

POTTERY & GLASS MAKING

SILKSTONE REFLECTS ON THE CHURCH HERITAGE

The Pilmay family at Silkstone, and John Fox at Bolsterstone established 'world-class glass-making in the 17th century'.

In 2002 archaeologists revealed the remains of the glass-house and pottery beneath the floor of a barn-like building at Pot-house Hamlet, Silkstone.

This intensive study revealed a wealth of information.



The Pilmay Family

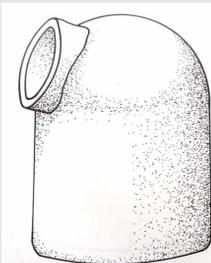
John Pilmay and his wife Alice de Houx were descendants of French glass-makers. They came to Silkstone via Gloucestershire, Shropshire and Manchester to use local coal since the use of charcoal was banned. By 1658 they had built a glass-house.

Abigail Scott, widow of land-owner William Scott, married the Pilmay's son John in 1658. She had inherited Coates Farm, Silkstone Mill and land which provided coal and clay for glass-making. Coal fumes darkened the glass so along with John Fox they experimented with new crucible designs. By 1680 they had resolved the problem and were making fine quality lead crystal as well as green glass.

In 1675 John Pilmay died and Abigail took charge, with help from her brother-in-law Peter. Abigail's business prospered, and in 1682 she built a new house with a date-stone over the door.

In 1696 Abigail signed a petition against the glass tax, the Lords were told that because of the glass tax, trade around Silkstone was 'greatly discouraged' and alternative containers were being used, meaning that they could not sell their stock of glass, and could not carry on: *'the Trade is so greatly dis-couraged since the Duty laid thereon, that the Consumption thereof is lessened to that Degree, that their Stocks lie dead upon their Hands: unless the Duty be taken off, they cannot any longer carry on their Works.'*

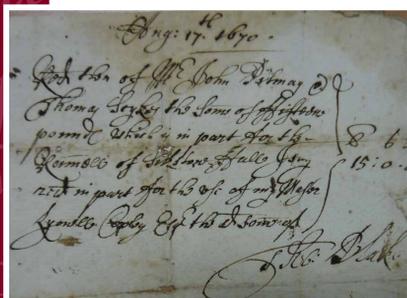
Abigail died two years later. The list of her property included glass-making ingredients in her warehouses, a glasshouse for green glass and one for white, and chambers for workers furnished with beds. She is buried in the north aisle.



Glass Making in Silkstone

More than 400 drips of glass and other waste found during the archaeological dig were analysed, the most wide-ranging analysis ever carried out in Britain. They revealed changes in glass production technology. Information about the ingredients used was supported by the contents of Abigail's estate inventory of 1698.

The raw materials were loaded into crucibles, which sat on a stone bench in the furnace. Fuel burned in a trench beneath them. High-silica sand was the main ingredient, with lime, potash (produced locally by burning plants) or lead added to help the silica melt at a lower temperature. Colours and other ingredients were sometimes added; iron oxide from plants gave a green colour.



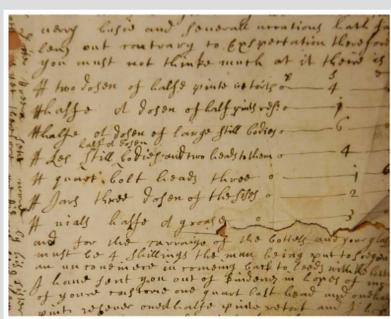
Fine lead crystal glassware required red lead. A lead mine at Brougholmlee in the Ewden valley supplied lead 'used in the production of flint glass at Bolsterstone glass house' and probably also Silkstone. Fragments of a rediscovered crucible had layers of glass adhering to the inside surface, remnants of its last two melts. The lower layer was the old green glass, and the upper layer was the new lead crystal glass.

One of the ingredients produced locally was potash. In 1671 John Pilmay paid for rammel (fallen twigs) from Fall Wood on the east side of the glass-house. This was burnt to ash, which helped the glass to melt at a lower temperature.



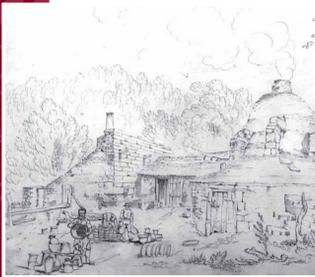
The Glassware Made at Silkstone

Fragments found in the dig included window glass, bottles, vials, wine glasses, tumblers and bowls. A blue bead was also found (when Abigail died 'blew powder' was listed amongst her possessions), and two fragments of a 'shaft and globe' bottle. Pieces of broken tobacco pipes dated one layer of the dig to between 1680 and 1730.



In 1685 John Pilmay wrote to Dr Francis Stanhope of Horsforth, about a delivery of half-pint retorts and vials. The doctor was probably distilling medications for his patients.

Abigail's daughter from her first marriage to William Scott lived at Hilltop, Silkstone Common. A walled-in leaded window was found there during alterations, perhaps made of local window glass.



Silkstone Pottery

John Scott, Abigail's son from her first marriage, made glass for a time but then demolished the glass-works and built a pottery kiln.

A hundred years later JC Nattes, tutor to children at Cannon Hall, drew the pottery with its wares on display along with the mill which had been a part of Abigail's inheritance. In the restaurant you can still see the groove worn by the turning waterwheel in the mill wall.

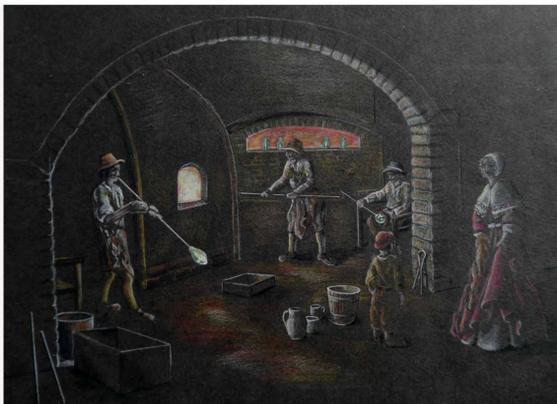
John and Hannah Taylor were potters here. The pottery owned pews in the church, and their names appear in lists and plans of pew owners from before 1792 and 1825, showing that the pottery had 4 pews next to the screen. In 1820 they sold two chamber pots and a chimney pot to the church. Both John and Hannah died in 1815.

A flagon from Silkstone Pottery may be seen in the Victoria Jubilee Museum in Cawthorne.

Finds from the 2002 dig and an earlier dig of the old Vicarage site are in the care of Experience Barnsley Museum.



Glassworkers at work, with Abigail and son John looking on. They are gathering molten glass from the crucible through the 'gathering hole' and working with blowing irons.



Look in the Mining Cabinet: can you find something mentioned in this banner?

project supported by:

