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# Harris & Pearson

## Oral History Project

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### Ralph Heeley

### Interview

#### **When did you work at Harris & Pearson?**

I didn't – I worked for E J & J Pearson, but I visited Harris & Pearson almost daily in the course of picking up materials for testing and discussing products and where they were to be used.

#### **How long did you work there for?**

I came down to work in Stourbridge in 1952 to carry out research on products for the glass industry, and I worked for E J & J Pearson and later Price Pearson for 19 years (until 1971).

#### **What was your job there?**

Shortly after I joined them E J & J Pearson shared a pot building set up with Stuart's Glassworks – I helped them to set this up. I also became something of an expert in night storage heaters.

#### **The part of Harris & Pearson you visited the most was the two small offices on the right as you look from the front.**

E J & J Pearson brought down to Stourbridge from Yorkshire a man who had been experienced in slip casting clay ware – his name was Dr Sidney Waterton – and he set up a new department in what had been a corner of Harris & Pearson's works – a spare stove – right down in the far corner of the site, diagonally opposite where the offices are. In the offices there was a small kitchen and the office on the roadside was where Sidney Waterton sat and his secretary too. Down on the works he also had a hut – which was the foreman's office for the slip casting stuff. The materials were mixed together in a blunger – a large hexagonal tank – with big paddles inside, which swished this round for 24 hours.

#### **What happened to Dr Waterton?**

For a period of time he was made a Director of the company, but he wasn't the easiest of men to get on with – he was a Communist, and felt that family businesses were not the way to put the world to rights. He made his views known, but, nevertheless, he was a good technical person, and a good businessman, and he virtually ran the business from there. He had been there since just after the war and he stayed for 15 years after I joined (1967) and then up and left and went to Canada.

### **Who followed Dr Waterton?**

A young fellow I had taken on from school and trained in my test laboratory, a chap called Arthur Timmins. He worked along with Sidney Waterton, until he (the latter) became a Director and moved his office to Sidney Evers' works at Homer Hill. Later we opened another small casting department, and Ray Barratt ran that.

### **Who else do you recall at Harris & Pearson?**

Chiefly the Works' Manager: Charlie Salt. When Dyson's took us over they liked to move the managers about. Joe Dudley came from a works by the Saltwells and Charlie Salt was moved to another one. Dudley had experience in running the huge Belgian kiln that Harris & Pearson had. This had to be filled and emptied in sequence – it never went out. It had 28 chambers. Ron Pearson too – he would go out to customers, but spent most of his time up in the office there. Leslie Tonks – he was a Clerk in the office, mainly involved with sending out quotations.

### **What do you think contributed to Harris & Pearson's decline?**

Their strength was their vast stock of standard shape bricks, which they always had available. They stockpiled when prices were low and sold when they were high, but the industry was changing, and they didn't adapt. Also their traditional markets were declining, such as gas works, the railway's use of steam locomotives, higher temperatures used in iron and steel making, and refinements in glass making. Also the newer kinds of bricks had to be fired at much higher temperatures and to much closer tolerances, which Harris & Pearson couldn't achieve.

*[Note: These are the most relevant portions from a much fuller and wide-ranging interview with much information on the firebrick industry not of direct relevance to Harris & Pearson – for which please listen to the full recording].*



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