



## HIGHLIGHTS

Chance Day Out

Chance Characters

Meet: Kieran Dyde

James Timmins Chance

**the CHaT magazine**

APRIL 2020



CHANCE  
HERITAGE  
TRUST



## Chance Heritage Trust

[www.chanceht.org](http://www.chanceht.org)

CBS Registered No: 8180

### Ambassador

Toby Chance

### Directors

Mark Davies (Chairman)

Henry Chance

Kieran Dyde

Tonia Flanagan

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Marianne Monro

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John Pye

Madelene Schofield-Whittingham

### Front Cover:

*The volunteers are getting younger! Here's one showing his model lighthouse at the recent Chance Day Out event.*

*Photo © Valerie Woolford*

## the CHaT magazine

... is a free and occasional publication aimed primarily at subscribers of the Chance Heritage Trust (CHT). Your contributions are welcome: please send articles, letters, thoughts, anecdotes to [editor@chanceht.org](mailto:editor@chanceht.org)

Photos are especially helpful! Please ensure these are photoed or scanned at high resolution for optimum result.

Photos are best sent as JPG or PNG, and without cropping if possible.

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All information is correct at time of publishing, E&OE excepted.

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# Editorial CHaT

As you know we launched our Pioneer Community Shares Offer on the 29<sup>th</sup> February. Unfortunately, it was just as we were beginning to feel the effects of Coronavirus and little did we realise how much it was going to have an impact on all of our lives. Clearly, these are difficult times for everyone and understandably people are focused on the welfare of themselves and their families, and their financial well-being.

We love our project and want to press on with the regeneration of the glassworks as soon as we can, but we recognise this is not the right time. Ours is a project of the future and not the present. Right now there are many worthy causes that have a more pressing need than ours. The Board have for this reason taken the difficult decision to postpone our community share offer to a date to be set later in the year.

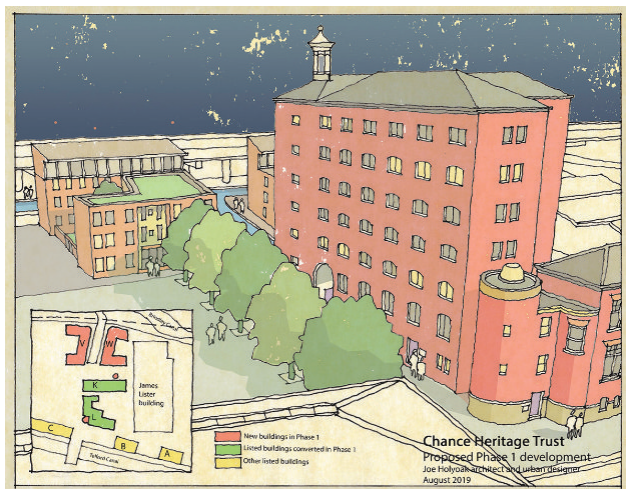
Our heartfelt thanks to everyone who has supported us so far. As It would not be fair for the Trust to withhold those pledges already committed, those of you who have already made an investment online will be refunded via the Crowdfunder Platform and for those who pledged by post, they will have their cheques returned.

In the meantime, despite the difficulties, work will continue in the background and as soon as life returns to some kind of normality we will relaunch our community shares offer when we trust we will be able to call on your highly valued support again.

Very best wishes to you and your families and thank you again for your support.

*Mark Davies, Chairman*

*Don't worry – we will be back!*





## CHANCE DAY OUT

The "Chance Day Out" event went ahead on 29<sup>th</sup> February and was a resounding success! Over 600 people passed through the doors and were treated to a variety of attractions.



*From top, left to right: Harold Jones with a magnificent lump of cullet that he kindly donated (I'm sure we can polish out the chips, Harold!) but if you could get in touch with us, we would be grateful*

*The ever-dapper Henry Chance being interviewed by Enzo Moreno a Sandwell College Year One film student*

*Stuart Summers assessing some Intaglio pieces. Spot the scarce handkerchief vases: Psychedelic and Carré*  
*Chairman Mark Davies (right) with the Deputy Mayor of Sandwell, Cllr. Suzanne Hartwell and Deputy Consort Geoff Deakin*





A joint event organised by:

  
Smethwick  
Heritage Centre

 CHANCE  
HERITAGE  
TRUST



From top, left to right: Not one hopscotch ... but six! These rare "friggers" were made by the Chance workmen for their children  
A busy day, overseen by Mo the librarian  
Former workers at Chance Brothers  
Nanette Hedley (Office) and Ray Drury (Chief Engineer) chatting with Avtar Purewal from the Young Advisory Group



## CHANCE DAY OUT

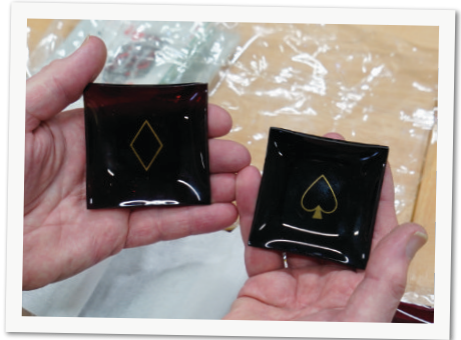
Included in the shares launch event at Smethwick library was an opportunity for people to bring along anything from the Chance works that they wanted more information on and a rough valuation. It was nice to see so many people bring along so much glass and hear so many stories from the time when the works was operating.

As David Encill had other engagements at the time it was left in the hands of myself and the keen collector brothers of Keith and Mike Fenton.

Most of the glassware made by Chance was mass-produced for the domestic market and there is enough of it still about that it is not worth a great deal. It tends to be the trial pieces and patterns which were not successful at the time and so had short production runs that have now become more collectable.

Something none of us had ever seen was a Psychedelic tray from 1970. This pattern is often seen on the very desirable Handkerchief vases but the trays are very rare so it was nice to see one.

A member of the Facebook group, Robert Higginson kindly brought along some items for us to view. He had previously posted pictures of the experimental Motif trays (right) that were not known to exist as they had only been seen mentioned in estimate books. It was nice to see them for real and confirm that one was in Ruby Flashed glass and one in black "Protane" glass. These are very rare.



Also nice to see were the Hopscotch pieces that were hand-made by workers for their children. There was a box full of these unique items (*see previous page*).

All in all a very enjoyable day for us and thanks again to everyone who came along.

*Stuart Summers*



## SPOTLIGHT ON THE DIRECTORS: Kieran Dyde

Kieran graduated from Aston University in 2019 after four years studying for a BSc in Politics with International Relations. He joined the engineering firm Mott MacDonald as a Technical Adviser in January 2020, in part due to his role with Chance Heritage Trust.

As a local resident and following a year as a student placement with CHT, Kieran has become very passionate about being part of what could be the most significant regeneration project in Sandwell. As a member of the board, he believes he will be a voice in representing the young people who eventually will take up the mantle of protecting and restoring heritage such as Chance Glassworks.



## Chance Day Out, continued



*Above: A very unusual handkerchief vase, that appears to be the Plum tinted glass. Also, a very nice example of a Britannia fruit bowl on a pedestal.*

*Right: Smethwick Library kindly exhibited many highly interesting exhibits for people to view.*



## CHANCE CHARACTERS: Joe Swan

Joe Swan enjoyed a long and eventful career at Chance Brothers. Starting work in the Optical Glass Department at the age of 14 in 1878, he trained to become a glassblower, although he was to discover that this was not the easiest job at the works. But he persevered and nine years later he had succeeded in that task.

The working day for Joe started at 6:00am and one of the first tasks was to cook breakfast: bacon and eggs on the hot floor by the furnace. He also recalled the glassworkers being provided with beer – apparently a beery breath would swell the heated glass bubble to about 2ft. wide (about 60cms), but with rum 'it swelled out twice as big' causing him to comment, 'the bosses never could make out how much rum we puffed and how much we supped'.

Joe's great-grandson, Andrew Hawkes, recalls the trials that the family endured:

*He was well paid but that did not really help the family! At the weekend he would get dressed up in top hat tails and spats and would go into Birmingham on a Hansom Cab, where he drank and bet away his money. He had to walk home drunk and often beat the door in the the early hours of the morning saying the devil was chasing him (it was in fact his own shadow). My mom was against drinking for the rest of her life.*

In 1944, his eightieth year, it was reported that Joe was still working there, refusing to retire after 66 years service. But by 1945 Joe had retired and it is recorded in the Board minutes that he was granted an extra 10s per week (about £43 today) pension above his usual entitlement after 67 years service.



Top: Joe's Long Service medal.

Left: Chance pensioners with at least 50 years service, photoed in 1916



## SNAKESKIN

Is this a close-up of a reptile's skin? Or an elephant's? Or even a leaf?

Actually it is the design for a rolled plate texture as submitted for a design patent, dated 1912. The artist is none other than Edward Ferguson Chance, a director at Chance Brothers.



Another designer of these textures was T. J. Woodward, who was responsible for many of the Art Nouveau designs between 1893 and 1909. We will feature his work in the next issue.

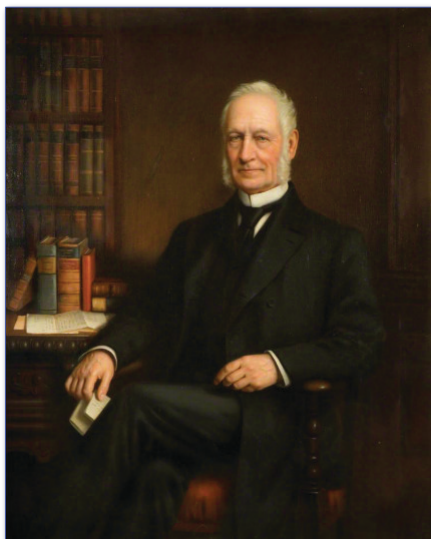
E. F. Chance was very much a “hands-on” Director and was instrumental in continually re-engineering the original machinery to improve its performance, the result of which was finally patented in 1892. He became Chairman of the company in 1919, but retired two years later through ill health.



*Although winter has virtually passed – and very few of us saw any snow – this charming pen & ink drawing was discovered in the March 1949 issue of Chance Comments. The artist was Eric Juggins of the General Office.*

## Sir James Timmins Chance (1814–1902) and the development of lighthouse optics

James Timmins Chance was arguably the greatest of a family of outstanding entrepreneurs and manufacturers. The nephew of (Robert) Lucas Chance, founder of the eponymous Smethwick firm, he was persuaded by his uncle to abandon early plans to go into the church or the law, becoming a partner in Chance Brothers in 1839. His notable contributions to the improvement of glass production included 'Chance's Patent Plate' (1838), but his most far-reaching achievement was in optics manufacture.



In 1819 Augustin Fresnel invented the stepped refracting lens for lighthouse illumination, essentially a cage of glass comprising a lens encircled by separate rings of refracting prisms surrounding the light source. However, the manufacturing techniques required to make such large and complex structures lagged far behind the concept. His first optics were thus a compromise between the ideal and the possible. Installed at Cordouan in 1823 and at Chassiron in 1827, these instruments consisted of central belts of refracting panels made up of polygonal segments. However, size limitation of glass panels imposed by technological inadequacy forced him instead to use silvered metallic reflectors to capture rays escaping above and below. Even though metal absorbs light, these early instruments projected beams that were eight times more powerful than any previous system. Fresnel died in 1827 and it was left to later generations to produce the perfect all-glass optic with complete annular rings of prisms he had intended. This is where James Timmins Chance came in.

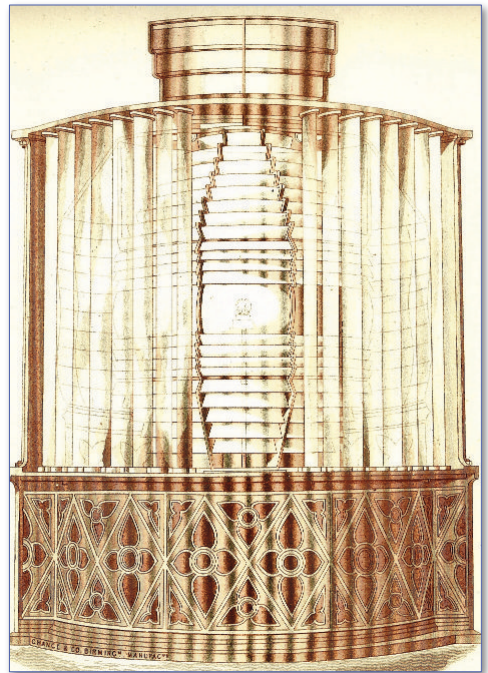
In the wake of the Glass Tax repeal, Chance was encouraged by the great French glassmaker, Georges Bontemps, to set up the firm's lighthouse department in 1850. Bontemps sent him Jacques Tabouret, who had worked with Fresnel himself, and he and a group of French assistants trained the workforce. Tabouret built the firm's first all-glass optic, exhibited in 1851 at the Great Exhibition. It was far from perfect but nevertheless signalled the arrival of Chance Bros. into the lighthouse world.

However, Chance himself only became seriously engaged in 1860 when he was consulted by the Royal Commission of 1858–61, set up to examine the generally poor state of lighthouse illumination in Britain. He pointed out that his firm was employed only to make the glass components and thus had no control over the fitting of the lenses and prisms into their metal framework or the correct positioning of the lamp to ensure the full benefit of the refracting properties of the optic.

As a result, the Commissioners made this the central plank of their enquiry and Chance came to dominate the technical aspects, innovating with scientist Michael Faraday a method whereby the correct placing of the whole apparatus, taking into account the characteristics of whatever site it was destined for, could be determined in the works. In 1861, Trinity House, the English lighthouse authority, asked him to examine all the refracting lights under their jurisdiction. For the next twelve years he devoted himself entirely to the construction and improvement of lighthouse apparatus.

Optic manufacture was a highly specialised business, demanding a blend of exceptional mathematical proficiency to calculate the prismatic rings and outstanding expertise in mechanical engineering. Chance had this almost unique combination of skills. He worked closely with the famous lighthouse engineer Thomas Stevenson who was inventing new prismatic forms to direct light in different directions. In order to turn his ideas into workable forms, Stevenson needed Chance, who worked with him on the design process as well as developing increasingly sophisticated tools to shape and polish the prismatic rings. By 1872, Chance had personally designed over 180 optics for lighthouses and the department had become a powerhouse. Optics are objects of great beauty and many of Chance's still shine out in far-flung parts of the globe.

*Julia Elton*



*One of a pair of leading lamps used at the mouth of the River Tay. Designed jointly by J. T. Chance and Thomas Stevenson*



## CORRESPONDENCE

Hi, my name is Paul Alexander and my nan Catherine (Kitty) Forsyth and her twin sister Elizabeth (Betty) along with the third sibling May were born in the gatehouse of Chance Brothers, as my great-grandfather, William (Bill) Forsyth was gate keeper. The sisters also worked in the factory after leaving school in around 1933. My nan passed away some 25 years ago, along with Aunt May, but my great-aunt Betty turned 100 in June 2019 and is living a happy life in a care home in Kingswinford. Please do not hesitate to contact me for any more information as my mom (Kitty's daughter) and my Aunt Valerie (Betty's Daughter) have many stories.

Regards, Paul Alexander

*Thanks Paul. We would welcome any stories related to Chance Brothers, so do keep in touch. Remember that photos are particularly welcome. Editor*

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David Viner writes about his grandfather, Joseph Viner (b.1865), a former Chance employee. The photo (right) shows Joseph on his wedding to Florence Bishop, on 13<sup>th</sup> November 1923.




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Jane Gregory asks for any information regarding links to the Chance family. Jane explains:

*My father, John Thomas Cosnett, worked at Chance Brothers in Smethwick. On the 1911 census he worked as a 'Rolled Plate' helper at the glass works. His brother, Richard Cosnett, who was a year younger than John, also worked for Chance Brothers in 1911 census as a 'Pipe Warmer'.*

*In March 1923 John was sent over to America to help to develop glass making over there. I believe he worked with reinforced glass. Once established over there he called for his wife and daughter to come over and live in America with him. When they were expecting their second child they returned to England, planning to return to America later, but they never actually did.*

*My father's first wife was Rose Ethel Chance, but I have never discovered a family connection to Chance Brothers themselves, and John and Rose were certainly very poor. John made his own furniture and sold paintings to help to provide for his family.*

# NEWS

## Social Media Manager

We are pleased to welcome aboard Andrea Hegedus who has kindly agreed to act as the Social Media Manager. This will take a lot of the load off the shoulders of our very busy Chairman!



## Website

We are still looking for someone to help maintain our website. Although a certain amount of technical skills are required, this should not prove too tasking for anyone with a modicum of computer knowledge (honestly). The web development platform is [Wix.com](https://www.wix.com), which has plenty of features and offers a very user-friendly interface. A certain amount of training can be given to a suitable candidate.



Contact [info@chanceht.org](mailto:info@chanceht.org) for details.

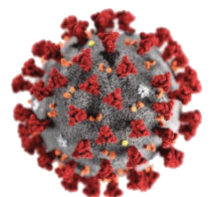
## Fresnel Lens

Julia Elton contacted us to mention that she has written a paper (*A Light to Lighten our Darkness*) for a PhD thesis on the development of the Fresnel lens. Julia has kindly submitted an article on James Timmins Chance's relationship with Thomas Stevenson, which can be found on pages 10 & 11.



## Coronavirus

Our proposed presentation on *A Brief History of Chance Brothers* for the Bournville Historical Society on 1<sup>st</sup> April was inevitably cancelled. As can be appreciated, other events will similarly be affected in the future.



**Keep Protected; Keep Distance; Keep Safe!**

## Breaking News

On the 26<sup>th</sup> March, Sandwell Borough Council managed to secure one of the earliest known examples of a Chance catalogue – but this is a catalogue with a difference!

Dating to 1847, it marks the date when the Coloured & Ornamental Department started to advertise its products.

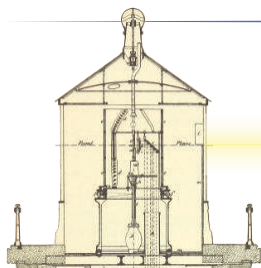
While we knew about similar catalogues that were produced in 1853, 1857, 1862 and 1867, this one was previously unrecorded making it even more essential for the Council to secure it. This catalogue is also distinguished by being hand-coloured and printed in Birmingham, rather than the French chromolithograph process used for the later editions.

Thanks must be extended to Frank Caldwell and Jack Whitehead for engineering the bid.

*Right: A sample page from the catalogue*



In a joint initiative with [Smethwick Heritage Centre](http://Smethwick Heritage Centre), every available issue of Chance Comments is now available to view online! Go to [www.chancecomments.co.uk](http://www.chancecomments.co.uk) for more details.



Do you have an interesting lighthouse story? Mail me at [editor@chanceht.org](mailto:editor@chanceht.org) and we will see if it can become a regular feature of this magazine.

## the CHaT magazine

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