

OffCuts

Lifestyle news from Stourbridge Glass Museum
and the British Glass Foundation

STOURBRIDGE
GLASS MUSEUM

 British Glass Foundation

Stourbridge Glass Museum – how it came into being.

The remarkable tale of the period from the formation of BGF in 2010 to SGM official opening in 2013.
Now available direct from the museum. All proceeds to BGF.

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Welcome ...

... to the first edition of **OffCuts**, our brand-new lifestyle bulletin that will accompany your regular **GlassCuts** as an occasional look in more detail at goings-on in the world of Stourbridge Glass Museum and the British Glass Foundation.

We do hope you enjoy this new initiative and would welcome your comments. Contact details are in the accompanying *GlassCuts*.

We present this inaugural edition with a couple of tales contrasting some items from the not-too-distant past with those from a new raw talent on the block.

From the archives



Our taste buds were tickled by a couple of news items sent in to us recently by David Willars of the Glass Society that show a couple of latest acquisitions to the Stourbridge Glass collection back in the day. One is a piece made at Thomas Webb celebrating a giant African elephant at London Zoo before it was sold 'amidst great controversy' to showman P.T. Barnum in 1882. The poor critter was paraded around America before being 'tragically killed in a railway accident'. At the time of its acquisition for the collection the vase was already 'a Century old', having been engraved in 1884 so it is certain its creator has long gone to that great Glory Hole in the sky.



Not so the creator of the second one, the ruby-coloured Elton John cameo vase, made in 1983 at the former Stourbridge Cameo Glass Company. This was in existence for only a few years but turned out some intriguing stuff, of which here is an example. It actually belonged to Elton John in the days before his ennoblement when he was still plain 'Mister', who was apparently 'one of the country's great glass collectors.' Funny, that. I knew he wore a wig but I never knew he collected glass. Although I can confirm that up to around ten years ago the man who made it was very much still with us; I was presenting a talk somewhere or t'other in Stourbridge one night when I showed an image of the vase and a gentleman in the audience piped up proudly: 'Yep, I made that'. If you're still around and willing, Sir, it would be great to hear your take on this quite distinctive piece.

If these take your fancy as much as they did ours then you'll be delighted to know that, as we speak, they are both being transferred from the dark bowels of their current hidey-holes to be displayed here at Stourbridge Glass Museum. Now, if you are the man who created the Elton John vase, then we would be delighted to reacquaint you with it. We'll be even more excited if the man who created the Elephant Vase turns up. But we somehow doubt that one.



A sparkling future

Now here's a tale to illustrate how the future of Stourbridge Glass lies in safe hands. Some years back I was hanging around the Ruskin Centre, as you do, together with a man who has since become my good friend Ian Dury. It was around the time Ian was project-managing his 2012 Portland Vase Project, for which I had the considerable honour of being official biographer.

A lifelong glassman to his bootstraps Ian, to use that hackneyed but nonetheless true expression, has forgotten more than I'll ever know and it was during a break from Roman matters that he introduced me to a lad in his mid-teens who was working intently on an engraving machine. Not yet proficient, but clearly dedicated; one knew instinctively he just had to come good.



Thus did I first meet Thomas (Tom) Southall, a young man who was clearly to the manner born. Tom's abilities have since truly blossomed and we were delighted when he accepted a residency at Stourbridge Glass Museum, where he is rapidly making big waves in the *uber*-skilled world of glass engraving. So, in compiling this item I returned to Ian Dury for a bit of historical background as to Tom's rapid rise through the ranks. He told me:

'I would like to think I played a big part in starting Tom, who is now only 30 years of age so still with many years ahead of him, with his glass engraving career. He was a student of mine for three years at the Ruskin Glass College. He then went to Stourbridge College for a three-year art course. He didn't enjoy some of the more academic aspects of this, so left after a year wondering how to proceed. This must happen all the time; gifted youngsters such as Tom are disillusioned by a system that is not geared to cater for their specific needs.

His parents approached me for help. I acquired an old copper wheel engraving lathe from the Brierley Hill Glass College that once belonged to Kevin Andrews (*arguably one of the best engravers of his era, sadly now deceased – Ed*). I set the lathe up at what was then the Webb Corbett Visitor Centre.

Kevin took a shine to Tom and recognised his potential. Kevin spent many hours teaching him the art of copper wheel engraving. Kevin desperately wanted Tom to succeed; he even paid for two years' subscription to the Guild of Glass Engravers on Tom's behalf. Andy Cope, the resident copper wheel and engraving tutor at the Glasshouse College, also assisted Tom.

For personal reasons Tom left the site for a while and I encouraged him to work from home, selling his work on line. I located an old cutting lathe for him to work on, hired a van and delivered it to his house in Gornal.

Tom's various talents developed rapidly and, with my guidance, over a two-month period using a hand-held recorder he produced the time lapse video of Terri-Louise College engraving the 2012 Portland Vase base plaque. He then edited the whole thing to produce a wonderful historical recording of this hugely significant aspect of the project. Coincidentally, more than a decade down the line, Tom and Terri are now working alongside each other at Stourbridge Glass Museum'.

Ian concludes: 'Tom is an unbelievably gifted young man and could become one of the best glass engravers of his generation. It is great to see he is getting support and backing from the new museum.'

We tend to agree, but we're happy to let the facts speak for themselves. A little while back, following the destruction of The Crooked House pub in Gornal, Tom produced a stunning image of the place as it appeared before the event. There's a report in *GlassCuts* (edn 230 dated 29.9.23) that can be found [here](#) or, even better, we have the plaque at the museum so you can come and see it for yourself.



Tom's latest effort is nothing short of awesome; an engraved image of Himley Hall. He has moved on from the copper wheel for the moment and is currently using a high-speed dentist's drill, as does Terri College. The image barely does it justice; look closely at the windows on the left that appear to stand out in 3D.





Tom is on hand at the end of the red carpet (just turn left when you come in) here at Stourbridge Glass Museum, where items he has made are for sale and he also accepts commissions. He is usually around during our opening hours but best check first.

Just take a look at his work and you'll understand why we are so pleased that he chose our place to set up his stall.

Tom is just one of a number of talented craftspeople either based or regularly working at SGM; we will be featuring all of them here in **OffCuts** in due course.



Learning a Disappearing Craft

Ex-student at Glasshouse College takes an Apprenticeship

Tom left Glasshouse College in July and has taken up learning the dying art of Copper Wheel engraving as well as continuing his skills at engraving with diamond wheels. Under the expert guidance of two of the top experts in the field, Ian Drury and Andy Cope, Tom is also attending an Art & Design course at Stourbridge College. Ian, Andy and Tom explain how this success story came about.

Ian Drury, of Stourbridge Glass Engravers, explains why he has taken on Tom

Tom was a work experience student of mine last year and I picked up that he had a natural ability for glass engraving. I introduced him to Kevin Andrew, an former copper-wheel engraver at Webb Corbett, which used to be based on this site. Kevin went on to be an engraving tutor at Briarley Hill Glass College. Kevin was so impressed with Tom that he donated his equipment to him, introduced him to the Guild of Glass Engravers and funded his guild subscription for two years.

Tom left Glasshouse College in July, doing an Art & Design course at Stourbridge College three days a week, and works here at the Webb Corbett Visitor Centre in the new Glasshouse Arts Centre two days a week. Tom works under my direction and also with Andy Cope, who is the engraving tutor at Glasshouse College. Our long-term goal is to develop incubation units in the centre, which Tom might be able to take on as a business concern, as there are no younger-generation engravers coming through.

Whilst I was making a replica of the Portland Vase, Tom filmed and edited a video of the work on his own. Andy is now going to teach Tom how to do copper-wheel engraving, as opposed to diamond-wheel

engraving, as Kevin left over 100 wheels in his collection of equipment.

Andy Cope, Copper-Wheel Engraver & Tutor

I taught Tom for three years whilst he was at Glasshouse College. I saw his natural ability and eye for design. I am starting to teach him copper-engraving, which is the traditional way, as today engravers use diamond wheels. Tom will have the opportunity to learn a dying craft, which is no longer taught anywhere as far as we know. I did a five-year apprenticeship at Webb Corbett from the age of 16 until Royal Daulton took over the site, so I am very excited about teaching Tom some of my skills.

Tom, Ex-Student

When I started at Glasshouse College in 2009, I had some social problems from bad experiences in secondary schools, which severely affected

my self-esteem. I've been diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome and was very happy to come to a practical skills college. It has been very helpful and has changed my outlook on life and my artistic desires.

It has helped me with my direction and what I want to do and I have received an enormous amount of support from the staff. Before,



Tom with Andy Cope on the traditional equipment. Left to him from Kevin Andrew. Tom works in the new Webb Corbett visitors centre at the newly refurbished Glasshouse Arts Centre, Wollaston Road, Stourbridge. See page XX for more information.

I wouldn't talk to anyone, but now I am much more sociable and my confidence has improved, which has helped me to be more independent and get a place at Stourbridge College.

I knew nothing about glass and only started engraving in my second year. As I like drawing by hand, engraving designs onto glass is a similar experience. Having started with the basics, Ian introduced me to Kevin Andrew, who gave me one of his old drills to work with, but because of his health, he had to retire and he left me all his equipment.

Working here with Ian and Andy has been going fantastically well and I have been helping Ian to set up the work area in the visitors' centre and sort out the equipment. I'll be working here in a heritage site with the traditional tools and techniques and hope to be able to sell my glass in the future. The Art & Design course is helping me to broaden my ideas and take inspiration from other glass artists that I come across around Stourbridge and on the internet. I would like to give special thanks to all the tutors, staff and glass workers and to Ian and Andy for all their support.



Tom with one of his engravings and with Kevin Andrew's copper wheels in the background at the Webb Carbett Visitor Centre.

The Portland Vase Recreated

at Ruskin Glass Centre



Photo: Phil Looch

To celebrate 400 years of glass making in Stourbridge, a group of 12 glass makers and engravers set about recreating the Portland Vase and the ancient art of cameo glass. The original, dated to the 1st century BC, was notoriously broken into pieces in 1845 and the repaired remains are in the British Museum. A Victorian replica was made by John Northwood in 1876 and is now in the Corning Museum in New York.

The story by Ian Drury, his principal team of Richard Golding, Glassmaker, and Terri-Louise Colledge, Cameo Engraver, and their many associates, can be found in the book on its recreation, entitled *The 2012 Portland Vase Project*, published by Sparrow Publishing (ISBN 978-0-9548781-4-6). The team realised their goal in time for the fifth International Festival of Glass hosted by Glasshouse College and the Ruskin Glass Centre and the vase was a highlight of the festival.

To see the vase and visit Ian's studio gallery, visit Ruskin Glass Centre in Stourbridge or visit their website at www.ruskinglasscentre.co.uk. Telephone Stourbridge Glass Engravers on 01384 399466 or email: sales@stourbridge-glass-engravers.co.uk.

Join us again soon for more *OffCuts*. In the meantime, *Keep it Glass*.

GF@BGF