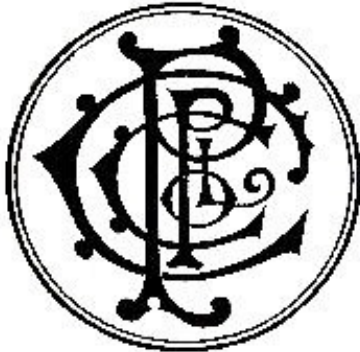


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PRICE'S PATENT CANDLE COMPANY by Jim

As many of you know, George and Samuel Clarke were well known candle makers in the United Kingdom. In 1844 George Miller Clarke applied to the British Patent Office in London for a patent on an "improvement in night lights." In 1857 Samuel Clarke received another patent for improvements under the same patent classification.¹ Samuel Clarke continued making candles until he sold his company to the Price's Patent Candle Company in 1910. Had Samuel Clarke not been a marketing genius and developed the "fairy lamp," I suspect his company's legacy would have gone unnoticed after the sale of his company to Price's. Instead, Clarke's legacy lives on as the most recognized name in fairy lamps.



*Price's Patent Candle Company, Limited
company logo from 1907 – 1908 price list.*

Price's Patent Candle Company continued marketing Clarke's candles and some of his fairy lamps for a period of time after 1910.



This is evident by several examples of Clarke's Pyramid Night Light boxes bearing the phrases, "Now Price's Patent Candle Company" and "Manufactured by Price's Patent Candle Company, Limited."

The Price's Patent Candle Company, after a long and diverse history of owners and product lines, is still in business today and continues to be one of the England's most well known candle manufacturers.

Recently, I came across two documents that provide interesting details about Price's long history of candle making.

The first document is the history of the company as told by the Price's Patent Candle Company. This is an extremely detailed historical account of the company's development of their candle products from the earliest beginnings to today. It is an interesting account filled with the complexities and competition within the candle making industry. With the exception of a couple bits of information, this historical account is much too complex and detailed to relay here. I have, however, included it on our Club's website for anyone to review.²

¹ *Fairy Lamps Evening's Glow of Yesteryear*, by Amelia E. MacSwiggan

² www.fairy-lamp.com/Fairylamp/Prices_History.html

The second historical account of the Price's Patent Candle Company was provided by Graham in the UK. This historical information was included in a 1984 issue of the *New Collecting Lines* magazine. The article was titled: *Few Hold a Candle to Them* by Roy Morgan — a title that would hardly get the attention of fairy lamp collectors. It did, however, document, in layman's terms, the colorful history of the Price's Patent Candle Company along with several advertisements and drawings of the company's factory and trademark. I have reproduced excerpts from the article for everyone's benefit.

The following are excerpts with minor editorial changes, additions from other sources and supplemental graphics from:

Few Hold a Candle to Them

by Roy Morgan, *New Collecting Lines*, 1984

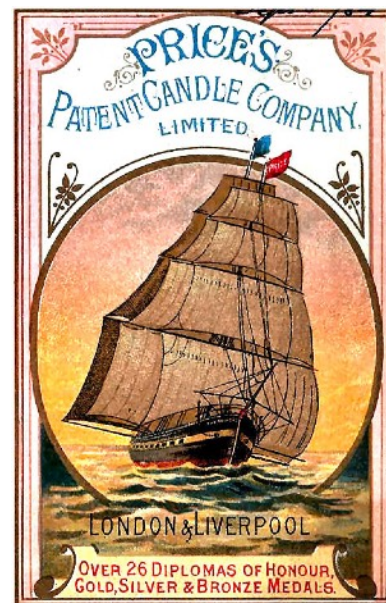
The company is well known to most postcard collectors, all bottle buffs, enamel ad addicts, trade card fanciers and ephemera folk will also be familiar with the name.

Even the 1984 every housewife will probably know about the candles, night lights and related products produced by Price's Patent Candle Company.

This long established concern, founded in 1830 and still very much in business, issued a multitude of wares, and consequently a very wide range of product-linked packaging, advertising and other promotional material this and last century (and particularly in Victorian and Edwardian times). There are Price's bottles, candle lanterns, trade cards, advertising postcards, show cards, enamel signs and all sorts of paperwork carrying the firm's familiar sailing ship trade mark.



Trade cards of the types in their "Battle Scenes" series, a shaped type, in the form of their sailing ship trade mark. The trade mark was said to have been copied from a menu in 1864 by the company chairman while he was lunching with W. H. Smith, founder of today's retail chain by the same name.



1884 advertisement showing Price's sailing ship trademark. (Source: British Library³)

The initial beginnings of the Price's Patent Candle Company were started by William Wilson and Benjamin Lancaster over 150 years ago.

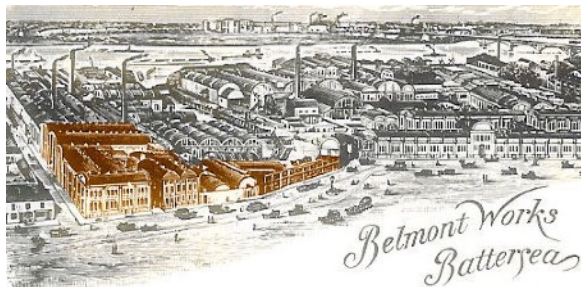
William Wilson (b. 1772) was a son of the family which once owned the Wilsontown Ironworks in Lanarkshire. The ironworks

³ www.bl.uk

folded in 1808 and the Wilson family went broke. In 1812 William moved to London to try a change of career. He joined up with Benjamin Lancaster to become a broker in the Russian tallow⁴ trade.

In 1830 the London partnership purchased James Soames' patent for processing coconut oil — separating the solid and liquid constituents by hydraulic pressure. The liquid was used to make lamp oil, and the solid fatty material was found to be an ideal tallow substitute.

They built a factory at Battersea to handle large scale coconut pressing, and named their operation "E. Price & Co." (One of the partner's aunts was named Price though she did not play any part in this venture.)



The remaining portions of the Battersea Belmont works are shown in brown. Many of these buildings have been converted to flats and condos. The far right hand two-story building, however, is Price's wholesale & retail shop open to the public to buy their candles. Source: Graham Pullen

Lancaster soon sold his interest in the firm, and the company was subsequently renamed "Edward Price & Co."

The company manufactured and marketed very good quality candles. These candles were usually made from stearic acid⁵ and the fat from coconut oil and held a special plaited wick (that had been patented in France). Because of their popularity, they were much copied by competitors.

Note: It was around this time that George Clarke applied for patents on a certain "improvement in night lights." Do you think Clarke was one of the companies that copied Price's products?

In May 1847 it was decided to convert the business into a public company, and Price's Patent Candle Company came into being. William Wilson was company chairman and his sons, J. P. Wilson and G. F. Wilson, were managing directors.

By 1849 over 700 people were employed by the Price's Patent Candle Company.



The company had a display at the Great Exhibition of 1851⁶ and developed strong trading links with certain French firms. This resulted in an increased demand for their brand of cloth oil. Expansion was necessary — so in 1853 a new factory was opened near Liverpool at Bromborough, Birkenhead close to the company's existing warehouse at River Street Wharf, Liverpool.

⁴ A mixture of animal fat refined for use in candles

⁵ Saturated fatty acids that come from many animal and vegetable fats and oils. It is a waxy solid used for making candles and soaps. From the Greek word *stear*, which means *tallow*.

⁶ Also known as The Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace – www.victorianstation.com/palace.html



During the Crimean War (1854-1856)⁷ the company supplied stoves and candle lanterns to the troops — the stoves could burn cakes of pressed coconut oil and were used for warmth and cooking.

Price's went Limited in 1857 and also started to import crude petroleum from Burma. Making maximum use of their steam distillation methods, they were now involved in the manufacture of lubricating oils, burning oils, and paraffin wax (for candles and night lights). They also branched out later into soap production.

Company founder William Wilson died in 1860. Eleven years later Price's foreman John Hodges patented a brand new and safer way to produce paraffin wax. The refinery at

Battersea was enlarged and within a few years Price's became the world's largest paraffin supplier.

By 1900 Price's was producing 130 differently named and specified sizes of candles, any one of which could in theory be manufactured in 60 different permutations of material, color and hardness. Candles were created for every conceivable need: carriage candles, piano candles, dining-room candles, bedroom candles, servants' bedroom candles (that only lasted 30 minutes) photographic darkroom candles, "The Burglar's Horror!" nightlight, and candles for coal miners, navies, engineers and emigration ships.⁸

(Note: The above paragraph suggests that Price's was manufacturing Clarke's candles before the sale of his company in 1910).

Around the turn of the century the company had a workforce of 1750 at Battersea and Bromborough.

A price list for 1907 - 1908 confirms the company was now involved in supplying a huge range of candles for church use, fancy candles, and candles for exportation. They were also selling night lights, lighting tapers, soaps, petroleum jelly, gas engine oil, lubricating and other oils, paraffin in blocks, and horticultural sundries.

During the closing decades of the 19th century and the 1900-1914 periods, the company made use of numerous methods of advertising signs including enamel signs for their night lights.

⁷ United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland along with several allies fought against Imperial Russia. The majority of the conflict took place on the Crimean peninsula in the Black Sea.

⁸ A history of Price's Patent Candle Company - www.prices-candles.co.uk/history/Historydteailwithyears.htm



Enamelled advertising sign showing their "Child's Night Lights" acquired by Price in 1849

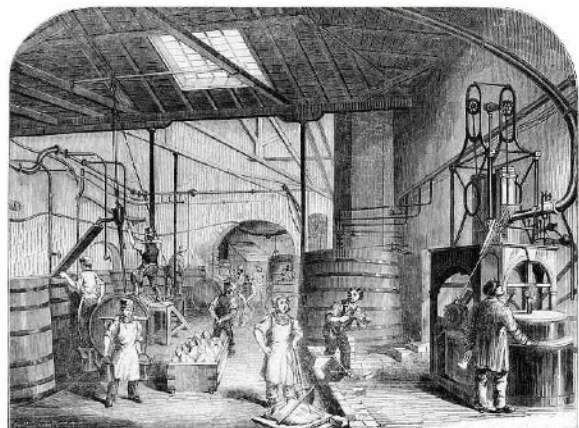
Captain Scott took hundreds of Price's candles with him on his 1911 expedition to the South Pole. Before embarking on his final journey he told the company, "I am glad to inform you that the candles to this expedition have proved quite satisfactory. They have been used extensively in the hut and by sled parties. You will be interested to learn that they burn satisfactorily at 70° F below zero." (Stearine candles were preferred as these could be eaten if necessary.)

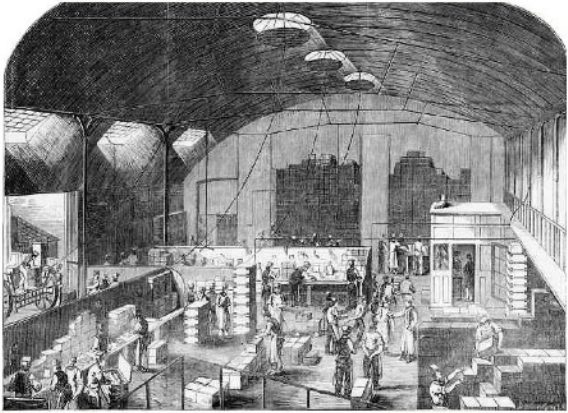
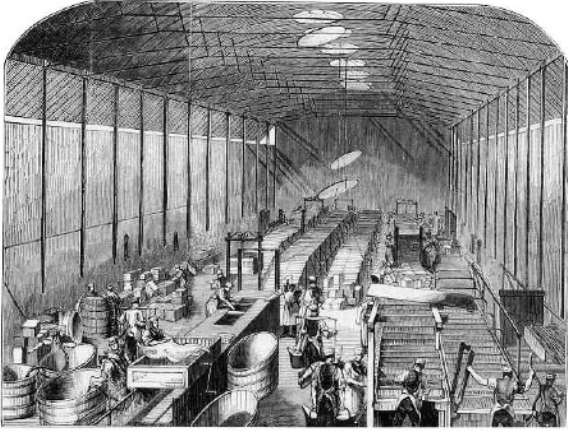
After World War I the fatty acid side of the business was confined to Bromborough, and the Battersea plant concentrated on candles and lubricants.

In 1936 the Bromborough works became a totally separate company (it is now part of the Unilever Group). A Price's offshoot, Price's Lubricants Ltd., was launched in 1937 and, in 1953, acquired by the Shell Mix/BP empire. Their motor oil "Energol" — first introduced in 1949 became the "B.P. Energol" used by today's motorists.

That concludes the Price's historical information as reported in the article in the *New Collecting Lines* magazine.

The following are a few drawings of Price's manufacturing processes from a December 8, 1849 issue of the *Illustrated London News*. They illustrate many of the candle making processes and working environment.





Since Price's Bromborough plant was not built until 1853, these scenes may be of the Battersea Belmont works. Or, they could have been "promotional drawings" for the new plant at Bromborough. Both plants, however, have large arched-roof production halls illustrated in the drawings. Regardless of which plant they represent, making candles in the 1850's was a big business!