Hey all! 🕛 You’ve probably heard of Blackfriars before, but do you know about Whitefriars? The Whitefriars glassworks were established in 1680 at Temple in the City of London. They were based in Temple because it was easy to access the Thames from which sand, clay, coal and other materials could be easily transported - all of these materials are used to make glass! Whitefriars Street still exists today, off Fleet Street. There used to be a monastery with monks there that wore white habits, hence the name!
But it wasn’t always called Whitefriars. In 1834 the glass factory was purchased by James Powell who renamed it James Powell & Sons, and it stayed that name for five generations!! They moved to Harrow in 1923 and built a factory in Wealdstone. They even carried a lit brazier from the old factory to the new one so that the fire started in 1680 still burned! In 1962 the company was renamed Whitefriars, but sadly closed down soon after in 1980. They made lots of lovely things like these millefiore and cut glass items you can see in the tank cases! People still collect, trade, and sell pieces today. This afternoon we’ll look at some more!
Welcome to the Whitefriars Room!

By the time they moved to Wealdstone, Whitefriars had been making glass for almost 250 years!
Whitefriars was and still is well known for mastering many different glass techniques!

Three are shown in these cases: millefiori, blown glass, and cut glass.
Making millefiore is a complicated process with many stages. First, the glass was heated, coloured, and stretched into ‘canes’!

Canes were bundled together and put into a ferrule (mould). Below you can see the front and side of the wooden design for the Three Kings paperweight ferrule, which would have been cast in metal to make a hollow mould, like the flower shaped one on the left.

Finally, the canes would be reheated and stretched again, to make the beautiful ‘core’ design like in the large blue cane below!

Can you see all the canes inside the flower??
Whitefriars specialized in making millefiore paperweights!

After the cane core was formed in the mould, it was cut into segments so that the pattern on the inside could be seen – forming a ‘button’. A large ‘gather’ of clear glass was then poured over the button to form the characteristic paperweight dome-shape. Finally, the paperweight was rolled by hand on newspaper to give it a shine!

Can you spot the Three Kings design from the mould we saw before?
They also made lovely cut glass from lead crystal, like chandeliers and goblets! They used moulds to cast the general shape, and following cutting mats like the one on the left to guide the design, they used grinding wheels like the one on the right to cut and polish the glass.
We can see the four stages here, on the ‘Stanmore’ pattern glass:

After glass leaves the mould... guidelines are hand-drawn... then the cuts are made... and finally polish and acid bath to bring out the shine!
Hi I’m back with more glass! 🤚 This afternoon we’re visiting my friend Dilly Duck, who was made by Whitefriars. The innovation of blown glass combined with moulds meant that the glassblowers at Whitefriars could get really creative with making vases, cups, and animal figurines. These pieces are the ones people typically think of as classic ‘Whitefriars’ glass; each one has a pattern number and people like to try to collect them all! Each pattern was attributed directly to designers like Geoffrey Baxter, William Wilson, and Harry Dyer, who liked to innovate and experiment with beautiful bright colours and textures. Most of these fun designs were made in the 1960s and 1970s.

I like the knobbly vases and that weird banjo one, too! But my favourite are the swans - they don’t have official names like Dilly Duck, but we have named them Sybil, Sylvia, Sammy, and Scott. And of course we can’t forget Polly the Penguin and Harry the Horse!
Here are some former Whitefriars employees making a blown glass jug using a mould! Looks like fun!
Glassblowers used special benches like this one so they could roll their blowpipes back and forth to shape the glass!
Glass jug pattern 9617 in Blue, Tangerine, Ruby, and Kingfisher

Banjo vase pattern 9681 in Cinnamon

Bark vase pattern 9689 in Tangerine, Ruby, and Kingfisher

The ‘Textured’ and ‘Knobbly’ ranges were two of the most popular types of glass styles made in the 1960s and 1970s at Whitefriars. Here are some examples.

The Banjo vase is my favourite – it really does look like a banjo!
Love your bubbles, Dilly and Polly!

Hiya Harry, fancy pose you got there!

There will always be room for you guys in my duck pond, Sybil, Sylvia, Sammy, and Scott!
Hi there! 👋 There’s just so much glass to show you that I couldn’t fit it all into one day! Whitefriars didn’t just make glass objects, they also designed and made stained glass windows which can now be found all over the world, I’ve heard there’s even one with my cousins the Kangaroos down under! In 2016 the museum people worked with over 100 young people from Harrow in a Young Roots project to learn all about the history and heritage of Whitefriars. They worked with the last Chief Designer and Manager of the Stained Glass Studio, Alf Fisher OBE, to design and create a piece that shows off all sorts of Harrow history! It’s displayed in our Moat Cafe now, have a look next time you’re picking up my duck food!

The museum has a very special 19th Century sketch book in it’s collection - it belonged to James Powell, the owner of Whitefriars himself. The team here worked with the Museum of London to have the sketch book digitised - they even made a video & blog about it! I think I might install one of these windows into my duck house, what do you think?
Last but not least is stained glass! Under James Powell, the demand for beautifully coloured Whitefriars stained glass windows skyrocketed.
We have lots of original drawings for stained glass windows in the Museum collection.

Many windows designed by Whitefriars are still visible today – like this one at St Peter & St Paul Bassingbourn in Cambridge!

But how do you get from drawing to window?? Let’s follow the Young Roots project to find out!
First you design your window on paper. This is called a ‘cartoon’. Whitefriars artists took inspiration from all over, as you can see from this sketchbook by James Powell himself!
Next you cut and form the lead camees which hold the glass in place for your design.

You can see the soldered lead camees surrounding this piece of sample stained glass. It shows three types of stained glass techniques – coloured, etched, & painted!
Raw coloured glass lumps, called ‘cullet’ are melted down and blown into a ‘Norman slab glass’ mould, right.

Then the individual slabs are cut from the blown-mould, and broken into pieces to fit the window sections!
Finally the pieces are secured and the lead came soldered together. Isn’t it beautiful? This window now hangs in the Museum café!