

# The antiquarian

## History of Stevens and Williams

### Moor Lane Glassworks

Home

Research

Glass History

Glass Types

Glass Mfg.

Glasshouses

Glass Patterns

Patents

Rd #s

Links

Contact Us

Reference

Tribute

Brierley Hill's first glasshouse was built on Moor's Lane for Robert Honeyborne in 1744. Robert Honeyborne began his working life as a Maltster. In 1722, Robert married Ann Hamond, the only child of Thomas Hamond, owner of Bague's Glasshouse. Robert and Ann had two children, daughter Mary born in 1724 and son Hamond in 1726. Robert's wife Ann died nine months after giving birth to her son Hamond, who only lived 18 months after his birth.

It is assumed that Robert must have been successful because he purchased several pieces of land in 1732. His **father-in-law Thomas Hamond, again of Bague's Glasshouse, died with no surviving children in 1743. Robert Honeyborne was the beneficiary of the father-in-law's, Thomas Hamond's estate.** We are unaware of what happened to Bague Glasshouse, but Robert used the inheritance to build Moor Lane Glassworks.

**Robert's only daughter Mary was wed to John Pidcock, who had just inherited his uncle Joshua Henzey III estate one month following her father's wedding.**

**Robert Honeyborne, after 18 years of being a widow, married Jane Hodgetts.** Robert and Jane had several children. Robert purchased for his eldest son John a commission in the army. He left most of his estate to his younger son Robert Honeybrone II. **Robert Honeyborne Sr. died in 1769 at the age of 67.**

The first type of glass to be produced at Moor Lane Glassworks is unknown definitively but it is speculated to be bottles and window glass. **Robert Honeyborne II** operated the glassworks until **his death in 1802 at the age of 56. Robert II left his estate to his younger brother Thomas Honeyborne.**

Thomas Honeyborne took over the operation of the glassworks and changed the trading title to his name. We know they were producing flint glass tableware and decanters at this time. About 1804, the firm name changed again to Honeyborne and Batson. James Batson was self-described as a glass manufacturer of Stourbridge when he prepared his will in 1820. We do not know much about James Batson or his business arrangement with Thomas Honeyborne except that the firm carried his name in addition to Honeyborne's. We are sure he was a non-owner of the glassworks but assume he was a partner of the operational company. We also assume he retired around 1820, and we know he died in 1825. **At some period between 1803 and 1809, Thomas Honeyborne retired.**

Thomas Honeyborne continued to own the glassworks but it was **operated by his older brother John Honeyborne.** John continued to produce flint and stained plate glass. The firm continued to operate as Honeyborne and Batson from 1804 for a number of years past Thomas Honeyborne's retirement. In 1823, the glass trade was poor and John Honeyborne declared bankruptcy. Their stock was sold off on December 29, 1823.

**On February 2, 1824, Thomas Honeyborne leased the Moor Lane Glassworks for 14 years to Joseph Silvers and Joseph Stevens** for an annual rent of £80. Silvers and Stevens were brothers-in-law. Silvers had married Stevens' sister Anna Maria in 1805.

**After 1824 and before 1828, Silvers and Stevens were joined in their partnership by James Mills. The firm's trade name became Silvers, Mills & Stevens.**

**In 1828, the partnership was dissolved. Joseph Stevens took control of Holly Hall Glassworks outside of Dudley. A new partnership was formed with Joseph Silvers, James Mills and Joseph Stevens' younger brother James, who took his old position in the partnership. The company continued to trade as Silvers, Mills and Stevens. By 1836, they were producing flint glass—plain and cut. In 1835, the firm was known as Silvers, Mills and Stevens. But by 1839, the firm was referred to as Stevens and Silvers indicating that Mills was out of the partnership and Stevens held majority control.**

In 1831, Thomas Honeyborne died and his estate passed to his brother-in-law and agent Joseph Atkinson. **James Stevens died in 1846** at 48 years of age. **Joseph Silvers, then 67,** was left in sole control of the glassworks, but subsequently he decided to **retire.** Joseph Silvers only son had died also, so he turned the glassworks over to his two **sons-in-laws, William Stevens and Samuel Cox Williams.** Thus was born the famous firm of **Stevens and Williams.**

### **Moor Lane Glassworks – Stevens and Williams**

William Stevens was the son of Joseph Stevens, Sr., an experienced glassmaker. He had married his cousin Maria, the youngest daughter of Joseph Stevens. William had worked for his father at Coalburnhill Glassworks and as a furnaceman at Golds Green, West Bromwich prior to the Stevens and Williams venture. Of the two founders, Stevens was the only experienced glassmaker.

Samuel Cox Williams worked with his brother Richard in the local iron trade. He had some useful knowledge of furnace technology. Samuel had married Ellen another daughter of Joseph Stevens. Ellen died in 1850 after only 5.5 years of marriage. Samuel then married Ellen's older sister Eliza. Interesting point, the law at the time prohibited marriage to a widow's sister. Eight years after retiring, Joseph Silvers died in 1854.

**In 1858, union trade issues first erupted at E. & J. Webb and then at Stevens and Williams.** Strikes and lockouts soon followed.

**In 1864, Samuel Cox Williams brought his son Joseph Silvers Williams into the business.**

**In 1869, William Stevens died. Samuel Cox Williams purchased his partner's, William Stevens, share of the business from Steven's widow Maria.** However, they kept William and Maria's son, William Henry Stevens employed at the firm of Stevens and Williams.

By 1870, the old Moor Lane Glassworks was in bad shape due to a mine subsidence. Samuel Cox Williams built a new glassworks one-quarter of a mile away at North Street. The old Moor Lane Glassworks was demolished.

### **North Street Glassworks – Stevens and Williams**

Construction on the new North Street **Glassworks** began in January and was completed by August 1870. The new glassworks had a **12 pot Frisbie furnace and a 8 pot teaze hole furnace** and was located on the railroad instead of a canal. **On August 31, 1870,** glassmaking commenced. On September 7, 1870 the fires were doused for the final time at Moor Lane Glassworks.

The large **capacity of the new glassworks** allowed **Stevens and Williams** to produce a lot of glass but they had not yet developed the reputation for quality, innovation and design as **Richardsons, Webb** or other competitors. **Stevens and Williams** were following the pack not leading them. The **introduction of Rock Crystal** was six months after **Webb**. Stevens and Williams' engravers in 1879 included Frederick Kretshmann, Joseph Keller and John Vernon Orchard extremely skilled engravers.

**William Henry Stevens** patented a machine for mechanically applying glass threads on glass as means of decoration, but it was two years after **Hodgetts, Richardson and Son** had patented the first such machine.

**William Henry Stevens** apparently became a problem for **Samuel Cox Williams** and in July 1880, he gave Stevens a month's notice. **William Henry Stevens** with his family followed his brother **Joseph Silvers Stevens** to Canada. **William** died shortly after arriving, resulting in **Samuel Cox Williams** paying for Steven's widow and children to return to England.

Now at 62, **Samuel Cox Williams** had enough, so he retired and turned the business over to his son **Joseph Silvers Williams**. Joseph Silvers Williams became Chairman. Joseph began to put his stamp on the company. He hired **Fredrick C. Carder** on John Northwood's recommendation.

In 1882, **Joseph Silvers Williams** offered **John Northwood** the position of **Works Manager and Artistic Director**. With both Northwood and Carder working together, the direction of Stevens and Williams changed. **Northwood was a creative genius in glass design, decoration and in mechanization** to produce the different patterns. First, the change occurred in Stevens and Williams and throughout Stourbridge. From 1884 on, **Stevens and Williams** was leading the packing no longer following. In February 1886, **John Northwood** received a patent for his crimping device. On October 18, 1884, **Northwood** registered the design for the famous **Mat-Su-No-Ke; Rd #15353** ([please see Mat-Su-No-Ke link](#)).

In 1885, **Northwood** received a patent for his "pull up machine." The same year **Northwood** also received a patent for spring pinchers and a stamping device that allowed for quick application of flowers or rosettes.

In 1885, **Stevens and Williams** patented **Damascened glass** consisting of a deposit of silver or copper on the surface. The glass was then engraved. Engraved patterns were oriental or formal arabesques and were the work of **Oscar Pierre Erard**.

In 1886, **Stevens and Williams** earned the **Gold Medal Diploma** for their entry of table and decorative art glass in cut, engraved, crystal, cameo and so on at the **International Exhibition of Industry, Science and Art in Edinburgh, Scotland**.

Also in 1886, **Stevens and Williams** received a registration for **Jewelled Glass**, aka **Sea Shell**. With this pattern of ornamentation, glass threading covered the dip-molded piece from top to the pontil with vertical columns of small air blobs of a ribbed body. Also in the same year, **Pearl Satin glass** called **Verre de Soie** was developed by **Frederick Carder**. This glass pattern is what we would call **Mother of Pearl (MOP)** in the U.S. and our British counterparts would call **Air Trap**. The glass item was made entirely of spiral shaped MOP. The surface was treated with acid to make a satin glass finish. I believe an example of this glass would be **Pompeiiian Swirl**. MOP or Air Trap glass was popular from 1881 on.

Even though Stevens and Williams registered this type of glass in 1886, **Richardsons received a patent in 1857 ([Richardsons Patent Link](#))** and **Boulton and Mill's patented in 1885 ([Boulton and Mills Patent Link forthcoming](#))**, one year before Stevens and Williams. In **October of 1886, a style called Tapestry was patented by Stevens and Williams**. The design was by Oscar Pierre Erard and it featured finely threaded surface decorations in Persian, Indian and other Oriental styles. It provided a horizontal rib effect of a woven tapestry.

**In 1887, Stevens and Williams had dozens of pull-up glass designs which suggested that they solved the problems with Northwood's pull-up glass manufacturing machine.** This type of glass was marketed as **Osiris**.

**In 1888, Moss-Agate was developed by John Northwood** with the assistance of Will Bridges, the Stevens and Williams Glasshouse Manager. It was stated in the October 1888 Pottery Gazette: "It looks very well. Moss-Agate glass has a deliberately crackled or crazed surface on semi-transparent alabaster: the alabaster being off-white to honey in color and cloudy in appearance. Moss-Agate glass pieces are usually found to be wheel cut also."

**Samuel Cox Williams**, the last surviving founding partner of Stevens and Williams, **died in 1889**.

Frederick Carder's first sketchbook dates from 1888. It was some of his ideas from his third sketchbook that made it into the 1887-1889 Stevens and Williams's designs. One design was Intarsia, which is an Italian word for marquetry inlay for furniture.

**In May 1889, Oscar Pierre Erard and Benjamin John Round patented a method for electro-deposition of a silver design on glass that was used by Stevens and Williams.**

In 1889, a school of art was built in Wordsley. Frederick Carder was its master.

**In 1897, Joseph Silvers Williams was joined by his 17 year old son Hubert in the firm of Stevens and Williams.**

**John Northwood II continued the pioneering work of his father by developing Silveria in 1900.** Silveria glass is a colorful but abstract design. It was made by sandwiching silver foil between two layers of glass. The glass may be clear or colored or with trails of color. **Silveria is usually marked with "S&W" and "England."** Edward Webb and Joseph Webb both had produced their own versions in 1883. Stevens and Williams' **Silveria differed from Webb's foil work since the silver foil remained intact rather than breaking into fragments.**

**John Northwood's health began to fail in 1901. Frederick Carder was appointed chief designer. This marked the end of what is known as Stevens and Williams "Fancy Period."** John Northwood died in 1902 at the age of 65.

**In 1902, Frederick Carder was asked by the Director of Education for South Staffordshire Count, Braham Balfour, to visit Germany and Austria and report on their glassmaking techniques.** Carder expected to be promoted to Art Director after John Northwood's death. Northwood's son John Northwood II was offered the position instead. The promotion did not set well with Frederick Carder. Carder's report to the county council was a great success and well received.

**In 1903, the county asked Carder to perform the same type of research in the U.S.**

As part of that trip, Carder met Samuel Clemens, aka, Mark Twain and T.G. Hawkes. **Hawkes asked him to start a factory with him in Corning, NY.** Carder became the Manager of Steuben Glass Works and a minority shareholder in March 1903.

Carder returned to England but was angry at being passed over for the Art Director position, so he left England in July 1903 for the U.S. Stevens and Williams even offered to triple Carder's wages but to no avail.

**In 1903, Joseph Silvers Williams adopted the name Joseph Silver Williams-Thomas,** this was at the request of his father-in-law who died without a son. His father-in-law was a banker.

**In 1906, Stevens and Williams introduced Crystal Cameo.** This was the same as crystal glass that was relief carved as cameo had been.

The First World War brought a great disruption to the glass industry. Stevens and Williams was no exception. However in **1919, they received a Royal Warrant by King George V for their war efforts.**

**In 1926, Stevens and Williams applied for a patent for "Brierly Royal Crystal."** They were just capitalizing on the Royal Patronage. Also in **1926, Joseph Keller retired due to health problems.**

**In 1930, Joshua Hodgetts was forced to retired at the age of 73.** He was granted a £1 per week pension providing he did not engage in his trade to the detriment of the company. During the depression, **Stevens and Williams could not afford to pay Mr. Hodgetts' pension** and so informed him. **He immediately went back to work freelance producing many prize pieces for the next three years.** He died on **May 12, 1933,** at the age of 75.

During the 1920's and 1930's, all of the Stourbridge firms attempted to switch to the Art Deco style of production with varying degrees of success. In 1932, Keith Day Pierce Murray was appointed to do design work for Stevens and Williams. He worked for them for seven years producing about a 150 designs.

**Joseph Silvers Williams-Thomas died on October 11, 1933.** He was succeeded by his son **Hubert Silvers Williams-Thomas.**

**In 1946 John Northwood II retired.**

**During the second World War, most glass production was for the military.** At the end of the war, Reginald Silvers Williams-Thomas, son of Hubert Silvers Williams-Thomas, returned from military service and returned to the firm. He had previously started in Stevens and Williams in 1931 and had worked his way through all departments. After returning from the war, he started rebuilding and reorganizing the factory. **By 1949, the factory was completely remolded. The two old cone furnaces were demolished and replaced by modern furnaces in a far more spacious building.** **By 1959, Hubert Silvers Williams-Thomas was the Chairman of Stevens and Williams and Reginald Silvers Williams-Thomas was the Managing Director.** During this period and to today, Royal patronage continues. **Hubert died in 1973 and his son Reginald retired in 1985 and died five years later in 1990.**

The firm was struggling and it was purchased by Epsom Enterprises in 1999. **By May 2000, the firm was closed in the hands of receivers and 230 jobs were lost. That was**

# the end of Stevens and Williams.

Individual (Relationship)	Born	W. in G. B.	Partnership	Retired	Death	Notes
Joseph Stevens (GF, founder of S, M & S)			1824-1828	1840	1852	Silvers, Mills & Stevens
<b>William Stevens (Father &amp; Founder of Stevens &amp; Williams)</b>	1818		1840 <b>1847 S&amp;W</b>	<b>N/A</b>	<b>1869</b>	J. Stevens & Sons <b>Stevens &amp; Williams'</b>
Joseph Silvers Stevens (Eldest Son)	?	?	N/A	N/A	?	Goes to Canada
Williams Henry Stevens (Son)	1840		N/A			Fired
<b>Samuel Cox Williams (Father &amp; Founder of Stevens &amp; Williams)</b>		<b>1847</b>	<b>1847</b>	<b>1880</b>	<b>1889</b>	<b>Stevens &amp; Williams</b>
Joseph Silvers Williams, Thomas (Son)	1849		1880 Chairman		1933	Stevens & Williams
Hubert Silvers Williams-Thomas (Grand Son)	?		1933	1973	?	Stevens & Williams
Reginald Silvers Williams-Thomas (Great Grandson)	?	1931	?	1985	1990	Stevens & Williams

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