

A FAMILY AFFAIR

THE ORIGINS OF THE STOUR VALLEY GLASS INDUSTRY

John Hemingway

The story of the glass industry in the west midlands area begins in the sixteenth century, with the arrival of families fleeing persecution in France. Their arrival coincided with changes in legislation which made the Stour Valley an ideal location.

In 1568 Thomas and Balthazar Hennezel came to England from their native Lorraine in France to make glass. One of the reasons they came was that, as Protestants, they were a minority in an overwhelmingly Roman Catholic country. They brought with them their relatives the de Tysacs, de Thietrys and the Bigots. We know the families by an Anglicisation of these names: Henzey, Tyzack, Tittery and Bigoe.

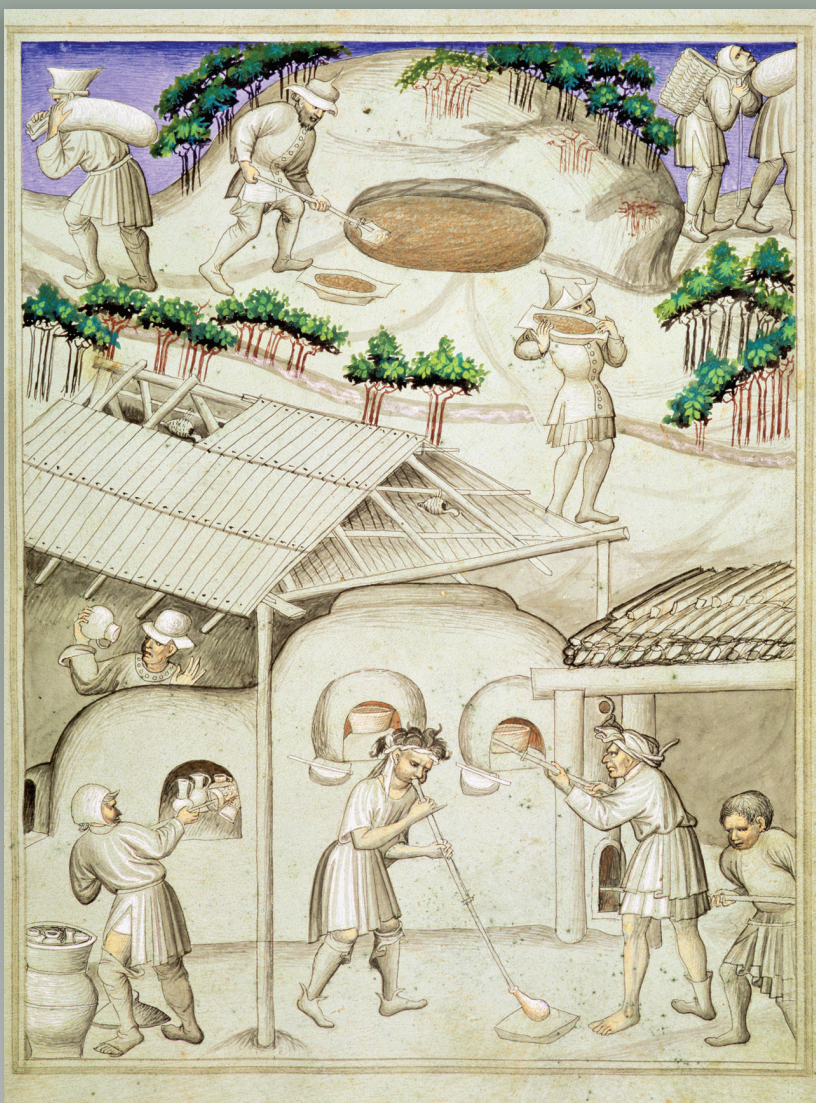
They used wood to fire their furnaces and started work in a woodland area, the Weald of Kent, but were intimidated by local workers and moved away. They were in Staffordshire by 1600 and worked on Cannock Chase, where an early furnace has been excavated at Wolseley near Rugeley. By 1612, they had reached the Stour Valley area, as the baptism of John, son of Paul and Bridget Tyzak, in Kingswinford church shows.

The Perfect Location

In 1615 King James I, worried that the woodlands of Great Britain were being destroyed, forbade the use of wood in glass production. However, the Stour Valley proved ideal in this new environment as it contained the essential raw materials used in manufacturing glass. These included, locally available Bunter Sandstone to provide one of the ingredients of glass, sand; bracken on Pensnett Chase which could be processed to provide the alkali, soda; fireclay for making the crucibles in which glass was cast; and the presence of the thickest coal measures in the country, which served as an alternative fuel to wood.

Paul Tyzack was living on Pensnett Chase close to the east of Amblecote boundary in Ravensich Coppice. The Ravensich area had been mined for coal from the medieval period and it is likely that he was able to secure the excavation of local coal.

The first glasshouse that was erected in the valley was occupied by Tyzack and was situated at a place called Colemans. There has been much debate over where the site was, but it seems likely that it was south-east of Ravensich at Lye. The existence of this glasshouse is evidence that Tyzack was the probable founder of the Stourbridge glass industry.

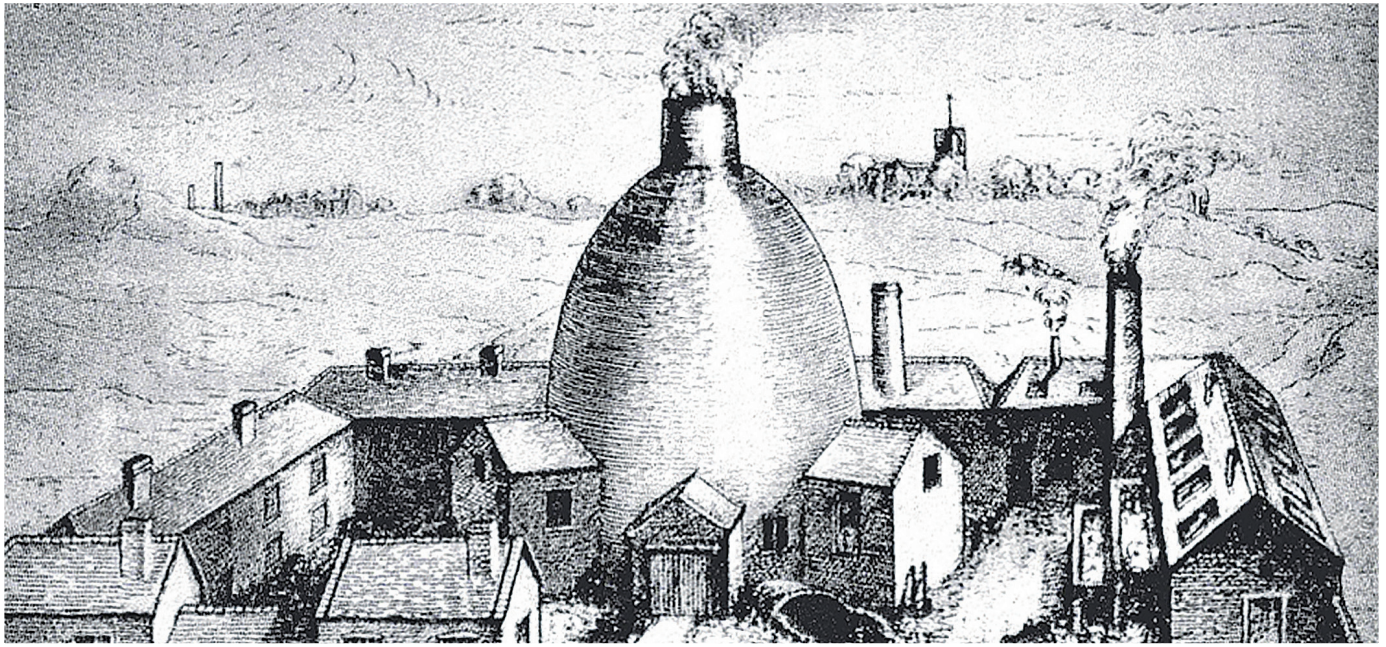


Glassmaking in the fifteenth century. A similar furnace has been excavated near Rugeley.

Status and Connections

It was not the Tyzack family, however, which was the most important at this time in the area – it was the Henzeys. Joshua Henzey probably came to the Stour Valley about the same time as Paul Tyzack. The glass-masters were all thought of as gentlemen in France and this status was recognised by the English. Virtually all the Lorraine glass-masters either married one of their own or into one of the leading families in the area.

Add 24189 f.116 Glassmaking at the Pit of Memnon, from the 'Picture Book of Sir John Mandeville's Travels', c. 1410 (vellum). Bohemian School, 15th century/British Library, London, UK © British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library



Robert Honeybourne opened the Moor Lane Works, shown here in a nineteenth-century print, in the late eighteenth century.

English Glassmakers

Joshua Henzey married Joan Brettell in 1619. The Brettells were an important family in Kingswinford and took their name from the township in which they lived. Henzey was wise in marrying a Brettell as the family fields were coal-rich. Evidence of this can be found in that the iron-master Andrew Yarrington laid a horse-drawn mineral railway track from the Brettell fields to his newly constructed canal on the Stour to transport coal down river. Henzey erected a number of glassworks in the area, which included Ridgrave Glassworks near Hungary Hill and Brettell Lane.

The Tyzacks had a disagreement with the owner of the land at Colemans and moved to Whittimore. They then had a difference of opinion with the Henzeys, who had a part share in the Whittimore Glassworks, and subsequently moved to Hagley.

The Henzeys were important. They built glassworks and acted as merchants for other glassmakers. Other notable glass-masters with glassworks in the area were: Jeremiah Bague, who owned Brettell Lane Works (Bague employed the Henzeys to build a new glassworks for him in 1696-7 with a cave), and Daniel Tittery, who owned the Hoo Works (later called Holloway End) in Amblecote.

Many historians think that the construction of glass cones started in the Bristol area in the 1690s, but a plan of Amblecote dated 1688 shows the Withymore Works and the Hoo Works with glass cones. How much earlier they were built it is not possible to say, given the state of current knowledge.

Marrying into the Lorraine families gave Englishmen a chance to enter glassmaking in the eighteenth century. Anne Tittery's first husband was Thomas Rogers, who took over the Holloway End Works, and when he died she married Edward Bradley, who opened up Jacobs Well Works at Camp Hill. Edward's brother Thomas opened up The Fimbrell at Dennis Hall and the Coalbournhill Works. Edward's daughter married Thomas Hammond (who by then had Bague's glassworks) and his granddaughter married Robert Honeybourne who opened up the Moor Lane Works. Joshua Henzey's son Ananias opened up the Hawbush Works next to the Brettell Lane Works and his sister married Joshua Bradley and he opened up the Whitehouse Works.

By the middle of the eighteenth century glassworks had spread across the area as far as Dudley. This movement was partially due to the intermarrying of the glassmaking families.

Booms and Slumps

The glass industry in these early years had many problems. There were constant booms and slumps in the trade, partly caused by taxation which made glass very expensive. Rarely did a glassworks remain open for very long. It was not until the later nineteenth century that the Stour Valley industry effectively took off. ●

Also see these articles:

Glassmaking: The Growth of an Industry – page 8.
Stourbridge Glass: A Cut above the Rest – page 14.

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Further Reading

Jason Ellis, *Glassmakers of Stourbridge and Dudley 1612 -2002* (Exlibris, 1993).

D R Guttery, *From Broad-Glass to Cut Crystal* (London, 1956).

Charles Hajdamach, *British Glass 1800-1914* (Antique Collectors' Club, 1991).

John Hemingway, 'In search of the long lost township of Bredhull', *Black Country Bugle*, 30 August 2012.

Christopher Welch, 'Glass-making in Wolseley, Staffordshire', *Post-Medieval Archaeology* 31 (1998, pp. 1-60).