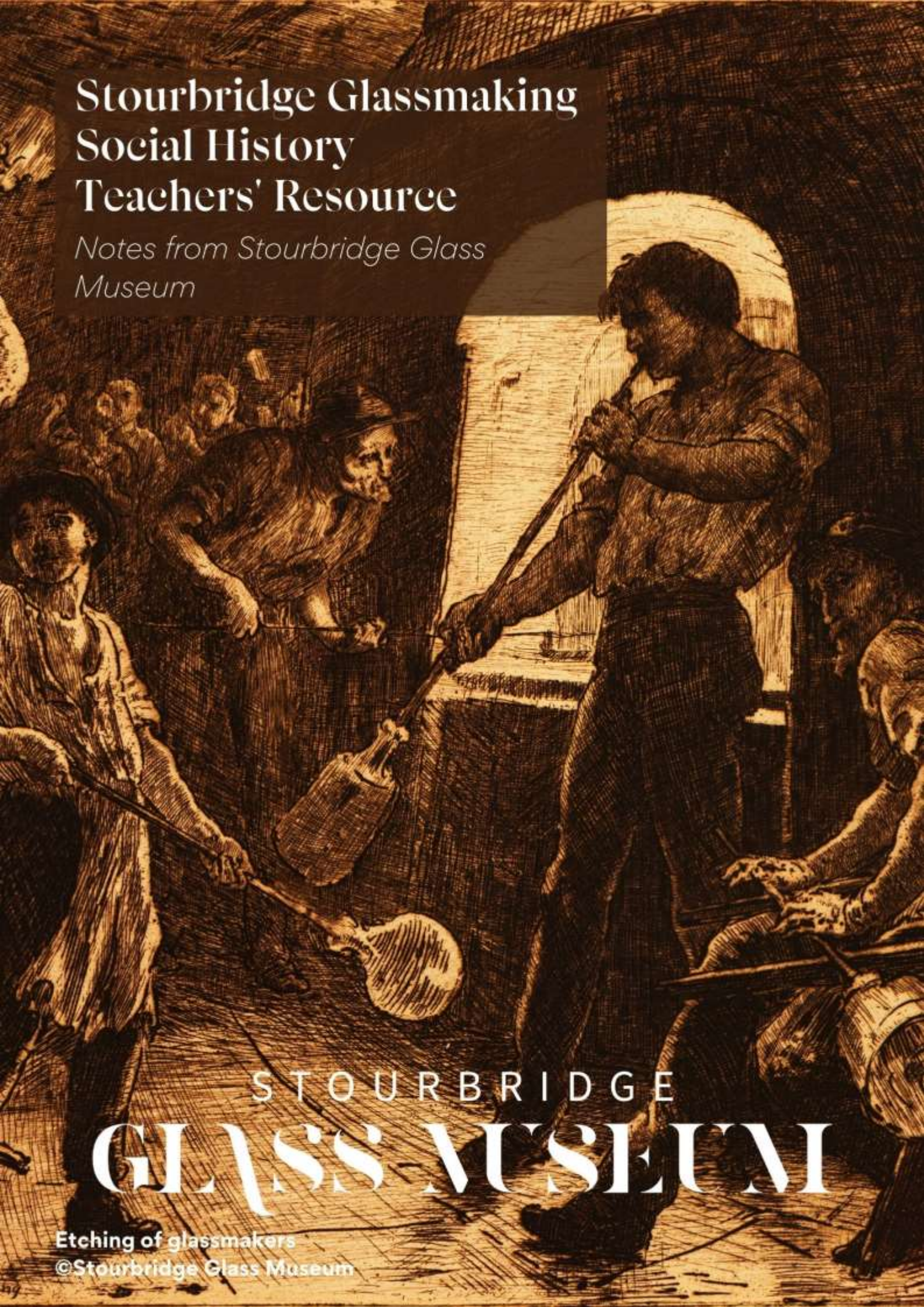


Stourbridge Glassmaking Social History Teachers' Resource

*Notes from Stourbridge Glass
Museum*



STOURBRIDGE
GLASS MUSEUM

Etching of glassmakers
©Stourbridge Glass Museum

How glassmaking changed the culture of Amblecote and Wordsley in the Stourbridge area

1: Death, Disease and Danger:

Introduction:

As with any industrial work, glass making came with its dangers. Without modern health and safety laws or protective equipment to wear, workers could be injured or occasionally even killed as a result of their job. Click through the pictures to find out more about the working conditions and think about whether this was a job you would like to have done.



Glassmaking was a constant process which went on day and night. The process would start early on Monday morning, with workers working six hours on, then six hours off all through the day and night until Thursday night or Friday morning. If a worker didn't turn up for his shift, one of his workmates would have to continue the shift to cover him – so he probably wasn't very popular!

Making glass could be extremely dangerous. Furnaces heated to a thousand degrees, and molten glass, could cause severe burns if something went wrong. Working with heavy machinery and using noxious chemicals also carried dangers. Mercifully, accidents were generally rare but it is important to remember that workers did not have protective equipment like we do today and, if they were injured, there was rarely much by way of sick pay.



THE ACCIDENT AT BRIERLEY HILL.

INQUEST AND VERDICT.

Mr. A. B. Smith (deputy coroner) held an inquest, yesterday afternoon, at Brierley Hill, upon Enoch Oliver and Albert Ryder, the two men who met with such a terrible fate at Messrs. James Wright and Co.'s glassworks, on Thursday. Mr. Hoare, inspector of factories, and Superintendent Wollaston were present, and Mr. Waldron appeared for the proprietors of the works.—The Coroner said the report he had received of the accident stated that the deceased men were at work under a tank containing some tons of boiling metal, when a brick in the tank burst and the whole of the metal ran out, and completely covered both men. The bodies were entirely unrecognisable, but a ring which had been found was stated to have belonged to one of them. The only identification practicable was that the two men were the only two under the tank when the accident occurred. He asked the jury to go and look round the works. It appeared to him that the works were in a dilapidated condition: at least that was his idea so far as an unskilled person like himself could judge.—The jury then went to view the works; but the examination of witnesses was proceeded with while they were away.

In 1893, a horrific accident led to the death of two glassworkers from Brierley Hill. Workers at Wright & Co found a leak of glass from underneath the furnace. They went to investigate when suddenly, the fireclay around the base of the tank collapsed, releasing a flood of molten glass! Tragically, glassworkers Albert Rider and Enoch Oliver were killed immediately, with Oliver only

identifiable by a ring he was wearing on his finger.

STOURBRIDGE

Women acid dipping.

One way to etch designs onto glass was through a process called acid dipping. Workers would dip glass into vats of hydrofluoric acid, wearing protective gloves like these ladies, to prevent accidents. However, the vats still gave off toxic fumes. Anyone who wore glasses had to take them off, or the glass in them might also start to frost. Over time, inhaling the fumes may well have damaged the health of the workers.



Child labour

Introduction

It wasn't just adults who worked in the glass industry. In a time when there was very little regulation of children's work, plenty of children and teenagers were employed in the industry, doing a variety of different jobs – some of which were more dangerous than others!



annealing oven, as in this picture.

Many young boys worked in the glass industry, learning the skills of the trade. Often, family connections helped to get employment at a specific company, with a father or uncle finding work for their son or nephew. Boys started off doing simple jobs, like cleaning tools, holding moulds, or working as a '*tekker-in*' – someone who put the finished item in the

Boy labourers.

During the early 19th century, some industries employed children as young as 5 years. In Stourbridge, the average age at which children started working in the glass industry was typically about 12 years old. This was still felt to be too young, however, and in the 1890s, the minimum age for child labourers was raised to 14. How well this was enforced, though, is perhaps questionable.





Girl workers during WW1

Girls as well as boys worked in the industry. Women were not allowed to enter the hotshops as glassmakers were often superstitious! It was commonly held that the presence of a woman brought bad luck, causing work to fail or not be up to scratch. However, this did not apply to

young girls, like those in the picture, who hadn't yet reached adulthood.

Workman's Union Card at Richardson's, c. 1850

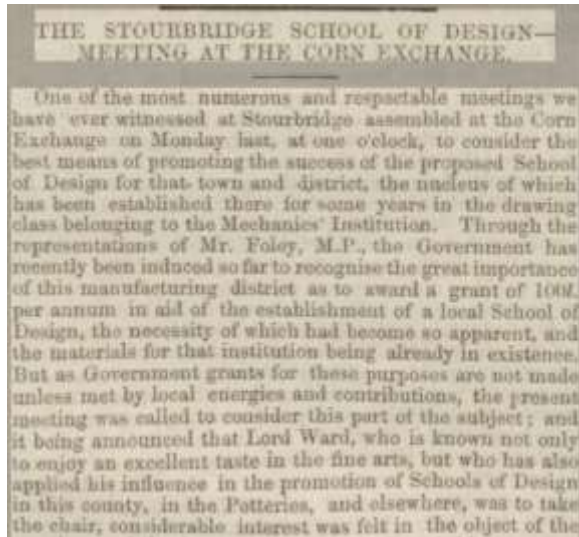
On average, child labourers in the glass industry earned about 4 to 5 shillings each week. In comparison, a skilled glass blower earned around 56 shillings each week by the end of the 1850s. Highly skilled men could receive a good wage in the glass trade, but it did take a while to learn the skills needed to earn these kinds of sums.



Stourbridge School of Art

Introduction

Stourbridge School of Art was established to provide technical training in art and drawing in the mid-19th century. The government provided funding for a number of design schools across Britain to improve the skills of artisans working in local industries. But how many local people actually attended the school?



Newspaper headline on founding meeting; Worcester Chronicle, 5 February 1851, p. 8.

During the 1840s, drawing classes had been held at the local Mechanics' Institute but a number of leading figures in the local community, including business owners, industrialists and local aristocrats wanted to go further and establish a design school. They worked together to

secure funding from the government and local sponsorship, and Stourbridge School of Art was opened in September 1851.

William Bowen

The first five headteachers of Stourbridge School of Art were Henry Alexander Bowler, Andrew MacCallum, George Yeats, William Bowen

(pictured), Edward Simms, and George Cromack. Although they were all talented artists and teachers, none were from the area and had little experience of glass engraving. They also did not seek to work with the local glass industry to find out what skills and training local workers might need.





Stourbridge Exhibition poster

Hundreds of students attended the school over the years. Very few glass blowers or glass manufacturers appear to have attended, but a number of glass engravers and decorators were taught at the school. Exhibitions were held and there were usually a number of Stourbridge students from the glass industry among the prize winners each year.

Stourbridge School of Art at its new location

The Stourbridge School of Art had outgrown its original site by the early 20th century. Following a substantial gift from the philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, the Art School moved into a new, purpose-built site shared with the public library in 1905. Art classes were held there until the 1980s, when the classes were subsumed into the University of Wolverhampton. The building still stands and is today luxury apartments.



Glass All Around

Introduction

Although today, most of the big glass factories in the area have closed down, you can still find traces of Stourbridge's glass industry in many unexpected places. Have a look through the pictures at some local institutions whose names reflect our heritage, sometimes in surprising places! Do you know any other examples?

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The Glasscutters Arms

At the end of a hard-working day, many glassmakers would have been glad of the opportunity to head down to the pub for a drink! Some local pubs, like the Glasscutters Arms in Wordsley, took inspiration from the trade in their names.

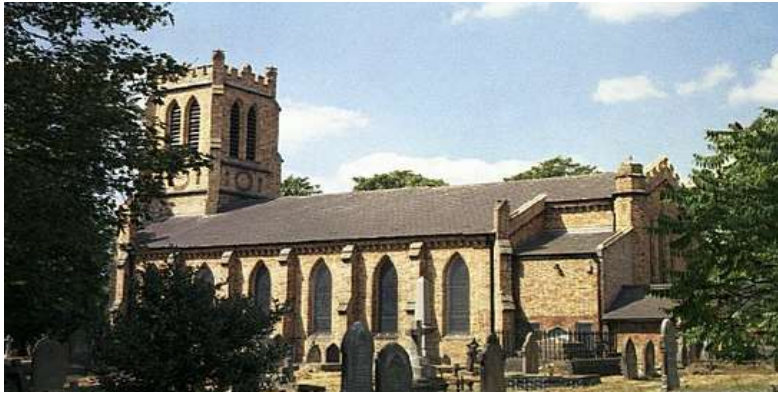
Stourbridge Town Football

Stourbridge FC was founded in 1876 and was originally known as 'Stourbridge Standard'. However, players soon became nicknamed '*The Glassboys*' because of the local industry, and today they're joined by a ladies' team known as the '*Glassgirls*.'



Crystal Leisure Centre

In 1901, Stourbridge's first swimming baths were opened, but they were closed down in 1987. Three years later, a brand new leisure facility was built, with a swimming pool and several sports halls, known as the Crystal Leisure Centre in reference to the local glass trade.



Holy Trinity Church,
Amblecote

Many men and women who worked in the glass trade, including some of the most famous glassmakers of their day, like John

Northwood, the man who reinvented the techniques needed to make cameo glass, are buried in the churchyard at Holy Trinity. Today, the church still plays an important part in the International Festival of Glass.

John Northwood's tomb featuring a stone sculpture of the Portland Vase



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