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# AN ENGLISH ART-GLASS AND TEAK SCREEN WALL,

c. 1969, by Geoffrey Baxter (1922-95) of Whitefriars (formerly known as James Powell & Sons), removed from the restaurant of British Home Stores, Southend on Sea **ON RESERVE**

comprising five tall panels and two shorter panels - the tall with a pair of lights, the shorter with four, each light being a vertical stack of "Architectural Slab" glass blocks hand-made in "Flint", "Willow", "Cinnamon" colours to a wide selection of repeated pattern variations; the blocks, over 700 in number, comprising rectangular bricks, impressed with repeated abstract motifs and extrusions, many with wavy threads of colour and bubble inclusions, flat to the back with a textured surface, the seven stud-work teak frames, canted in section with removable glazing fillets,

DIMENSIONS: 245cm (96<sup>3</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"") High, 67cm (26<sup>3</sup>/<sub>2</sub>"") Wide, 9.5cm (3<sup>3</sup>/<sub>4</sub>"") Thick, the five large (the two smaller measure 182 x 128 x 9.5cm (h x w x th)

STOCK CODE: 44785



## HISTORY

LASSCO is delighted to have discovered this screen wall - hidden, boarded-up and forgotten within the stud-walls of the much-missed British Home Stores in Southend-on-Sea. BHS has gone to the wall in recent months - with its department stores closing across the country. The Southend BHS building - after much uncertainty (and even enduring a much-reported period of

being “squatted”) is to be leased by “Primark”.

This fabulous glass wall formed a screen for the original restaurant at BHS. We suspect it was commissioned direct from Whitefriars at the point that the Department store was built in 1969 - which was both a key moment in Southend and a pivotal moment at the Whitefriars foundry.



Southend on Sea was completely re-invented in the 1960's. Like many of its New Town neighbours in Essex and the Home Counties, and the sea-side towns that had seen continual decline since the 1930's - a new program of town centre clearances and modern shopping precincts were being built and investment was being injected. With this investment and civic

pride, forged in The Festival of Britain and the Brave new World that it had garnered in the 1950's, came modern sculpture - particularly relief sculptures and even the Department Stores and Supermarkets seized on this. This screen wall is part of that.

At Whitefriars in Hertfordshire, the Managing Director William Wilson had also seized on the need to grasp Modernism and, somewhat from necessity re-invent the wares that the glassworks produced. In 1954 he had grabbed the young Geoffrey Baxter on seeing the product of his degree show at The Royal College of Art - and put him to work. Baxter soon found his feet at the august Whitefriars workshops and was eventually given free rein. Wilson and Harry Dyer had started on a new direction of travel in 1957 - moving towards "Contemporary Taste" but by 1963 Baxter's influence could be clearly seen - evident in the bio-morphic "Knobbly" range by Wilson and Dyer. Baxter took it further and experimented with the use of extant lighting moulds but started adapting them in his shed at home - using tree-bark and tin-tacks and other "found" and "repeated" motifs to create new textures. He was allowed to introduce new colours too (and retire old ones). The "Bark" range of glassware followed in 1967, the "Banjo" vase, the "Textured waisted" vase and his most sought after "Drunken Brick-layer" vase that went into production from 1966 and was produced for the next decade. By 1969 he had produced the range of "Architectural Slabs". If these bricks come to market they are generally pre-fixed with the word "rare". The quantity we have discovered in the walls at Southend must be considered one of the few - or only - surviving large commissions of these designs.