

# Electric melting specialist charts 34 years flying the flag

## for energy efficiency

While many glass industry suppliers have evolved through diversification and continuous additions to their product ranges, Electroglass has remained true to its core area of specialisation - electric glass melting systems and related equipment - and has reaped the rewards over 34 years, in the form of high repeat business and installations all over the world. Helen Bird met with Managing Director Richard Stormont to discuss the history, current projects and proudest achievements of this successful independent company.



“Energy efficiency is one of our mantras,” says Richard Stormont of Electroglass, the UK supplier which facilitates exactly that with its range of electric melting systems and related ancillary equipment.

Mr Stormont, who has been with the company for 21 of its 34-year history - 15 of those as Managing Director - clearly knows the business inside out and is rightfully proud of its many achievements over the years.

### Grounded in expertise

Electroglass was formed in 1976 by Fred Scarfe along with a group of others who, by that time, had already spent up to 20 years in the field of electric melting. Mr Stormont, who himself entered the world of electric melting in 1970, describes Fred as being “one of the pioneers of the industry”.

After working for seven years in this capacity, Richard moved overseas, where he spent approximately 10 years working in other engineering fields. He then returned to the UK, joining Fred and the Electroglass team in 1989 as Projects Engineer and quickly being promoted to Projects Director.

The company has always been based in the South Essex area of the UK, starting out in Rayleigh, then moving to Basildon before settling at its current premises in Benfleet, where it has remained for the last 25 years.

In 2003, when Fred decided to retire, Richard

effectively bought out Electroglass, giving him even more of a vested interest in the business. It was at this time that Richard’s wife, Rosemary, who had spent a few years in the industry in the 1970s, also joined the company and she remains part of the team today.

### Staying power

A modest yet highly experienced staff of 30 is distributed across the areas of engineering, design, project engineering, production and administration based at Electroglass’s 2500m<sup>2</sup>

“Energy efficiency is one of our mantras.”

▼ Electroglass converted two gas-fired forehearths to electric at the Hite glass manufacturing plant in South Korea, achieving a 70-80% energy cost saving.

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▲ Some of the projects team gather for a meeting (L-R): Steve Tawn, Projects Engineer; Andrew Selim, Senior Projects Engineer; Richard Stormont, Managing Director; Richard Petrocchino, Electrical Projects Manager; Andrew Barlow, Electrical Development Manager; and Phil Davis, Laboratory Technician.

premises. The spacious site houses offices for all departments, as well as a research, development and model testing laboratory and both electrical and mechanical manufacturing workshops.

Indeed, the company holds a remarkable accolade in terms of its staff that is most likely unmatched by any other - competitor or otherwise. Richard confirms that the average length of service for its employees is more than 13 years. Moreover, within the last seven years, only one member of staff has left the company other than through retirement.

Such a low employee turnover can only be testament to the value Electroglass places on its staff - an advantage, perhaps, of operating a smaller, independent company rather than a large corporation, where a sense of team spirit can easily be lost. "This is something we're very proud of," says Richard.

### Long-time specialisation

The other asset with staying power under the Electroglass name is, of course, its product range. Since day one, Richard explains, "the core

product range has never changed", emphasising that "to this day we remain resolutely specialist in electric melting, all-electric forehearths and electric boosting".

In addition to its core competencies of all-electric glass melting, conditioning and boosting, the company offers a precision controlled bubbling system and a comprehensive range of ancillary systems and equipment, including electrodes and electrode holders, continuous drain systems, throat heating systems and temptrim forehearth temperature homogenisation systems; all of which are designed and manufactured in-house.

### The rise of all-electric

While all-electric melting is by no means a new technology, its popularity has undoubtedly and unsurprisingly increased in recent years. "As a proportion of our business it has increased substantially," confirms Richard, "and most of that increase has been within the last 15 years".

Traditionally, most electric melting has been applied in the special glass sectors, such as fluoride opal, borosilicates and lead crystal glasses. More recently though, there has been a sharp rise in interest in all-electric melting, even for conventional soda-lime container glass. "That's an area we're likely to be doing more work in," says Richard.

The company is particularly proud of its work in electric furnaces for opal glass and considers itself to be world leader in this area.

With many historical opal furnace installations and more recent projects in the Middle East, Germany and India, this is a particular example of the worldwide presence Electroglass has established, not only in this area but in others, as we learn from some of its other success stories.

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**“To this day we remain resolutely specialist in electric melting, all-electric forehearths and electric boosting.”**

► Electroglass designs, manufactures and supplies a comprehensive range of ancillary systems and equipment, including electrode holders for almost every glass melting or conditioning application.





▲ A typical batch blanket in an Electroglass all-electric melting furnace.

“There’s very little revolutionary in this industry but there’s always scope for improvement, so development is a progressive thing.”

### Customer satisfaction

Approximately 95% of Electroglass’s total output is exported overseas - rather impressively to markets across all five continents. Its strongest geographical markets vary greatly from year to year, Richard confirms, adding that in the last 12 months it has received orders from more than 25 countries, which span North and South America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and even Australasia.

One of the company’s long-established markets is Japan. “We have had distributors in Japan for at least 30 years,” says Richard.

In the supplier’s historically strong markets in Asia and the Far East, and a well-documented successful project in this region is at the Hite glass manufacturing plant in South Korea. Here, Electroglass was commissioned to convert two existing gas-fired forehearths to all-electric: One with a 36” wide channel and one with 48”. The reasoning behind the conversion, Richard reports, was primarily energy saving and temperature control.

Indeed, since the installation was made in 2008, the forehearth energy cost saving at the plant has been a staggering 70-80% - an impressive achievement by any standards, and one that Electroglass is understandably proud of.

And, on the strength of such a significant result, the company has received a lot of interest in its all-electric forehearths, which, confirms Richard, is one of its areas of growth for the future. “We’ve done a lot of electric forehearths for decades, but I think we’ll be doing more,” he says.

### Repeat business

As Richard explained from the outset, one of the company’s other most popular products is its electric boosting system, which can increase the output of conventional fuel-fired or oxy-fuel furnaces by typically 10-40%, and in one case by at least 60%.

Customers that have capitalised on the benefits

of such an investment include leading Portuguese container glassmaker Santos Barosa, which has Electroglass boosting systems in every one of its large furnaces, as well as its Temptrim forehearth conditioning systems in each of its main forehearths.

Now the supplier is proud to have received yet another order for a major boost enlargement project. “Those are the sort of valued customers and projects we’re most proud of,” says Richard, “because of the level of repeat business”.

In fact, the level of repeat business is so high that it accounts for almost two thirds of its boosting system orders, and approximately half of its bubbling system orders. “You don’t get to do that if the customers are unhappy!” says Richard.

And with such a steady flow of business, the company has happily managed to ‘weather the storm’ financially in spite of the recent global recession, confirming that its 2009 turnover was less than 15% down on the previous year.

### Progressive development

Electroglass, like most glass industry suppliers, considers research and development an important investment, although it retains a degree of realism in terms of what can be achieved.

“There’s very little revolutionary in this industry but there’s always scope for improvement,” Richard explains. “It’s progressive development really, we’re forever striving to improve. At the moment we are working on advances in electrode holder design, further improving our glass level sensor and new approaches to batch charging for all-electric furnaces,” he adds.

### Clear focus

Meanwhile, the company remains focused on its key objective of improving energy efficiency in glass production, firmly believing that electric melting technology is the way forward for the industry.

It seems that even some of the world’s most fuel consuming countries are taking stock of the importance of environmental protection and looking at ways in which to make their most energy intensive industries reduce emissions, while others are already pursuing it.

While these are all steps in the right direction, the key to remember, according to Richard, is that significantly improving energy efficiency is very much “an incremental thing”.

In the meantime, and aside from its commercial successes over the years, Electroglass continues to make a worthy contribution to the industry’s ongoing quest for more energy efficient operations.

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