

A NEW GLASS MUSEUM FOR THE BLACK COUNTRY

When I first arrived to work in the Black Country in 1988, there were a number of crystal glass-producing companies in the area – Stuart Crystal, Royal Brierley, Edinburgh Crystal and Tudor Crystal to name but a few. Some allowed members of the public to view their work by organised factory tours. Broadfield House Museum was also the place where one could also see examples of glasswork and their history. These glass companies were generally centred round the areas of Amblecote and Stourbridge. One reason these locations were chosen is they were adjacent to the new canals network, thus providing ready transportation of goods to other towns connected by canals. Perhaps the most striking building still in existence is the ancient brick-built 17th century Glass Cone at Amblecote, one of only four still surviving in the U.K. (The good news is a major programme of restoration is about to take place to help strengthen and preserve the whole building and its complex.)

However, with various recessions and strong overseas competition, the crystal glass industry started to disintegrate some twenty-odd years ago. One by one came news that most of these companies were closing down or, in the case of Stuart Crystal, their production work being transferred to their Crieff factory in Scotland (which we visited on a couple of occasions whilst on holiday in the area!) Likewise, Royal Brierley was a thriving company and a few years ago had a visit from Prince Charles and Princess Diana. Items from the various companies, especially historic or unusual, were taken for exhibition at Broadfield House Museum which was re-opened by Princess Michael of Kent. It eventually closed down in 2015 at the creation of The British Glass Foundation, which then brought together all relevant glass and cultural organisations to help preserve glass, archive and former technical collections.

Craftsmen in glassmaking had been operating in the Dudley area since the 16th century where the local economy was dependant on local mineral resources. It would eventually be considered as one of the most important centres for glassmaking in the world.

Opposite the present Glass Cone on the A491 (still owned and also run as a thriving museum, sales area, and eating house by Dudley Council) was the original site of White House Glass Works, with its own glass cone (across the main road). Unfortunately, there was a fire in 1914 and the site was bought by Stuart Crystal in 1916. However, in late 1930's the top half of the Stuart cone was lowered to disguise it and avoid being a target in WW2 (it also had a tunnel underneath which was also used as an air raid shelter). The building finally deteriorated and demolished in 1979 as production had dwindled. The Stuart work was eventually moved to Scotland but, later, Stuart was bought by Waterford Crystal in 1995. Sadly the former building at Wordsley caught fire some years ago and was eventually demolished. Later, plans were made to re-build on the original site to create a new Museum of Glass. It has been some years coming to fruition but was officially opened on 9 April of this year.

The visitor can expect to see world class displays of the best of a strong glass collection; demonstrations in a working glass Hot Shop, a display of 400 years of Stourbridge's rich glassmaking history; and hands-on and digital inter-actives displays for all ages. There is also an on-going programme of exhibitions, talks and monthly events. Undoubtedly, one of the Museum's attractions is the Hot Shop, where one can see highly-skilled glass makers in action; see molten glass at very high temperatures; and possibly take part in glass workshops? The address is: Stourbridge Glass Museum, High Street, Wordsley DY8 4FB. Admission prices are £4.00 – Adults; £2.00 - Children; Seniors over 65 - £3.00. Opening hours are Tuesday – Sunday 10.00 am to 4.00 pm. (Tel: 01384 900447). Website: www.stourbridgeglassmuseum.org.uk

It is a brilliant display with much interest and one of which I can well recommend a visit!

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