one of the prettiest groupings of black glass (after swirlbacks, of course). A tray of decorative finishes can really be spectacular! This is a good one for hanging on the wall to impress all those visitors who make fun of button collecting! (I’m also thinking of making a t-shirt that says “No, I don’t want the buttons off your shirt”.) There are pearlized black glass and many lovely and oh-so-subtle acid etched/abraded buttons with designs. Of course the lusters and “washes” really can be spectacular! There is such a variety even within each group.



#### Mechanical Make-up Class 6- 5

Another favourite class! (okay... they are all favourites...). I especially love frame buttons which really are just what the name says: the black glass base forms a “frame” in which another piece of glass, or other material, is set. This includes the elusive “watch crystals”. They are basically the same as watch crystals under the clear and colored glass category but then the watch crystal is set into a black glass base.

*Black Glass frames**watch crystal**brown glass**shell**engraved  
white metal*

There are many buttons that fall under the metal back category including wafers which are very thin black glass wafers with a metal back covering most of or the entire back of the glass to provide strength. There are some lovely ones that are acid etched on the top. Of course, there are the incredible riveted black glass buttons under this class. Can you imagine making all those little pieces of black glass with a tiny metal “rod” sticking out of the back... and then riveting (or even just gluing) all those little things onto a metal back??? Amazing, isn't it? And they are so beautiful too!



### Molded/cut Surface Designs Class 6- 6

When it comes to the various types of surface designs, the best help is the classification guide! It provides excellent definitions of each of the types of surface design... Some are more straightforward than others, of course.

*Minerva with a beard!**Cameo**Intaglio  
(reverse cameo)**Impressed**Incised*

Imitation fabric is a seemingly limitless group. There are hundreds of different types of fabric... and those black glass manufacturers tried to copy all of them, I'm sure! Studying the different fabric types is fascinating; you can learn about weaves like 5 shaft satin weave, herringbone, or the different types of lace, or fabric treatment...the list goes on!





*Braided*



*Crochet*



*Beaded on silk*



*Tapestry*

Black glass lacies are another big favourite (they must be since I have cards & cards of them!) The black glass lacies have “delicate surface designs” and sometimes have a clear and coloured glass counterpart. This is my all time favourite lacy is both black and clear & coloured glass:



and some of my favourite runners-up:



#### Other material embellishment Class 6- 7

There are many lovely buttons with metal, steel, clear or coloured glass, shell.... well the list goes on!



### Shapes Class 6- 8

And finally there are shapes. There are three basic shapes: contour (it must have “significant height”... basically, a “shape” when viewed sideways), linear (round, oval, etc.) and realistic (they must represent the actual shape of something or someone found in the 4 pictorial sections of the classification). The main thing to watch out for is that buttons that are heart shaped or paisley shaped, etc., are **not** realistics... they represent patterns or symbols, not actual things like animals, objects, etc. Hmm, I did discover that I don't have many realistics in black glass!



Of course I could go on and on about black glass but mercifully, space is limited! I do hope that this review of the black glass classification and the worksheets will help in understanding black glass... and in getting you excited about attacking those piles of black glass buttons that I just know are sitting in your button room!