

MIKE DEEMING
WRITES

In 1822 James Powell took over the long-established glassworks, Whitefriars Glass, under the shadow of St Paul's, and steered it onto a path to becoming one of the major Gothic Revival stained glass window makers in the country.



However, there are three aspects that differentiate Powell's from the other main Victorian stained glass window makers. The first of these was their central role in the chemical synthesis of colours that matched exactly the colours in medieval glass. This was in association with Charles Winston, the leading commentator on glass and the funder for work on re-creating the medieval glass colours. Winston wasn't the easiest to work with, as was shown in his correspondence with the Cathedral authorities in 1852 (see J&T 60). Indeed, Sir George Gilbert Scott felt more could have been achieved if Winston had been less abrasive. Scott wrote 'The art of glass painting has suffered a great loss from the crochets and ill-nature of a man who of all others was the best qualified to help it forward'. Nevertheless, Powell's persevered and their resulting 'antique' glass was a triumph; they sold it at premium prices to other glaziers, along with quantities of more basic sheet glass.



Secondly although they had in-house designers, they made glass windows for freelance designers too. Thus, they made glass for the likes of Rosetti, Burne Jones and Mary Lowndes, as well as for in-house designers like Henry Holiday and J W Brown. Even Matilda Radnor's window in the north quire aisle was made by Powell's after she'd had been coached by J W Brown. We have examples of their glass throughout the Cathedral, including most of the windows in the Morning Chapel.

Harry Powell, grandson of the founder, joined his grandfather's company in 1875 and opened up new areas for them. This was the third way they distinguished themselves, in particular in the development of coloured glass for tableware. He was seeking to match the Georgian glass bottles and drinking glasses as illustrated in this tavern scene from Hogarth's 'Rake's Progress', an image

An advertisement for James Powell & Sons (Whitefriars) Ltd. The top part of the ad features the company name 'JAMES POWELL & SONS (Whitefriars) LTD' in a bold, serif font, with 'WHITEFRIARS GLASS WORKS.' underneath. Below this, the address '11, CONDUIT ST., W. 1.' and telephone number 'Telephone: Mayfair 3654' are listed on the left, and '26, TUDOR ST., E.C.4.' and 'Telephone: City 7850.' on the right. In the center is a detailed illustration of a stained glass window depicting a figure, possibly a saint or a historical figure, within a Gothic-style frame. Below the illustration, a list of products is provided: 'STAINED GLASS WINDOWS, MEMORIAL TABLETS, MOSAICS, COLOURED GLASSES AND ENAMELS FOR ARTIFICIAL EYE MAKING, etc., LATHE-TURNED AND BORED CYLINDERS AND ROLLERS.' To the right of the illustration, another list of products is shown: 'CUT AND BLOWN TABLE GLASS, ART GLASSWARE, LENS-FRONT THERMOMETER TUBING, ORDINARY TUBING IN ALL SIZES, OVAL AND ROUND SURGICAL SPECIMEN JARS.' At the bottom right, the text 'STAND No. G. 48.' is displayed. At the very bottom, a small line of text reads: 'The Company will be glad to furnish illustrations of their Glass-ware; to make special designs in accordance with their clients' wishes; or to match any patterns that may be submitted.'

that might have been mirrored by Grayson Perry in 'The Vanity of Small Differences'.

Indeed, Powell's range of products became extensive, as shown in this advert for the 1922 British Fair. Harry's interest in chemistry had led him to develop heat-resistant scientific glass for use in laboratories and industry for early applications in electric



light bulbs and x-ray tubes. He also planned to move the factory to Wealdstone (Harrow) in 1923, but sadly died just before the move took place. There it increasingly focussed on glassware. But gradually the market declined and the factory closed in 1973 to be replaced by a primary school, named Whitefriars School.

Most of the Powell's windows in the Cathedral were installed in a very short period from 1908 to 1913. Two windows that don't attract too much attention are the triforium window in the south transept (alongside a medieval grisaille window that may be in situ); and the pair of lancets above the entrance from the consistory court, a memorial to John and Sophia Angell (above).



Sometimes Powell's windows carry the Whitefriars maker's mark (seen here), but I can't spot one in the Cathedral. Please let me know if you see one or, indeed, if you have one in your local church.