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A FAMILY BUSINESS

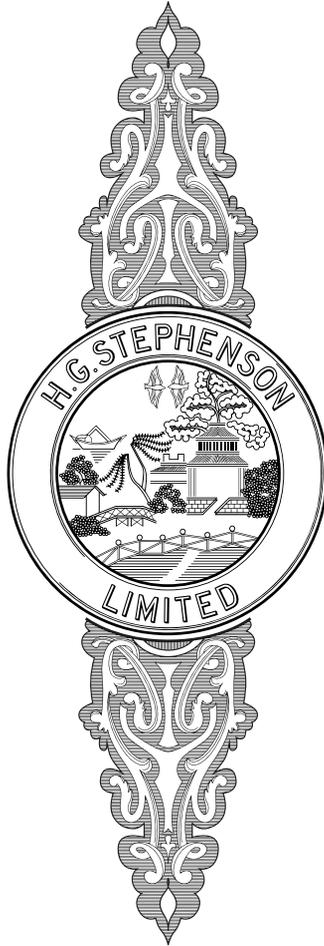
# STEPHENSON'S

Supporting The Catering Trade Since 1868



Celebrating 150 Years of  
Supporting the Catering Trade

Sue Bailey



## **Thank You**

With grateful thanks to all our customers for making this achievement possible.

*Michael. Stephen .*

Michael Stephenson, Chairman

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Thank You

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## Foreword

**M**y own career in the world of Glass and China supply to the UK hospitality industry started in 1960. One important customer that I was initially made aware of was H. G. Stephenson. It was at a Blackpool trade exhibition in 1963 that I was first introduced to Harold Stephenson and his son Robert Michael – known affectionately today as “Mr Michael”. Over the years a friendship outside the supplier/customer environment grew and a trust and admiration for our respective businesses and families was firmly established.

Whenever we met we would discuss the challenges that faced our companies as well as enjoying some memorable social occasions. The trade organisation that existed during that period known as the TDA was a great communication bridge between distributors and suppliers and was a catalyst to some lasting friendships outside business. I regret that such a bridge no longer exists, or is seen as relevant in today’s business world.

It was some 30 years after that 1963 introduction that “Mr Michael” invited me to serve as a non-executive director of H. G. Stephenson Ltd. I readily accepted this new chapter of experience in my working life with enthusiasm and humility and went on to be officially registered as a director of H. G. Stephenson Ltd on the 8th March 1993.

This means that the 150th anniversary of Stephenson’s actually coincides with my 25th year of service. And, over these past 25 years of involvement, I have learnt a great deal.

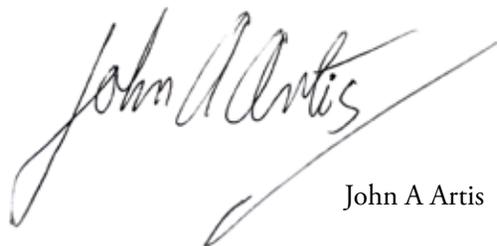
The most important aspect being the absolute commitment it takes to steer a family business where several family members are involved on a daily basis — all with distinctive perspectives! I've also often seen compassionate measures of support being given to the loyal and hardworking members of the Stephenson's team, which is something that you too rarely see in business today.

Twice I've witnessed the handover of the ultimate responsibility for the health of Stephenson's. The first from "Mr Harold" to "Mr Michael" and secondly from "Mr Michael" to Henry. Yes, that is another cultural change I have seen develop. If you had referred to "Mr Harold" as Harold you would have been in trouble! Less so in "Mr Michael's" period of ultimate responsibility. I think today if one referred to Henry as "Mr Henry" he would probably just be puzzled by the title. Progress? No, just an example of change in the continually developing culture within the company that ensures it stays in touch with the mood of the period.

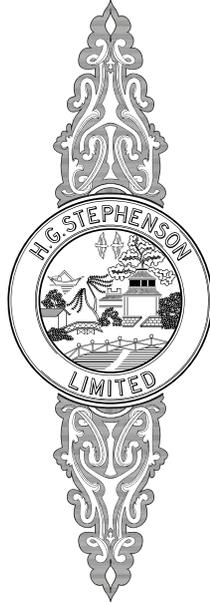
Fittingly, change and development are features that define this story in front of you. It begins with a courageous young man brought up in the famous potteries town of Hanley, who had a determination to turn his passion for pottery into a career for life. It is certain that Henry George in the early days of trading, from the Flat Iron Market in Salford, could not have envisaged that 150 years later descendants of his family would be running an altered and modern business carrying the family name. It serves as a reminder that the inherited determination to succeed is as alive and active in the current generation as it was in the founding Father.

Throughout the book, descriptions of the 'roughish' and dishonest behaviour of family members and trusted employees who betrayed the family's faith are both shocking and riveting. Particularly when contrasted with the accounts of loyalty and resolve that have continued through the generations to make Stephenson's the successful business that it is today. I suppose in their own way, all of these documented events (bad or good) have helped Stephenson's grow.

It has been an absolute privilege to have been part of the story of Stephenson's for a sixth of its life and I hope to continue my 'five pennies worth' of input beyond its 150th year. A big 'Thank You' to all who I have had the opportunity to cooperate with over the 55 years that the Artis family and company has been working with the Stephenson family and company.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John A Artis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

John A Artis



## Introduction

**T**he china and glassware business that came to be known as H.G. Stephenson Limited was started by Henry George Stephenson in Manchester in 1868. Today, 150 years later, the Managing Director of the company is Henry George's great great grandson, also named Henry. Now based in Stockport, Stephenson's is one of the few businesses that can claim five generations of family involvement.

The story of the company's one and half centuries of trading is also the story of a family living through the major events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including two world wars and four recessions. During the company's existence the British social, political and geographical landscape has undergone immense change. When Henry began to sell glass and chinaware, Queen Victoria was on the throne and William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli were alternating in the role of Prime Minister. Since then there have been a further five monarchs and twenty-four prime ministers. The company has witnessed and endured some major technological advancements, with the introduction of electricity and motor vehicles on the one hand and computers and the internet on the other.

This account of the history of the Stephenson family and their business begins in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with Henry George Stephenson's origins and early years.

It moves on to Henry's children (all eleven of them) and looks at where the family lived and how the children grew up. This information was derived partly from online genealogical archives and partly from family stories that have been carried down through the generations.

There is a precious set of three ledgers in which the minutes of every one of the Board Meetings held between 1900 and 1998 have been recorded by hand. These form the foundations of the story as it moves into and through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Alongside the three ledgers are numerous letters, legal documents, company papers, bank books, catalogues, leaflets, photographs and newspaper cuttings all kept by Michael Stephenson in his various drawers, cupboards and two rather large safes. For the author of this book, as it would have been for any lover of history, going through all the material, with Michael revealing one piece after another, was rather like having one birthday after another.

Oral history has played a very important part in putting together a picture of the company and its employees in the later years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Jim Milnes, now aged 89 can take us back to 1954, when he was taken on as a cashier. Michael Stephenson formally joined the company in 1963, but, as a child, had spent part of his school holidays at Barton Arcade and so can paint a picture of what it was like then, as well as later. And it must be said that Michael's ability to remember the past in such remarkable detail has played a very large part in assembling this history. There are Derek Rhodes and Eileen Walsh who talk about the 1970's and the early days of working at Kennerley Works, the original name for Stephenson's Stockport site. Mary Stephenson, too, Michael's wife, has many entertaining and interesting anecdotes to tell of her days with the company from the 1980's onwards. And there are many more who have been generous with their memories of the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The book ends, quite fittingly, with the voices of the present. A selection of the employees drawn from across the whole spectrum of the company's departments and operations tell us what it is they like about working for the company today. It's an ending that doesn't dwell on the company's historic past, but instead focuses on the people who will help build the future.



*Henry George Stephenson, c. 1880*



## Henry George Stephenson's Early Years

### Henry's Start in Life

There were two influences on Henry George Stephenson's early life that may provide the key to his success as a businessman. The first was his place of birth, Lamb Street in Hanley, and the second was the fact that his mother became a financially independent woman in a time of patriarchy. It would seem that the will to succeed was a seed sown from the start.

Hanley was a market town in the very heart of the Staffordshire Potteries, and Lamb Street was at the very centre of Hanley, only a minute's walk away from the High Street and Market Square. A description of the town written in 1851 states:

*"The houses have a neat appearance and some of them are spacious and elegant, there being here many of the most wealthy and extensive china and earthenware manufacturers in the Potteries, and in the suburbs are several coal and iron works."*

Born in 1847, Henry would have seen first hand the prosperity that the pottery industry could generate for those involved in it, as well as being able to observe the commercial trade that was taking place in the town's market and shops.



*Looking down towards Lamb Street from Market Square, Hanley c. 1900*

Henry's mother Naomi Bull married Peter Stephenson in Manchester in 1841. She was born in Sleaford, Lincolnshire and Peter in Whittingham, Northumberland where the Stephenson's had farmed for many generations. Peter was a draper by trade and Naomi a dressmaker. How the two came to meet, or why they decided to settle in Hanley after their marriage isn't known. Irrespective, the marriage ended in divorce when Henry was just 10 years old. In February 1858, the Staffordshire Advertiser reported:

*“Peter Stephenson, formerly a draper, applied to the magistrates to rescind the order which three weeks previously they had made, granting his wife protection for her earnings, under the New Divorce Act. The bench heard the man's statement, and decided that there was no ground for the application.”*

The earnings Naomi was protecting came from her thriving millinery and dressmaking business — she was employing one assistant and ten apprentices, as well as a domestic servant. It's fair to say that seeing his mother successfully manage a business would have left quite the impression on the young Henry.

## Henry is Orphaned

Henry's mother died in 1866, aged 46 after his estranged father had passed 3 years earlier. Thus Henry and his sister became orphans at the ages of 18 and 12 respectively. His mother's probate entry recorded that Mary Holt of Sleaford in Lincolnshire (Naomi's place of birth) was guardian to the children, who were both still minors. Mary was 79 at the time and there is no evidence that either of the two children actually went to live with her in Lincolnshire.



*Salford's Flat Iron Market as depicted by R. R. Berry, 1894*

## Henry's Start in Business

Family history tells us that Henry began his business as a china dealer on Salford's Flat Iron Market. His arch-rival and competitor was a man named Thomas Hayward, who had an adjacent stall selling a similar range of products. In those days, both men were reliant on one supplier in Stoke on Trent and weekly made a pilgrimage by horse and cart to collect their wares — Henry supplied by Wood & Sons, Hayward supplied by Maddocks. There was considerable rivalry between the two vendors and the first one to set up stall with his wares commanded the best pitch and a better price from the general public.

## **Barton Arcade Beckons**

Henry's early days of trading must have been profitable, for, although only in his early 20's, he had already built up sufficient capital and confidence to make the move from being a market trader in Salford to a shopkeeper in the centre of Manchester. By 1868, Henry was contemplating taking up a lease on premises in Barton Arcade on Deansgate, Manchester, and in doing so was, reputedly, Mr Barton's first tenant.

Manchester was a very prosperous city by the 1870's, the cotton trade having brought it immense wealth. Merchants, dealers and manufacturers, made rich from the Industrial Revolution, were eager to furnish their homes in a manner that reflected their wealth and status. This opulent outfitting would include the purchase of china and glassware. Henry didn't focus all of his attention on the wealthy though. He clearly understood that catering to the tastes and purses of all strata of the late 19th century social classes was a wise strategy to build his business. In an 1887 advert he stated:

*"Our stock of Glass is well assorted, and contains some of the least as well as some of the finest and most elaborate that are made".*

Henry was purchasing from a number of independent traders, some of whom today have gone on to become famous names in the industry. Amongst these early suppliers were Doulton, Wedgwood, Aynsley, Woods, Maddocks, Royal Crown Derby, Royal Worcester, Webb Corbett and Thomas Webb. Goods were supplied sale or return, cash was paid by manufacturers for the best display windows, gifts were bestowed upon the various buyers; and so the business grew. With the advent and development of rail, goods were delivered direct from Stoke on Trent. This was a method considered to be risky, but far quicker than canal and horse drawn vehicle.

Nevertheless, in 1896 local deliveries were still carried out with a horse and cart. In an article in the 'Pottery Gazette' in 1938 an employee of fifty year's standing with Stephenson's, Mr Charles Martin recalled:

*"There were no motor deliveries in the early days. Stephenson's used to have a horse van which started out at eight o' clock in the morning and ran as far as Altrincham. At special times, such as Christmas, that van would go out loaded with as many as ninety 'calls'. On occasions it would not get back until the early hours of the morning."*



*Architect's drawing of Barton Arcade (Courtesy of Manchester City Council Archives)*



*The 'Horse Van' photographed in July 1896 on Dunham Road in Bowdon, Cheshire*

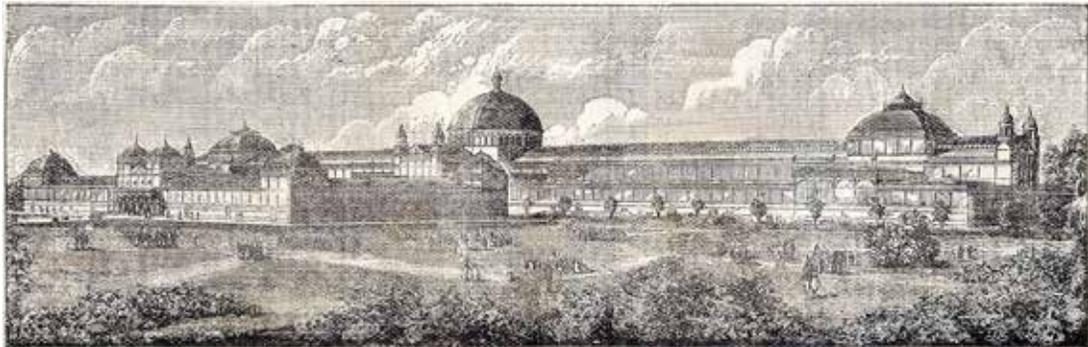
It is interesting to note that Henry didn't use his name for the business at that time, referring to it instead as 'Barton Arcade Glass and China Shops'. This is something that went back at least as far as 1884 and probably up to when the business first opened in Barton Arcade - as illustrated by this advertisement below.

**BARTON ARCADE GLASS AND CHINA SHOPS.**—Our "Moresque" Dinner Service (85 pieces) at 42s. is quite exceptional value.  
**BARTON ARCADE GLASS SHOPS.**—Our 10s. 6d. Cut-square SPIRIT DECANTER is the cheapest ever produced in cut-glass.  
**BARTON ARCADE CHINA SHOP.**—H. G. STEPHENSON, Proprietor.—Our PALMYRA DINNER SERVICE is one of the prettiest things in the trade.

*Advertisement, 1885*

### **The Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester, 1887**

A measure of Henry's confidence in his business and its growing success was that he took a stand at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition, held in the Royal Botanical Gardens, Old Trafford, Manchester in 1887. The Exhibition was not dissimilar in scope and style to the 1851 Great Exhibition held at Crystal Palace, as can be seen from the illustration of the pavilion.



*Illustration of the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition building, 1887*

A small booklet entitled 'Old and New Manchester from 1800 — 1887' was published to coincide with the Jubilee Exhibition. It contained advertisements for Stephenson's and it reveals that Henry had three shops just twenty years after initially starting his business.

BARTON ARCADE CHINA AND GLASS SHOPS,  
**DEANSGATE AND ST. ANN'S SQUARE,**  
**MANCHESTER.**

(HENRY GEORGE STEPHENSON, Proprietor.)

\*\*\*\*\*  
**NOTED AS THE MOST REASONABLE & SUCCESSFUL IN THE COUNTY.**

Visitors are respectfully requested to favour our Establishment with a call.

All Goods Packed for Travelling Free of Charge, and Carriage Paid  
 any reasonable distance.

WE CALL SPECIAL ATTENTION TO OUR

**£5 10S. GILT DINNER SERVICES**

(85 pieces), which are admitted to be the best value in the trade.  
 Also to our large and varied Stock of

**AFTERNOON TEA, AND TOILET TABLE SERVICES,**

Of which we have undoubtedly the best assortment in the kingdom.

We have also one of the largest assortments of **Dinner Services, Breakfast Services, Bedroom Services, Tea Services, and Ornamental Goods** in the county.

Our Stock of **Glass** is well assorted, and contains some of the least expensive as well as some of the finest and most elaborate that are made.

Ours is the principal depôt in Manchester for the Crown Derby China, and we propose making a fine show of these productions at the Exhibition.

All kinds of **Mirror Brackets, Mirror Screens, and Flush Frames** made on the premises at short notice.

I also call attention to my Branch Shop for Glass and Ornamental Goods in the

**GUARDIAN BUILDINGS, CROSS STREET**

(immediately opposite the Royal Exchange), which, when lit up at night by the Electric light, is said to be one of the

**PRETTIEST LITTLE SHOPS IN MANCHESTER.**

Archived photographs of the exhibition include one that gives a partial view of Henry's stand. This together with the description contained in June 1, 1887 edition of *The Pottery Gazette*, provides a good picture of the H. G. Stephenson stand and how it must have appeared to the 4.5 million people who attended the 166-day exhibition between May and October 1887.

*“Mr Henry G. Stephenson, Barton-arcade, Deansgate, and St. Ann’s-square, Manchester, makes a very effective display at Stand 282, which is nearly under the dome. The entrance is flanked by two Nubian girls in bronze, who are models of grace as they poise with their waterpots on their heads in Eastern fashion. The electric light is placed on the heads of these figures at night, giving the whole stand and district immediately near a brilliant appearance. The case of Crown Derby is an artistic treat, and other specimens of artistic ware will well repay inspection, notably the selection of Messrs. Thomas Webb and Sons, Stourbridge, Webb’s peach blossom glassware and Burmese ware. The selection of Burmese ware is simply superb.”*

— Pottery Gazette Excerpt (June 1, 1887)

To the far right of the image we can glimpse of the one of the “Nubian girls” with the water pot on her head.

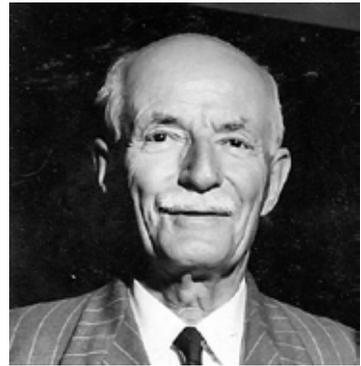


*Henry's stand No 282 at the Royal Jubilee Exhibition (Courtesy of Manchester City Council Archives)*

## Working at Stephenson's in the Late 19th Century

Mr Charles Martin has already been mentioned with reference to the horse drawn delivery van. The same article, in which he recollects his experiences of working for Henry Stephenson, evokes a picture of both his employer and the china and glass business.

He began work with Mr H. G. Stephenson in 1887 at the age of 12. At this time his commencing wage was 3s. (Shillings) 6 d. (pence) per week.



*Mr Charles Martin, c. 1938*

It was not long afterwards that his first reward came as a result of a regard for his employer's interests. One day, whilst passing through the warehouse he noticed a quantity of Wedgwood Jasperware that was dirty. On his own initiative he took it into a little room and started to wash it. The "gumnor" happened to pass that way and noticed the incident. He asked young Martin what he was doing, and who had asked him to do it. When he explained, Mr Stephenson said: "What are your wages, my boy?" When he was told they were 3s 6d. per week Mr Stephenson said: "Well, they are 5 shillings now."

One of the first real "jobs of work" that Charles experienced was to be placed in charge of the kitchenware department. Mr Martin told the writer of the article:

*"We used to have a catalogue which illustrated, among other things, how twenty pounds could be usefully expended in the kitchen ware when furnishing. And no orders in those days were sent out without a pestle and mortar."*

Later, he was entrusted with the giving out of orders to glasscutters and engravers. (The firm used to keep their own staff for carrying out special jobs of this sort.) Mr Martin remarked that he had seen one of their cutters handle the altering of a massive glass plate for a hotel window, and that he had seen the same man cut a wine glass or jug to match one of the intricate patterns of the "tip-top" Stourbridge manufacturers.

This short extract from the interview, and the other recollections from Mr Martin included in this book reflect the testing nature of work, but also the rewards for loyalty. As we'll see, Charles Martin went on to manage the Stephenson's shop in Piccadilly, showing that hard work does indeed pay off.



## Henry's Family Life

### Henry's Marriage and Growing Family

Henry married Mary Agnes Malpas from Longton, an area south of Stoke-on-Trent, in 1876 at the age of 29. Her father was described as a grocer. Mary moved to Manchester to join Henry. Between 1877 and 1895 they had 11 children:

**Harry Malpas**, 1877

**John Vincent George**, 1879 (known as 'Vincie')

**Reginald Johnstone**, 1880 (known as 'Reggie')

**Robert Edgar**, 1882 (known as 'Edgar')

**Agnes Gladys**, 1884 (known as 'Gladys')

**Ernest Adrian**, 1885

**Daisy Louise**, 1886

**Violet Naomi Blanche**, 1889 (known as 'Vi')

**Charles Geoffrey**, 1891 (known as 'Geoff')

**Madaline Mary**, 1893 (known as 'Mamie')

**Edward Lionel**, 1895 (known as 'Teddy')

After briefly living at 26 Queen Street, Cheetham Hill, Henry and Mary spent 10 years at 140, Clowes Street, Broughton, Manchester during which time they had their first six children.



*Kensington House is the building on the far right*

In 1886, they moved to Kensington House on the Promenade in Blackpool - a choice no doubt dictated by the growing trend for the upper middle classes of Manchester to take houses by the sea on the Lancashire coast to escape Manchester's infamous pungent and sulphurous fogs. Henry and Mary had three more children while living in Blackpool.



*Park Point, Broughton, Salford*

In 1893 the family moved to Park Point, Broughton in Salford, which is where the last two of Henry and Mary's eleven children were born. The house was chosen because, in its elevated position, it sat above Manchester's 'smoke line'.



*A commemorative plate, commissioned by Henry, is thought to show his first four sons at the ages of approximately 7, 5, 4 and 2, in which case it was produced in 1885*

This family photograph was taken in front of Park Point about 15 to 20 months after Teddy's birth, perhaps in 1897. It's believed that the family posed for it after attending a wedding.



*The Stephenson Family, c. 1897*



*Henry, 50*



*Mary, 46*



*Harry, 20*



*Vincie, 18*



*Reggie, 17*



*Edgar, 15*



*Agnes, 13*



*Ernest, 12*



*Daisy Louise, 11*



*Violet, 8*



*Geoff, 6*



*Mamie, 4*



*Teddy, 20 months*

*The Stephenson Family, c. 1897*

## The Children's Lives

Henry and Mary employed a governess for their children's early education, after which the boys were sent to boarding school, and the girls to day school. It's known that Teddy went to King William's College in the Isle of Man, as may have some of his older brothers. The school had its own Officers Training Corps. It's probable that Henry's eldest son, Harry, also attended King William's, and this may explain his subsequent enthusiasm for the army.

The following descriptions of the children are contained in a story that is believed to have been written by one of Vincie's children. It was kindly provided by Robert Inglis - who is now married to Vincie's granddaughter.

*"There was Harry, who became a soldier when he grew up, and commanded his Regiment. Some of the boys with nicknames were Vincy-Mephistopheles, Charley-Coalbucket and Miserable Starkey. Charley-Coalbucket also grew up to command a Regiment. Vincy-Mephistopheles was very good at games but was too fond of racehorses. Reginald disliked his own name, as did Edgar, so they were mostly called by their initials. The girls had very Victorian names – apart from Madeleine they were Violet, Daisy and Gladys.*

*Charley-Coalbucket was Teddy's nickname. Miserable Starkey is of course a character in 'Peter Pan', which had only just been written when this family were children. The nickname was given to Geoffrey because he yelled with fright when he was first taken to see 'Peter Pan.' In fact, he was never the least bit miserable. After he left school he was sent to Canada where he helped to build the railway from Toronto to Hudson's Bay. Then the First World War came and he was taken prisoner almost as soon as his Regiment landed in France. He was certainly one of the naughtiest boys in the family and taught us children to play cards for money when we were far too young. But everybody loved him."*

Michael's father, Harold, remembered Teddy with great fondness. Teddy used to give him half a crown (12 ½ pence) and ask him to go to the shop and get him one penny's worth of treacle dabs. On returning from the shop with the dabs, Teddy would tell him to keep the change.

When the census was taken in 1901, all the children were living with their parents at Park Point, except Harry (who was fighting in the Boer War in South Africa at the time) and Agnes, whose whereabouts are unknown.

1902 saw the marriages of Harry and Vincie to sisters Sarah and Agnes Donaldson, in the spring and autumn, respectively, of that year. The sisters lived in Higher Broughton and their father, John, was a wholesale fish dealer.



*Harry with his future wife, Sarah Donaldson c.1899*

### **Mary Stephenson's Death, 1903**

The celebrations and expectations as a result of the children's marriages must have been overturned by the death of Mary at the age of 49 on 1st January, 1903 at Park Point. Her death certificate records that her son Edgar was with her at the time of death, and that the causes of death were pneumonia, asthma and cardiac failure. In the two years immediately prior to her death, the number of dense fogs recorded in Manchester was 52, and exactly one year later at Christmas 1904, during four days of heavy black fog, the need for artificial light exhausted Manchester's gas supply. Although Park Point may not have suffered as badly as the city centre, it's hard to imagine that Mary's asthma was not caused or exacerbated by Manchester's atmospheric conditions.

We know more about Mary's death than we do of her life, except for the fact that she performed the remarkable feat of bringing eleven healthy children into the world. An accomplishment that is noteworthy because this was at a time when maternal mortality was still a very common threat. We are left with just the one image of her from the 1897 family photograph, and with her gravestone in the churchyard of St. Paul's, Kersal, Salford.



*Mary Stephenson's gravestone, St Paul's Church, Kersal*

## **Author's Note**

When the author and Michael Stephenson visited the graveyard in Kersal, the grave stone was much overrun with moss and undergrowth. Having removed a great deal of it with the aid of penknives, they found on the side of the base of the pedestal another inscription in the same lead lettering, recording the death of one of Henry and Mary's grandchildren. It read:

**Mary, Infant Daughter of  
Vincent and Agnes Stephenson  
Born September 12th 1906, Died October 17th 1906**

## **1911 - The Family has Grown Up**

By the time of the 1911 census, Henry had moved from Manchester to St. Anne's on Sea where he was living at 34, North Drive. With him were Reggie, 30, a land agent; Ernest, 26, a traveller/salesman for the company; Violet, 21 and Madeleine, 17.

Harry and Vincie had two and three children respectively, as well as houses in St. Annes on Sea. Edgar had married Dorothy Bury in 1907, had one daughter and was living in Kersal, Manchester. Teddy, 16, was a scholar boarding at King William's College in the Isle of Man.

Geoff, just turned 20, and describing himself a 'salesman' boarded the S.S. Megant at Liverpool in March, 1911 heading for Canada where, as we read earlier, it's said he helped to build the railway from Toronto to Hudson's Bay.

On September 28th of the same year, Reggie sailed to New York on the R.M.S Adriatic, to marry a wealthy and, reputedly, very beautiful widow, Grace Shaffer Hamilton in Boston on October 2, 1911. Grace was 15 years older than Reggie and had been born in Manchester. On the marriage certificate, she named her father as William Hamilton, leaving us to suppose that her first husband must have been a Mr Shaffer and she gave her address as Chicago. The couple returned to Britain soon afterwards.

Mary, Henry and all their children except Harry, Ernest and Violet have shared the same fate as far as the Stephenson company archives are concerned: there are no photographs of them other than the one above taken in 1897. As we move forward in time, we have a reasonably good amount of information about the lives of Henry and Mary's sons. Those of their daughters are less well documented.

This is as much as is known: Gladys married and moved to live in Vancouver; Daisy married Leslie Hampton, who salvaged sunken ships and went to live in the US and then Vancouver; Violet married a Canadian Frank Mollard, lived in Toronto and had three children, and Madeleine married an industrial engineer Carl Shephard and had three children while living in England. None of the daughters were to play any role in their father's company, although they held a certain amount of shares, and received grants from time to time.



*The R.M.S. Adriatic on which Reggie sailed to New York*

### **Stephenson's and Sons – The Family Business Begins**

In 1895, Henry's first born, Harry, aged 17 entered the family business. By 1898, he had become the assistant manager of the china, glass and 24 St. Ann's Square in Manchester and the newly opened Jewellery Department housed in next door in No. 26, both trading under the name of Stephenson's and Sons. His father had formed an agreement with Mappin & Webb, manufacturers of silverware and jewellery, for Stephenson's to become their sole agent in Manchester.

An advertisement from the same year shows the extent to which Henry had grown the business in Barton Arcade as a 'principal depot' for the best known pottery manufacturers, as well as having made the significant move of opening a wholesale department taking up the whole of the sub-basement of the Arcade - over 1,700 square yards - selling to 'hotels, clubs and public institutions'.



*The corner of St. Anns Square, c.1900. Stephenson & Sons was situated where the women are standing with their parasols (Courtesy of Manchester City Council Archives)*

**STEPHENSON'S CHINA & GLASS SHOPS.**  
**BARTON ARCADE, MANCHESTER. Telephone, 2,018.**  
 Estimates for the Supply of Crockery and Glass to Hotels,  
 Clubs, and Public Institutions.  
**SERVICES MATCHED, no matter where purchased.**

---

**STEPHENSON'S GLASS & CHINA SHOPS**  
**WHOLESALE DEPARTMENT IN SUB-BASEMENT.**  
 Our SUB-BASEMENT WAREHOUSE covers an area of  
 of over 1,700 square yards, extending underneath the whole  
 of the Arcade and a number of the Deansgate shops.

---

**STEPHENSON'S GLASS AND CHINA SHOPS.**  
**PRINCIPAL DEPOT in MANCHESTER for the**  
**COALPORT, WEDGWOOD, WORCESTER, DERBY,**  
**MINTON, and COPELAND FACTORIES.**



*Advertisement, c. 1898*

*Mappin & Webb Silverware*

Henry's second son, John Vincent George had also been taken into the business by 1899, being then aged 20 and assisting Henry with the management of the Barton Arcade shop. Ernest joined in 1900 as a clerk at the age of 15. The next strategic business move Henry was to make came as the century turned, by which time he was 53 years of age.



## Golden Years for the Business 1900 - 1914

### 1900 - Henry's Business becomes a Limited Company

When he first started his business Henry named it the 'Barton Arcade Glass and China Shops'. In 1898 he changed this to 'Stephenson's Glass and China Shops'. On the 23rd April, 1900, Henry took the step of registering his business as a limited company – it became 'H.G. Stephenson, Limited'. The Purchase Agreement between Henry George and the Company was signed and sealed with the seal still in use today, 118 years later.

One of the objectives contained in the Memorandum of Association illustrates the range of stock:

*“to carry on the businesses of manufacturers and dealers in all kinds of china, glass, stoneware, earthen ware, marble statuary, furniture, jewellery, clocks, watches, silver and gold plated goods, leather goods, drapery, books, ironmongery, cutlery, baskets, Japanese goods, bronzes and ivory and to carry on, as thought fit, the business of general storekeepers.”*

The capital of the company was £40,000 divided into 20,000 Preference Shares and 20,000 Ordinary Shares. One Ordinary Share was issued to each of the subscribers named in the document:

**Henry George Stephenson**

**Margaret Agnes Stephenson**

**Harry Malpas Stephenson**, Assistant Manager

**John Vincent Stephenson**, Assistant Manager

**Reginald Johnstone Stephenson**, Stockbroker's Clerk

**Hubert Teague**, Accountant

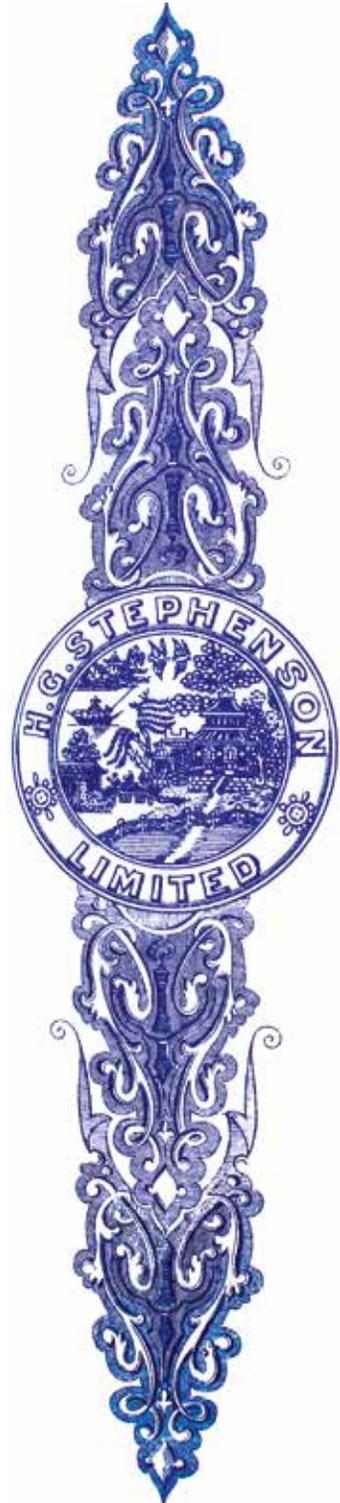
**James Hislop**, Solicitor

Later in the year, with the company fully registered, a further share allocation took place giving Henry the majority holding. Henry, Harry and Vincie were appointed directors with Henry as the Chairman of the Board of Directors. A little later in the year, Reggie joined them. This was a nominal position insofar as he was pursuing a career as a stockbroker, but he regularly attended Company Board meetings.

The first Board meeting was held on 3rd May 1900. Its proceeds, and those for the next 105 years, were recorded by hand in a series of Minute Books that have been preserved by the company and have served as an invaluable resource in compiling this account of its history.

Harry, then 22, was absent from the meeting because he was serving with the Imperial Yeomanry in the Boer War in South Africa as a voluntary recruit. He sailed for South Africa mid-April 1900 and returned 11th June 1901, leaving the battalion on 17th June, 1901. He was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal for his services.

*Right: A seal design that formed part of the original share certificates*





*The first of the Preference Share Certificates was issued to Henry and voided with a cross upon his death*



*The Company Seal, still in use to this day*

## The Business Expands

A 1902 advertisement for Stephenson's annual sale makes mention of there being great bargains in "large ornamental pieces, pedestals, flower pots, busts and statuary". In the same year Henry was promoting the business as the principal agent in Manchester for Worcester, Doulton, Coalport, Wedgwood, Copeland, Minton and Cauldon, and holding, he said, the largest stock of these goods as well as 'real Meissen china'.



*Barton Arcade shop windows facing out onto Deansgate, c. 1900*

A showroom had been set up for the Wholesale Department in the upper room of No 57 Deansgate (one of the Barton Arcade shops facing out onto Deansgate). A hydraulic lift was installed to replace the stairs from the shop to the showroom. The fascia signage on the first and second of these advertises the wholesale business supplying to hotels, cafes and clubs, railway companies and public institutions. At the time, the family claimed that every glass on the railway was supplied by Stephenson's.

Regular orders for jewellery, clocks, watches and silverware to be sold in the St Ann's Square shop were being placed with Mappin & Webb; most were on approval, some items were bought outright.



*Invoice heading, c. 1903*

## 1905 - The Opening of the Piccadilly Shop

The business continued to thrive prompting the opening of a new shop in in 1905 at No.37 Piccadilly in Manchester, immediately opposite the Manchester Infirmary on the site now known as Piccadilly Gardens. The lease for seven years cost £1100 and the annual rent was £390. The shop was opened just in time for the Christmas trade.

Mr Charles Martin, who we heard from earlier and had entered the business at 12, had an interesting, if perhaps anecdotal, story of how he came to be the manager of Henry's new venture. It was reported thus:

*“Mr Stephenson walked in one day and asked him [Mr Martin] to put on his hat and come along with him. Together, without any conversation as to what was going to happen, they went to the old tramway office in Piccadilly, Manchester – then an empty shop. On arrival there, Mr Stephenson remarked: “I am going to open this as a shop and you are going in as manager.” Apparently, however Mr Stephenson was not altogether optimistic in his own mind as to what the results were going to be, knowing, as he did, that the trade of Piccadilly was altogether different from the trade of St. Ann's Square. Asked by Mr Stephenson what he thought of the prospects, Mr Martin replied: “We shall meet our expenses here with Goss Ware alone.”*

Ultimately, Mr Martin's prediction rang true:

*“All I can say is that when Mr Goss's traveller came along in those days we never gave him an order for less than £100 worth, and I can remember on one occasion, when there was an important football cup tie re-play in Manchester on a Monday we sold £30 worth of Goss ware between 7 and 9 o' clock in the evening; and the most expensive piece was half a crown and the majority not more than a shilling.”*

Goss China was manufactured between 1881 to 1934 by William Henry Goss at the Falcon Pottery in Stoke. Better known as heraldic china, it was often bought as souvenir ware representing particular places or events. Mr Martin was clearly aware of what would appeal to customers passing the shop in Piccadilly.



*H.G. Stephenson Ltd. at No. 37 Piccadilly, Manchester, the dark building to the left of the tram, c.1907*

Mr Martin dealt with the travellers from the potteries for over forty years, and he recalled how some of these men used to pay their calls meticulously attired in frock coat and tall hat. “But those were the days when Mr Stephenson himself always wore a silk hat,” he added.

In 1909, Henry made one of his more extravagant claims in a newspaper advertisement. He declared that his new windows in Barton Arcade were ‘one of the sights of Manchester’ and there was “no such other display in the Kingdom”.

As good as things may have looked on the surface, at a meeting in June, 1910 it was brought to the directors’ attention that the company was in a position where it needed to raise working capital and lower the dividend being paid to shareholders. Nine months later, an Extraordinary meeting of the Preference Shareholders (all family members) was held at 34 North Drive, St. Annes on Sea, where Henry was now living. This meeting was to approve the issuing of debentures to the Manchester and Liverpool District Bank to cover “the existing and prospective overdraft”. No mention was made of the amount involved.

### **“A Very Heavy Stock”**

The start of 1912 saw Mappin & Webb terminate their agreement with Stephenson’s. Within six months Henry had responded by registered his own trademark of ‘Palatine Plate’ for silverware that he was commissioning direct from manufacturers in Sheffield. It’s quite possible that the name was chosen to evoke an air of authority or speciality. Alternatively, it may have been named after the Palatine Hotel, which stood in Manchester till 2016. By December an advertisement was placed for a “special show of dessert dishes in sterling silver and Palatine Plate”, guaranteed “to wear equal to solid silver for 30 years”.



*Stephenson & Sons ‘Palatine Plate’ trademark*

In the February 1912 edition of the Pottery Gazette there was an illuminating article on the Stephenson’s business. The descriptions it contains correspond exactly with photographs of the shops taken sometime during the first decade of the 20th century.

*“H. G. Stephenson Ltd., have a fine range of premises in the covered enclosure, Barton Arcade. The company have practically three or four shops in which they display a very large collection of glass and china, which comprises the very best productions of the most famous manufactories of the world, and a selection of medium class goods suited to all the requirements of the public. Stephenson's display every grade of pottery and glass ware except the commonest.”*



*Stephenson's Barton Arcade interior window displays*

*“The numerous showrooms are large, and though filled to the utmost capacity, the admirable arrangement avoids the appearance of over-crowding. Ladies who like to “look at the shops” without any immediate intention to make purchases will find plenty to interest them in the Barton Arcade. Messrs' Stephenson alone have above a dozen window displays, in which goods of particular grades are shown by themselves, so that their artistic and decorative effects are not marred by the proximity of a different class. For instance, one window contains a fine assortment of Worcester, Crown Derby, Coalport, Doulton, and wares of the same high class, and in the adjacent shop there are all descriptions of high-class useful ornamental china and pottery generally.”*

*“The company keeps a very heavy stock, the extent of which is not indicated by the samples so attractively displayed for sale. Mr Stephenson accompanied me round the greater proportion of the premises, and explained to me that large as they are, they do not afford space enough for the immense business done.”*



*Barton Arcade window display featuring two china statuettes*

*“There are several showrooms on the ground floor and on the floors above, and the wide stairways are all utilised for displaying goods. One window is stocked with rare and attractive useful lines in which dinner and tea services, toilet ware, dessert services, and tableware generally are the most conspicuous features. Other windows are filled with bric-a-brac and fancy goods generally. In one of them is a large collection of Doulton’s new Shakespearian ware. Prominence is evidently given to these and other goods just now, because of their suitability as gifts. All through their rooms the company draw attention by artistic labels to pretty things for presentation purposes.”*



*Barton Arcade window display featuring figurines*

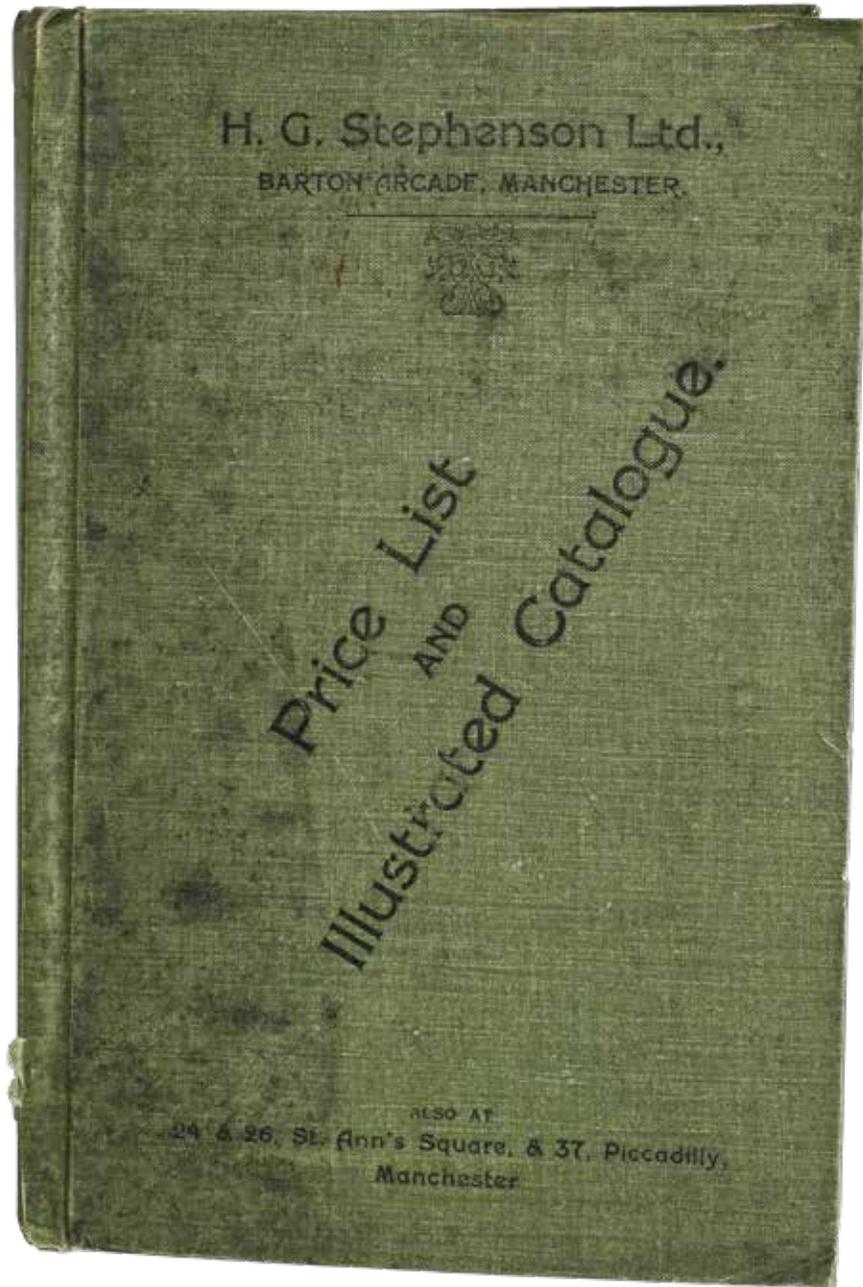
*“Having shown me the handsome showrooms, Mr Stephenson took me through the store-rooms in the basement. These even more handsome shops indicated the extensive business of the company. These rooms are not confined to the basements under their own shops, but include practically all the space under the Arcade.”*



*Barton Arcade window display of dinner services and silverware*

*“There are receiving and un-packing warehouses and packing and forwarding rooms, in addition to large stock-rooms. The company have branches at 57, Deansgate, 24 and 26, St. Ann’s-square (close to Barton Arcade), and a fine shop with an excellent window at 37, Piccadilly.”*

A set of further examples of the quality and extensive range of china being stocked comes from a catalogue held in the company's archives. It isn't dated but would appear to have been produced between 1900 and 1910.



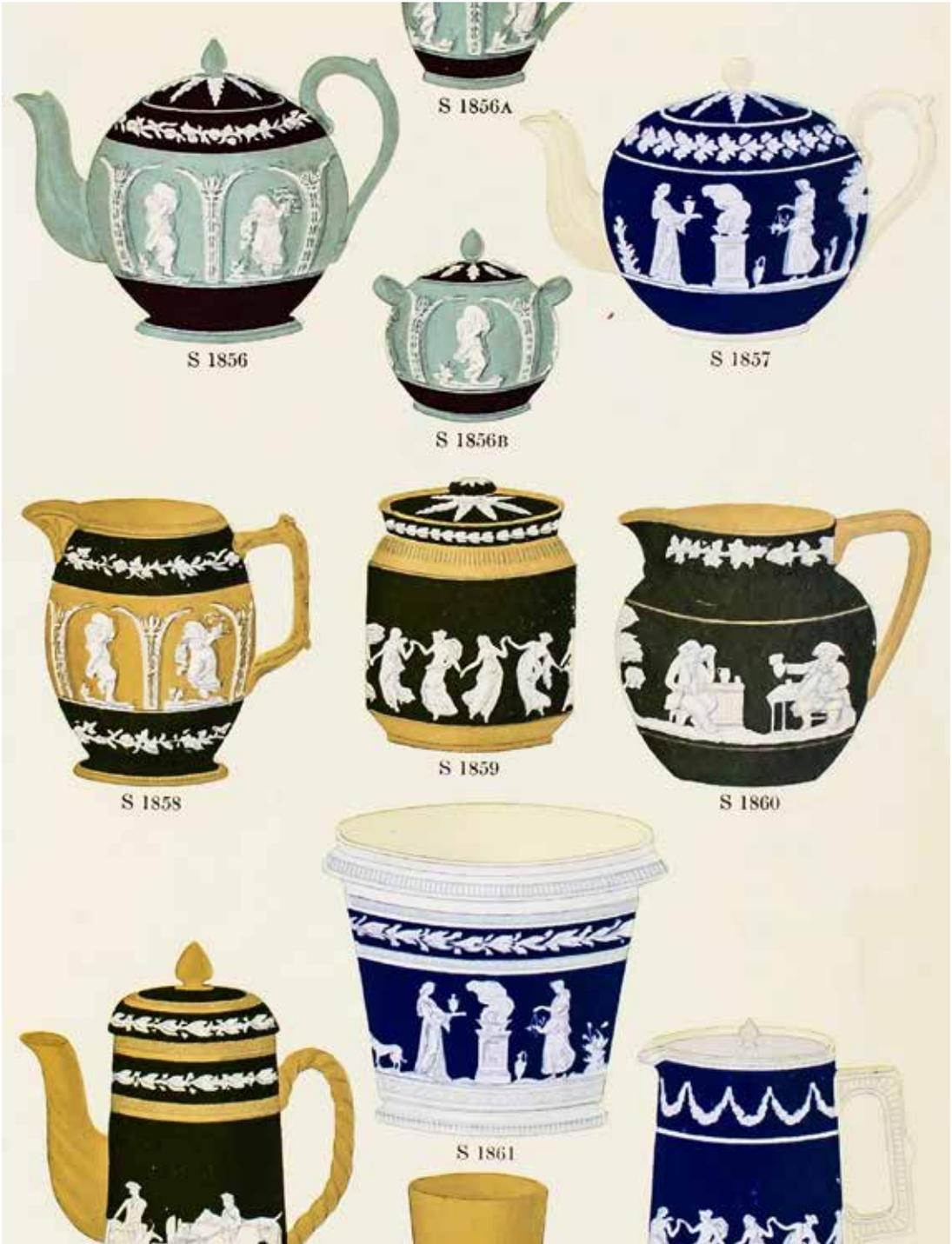
*Stephenson's Catalogue, c. 1900-1910*



*Earthenware Dinner Services. Prices ranged from 25 to 40 shillings per dozen, £100 - £160 in today's money*



*Rich China Dessert Plates; Design 9542 was 25 shillings per plate, £100 in today's money*



*Wedgwood China*



1  
6013



1  
8119



1  
8749



Louis XV. Vase.



Spode's  
967



Louis XV. Coffeepot



1  
2907

Waverley Ink



1  
2942

*Copeland Spode China, the Louis XV vase cost £3.5.0, in today's money £288*



*A selection of crests available during this period*



*Dinner Service, 102 pieces cost £17.10.0, in today's money £1,400*



*Examples of Monogrammed and Crested items*



*Examples of beautifully ornate Dinner Services*



## **The First World War & Henry's Death 1914 - 1919**

### **The Closure of the St. Ann's Square Shop**

The outbreak of the First World War in 1914 saw Harry, Reggie and Geoff leave to serve with the Armed Forces. Teddy had emigrated to Australia and joined the Armed Forces there. As a result of his brothers' absences, Ernest became a director in 1915, aged 30, serving alongside Henry and Vincie. Ernest had joined the company sometime before 1909 when he was recorded in a masonic document as a 'traveller' (a rep). The situation was not too bad initially: Henry raised his salary to £750 per annum, and a motor van was bought to replace the horses and vans. Plans were also in hand to extend the Wholesale Department at Barton Arcade.

Quite suddenly, however, in November 1914, and four months after Harry had left his post as manager, the St. Ann's Square shop was closed and its stock and fixtures and fittings sold. At the first of only two Board Meetings held in 1915, Henry called attention to the balance sheet, which showed a loss of £10,354.4, adding, "this is of course due to the forced sale of the St Ann's Square stock and fixtures". This was a very considerable loss and no explanation is forthcoming in the Minute Book as to why the sale was forced on the company.

As the war progressed, board meetings dropped in number, until there was just one in 1917, and so very little was recorded that could tell us how the business was operating. Meanwhile, Geoff had been captured as a prisoner of war and Harry and Reggie were still fighting on the Western Front.

## Harry's War

It's recorded within family history that Harry was a 'living legend' and 'a soldier at heart'. Great nephew, Michael Stephenson, recalls Harry being 'a real character with a very good sense of humour' and remembers "Uncle Harry would let me play with his wooden leg when I was a child. If you pressed it at the knee, it would kick up. I got very excited about that, it was a lot of fun."

In 1919 Harry's distinguished service during the First World War was recognised by both the British and French governments. The British awarded him the Territorial Decoration on the 30th May to mark 20 years of service. The French Government made Harry a Knight of the Legion of Honour on the 15th December.



*Harry's medals now lodged with the Museum of the Manchester Regiment, Ashton under Lyne*

Both before and after taking part in the Boer War, Harry was the manager of the St. Ann's shop, but many of his evenings and weekends had been spent as a volunteer in the 5th (Ardwick) Volunteer Battalion of the Manchester Regiment, which he joined as an Officer in 1903. He was elevated to a Lieutenant in December 1905 and then a Captain in June 1906.

Harry's battalion became the 8th (Ardwick) Battalion of the Manchester Regiment. It was called into service as soon as the war broke out in 1914. Harry was immediately promoted to Major, a commanding rank that would've made him responsible for a sub unit of around 120 soldiers. Within six weeks the battalion was sent to Egypt and then to Cyprus where Harry took part in the British annexation of the island.

In May 1915, the battalion fought in Gallipoli. Harry was wounded in the head after just 3 weeks. He was evacuated to a hospital in Malta and, a month later, sent back to the UK to complete his recovery. He re-joined his battalion in Egypt in June 1916, from where it was then sent to the Western Front in France.

Harry led the 11th Battalion of the Manchester Regiment in the Passchendaele offensive in Belgium, 1917. It was in the Battle of Broodseinde, that Harry sustained a serious injury to his leg, forcing doctors to amputate it. He returned to England in January 1918 and retired from the army in 1919.

## **Henry's Death**

The first intimation of Henry's deteriorating health was his inability to attend a Board Meeting in December 1918. It was recorded that the Directors regretted that, owing to causes beyond their control, the accounts and balance sheet were not completed. The meeting was adjourned.

Unusually, the next meeting, three days later, was held at the family home – Arncliffe on Waterpark Road in Broughton – at which it was recorded that Vincie was instructed to make arrangements to have the bankers withdraw the debentures held by them against the overdraft, with the overdraft having been paid off. In fact, Henry was by this time probably very ill as he was suffering from stomach cancer. It's possible that, knowing his days were few, he used his own capital to pay off the overdraft in order to pass the business on debt-free to his sons.

On the 12th December, the Annual General Meeting was cancelled since "it had been found impossible, owing to reduced staff thro' sickness and military service, to prepare the report and balance sheet". Vincie and Geoff were on their own. The 1918 flu pandemic was raging, their brothers were at war and their father was dying.

It was on the 4th February 1919 that Henry died at his home at the age of 71 with Vincie present. His funeral was held three days later at the Manchester Crematorium. He was buried in the same grave as Mary at St Paul's Church, Kersal, with his inscription being added below hers. His estate was worth £15,843. 4s. 7d.



*Henry and Mary's gravestone, St. Paul's Church, Kersal*



## **Vincie and Geoff Get Into Trouble 1920 - 1930**

### **The Brothers are Reunited**

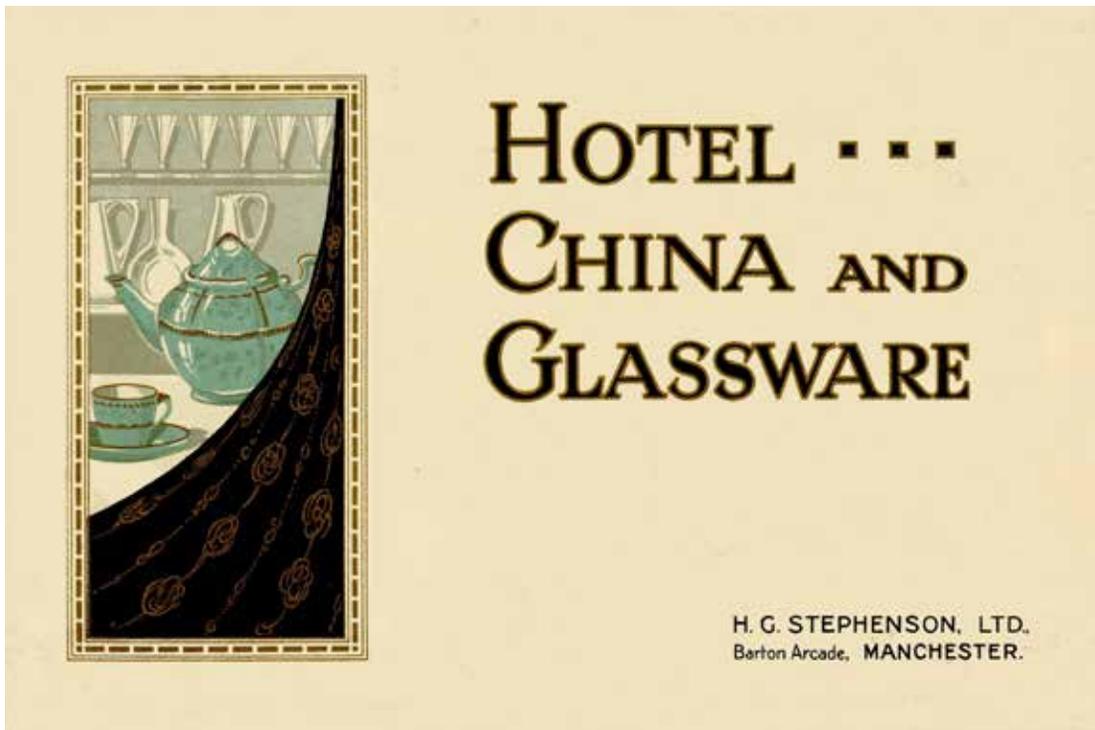
No doubt divided by their personal experiences of the war, but united by their father's death, the brothers had to come together to decide how the business was to be run in the future. Harry became the new Chairman of the Board (but he retired from active involvement in running the day-to-day business and took up a farm in Cheshire). Vincie was appointed the Managing Director, effectively taking Henry's place. Ernest was confirmed as Manager of the Wholesale Department and Geoff was elected as a Director. All seemed well.

It may have been, and very probably was, known that Vincie had a gambling habit (related to horse racing), one that his brothers possibly suspected was being subsidised by the company. Certainly they ensured that a new regime was introduced for how the Managing Director (Vincie) would be accountable to the Board. Meetings were to be held once a month and at these Vincie would report and show the books for all amounts of sales, invoices, goods paid for and expenses for the previous month, and report any actions he had taken outside the usual routine business. Any proposals for alterations and improvements involving an expenditure exceeding £50 were to be sanctioned by the Directors before being proceeded with.

## Back to Business

An advertisement placed in the Manchester Guardian on 5th December, 1919 invited the public to view Stephenson's "Window Exhibit, the most extensive display of the kind in the United Kingdom". Amongst the items on offer were Dinner Services from £3 up to £250 and Suites of Glass from £5 up to £200. Today this would be £110 up to £10,000, and £180 up to £8,000. It suggests that, for some, the war had not reduced their wealth.

Meanwhile, Ernest spotted the opportunity to expand the wholesale trade by selling not only to hotels but also to the brewery and catering industries. Optimism about the future led to the directors considering taking on a showroom in London, and a catalogue was produced for the Wholesale Department.



*Catalogue produced by the Wholesale Department, c.1920*

H. G. STEPHENSON, LTD.      BARTON ARCADE      MANCHESTER.      Page 1

**KINGSLEY PATTERN**

SAFETY SHAPE LIDS.  
Interchangeable.

MADE IN ALL  
SIZES

WORCESTER SHAPE.

Specialists in the Manufacture of Crockery and Glass for use in Hotels, etc., etc.

*Wholesale China, c.1920*

H. G. STEPHENSON, LTD.      BARTON ARCADE      MANCHESTER.      Page 11

ETCHED CIRCLE SUITE      ETCHED KEY SUITE

Specialists in China and Glass for Hotels Restaurants, Clubs, etc.

*Wholesale Glassware, c.1920*

H. G. STEPHENSON, LTD.      BARTON ARCADE      MANCHESTER. Page 13

Specialists in China and Glass for Hotels, Restaurants, Clubs, etc.

*Wholesale Glassware, c.1920*

H. G. STEPHENSON, LTD.      BARTON ARCADE      MANCHESTER. Page 14

BARTON LITHO

HORS D'OEUVRE OR BUTTER DISH

AUDLEY SHAPE

MADE IN ALL SIZES.

SAFETY SHAPE LIDS  
Interchangeable.

Specialists in the Manufacture of Crockery and Glass for use in Hotels, etc., etc.

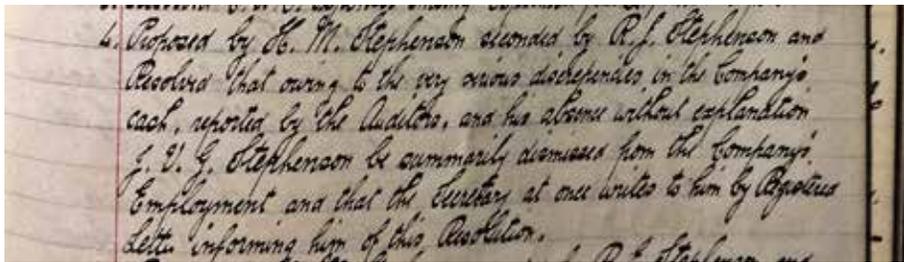
*Wholesale China c.1920*

## The Problem with Vincie

Vincie might have thought continuing to use company funds to pay off his gambling debts would go unnoticed. This wasn't the case, with the first indication that his brothers were 'on to him' coming in September, 1920 when it was noted in a Board meeting that:

*“the matter of withdrawals of the Managing Director was before the Board and it was decided that the amount overdrawn should be considered as a temporary loan.”*

This didn't hold Vincie back and he continued to recklessly embezzle funds. At the Board Meeting held on 14th September 1922, Vincie was finally dismissed by his brothers:



*“It was resolved that owing to the very serious discrepancy in the Company's cash, reported by the Auditors, and his absence without explanation, John Vincent be summarily dismissed from the Company's Employment and that the Secretary at once write to him by Registered Letter informing him of this Resolution.”*

One month later the Board heard the details of what was described in the minutes as John Vincent Stephenson's 'defalcations' (another term for embezzlement). In total he had taken £5,230 (around £180,000 today) from the company without its authorisation.

Vincie took the shrewd precaution of removing himself from the scene of the crime by boarding, alone, the White Star Dominion steamship 'Regina' bound for Montreal on 22nd October. He returned on the same ship in February 1923, though from New York and not Montreal.

The directors decided to award Agnes, Vincie's wife, a grant of £6 a week, reduced soon afterwards to £4. Vincie's two life insurance policies were assigned to the company. A census record from 1939 shows that Vincie and Agnes were living in Twickenham and that he had set up his own business as a china and glass dealer.

In 1949 Vincie made it known to Ernest that he was in difficult financial circumstances. The minute book records “it was agreed with the Co-Directors that in view of his association and service with the company an ex-gratia payment of £120 be made to him annually, payable by monthly payments”. Vincie died in Middlesex in 1970, aged 91, upon which one of the life insurance policies taken out on his life in 1922 was redeemed in favour of H.G Stephenson’s Ltd.



*The SS Regina on which Vincie travelled to Canada in 1922*

### **Ernest and Geoff take the reins**

In the aftermath of Vincie’s departure, Ernest was appointed as the Managing Director to the company and, within 12 months, Geoff, aged 32, was appointed the Assistant Manager of the Retail Department. The start of the following year saw Harry, Edgar, Reggie and Ernest as the directors of the company. They resolved that no further directors’ private financial undertakings were to be mixed with company business.

In the months that followed, telephones were installed in the Piccadilly and Arcade shops. A new outside showcase was commissioned for the Arcade; a Show Room was taken at Hatton Gardens at £11 rent per week and Ernest bought a second hand Ford Sedan for £90. Another commercial traveller was taken on and a new case window was fixed at the entrance to Barton Square at the cost of about £200.

## A Venture in Blackpool

In an interesting expansion move for Stephenson's, the seaside resort of Blackpool was selected as a prime location for a new store. The Board approved a proposal from Ernest to rent a small shop in Blackpool, for £100 per annum for one year, extendable for a further two on the same terms. The alterations and decorations were organised and shop was set up at 12 Adelaide Place in 1924. The Blackpool Glass and China Stores Limited, as it was called, was on a site very close to both the Blackpool Tower and the Promenade, guaranteeing a lively trade from visiting holidaymakers. There is no record as to how long the shop was kept open but it was definitely no more than 10 years as there is no listing for it in a 1934 Blackpool Street Directory.



*Blackpool Promenade, c. 1898*

## **Stephenson's make way for the BBC**

At the same time as this new venture was getting underway, the company received an offer of £1,000 to terminate its lease on the Piccadilly shop in 1926 from the owners of the premises, the Manchester and County Bank. The offer was accepted and the shop closed in March 1926.

The reason for the bank's desire to reclaim its premises was that the newly formed BBC wished to situate one of its local radio broadcasting stations in the building. Radio signals could only be broadcast over relatively short distances and by using a network of local stations, based in the larger towns and cities, a wider coverage could be achieved. Ultimately these stations were merged to become the BBC's Home Service.



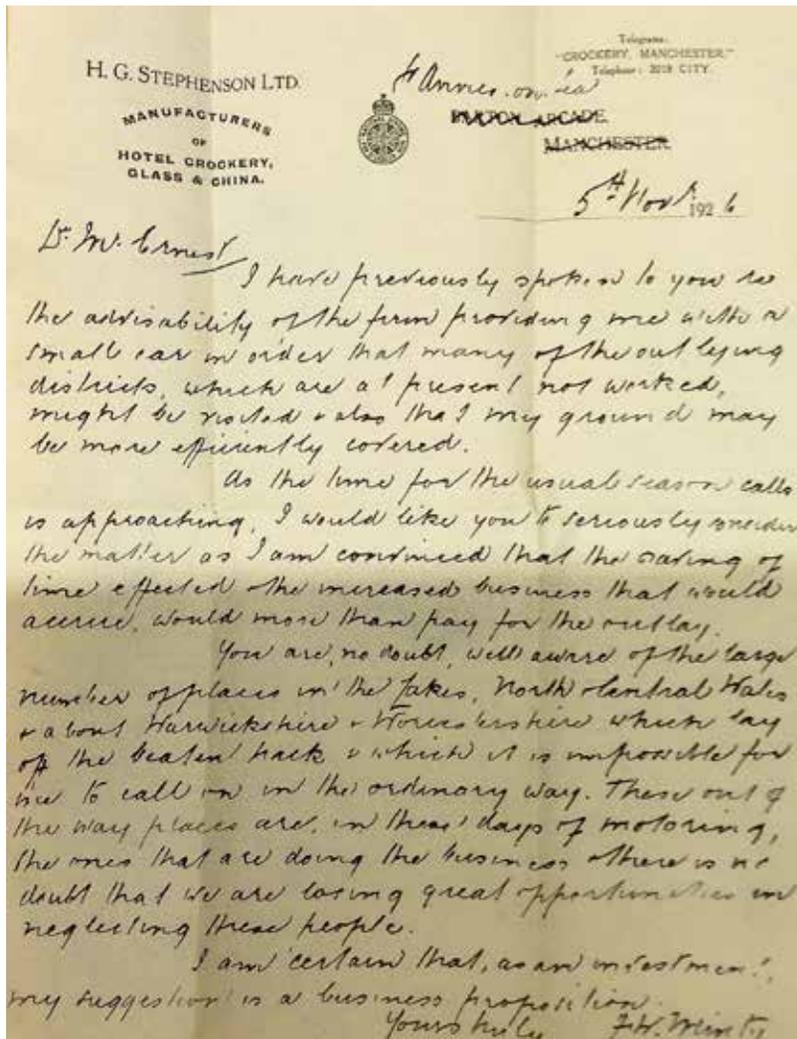
*The Control Room at the BBC's broadcasting station at 37 Piccadilly, c. 1935*

## **The 1926 General Strike**

At the company's Annual General Meeting in 1926, Chairman Harry commented on the bad state of trade and labour unrest that was responsible for the reduced profits of the company but said that he had great hopes for an early improvement. He was referring to the eight-day general strike brought about by the miners' rejection of their wages being lowered and their working day lengthened. Railwaymen, transport workers, printers, dockers, ironworkers and steelworkers came out in support.

In response to the strike, a “militia” of special constables called the Organisation for the Maintenance of Supplies (OMS) was put in place by the government. It comprised volunteers, mainly of the middle classes, to maintain order in the street. Harry Stephenson was a member of the OMS and the truncheon he was issued remains in the Stephenson archive today.

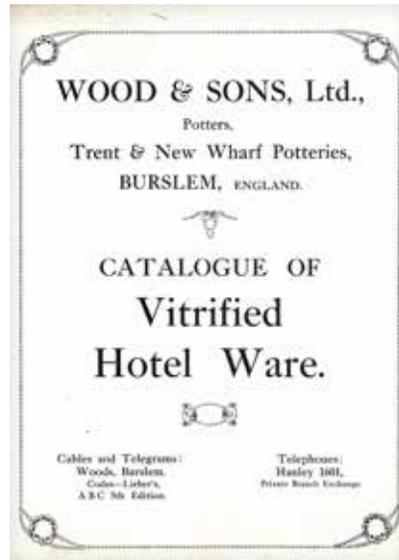
Perhaps, seeing that trading was difficult, a salesman, Mr Minty, wrote to Ernest in November, 1926 suggesting that, were he to be provided with a small car, he would be able to bring in business from the large number of places “off the beaten track” in areas such as the Lakes, North and Central Wales, Warwickshire and Worcestershire. It’s not known if his request was granted.



Mr Minty's letter to Ernest

## A Lasting Partnership

Wood and Sons was established in 1865 in Burslem. One of their earliest customers was Henry Stephenson. The two companies maintained a close relationship for well over a century. A Wood & Sons catalogue held in the company's archives appears to date from the 1920's. It provides an interesting illustration of the service it offered in badged hotel ware. The two companies continued to do business until the official closure of Wood & Sons in 2005.



*Wood & Sons Catalogue Title Page*

- ¶ Durability and economy in regard to Crockery are synonymous terms. Where it is in constant hard use with quick service in Hotels and Restaurants, immunity from breakage is essential.
- ¶ Our Vitrified Hotel Ware fulfils these requirements. The body is fired to vitrification at a high temperature, and is then coated with an equally durable and resistant glaze, which is, nevertheless, extremely brilliant and receptive of any form of decoration.
- ¶ Our decorations are numerous, varied, and in good taste, and are entirely executed under the glaze.
- ¶ We recognize the necessity of prompt and exact matching, and we devote special attention to Badged Ware.
- ¶ To test the justice of our claims for durability, it is an interesting experiment to take in one hand one of our Vitrified Hotel Plates and in the other hand a similar plate of another make. Strike the edges together forcibly at right angles and note the results.

*Text describing the benefits of Wood's Hotel Ware*

WOOD & SONS, Ltd., Trent & New Wharf Potteries, BURSLEM, England.

EXAMPLES OF ENGRAVED BADGES.



VITRIFIED HOTEL WARE.

Examples of badging demonstrate the diversity of organisations purchasing Staffordshire pottery, c.1920-1930

WOOD & SONS, Ltd., Trent & New Wharf Potteries, BURSLEM, England.

EXAMPLES OF ENGRAVED BADGES.



VITRIFIED HOTEL WARE.

Examples here include a bank, hotels, the Metropolitan Police and a ferry company, c. 1920-1930

## The Problem with Geoff

The real and looming problem for the company wasn't immediately apparent in 1926, nor was it a consequence of the general strike or the national economic downturn. It was to take three years before it came to a head and it was Harry who saw it coming.

The problem was Geoff.

Between 1927 and 1930, Harry, as Chairman, made it clear to the Board (i.e. his brothers) that he was increasingly concerned that Geoff was overspending on stock in the shops. Despite, or perhaps because of this, Ernest and Geoff were appointed as independent managers of their own departments in 1927, possibly making it easier to monitor Geoff's excesses.

At the end of 1928 Harry demanded that either he was given full control of the business, or he would step down. His brothers were not prepared to agree to this and Reggie took over as Chairman. Harry remained as a director and continued to express his worries.

By June 1930, the situation was serious. Preliminary conversations took place between Harry and Lawley's Ltd with a view to an amalgamation. Two months later the Board agreed that Ernest should take over full control of the Company's business (it's worth noting that Geoff was present at the meeting).

The crunch came nine days later at a Board meeting on 27th Sept 1930, when his four brothers, via a resolution that was tabled and seconded, informed Geoff of his dismissal. It stated that:

*“Charles Geoffrey Stephenson ceases forthwith to be a Director of the Company and that his agreement with the Company as Managing Director is hereby terminated under the clauses and conditions of the Agreement and that his services with the company are dispensed with.”*

£5,000 was transferred to a 'Special Stock Depreciation Suspense Account'. This was the amount that Geoff had either overspent by or had misappropriated.

222nd. Board Meeting.  
 Held 27th September 1930 at the Registrar's Office of the Company.  
 Present :- R. J. Stephenson (in the Chair).  
 H. M. Stephenson, E. R. Stephenson, G. G. Stephenson and R. S. Stephenson.  
 1. Resolved that G. G. Stephenson ceases forthwith to be a Director of the Company and that his Agreement with the Company as a Managing Director is hereby terminated under the clauses and conditions of the Agreement and that his services with the Company are dispensed with.

*Geoff's dismissal, 1930*

The story that has been carried down through the family is that Vincie's embezzlement, discovered in 1922, took the form of hiding invoices received from the company's suppliers behind a picture frame in his office and paying the amounts due to them into his own account. They were found years later. It's actually entirely possible that it was Geoff who was responsible for the hidden stash of cheques. Either way, he took just the same action as his older brother had done eight years previously. He sailed to Canada — a country he had already visited. Unlike Vincie though, he remained there for the rest of his life, working as a salesman in Montreal. He died in 1961. It's known that Vincent and Reggie kept in touch with him.

### **H.G. Stephenson's Stock in Trade**

Geoff might have been forgiven for wanting to overstock the shops when one sees just a small selection of the beautiful china that the company was commissioning and selling. This came mainly from the Staffordshire Potteries but also from Limoges in France. Over the years, the Stephensons were not overly sentimental about their stock and very few pieces were kept. Those that are now held in the company's archive have been bought back over recent years from sales, auctions and online retailers. They are shown on the following pages.



*A Stephenson's hand decorated gilded milk jug*



*A Stephenson's hand decorated gilded tea set*



*Limoges dish and tea set - a very popular line in the 1920's*



*Limoges tea pot and accompanying H.G. Stephenson stamp*



MADE FOR  
M.G. STEPHENSON LTD  
MANCHESTER  
REGISTRATION  
APPLIED FOR  
ESTD 1774  
CAULDON CHINA  
ENGLAND



*Cauldon hand tinted china cup and saucer*



*Wedgwood Dinner Set*



## The 1930's

### A Difficult Start to the Decade

The trading conditions facing Stephenson's directly following Geoff's departure were not good. The Depression had taken hold and unemployment was high. As a consequence, spending on household goods had severely reduced. To help ease the company's financial position, Lucy Annie Bury, Edgar's mother-in-law stepped forward and provided a loan.

At this time, Mr George Neville Crossland was employed as Manager of the Retail Department under the direction of Ernest and the Board of Directors. Within two weeks he was elected as a Director of the Company. He had by this time reached an agreement with Liberty & Co. Ltd for Stephenson's to become its Manchester agents. The haste with which these new arrangements were made would seem to indicate that the four brothers had been exploring options for the future of the company for some time, in the knowledge that Geoff's days were numbered.

Ernest and Mr Crossland became joint co-directors. They reorganised certain sections of the company's business and staff were approved. The Deansgate shop was fitted out for the opening of the new Liberty shop in Feb 1931. The Liberty Department was extended in 1932 by taking in the Wholesale Showroom.

Gradually, the company was reshaping its business. The government's decision in September 1931 to leave the gold standard allowed it to cut interest rates and target higher inflation. By 1933 interest rates had fallen from 9% in 1931 to 0.6%. In the same period the pound was devalued by 28%, which boosted both UK exports and domestic demand. The worst was over.

In the same year, an additional room in the Arcade adjoining the new showroom was taken on. Windows previously belonging to another business were rented for display purposes. A Morris 10 was bought for Wholesale Department travellers for £135 and a new Ford delivery van for £225. Stephenson's became the agency for selling goods produced by the Parker Pen Co. Ltd. and £500 was set off against Charles Geoffrey's debt account.

### **The Third Generation Enters**

Reggie, now aged 53 tendered his resignation as Chairman in 1933 because he was reducing his business commitments. He continued as a director. Edgar became the new Chairman and remained Secretary to the Board. Ernest was now 48. With the increasing ages of the directors, there was evidently a need to bring the next generation into the business. Remarkably, of Henry's seven sons, only one had a son that was eligible.

Harry's son, Kenneth, was an accountant who had moved to Shanghai in 1923. He married and settled there, possibly moving to the United States in 1933 after the Japanese invasion of Manchuria. Vincie and his children were out of the picture as was Geoff and his offspring. Reggie had no children and Ernest had one daughter but no sons. Teddy was in Australia with his children. Only Edgar had a son who was available to join the company.

This was Harold, born in 1916. He joined the company in 1933, then aged 17 years. On reaching 21 years of age, 350 shares were transferred to him by his father, a precursor and prerequisite to becoming a Director. Harry married Dorothy Harrison from Macclesfield, Cheshire in 1938 seemingly secure as the only family member in place to be Ernest's successor.

In 1936, Ernest wrote to his customers in the Isle of Man to inform them that his representative, Mr Maskell, would be 'showing' at the Hotel Sefton, in Douglas. He principally drew their attention to samples of "ARMA" real toughened tumblers and hotel china.

"ARMA" was first registered as a trade name in 1925 for china and a year later for glassware. Since then it has been re-registered several times and is still actually in use today, though now primarily for Stephenson's branded cleaning products.



*Harold posing with 1930's celebrity, Jean Colin, as she examines a china tea set*

### **And Then There Were Two**

Both Harry and Reggie resigned from their positions as directors at the end of 1938 leaving Edgar, Ernest and Mr Crossland as the remaining directors. At the start of 1939, the financial position of the company was discussed, particularly regarding the decreased turnover in the Retail Departments. It was decided to close down the Liberty retail section. Subject to Mr Crossland obtaining the Liberty Agency for himself, it was unanimously agreed that his contract with the company be terminated by mutual consent, which it was, in May 1939. Mr Crossland was thanked for his services and he was wished every success for the future.

This left just two directors – Edgar (aged 57) and Ernest (aged 54) – present at the 321st Board Meeting in the August of 1939. They resolved that Harold Stephenson (aged 23) be elected a Director and he (being present) accepted. At the same meeting, it was decided to close down the Deansgate premises and Ernest to be left to ascertain whether windows could be retained for show purposes.

WHOLESALE & CONTRACT DEPARTMENT.

ESTD

1868

H.G. Stephenson Ltd

PHONES - BLACKFRIARS - 3777 &

TELEGRAMS - CROOKED - MANCHESTER

MANUFACTURERS OF  
THE CELEBRATED  
ARMA-WARE

Page No. 446/55



BARTON ARCADE & DEANSGATE  
MANCHESTER

CUT GLASS CHINA  
& EARTHENWARE  
FOR UTILITY & ORNAMENT

2nd January 1936

Dear Sir or Madam,

We have very great pleasure in advising you that our Mr. Maskell will be showing at the Hotel Sefton, Douglas, from January 7th - 16th.

He will have with him a special range of new samples for 1936, including samples of "ARMA" real toughened tumblers. These are the genuine make of toughened tumblers, which are practically unbreakable and are non-chippable.

He will also have with him samples of "ARMA" Hotel China, and any decoration can be supplied in this special make of China.

We should esteem it a favour if you will kindly pay a visit to his showroom, as we feel sure you will be very satisfied with both the quality and price of the goods he will have to offer.

In the meantime we beg to remain,

Yours truly,  
For H.G. STEPHENSON LTD.

*E. Stephenson*  
Managing Director.

*Ernest's letter to his customers in the Isle of Man, 1936*

**SELL BRITISH BEER  
IN A BRITISH**

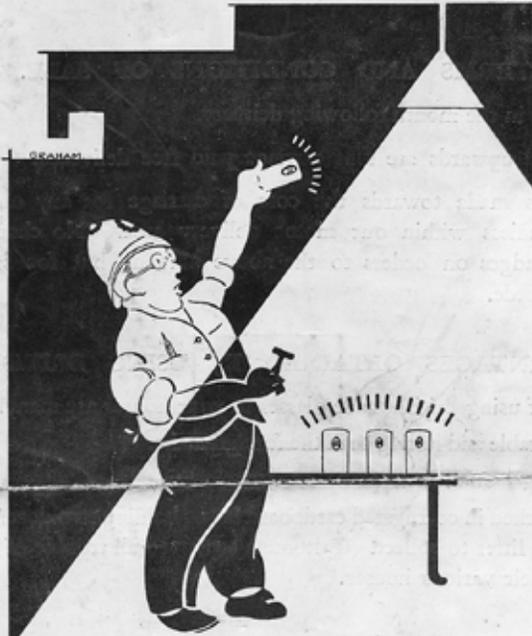


**H. G. STEPHENSON L<sup>TD</sup>**

CHINA AND GLASS MANUFACTURERS  
BARTON ARCADE AND DEANSGATE  
M A N C H E S T E R

*Stephenson's brochure promoting government stamped beer glasses*

# “W” BRAND BRITISH-MADE TUMBLERS



GOVERNMENT STAMPED

EVERY GENUINE “W” BRAND BRITISH-MADE  
TUMBLER BEARS THIS MARK



**H. G. STEPHENSON LIMITED**  
BARTON ARCADE & DEANSGATE :: MANCHESTER

*Stephenson's brochure promoting government stamped beer glasses*



## World War 2 and Its Aftermath 1939 -1949

### **Precautionary Plans**

In October 1939, one month after war had been declared, Harold joined the army, leaving Ernest alone to run the business. He and Edgar took steps to minimise the operation.

A year later, in October of 1940, Mr Barton (owner of the Arcade) agreed to surrender the existing lease and to grant a new lease excluding the Deansgate shop premises, together with the showrooms above and the basement underneath. The terms that Mr Barton offered were accepted. Within these terms, Ernest had to enter into an agreement to stay with the company during the length of the lease.

At the time, Tommy Noble (an apt name) was caretaker at the Arcade and lived in a flat on the roof. He used to go out during a raid, scoop up the incendiaries and put them in a barrel of water. One night, he unfortunately missed one...

## Barton Arcade Hit in the Blitz

Little were Edgar and Ernest to know that just two and a half weeks after the new lease, during the first night of the Manchester Blitz on 23 December 1940, Barton Arcade was to be hit by an incendiary bomb at its northern end. The red circles on the map below show the ferocity of the aerial bombardment in the area surrounding the arcade.



*The position of the Incendiary Bomb that hit Barton Arcade, 23rd December, 1940  
(Courtesy of Manchester City Council Archives)*

In the immediate aftermath, “regarding the damage caused by Enemy Action to the business and stock of the Company”, Messrs’ Boote Edgar & Co were dealing with the question of Disclaimer of Rent and Messrs’ Airey Entwistle & Co with the damage to the stock and fittings.



*A view of the damage to St. Ann's Square, just behind Barton Arcade*

At the end of 1941, the Board Minutes recorded:

*“The question of re-opening the Retail Department was discussed at considerable length and it was resolved that in view of shortage of staff and other War time difficulties to postpone the matter indefinitely and that the Barton Arcade ground floor shop be emptied of all goods so as to save payment of rates.”*

### **Ernest's Faith in the Company's Future**

With pressures mounting, Edgar began to take on a pessimistic outlook for the company's future. He had little confidence that his son, Harold, having joined the army, would survive the war. The shops were finished for the time being, and had been under threat of closure anyway. For Edgar, the best course of action was to close the business.

But Ernest had faith. He ensured that, while the retail side of the business was suspended, the wholesale department carried on trading from the sub-basement in Barton Arcade.

Despite war still raging, in 1944 the business had 17 employees. Entries in the company's ledger in the early months of 1945 show the following staff and their weekly wages:

**Jack Schofield**, Shop Manager (presumably kept on in the warehouse) - £4.0.0

**Laurie Tideswell**, Warehouse Manager - £4.0.0

**Mr Montie**, Sales rep - £4.0.0

**Miss Smith**, Secretary - £4.5.0

**Mr Albury**, Accountant - £5.10.0

**Mr Maskell**, Sales Rep - £3.5.0



*Harry was active during the war, fulfilling official duties as opposed to fighting*

During the war years, the company's finances were re-organised. £1000 was invested at 3% in Defence Bonds and £9000 at 2.5% National War Bonds. New arrangements for how the company's shares were valued and held were made, resulting in there no longer being any Preference Shares. Accordingly, in April 1944, a new set of Articles of Association of the Company was approved with a 5% dividend paid on the 17,500 shares Ordinary Shares.

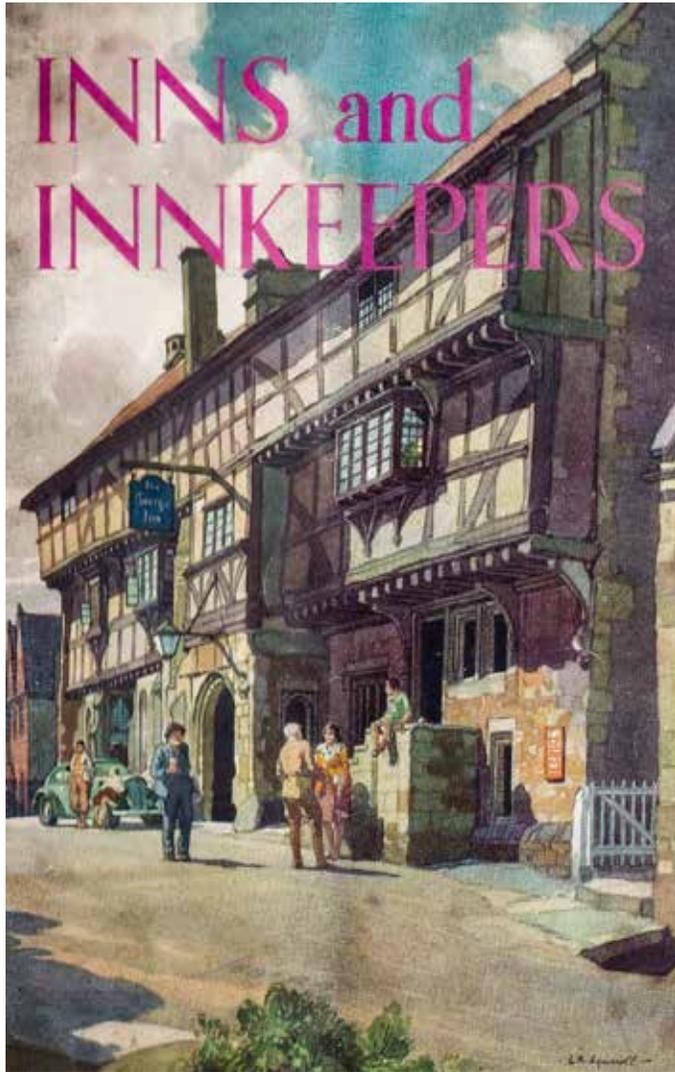
Ernest's insistence that the company keep trading so that Harold might carry it forward was eventually realised in 1946 when his nephew returned home safe from Burma. The company, like its country, survived to fight another day.

### **Peacetime Recovery**

Britain's return to a peacetime economy was a difficult and protracted process for some. The manufacturing industries had to move away from wartime production and develop new lines. However, for H.G. Stephenson's, there was a relatively speedy turnaround in company affairs. Ernest continued as Managing Director, now aged 61 and Harold was appointed Assistant Managing Director in 1946.

The company received a welcome cash injection in the form of compensation for stock and fittings lost at the time of the Blitz and a refund of the Excess Profits Tax taken during the war. At the Annual General Meeting in June 1946 it was agreed that a Dividend of 5% together with a Victory Bonus of 5% for the year be paid on the 17,500 Ordinary Shares. By August of the same year, the number of employees had risen from 17 to 23, and by the year's end to 31. The Retail Department was re-opened on 31 April 1947, by which time 47 staff were listed in the wages book. Then, in 1948 a portion of the basement was successfully re-opened as a showroom. Despite everything, the return to normality was well and truly in motion.

In line with the British recovery, the brewery trade, a large part of the Stephenson's customer base, set about promoting a post-war 're-birth' of inns and pubs. A small booklet, reflecting these notions, has been kept in the company's archives.



*Post-war brochure promoting British inns and pubs*

*“The Pub of the Future; As soon as labour and materials can be spared, brewers will be ready to take up the task of rebuilding and improving their inns where they left off in 1939.*

*Some of the new houses will need to be social centres for large neighbourhoods. Most will be “locals” offering greater comfort and better service than did the old.*

*This will call for a vast outlay of money. But out of a true net profit of less than a ha’penny on a pint of beer, brewers are putting by for this purpose as much money as possible.”*



## The 1950's: Post-War Progress

### Ernest's Television Set

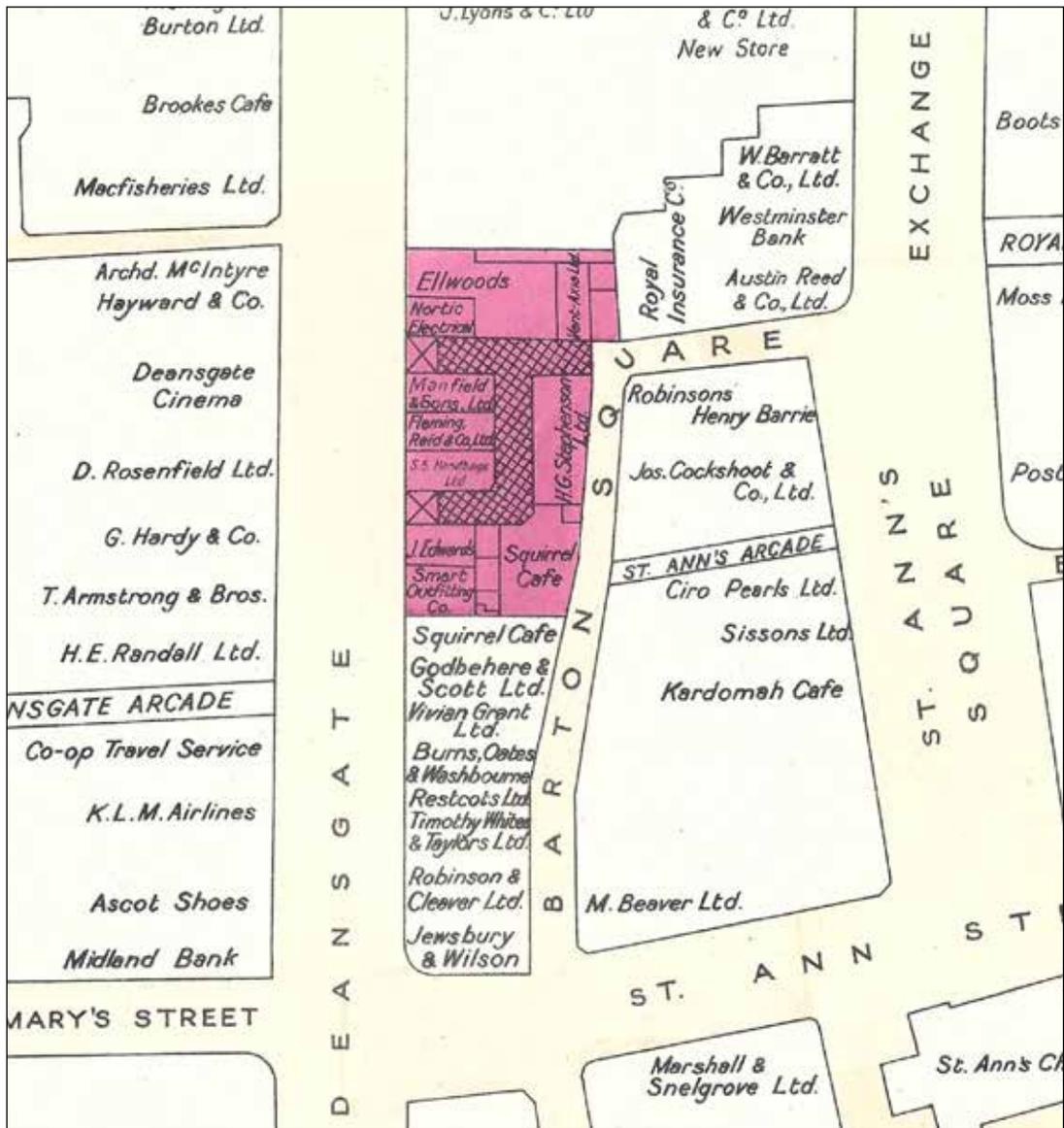
In 1950, Ernest was presented with “a television set to the approximate value of £100 to show appreciation and recognition of his 50 years of service”. He had joined the company at the age of 15 in 1900 as a clerk, at 22 he became a ‘commercial traveller’, and at 37 the Managing Director. Now, at 65, Ernest had seen the company through thick and thin and this relatively advanced piece of technology was a nice gift to commemorate that.

The early ‘television sets’, as they were called, were imposing pieces of furniture often cased in wood with a screen no larger than 12”. It’s very likely that the historic television event of the decade, the Queen’s coronation in 1953, was watched by the Stephenson family on this very set.



## Business As Usual at Barton Arcade

Despite rationing on petrol continuing until 1951 and on food until 1954, H.G. Stephenson Ltd. was thriving and was by far the largest business in the arcade, leasing 18,000 square feet and occupying approximately 33% of the available space by 1952. The premises included 3 ground floor shops, 6 first floor office spaces, 6 rooms in the basement and the whole of the sub-basement.



Plan showing Barton Arcade, its occupants and nearby businesses, 1952

The company began to mount its own exhibitions as well as taking stands at events such as the annual Brighter Homes Exhibitions.



*Brighter Homes Exhibition, City Hall, Manchester, 1951*

Some months before the 1953 coronation of Queen Elizabeth II, the company entered into a lucrative agreement with the City of Manchester Corporation to supply 72,000 Coronation Souvenir Mugs.



*Badging the Coronation mugs in the Royal Cauldon factory, Staffordshire*



*Commemorative mugs*

## Mr Milnes is taken on

It was in 1954 that Mr Jim Milnes was taken on by Stephenson's.

*"I was working at the Midland Bank in Cross Street, Manchester, when Mr Harold mentioned to my manager, Mr Donaldson, that he was looking for an accounts cashier with a view to him becoming a Director on the Company's Board."*

Following a successful interview with Mr Harold and Mr Ernest, Mr Milnes was offered a salary double what he was earning: £17.00 a week. A story where Mr Milnes recalls his first Christmas at Stephenson's reflects his affable demeanour:

*"The girls said 'Mr Milnes, we'll make some sandwiches and cakes'. I said 'Right-ho girls, you do that and I'll pay you for them out of petty cash'. When we closed, we invited all the staff up to come and have a drink and a sandwich. Oh, they thought it was marvellous, they'd never had anything like that before."*

Working closely with Ernest and Harold, Mr Milnes was to play a very large part in the life of the company for the next 40 years as the Financial Director, Company Secretary and in many ways, the man who kept everyone in order.

In the August of 1953 Edgar Stephenson died aged 72. Ernest, aged 69, was elected as Chairman of the Board and Harold, aged 38, as Company Secretary. A year later Harold's wife, Dorothy Stephenson, was elected to the Board. The fourth director was chosen as Elizabeth Tatham Walker, Ernest's daughter. Elizabeth was known affectionately as 'Bobby' and was married to Bernard Walker. They had two children — John and Adrienne and lived happily in Bolton.



*A visiting celebrity tests the strength of a vitrified plate by standing on it, 1954*



*An exhibition of Royal Doulton in the Barton Arcade Basement Showroom opened on June 21st, 1954*



*A senior pottery decorator from Royal Doulton demonstrating her craft*



*A Barton Arcade window display of Royal Doulton coinciding with the exhibition inside the shop in 1954*

## H.G. Stephenson Goes for a New Look

In 1957 the lease on Barton Arcade premises was extended for 7 years. A year later it was decided that a lease would be taken up on 59 Deansgate, a shop the company had previously leased from its earliest days to the start of the Second World War.

The shop window faced out onto Deansgate and the intention was to catch the eyes of passers-by, just as Henry's displays had so skilfully done in the past. In preparation for the opening, the other of the ground floor shops and the basement showroom were decorated throughout. The shop window frames were repainted and designs put forward by Royal Doulton Pottery designers for window displays were considered.

No. 59 opened on 16th April 1959. In keeping with the times and the public's emerging taste for all things modern, the new shop aimed to attract those looking for less traditional styles of crockery and glassware.

A month later the Manchester Evening news devoted a double page spread to the new shop, financed no doubt by the 28 advertisements from suppliers that accompanied the images and copy, and which reinforced the narrative of a very well established business setting off in a new direction.

The copy accompanying the spread described the 'new look' as:

*"Artistic and colourful – those three words sum up the window display in the new Deansgate extension of H. G. Stephenson, Ltd. of crockery and glassware. There you will find everything from piggy banks at 7s. each to dinner services at £250.*

*But don't let that last price scare you. The young married couple of to-day can buy for as little as 45s 6d a complete set for four people of dinner, sweet, soup and side plates – as well as four cups and saucers."*



From piggy banks to dinner services  
—the shop with sparkle and poise

THE STORY OF...

PERFECTION IN GLASS AND PORCELAIN



These are the windows for which nearly a century have displayed the best in current designs and patterns of household and decorative glassware and porcelain. And shoppers in Barrow Avenue — whether they're the hawker — a dabbler — or just plain housewife — can seldom resist the temptation to pause and look.



Everything for the table except the food and drink... as customers at Stephenson's new Deansgate extension admire a display of china and crystal.



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR OLD FRIENDS  
LOOK FOR DOMINO  
A SOPHISTICATED STUDY IN BLACK & WHITE BY

Foley

FAMOUS FOR BONE CHINA SINCE 1850

Examining one of the many attractive dinner services available at Stephenson's.

For this reason, the firm keeps a special 'van' at the port for emergency orders. Harold believes that the success in this department is largely due to the sort of service they give.

This sort of service: One one afternoon a hotel 25 miles out of "an" order rang at 2 30 p.m. with an order for 72 dozen assorted glasses wanted for the evening.

The order was delivered before 5 p.m. the same day. On this kind of service: A hotel one morning ordered 200 dozen half-pint tumblers "hugged" with the same message.

They were delivered the same afternoon.

time calling an catering establishments. Not only do they place orders but they are experienced in the trade and can give good advice on the most suitable types of glassware or crockery for the job it has to do.

BADGING "is done on the premises. That means that by a special high-power sand-blasting process the caterer's name can be indelibly impressed on the article.

Evening News Reporter

ARTISTIC and colourful — three words sum up the window display in the new Deansgate extension of H. G. Stephenson, Ltd.—crockery and glassware.

At Stephenson's you can see the huge range of goods which are now made from the ancient arts of glass-blowing and porcelain manufacture.

There you will find everything from piggy banks at 1s. each to dinner services at £250.

But don't let that last price scare you. The young married couple of to-day can buy as little as 41s. 6d. a complete set for four people of dinner, evening, soup and side plates—as well as four cups and saucers.

The days of thick, cheap household crockery were over long ago. These sets can be obtained in an attractive grey

or other pastel shade, delicate but strong.

And, if you buy out what are called "stock patterns," you can replace broken items with ease and at very little cost. Mr. Harold Stephenson, a director, believes that this basic set is all that any young couple need buy for a beginning.

Later, as they save from their weekly budget, they can collect the little "extras" which make home more than a place to eat and sleep.

FOUNDED in 1868, H. G. Stephenson's has a record of household needs in crockery and glassware.

Into their selection of stock goes nearly a century's experience of what the people want—and the prices they like to pay.

This firm began in the old-fashioned glass-blown Barrow

Arcade, between Deansgate and St. Ann's Square in the centre of Manchester.

The founder was the late Mr. Henry George Stephenson, and under his stewardship the business gradually flourished and expanded.

Towards the end of the last century, half the present extension was acquired and shared with "Din's" flower shop. When eventually "Din's" moved on, Mr. Stephenson took over the other half as well.

This section was then developed into a specialised shop for Christmas-trees and lamp-glasses.

THEN came war. In December, 1940, the arcade was hit and severely damaged by fire. The Deansgate frontage was vacated and the retail department closed.

But in 1948 the firm straggled back into the retail business and reopened premises inside the arcade. It was not until April of this year that they were able to re-occupy their Deansgate frontage to give business shoppers a hint of what lay further inside the arcade.

Mr. Henry George Stephenson died in 1919 and his son, Harold, is now chairman and managing director.

He began in 1890 at the very bottom—by working as an apprentice in the "wainwright" trade. His main job: to deal with "a table" of orders.

In 1883 a special department had been opened to the supply of crockery and glassware to hotels, taverns and the catering trade in general.

So in 1930, his apprenticeship over, Ernest Stephenson devoted most of his energy to this branch and still—though now 71 years old—takes an active part in its management.

Because of the hills, this

was the only department which remained open until the end of the war, due to the difficulty of obtaining staff and supplies.

TO-DAY'S directors are Ernest Stephenson and his daughter, Mrs. Walker. His nephew Harold Stephenson (a grandson of the founder), and Harold's wife, Dorothy.

A notable, Mr. Harold Stephenson has been in the business for 24 years—since he was 17. He has seen it grow until now he can boast of having a larger floor space than any competitor in Manchester.

As long as an article is made of glass and porcelain and has a use on the table, in the kitchen or as household decoration, Stephenson's will have it.

And if they haven't, they'll do their best to get it. Most of the tableware sold in England made. This is because of the simple fact that England is miles ahead of any other country in the design and quality of china and earthenware," Harold Stephenson says.

AN important part of the trade is the supply of goods to hotels and restaurants.

He began in 1890 at the very bottom—by working as an apprentice in the "wainwright" trade. His main job: to deal with "a table" of orders.

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**Carnaval DEANSGATE!**

The CARNIVAL range of boxed glassware from Heston, Harold, includes the most delightful shapes and colours. Perfect for gifts, presents or others. It's a real treat to give! H. G. STEPHENSON'S new Deansgate extension now enables you to see more CARNIVAL than ever! Why not? Go and see it now! MANY DISPLAYS TO INSPIRE YOU. H. G. STEPHENSON LTD. 111, 113, 115, 117, 119, 121, 123, 125, 127, 129, 131, 133, 135, 137, 139, 141, 143, 145, 147, 149, 151, 153, 155, 157, 159, 161, 163, 165, 167, 169, 171, 173, 175, 177, 179, 181, 183, 185, 187, 189, 191, 193, 195, 197, 199, 201, 203, 205, 207, 209, 211, 213, 215, 217, 219, 221, 223, 225, 227, 229, 231, 233, 235, 237, 239, 241, 243, 245, 247, 249, 251, 253, 255, 257, 259, 261, 263, 265, 267, 269, 271, 273, 275, 277, 279, 281, 283, 285, 287, 289, 291, 293, 295, 297, 299, 301, 303, 305, 307, 309, 311, 313, 315, 317, 319, 321, 323, 325, 327, 329, 331, 333, 335, 337, 339, 341, 343, 345, 347, 349, 351, 353, 355, 357, 359, 361, 363, 365, 367, 369, 371, 373, 375, 377, 379, 381, 383, 385, 387, 389, 391, 393, 395, 397, 399, 401, 403, 405, 407, 409, 411, 413, 415, 417, 419, 421, 423, 425, 427, 429, 431, 433, 435, 437, 439, 441, 443, 445, 447, 449, 451, 453, 455, 457, 459, 461, 463, 465, 467, 469, 471, 473, 475, 477, 479, 481, 483, 485, 487, 489, 491, 493, 495, 497, 499, 501, 503, 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*A partial view of Stephenson's shop window inside Barton Arcade, c. 1959*



*No. 59 Deansgate, c. 1959*



## The 1960's

### **The End of the Retail Business**

In 1961, Harold was appointed Assistant Manager. He had been running the retail side for some time whilst Ernest managed the wholesale but this arrangement was not to last for much longer as in September 1961, the shops were sold to Lawley's. The focus was now to be on the licensed victual and catering industries. The Wholesale Department and its offices remained at Barton Arcade, but 93 years of Stephenson's history as a retail business had finally come to an end.

### **Michael Stephenson joins the Company**

Michael Stephenson, Harold's son, joined the company in late 1963, aged 16. He had not been happy about the decision to sell the shops, having seen them as part of his future but was soon put to work learning the wholesale business.

Working initially in the warehouse in the sub basement of Barton Arcade, Michael's wages were £2.10 shillings a week from which his mother Dorothy retained 10 shillings for his keep.

These were happy days for Michael and he thoroughly enjoyed warehouse work under the foreman, Frank Calderwood — who Michael proclaims was a delightful fellow.

Michael's descriptions of the Barton Arcade operation in the mid 1960s suggest that they had not changed greatly since the 19th century. He remembers that space was rented in Store Street, close to Manchester Piccadilly station, which was used to store goods arriving by rail from the Potteries. In the early 1950's, a man called Albert and his railway horse and cart would collect crates of goods from the arch and deliver them to Barton Arcade. At the back of the arcade there was a metal gantry and a door opening to a lift. The method was to unload the crates via a ramp leading to the lift. These were then taken down to the storeroom in the basement. Glassware was delivered 6 dozen glasses to a crate and each one carried a deposit charge of ten shillings, repayable on their return to St Helens. Eventually, a three-wheeler Scammell replaced the horse and cart and after his tenure with the horse cart, Albert went on to become the Scammell Driver.



*Early versions of the Scammell*

Seen from a 21st century perspective, the sub-basement was also a curiosity. Recent photographs show it empty whereas, from the 1890's until 1967, all the arches would have held shelves loaded with Stephenson's crockery and glassware. (As this book goes into print, the old Stephenson's basement is set to be given a new lease of a life by a Manchester property management firm seeking to utilise the space for events and more).



*Sub-basement today, main corridor*



*Sub-basement today showing fireplace*

People working in the sub-basement rarely saw the light of day but it was warm and dry, being heated by coal fires initially and later gas heaters suspended from the brick ceiling. There was a staff canteen – not a very grand affair but serviceable enough for a cup of tea, a bite to eat and a game of dominoes at lunchtime. Lunches were prepared by Lil and Lil, described by Michael as ‘proper cooks!’.



*Staff in the basement canteen in the 1950's playing dominoes*



*'Little' Bill Macpherson in the sub-basement canteen in the 1960's*

Not long after his arrival, Michael had noticed that the sub-basement had many areas boarded up that could have provided more storage. Taking the initiative, he had them opened up to reveal stock items that had been damaged during the Blitz in December 1940 and stashed away in the arches. Much of what he found was smoke-damaged but after a wash it was perfectly good and was sold by the company's 'superb' rep, Stanley Wilson, at bargain prices. Thus 3000 square feet of extra storage space were released – Michael's first strategic success.

### **Michael Learns the Business**

Having obtained his driving licence in 1964 and after finishing his stint in the warehouse, Michael was promoted to doing deliveries in Mini Van registration 1824 VR. He remembers those days fondly - "How I loved that van and getting about and meeting people".



*1960's Mini Van*

The next move was to the Sales Office under Tony Tilbury, "a patient and extremely good teacher with a sense of humour". Michael reflects that he had joined the company not knowing what a percentage was. This was soon rectified and after all the years at school, a practical application of numbers benefitted him greatly — "I suddenly understood the reason for maths!"

Michael was set to continue his training development by going to the accounts department across the balcony of Barton Arcade, which was run by Jim Milnes. Life was stricter over there, but he didn't have to stay for long as his father soon decided he instead wanted his son on the road selling. Michael was given a territory that included Macclesfield, Leek, Congleton and parts of Derbyshire and Shropshire.

There were virtually no active accounts in this area and it was hard work getting them going. Michael's first and most loyal customer was Frank Campbell at the Jodrell Arms, Whaley Bridge, who even named his son, Michael after him! Another customer Michael remembers fondly was Jean Bowler who managed the Knott Inn, Rushton Spencer. There was also Bob Upton at the Swan Hotel, New Mills. At that time, around 1965, the company sold only pottery, glass, Mermaid aluminium cookware, Old Hall stainless steel and chrome special cutlery. Bob was most insistent that it should add bar sundries, cleaning chemicals and other ancillary items. Harold was a man who took much persuading so, in a bold move, Michael took Bob to see his father. After which these additional items were duly added to the Stephenson's repertoire, where they remain a staple part of the business to this day!



*Michael's first 'real' company car, a 1959 Standard Vanguard (£200)*

## The Move to Kennerley Works, Stockport

The current home of Stephenson's is the Kennerley Works site on Buxton Road. The plot actually has a history of its own, beginning in the early 1900's as home to a motor engineering and taxi firm known as Birch's. A descendant of its founder deposited documents relating to the business with Stephenson's some years ago. They included a 1922 plan of the site, a list of the buildings and photographs of some of the taxis. It would seem that things have always been hustle and bustle at Kennerley Works!



*One of Birch's employees and his taxi*

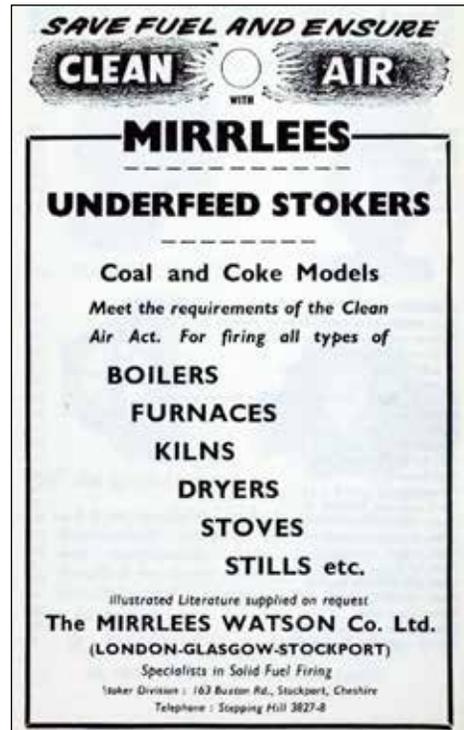


*Thomas Birch's business card*

By the 1930's, the site had been bought to house the Mechanical Stoker Division of the Mirrlees Watson Co. Ltd. It's thought that it was situated there for the convenience of Charles Day, founder of the Division, who lived with his family in the large mansion house next door to the site.

During this tenure, Day erected new sheds on the site. One, known as Testing Shed 'E' is now part of the Stephenson's warehouse. Integral to its roof, still, are hatches that would blow away from the roof should any of the stokers have exploded during testing.

The Stoker Division closed in 1967 leading to the sale of the site. Fortuitously, this happened to be at the exact time that Stephenson's were searching for new premises.



*Advertisement for Mirrlees Stokers*

Mr Jim Milnes recalled many years later:

*"We had been looking around because we were at Barton Arcade yet we'd sold the retail shops. We were looking for somewhere because we only had the small back street behind the Arcade for the delivery vans and they were getting booked on the street even when they were loading.*

*One night I had been in the garden, and came in for a cup of coffee and had a look through the paper and there was this advert, not a big one, that read – 'Premises on land adjacent to the Alma Lodge Hotel, £15,500'."*

After a quick phone call to Harold, they went to see the plot immediately.

*"The gates were closed and Harold was standing up, looking over them with Mrs Stephenson and my wife. He said, 'I like this'."*

The following morning Harold put in an offer, which was duly accepted.

The move was managed in stages. Once some of the old buildings on the site had been refurbished, the stock was sent from the Arcade to Stockport. Harold set up his office, and then the staff moved in on the 20th August, completing the transfer. A 3.5-ton van was purchased to collect crockery from the Potteries every week and the storage of stock was moved from British Rail's Store Street warehouse in Manchester to the Bryant warehouse in Stockport, then also owned by the railway.

Mr Mellor, the previous managing director of the Stoker Division, was very helpful in assisting with the purchase and his son Bob actually ended up working for the company for some years. Michael Stephenson recalls that it was the end of an era moving from the Arcade in September 1967, but, practically, it was the right move and Stephenson's bid farewell to Barton Arcade after almost 100 years. It had been quite the journey. From humble beginnings with a horse and cart, to housing a prosperous fourth generation family business — Barton Arcade was the location where Stephenson became Stephenson's.



*A Stephenson's van in front of the old buildings now replaced by the showroom and office building, c. 1984*

During this hectic relocation period, trade didn't cease for a second. Michael recollects the stresses of handling a large scale move and continuing with day-to-day business, but somehow Stephenson's made it work.



*Building work commences at the Kennerley Works site*

Consequently the big move brought in an important new customer – the nearby Stockport College of Technology. To move to Stockport and immediately begin supplying the town's higher education sector was a fitting way to mark Stephenson's arrival . Note the order of ashtrays in the picture below — how times have changed!

ORDER No. **B 853**

COUNTY BOROUGH OF STOCKPORT—EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

PHASE III Loan No. 1655 Town Hall, Stockport

To H.G. Stephenson's Ltd.  
 Kennerley Works,  
 161, Buxton Road,  
 SK2 6BQ

19th August 1969

Please supply STOCKPORT COLLEGE OF TECHNOLOGY, Wellington Road South, Stockport, with:—

STOCK REF.	QUANTITY REQUIRED	ARTICLE OR SERVICE	ESTIMATED COST
3/B15		<u>Please supply as per your tender.</u>	
/20	72dz	Tea Cups - Opal ware 7oz.	£66. 18. 0
/21	72dz	Saucers - Opal Ware	£48. 6. 0
/22	36dz	Side Plates - opal ware 6½"	£29. 2. 0
/23	36dz	Joint Plates - Opalware 9½"	£48. 9. 0
/24	36dz	Sweet Plates - Opal Ware 8"	£37. 19. 0
/31	36dz	Ashtrays - Aluminium 5½" dia.	£21. 9. 0
/33	6only	Jugs - Stainless steel Non drip 1½ Litre	£15. 8. 0
/34	3only	Jugs - Stainless steel non drip 4 litre	£10. 7. 0
/43	4only	Bucket and Lid - stainless steel 10 litre	£14. 0. 0
/47	1 only	Dumb Waiter - Wooden - Light Oak	
		48 x 18 x 42 4drawers and Cupboard under all lockable	£29. 1. 3
/51	3only	Cutlery Tidy - Wooden 20" x 12" x 6"	£ 5. 6. 6
		TOTAL	£326. 5. 9

874/61162

THE NUMBER OF THIS ORDER MUST BE GIVEN ON INVOICES AND DELIVERY NOTES  
 All deliveries must be accompanied by a Detailed Delivery Note.  
 Detailed Invoice must at once be sent to The Principal, Stockport College of Technology,  
 Wellington Road South, Stockport.  
 No goods may be supplied, work done or services rendered without an official order.

*[Signature]*  
 Principal

*[Signature]*  
 per pro. G. DAVEY  
 Director of Education

An order from Stockport College of Technology, 1969

## **A Seat on the Board**

Michael Stephenson was invited to take a seat on the Board in February 1968, aged 21, exactly 100 years after his great grandfather Henry George Stephenson had started the business. This was a time for celebration, but there were difficulties ahead. Ernest had retired as Managing Director at the age of 81 in 1966 and after his departure Harold and Jim Milnes carried out the day to day running of the company. Despite this, Harold, now 50, was having problems with his health and this affected his ability to cope with the demands of the job.



*Jim Milnes, Harold and Michael, 1966*

## **New Places, New Faces**

The 1960's had been a time of metamorphosis for Stephenson's. The relocation to Kennerley work was an integral milestone in the company's history and one that would solidify firm foundations with the North West of England. Equally, Michael Stephenson's arrival and subsequent ascent to the board reflected the major role he was to play in the shaping of the business for a new era. As we'll see though, he had a huge task ahead of him.



## The 1970's

### **Michael Stephenson Becomes Managing Director**

In 1970, it was agreed that Michael should take over from Harold as Managing Director. At only 23, he was faced with the very difficult challenge of taking the reigns of a company that was, in his own words' "in dire financial straits", and had only recently gone through the taxing re-location from Barton Arcade to Stockport. It had lost over £10,000 in the previous year, and the bankers were initially unwilling to help. However, as Michael says "due to a huge effort on his part and with the constant support and advice of Mr Jim Milnes, as well as a great deal of luck and good judgement, the year ending figures showed a healthy profit."

The final break with the second generation of Stephenson's sadly came when Ernest died suddenly in January 1971 and his elder brother, Reggie, passed the day after at the age of 91. Both had given unstinting service to the company as Directors and from their earliest years.

So, free of the past but without all the wisdom and experience it could offer, Michael began to make changes that would secure the company's future trading and profits. A loan arrangement paid for the erection of a single block warehouse at the rear of the back yard. This was used to transfer stock from the Bryant railway store, which saved a considerable amount in rental fees.



*A 1973 Exhibition Stand, at Scarborough, Sam Vamplew and Geoffrey Savile-Dean*

In 1973, Michael oversaw the introduction of a more effective stock control system and had achieved a growth in sales that made it possible for him to approach the bank for an increase in loan facilities.

By now the recession of the mid 1970's had taken hold but as Michael explains:

*“In times of recession past people used to drown their sorrows in the pub, which is no longer the case. It was at this time that people began to see the value of ‘eating houses’ which assisted the company’s growth with the sale of pottery, cutlery and all things on the table top.”*

And so it was that Michael got two new contracts, the first with Lanchester Taverns South and the second with Scottish Brewers to cover ‘managed’ eating houses and hotels all over Yorkshire and the West Coast up to Carlisle and Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

# The Wedgwood Group

ROYAL TUSCAN HOTEL CHINA



Green  
Chantilly

Ambassador



Grey  
Dawn

JOHNSON  
BROS



Blue  
Charade

See price list for items available.

H.G. Stephenson Ltd. **RIDGWAY STEELITE**  
a product of the Doulton Group

September Harvest



Avocado Marina

Dark Blue Marina



See price list for items available

*H.G. Stephenson's Steelite Catalogue, c. 1970*

# Vitrex Hotelware by

H.G. Stephenson & Sons WOOD & SONS



Maroon Florentine



Symphony



Indian Tree



Jasmine



Beryl

See price list for items available.

To handle the latter, premises that included a 17th century farmhouse and outbuildings were bought at 808 – 810 Great Horton Road, Bradford to act as a warehouse depot facility. Harold and Frank Calderwood managed this depot and took on two reps. Twelve months later the minutes of the Board recorded that “due to various unforeseen circumstances (the miners’ pay dispute, the 3 day working week and electricity restrictions)” business at Bradford had not progressed as had been anticipated and the premises were sold. Fortunately a profit of almost 50% was made on the purchase price.

Michael recalls that the Scottish and Newcastle buyer was a delightful man called Jack Weddel and that the two spent many happy hours wining and dining. Most business, he says, was conducted so in those days. Through Jack, the company obtained the Newcastle business in 1974 and opened a depot at Henderson Haulage near Gateshead. Harold then spent much of his time looking after the Newcastle account that was worth over £0.5 million per annum.



*Michael attending a Wedgewood Luncheon at the Box Tree Restaurant, 1970's*

Inflation was rampant during the late 1960's and early 1970's which, though not desirable, had the benefit that nobody could really quote a definitive price. If the company was careful with prudent buying, this could be an advantage. Other measures were taken to reduce costs: 'fuel hungry' cars were sold because the 1973 oil crisis had pushed the cost of petrol up to an all time high, glass price lists were discontinued offering greater flexibility to build discounts into prices and unfortunately redundancies were made. Michael also set about securing the controlling interest in the company by calling in the many shares that had become dispersed amongst various family members who didn't actually have any direct contact with the business.

As the worst effects of the recession lessened, however, it was possible to start investing in infrastructure. A new warehouse building was erected at Kennerley Works and a bid was put in for land adjacent to the site. A forklift truck was also added to the arsenal. Furthermore, the showroom was refurbished, the roof was renovated and the area between the glass shed and the showroom was covered over so that it could house cleaning materials.

One piece of good news in these dark times was Michael's marriage to Mary Lewis-Booth. Mary very clearly remembers being introduced to the company's staff at Kennerley Works. She recalls that they were lined up to greet her as if she were royalty. They were thrilled, apparently, because she was wearing brown trousers — it was Mr Milnes edict at the time that all female staff had to wear skirts!

### **Technology Calls: Stephenson's First Computer**

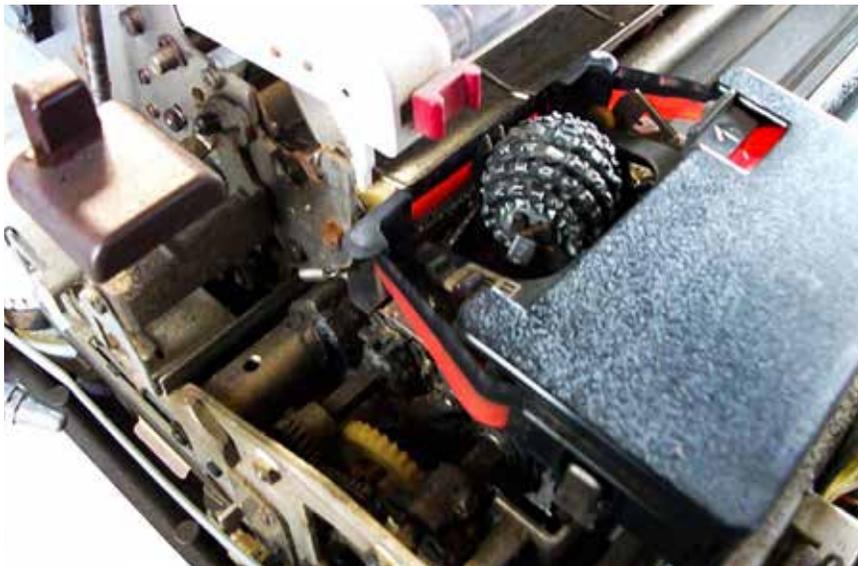
It was in 1977 that Jim Milnes, the Financial Director, persuaded Stephenson's Board of Directors that the company needed to spend £4,500 on a computer-posting machine. It was the Olivetti Audit 5, described today as 'a strange cross between an electric typewriter, a microcomputer and a printing terminal'.

The machine was the size of a desk and was used to keep track of account records. The details were kept on a card that had a magnetic strip along one side, one for each account. To add a transaction, the card was put into the slot on the machine, the information typed in and it came back out with the new information stored on the magnetic strip. It also printed off the transaction as a modern day printer would, but through a 'golf ball' rolling mechanism. The Olivetti was famed for the noise it made when being operated.

Little did they know it at the time, but Jim Milnes had 'seen the future'. The A5 was one of the precursors to today's computer systems.



*The Olivetti Audit 5, a precursor to the modern computer and a symbol of progress*



*The rolling 'golf ball' printing mechanism*



## The 1980's

### **Recession No. 2, 1980-85**

Minutes from a Board meeting in 1979 recorded that industrial strikes were discussed and it was noted that they were having an adverse effect on trading. With shades of 1926, these strikes were the biggest mass stoppages since that period and it came to be known as the infamous 'Winter of Discontent'. Despite the difficulties, it was ultimately agreed that no staff would be laid off.

By the next year, although figures were expected to be good for the year ending 1979, the minutes record that "the slump was so long the forecast was finally on the whole country". Jim Milnes was asked to "keep an eye on figures". It was decided there were too many vehicles and the surplus were subsequently sold for £10,500. Sales for the first quarter of 1980 were up by 20% but overheads had risen 14.5%. Orders had stopped flowing in and the reps were reporting that customers were cutting down on purchases. By June, six members of staff had to be made redundant. Buyers were told that all purchases, other than for goods sold, had to stop for two months and stock had to be reduced.

## Trying to Steady the Ship

By September 1980, the overheads had been contained but the stock were down and sales figures were continuing to drop. The Board agreed that the situation was not good but that it had reached a reasonable level.

In the same month, Harold was granted an indefinite leave of absence due to sickness. In December, Michael purchased Harold's shareholding thereby obtaining the controlling interest in the company and becoming its Chairman.

1981 saw falling sales due to the loss of the Whitbread contract and rising overheads. The company was making "quite a substantial loss". It was agreed that Michael and Jim Milnes would explore every overhead and decide if further redundancies were required.



*One of the offices in the 1980's, prior to a move to new facilities in 'Test Shed E'*

By December it was reported that three excellent months of trading had improved the situation dramatically but profit or loss for the year depended on stock figures.

It was in 1982, when a typist at the company left, that Mary Stephenson stepped in, on a temporary basis to help out until the post was filled. Once there, her previous experience of working as an auditor soon began to update systems. Her love of doing what she called the 'detective work' that's involved in auditing came in useful as she began to check purchasing invoices and to see that orders had gone out. During this period Mary produced comprehensive staff files and introduced fuel cards for all company vehicles, whereas previously drivers brought in their fuel bills after filling up locally.



*One of the new vans, c. 1979*

The Stephenson's Cash & Carry, now an integral component of the business, was opened in 1982. It was Doug Almond of The Crown at Hawk Green, Marple, who initially suggested the idea. To this day Michael is very grateful to him and he and the family remain great friends. Derek Rhodes, a full-time salesman with the company, was responsible for the installation.

He explains:

*“We knocked all the old wooden fittings out that were there in what was a scruffy and very dirty warehouse that had been there since the Mirrlees days. It was pretty grim. We didn’t have a very big budget at the time so I sourced some steel shelving and put that in.”*

Although Michael had done everything possible to safeguard the company’s financial health, and Mary was making headway in putting better administrative systems in place, by the mid 1980’s Stephenson’s was in a very vulnerable position. There had been increasing overheads, particularly with the Newcastle depot. Discounts had been given to breweries to keep their business and there was the problem of cut-throat business deals that were ruining many of the companies that were Stephenson’s customers. So, although sales were up, profit margins were dropping.

The Newcastle depot had to be closed. From then on the Scottish and Newcastle Brewery had to be supplied by a weekly van trip. The loss of the Lanchester Taverns account hit sales very badly.

And so, in 1985, as a crisis seemed to be looming, Michael presented a very detailed proposition for a merger with T. Gibson & Sons on a 70% / 30% basis in favour of Stephenson’s. Although agreed by the Board, the deal was dropped within a week after difficulties about the merger arose with the other company. At this point the Midland Bank offered to send in one of their personnel attached to the Bank Advisory Services to appraise the situation and, in September, Michael was able to report that overheads were under control, the sales of all commodities up and the overall picture was very much improved.

By October, Stephenson’s had won the Pennine Host contract, Wolverhampton and Dudley Breweries, and had seen rapid growth with Yates’s Wine Lodges, a customer of 99 years.

At this time, many competitors were taken over by the Black Group (a subsidiary of Palmer & Harvey) and despite various meetings and desultory offers, Stephenson’s decided to remain independent. These competitors included Clarke & Young (Liverpool), Harry Haworth (Manchester), Northampton Glass, Tordoff’s (Bradford) and Thomas Upton (Birmingham), among others.

This rapid buyout of much of the competition, and with it the independent circuit and their proprietors left a gap for Stephenson's to position itself as an enduring beacon of knowledge and expertise that could continue to grow.



*A second office in the mid 1980's prior to a move to new facilities in 'Test Shed E'*

## **Recovery**

By 1986, a turnaround had been achieved. Sales had broken all records and Michael was confident that they would pass the £2m mark by year's end. This was attributed to the Pennine Host contract but other sales were up also. After a period of turbulence and genuine concerns for the continued existence of the company, Stephenson's was finally in a position to get back on track — though there were still some bumps in the road ahead...

In light of this financial recovery £14,000 was to be spent on upgrades to the Olivetti A5, bringing its memory up to 14 megabytes. Today, this memory would barely store three songs but at the time it was critical in linking in with the brewery's computer systems.

Even so, more computing capacity was eventually needed. Jim Milnes reported that “so much information was now being put in and extracted that the sides (of the computers) were literally bulging”.

And so a new computer was purchased and installed in October 1986 which, with 2 new screens and a faster printer, came to £19,105 (over £54,000 in today’s terms). It’s almost impossible now to imagine that 14 megabytes of memory was an advance when we talk now about the memories of mobile phones and tablets in terms of gigabytes.



*Michael at a Steelite Awards event in the 1980's with Geoff Radford, Steelite Sales Director*

Meanwhile, Mary Stephenson had got to work on the warehouse realising that it would benefit from the introduction of ‘bin locations’ – a more efficient approach to coding, storing and locating stock. She spent months on this, so involved in the task that her helper often had to remind her mid-afternoon that she might like to stop for lunch.

New offices were also created in what continued to be known as ‘Testing Shed E’, a name carried over from when the Mirrlees Stoker Division used the building.



*Test Shed 'E' before the new offices were installed. The shelving at the back held the cutlery stock*



*Derek Rhodes, seen here, was responsible for all the work done, alongside his role as a salesman for the company*



*New offices in Test Shed 'E'*

Sales figures broke all records in 1987 and it was hoped that profits would do the same, but stocks were too high and buying had to be kept down. The main problem was the huge stock of Wedgwood Pottery just sitting on the shelves as sales slowed down (Wedgwood lead times were up to 8 or 9 months). At the same time, the purchase of the Harrington Arms public house was being discussed with Yates Bros. Wine Lodges Ltd. The commencing asking price was £160,000. It was proposed that Lloyds Bank would put in £100,000, Robinson's £40,000 and Stephenson's £20,000. The Board agreed the deal with a subsidiary company to be formed.

The Harrington Arms proved to be a challenge in these early years. A considerable loss was made on the pub in the first 6 months that included one off costs for fees and decoration. To worsen these issues, the new managers then unexpectedly gave notice and left. It was decided that Michael should run the pub with his son Julian until a purchaser was found. He remembers this period as being extremely stressful.

In May 1988, the year-end figures were discussed: the profit of £42,510 on trading was excellent but the loss of £32,900 on the Harrington Arms reduced this to £4,816 after tax. February 1989 saw Robinson's Brewery step in, buying the Harrington Arms for £260,000 leaving a £60,000 profit after deductions and repayment of the initial loan.



*The Harrington Arms, bought in 1987*



*The liveried 'vintage type' promotional vehicle parked by the Harrington Arms, 1987*

# Serving the caterer for generations

FEW people in the catering industry in the north of England will not have heard of Stockport-based H.G. Stephenson who offer high quality merchandise matched with personal service.

Throughout the firm's long history a member of the family has been at the helm and the present managing director Michael Stephenson is proud of the record they have been able to achieve.

"Because this is essentially a family firm it means we can give our customers a special kind of commitment that is often missing when dealing with bigger, more impersonal suppliers" he says.

When the decision was made to concentrate on the wholesale side of the business in the mid-Sixties it was being run from a collection of sheds on freehold property the company owned at Stockport.

This has now been extended to a superb showroom offering many hundreds of items, a 12,000 square-foot purpose-built warehouse, more than 40 staff and a fleet of delivery vans.

Stephenson's supply caterers over a wide area - Manchester, Lancashire, Cheshire, Yorkshire, the Midlands, North Wales, The Wirral, Cumbria and across to Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

Goods are sent by their own vehicles and deliveries to customers are normally made within three working days of receipt of orders with an express service available in emergencies.

A team of seven representatives make regular calls on customers throughout the north of England and there is also a trade counter for personal callers.

Stephenson's may be a firm with traditions, but they are also up-to-

date with technology including a fully comprehensive computer system installed five years ago.

Direct involvement in entering was established recently where Mr Stephenson's stepson Julian Lewis-Booth took over the running of a Cheshire country pub which is providing an exciting venture for the family.

Mary Stephenson, Michael's wife is heavily involved within the company, his mother Dorothy is a director of the company and two long serving members of staff, Frank Calderwood and Jim Milnes who have completed 37 and 35 years respectively, have been made directors.

But the family line looks set to continue... Mr Stephenson's son, now aged 12, has expressed strong interest in joining the family firm. His name: Henry George, which is precisely where it all started!

*Article in the Northern Caterer, December 1988*

The Northern Caterer carried an advertising article in December 1988 in which Michael described the developments at Kennerley Works and the involvement of the family.

## **Snakes in the Grass**

In May 1989 it came to Michael's attention that one of the company's van drivers might have been stealing goods and selling them on. To probe for the alleged thefts a company specialising in events of this nature, Special Investigation Services (SIS), was brought in.

For this investigation a "mole" was put into company by SIS. This individual proceeded to "gain the confidence of fellow work-mates" and they found that theft was indeed happening on a large scale. SIS had notified the police and arrests were carried out at the start of July. Charges were brought against the driver in question and also against two individuals who had been the receivers of the stolen goods.

From then on, a security guard was employed with a cabin as his office in the yard.

A year later, there came to light a substantial theft by a member of the Accounts Department. It was in the region of £85,000 — such a large amount that cash flow suffered for some years afterwards. One of the staff had spotted what appeared to be a minor accounting error, but with good detective work, the scale of the theft that had been taking place became apparent. Again the police were notified, the guilty party was arrested and charged, and ultimately served a prison sentence.

Although extremely damaging to the business, few such betrayals of trust have occurred since. In fact, many of those who came before, during and after these events have been notable in their loyalty and long-standing service with the company.



*Henry, Mary, Michael, Dorothy and Harold Stephenson celebrating in the 1980's*



## The 1990's: A Changing Landscape

### **“It wasn't all bad”**

Michael Stephenson says:

*“It wasn't all bad... Business in the 1960's through to the 1990's was mainly a lot of fun. Customers, whilst taking negotiating seriously, enjoyed discussions over lunch”*

...and he confesses that they assisted him in consuming vast amounts of alcohol...

*“Suppliers were of a similar vein and a considerable amount of the working week was spent entertaining, or being entertained, in the furtherance of business.”*

This is perhaps just as well, because having survived the 1970's oil crisis and the 1980's 'slump', the 1990's began with yet another recession.

Ironically, sales had been up at the end of 1989 and the Christmas bonus for the staff was half a week's wages plus a turkey each. An investment was made in a Mercedes Sprinter van, the brand the company now always uses for the transit of goods.

However, as Michael explains:

*“Because of intense competition, the pressure was on. Everyone was discounting to chase business. To protect margins, the company had to try to get terms off suppliers that would make up for it. It was hard work. We had to lose staff across the board during that period.”*

Systems had to be introduced to bring the company more into line with modern times and to help reduce costs. A new level of professionalism was needed. Michael Lewis of Yates helped bring this about when he was appointed to as a non-executive board member in early 1991. Michael says:

*“He put us on the track that has progressed ever since. Before that it was a dictatorship, me; before me it was father and before that it was Uncle Ernest – always run by the man at the top. But then we began sharing with management, to bring management into the meetings, having discussions.”*

As a result of the changing landscape and the introduction of the ‘Beer Orders’ act, which brought about legislation to force breweries to release a very large number of their tied public houses, Stephenson’s concentrated its efforts on developing strong relationships with regional brewers including J.W.Lees, Joseph Holt, Frederic Robinson, Hydes and Daniel Thwaites. In addition, moves were made to grow the company’s presence in the independent on-trade that was growing, and in sectors such as education, hospitals, care homes & leisure. The contract with ICI (Imperial Chemical Industries) also accounted for a good part of the business.

A further aspect of change is that while some suppliers improved on their production dates, resulting in Stephenson’s not having to carry so much stock, many were closing down due to the structural changes in UK manufacturing.

On 19th September 1991, Harold Stephenson passed away. He was Edgar Stephenson’s son and Henry George Stephenson’s grandson. As the only 3rd generation male heir available to take over the mantle from his Uncle Ernest, he had served the company well from 1933 to 1980.



*Michael raises a glass with Peter Dickson at the Stephenson's-Yates joint 125th Anniversary party, 1993*

### **A Retail Reintroduction**

In 1994 Jim Milnes retired and Caroline McGeorge became the new Financial Director. Mary Stephenson was appointed Company Secretary. In the same year it was decided to try to re-introduce retail at Kennerley Works, 33 years after the Barton Arcade shops had been sold to Lawley's. For this retail reintroduction, a first showroom was opened in the area that now houses the cash and carry. Then, in 1998 the current showroom replaced this, with Mary working on all aspects of the fittings and the displays. Having these two units opened up opportunities to cater for both hospitality and retail.

In the years that have followed, Mary has always supervised the showroom.

*"Displaying everything that's in the catalogue- cutlery, glassware, bottles, carafes and ancillaries and showing a selection of each pattern of pottery. We do the makeover of the showroom each year after the new catalogue has been published in February."*



*Mary and Michael Stephenson*



*Construction of the new offices and showroom begins, 1997*



*L-R: Mary Stephenson (second from left) John Artis (fourth from left), Ray Chadwick (centre), Michael Stephenson (fourth from right), Roy Gibson (third from right), Glen Marshall (second from right) and Norris Brookes (far right)*

Mary continues:

*“Also, the samples are prepared for the Northern Restaurant and Bar show at Manchester Central. Once the show is over, the samples have to go into the showroom. There are over 5,000 items to be displayed and each one has to have its code correctly assigned to match the catalogue entries.”*

### **1998 - The Next Generation Comes on Board**

By 1997, turnover had reached £4.2m with sales to Yates accounting for about 30% of this. Five new employees were taken on including a new Transport and Warehouse Manager in Mick Brunton.



*The Stephenson's showroom as it appears today*



*L-R: Aaron Letch, Calum Hendry, Gary Thompson, Chris Morral, Nik Koroneos, Julian Lewis-Booth, Euan Stirling, Steve Jordan, Jamie Murphy, John Pedley, Rob Douglas and Paul Barnes*

*Julian flanked by the company's Territory Managers*

In 1998, Julian Lewis-Booth, Michael's step-son decided to return to the North West from London and to take up his father's offer to join Stephenson's.

Stephenson's wasn't new to Julian — his earliest memory is of earning pocket money by filling 5 litre plastic containers with concentrated pine disinfectant (diluted with water) in the back yard of Kennerley Works! He was paid 5 pence for every container. He then graduated to the position of bartender at the age of 12 helping to promote a new product, Crystamix, an additive to cocktail drinks. As they say, 'start them young'.

Twenty years later, Julian's experience of working in London, latterly at Ernst and Young, had provided him not only with a good working knowledge of corporate business operations but also a familiarity with the IT systems to support them.



*Julian working as a bartender, c.1981*

The first task Julian embarked on was to streamline the whole internal administrative and communications operations. He set up a new computer network, as well as the in-house email system (on which the company became completely dependent within two weeks of installation). With the foresight of online sales in mind, Julian also bought the domain name 'hgs.co.uk'.

At that time, the large accounts such as Daniel Thwaites, Frederic Robinson's, J.W. Lees and Yate's Wine Lodge began to want data from Stephenson's to create budgets for their individual sites (mostly pubs). In response, Julian built a new database system so that tailor-made reports could be supplied.

It was through this activity that he forged a close relationship with the customers, and consequently became the National Account Manager dealing with requests, breakdowns, sales control, prices and budget. At that time looking after the sales team was secondary (as it was primarily dealt with by another member of staff) although now that is the major part of his job and something he greatly enjoys.

Julian sees Stephenson's strength as having the experience and expertise to buy well. "The prices we obtain from suppliers for goods are at the better end of what's out there. That means we stay competitive." He adds though that he's always relied on a strong relationship with customers to carry the business through.



*Julian congratulates Ryan Pardon on his completion of the Stephenson's apprentice scheme, 2017*



*Managing Director, Henry Stephenson, 2015*



## **The New Millennium**

### **A New Managing Director**

Henry Stephenson joined the company on July 24, 2005 as Marketing Director, and as the fifth generation of the Stephensons to be involved in the business. Prior to this, he had spent five years at Sainsbury's, latterly as Senior Buyer for spirits and alcopops. His last role joining the family business was in the whisky industry with William Grant & Sons, where he was responsible for a budget of over £350m.

Henry's arrival came just after Stephenson's had lost their largest customer, Yates Wine Lodges. With 30% of their turnover gone, it was a tough year for the company. Being new to the business, Henry could be objective. He saw that there needed to be a period of 'refocusing'. Some of the first issues identified were that too many duplicate lines were running alongside each other and that pricing was out of kilter with competitors.

As part this overview and refocus, Henry joined a sales rep for the day. He was shocked to see that the rep was working with a boot-full of manufacturers' catalogues. Not only was this inefficient, but it also meant that Stephenson's were failing to leave their brand with the customer. This trip was the catalyst for Stephenson's to produce their own comprehensive catalogue which began yearly range reviews and allowed the company to annually benchmark prices.

He remarks that the first catalogue was a ‘backbreaker’ then, and continues to be so, but it is Stephenson’s own branded literature and has become absolutely essential to the business. Just as Henry intended.

In 2009, Henry was appointed Managing Director, with his father, Michael, moving onto the position of chairman after 39 years in that role. After a few years as MD, a 2011 market survey sparked Henry to make more business alterations. The company began work on refocusing prices, retaining staff and offering new levels of customer service. The survey also brought to Henry’s attention the value of having its own drivers, rather than outsourcing to a transport firm. Over the proceeding years, Henry oversaw changes that included building a larger management structure and increasing the number of staff. Whereas there were 35 in 2005, there are now over 100.

Having a real passion for the products Stephenson’s offer, Henry takes an active interest in the purchasing side of the business. This is also expressed in his involvement with Caterbar, a buying consortium founded in 1986, of which Stephenson’s is the only remaining founding member. In 2015 Henry was made Chairman of Caterbar and with his appointment he expressed a desire to expand the consortium to ensure that it was large enough to maintain the bulk discounts given by the suppliers it deals with. Since Henry took the reins, key new members have joined and the combined turnover for the consortium is over £100,000,000.

Henry sees the strength of H.G. Stephenson Ltd. being its knowledge base, built up over many years of trading. Indeed, a great deal of it resides with staff who have stayed with the company for a large part of their working lives. He feels that this shared knowledge base, that permeates the business, is what allows Stephenson’s to understand exactly what it is that customers want and to offer advice appropriate to their needs.

### **The Journey so Far and a Look Ahead**

In 2019, Henry believes that Stephenson’s can define itself as a ‘one-stop-shop’ servicing the independent UK catering and hospitality industry, as well as being a vital place of support for bars, hotels, care homes and the education sector. Both essential and innovative products are sourced directly from manufacturers and UK importers to ensure the best items at the best prices.

Henry’s arrival has resulted in many significant steps forward. Highlights include a 330% turnover spike since 2006, two new warehouse units amassing over 20,000sq.ft of space and an 11% increase in staff satisfaction from 2011-17.



*The Lantern Tankard is exclusively available from Stephenson's*

The company even launched their own innovative product with the revival of Britain's first handled beer glass, the ten-sided Lantern Tankard. Despite these successes, Henry has the desire of all good business leaders — keep growing.

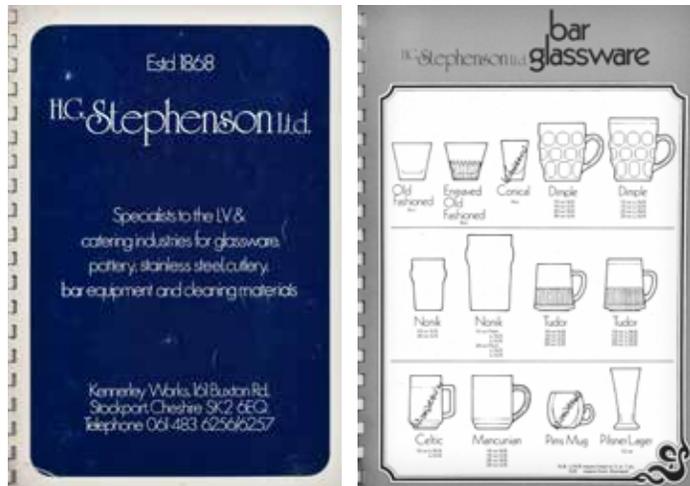
Looking ahead, his plan is really no different from that of his descendants — to pass on a successful and prosperous company onto the next generation of the Stephenson family. Henry intends to achieve this by controlling costs and overheads, identifying new markets (hotels and the care sector are high on the agenda) and seeking out the most innovative products. It is also crucial, he says, that staff continue to provide unparalleled guidance and that the company works on deploying social/mobile networks to communicate with current and potential customers. Plans for a whole new premises are also on the horizon.

There may be 150 years between Henry George Stephenson and his namesake, but they both share the same understanding of what it takes to run a successful business: a passion for the industry, an understanding of the market, a willingness to embrace and respond to new trends and, crucially — a desire to provide the customer with the right product, at the right time, at the right price. Through the work of the four generations that came before him, as well as his own significant contribution, Henry can, with confidence, describe H.G. Stephenson's as:

***“A trusted family business inspiring the caterer through service, advice, innovation and price”***

## The Production of the Catalogue

Stephenson's currently offer in the region of 30,000 lines. Its 2018 catalogue included about 10,000 of these. It was a rather different document in the past though.



*The first H.G. Stephenson Catalogue from the late 1970's*

As seen earlier in the book, there had actually been illustrated Stephenson's catalogues produced as early as 1900, but these were not distributed or planned in the same manner. Later, in the 1970's Mary Stephenson and her team worked painstakingly on catalogues that highlighted key ranges.

The first fully comprehensive Stephenson's catalogue was compiled in 2006. Brad Duncan was hired to design, and Henry, along with the team of Stuart Linsey, Laura Shervin and Aaron Letch assisted in its creation. Now there is a dedicated team of more than twenty people who meticulously put the catalogue together each year, working through the night and weekends as it comes up to the print deadline. In 2006 the first catalogue came in at 213 pages; the 2018 edition contained 634. Traditionally, the catalogue is launched at the Northern Restaurant & Bar Exhibition, which is held every March in Manchester. Stuart believes that having this deadline is an essential spur that drives the production of the catalogue, and that this is aided immensely by it being put together by the in-house team. He remarks that:

*"However hard you work on bringing in new products through the year, and even if you think there can't be much more, as soon as you start talking to the manufacturers in January, there's a huge number of exciting new products to introduce. We strive to be on top of this".*



*The evolution of the Stephenson's Catalogue, from 2006 to 2018*

## **The History of the Website**

One of the most profound changes to hit Stephenson's, and the world as a whole, was the advent of the Internet. Suddenly, here is a service that can provide consumers with a vast assortment of products, all available to see and order remotely. It changed everything for those in commerce, and despite the company having firm foundations of over a hundred years, modernisation waits for no one.

Stephenson's had to keep up and so the very first incarnation of the website was registered under the domain [www.HGS.co.uk](http://www.HGS.co.uk) in 2000. As current Stephenson's Marketing Manager Brad Duncan recalls, "Abbreviations were very reflective of the late 90's branding at the time. Companies were always shortening their names in an attempt to optimise retention." This first site was created by Geoff Bennion (Technology Administrator) which Brad says was "very much like a brochure that just served as an advertisement for the business".

By 2002 there were some buying capabilities but Brad remarks that "the visual features were minimal and pictures weren't placed with products". At this time, the early connection method of dial-up and loading times were just too restrictive for creativity. Essentially, it was function rather than presentation.

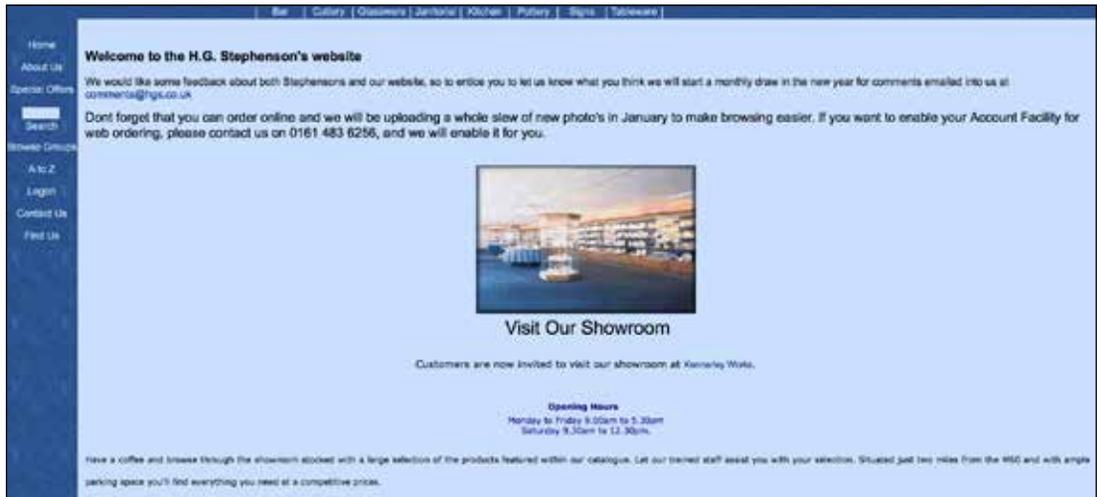
2006 heralded the first major web rebrand and this coincided with the successful launch of the modern format of the catalogue at the Northern Restaurant & Bar Exhibition. Brad was on graphics and Geoff was on the technical aspects such as coding. It started with a few face-lifts to the existing content, before a whole new site launch on October 23rd 2006.

Following on from this rebrand, the domain name then came into question. Despite the early web-centric adoption of abbreviations, it was decided that a move to the family name of 'Stephensons' was the right idea as more customers were familiar with that name. There was one small obstacle in the way though... Midwest Grooming Supplies & Service, an American dog grooming company, actually already owned the 'Stephensons' domain name. Brad remembers: "I sent an initial email expressing interest in the domain name. At this time it was a hectic period of people registering and then selling on domains but fortunately, after negotiations, we managed to get it for around \$4,000."

After the successful name purchase, Brad and Geoff began upping the Stephenson's online presence with a new platform and features, such as a picture for every product. There was one hitch though. For the first year, whenever the Stephenson's page was opened there had to be a section asking if you were looking to access to Midwest Grooming Supplies and Service!

Over the succeeding years there were a number of improvements and steps towards user friendliness and, even amidst early public worries of online shopping security, the site started to gain traction. In November 2009 there was another platform and design overhaul to keep up with growing demand. Brad comments that "by the period of 2010-2012 we noticed online sales just flooding in and we realised that the website offered us something the catalogue couldn't — an almost unlimited number of potential products." This point saw Laura Shervin (who'd held a number of key cross-department roles) join the marketing department, bringing with her an in-depth knowledge of the products. The marketing team then organically expanded from there.

The website has gone on to become one of the most crucial aspects of the business and the first port of call for many customers. 2019 will see another impressive website re-launch to mark the 150th anniversary and cement the company's position as a modern distributor. The new site has been designed with a dedicated emphasis on today's customer's needs such as easily accessible information, seamless navigation, intuitiveness and an overall positive user experience.



*An early version of the website, c. 2003*



*The website is constantly evolving and improving. Home page, c. 2007*



Inouvelle ECO Soft Toilet Roll  
 2 Plx 307cm  
 £12.99 case of 48



Booze Kettle Wet Heat 10  
 Litres Black  
 £39.99 each



Traditional Red Stripe Reels  
 Paper Straws  
 £1.99 pack of 100



Vintage Tinned Metal Plates  
 12x18cm  
 £7.16 each



Stainless Steel 1/1  
 Gastronorm Chafin Dish  
 £20.99 each



The current Stephenson's website, c. 2017

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 LEAD CLEAR  
 CLEARANCE

*A pre-launch preview of the new Stephenson's website, due to launch in 2019*

## Marking the Sesquicentennial Anniversary

To reach 150 years in business is quite the achievement for any company, but this landmark is especially impressive when you consider the trials, tribulations and ever-changing business landscape detailed in the previous chapters. Indeed, when 2018 rolled in and heralded Stephenson's 150th year, you could've forgiven the company for taking a step back, a deep breath and reflecting upon the achievement... this wasn't to be the case though.

One of the first major achievements of 2018 was being named the Regional Distributor of the Year at the annual Foodservice Packaging Association awards show in Brighton. This accolade commends excellence in food packaging distribution — taking into account service, price, variety and sustainability. With Stephenson's making such a commitment to bolstering their disposables offering in recent years, the trophy serves as recognition of hard work paying dividends. Significantly, the award was also voted for by the company's own customers.



*FPA Regional Distributor of the Year Award, 2018*

Following the FPA title was the annual Northern Restaurant and Bar show at the Manchester Central Convention Complex — a mainstay in the Stephenson’s calendar and notably, the occasion of the company’s trademark annual catalogue launch. After months of painstaking organisation, the show went off remarkably well. The 150th anniversary catalogue clocked in as the most extensive ever produced, and it was supplemented by the launch of an anniversary newspaper filled with stories from the history of Stephenson’s.



*The Stephenson’s stand at NRB 2018*

The show stand itself was a bespoke open-plan wooden display, custom built to showcase some of the brand new product ranges from the catalogue. Over the two days the Stephenson’s stand became a hive of activity and, when the dust had settled, NRB 2018 could be firmly categorised as a success.



*The Stephenson's stand at NRB 2018*

After a busy summer of trading boosted by warm weather and World Cup fever, it was time to formally celebrate the anniversary. Fittingly, the company decided to return home to the location of its original retail shop — Barton Arcade in Manchester. The space, which now houses Lunya Catalanian Restaurant and Deli, was transformed for the evening of September 17th with recreations of the shop's original features, including a crockery storefront and authentic window decals.

On the night, both Michael and Henry gave reflective speeches to a host of guests comprised of the business's valued customers, suppliers and employees. Entertainment came in the form of swing jazz and magic, and as the last guests departed, many a glass had been raised in toast of Stephenson's.



*The entrance to the 150th Anniversary Party in Barton Arcade*



*The original Stephenson's shop front was recreated for the occasion*



*The party was quickly in full swing*



*Michael Stephenson & Jim Milnes*



*Brad Duncan & Henry Stephenson*



*Katie, Mandy & Doug Almond*



*Vito Angrisani, Richard Tavini & Valentina Ceccacci*



*Nicolla, Georgia & Ellie Hudson*



*Paul & Kathryn Roden*



*Jennifer, Jordan, Lorraine & Stewart Brookes*



*Kevin Oakes*



*Marc Dumbill & Corin Bell*



*Gemma Hodgess, Rachel Lowe, John Temple*



*John Pedley, Chris Hill, Gary Bellamy (rear), Ford Maddox Brown, Andrew Jackson & Rebecca Dobson*



*Pablo Caramuta*



*The Black Sheikhs Jazz Swing band*



*L-R: Michael, Henry & Mary Stephenson, James, Alex, Julian & Nikki Lewis-Booth and George Stephenson*

Innovation and sustainability were also on the 2018 agenda and in late October, Stephenson's partnered with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to launch the Manchester Bee Paper Straw. The 'bee straw' is the first step in the council's mission to eradicate avoidable single use plastics in Greater Manchester and is only available to signees of the 'PlasticFreeGM Pledge'.



*The Manchester Bee Paper Straw, photographed in the Science & Industry bar in Manchester*

The straw is aptly emblazoned with the Manchester Bee, an iconic symbol of the city's unity and work ethic, and a donation from each box will go to the Manchester Emergency Fund – the charity set up to aid those affected by the attack at Manchester Arena. It's also FSC certified and fully recyclable. As of writing, over 200 businesses have already signed up to support the campaign and it looks like the straw from Stephenson's will play a key role in helping to make Greater Manchester a little greener.



*The Manchester Bee Paper Straw, photographed in the café in Manchester Art Gallery*

These few pages could be vastly extended with details of an eventful sesquicentennial year for Stephenson's that included; a BBC appearance, the Manchester to Blackpool charity bike ride, being featured in the PwC family business survey and sponsorship at the Manchester Food and Drink Festival, to name but a few. One of the crowning achievements of the year however occurred in mid-November.

After months of applications, interviews, site tours and emails, in October Stephenson's were listed as one of three nominees for a prestigious Manchester Evening News Business of the Year Award. Subsequently, on the evening of 15th November the Principal Hotel in Manchester played host to the 26th instalment of the M.E.N Business Awards, and a small group of guests from Stephenson's were there to join over 350 attendees and take in the atmosphere.

The company was vying for the Business of the Year Award in the ‘£10-25 Million Turnover’ category, up against consumer insights agency Join the Dots and experiential trip planners Sports Tours International. Despite the very worthy competition, it was Stephenson’s who reigned supreme on the evening, with the judges highlighting a “widespread passion throughout the business” and “a thorough understanding of the market” as swaying their final decision.



*The MEN Business of the Year Award (£10-25m Turnover), 2018*

To be recognised as one of the best businesses in the region by the Manchester Evening News is truly a fitting way to crown the anniversary year, especially for a company that officially started in that very city 150 years ago.

Perhaps the best way to summate on the whirlwind anniversary year is Henry’s comments from his interview in the Stephenson’s anniversary newspaper — “Our history is fabulous, but we cannot rest on our laurels. If we’re not competitive or we miss a delivery, it counts for very little”.

It’s exactly this approach to business that has helped Stephenson’s to endure for so long.



## Long-Serving Employees, Past and Present

### Miss Smith, Employed 1918 - 1984

All those who still remember Miss Smith testify to the fact that she played a legendary role in the life of Stephenson's. Her full name was Anne Mary Smith but she was only ever known as 'Miss Smith' in all her 66 years of service.

Having decided that she wanted to work for Stephenson's she duly undertook a typing course at an establishment in King Street in Manchester and was taken on as a typist in 1918 at the age of 14. She didn't retire until 1984, at the age of 80.

Little was known about Miss Smith's private life although there is one small detail. She had a gentleman friend who used to phone her at work. Unwittingly, he earned the nickname amongst her fellow workers as "Speaking", since this was the first thing Miss Smith would say when she took his calls. It came to a tragic end though as the man known as 'Speaking' died in action in the Second World War.

Miss Smith never moved on from her old typewriter, on which she must have produced so many letters and invoices. Michael remembers that he would dictate a letter to her and after she returned it to him, typed and ready for signing, it had always gone through a transformation, and always one for the better.



*Miss Smith at her retirement party*

### **Mr Stanley Wilson, Employed 1928 - 1994**

Mr Stanley Wilson joined H G Stephenson's in 1928 at the age of 15 as an errand boy. 65 years later, in 1993 and aged 80, he was still working at the company in a managerial role in the showroom. In the intervening years he was a sales representative covering the Blackpool/Fylde coast area, which is perhaps where he acquired his love of ballroom dancing.



*Stanley Wilson in typically dapper attire*

Recalled by everyone at Stephenson's who knew him as a very smart dresser, and "very well turned out, dapper". He was precise in the way he spoke and was given to using long words, whether he understood them or not. He had a habit of twirling the ends of his moustache. Keen to maintain a youthful appearance, he once dyed his hair — Michael Stephenson recalled with a smile that the result was an interesting colour of orange!

## **Mr John H. Ball, Employed 1953 - 1985**

John Ball joined the company in 1953. Harold Stephenson took him on from the Labour Exchange, following a period of service with the army. He went on to become a very fine sales representative. Many fondly recall his tidy handwriting and his great sense of humour. John was much liked by his many customers in Manchester and its surrounding areas, North Wales and the Isle of Man. He retired owing to ill health in the mid 1980's



*John Ball (left) pictured with Michael Stephenson (second right)*

APPROX 2.30 JULY MR PROPHET  
 DAVE EDWARDS 973-3815  
 JW LEES, 740V 9238  
 NORTH MLC CLUB (EX 101)  
 DEKAUNES RD  
 BLACKLEY

3600g 24oz LNS HENIK ✓  
 24 ✓ 12oz ✓ ✓ ✓  
 18 - 24oz ✓ DIMPLE ✓  
 24 - 5oz SLIM JIMS ✓  
 12 - 8oz ✓ ✓ ✓  
 16 - 12 ✓ ✓ ✓  
 16 - 19/2 5/6 LNS ✓  
 4 - 4 1/2 KINGO 3 1/4 5/6 LNS ✓  
 4 ✓ 5/6 LNS HIGHWAY ✓  
 4 ✓ 8oz BRANDY ✓  
 6x DOMINORS 1.70  
 12oz 6oz RIVERSTAR LINED AT 5oz ✓  
 600g SAUCER CHAMPAGNE ✓  
 6x LATTRE CARRER  
 6x 1/2 ✓ ✓

A page from John Ball's Order book, 1982 showing an order placed by J. W. Lees  
 who are still a much valued Stephenson's customer today

### **Mr Jim Milnes, Employed 1954 - 1994**

Mr Jim Milnes started with Stephenson's in 1954 as a cashier and worked his way up to become the company's first non-family director, having been appointed Company Secretary in 1966 and then Financial Director in 1983. He worked through three generations of the Stephenson family, Mr Ernest, Mr Harold and Michael. Remembering the day in 1954 when Harold Stephenson walked into the Midland bank in Manchester where Jim was working, he says:

*"My bank manager, Mr Donaldson, called me in and said to me, they're looking for an account cashier and they'll make you an accountant one day. So I went."*



*Mr Milnes on his retirement day with Michael Stephenson, 1994*

A year after starting, Jim had a nasty accident when he fell backwards through a glass showcase. Mr Harold took him to Aytoun Street blood bank – they exclaimed, “We take blood, he needs blood!” Once at a hospital he was given the necessary blood transfusions and had 14 stitches. Jim recalls:

*“I’ve known Michael since he was 7 years old. He would often come into work during the school holidays and busy himself around watching, not doing anything because he was too young. He loved to come into the accounts office and was very keen on knowing how the money came in. He was very monetary minded.”*

When Michael became Managing Director in 1970, it was Jim who was his mentor and right hand man.

After the Second World War, National Service in the armed forces was compulsory for all 18 year olds. Jim served in Egypt and then in Suez. This may well be where he picked up his two famous catch phrases: ‘Chop chop’ and ‘Press on, girls, press on’.

Jim said at his retirement party that he had the happiest days of his life working at Stephenson’s. He is very fondly remembered by all who worked with him, and although there are many jokes about his strictness, he was, and still is, very well respected for the enormous contribution he made to the company during his 40 years of service.

In a lovely turn of events, and despite being 90 years old, Jim was able to join Stephenson’s for their 150th anniversary celebrations at Barton Arcade.

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## Final honour for Jim 40 years on

**By Kevin Dolanoy**

**AFTER 40 years of service, finance boss Jim Milne has retired.**

The 66-year-old grandfather of four joined H G Stephenson Ltd, suppliers of hotel and catering equipment, at Kennerley Works in Buxton Road, Stockport, in 1954.

He worked his way up from cashier to become the firm’s first non-family director.

A retirement lunch was held in his honour at the Alma Lodge Hotel, Stockport. Company secretary

Mary Stephenson, whose husband Michael is the managing director, said: “Another member of the family poached Jim from a bank where he was working and persuaded him to come to our accounts department.

“He has been with us right up to his retirement.”

In 1966, Jim, a father of four, was promoted to company secretary and then in 1983 he became financial director. He said: “They

were the happiest years of my life. However, I’ll have plenty to keep me busy in my retirement.

“After a Mediterranean cruise, there will be my garden to look after.

“And I will also be able to pursue my hobby of woodwork.”

Mary added: “We’re very much a family firm and we’ve got quite a few staff members with long service just like Jim.

“If you’ve got less than 20 years’ service here, you’re still a newcomer,” she joked.

*Mr Milne’s retirement was even covered by the Manchester Evening News*

### **Mr Frank Calderwood, Employed 1953 - 1997**

Frank Calderwood joined the company to work in the warehouse, then situated in the basement of Barton Arcade. He took the job on what he thought was a temporary basis, having tired of the trade of painting and decorating. He retired 44 years later following a period of ill health. He worked under Lawrence Tideswel, the Warehouse Manager and took on the role after Mr Tideswel's death. From there, Frank moved into Purchasing in 1981 and always did an excellent job. He was elevated to a Directorship of the company in 1985, serving the Board well until his retirement.

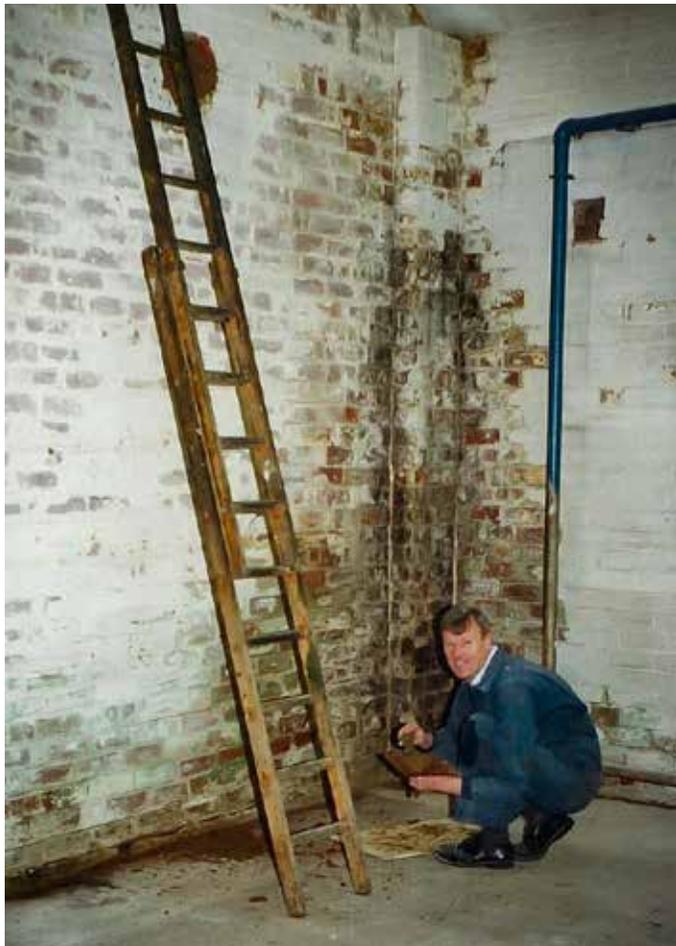


*Frank Calderwood (centre), flanked by Derek Rhodes (right), and David Franks*

## **Mr Derek Rhodes, Employed 1978 - 2000**

Derek's story is one of 'climbing up the ladder' at Stephenson's – sometimes literally. He started in 1978 as a van driver, a job for which he was greatly over-qualified having previously been a national manager for the Green Shield Stamp Company. Having been made redundant, however, and finding it hard to secure a new position, he took the driving job doing deliveries all over the North West and Wales in a Transit Luton van.

About six months later Derek agreed to Harold's suggestion that he do some 'repping'. He drove his little Ford van out on the first day and visited every pub and every restaurant from Stockport to Buxton and back.



*Derek Rhodes preparing to install the new offices*

When he took his orders, he would make them out himself, collect the goods from the warehouse the same day, make out the invoices, and then deliver them the next day, thereby cutting short the usual, longer delivery dates of up to a week.

Derek's abilities didn't lie only in selling. He was skilled at internal building work and during his time with Stephenson's he helped build the Cash & Carry, two showrooms and a set of new offices. He also designed, built and installed the stands for the GMEX Trade Show and for events such as Brewery Open Days, which he visited with Michael.

He became more and more involved with executive accounts rather than doing the 'door-knocking', and he began to visit London with Michael and meet the major customers. Eventually Michael asked if he'd like to become an accounts executive, to which he happily agreed. He confides that, after such a long time, he felt he'd made it back to where he'd been in 1978, before he joined Stephenson's. The major accounts that Derek handled were Yates, SAS at Manchester Airport, ICI, Robinsons, Jennings and Boddingtons.

Professionally, Derek made a considerable contribution to the company. At a personal level, he was greatly trusted by Michael and Mary and he says that the family treated him like a friend; "it was more than just working for someone". Derek retired in 2000 after 22 years with the company.

### **Eileen Walsh, Employed 1974 - 2002**

Eileen was interviewed by Mr Milnes. She thinks he was impressed that she had been trained as a telephonist at the GPO. She became known to everyone as 'Eileen Switch'. It was her job to take all the incoming calls and direct them to the appropriate members of staff. Through this, she became familiar with all of Stephenson's customers and suppliers, recognising them by their voices when they phoned. The company archives still hold two of Eileen's directories containing all the names and numbers entered in her handwriting.

Eileen would always travel in to work with Derek Rhodes. He would open up and she would have all the mail opened by 9.00am. Derek says he used to feel sorry for her in her tiny office all day, but Eileen has no complaints, and besides she did move to a larger office when Kennerley Works was renovated and refurbished.



*Eileen at the switchboard in the 1970s. Her right elbow is resting on the first Stephenson's catalogue*

Over her long period with the firm, Eileen grew close to Mary and Michael Stephenson. She has fond memories of looking after Julian and Henry when they were still toddlers, with them sitting on her knee as she manned the switchboard. Such was her loyalty to the business that whenever she went on holiday she would take a Stephenson's carrier bag with her and be photographed with it.



*Eileen at her new desk in the 1990's*



*Eileen advertising Stephenson's in Switzerland*

## **Beth Boswell, Employed 1971 - 1978 and 1996 - present**

### *Cash & Carry*

Beth started to work at Stephenson's in 1971 straight from school and aged 15. She remembers being interviewed by Mr Milnes. She was wearing hot pants (short shorts) and was soon to find out about Mr Milnes 'skirts, no trousers policy' for female staff. She decided to push her luck and wear a pair of culottes that she says were well made and very expensive. Eileen on switchboard wasn't at all sure she'd get away with it. Sure enough, Mr Milnes came down and shouted "Elizabeth!" He'd spotted them. To Beth's surprise the rule was still in force when she returned to Stephenson's in 1996.

Despite all that, Beth remembers Mr Milnes fondly.

*"He was good, he'd come round every morning and he spoke to you and asked how everything was and how the family were."*

She also remembers Mr Harold who was, in her words:

*"Great, very good, he was a quiet character with a sense of humour, very dry, and he was kind."*

She was initially put to work as a junior in the sales office. At first she did the 'bitty jobs' no-one else wanted to do, then progressed to entering orders handed in by the reps into the ledgers – handwritten in those days. Lunchtimes were spent with other staff in the canteen, often playing cards, darts or cribbage.

Beth did some serving in the showroom and remarks that it was very different then with its relatively small stock of crockery, glass and bar sundries. Customers who came in were mostly running local restaurants and hotels. By the time she left to start a family in 1978, Beth was taking orders from all the brewery accounts over the phone and had her own customers who would ask for her.



*Beth Boswell, centre, 1978*

When she returned in 1996, it was to a sales job in the Cash & Carry Department. Previously goods had been priced up in ‘a massive book, like a bible’ at the end of the till desk but now everything was computerised. Almost 20 years in her job now, Beth is a fount of knowledge – “tons and tons of codes, they’re all up here” she says tapping her head.

## **Lynn Shervin, Employed 1991 - present**

### ***Credit Controller***

Lynn started with Stephenson's on 11th November 1991 as a part-time Credit Controller. Her role initially involved chasing payments, ringing customers asking them to pay, sorting out any queries and controlling the amount of credit Stephenson's would give a potential new customer. Previously, she had worked as a cashier and on the sales ledger, as well as being responsible for some credit control and the chasing of money but, as she remarks, "this was full-on chasing money!"



*Lynn Shervin in 1996*

In the early days Lynn was in a small office at the back of the Cash & Carry. There were two others working in accounts then, with the Finance Officer in an adjoining office.

The Financial Director, Mr Milnes was Lynn's boss. She says, "He scared the life out of me at first", but she came to realise that his bark was worse than his bite. When she started she remembers him giving her a list of all the customers. There were about 300, now the database contains about 5,000 accounts of which 1,500 to 1,800 are active.

With 26 years experience behind her, together with her knowledge of the customers, Lynn knows when she will need to put a 'stop' (i.e hold an order back) on an account if payment is overdue, and when it won't be necessary to do so. This is vital knowledge because "if we put a stop on everyone we'd have no customers!"

In further proof of Stephenson's penchant for family ideals, Lynn's daughter Laura started with the company in July 2000, a few days after she finished college, and went from sales office junior all the way to Marketing Communications Manager. In fact, a number of the Shervin family have been employed by the business, prompting Stuart Linsey to once comment that "It's not the Stephensons', it's the Shervins".

Reflecting on working at Stephenson's, Lynn says:

*"It's one of these companies where you come and you stay, or within 18 months you go. I like the smaller family run business. You get to see the job all the way through. It can get very hectic. In the old days we used to dread September, October and November - the run up to Xmas - but now it's like that all the time, so we must be doing something right. Everybody moans about their job but at the end of the day I wouldn't work anywhere else. I wouldn't have stayed here otherwise."*

## **Sandra Innocent, Employed 1991 - present**

### ***Accounts Administrator***

Sandra was taken on in the Sales Office in 1991, in what were then the new offices in Testing Shed 'E', where she recalls there were no windows and so no view of the outside. Initially she took calls and placed orders. Soon, she was given two reps to look after, Roy Gibson and Phil Lee who she remembers as being very good at their jobs.

In the 1990's, Sandra remarks that the computers were basic and so there was still a lot of paperwork and just three staff in Sales. As others have observed, the pace is now so much faster and everything is dependent on digital technology.

In the late 1990's, personal circumstances led to Sandra re-assessing her role. She had thought to leave Stephenson's and remembers the kindness of Michael and Mary in helping her to work through that period.

The result was that she moved into Accounts, where she has remained to this day. And she says she doesn't see that she'll be moving anywhere else now.



*Sandra Innocent at her desk, c. 1991*

One thing in particular stands out, in Sandra's mind from her early days at Stephenson's: for ten years, at Christmas, Michael gave each member of staff a turkey as a bonus. As many in the company do, she appreciates working for a family firm rather than a large corporate organisation. She says:

*"You give more because of the family, they've been very good to me, and if you get treated well, then there's give and take, and you treat them as you want to be treated."*

## **Stuart Linsey, Employed 1992 - present**

### *Purchasing Manager*

Stuart joined Stephenson's in 1992 after being let go by a catering company in Chester who were changing business direction. At the time he had a catalogue in his desk containing black and white line drawings and a price list. It had come from Stephenson's. He phoned the number on the catalogue, was promptly interviewed by Michael and by the following week had started in the Cash & Carry Department looking after light equipment sales. These products (mixers, blenders and Lincat modular equipment) weren't well known to the staff at Stephenson's, so Stuart became pigeonholed as the 'expert' in this field.



*Stuart Linsey with Donald Bird (Catering Utensils Association Founder)*

Stuart thinks he must have won Mr Stephenson's trust on this because, after about a year, he began placing orders for the equipment, and so had the combined role of selling and buying. At that point he was still operating out of the Cash & Carry with access to an office when he needed to do some buying. However, after the company lost the Yates contract, consultants were brought in to look at how the business could be maximised. They advised Stuart that it made no sense for him to be doing the selling and the buying, and he was asked which of the two he wanted to do. Stuart chose to go into purchasing full time and took the recognised qualification: The Chartered Institute of Purchasing and Supply (CIPS) Diploma over a two-year period.

Stuart says of his job now, “It’s not just buying and forget it.” He and his team spend at least half their time liaising between the warehouse, the reps and the day-to-day customers. It’s all about dates. When the purchasing team place an order, they contact the supplier to find out what’s coming in and when. And they have to know which lines aren’t immediately available and ascertain when they can be expected. They enter this information online so that both the reps and Customer Services can see the ‘live’ movement of goods at any time.

As well as data management, personal contact with the reps is a large part of Stuart’s daily life. One important time of close liaison is when a rep gets an ‘opening order’ – where a bar or restaurant, for example, is starting from scratch in a new premises. These orders are ‘time critical’ and when the builders move out there is a rush to get goods in, so it’s essential that everything moves smoothly for the customer.

Another dimension of the job is what Stuart describes as being a ‘product detective’. Reps will send the purchasing team pictures of items their customers have seen, photographed and want. Not only do the team have to find them but also they have to get them in to suit the customer’s time frame.

When pressed Stuart admits that there are moments of pressure:

*“When a supplier runs out of stock it’s a little uncomfortable if you can’t switch in another product. If we ran out of Blue Roll (Stephenson’s best selling line) for example, that would be a nightmare situation.”*

Stuart concludes:

*“Every rep’s order is special so anything that doesn’t go 100% right is this day’s tragedy. Sometimes there’s a lot of firefighting and you don’t always know what’s important: it might be worth 50p and seem unimportant but actually it belongs to an order for £15,000 that’s critical so you have to rush things in. But, when it finally comes together, there’s a true sense of accomplishment ”*

**Aaron Letch, Employed 1997 - present**

*National Accounts Manager*

Aaron joined Stephenson's from university in 1997. His role was to assist the National Accounts Manager, which at that time was Derek Rhodes. After some weeks in the Accounts office learning about the business, he started to work with Derek processing the orders that Derek would be sending in from the various companies he was visiting. At that time, Yates Wine Lodges was the biggest account and Aaron would spend each morning tending to their orders. During this time, he remembers being in the offices that have now become part of the Cash & Carry showroom.



*Aaron Letch exhibiting at the Robinson's Roadshow, 2013*

After two years Aaron moved to Customer Relations and he remained there for 15 years, during which time he rose to become Customer Relations Manager. In the early days his job involved dealing with enquiries using the 'old' technologies of phone and fax machines. He recalls that thousands of pounds' worth of orders would come in over the fax machines everyday and how sometimes, when hand-written, the messages could be very hard to decipher. With the catalogue listing the lines Stephenson's carried in text but without images, and without the internet, a lot of Aaron's time was spent on following through with advice to customers on their orders.

In 2012, Aaron took over the management of the Cash & Carry, a job he loved because of the interaction with customers and staff and because everyday was different. At the time of writing, a new role awaits: having built up 20 years of experience, and having seen the business expand rapidly over the last 10 years, Aaron is now set to become the National Accounts Manager.

## A Great Day is...

We end the book with the help of the staff employed at Stephenson's today. Here they describe what a good day at work is like for them and, in doing so, demonstrate why the company is the success that it is.

A Great Day at Stephenson's is...

**"Arriving at work to all the friendly faces and sharing a few laughs whilst getting the job done."**

- Prue Davies, Showroom

**"Receiving positive feedback from customers, suppliers and staff about our website and catalogue. It makes all the blood, sweat and tears worthwhile to know that they are happy with the job we are doing."**

- Laura Shervin, Marketing

**"Completing the challenge of the everyday workload!"**

- Mark Denton, Goods In

**"When the Goods In team have worked extremely hard to get as many deliveries booked in as possible to fulfil our customer's orders."**

- Paul Maudsley, Goods In

**"Buying new and innovative products, working as part of team that's full of great people and hearing good feedback from customers."**

- Rachel Taylor, Purchasing

**"The team's hard work had paid off when a customer tweets that they are going to kick back, turn off their phone and drink their coffee while digesting the new Stephenson's catalogue."**

- Bradley Duncan, Marketing

**"When all the orders get picked and delivered on time!"**

- Connor Hambleton, Warehouse

**"Working with a great team and being able to help the customers with their needs. It's also nice to have a great manager."**

- Michelle Simpson, Cash & Carry

**"When I get compliments on the team and the customer service they give."**

- Chris North, Cash & Carry

**"The best part of carrying out a HR role at Stephenson's is the variety. I get the opportunity to engage with some amazing people from Management, to Operations, to Customer facing teams. I also enjoy getting an insight into the company's DNA and bringing in new employees to complement our team's capabilities."**

- Clair Higham, Human Resources

**"Every day. Because I've worked here for ten years now and grown up with the company, Stephenson's has become a part of my extended family. We all work hard, but we can also have fun and make each other laugh. That makes every day a great day."**

- Hannah Bale, Key Accounts

**"Knowing I'm not working with my colleagues  
in a business - but with my friends in a family."**

- Christian Sanders, Cash & Carry

**"Coming in every day, knowing I'm working with friends  
in a great environment."** - Jordan Ironmonger, Cash & Carry

**"When we are able to fulfil a full service to the  
customer and in turn receive great feedback  
without expecting any at all."**

- Emma Smith, Customer Services

**"Smooth, fluid transactions and good-  
natured banter with customers  
and regulars."**

- Kirsty Millward, Cash & Carry

**"The people - working together through all departments!  
On one occasion I had to get 10 sets of skull glasses to Paris.  
Between myself, accounts, purchasing, Julian, Goods in and  
the Pack team we did it in three days door-to-door!"**

- Laura Carroll, Customer Services

**"SELLING and SELLING!  
Especially from my Clearance Department!"**

- Adrian Mann, Cash & Carry

**"Fridays. Everyone is always more relaxed and happy!"**

- Niamh Hambleton, Customer Services

**"Processing an opening order, which could normally take weeks, within a few seconds. All because they need it A.S.A.P - turn the impossible into the possible!"**

- Rebecca Dobson, Customer Services

**"When customers are happy with the products ordered and the service received."**

- Amanda Latham, Customer Services

**"When a plan comes together. Last Friday for example was a great day. I went to Grunweg to collect a new pattern of cutlery, checked off a good customer's opening order for an exciting project with Bocelli, helped a deli client choose between Steelite, Churchill and DPS, before going back to Bocelli to check off some Artis stuff we'd sent dropship!"**

- Chris Morral, Territory Manager

**"Knowing you have made a positive difference for our customers."**

- Aaron Letch, National Accounts Manager



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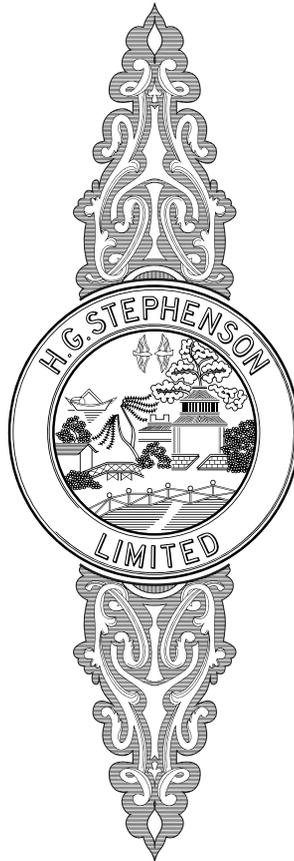
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1868

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## **Thank You**

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*Second Left to Right: Julian Lewis-Booth, Michael Stephenson, Mary Stephenson, Ford Maddox Brown, Henry Stephenson, Brad Duncan, Nicholas Owen*

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