

The Smethwick Glass Works of Chance Brothers, West Midlands

Image: The Glass and Lighthouse Works at Smethwick in the early 20th century. Glass cones can be seen at various locations across the site. Chance Brothers & Co., Limited, 100 Years of British Glass Making 1824-1924 (Smethwick and Glasgow, Chance Brothers & Co., 1924).

Following images from: Broadfield House Glass Museum, Kingswinford, Dudley, West Midlands

Summary:

These photographs were taken by Arthur Reeves, a former employee of Chance Brothers Smethwick in the 1940s. They were digitised from 30 slides which Mr Reeves deposited at Broadfield House Glass Museum, Kingswinford, Dudley in the West Midlands during 1984. Mr Reeves provided descriptions to accompany the images which are included in this exhibition with minor alterations. Most of the images show glass houses, furnaces and other factory equipment at the factory dating from the mid 19th century. Demolition in the 1940s provided a record of their internal construction and the industrial processes they housed to make crown glass, plate glass and optical glass.

Chance Brothers was founded in 1824 in Spon Lane, Smethwick. During the 19th century it became one of the most important glassworks in Britain. It manufactured sheet glass, including the panes for the Crystal Palace of 1851, window glass in different colours and optical glass including the lenses for lighthouses. Chances pioneered new ways of making glass and many of the images provide evidence of innovative practices. One 20th century example shows the welding of a cathode ray tube used for radar detection (number 9). Fire was a constant hazard and Chances created a fire brigade at the works in 1848 (number 4).