

Redfearn Bros.

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Beginning in 1862, the Redfearn family had more than a century of history in the field of bottle manufacture by the time the firm merged with the National Glass Works to form Redfearn National Glass, Ltd., in 1967. In a purchase by a Swedish firm, the company lost its individual identity, although the final factory remains in business in 2019 as part of the Ardagh Group.

Histories

Because Redfearn Bros. merged with the National Glass Works in 1967, we have included a brief history of National here.

National Glass Works, York, Yorkshire (1930-1967)

Hampston & Prince opened the first glass house at Fishergate, York, Yorkshire, in 1794 to make flint glass and medicinal phials. While it is unclear whether that was an ancestral firm to National Glass, it certainly may have been. The York Flint Glass Co. began in 1835 at Fishergate and incorporated as the National Glass Works, Ltd., on March 3, 1930. The firm merged with the Redfearn Bros. in 1967, but the factory was demolished in 1988 (Lewis 2016).

Containers and Marks

N in a Diamond (1930-1967)

Toulouse (1971:371, 585) identified the National Glass Works as the user of the Diamond-N logo based on a 1965 list. Whitten (2018) dated the mark at least from the 1950s until the 1967 merger, but we suspect that the logo probably began with the 1930 incorporation (Figure 1).

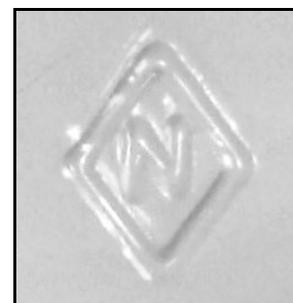


Figure 1 – Diamond-N
(Whitten 2018)

Redfearn Bros., Barnsley, Yorkshire (1862-1967)

George and Joshua Redfearn began their career as “bottle merchants” (jobbers), then purchased the Old Mill Glassworks in 1862 and operated it as the Redfearn Bros. When George died in December 1869, Joshua, the younger brother, continued the firm, retaining the name. The company apparently expanded in 1895, purchasing a works at Aldham Bridge, Wombwell, although this factory did not show up in later reports.¹ The Redfearns adopted Owens automatic machines along with Dan Rylands and the Kilner Brothers in 1906 then incorporated as Redfearn Bros. in 1910 (Bottle Digging 2013; Grace’s Guide 2013; Spencer 1988:693).

Toulouse (1971:438), however, failed to mention the Owens machines, and none of the examples we have seen display *obvious* Owens scars – as we would expect from bottles of the early 1900s. He instead reported that “Redfearn started in hand operation, advanced to semiautomatic machines about the turn of the century, then O’Neill and Lynch automatics, and now Hartford I.S. equipment” His information came from Milton Asquith, chairman of the glass Manufacturer’s Federation. Asquith also a managing director at Redfearn. When Toulouse used the word “now,” he referred to the ca. 1970 period (or earlier) when he gathered information. By that time, the company would have been Redfearn National Glass, Ltd., although the machine information prior to the I.S. equipment referred to Redfearn Bros.

In 1930, the Redfearns became a public corporation, and the group expanded in 1946, building a new plant at Monk Bretton, two miles away. In November, the move was shown to be a wise decision. The Barnsley Canal escaped its confines leaving the Old Mill plant isolated from its access to the canal, but production continued at the new location (Bottle Diggers 2013; Grace’s Guide 2013; *Yorkshire Post* 2013). South Yorkshire (n.d.) noted that the new plant was built because the Old Mill factory was too small. However, the firm regained the access to the older plant and continued to use it.

The 1951 Directory for the British Glass Industry provided a cameo view of the firm. The main office and factory continued to be the Old Mill Works at Barnsley, along with the

¹ The reporter, on a collectors’ forum called Bottle Digging, UK, was corroborated in his other information by additional sources, so the Aldham Bridge plant may have been in operation into the 20th century, closing before any later mention.

Monk Bretton plant. The combined factories operated a total of seven continuous tanks, making “bottles and jars, medical and pharmaceutical; bottles for the beer, wine, spirit and mineral trades; Winchesters; fruit-preserving Jars.” M.R. Asquith was chairman and managing director with H. Bunniss as secretary; J.S. Jessop and A.P.L. Barber were additional directors. Redfearn Bros. merged with the National Glass Works in 1967 (Grace’s Guide 2013).

Containers and Marks

RB (cursive) (poss. 1880-1900)

Toulouse (1971:438) identified these initials as possibly indicating Redfearn Barnsley (Figure 2). He stated that they were “found on handmade bottles of the 1880s mining era in California, and may or may not refer to Redfearn.” We have not seen an example and lament (not for the first time) that Toulouse failed to identify the *type* of bottle.



Figure 2 – RB (Toulouse 1971:438)

RBB (1916-1967)

According to Toulouse (1971:438, 586), R.B.B. was a “modern mark” used by the Redfearn Bros., Ltd. of Barnsley, Yorkshire, England. He provided no other information. A post on QLocal, a British discussion forum noted a bottle embossed “REDFEARN BROS BOTTLE MAKERS BARNSLEY” on the heel and “RBB” on the



Figure 3 – RBB (eBay)

base. Examples from eBay include “R.B.B. 625” in an inverted arch with an “X” in the center of the base; “R.B.B. (arch) / {large 5-pointed star} / 1809 (inverted arch)” also on the base; and a Codd-stoppered bottle embossed “RB (arch) / B” (Figure 3). The numbers were almost certainly mold codes, indicating the model of the bottle. All but one of these “RBB” marks were on culinary bottles, each of which was machine made, suggesting that the marks were incorporated after the 1906 adoption of Owens machines (Figure 4). It probably continued in use until the merger that created the Redfearn National Glass Co. in 1967 (see below).

REDFEARN BROS. MAKERS BARNLSLEY (ca. 1880-early 1920s or later)

These marks included “REDFEARN BROS / BOTTLE MAKERS / BARNLSLEY” on the reverse heel, “REDFERAN BROS / BARNLSLEY” also on the heel, and “REDFEARN BROS LD BARNLSLEY NO. 453” on the base (Figure 5). A flower vase was marked on the base with “REDFEARN BROS. BOTTLE MANUFACTURERS, BARNLSLEY.” The obvious maker was Redfeearn Brothers. Since these marks seem to mostly center around Codd-stoppered



Figure 5 – Redfeearn Bros.

bottles, they were probably used primarily during the era of Codd popularity (1880-1920) and likely phased out soon thereafter in favor of the simpler “RBB” logo.



Figure 4 – RBB bottle (eBay)

Redfeearn National Glass, Ltd., Barnlsley (1967-1989)

In 1967, the Redfeearn Bros. merged with the National Glass Works to form Redfeearn National Glass, Ltd. It is unclear just how many plants remained operational at this time – or which ones. Grace’s Guide (2013) listed the firm as “strong in the soft drink, beer and cider market” with “factories at: Barnlsley (6 furnaces) and York (2 furnaces).” Since the combined Old Mill and Monk Bretton plants operated seven furnaces in 1951, this suggests that the smaller plant, Old Mill, had closed at some point after the merger. Wikipedia (2018) reported that the Monk Bretton plant was “formerly the largest glassworks in Europe.,” and it obviously remained in operation.

Lewis (2016) commented on the closing of the York (former National Glass) unit on December 23, 1983, “ushering in a bleak Christmas for the 300 workers who lost their jobs.” He

added that Chairman John Pratt had explained the closing, stating “that the company had lost £1 million in six months from October 1982 to March 1983, and . . . price competition, the rise of non-glass containers and the recession were to blame.”

Lewis (2016) also described the factory’s skyline:

The factory had three chimneys for many years, but they were replaced by a single 180ft chimney, to send emissions higher into the sky, cutting pollution. In 1982, an extension was added, taking it to 235ft – making it the only structure in York taller than the Minster.

The Swedish PLM Industries purchased the firm in 1989, then composed of only the Monk Bretton plant. At some point, the Ardagh Group had acquired the business by 2015 and maintains the plant in operation in 2019 (Bottle Diggers 2013; *Yorkshire Post* 2013).

Containers and Marks

Diamond and Circles Symbol (1967-1989)

The symbol consisted of a diamond (actually a square revolved 45 degrees) filled with four circles, one inside each corner (Figure 6). Emhart (1982:28) illustrated the logo for Redfearn National Glass Ltd., and it appeared in a photo of the factory in 1977. These were probably used during the full tenure of the firm – 1967-1989.

Discussion and Conclusions

Although it is unclear how prominent Redfearn bottles and/or jars were in the U.S., there is little doubt that at least some of them found their way to the American continent in the form of occasional Codd-stoppered bottles and imported foods. With the exception of those noted above, there seems to have been little change in the use of logos on glass containers.



Figure 6 – Diamond & Circles (York Stories 2019)

Acknowledgments

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