

SANDWELL ARCHIVES ANNUAL REPORT

25-26



A Year in Archives

External Funding

Archives Revealed' cataloguing grant, totalling £49,055 and 'Resilience Grant', totalling £19,580 from The National Archives.

New Accessions

Ongoing collection of pub and scene sketches from Smethwick artist, Terry Eaglestone; West Bromwich Townswomen's Guild; Deeds for Tipton Messrs Powell and Brown. Total of 65 deposits added into the collection.

Events

'Illuminating the Chance Glassworks Collection' heritage open day on Saturday 13 September; '60 Years On: Malcolm X in Smethwick' Open Day for Black History Month; Local history talks; Poetry event for Black History Month; Creative writing workshops, Creative Chance Workshops -total 260 attendees across all events

New Partnerships

Multistory; EWA CIC; RAF Cosford; West Bromwich African Caribbean Resource Centre; Stourbridge Glass Museum



20,000

Digital Hits to the Website



805

Visitors to the Archives Searchroom



101

School Children Visited



1282

Research enquiries



11

New Volunteers Enrolled

Highlights



Volunteer Hours

A total of 1166 hours
of volunteer work

(April 2025- January
2026)

Artist Workshops

Creative Chance workshops with
artists Abigail Villarroel and
Daniella Turbin

Abigail's workshop: 6 attendees
who made colourful, collaborative
art pieces depicting the Crystal
Palace

Daniella's workshop: 7 attendees
who made paper vases inspired
by Chance's handkerchief vases



Exhibitions

Exhibition with West Bromwich
African Caribbean Resource
Centre celebrating their 50th
anniversary

Mini exhibition with local
photographer Brendan Jackson,
titled 'Sites of Memory'

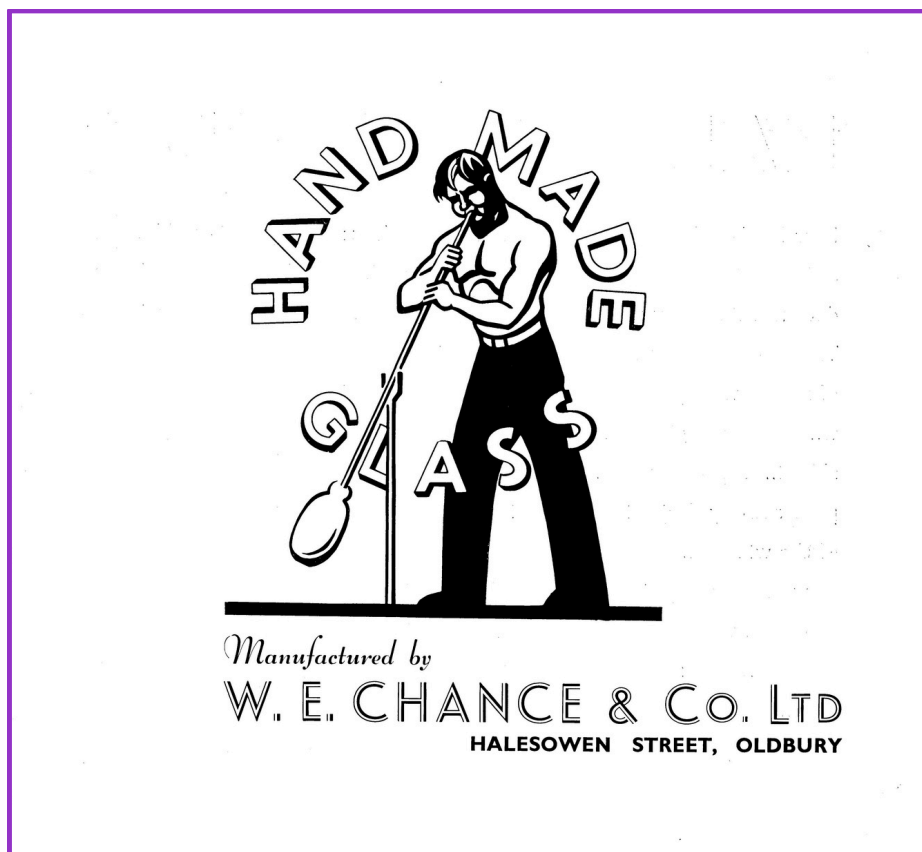
Mini Chance Brothers exhibition
with Sandwell Museums and
showcasing Sandwell Archives'
collection

Focus On: 'Illuminating the Chance Glassworks Collection' Project

'Illuminating the Chance Glassworks Collection' – a 12-month part-funded National Archives' project to catalogue and promote the archives of Chance Brothers glass manufacturers in Smethwick, has revealed some fascinating stories of life in the glass making industry of Smethwick and the Black Country.

Glass panels for the Crystal Palace which hosted the Great Exhibition of 1851, the faces on the clock tower of Big Ben in the Houses of Parliament, and the ornamental windows of the White House in Washington were some of their more famous glass products. Perhaps however, they are best remembered for their manufacture of optical glass lenses for lighthouses, some of which can still be seen today.

After closing in 1981, the factory site in Spon Lane was saved for posterity and is now in the caring hands of the Chance Heritage Trust, and the archive material was deposited at Sandwell Archives. Of the 180 boxes of Chance archives stored here, over 50 boxes have been catalogued – that's over 1600 additional items for the public to access and enjoy. Items detailing the level of illiteracy of many Chance employees (substituting a signature with an 'X'), and documents from the 1840s and 1850s recording the status of female workers, give a tantalising glimpse of working life in mid-nineteenth century England.

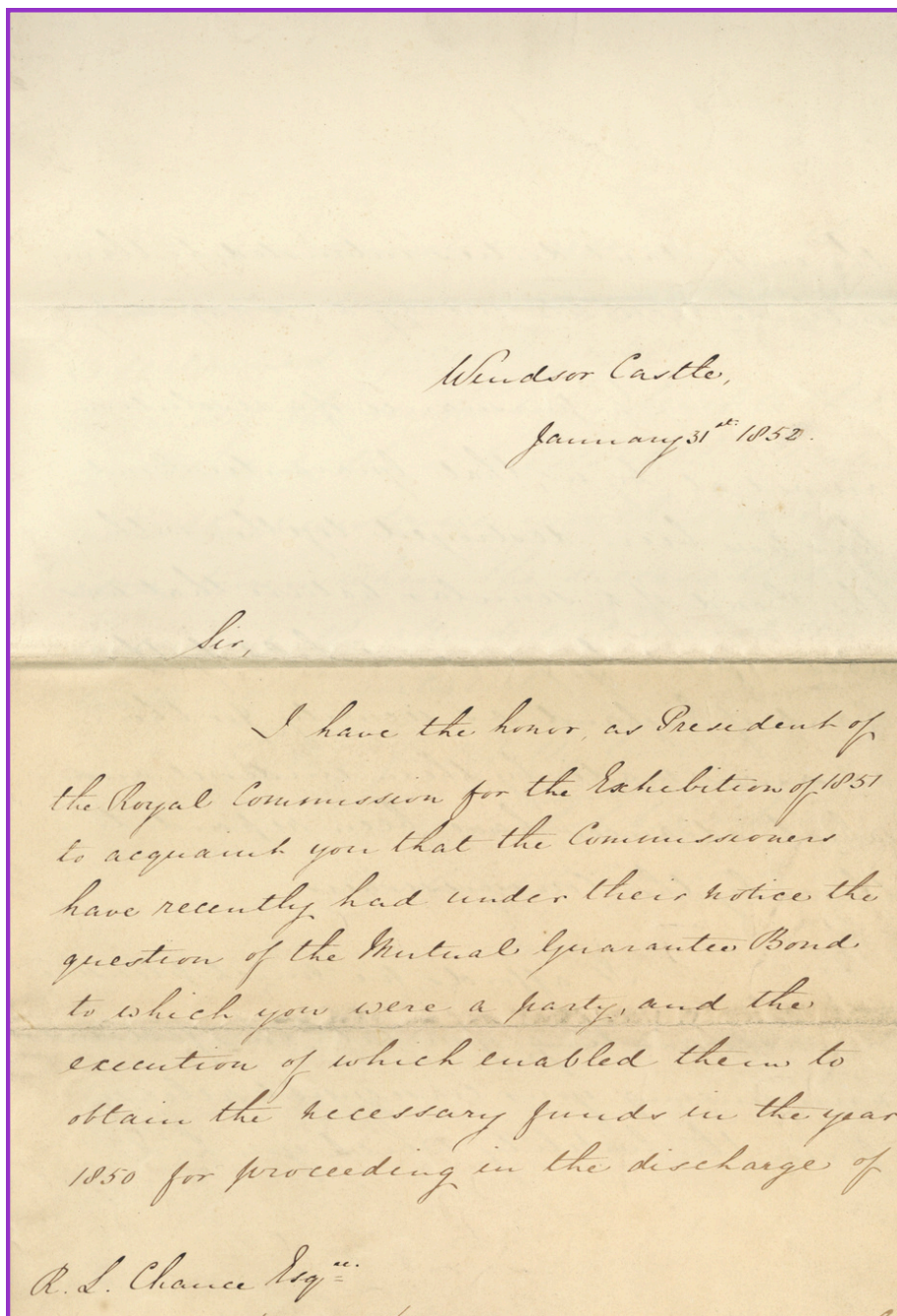


Sandwell Archives, BS6-10-3-3-3

Focus On: 'Illuminating the Chance Glassworks Collection' Project

Throughout its manufacturing life Chance made many connections with the great and the good both nationally and internationally. The signatures of Prince Albert, consort to Queen Victoria, the Prince of Wales (the future King Edward VII), Neville Chamberlain, William Gladstone, John Logie Baird and the Marconi family pepper the collection.

The Project has most certainly highlighted the importance of promoting such an influential company and helped to 'shine a beacon' on its close connections with Smethwick for nearly 200 years.



Quotes from our Visitors

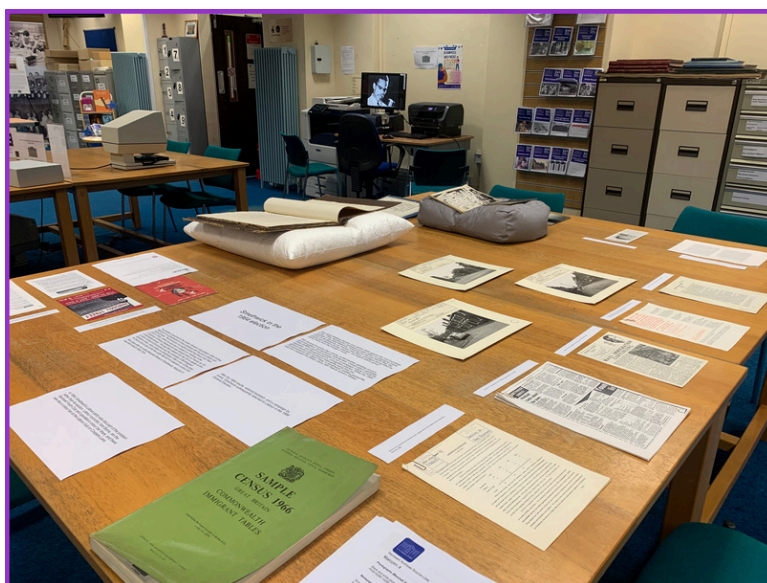


“This is excellent... Thank you so much your help so far- I really appreciate it and can't wait for my visit.”

Researcher

“We had a very useful visit on Friday and many thanks to everybody for being so accommodating”

Researcher



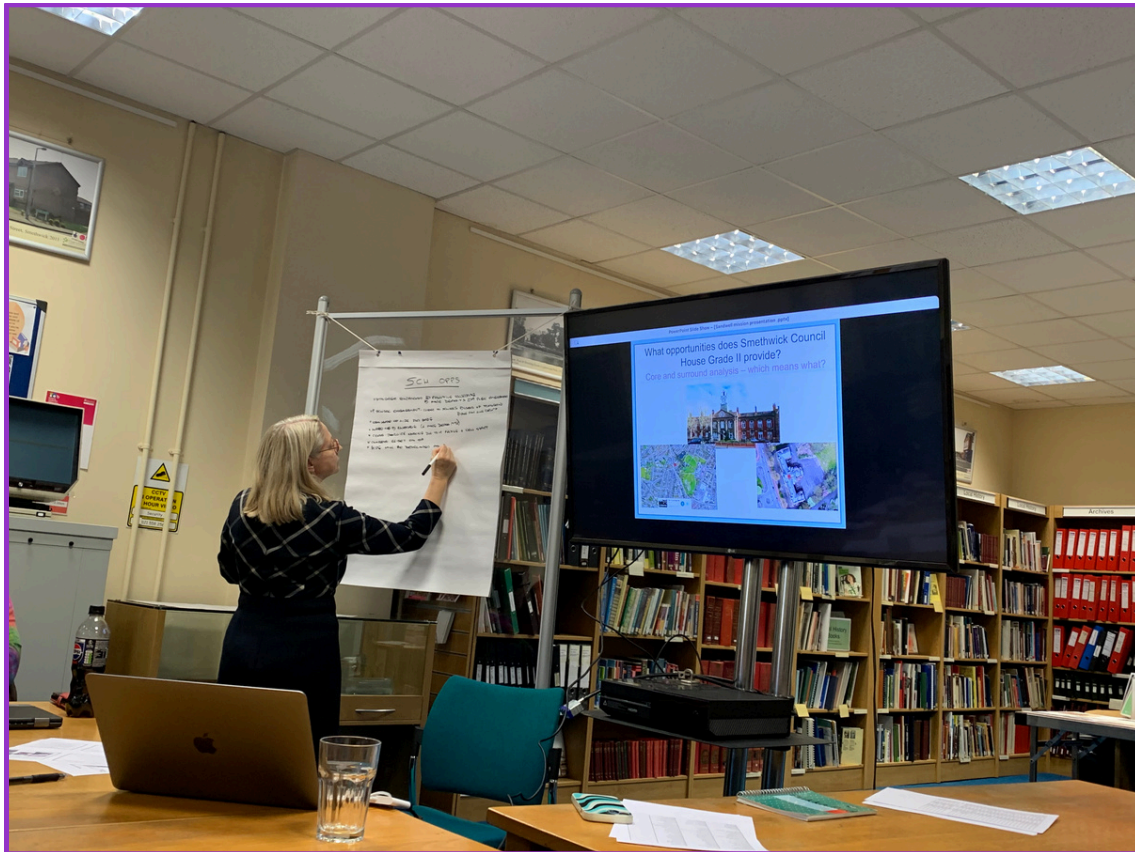
“We met last Wednesday when I was visiting the Sandwell Archives to research my late father’s schooldays... you were kind enough to offer a bit of your time to try to track down any information on my father’s ancestry”

Researcher



“That is fabulous news I’ve been trying to find this for years, you really have made my day thank you”

Researcher



With thanks to:

Our fabulous volunteers Michael Byrne, James Billiard, Linda Guest, Bev Gill, Rabia Akhtar, Rogan Vlahakis, Zeruiah Thompson, Emily Workman, Olivia Howell, Ken Lovell, Jayne Smith, and Gia Kaur.

Partners including the Chance Heritage Trust, Winterbourne House and Gardens, the University of Birmingham, Birmingham City University, Stourbridge Glass Museum, Multistory, the Canal and River Trust, and West Midlands Archives.

And The National Archives for their ongoing support and funding.