

## Thomas Webb and the Rembrandt Guild

The 1987 British Glass Between The Wars Exhibition at Broadfield House included four pieces of Webb glass which were marked "Made Exclusively For Rembrandt Guild", and Stan Eveson's article in the exhibition catalogue discussed the relationship between Thomas Webb and Sons and the Guild in the 1930s. Stan Eveson, of course, was working in the factory when these pieces were made.



Two years ago I showed him the illustrated vase which I had recently acquired. I wanted him to confirm, if he could, that this was one of Tom Pitchford's designs; Stan said it was, but whilst he was handling it a twinkle appeared in his eye; he turned to me and added that he knew who had made this particular piece of glass. There was only one man at Webb's, he said, who could make pieces of this quality and that was Frank Bridgens, the gaffer who was given nearly all the commissions from the Rembrandt Guild because he was the only who could meet their exacting standards. Frank Bridgens left Webb's in 1937, so that was the last possible date for the manufacture of my vase.

But who or what was the Rembrandt Guild?

Stan didn't know much more than he had written in his article, namely that they had shop premises in Daimler House, Paradise Street, Birmingham, close to the Town Hall. Recently I have tried to find out a little more, but that has not been easy because the shop no longer exists and no records appear to have survived. The first entry in Kelly's Directory for Birmingham is in 1932:

***"Rembrandt Guild (The), picture dlrs, Daimler ho. Paradise st. T N Midland 0216."***

The same entry appears every year until 1952, but between 1944 and 1948 there is an additional entry:

***"Rembrandt Studios, photographers, 167 York rd. 28"***

Birmingham's history yielded a little more information. The "shop" was apparently on the second floor in Daimler House, and there was one recollection that it was "very exclusive" and was more like a gallery than a retail outlet. It specialised in fine art and picture frames and other exclusive furnishings for the home, but not furniture. The opening of a photographic branch in the suburb of Hall Green in 1944 is unremarkable. There couldn't have been much of a demand for fine art in wartime Birmingham, and photography and framing are obviously linked. That enterprise didn't last long, and by 1953 the Guild itself was no more.



One lead proved to be something of a red herring. I was told that there might have been a connection between the Rembrandt Guild and the Bromsgrove Guild. The Bromsgrove Guild of Applied Arts was founded in 1898 by a group of craftsmen and women influenced by the Arts and Crafts Movement and based in Bromsgrove in Worcestershire. In their early years they made jewellery, tapestries, gesso, metalwork and stained glass, and it was suggested that the Rembrandt Guild may have been a retail outlet for the Bromsgrove Guild's work. I contacted the Bromsgrove Guild's historian, Quintin Watt, but he thought such a link was improbable because the Bromsgrove Guild was only active in all these fields before the first World War, and by the 1930s most members were metalworkers and their gates and screens were unlikely to have been sold through a retail outlet. Unfortunately we shall never know for sure because all the Bromsgrove Guild records were destroyed when it was wound up in the 1960s.

The illustrated vase, with its Rembrandt Guild acid etched mark, is not uncommon. I saw another identical piece in a Brighton antique shop during the summer and this and some other designs by Tom Pitchford will be included in the selling exhibition with the working title "British Cut Glass, 1920s to 1970s" that Nigel Benson and Jeanette Heyhurst are planning for next summer.

It is always nice for a collector to be able to identify both the factory and the designer for a piece in the collection. In this case we know the retail outlet, too, because it is included in the mark. But it is very unusual indeed to be able to date a piece so precisely to the five-year period 1932-37 and even rarer to know the name of the workman who made it. Thank you, Stan Eveson, for a phenomenal memory.

## Credits

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