



HIGHLIGHTS

Smalls Lighthouse

Peter Tysoe

Rolled Plate Glass

Wrekin Beacon

the CHaT magazine

May 2021



CHANCE
HERITAGE
TRUST

Chance Heritage Trust

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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

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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Front Cover:

A 1950s Chance promotional rolled plate sample box

Editorial CHaT

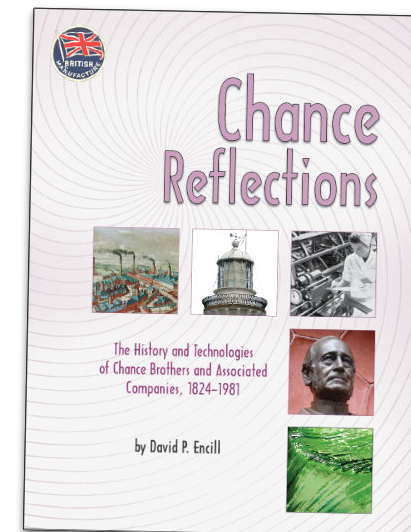
A rather delayed issue for this month, partly because of the limitations imposed by the lock-down that prevents any form of activity (and therefore news), but also because I decided to knuckle down and advance my book on the history of Chance Brothers, called *Chance Reflections*. This has now topped 420,000 words – and there's still plenty to do – so it is hardly surprising that I'm on my fifth keyboard and several mice have died "in the making of this book!"

The question is always "when to stop". Do I skip over the more personal reflections of workers and concentrate on the core history, or write a more complete book covering all the fine points and minutiae. I opted for the latter: missing out data would never do justice to the work carried out by James Frederick Chance, the man responsible for the book covering the first century of operation and from where a good proportion of information has been gleaned.

The next problem will be how to publish such a large work. By my reckoning, with it being liberally illustrated, it will be about 1,200 pages long so way too big for a single volume. This will mean splitting it into four or five volumes, although as it is written chronologically (unlike J. F. Chance's work) this makes it quite simple to achieve.

And when will it be published? A huge clue could be the bicentenary of when Lucas Chance took over the operation of the British Crown Glass Co. on 17th May 1824, however, although three years seems a long way off, there's no guarantee I will have finished it by then!

David Encill



Provisional cover of
Chance Reflections

LIGHTHOUSES

The Dark History of Smalls Lighthouse

The lighthouse at Smalls Island is a remote strip of land, off the coast of Pembrokeshire in Wales, had a long, fascinating, but also grim history. It was first commissioned in 1775, but a Liverpool merchant and shipowner by the name of John Phillips whose interests were being compromised hired Henry Whiteside to design a lighthouse. Whiteside's trade was actually manufacturing musical instruments – far removed from the massive construction necessary to build lighthouses.

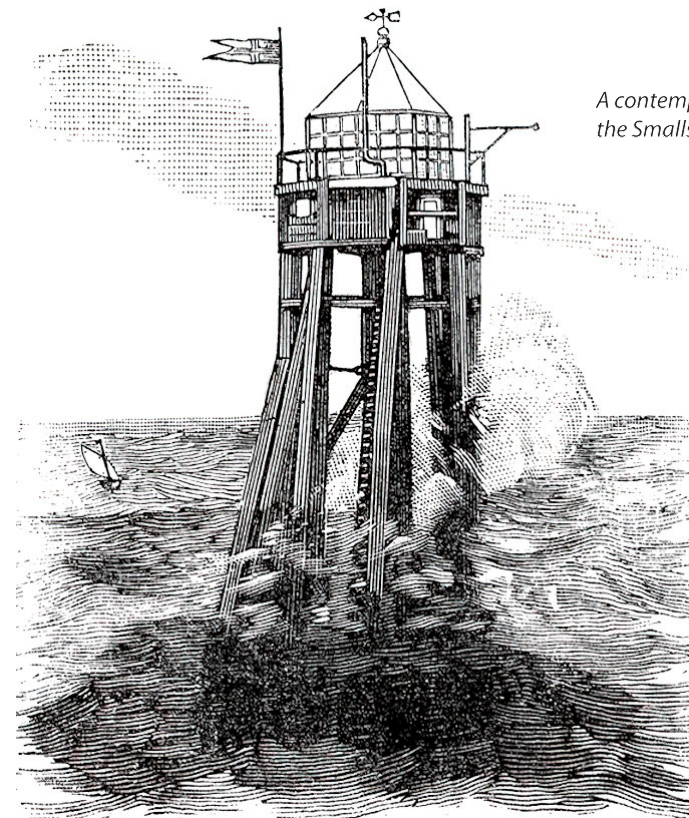
Although his trade was so far removed from lighthouse design, Whiteside's design was thoroughly inspirational and would set the tone for future builders of these edifices. The tower was actually built using nine oak piles that elevated the keepers' hut above the worst of the waves. This open lattice work design would later be revived as it could withstand the worst of the storms.



An 1861 map showing Smalls Island on the extreme left, about 18 miles from the Welsh coast

Image courtesy of Trinity House (www.trinityhousehistory.wordpress.com)

The lighthouse at Smalls Island caused a fundamental change to the manning of lighthouses. Originally, just two men would be expected to maintain and operate the lighthouse, irrespective of how remote it might be. However, the crew at Smalls in 1801 comprised of Thomas Howell and Thomas Griffith, who were rumoured to argue frequently. Following a freak accident where Griffith's died, Howells feared the authorities would charge him with murder. But by retaining the body he felt this was a means to vindicate himself. One problem was that the body began to decompose and so Howell built a makeshift coffin



A contemporary engraving of the Smalls Lighthouse in 1775

and strapped it to the outside shelf. Unfortunately for Howell, a storm blew the coffin apart and one of the decomposing arms would flop in front of window of the living quarters, with the strong winds animating the arm. When Howells was finally relieved he was unrecognisable and was so traumatised by the experience that he would never serve at a lighthouse again. This single incident might have been responsible for the authorities to order three men staffing.

The Smalls appeared to be beset by tragedy. In 1831 the tower was hit so hard by a giant wave that the floor of the keepers' hut was torn up and slammed all the keepers into the ceiling. All were injured, but one so severely that he died. Even though the damage was repaired the lighthouse survived another thirty years before it was finally replaced.

The Bust

Not a new crime-busting series for TV, but a small mystery uncovered by our intrepid Vice Chairman, Henry "Sherlock" Chance, in communication with John Satchwell of Sandwell Council:



Henry: *The bust of James Chance is missing from the memorial in West Smethwick Park – is this part of the restoration or has it been swiped again?*

John: *We've got it in storage. It's all part of the restoration project. I'm hoping that the Heritage Works will commence again in the next few months so we should hopefully see it return sooner rather than later.*

Many people will already know that the original bronze bust was stolen but that it was restored and rededicated in 2008 at a ceremony at West Smethwick Park (see previous issue, November 2020).

The Wrekin Beacon

The beacon gave travellers young and old a warm glow as they returned to Shropshire after a long journey. Men from the airfield at Atcham erected the R.A.F. Chance Light during the 2nd World War to alert approaching aircraft.

It was removed on 27th August 1970 and rumoured to have been shipped to Australia to be placed on top of Sydney Harbour Bridge, but this proved unfounded and the fate of the light is unknown.

To celebrate the new millennium in the year 2000, a new beacon was installed, which is visible for many miles.



The Wrekin Beacon, c.1955

More Progress on Phase One!

We are delighted to announce that we have commissioned BPN Architects to carry out a Concept Design and Feasibility study on Phase One of the Chance Glassworks. The work is being funded through a grant from Homes in Community Hands provided by the Big Lottery Fund, through Power to Change.

It is very important to the Trust that the proposed design meets the needs of the local social and economic community. COVID-19 prevents us from conducting face-to-face consultation. However, we are conducting an online survey (see below) seeking people's views. We would be very grateful if you could spend just five minutes (yes only 5 minutes) as we are very keen to hear your views. Local companies and other organisations are welcome to complete the survey too.



Have your say in the restoration of the Chance Glassworks!

The Chance Heritage Trust intend to regenerate the Chance Glassworks in Spon Lane Smethwick and to bring it back in to use for the benefit of the local community. It will provide training, jobs, places to live and work. It is crucial that the design of the scheme meets local community needs.

This is an opportunity to have your say in what should be included in the design. We are keen to hear everyone's views and are particularly keen to hear from people and organisations who live or are based in Sandwell. We urge you to take just a few minutes to complete the survey which can be found by clicking this link:

<https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/26PBP6Q>

Please feel free to pass on the survey to anyone who you think should have the opportunity to express their view

PETER TYSOE

The contributions made by Peter Tysoe to the Fiesta range of glassware are seriously underestimated by many people. Not only did he introduce startling new, contemporary patterns, but he also redesigned the shapes of the glassware itself. All these designs were created between 1969 and 1970.

Towards the end of the 1960s, a survey was carried out to determine consumer tastes towards existing Chance patterns and new designs that would move away from the rather staid floral designs that were already in production. This also coincided with a change to the labels used on Fiestaware (see label, right). After the company approached Peter, he created the following new designs and patterns:



Honeysuckle

A delicate outline of the flower, in turquoise and lilac. Although it was not immediately successful, it is one of the more collectable floral designs.

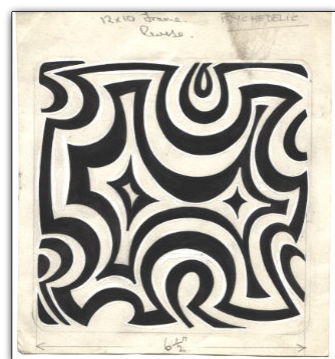


Above: The delicate tracery of the Honeysuckle pattern

Psychedelic

One of Peter's most identifiable designs that really evoked the pop-art culture of the time. The most commonly found items are the posy bowls (aka handkerchief vases), but a few trays were also produced.

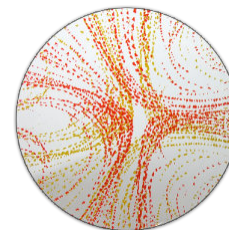
Apart from the rare designs, the Psychedelic pattern is the most sought-after of all the handkerchief vases.



Above: The original drawing by Peter of the Psychedelic pattern

Left: The handkerchief vases in orange and black

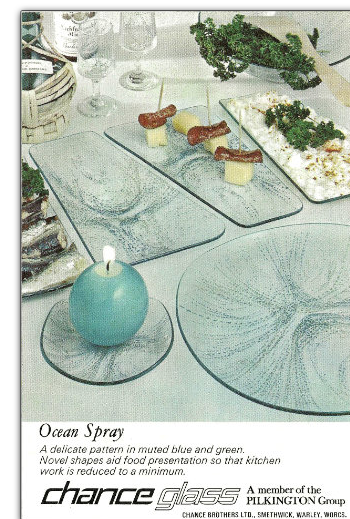
Gold Spray/Ocean Spray



A very dynamic design in orange and yellow (Gold Spray) and blue and green (Ocean Spray).

Left: Gold Spray in detail

Right: A promotional card showing the Ocean Spray range



Glacier & Grey Dawn

Glacier used existing rolled plate glass called "Cotswold" that was shaped before being "slumped" into the former.



Left: A Glacier fruit set

Below: A rare triangular tray in Grey Dawn glass

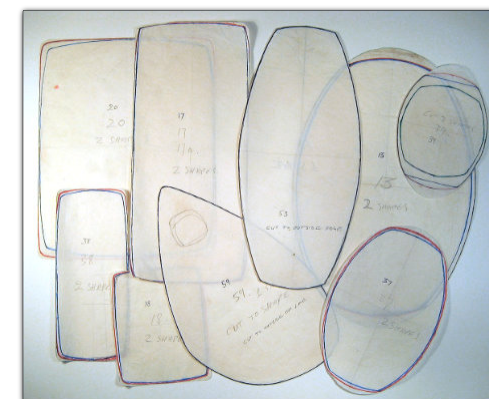


Grey Dawn actually didn't use Chance or Pilkington glass, but that from the old French company Saint-Gobain. Peter required a grey- or bronze-coloured glass but as this wasn't available he contacted a friend at Saint-Gobain's London office who arranged a supply through Pilkingtons.

Redesigned Shapes from 1970

Finally, to emphasise this more modern approach, the company decided to introduce new shapes, moving away from the more formal rectangular and circular shapes to ones having curved sides and smoother corners.

The original templates for the shapes as drawn by Peter



ACQUISITION: CHANCE SAMPLE BOX

The Trust was fortunate to secure a superb and rare example of a Chance Brothers salesman's sample box. These boxes were used to show off the new rolled plate patterns that were currently offered, although they may have also been supplied to larger firms of glaziers to promote the use of Chance glass.

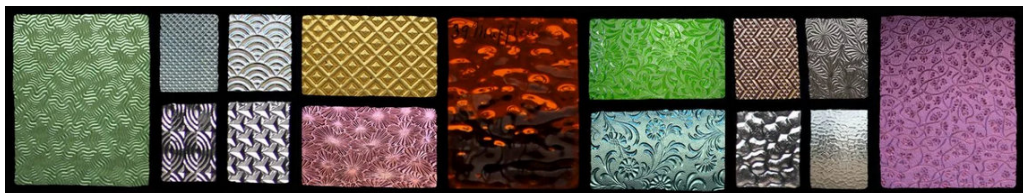
The samples themselves are invaluable from a researchers point of view, particularly when they retain the original paper label. For example, this particular box appears to date back to the mid-1950s, although some of the earliest patterns dating back to the 1890s. This suggests that "Figured G" had been in continuous production for over 50 years.



More on Rolled Plate Glass

If you want to learn more about these rolled plate textures, then one "must-see" website has been put together by Simon Free who is based in Australia. This site demonstrates the sheer diversity of the range that was available and also tells the story of how rolled plate glass developed from the early stages:

<https://sashwindowspecialist.com/blog/history-patterned-window-glass/>



NEWS

Click the following link for an interview with Mark Davies on a brief history of Chance Brothers, given to the United States Lighthouse Society:

<https://news.uslhs.org/2020/12/14/light-hearted-ep-93-mark-davies-and-the-chance-heritage-trust/>

New Grant Awarded

We are delighted to announce that we have received a grant awarded through the Homes in Community Hands Programme. The Programme is funded by Big Lottery Fund, through Power to Change.

It is great news and enables us to take significant steps in advancing the early development of Phase One of the Chance Glassworks.

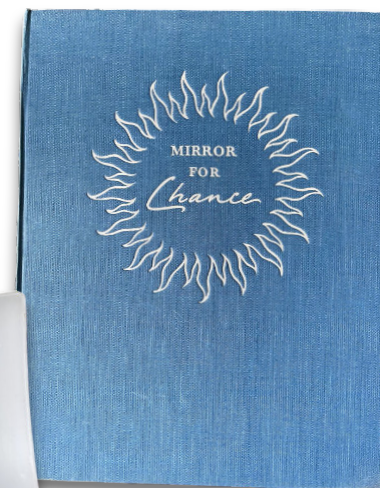


A big thanks to the Big Lottery Fund and Power to Change!

Donation

We were very pleased to hear from Alethea Wilson, who very kindly donated two items of her late father's – a copy of Mirror for Chance and a 1974 commemorative tray.

The book is a wonderful summary of the Chance operation in 1951 and is extensively illustrated. The tray was produced for the 150th anniversary of the company.



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Do you have any news you would like to include?
Please just contact info@chanceht.org

UPDATES

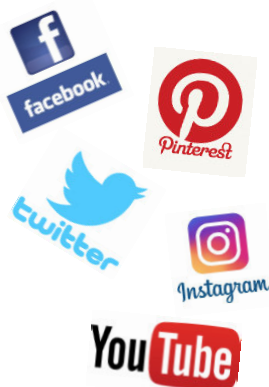
Social Media

Plenty of new activity on our Facebook page!
However, we now have our own forum if you would prefer to use this ...

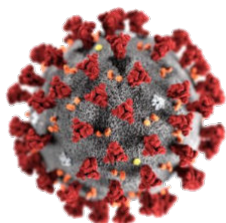
New Chance Forum

Go to our website at www.chanceht.org/forum and browse the topics.

Anyone can join and we look forward to meeting you there! Contact info@chanceht.org for more details.



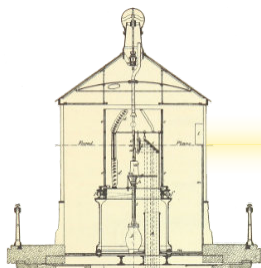
Coronavirus Update



At the time of writing we have now come out of lockdown, although this still prevents large groups of people forming, which curtails any gatherings or meetings.

Over this period, our board of directors continued to meet by using the Zoom app.

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



Do you have an interesting lighthouse story? Mail me at editor@chanceht.org.

the CHaT magazine

a free and occasional publication



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