



THE CLOCKMAKERS OF TENTERDEN

During the winter programme 2008/9, the Society members were given a talk by Mr Bundock on the various types of clocks produced in Kent. In the question time which followed, I commented that when given a William Hopkins clock some years ago, the Museum purchased a well-written book called "Kent Clocks and Clockmakers" by Michael Pearson. This publication listed all the many clockmakers in the county including those who carried out such a trade in Tenterden, or who had connections with the town. I have been asked by our Editor, Jack Gillett, to write an article about these men who worked in a business no longer in existence as such.

Clockmaking was at its height in Kent, and indeed Tenterden, in the latter half of the 18th century and the early decades of the 19th, although there were exponents of the trade both before and after this period. The three better-known makers were Birch and Masters at 30 High Street (now Crew Clothing), Owen Jackson at 51 High Street (now Webbs Ironmongers) and James Hukins at 38 High Street (now Femme Fatale). All of them tended to advertise themselves as watchmakers, jewellers and silversmiths, and occasionally gunsmiths, i.e. I suppose all work which required precision.

Birch and Masters

William Birch was known to be a clockmaker in the early 1800s, later producing clocks in partnership with Thomas Ollive of Cranbrook. In 1836 he took on John Masters as an apprentice and was so pleased with the latter's work that he sold half of the business to Masters when the apprenticeship was completed, the necessary finance being provided by Masters' uncle. When Birch died, he willed his half of the business to John Masters, who gained in prosperity over the ensuing years. There still remains to this day a plaque on the building bearing the inscription "JM 1858", no doubt when the business was at its height. However, family relations were such that Masters' eldest son, John Neve Masters, parted company with his father, moving to Rye and prospering greatly as the years went by. A younger brother Thomas inherited the business upon John Masters' death, later moving the firm to Chatham in the 1890s.

Owen Jackson

One of two sons of a gunsmith in Cranbrook, Owen had a disagreement with his brother Thomas, when the father died, as to who was to take over the business. For a time, they both practised in different parts of the town but in 1767 Owen Jackson bought the premises at 51 High Street from Henry Goddard who was practising as a watchmaker, gunsmith and silversmith. He took up clockmaking at a later date, eventually taking on his son John as a partner in the firm, before his retirement in 1803. He gave his name to the lane which runs beside the shop and which leads to Bells Lane, i.e. Jacksons Lane.

James Hukins

He was practising his trade in the 1830s and worked until the 1860s when his son George Hopper Hukins took over the business. The latter carried on until the end of the century, retiring to Guernsey where he later died. His son George followed his father in the same trade and premises until the 1940s, older Tenterdonians remembering him as an elderly gentleman outside his shop. One lady now living in Lydd wrote to me about George Hukins, asking if I had a photograph of one of his clocks. Answering her in the negative, I was able to show her the Hopkins clock in the Museum and also where the Hukins' shop was. When she asked me to take a photograph of the premises, I politely declined as it is now occupied by Femme Fatale!!

Of the remaining nine clockmakers recorded in Michael Pearson's book, there appears to be no indication of where their premises were located, except for Henry Goddard, and indeed in most

cases little is known about them at all. Goddard occupied the shop, now Webbs Ironmongers, from 1730 to 1767, when he sold it to Owen Jackson, as mentioned earlier. William Hopkins, who made the clock now residing in the Museum, including the wooden case, was rather a man of mystery as far as Tenterden was concerned. He was apprenticed in London in 1742, became a Freeman in 1751, and came to Tenterden in 1760. After 10 years he left the town, to where nobody knows. John Kingsnorth was also apprenticed in London in 1688 to David Stevens, coming to Tenterden in 1695, thereby being the earliest recorded clockmaker in the town. He is thought to have trained George Thatcher in the craft, who later became renowned for his work in Cranbrook. There is mention of John's son Thomas becoming a partner in 1714. Thomas Ollive, shown earlier as a part-time partner of William Birch, worked in Tenterden for a few years starting in 1775, before moving to Cranbrook in 1778. He later took Oliver Reader into his business in 1780, and died in 1829. W C Woolley appears to have set up in business in 1780, working with Thomas Wraight of Charing as his partner, also having an assistant William Strickland from 1790 onwards. Strickland in 1803 took over from them and was indentured as a Watch, Clock and Gunmaker and Silversmith.

The remaining three, of which very little is known, were:-

Thomas Allen, recorded in practice in 1823.

James Munk, circa 1800.

Thomas Thatcher, son of George Thatcher of Cranbrook is thought to have worked in Tenterden for a short while.

Michael Pearson's book is a fascinating read and includes descriptions of the different types of clock similar to those mentioned by Mr Bundock in his talk to the Society. There is a lengthy list of all the clockmakers in Kent, and whereas such large towns as Maidstone and Canterbury were predominately the main centres, smaller locations such as Lenham and Staplehurst are also mentioned.

Alec Laurence

LOCAL HISTORICAL RESEARCH

At the end of the Society's AGM in March, I spoke, at the behest of the Committee, about the possibility of conducting organised research on local matters. When the Society was founded in 1955 and for several years afterwards, the early members carried out quite an extensive list of projects, some of which are useful in answering queries received by the Society at the present time. But these did not include such subjects as the past history of the larger houses in the area, or that relating to the many interesting buildings along the length of the High Street.

As for the former subject, quite a lot is known for instance about Heronden and Heronden Hall. But little about, say The Cedars. With the High Street buildings, a certain amount is known about some sections in the immediate town centre but virtually nothing about those west of Station Road.

Another subject which has a certain fascination is the past naming of streets in the town, now known by a different name, e.g. Brewhouse Lane, presently Station Road. That is an easy one. But there are those harder to locate, especially those in Victorian streets, e.g. xxxxxxxx Villas or xxxxxxxx Mansions. A recent enquiry received was to identify the location of Chestnut Terrace of late Victorian times as at the present time. As a Society, this sort of information should be readily available for easy reference, but it is not. Is there any member sufficiently interested to join in organised research?

Alec Laurence, Vice-President