

The Glass Houses of Alfred Alexander

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Alfred Alexander and his two sons, Alfred (junior) and George, were involved in a series of English bottle factories during the last half of the 19th century and the early 20th 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

Blaydon Glass Bottle Co, Blaydon, Durham, England (1854-1860)

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

In 1854, Anthony Thatcher established a bottle plant at Blaydon-on-Tyne, Durham, England. The factory was called the Blaydon Bottle Works, although it is unclear whether that was an official name. By at least the following year, Alfred Alexander was the agent for the Yorkshire Bottle Co., with a warehouse at Victoria Wharf on Earl St. and a sales office on Upper Thames St., both in London (McFarlane 2009; North East Bottle Collectors 2011).

At some point, possibly from the beginning, Alfred Alexander, Anthony Thatcher, James Battle Austin, and Henry Poole formed a partnership – the Blaydon Glass Bottle Co. – to operate the Blaydon plant. We have discovered virtually nothing about the operation of the factory during this period, although the partnership was formed as “Bottle Manufacturers and Bottle Merchants.” Thatcher retired, so the partnership dissolved on July 2, 1860 (McFarlane 2009).

Alexander, Austin & Poole, Blaydon (1860-1861)

With the retirement of Thatcher, the remaining three – Alexander, Austin & Poole – operated the Blaydon plant under this name for a brief period. 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). The firm, however, was very short lived.

Alexander & Austin, Blaydon (1862-1873)

Alexander & Austin, Southwick, Sunderland, England (1862-1873)

Although we have found no record of exactly when or why Poole left the firm, Alexander & Austin were in control by 1862. Ross (1982:1982:527) 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 1884.

Because Austin was a shipbuilder from the area, the firm acquired a vacant factory at Southwick, Sunderland by at least 1862. The Blaydon plant made “pale” (very light aqua) bottles, especially “soda water bottles, confectionery bottles, and druggists’ bottles” as well as amber, green and blue druggists’ bottles. 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). The firm maintained its London warehouse and office (McFarlane 2009).

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. Von Mechow (2013a) listed the patent history for Hiram Codd:

English Patent: November 24, 1870, No. 3,070

English Patent: August 22, 1871, No. 2,212

American Patent: July 23, 1872, No. 129,652

English Patent: September 3, 1872, No. 2,621

American Patent: April 29, 1873, No. 138,230

American Patent Reissued: August 13, 1878, Reissue No. 8,372

Aside from this vague, possibly distant memory, we find no historical support for any involvement of Alexander & Austin with the Codd-stoppered bottles. The partnership ended in 1873, so the firm would have been early indeed. This identification may have been based on bottles with the A. Alexander mark from the Leeds factory, but this would have been much later. We have found no references to bottles embossed with the name of Alexander & Austin.

Wikipedia (2013) noted that “Frederick Foster and William Brooke became early backers of Codd. In 1872 he was introduced to Richard Barrett, of London, whose two sons owned the Malvern Mineral Water Co. at Grove Lane, Camberwell. Barrett became Codd's partner.” This seems to be a much more likely trajectory than the involvement of Alexander & Austin.

On July 1, 1873, Alfred Alexander and James Battle Austin “by mutual consent” dissolved the partnership. At the time, the firm still controlled the Blaydon and Southwick plants as well as the warehouse in London (McFarlane 2009). The new management firm was Alfred Alexander & Co.

Alfred Alexander & Co., Blaydon and Southwick (1873-1913)

Alfred Alexander & Co., Hunslet, Leeds, England (ca. 1884-1913)

With the dissolution of Alexander & Austin on July 1, 1873, the firm of Alfred Alexander & Co. was born. The “& Co.” consisted of George Edward Alexander, Ernest Alexander, and Thomas Henry McMorland (McFarlane 2009). George and Ernest were the sons of Alfred.

Although the beginning seems to be shrouded in mystery, the Alexanders either built or acquired a glass factory at Hunslet, Leeds, by 1884. The plant made liquor, soda, and mineral water bottles as well as fruit jars and packers’ ware. Oddly, none of the online Hunslet histories mention the Alexander factory. Ross (1982:527) claimed that “Alfred Alexander, was already manufacturing pale bottles at the Hunslet glass works near Leeds” prior to 1861, but that is not supported by any other source we have found.

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 (McFarlane 2009). Throughout this entire span, the Alexander plants produced all their bottles by hand methods.

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).

Containers and Marks

ALFRED ALEXANDER & C^o (ca. 1870s-1880s)

Farnsworth & Walthall (2011:350-351, 359-366) discussed and illustrated an Apollinaris-style bottle embossed “ALFRED ALEXANDER & C^o MAKERS LONDON” around the heel. At the shoulder, the bottle was embossed “J.A. LOMAX (slight arch) / 14 16 & 18 CHARLES PLACE / CHICAGO (all horizontal)” (Figures 1-3). Lomax was located at the triple-numeral address from 1873 to 1886, so the bottle must have been made during that period.



Figure 2 – Shoulder of 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.

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



Figure 1 – Lomax bottle from Alfred Alexander & Co. (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:350)



Figure 3 – Heel of Lomax bottle with Alfred Alexander & Co. mark (Farnsworth & Walthall 2011:350)

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 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 (ca. 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.

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. Anther eBay auction pictured a Codd

bottle embossed “C GATCUM / ALDERSHOT” on front and “A. ALEXANDER & CO. / LEEDS & (both arched) / LONDON (horizontal)” (Figure 4). The Alexander plant at Hunslet, Leeds, was open from at least 1884 to 1913.



Figure 4 – Aldershot bottle with A. ALEXANDER & CO. mark (eBay)

Discussion and Conclusions

This history disagrees with several dates that are published 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.

It appears that the full name “ALFRED ALEXANDER” was used initially, although the presence of “A. ALEXANDER” on an older style “dumpy” Codd bottle also suggests an early venue. It seems likely that earlier bottles (ca. 1873-1884) used “BLAYDON” and/or “LONDON” place designation. Bottles embossed with “LEEDS” (with or without “LONDON”) were probably made after 1884. An overlap between the two logos may have occurred during the 1880s.

Future research should center around matching different types of Codd bottles with variations in the Alexander marks. There appear to have been no bottles made with the earlier Alexander & Austin name.

Sources

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