

Artefacts: Winter 2022

Changing Birmingham - its people and places: Hardman, Pugin and all things Gothic

By Jim Wells, Friends Trustee

Continuing our exploration of the Friends' acquisitions over the years, a particularly striking piece of silverware – a 'Silver Claret Jug and Cover' (see below) – led me to some detailed research into the manufacturers of this delightful piece.



'Silver Claret Jug and Cover'

by John Hardman & Co, 1861-1862; 1998M36

By the start of the nineteenth century Birmingham was well established as a centre for the manufacture of metal goods but often not with the best reputation for quality or design, being described by one commentator as 'lacquered sham'. This changed by the middle of the century due to a number of unique partnerships and friendships, not only in the production of metal products but also stained glass and embroidery.

The first significant friendship of our story was the result of a chance encounter at Oscott College, a Catholic seminary in north Birmingham, between John Hardman Jnr and A.W. Pugin, followed up by a dinner at the Hardman family home in Handsworth on the 29 May 1837, as noted in Pugin's diary. John Hardman Jnr (1811-67) was the son of a well-established button and medal maker, John Hardman Snr (1737-1844), who was a leading lay figure in the Catholic community in Birmingham. A.W. Pugin (1812-52) was an architect and a designer determined to revive the Gothic style of medieval England in both buildings and church

furnishings. To realise this dream he needed a manufacturer with a similar commitment. He found this in the Hardman family and persuaded John Hardman Jnr to set up his own company as John Hardman & Co in 1838.

Due to the rapid success of the company, it relocated to new premises at Great Charles Street in 1845, complete with a showroom and a new letterhead. Designed by Pugin, the letterhead advertised the company as 'Goldsmiths and Glass painters', having moved into the production of stained glass. Reviving both the technical and artistic skills required to produce the high-quality products inspired by a medieval style was a massive challenge for



'The Medieval Court' – an engraving of a view of the 'Medieval Court' at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, London, 1851; 1970V1133

the company. It was the friendship between the two men, with their regular correspondence, that allowed the company to thrive, growing from a turnover of £1,000 in 1841 to £12,000 by 1848. Pugin established a national profile, with the Great Exhibition of 1851 and its 'Medieval Court' display being the high point, and Hardman products eventually appeared all over the globe. Nowhere is this partnership better illustrated than in two major projects: St Chad's Catholic Cathedral in Birmingham and a secular building, the Houses of Parliament. A huge number of Hardman products can still be seen on a visit to Parliament, from stained glass windows to the clock face and hands of Big Ben, but the really strong connection between Hardman and Pugin can be seen here in Birmingham at St Chad's Cathedral. The Hardman family's connection with the Cathedral started in 1834, with John Hardman Snr leading the appeal for raising funds for a new church, then Hardman Jnr setting up the choir in 1854, and the family giving many generous donations including a controversial rood screen, removed in the 1960s, and stained-glass windows which have survived. St Chad's became the first Catholic Cathedral built in England since the Reformation, with the reestablishment of a Catholic diocese in 1850.



'Engraving - Interior of St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham' from the Wilkinson Collection, Vol I; 1996V148.46

An important aspect of this medieval revival was the demand for highly decorated clerical robes (vestments) and altar dressings (antependia). For this Pugin turned to Lucy Powell and her daughters. Lucy was the sister of John Hardman Snr and was married to William Powell, Pugin and Hardman's business partner. Such was the success of the initial products, particularly for St Chad's, that the business grew rapidly and to meet the demand a new partnership and lifelong friendship was developed between Lucy Powell and the Brown sisters, Lucy and Winnifred, fellow Catholics (who we assume were) skilled in textile production. Setting up their own independent business as Powell & Browns, which by 1845 had moved into its own premises at 55 Frederick Street, was no mean achievement given the prevailing attitudes at the time to women running their own companies. As with the metal work and glass they had the challenge of rediscovering the skills required to produce medieval styled items, predominantly for Catholic and Anglican churches. The partnership continued until 1863 when Lucy Powell died but the two sisters carried on in new premises in Easy Street until the end of the century as the 'Missis Browns' and were buried in St Chad's. Mrs Lucy Powell, in addition to running the business, had a number of children, one of whom - John Hardman Powell (1827-95) - was to become central to the Gothic revival.

Showing an aptitude for design while in Birmingham he was sent down to Ramsgate to become a pupil of A.W. Pugin, alongside his son Edward. After initial reservations by Pugin, particularly his sleepiness, Powell became a trusted assistant and the main link between Pugin and the Hardman's in Birmingham, taking on aspects of design in both metalwork and stained glass. With Pugin's premature death in tragic circumstances Powell became the principal designer for Hardman's eventually concentrating solely on stained glass. We are fortunate to be able to see locally some of his outstanding work, with for example the window of the immaculate conception in St Chad's, installed in 1868 and if you look carefully in the bottom left there is a portrayal of Hardman Jnr in his choir robes, a dedication to him having died in 1867.

These dynamic partnerships re-established Birmingham as a centre for high quality manufacturing in the mid nineteenth century and central to this was Hardman & Co, which in various guises lasted until 2008.

For sources and further background reading please visit our website: fbmt.org.uk/publications.

Illustrations

<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=6629&index=8&total=9&view=viewSearchItem>



'Silver Claret Jug and Cover' by John Hardman & Co, 166 Great Charles Street, Birmingham, 1861-1862; 1998M36; Purchased with the assistance of the Friends of Birmingham Museums & Art Gallery, the Victoria & Albert Purchase Grant Fund, the National Art Collections Fund, Midlands Charities & Trusts and N & I Franklin, 1998; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0

<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=25223&index=6&total=9&view=viewSearchItem>

'The Crucifixion with Evangelists', designed by Augustus Welby Northmoor (A W N) Pugin and manufactured by John Hardman & Co., Birmingham, c. 1850; 2013.0005; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0



<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=12287&index=0&total=12&view=viewSearchItem>

'The Medieval Court' – an engraving of a view of the 'Medieval Court' at the Great Exhibition at Crystal Palace, London, 1851; 1970V1133; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0. The print shows the display of Gothic Style furnishings, including that of J Hardman & Co, Birmingham.



<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=13053&index=2&total=4&view=viewSearchItem>



'Engraving - Interior of St Chad's Cathedral, Birmingham' from the Wilkinson Collection, Vol I; 1996V148.46; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

This engraving, from the nineteenth century, shows the interior of St Chad's before the remodelling of the 1960s, which was a result of the interpretation of the Second Vatican Council. The rood screen can be seen clearly. Produced and donated by the Hardman family, it was even controversial at the time of its installation. Bishop Wiseman had recently arrived to be coadjutor with Bishop Walsh. However, he had been based in Rome and had different liturgical and architectural views and did not want the rood screen. In the end he compromised under the threat of Pugin's resignation and the withdrawal of Hardman Snr's financial support. The rood screen is now at an Anglican church in Reading, Holy Trinity.

<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=7634&index=2&total=4&view=viewSearchItem>

Chalice by John Hardman & Co, 1854-55; 1887M884; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

Pugin's stated aim was to reintroduce medieval design and linked to that was the need to bring back traditional metal working skills so that the pieces would be authentic. Whilst Hardman did bring back many of those skills, they were mainly used at the high end of the market working in precious metals for specific commissions. John Hardman Jnr, being a Birmingham business man, persuaded Pugin that modern methods such as electro plating and the stamp could be used to enable the mass production of items for churches and organisations which wanted the Pugin style but did not have the funds to pay for either the precious metals or the labour time required by traditional production methods.



<https://dams.birminghammuseums.org.uk/asset-bank/action/viewAsset?id=14037&index=1&total=10&view=viewSearchItem>



John Hardman Studio Wages Tray by Hardman & Co, 1850; 1969F100; Photo by Birmingham Museums Trust, licensed under CC0.

A wooden box divided into five rows lengthways, each row containing eight tins painted with a number in red. Hardmans was generally seen as a good employer by the standards of the day and invested heavily in training and building the skills of an exclusively catholic workforce. Many workers stayed with Hardmans all their working lives. However, such was the quality of the training that some employees left to set up their own companies, in competition with Hardmans, manufacturing items in the Pugin style.

Sources and further reading:

Hardman and Pugin

- 1) Michael Fisher, 'Hardman of Birmingham: Goldsmith and Glass Painter', Landmark, 2008**

A beautifully illustrated book and a real insight into the Hardman Company in all its aspects, particularly its global reach, and taking us right up to the start of the 21st century.

- 2) Michael Fisher, 'Guarding the Pugin Flame: John Hardman Powell, 1827-1895', Spire Books, 2017**

An in-depth exploration of the life of J.H.Powell, his relationship with the Pugin family having married A.W.Pugin's daughter, along with the vast amount of work produced in the spirit of A.W. Pugin.

- 3) Brian Doolan, 'The Pugins and the Hardmans', Catholic Archdiocese of Birmingham Historical Commission, 2004**

A very accessible and readable booklet, part of a series on Catholic history in the Midlands, which gives an overview of these two families and their effect on church architecture and furnishings, particularly in the Birmingham area.

- 4) A. Foster (N. Pevsner, A. Wedgewood), 'Birmingham and the Black Country', Yale University Press, new edition 2022 (original 1966)**

A brilliant, recently updated, architectural guide to the region. It provides a thorough insight into the Hardman and Pugin legacy, particularly of stained glass.

- 5) N. Pevsner and P. Metcalf, 'The Cathedrals of England, (2 volumes), Viking, 1985**

Contains a thorough description of St Chad's from an architectural perspective, including a photograph of the original Hardman/Pugin rood screen which was removed in 1967.

- 6) Ann Eatwell and Ruth Gosling, 'Hardman Family', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Oxford University Press, 2008**

A succinct account of the different Hardman generations and their involvements in manufacturing across the years, up to the last family member to be involved in the business, John Tarleton Hardman (1872-1959), a resident of Dorridge who retired in 1935.

- 7) Birmingham Library Archives, 'Guide to the Hardmans'**

This provides a guide to the Hardman history and the associated business documents and letters held by the library (ref MS175) and the graphic materials (cartoons etc.) held by BMAG, rescued from a fire in 1970 at the Hardman premises in Newhall Street.

- 8) 'Birmingham Journal' and 'Arris Gazette' were accessed via British Newspapers online.**

- 9) Samuel Timmins (ed.), 'The Resources, Products and Industrial History of Birmingham and the Midland Hardware district', 1866**

Two articles give a real insight from contemporary sources on the relevant subject matter, one by John Hardman Powell:

- a) J.H. Powell, 'The art of stained glass'**

b) W.C. Aiken, 'The revived art of metal working'

Hardman products that can be seen locally:

We are fortunate that in Birmingham and the Black Country we are able to see stained glass windows, memorial brasses and other church furnishings in a wide variety of locations and from different eras. The obvious place to start is St Chad's, in the centre of Birmingham, with its stained-glass windows, particularly the one dedicated to glassworkers. In addition, there are a number of church furnishings produced by Hardmans at St Chad's, although sadly not the rood screen. Other venues to consider are Erdington Abbey (1854-59), St Lawrence in Northfield, Singers Hill Synagogue (1940s-1960s) and St Vincent's in Nechells (1967-58), to mention just a few. The recently revised Pevsner Guide to 'Birmingham and the Black Country', by Andy Foster, gives an extensive insight.