

Scientific Glass Blowing

A cracking time

Back at the end of 2022, whilst looking into the development of a glasswork course, I was fortunate to be invited to the International Scientific Glassblowing Conference in France. The invitation came from a gentleman called Jean Francois Boutry who is a Scientific Glassblowing teacher from the Lycee Dorian school in Paris. This was quite the chance encounter that arose from the fact that he had married a former Dunfermline resident and was over visiting the city when we happened to arrange a meeting with the BSSG, the British Society of Scientific Glassblowers. I am so glad the encounter happened.

Pack the suitcase and off to Paris.

The morning started with some presentations from various Scientific Glassblowers and Glassblowing companies, which all had the same theme. The number of fully qualified glassblowers across Europe is dwindling and in some places the profession is at threat of disappearing completely. Given the important role this profession plays, particularly at university level, losing it will have a huge negative impact.

A brief break, with enough time for a coffee and a warm croissant, and we were ready to move to the exhibition hall. Lots of glassware vendors from around Europe had set up stalls with examples of the types of glassware they produce, and it was nothing short of astonishing. To think that

someone could make these pieces by hand was very humbling and gave me a greater appreciation for the skill.

Time for lunch. A selection of charcuterie with a glass of vino to wash it all down. The things I have to endure for science.

It was then time for the practical demonstrations.

We were led downstairs to the glass lab where pupils were already at work, and I do mean school pupils. This was the other surprising part of the trip. I was under the impression that the school was a specific scientific glassblowing school however it turns out to be a standard state-run school. The schooling system in France is completely different from here in the UK. After the equivalent of standard grades, school pupils get to choose if they want to follow an academic or vocational path, and one such vocational path that the Lycée Dorian offers is Scientific Glassblowing. Watching the pupils complete some glass project was fascinating and you could tell they loved what they are doing.

I've talked enough and will finish off with some pictures of what the pupils produced.

Alan Purves,
Education Officer - Technicians, SSERC

