Journal of the British Society of Master Glass-Painters

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Vol. V. No. 4 October, 1934

Price: Ten Shillings and Sixpence

Published at the Offices of the Society, 6 Queen Square, W.C.1

W. E. CHANCE AND THE REVIVED MANUFACTURE OF COLOURED GLASS

By Thomas Stokes.

ALL interested in the art and craft of stained glass are only too painfully aware of the great deterioration in the quality of the stained glass manufactured in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, during which period comparatively little glass was produced worthy of the serious consideration of the modern craftsman. Owing to the inferior glass they were condemned to use; much excellent work by glass painters was rendered of little value; indeed, so poor was the glass that so distinguished an artist as Peckitt in the eighteenth century could not even satisfactorily repair the ravages of time in the old windows at York, Exeter, and other places. It was left to Mr. Winston in the middle of the nineteenth century, by his writings and practical experiments, to lead the way to the improvement of the quality of the material of the stained glass artist and craftsman, the glass commonly known as "antique."

It is only possible within the limits of a short article to trace a few of the currents of influence and circumstance which led to the renascence in this country of stained glass, and the improvements in its manufacture, as compared with that produced during the centuries of its decadence, until, through long and careful research, the secrets of the ancient workers had been re-discovered and their finest productions equalled, if not surpassed.

The impulse given to the religious life of the nation by the activities of the Dissenting Bodies in the eighteenth century gradually spread to the Established Church, and was reflected with greatest intensity in the Oxford Movement. Alongside, and in close spiritual affinity with the followers of Pusey and Newman, came the religio-romanticists Ford-Madox Brown, Dante Gabriel Rosetti, Edward Burne-Jones, and the other Pre-Raphaelites, whose minds were enriched with legendary

lore, and whose works redolent with colour, re-vitalised and stimulated the craft from within. At the same time the growing economic prosperity of the nation, and the development of the factory system, which made England for the time being the "workshop of the world," supplied the wealth necessary for the great Gothic revival about the middle of the nineteenth century—which gave impetus towards ecclesiastical building and restoration in general, and to the use of stained glass in particular under the inspiration of the eminent architect Sir Gilbert Scott. The acceptance of the Gothic as the architectural style most suitable for churches brought into fame its chief exponent Sir Gilbert, who, being responsible for the erection and restoration of many ecclesiastical buildings, sought for their embellishment the help of glass painters who could produce windows resembling in colour, tone and texture, the work of the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.

Mr. Winston, after attempts with several small London firms to improve the medium so that the skill of the glass painter might be more artistically expended upon it, co-operated for a time with James Powell & Sons, with the result that there was a great improvement in the material at the disposal of the artist. Notwithstanding this advance in the manufacture, the exacting standard of excellence required by Sir Gilbert Scott was not attained, and, failing to obtain what he desired, he enlisted the services of a rising young artist, John R. Clayton. The selection of this enthusiast was fully justified by the thoroughness with which Mr. Clayton gave himself to the task of surveying and studying, in this country and on the Continent, both ancient and modern examples of the best glass, devoting several years to making notes and sketches of its colour, style and treatment. On his return from the Continent and at the suggestion of Sir Gilbert Scott, Mr. Clayton (of whom the late Lewis F. Day, when lecturing to a group of National scholars at South Kensington, once said that he was the greatest authority on stained glass living in his day) opened his studio for the drawing and making of windows, an enterprise in which he was later joined by Mr. Bell.

Putting the results of his long and careful studies to practical

tests, Mr. Clayton was soon faced with the apparently insuperable difficulty of obtaining glass which in colour, quality, texture and tone could compare with that produced centuries before. At this critical time, however, he had the good fortune to come into contact with Mr. William Edward Chance (founder of the antique glass works at Oldbury), at once a cultured gentleman with a knowledge of languages and methods of manufacture which he had acquired by travel and investigation in the glass-making centres of Europe; a man of untiring physical and mental effort, a practical glass maker with a wide experience in the craft, and withal a man with an eye to business. During many years of research (in which he had the unique advantage of the help of his brother Alexander, who placed at his disposal the resources of the largest chemical works in the midlands), numerous highly speculative and expensive experiments were carried out by Mr. Chance at the suggestion of Mr. Clayton, not the least difficulty to be overcome being the making of rubies. Into the task of surmounting this difficulty Mr. Chance threw himself with characteristic energy and tenacity, and after years of trials he succeeded in producing not merely the desired rubies, but glass of all colours, in quantity, and equal in quality, to that produced in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries, so that he fully satisfied the exacting taste not only of Mr. Clayton but also of Mr Westlake, who had been untiring in his efforts to advise, help and encourage Mr. Chance to reach his goal, until without boasting it could truly be said that the output from the Oldbury works was superior to any of the Continental glass.

With the production of good glass and the capacity of the manufacturers to match, with repeated accuracy, the chosen historic samples entrusted to them, came an enlarged output of work by the increasing number of practitioners who, influenced by the study of the classic examples, formed a newer school of craftsmen.

Those unacquainted with the technique of glass-making may find it difficult to understand the obstacles, which confronted Mr. Chance in carrying through his experiments, obstacles calculated not merely to test the patience, but also the pocket of the experimenter; the problem of making "pots" to stand

the strain of continuous firing, and to resist the disintegrating effects of the materials employed to produce the extensive range of tints required; the problem of building furnaces that would attain a temperature sufficiently great to melt the ingredients; the different effects caused through varying temperatures, and the thousand-and-one unexpected results in the other processes often rendered of non-effect the work of weeks and months. In the light of this knowledge we can in these days appreciate how great was the courage and business prescience of the late Mr. W. E. Chance in forsaking a secure position and good prospects to embark upon what was then regarded by the wiseacres of his day as an "adventurous voyage on an uncharted sea," a voyage which, however, landed him in a haven of both pecuniary and artistic success.

One characteristic of this many-sided man was his keen discernment and judgment of others, and whilst his policy of short shrift for the indolent and incompetent was relentlessly applied, he secured the unswerving loyalty and co-operation of his best men. This was touchingly exemplified at a complimentary dinner held fifty years after the founding of the business, when the guests of honour were four men out of the thirteen who originally came with him in 1869 from the older works at Smethwick, and their references on that occasion to the "old gaffer" were many and affectionate. A personal reminiscence may perhaps be forgiven—the writer, as a boy, used not infrequently to meet Mr. Chance, a man then in his prime; his square figure, virile, athletic and well-groomed, his easily poised head with its defiant, thrusting chin and handsome face, lighted by a smile that was whimsical rather than playful, his measured swinging gait that challenged its destination at every stride, made a picture of physical and mental purposefulness not easily forgotten.

In 1894 Mr. Chance retired to Aldby Park, near York, leaving the management of the works in the capable hands of Mr. Edwin Richards, who for many years had been his chief lieutenant. He in turn was joined some years later by Mr. Harold Chance, elder son of the founder. On the death of Mr. Richards in 1914, the management of the works at Oldbury devolved upon his two sons, Mr. E. A. Richards (who died in 1926) and Mr. F. C. Richards, who as managing-director, is

now responsible for the manufacture of the antique glass at the Oldbury works, where the matching up of old specimens of glass is still carried to a fine art.

Mr. Chance, by his work for the improvement of antique glass, enhanced the traditions of the name he held, a name already great in the "glass" world. With his death in 1923 passed the last of the nineteenth-century workers for the improvement of the art of stained glass: Winston, Westlake, Pugin, Ward of Ward and Hughes, Sir Gilbert Scott, G. F. Bodley, Harry Powell, Clayton and Bell, Clement Heaton, Burlison and Grylls, and the late John Hardman, of Birmingham, but truly their names still live, and if you would see their monument, look around in the churches, abbeys and cathedrals at the stained glass executed during the last seventy years.

Note by Mr. John T. Hardman

The above history of the beginning of the revived making of "Antique" glass by Mr. Thomas Stokes is most interesting. As my predecessors in John Hardman & Co. were much in the movement, a few additional notes may be of interest.

Mr. W. E. Chance, a younger son in the firm of Chance Brothers, was a practical glass-maker who took a great interest in the revival of the art of stained glass, being encouraged as a youth by Mr. Evans, who had designed and made the "Robin Hood" window for Chance Bros. for the 1862 exhibition, and by Mr. John Hardman Powell, Pugin's son-in-law, who worked with Hardman, in Birmingham. He first made "Antique" glass, in an experimental way, in 1863, and tried to persuade the elder members of the firm to take up the work as a side line to their other glass-making. He no doubt being enthusiastic and young, pressed his point strongly. But his seniors, saying that he could make all the "Antique" in a week that would be used during the next twenty-five years, told him they would not, and when he pressed his views told him to take himself and his dreams elsewhere. As he believed in his own invention, he did so, and started W. E. Chance & Co., first as a separate firm at Spon Lane, then at Icknield Port Road, and afterwards at Oldbury. There is an old man of 82 still alive named John Thomas Hadley, who as a boy helped with the first pot of

antique glass made, and he says it was a standing joke at Chance Bros. that W. E. Chance had only one customer, and that was Hardman's. The first window made from Chance's antique glass was made by Hardman's.

Mr. Clayton probably soon became a customer, but he was not one at first. He persuaded Mr. Chance to experiment with more colours not made before. Lloyd and Summerfield, of Birmingham, and Hartley's, of Sunderland, started making "Antique" glass almost at once, and Powell's, of Whitefriars, must have done so either as early or earlier; but I have not a note of the date they began.

Mr. Chance was a real enthusiast, and when there was a pot of "Antique" in the making would not leave the works day or night, but slept among the kilns to keep his eye on the work. Mr. John Hardman Powell told me that many a time a boy would bring a message that the blowing was about to be done and that he, and perhaps my father and one of the others, would take a cab and go out to see the result; frequently, late at night or early morning, even leaving a dance to do so and watching the work in their dress clothes. Mr. Chance was a practical man, and would take part in the work himself. There are many stories told of him and his quick temper that often cost him dear. Mr. Hadley says he once made £15 in one day owing to it. He was given £5 in the morning to sign an agrement to serve so many years, but by dinner time, having offended Mr. Chance, he was given another £5 to cancel the agreement. But he was sent for during the afternoon and got another £5 to sign a new agreement the same as the first.

Mr. Chance once quarrelled with Mr. Clayton, and for years refused to make glass for him, which gave great joy to the other makers, for Mr. Clayton was not a man to go without what he wanted because of a little thing like that.

Mr. Gilbert Scott was no doubt the great encourager of the revival of stained glass from the time of his conversion to "Gothic" by Pugin's writings. Mr. Stokes gives the impression that he found in Mr. Clayton the only stained glass artist to his liking, but his name occurs constantly in our order books from 1840 until his death in 1878.

When I first joined the staff of John Hardman & Co. those old times were quite recent, and there were many on the staff,

both of our firm and W. E. Chance's—Mr. Edwin Richards, for instance—who had lived through the early days and were full of stories about them. Alas! when you are young you do not care so much for what the older ones have done—you want to do things yourself. But now I am older I regret that I did not listen more carefully to the traditions of a great and enthusiastic time. So history gets lost.

NOTE BY ALFRED J. WOOD (Hartley, Wood & Co., Sunderland).

I have read with pleasure and interest the article relating to the efforts of the late W. E. Chance in connection with the revival of the manufacture of coloured glass, also the additional notes by Mr. J. T. Hardman.

As my father, the late Alfred Wood, and also my grandfather, George Wood, made considerable contributions towards the efforts of W. E. Chance, particularly in those initial years 1870–1882, when the difficulties of furnace construction and the making of special colours and rubies was largely overcome, I feel your readers will be interested to have the following facts.

George Wood, whilst with Lloyd and Summerfield, made several special colours for W. E. Chance, and also gave personal assistance in colour mixing over a period of years about 1870–1880. My father, Alfred Wood, was the colour mixer for W. E. Chance for about ten years, during which period valuable advice was given by the French chemist Bontemps.

The late Mr. Edwin Richards took over the colour mixing about 1882 owing to Alfred Wood suffering a complete breakdown in health, doubtless due to the great strain of those difficult years.