

# The Glass Houses of Alfred Alexander

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Alfred Alexander and his two sons were involved in a series of English bottle factories during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. The firm made a large variety of bottles, including “pale” soda bottles at the Hunslet, Leeds, factory. Some of their bottles were used by U.S. and Canadian bottlers.

## Histories

Alfred Alexander was involved in a series of English glass houses from at least 1852 to the 1920s. He apparently began with Anthony Thatcher, eventually becoming a partner before moving into businesses where he was the dominant partner.

### **Anthony Thatcher or Anthony Thatcher & Co.**

**Yorkshire Bottle Co., London, England (1854-1860)**

**Blaydon Bottle Works, Blaydon, Durham, England (1854-1860)**

Anthony Thatcher announced in the *London Morning Post* for April 18, 1835, that his business, the London Wine Coopering and Bottle Establishment, Red Lion Yard, Old Cavendish Street, solicited

those Noblemen and Gentlemen who have wines to bottle to this establishment, where experienced men are kept to manage every department connected with the clearing, carting, fining, bottling, and binning of wines; and as the bottle business is combined with it . . . . Wines bottled for the trade.

According to Ross (1985:533), “Following the repeal of the glass duties in 1845 a new glass house was erected at Blaydon and, although originally intended as a crown works, it was taken over by a bottle manufacturer, A. Thatcher, under the title of the Durham Bottle Company.” While we cannot confirm the use of the Durham name, the Blaydon Glass Works

had been “recently erected” according to the December 3, 1847, edition of the *Newcastle Weekly Courant*. Anthony Thatcher & Co. seems to have purchased or leased the factory fairly soon after that time, certainly by 1850, calling the company the Yorkshire Glass Co. The Blaydon Bottle Works was located at Blaydon-on-Tyne, Durham, England.

By at least 1850, Anthony Thatcher & Co. had established Yorkshire Bottle Co with an office and shipping department at Brick Hill Lane, Upper Thames Street, London. An 1854 ad offered “bottles of the best manufacture, as used by Wine and Beer Merchants, Soda Water Makers, Oilmen, Wholesale and Retail Druggists, Surgeons, Perfumers, and others” (Pope 1854). The ad noted the factory as the Blaydon Bottle Works at Blaydon-on-Tyne. By at least 1852, Alfred Alexander was the agent for Yorkshire Bottle, with a warehouse at Victoria Wharf on Earl St. (McFarlane 2009; North East Bottle Collectors 2011).

Part of what is confusing in the above descriptions is that the partnership of Anthony Thacher & Co., like many of that time, used different names for different entities connected to its business, one for the partnership, another for the factory, another for the operating organization. To make it more complex, Yorkshire Bottle Co. (operating organization) had offices in London and Liverpool, the factory at Blaydon (Blaydon Bottle Works), and a shipping center at Victoria Wharfe – all under the auspices of Anthony Thatcher & Co.

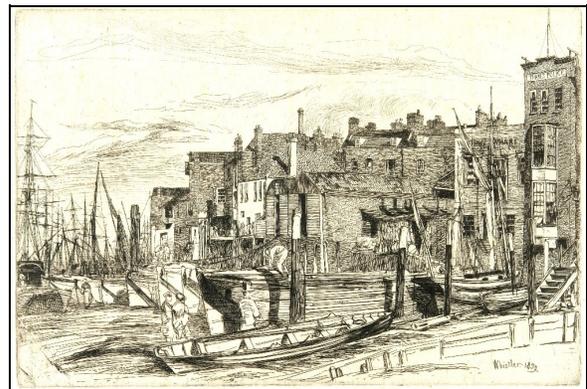


Figure 1 – Victoria Wharf (University of Glasgow)

By at least 1858, possibly from the beginning, Anthony Thatcher & Co. consisted of Anthony Thatcher, Alfred Alexander, James Battle Austin, and Henry Poole. Thatcher retired, so the partnership dissolved on July 2, 1860 (*London Daily News* 8/1/1860; McFarlane 2009). An interesting Whistler etching from 1859 (University of Glasgow) showed the warehouse location adjacent to the police station – also visible on an 1893 map (Figures 1 & 2).

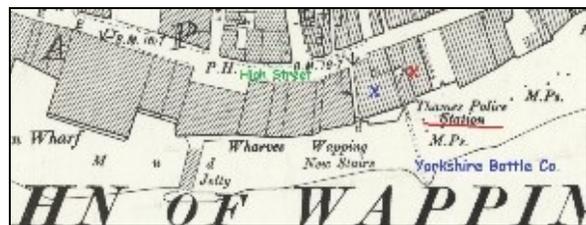


Figure 2 – 1893 map (National Library of Scotland)

## **Alexander, Austin & Poole (1860-1870)**

**Yorkshire Bottle Co., London, England (1860-1870)**

**Blaydon Glass Works, Blaydon, Durham, England (1860-1870)**

**Southwick Bottle Works, Sunderland, England (1862?-1870)**

With the retirement of Thatcher, the remaining three – Alexander, Austin & Poole – operated the Blaydon plant and the Yorkshire Bottle Co. as Alexander, Austin & Poole. The Yorkshire Bottle Co. – operated by Alfred Alexander & Co. – still maintained the warehouse at Victoria Wharf, but the sale office was no longer listed (North East Bottle Collectors 2011; Ross 1982:527). An 1865 map showed two bottle plants in the same area. The one marked “Pale



Figure 3 – 1865 map (National Library of Scotland)

Bottle Works” was almost certainly the Blaydon Bottle Works (Figure 3). According to Ross (1982:526-527), Alexander, Austin & Poole transferred the making of “pale” bottles (i.e., very light aqua colored glass) from Yorkshire, where it was first introduced, to Blaydon once the firm took over the Blaydon Glass Works. Poole withdrew from the partnership in 1870.

## **Alexander & Austin (1870-1884)**

**Blaydon Glass Bottle Co, Blaydon, Durham, England (1870-1884)**

**Southwick Bottle Works, Sunderland, England (1870-1884)**

**Hunslet, Leeds, England (at least 1872-1884)**

Although we have found no record of exactly when or why Poole left the firm, Alexander & Austin were in control by 1870. Although the firm continued to operate the Blaydon factory, producing “pale” (very light aqua) bottles, especially “soda water bottles, confectionery bottles, and druggists’ bottles” as well as amber, green and blue druggists’ bottles. The firm maintained its London warehouse and office (McFarlane 2009).

The partners obtained the Southwick Bottle Works in 1869 or 1870 and used it “as a black bottle manufactory to complement their existing pale bottle works at Blaydon” according

to Ross (1982:235). Around 1850, Henry Scott had built the Southwick plant. Because Austin was a shipbuilder from the area, the firm acquired a vacant factory at Southwick, Sunderland about 1869. Initially, the Southwick factory only manufactured “the traditional Sunderland black bottle,” although that plant, too, eventually added “pale” bottles to its inventory (Ross 1982:527).

There was a factory at Hunslet, Leeds, by at least November 19, 1814, when the Hunslet Glass Works advertised for a “crate-maker” in the *Leeds Mercury* – directing applicants to Joshua Bower. The Alexander group still did not control the plant as late as July 16, 1870, when the *Mercury* reported a strike by three young employees. The employer was John Scott of the Hunslet Glass Works. However, a document from the Royal Commission of Labor (1893:636) listed Alexander & Austin at the Hunslet Glass Works in 1872, so they added the plant sometime during that two-year period. The plant made liquor, soda, and mineral water bottles as well as fruit jars and packers’ ware.

Ross (1982:527) claimed that Alexander “was already manufacturing pale bottles at the Hunslet glass works near Leeds and appears to have transplanted the Yorkshire methods complete to Blaydon.” However, we have been unable to find any other reference to the Hunslet plant prior to 1875.

Ross (1982:157) noted that “Alexander & Austin . . . was said to be one of the first firms to whom Hiram Codd licensed the manufacture of his patented mineral water bottle.” This is repeated in some form on the internet by more than a dozen sites, but Ross was the originator. Aside from this vague, possibly distant memory, we find no historical support for any involvement of Alexander & Austin with the Codd-stoppered bottles – although the firm’s successor, Alfred Alexander & Co. certainly made Mr. Codd’s bottles.

In 1884, Austin left the firm, and Alexander created a new partnership that included his sons.

## **Alfred Alexander & Co.**

**Blaydon Glass Bottle Co, Blaydon, Durham, England (1884-?)**

**Southwick Bottle Works, Sunderland, England (1884-1912)**

**Hunslet, Leeds, England (1884-1913)**

On January 3, 1884, Alfred Alexander announced in the *London Post* that “having terminated his connection with Mr. Austen (*sic*), he has arranged an increased interest with Mr. Boughton and Mr. M’Morland [McMorland], and his eldest son, Mr. William Alexander, and the style of the firm will in the future be Alfred Alexander & Co. According to Ross (1982:535), however, his two sons, involved with the firm, were “George Alexander and Alfred Alexander, Jr. George acted as manager of both the Southwick and Blaydon works during the 1880s.” George was listed in a number of other primary venues.

On January 30, 1908, the original Alfred Alexander & Co. partnership disbanded. Although the name remained the same, both McMorland and the senior Alexander retired, leaving the firm in the hands of George and Ernest Alexander (McFarlane 2009).<sup>1</sup> Throughout this entire span, the Alexander plants produced all their bottles by hand methods.

According to the *Guardian* (3/14/12), the Sutherland Bottle Works closed on March 13, 1912. Although we have not discovered the date or reason, the Blaydon factory also appears to have closed or been sold by the time of the 1913 merger (see below). Only the Hunslet plant remained.

Alfred Alexander & Co. became one of the founding firms in the creation of the United Glass Bottle Manufacturers, Ltd., in 1913. The avowed purpose of this merger was to gain sufficient capital and leverage to capture the license for the Owens Automatic Bottle Machine. George Alexander was the first Managing Director of the new combine and eventually became the President of the Glass Manufacturers’ Federation (Ross 1982:536).

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<sup>1</sup> McFarlain claimed that these were the names of Alfred’s two sons.

## Alfred Alexander & Co., Ltd., Hunslet, Leeds, England (1913-ca. 1925)

During the first several years with United Glass Bottle Manufacturers, Ltd., the firm retained its own identity: Alfred Alexander & Co., Ltd. (e.g., see *National Glass Budget* 1916:13). Ads at least as late as 1923 continued to mention both the Alexander name and the Hunslet, Leeds, location, but both the name and location were absent from the 1927 ads (Figure 4). Obviously, two things happened during that four-year period: U.G.B. closed the Hunslet plant, and the firm ceased using individual firm names. During this period, the Hunslet factory apparently embossed some of its products with “AA&CoL<sup>TD</sup>.” See the section on United Glass Bottle for more information about that firm.



Figure 4 – 1927 UGB ad (eBay)

## Containers and Marks

### ALEXANDER & AUSTIN (1880-1884)

An eBay auction offered a pale aqua Codd-stoppered soda bottle made by Alexander & Austin. The photo of the bottle was too indistinct and too small to read the embossing, but the accompanying text noted that the front was embossed “‘Stalybridge; District Mineral Water Company’ surrounding a circular trade mark of a building. The reverse side had “Codd's Patent 6 London,” and the base was embossed “Alexander and Austin Makers London.” Despite the mixed-case report, the embossing was almost certainly all capital letters. We could guess at the spacing, configuration, and line breaks, but the basic information from the seller shows that Alexander & Austin applied their firm name to at least some codd-stoppered soda bottles, probably near the end of their venue, ca. 1880-1884.

### ALFRED ALEXANDER & C<sup>o</sup> (1884-1913)

Farnsworth & Walthall (2011:350-351, 359-366) discussed and illustrated an Apollinaris-style bottle embossed “ALFRED ALEXANDER & C<sup>o</sup> MAKERS LONDON” around the heel.



Figure 5 – Lomax bottle - Alfred Alexander (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:350)

At the shoulder, the bottle was embossed “J.A. LOMAX (slight arch) / 14 16 & 18 CHARLES PLACE / CHICAGO (all horizontal)” (Figures 5-7). Lomax was located at the triple-numeral address from 1873 to 1886, limiting the bottle’s age to that period. Since the firm did not reorganize as Alfred Alexander & Co. until 1884, however, the bottle could have been only produced between 1884 and 1886.



Figure 6 – Shoulder - Lomax bottle (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:350)

Lomax was a soda bottler and importer of ale and porter. Farnsworth & Walthall (2011:350) noted that the firm vended “Alfred’s Ale and Porter (London)” – so this bottle was probably made especially for the Alfred’s products to be vended in the U.S. by Lomax. Since Lomax originally migrated from England, his connection to his former home was apparently strong.



Figure 7 – Heel of Lomax bottle A.A. (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:350)

The timing of the bottle use is also interesting. When Adolphus Busch adapted Pasteurization to the brewing process in 1872, there were no bottles made especially for carbonated, lager beer. The older porter and ale bottles were not strong enough to withstand the pressure created by the carbonation. The only bottles strong enough at the time were those made for sodas, champagne, or mineral water. Although we may never know the reason for the choice, Busch used bottles made for Apollinaris water – probably because he found a good price on them and because of his strong connection to Germany (where the water was bottled (Lockhart 2007). Of course, the use of this style of bottle by Alfred’s (and Lomax) may have been purely coincidental.

At least one Codd-stoppered soda bottle was reported as embossed with “ALFRED ALEXANDER & CO / MAKERS / LONDON.” The bottle was used by an English soda bottler.

### A. ALEXANDER & Co (1884-1913)

Von Mechow (2013b) described two Codd-stoppered bottles that were used at St. Johns, Newfoundland, Canada. Both were embossed “THE BRITISH AERATED WATER Co (arch)” on the front body and “A. ALEXANDER & Co / LEEDS & / (both arched) LONDON (horizontal)” on the reverse lower body. St. Johns city directories listed the British Aerated Water Co. from 1913 to 1917, and an unidentified collector suggested that the firm was at St. Johns from 1912 to 1924.



Figure 9 – Base & heel (eBay)

An outdated auction reported a “dumpy” Codd bottle (i.e., one of the early styles that was made with a ball groove that extended beyond the sides of the bottle). The bottle was made of “pale” glass and was embossed “W. ROW / STOWELL ST / NEWCASTLE” on the front body and “A ALEXANDER & CO / MAKERS / BLAYDON & LONDON” on the reverse. The bottle was used by an English bottler. Another eBay auction pictured a Codd bottle embossed “C GATCUM / ALDERSHOT” on front and “A. ALEXANDER & CO. / LEEDS & (both

arched) / LONDON (horizontal).” The Alexander plant at Hunslet, Leeds, was open from at least 1884 to 1913. A final example was what may have been a sauce bottle – again from an eBay auction – embossed “COLEBROOKE & CO. (arch) / RYE (horizontal)” on the front and “A. ALEXANDER & CO. / LEEDS & (both arched) / LONDON (horizontal)” (Figures 8-10).



Figure 8 – A. Alexander & Co. bottle (eBay)



Figure 10 – Internal stopper (eBay)

**AA&CoL<sup>TD</sup>** (1913-ca. 1925)

John Sadowski sent us photos of an aqua colored wide-mouth bottle (Figure 11). The bottle was machine made with side seams that extended from the baseplate upward to the base of the neck. Another vertical seam extended downward from the parting line at the base of the finish to a point just below the shoulder, slightly offset from the body seam. This was commonly known as a “ghost” seam (Figure 12).



Figure 11 – Wide-mouth bottle (John Sadowski)



Figure 12 – Ghost seam (John Sadowski)

Another vertical seam extended upward from the base of finish offset 90 degrees from the side seams, and these seams extended to and over the top of the finish (Figure 13). The base had a distinct post-bottom. These are characteristics of the Ashley machine, the earliest machine to make small-mouth bottles in England. The Ashley machine was used in England by at least the late 1880s and in the U.S. by about 1900.



Figure 13 – Finish seams (John Sadowski)

The base was embossed “AA&CoL<sup>TD</sup>” in an arch on the base, the initials of Arthur Alexander & Co., Ltd. (Figure 14). United Glass Bottle controlled the Ashley patent, so Alexander WOULD have had access to the machines from 1913 on, but would not have had them prior to that time. This strongly suggests that Alexander used the “AA&CoL<sup>TD</sup>” mark on bottles from 1913 to ca. 1925.



Figure 14 – AA&CoLtd (John Sadowski)

A second example was as crown-finished soda bottle discussed on Antique Bottles.net, but the photos were too out of focus to reproduce. The base was embossed “AA&Co” in an inverted arch probably without “Ltd.” – but, as noted, the embossing in the photo was very indistinct.

L (poss. 1920s)

Jordan Barrett contributed a photo of a dark amber bottle with what appears to be an internal stopper. The base was embossed “UGB” in an arch at the top, with “L” at the left edge, and “5” at the bottom. In the center a logo composed of what appears to be a dragon superimposed on a figure 8 was in the center of a sunburst (Figures 15 & 16). While Gugler (2005:28, 153) claimed that the “L” indicated Castleford, Yorkshire, beginning in 1937, it is also possible that the initial was used briefly during the 1920s by Alfred Alexander & Co.



Figure 16 – L mark (Jordan Barrett)



Figure 15 – Amber bottle (Jordan Barrett)

## Discussion and Conclusions

This history disagrees with most of the dates that were published in secondary sources on the internet. The dates we have presented are from the best sources we could find and are supported by advertisements in various British publications from the periods involved.

Since we have found only a single bottle embossed with “ALEXANDER & AUSTIN,” the firm may have only begun marking its bottles near the end of that partnership in 1884. After the reorganization, the company used “ALFRED ALEXANDER” or “A. ALEXANDER” – although whether there was a temporal distinction between the two is unclear. The earliest bottles *may* have used the full “ARTHUR” designation and the generic “LONDON” – while later ones included “BLAYDON” or “LEEDS”.

The “AA&CoL<sup>TD</sup>” mark was almost certainly used by Alfred Alexander & Co., Ltd., during the period between 1913 and ca. 1925, the early years of United Glass Bottle Manufacturers, Ltd. The “AA&Co” logo without “Ltd” also may have been used during that period, although it may have been used anytime between 1894, when the crown finish was invented and 1913, when Alfred Alexander & Co. became part of the merger that created United Glass Bottle.

The use of “L” in conjunction with the “U.G.B.” logo of United Glass Bottle is questionable in view of Gugler’s identification of the initial as belonging to Castleford, Yorkshire.

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