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Geoff Allnutt Clocks & Scientific Instruments
Sales & Restoration of Antique Clocks

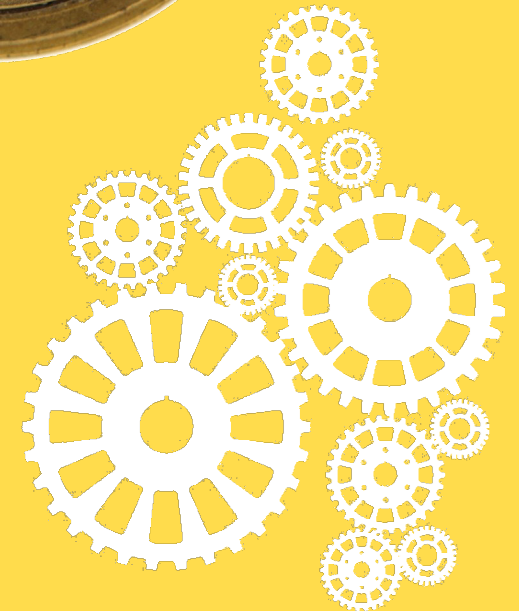
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Women in Horology



The Beginning

Due to the restrictive laws and society in 18th and 19th England there were more men than women practicing watch and clockmaking which may have led to a perception that it was a traditionally male profession. However, a recent trawl of all the records show at least 1300 women who had been horologists run successful horological businesses or worked in one of the associated crafts, such as case making or dial painting.

Since finding and collecting several watches with movements signed with women's names, Geoff Allnut has been keen to find out more about women in the industry. This led to him working with Su Fullwood to compile a list of all the women associated with watch and clockmaking. They first used books and existing lists and then primary sources. Although they found upwards of 1,300 it is clear that there were many more not so easily found in the records. Two of the women listed were working in West Street, Midhurst, possibly from the same premises now occupied by J E Allnut and Son. This has led to research continuing under the banner hashtag #HighlightingMary in reference to these two watchmakers. This booklet aims to tell some of the individual stories of our local working women and others across the country during the 18th and 19th Centuries, all who made a living from working with watches and clocks.



Acknowledgements

British Horological Institute

Dr Mike Flannery

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Lizzie McNaughton

Midhurst Museum

The Novium Museum, Chichester

Dr James Nye

Red House Museum and Gardens, Christchurch

Ted and Maureen Rudge

The Antiquarian Horological Society

The West Sussex Records Office

Sir George White

References

Amy Louise Erickson "Clock Makers, Milliners and Mistresses: Women Trading in the City of London Companies 1700 – 1750"

Sue Newman "The Christchurch Fusee Chain Gang"

To view a comprehensive listing of women working in the field of horology during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries go to [geoffallnuttclocks.com/research/women in horology](http://geoffallnuttclocks.com/research/women%20in%20horology)

Conclusion

This is not the whole story about Women in Horology but it is a taster and hopefully an incentive to find out more. On the whole women had many obstacles in pursuing any sort of profession or trade outside of domestic duties and marriage during the 18th to 20th Centuries but this did not mean that they didn't do so. When they had the opportunity, the stories are overwhelmingly about both survival, pragmatism, dynamism, continuing success and major achievement.

To view a comprehensive listing of women working in the field of horology during the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries go to [geoffallnuttclocks.com/research/women in horology](http://geoffallnuttclocks.com/research/women%20in%20horology)



Long Case Clock Dial painted by Barbara Thomas

Introduction

“Having learnt the trade, I am able to inform (him) that I think it is a most suitable and desirable employment for women”

Letter to the editor of the Clerkenwell News from “A Female Watchmaker” (unnamed) March 1866

Horology has a long history. In the 18th Century England was one of the centres of the profession for both watch and clockmaking. Some people may have heard the names of Tompion, Harrison, or Graham, but it is perhaps less likely that the names Wrapson, Lawrence, Stedman or Plowman will be well known. This is because they were provincial watch and clockmakers mainly specialising in the repair and retail rather than the grand makers and innovators. Also these businesses, along with many others across the country, were (eventually) run by women.

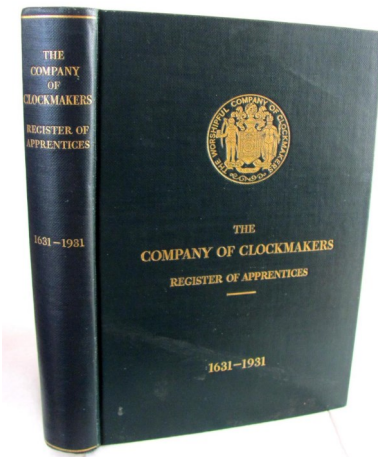
Usually these clockmakers were widows or daughters who had taken over the business from a husband, father or brother. There are however some who were apprenticed at a young age to become horologists and others who were trained to work in related fields and crafts such as case making and dial painting. Although during the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries it can be said from the records that horology was male dominated, it is not due to the nature of the profession or gender of the worker but more to do with the many restrictions legally and socially with which women had to contend. Despite these obstacles there are plenty of women in the records who are shown to be successful in the field of horology. There may also be many more than we can find easily as their stories tend to be hidden from the literature and archives.

Apprenticeships & evidence

In the 18th Century women were being taken on as apprentices and can be found in the records of The Worshipful Guild of Clockmakers. In London both men and women needed membership of a company and freedom of the city to trade there but both genders were allowed to do this. This wasn't the case in every town or city however, with rules varying across the country. For instance in Yorkshire both daughters and sons benefitted from the rules of paternity, enabling them to gain entry into a company and get the freedom of the city (and therefore run a business). While in Oxford and Southampton only widows were allowed to trade. In some places single women had to buy a certificate to trade which cost more than the company freedom that men could buy into.

The records of The Worshipful Guild of Clockmakers is probably one of our best sources of evidence for female apprentices to the watch and clock profession. However it must be treated with some caution as many of the apprentices were not automatically learning a horological trade despite being taken on by the Clockmakers Company. Although unable to explore this in detail here we recommend an excellent article by Amy Louise Erikson* which gives details about the apprentices and their trades in the first half of the 18th Century.

She does however make the point that although several of the girls became Milliners or learnt other trades at least half of the women listed did become horologists. This is a small number overall as only 1% of the total apprentices taken on (and recorded) were girls but it does demonstrate that it was not exclusively a male profession.



* See references page 27

Endangered Skills

Clockmaking and Watchmaking are considered to be traditional crafts. According to the website of the advocacy body Heritage Crafts ([Heritage Crafts | Heritage Crafts](https://www.heritagecrafts.org.uk/)) they are **“not recognised as either arts nor heritage so fall outside the remit of all current support and promotion bodies”**

In 2017 Heritage Crafts published the first report of its kind to rank traditional crafts as to whether they were likely to survive into the future. This was named the Red List of Endangered Crafts. Both clockmaking and watchmaking were on this list. In 2021 watchmaking had moved from the “endangered” into the “critically endangered” list. This means that it is a craft that is at “serious risk of no longer being practised in the UK”

Through our associations with both the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST) <https://www.qest.org.uk/> The Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST) and West Dean College of Arts and Conservation [West Dean College of Arts and Conservation](https://www.westdean.ac.uk/) as well as our work with apprentices, we support and actively contribute towards the teaching and training of craftspeople in the fields of horology.

The importance of passing on knowledge is one that is key to everything we do at every level, to ensure that a new generation of clock and watchmakers can continue to thrive, develop and innovate into the future.

Ms Andrée Richardson



Andrée is a totally independent, professional valuer, qualified diamond expert and gemmologist, she has over forty years valuation, diamond and gemmological experience in the jewellery industry. Andrée is a Fellow of the [National Association of Jewellers Institute of Registered Valuers](#) who adheres to the highest ethical standards, providing independent, detailed valuation documents.

Ms Andrée Richardson BSc (Hons), has been a Fellow of the Canadian Gemmological Association since 1987 and member of the Gemmological Association of Great Britain (Gem-A) since 1981. In 1993 became a member of the previous National Association of Goldsmiths scheme for valuers.

Andrée became Fellow of the National Association of Jewellers Institute of Registered (NAJ IRV) Valuers in 2011. All Fellows and Members are bound by the NAJ IRV Principles of Good Practice for Valuers, which sets the standards to be attained and maintained by their members.

from the Clockmakers Company

If you look at the numbers of women found in the records as being clock and watchmakers or associated with horology in some way the numbers do increase significantly. This is probably because many were being taught the skills informally by their families as well as more formally as apprentices to family members or acquaintances. Dr James Nye has recently published an article about a Quaker clockmaking family from Edmund Howard's autobiography. Writing in the mid 1700's (1710–1798) Howard describes how all the family (himself, his wife and three daughters) all work together to make the business a success. One paragraph is very telling "My wife also was not a whit behind in diligence and close attention to business, both in her household affairs, distilling simple waters, and often helping me both in the shop and the garden, and my children, as soon as able, helped in any works their strength could manage; one of my daughters, when very young, learned to clean an eight-day clock, and in a little time could do it as well as myself, and could put it together when cleaned" and it is likely that this was not unusual in many similar families.

So far by trawling the publications and some original documents we have found over 1,300 women in the 18th, 19th and 20th Centuries working with clocks and watches see geoffallnuttclocks.com/research/women in and ahsoc.org/resources/women-and-horology

More names are continually appearing but a lot more research needs to be done. So many will never be found because of name changes or simply because it was felt unnecessary to highlight their role. This is slowly being addressed and findings published. 2018 marked the centenary of (some) women getting the vote so it is long overdue for those women's stories to be told. We begin this with our local women, working in horology, in Midhurst, Petworth and Chichester.

Mary Wrapson, Red Lion Street

Mary Watts married Charles Wrapson in May 1812 at St Pancras Church in Chichester, West Sussex. Charles was 21, Mary possibly 23. They soon had three children, Mary Ann, William and Charles and had moved to Midhurst. In the 1830s they were working as clock and watchmakers in Red Lion Street. By 1841 they had another son Alfred and by this time William had moved out to run his own watchmaking business in Rumbolds Hill leaving Mary Ann, Charles and Alfred still living with their parents. We don't know whether this arrangement was an expected progression for the eldest son or whether he was seen as going into competition with the family. However it is most likely the former as records do show that William's children often lived with their grandparents, uncle and aunt at various times as they were growing up, suggesting they were all on good terms.

When Charles died in 1842 Mary moved to West Street, Midhurst and continued to run the business. As well as William, Charles and Alf were also trained as watchmakers. The younger two boys stayed with their mother and were listed Watchmakers in the Census returns. The business seemed to have thrived, the West Street premises were probably larger. Mary Wrapson is in the directories described as a watchmaker between 1842 and 1861. It seems she worked right up until her death in 1866. Certainly in 1861 she is still described as a watch and clockmaker at age 74 in the Census. By this time Charles and Alf were living with her as was her 6 year old granddaughter Ellen who was Williams's daughter. Alf disappears from the records after Mary dies and so he may have married and moved away or perhaps died at a young age. Therefore it is Charles alone who inherited the business.

Michael Martin



After working for several years as a commercial and creative writer Mikey decided to change career paths and pursue something more fulfilling in the world of craft. Having barely looked inside a clock before, he enrolled at West Dean Collage of Arts and Conservation in the clocks conservation department for three years, attaining a Foundation Degree Arts (FDA) and a Professional Development Diploma (PDD). It proved to be a subject that satisfied his combined interests of art, science and history, whilst getting to develop and use practical hand skills. He now uses those skills daily, working alongside and learning from experienced, professional clockmakers.

Robert East



Robert our Shop Manager, joined in January 2010. Robert has over 31 years experience in the jewellery and watch trade and is renowned for his customer service, before, during and after a purchase.

He is a member of the Society of Jewellery Historians and has completed a diamond grading course at the International Gemological Institute in Antwerp.

Mary Ann Lawrence

Mary Ann was the daughter of Mary and Charles Wrapson and was in fact the eldest child. She lived and possibly worked with her mother and father until at least 1841 when she was aged 25 but then she disappeared from the records for almost 20 years. There is no conclusive evidence that while she lived with her parents she learnt watchmaking or worked as a Watchmaker but it is possible at 25 she would have had to pay her way and she is not described as having any other occupation. This isn't an unusual situation in Census records of the time as women's occupations were often not recorded if they were living with parents or married, even if they worked outside of the home. It is very possible that Charles and Mary made a concerted effort to train her as a watch and clockmaker and she would certainly have informally picked up the skills if she was inclined to do so and this would explain her later continuation of the business.

Mary Ann resurfaced in 1860 in Portsmouth (Portsea) where she was living at The Corn Exchange, a tavern in Sackville Street (by 1897 the name had changed to The Coal Exchange. Unfortunately the building no longer exists, as the road was subject to devastation during the Second World War). She married a fellow resident George Lawrence who was working as a journeyman coach painter perhaps for the Public House. There is no information as to why Mary Ann was there or whether she had been married before.

By the time she married George she was 44 which may mean she was working up until then, (possibly as a Watchmaker?) They moved almost immediately back to Midhurst, where they lodged with 71 year old Mrs Margaret Timberley in Petersfield Road and this is where the Census records them as living in 1861. A few years later the Lawrence's were lodging with Mary Ann's brother, Charles now described as Master Watchmaker in West Street. Sadly in 1871 George died and in 1878 Charles also died. This is when Mary Ann took over the business.

Patrick Woodward



Patrick approached Geoff in November 2017, after reading an article about Jacob's success in the local press, regarding the possibility of an apprenticeship with J E Allnut & Son. He initially came in on a trial basis one day a week whilst also continuing for several months with his full time employment in micro electronics.

Geoff saw great potential in Patrick and offered him a full time apprenticeship in watchmaking in April 2018.

The process of training an apprentice is a long term commitment for any employer, in both time and expense, especially for a small business. Therefore Geoff approached several charities and educational trusts to secure the funding for full time training, watchmaking tools and the courses which Patrick would have to complete through the British Horological Institute.

Following intensive applications and interviews we were delighted that Patrick was been accepted for sponsorship by the prestigious George Daniels Educational Trust, QEST (Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust) and also received funding from a local charity, The Betty Martin Foundation in Midhurst.

Patrick has recently completed his apprenticeship of 4 years and qualified to become a Member of the British Horological Institute. He is now working towards becoming a Fellow of the British Horological Institute.

Martin Stapeley MBHI



Martin’s horological experience started at the age of 14 years old, working from his bedroom mending alarm clocks. He then joined his father in the family business from the age of 16 in 1971 serving his apprenticeships and qualifying in 1976. He became a Craft Member of the BHI and continued to work alongside his father, taking over the business in 1996 until the business was sold in 2006. In 2007 he joined Pressleys Jewellers in Worthing for 4

years before being accredited by Rolex in 2008. He became self employed and continued to specialise in the repair of vintage watches before joining J E Allnut & Son in 2011.

Jacob Russell FBHI



Jacob was apprenticed to Geoff for five years from the age of 16 and progressed to pass his British Horological Exams with merit together with the highest mark for his portfolio.

At this time he became the youngest ever fellow of the British Horological Society.

Now as a fully qualified watchmaker he specialises in the restoration of antique pocket watches, working to an extremely high standard of craftsmanship and care.

and West Street, Midhurst

We do get some glimpses of Mary Ann’s personality. She carried on working as a Watchmaker right up into her 80s. She employed several journeymen but is very clear in the Census returns of 1881 and 1891 that she is the Head Watchmaker and Mistress of the business and staff and is earning enough to employ a maid. Although there is no direct evidence to confirm whether Mary Ann was working on clocks and watches herself it is suggested by her own comments she was clearly the driving force. Like her mother before her she was certainly still working at aged 74 and probably continued after that. She died in 1900 at the age of 83. The total beneficiary of her will was her niece Emily. Joseph Ketterer was the executor of her will and continued to run a Jewellers and Watchmakers business in West Street.

You can read his very tragic story in the first volume of this series of pamphlets “Watch and Clockmaking in Midhurst 1700 to Present”.



It is possible Ketterer occupied the same premises as Mary Ann. This photograph was taken circa 1910. This is the same shop as J E Allnut & Son now occupy

Ann Stedman

There were other watchmaking families living and working locally, these included the Stedmans in Petworth (and Midhurst) and the Plowmans in Chichester. Both businesses were run by women by the middle of the 19th Century. Both were the widows of watchmaker husbands but they styled themselves very differently. Ann Stedman took over the family business when her husband George died in 1858. However she was quick to identify herself as a watchmaker's widow rather than a watchmaker in the 1861 Census. She had a large family, the boys all taking on watchmaking while training others too. Her daughters were Milliners and Dressmakers or went on into domestic service. One of her daughters, Mary Ann went to London as a maid in 1851 but ten years later she was back living with her mother under the same name with a son who was called William Wickenden. It is possible his start in life was uncertain but being taken in by his grandmother meant he eventually learnt to be a Watchmaker and moved to Chichester to run his own business (where he had a very large family of his own).

Ann was only once recorded as having an occupation while her husband was alive and that was school mistress so she was clearly a well known figure in the community doing a very important job herself. When George died she must have given this up and continued to head up the business. However it does seem she was not involved in any hands on work as she had plenty of others in the household who were described as watchmakers. As someone who probably had interests and skills elsewhere this is not surprising. She probably had no need (or the time) to learn the trade so this arrangement is understandable. Evidence suggests however that other watchmaker's widows were horologists in their own right.

Tim Hughes MBHI

An antique clock restorer who graduated from the distinguished West Dean College in West Sussex, attaining the West Dean Diploma, BADA and the West Dean Professional Development Diploma.

He is also a Craft Scholar from the Queen Elizabeth Scholarship Trust (QEST) which funds the education of talented craftspeople through traditional college courses, apprenticeships or one-on-one training with masters.



Tim is now a tutor at West Dean.

Cameron McNaughton MBHI

A watch and clockmaker responsible for the restoration of antique, vintage and contemporary watches. Cameron graduated from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1993, following a five year apprenticeship at Canterbury Clocks in Melbourne under the tutelage of Ken Payne.

He went onto complete, and graduate as the top student, on the WOSTEP course in Neuchatel in 1993, again studying under the Master Watchmaker Antoine Simonin, before joining Asprey's in London and SWICO in Surrey.



He is now an independent watchmaker.

The Team

Su Fullwood



Su Fullwood graduated in Classics and Archaeology first working for various Archaeology Units before going on to study for the Museum Diploma, while working in the Museum profession. In a career spanning 30 years she has since worked for The Roman Baths in Bath, Bath Industrial Heritage Centre, Fishbourne Roman Palace, West Sussex Museums Council, Chichester Museum (as Principal Curator and Director) and West Dean College. More recently, work has included projects with The Novium Museum, Arundel Castle, The Museum of Bath at Work, Antiquarian Horological Society in London and Goodwood House. In a freelance capacity.

As well as these organisations and working with Geoff, she also works with a variety of other individuals including artists, curators, collectors and conservators, in community and related projects across the country. These projects are based around both contemporary and historic collections.

Elizabeth Plowman

Elizabeth Plowman was more likely to be one of these women. Clocks by Plowman are not rare and it is likely the business in West Street, Chichester was thriving. When Joseph died Elizabeth only had one other journeyman working with her. She variously describes herself as “Watchmaker employing two men” (1851) Jeweller and Watchmaker (1861), Watchmaker (age 72 in 1871). In the 1861 census she is employing a watchmaker’s foreman which suggests that other watchmakers are being employed but who were not in the premises at the time of the Census.



Dial signed Plowman, Chichester. Wall Clock from the collection of The Novium Museum

The next pages tell some of the individual stories of women who were associated with horology in various ways. In the past women’s involvement and achievement in horology and many other areas of society have been hidden. Highlighting these personal histories is important to enable a true picture of the profession.

Hepzibah Dover

The inclusion of this story is to demonstrate how difficult it is to find information about women in horology (even someone like Harriet Samuel has much less information about her in the records than her sons and grandsons despite being the founder of the company, see page 14). Therefore research can lead you down many different avenues and women who have horological associations are sometimes there by chance. Information about the poorer in society is rare and for women from these classes even rarer, making it very difficult to track down individual stories. The following is typical of a person who would have been hidden from view in normal circumstances apart from a cataclysmic event that recorded her presence through history.

Hepzibah was the daughter of a watch and clockmaker but sadly we never get to hear whether she followed her step father into the trade as tragic events unfolded as a direct result of her involvement in her step father's work. However through this story we get a glimpse of living conditions in the 18th Century and we can see how girls and women were involved in their parents trades and therefore had access to learning the skills required to run a business if they were able. Hepzibah's father had died and her mother Esther remarried Isaac Northam in 1746 (their marriage was recorded as "clandestine" probably meaning it took place at somewhere like Fleet Jail where clergymen who resided there came at a cheaper rate than the law abiding ones). Northam was noted in the marriage record as a watchmaker and later Hepzibah was to describe him as a clockmaker. It also seems he may have been an unsympathetic man as she is recorded as saying that she was "afraid of him" . In July 1748 Hepzibah had just turned thirteen years old. Her mother often sent her to the local carpenter, a man called William Garner, to collect wood shavings. Wood shavings were commonly/traditionally used by watch and clockmakers to clean and dry components and Hepzibah had collected shavings from him many times before without issue. Sadly this time when her mother sent her, William Garner called her up the stairs and the clearly unsuspecting child went up only to be attacked and raped by the man.

As well as a long horological career, Geoff also has a large collection of horology related items. This ranges from historic tools to ephemera and promotional merchandise. The latter encompasses a wide variety of objects such as watch part packaging from the late 19th and early 20th century, enamel advertising signs and watch keys. In 2016 Su Fullwood joined the team to help organise, catalogue and interpret the collection, to make it more generally accessible. This is an on going job.



This collection also includes the pocket watches with women's names engraved on the movement. Interested by this, Geoff had begun listing the number of women working in horological related businesses from the 18th century through to the 20th Century and Su continued with this research. Other work is continuing to photograph and record ephemera and tools on our website geoffallnuttclocks.com which hopefully can eventually be used as a resource for researchers in the future.

Geoff Allnutt MBHI

Geoff Allnutt MBHI started his watchmaking career working alongside his father, John when he was 14. At 16 he left Midhurst and studied horology in London for three years at Hackney Technical College passing the final grade of the British Horological Institute exams with merit in 1985. He then embarked on the famous WOSTEP (Watchmakers of Switzerland Training and Education Program) course in Neuchatel, Switzerland studying under master watchmaker Antoine Simonin. Upon his return to the UK he re-joined the family business and for the past thirty years he has successfully developed the vintage watch restoration and sales side of the company, littlecogs.com. Geoff's sister, joined in 1992 and continues to manage the jewellery section, a mixture of contemporary, vintage and antique 18ct gold and silver pieces.



Following John's retirement, Geoff took over the running of the business and refurbished the shop. He is an advisor to tutors and students on the clocks programme at near by West Dean College, (westdean.org.uk). Despite there still being a demand for skilled watch and clockmakers, this profession has been highlighted as one of our "endangered crafts" by the Heritage Crafts Association (heritagecrafts.org.uk/the-radcliffe-red-list-of-endangered-crafts). Therefore Geoff is also working with others in the field to establish a formal Watchmaker's Apprentice Scheme to ensure the knowledge and technical skills are passed on. In October 2017 he began a dedicated Clock and Scientific Instruments shop (geoffallnuttclocks.com) He is now employs a team of 6.



Watchmaker's daughter, 18th Century

Hepzibah traumatised by this horrendous experience went home and as he had threatened to murder her "the first time he met me" if she told anyone, kept quiet for over a week. Eventually Hepzibah had to tell her mother what had happened after she was sent again to collect shavings. Although this time she avoided a second attack she refused to go again and had to explain why. By this time it was clear she had also contracted a venereal disease which disabled her walking and her ability to sit down, already noticed by Esther and believed to be due to a bath of scalding water. William Garner was arrested, tried at the Old Bailey on 7th September 1748 and subsequently found guilty of rape. He was sentenced to death and was executed the following month (28th October 1748). A transcript of the whole trial in every detail can be found in The proceedings of The old Bailey, London's Central Court which is the largest record of texts detailing the lives of non-elite people ever published. It is because of this, Hepzibah's terrible story still exists. It is a traumatic story both for the terrible crime and the speed with which Garner was convicted and executed without any legal argument or a jury.

The full document provides a valuable insight into 18th Century law, living arrangements for the poorer in society and a comment on the conditions and family life of watchmakers of the period.

On looking through other records it seems that Hepzibah did get married at the age of 29. Sadly as is the case with many women who married, she drops out of the record, so it can only be hoped she led a happier life than in her childhood.

Due to the court records she is not forgotten and we remember the dangers that women faced that are still very relatable today .

6. WILLIAM GARNER, of the Parish of St. Andrew, Holborn, was indicted for that he, not having the Fear of God before his Eyes, &c. on the 6th Day of July, in the 21st Year of His Majesty's Reign, in and upon Hepzibah Dover, Spinster, did make an Assault, and her the said Hepzibah did feloniously ravish, and carnally know and abuse, against the Form of the Statute in that Cafe made and provided.

Hepzibah Dover Old Bailey Record

Harriet Samuel

Horological Entrepreneur, 19th Century

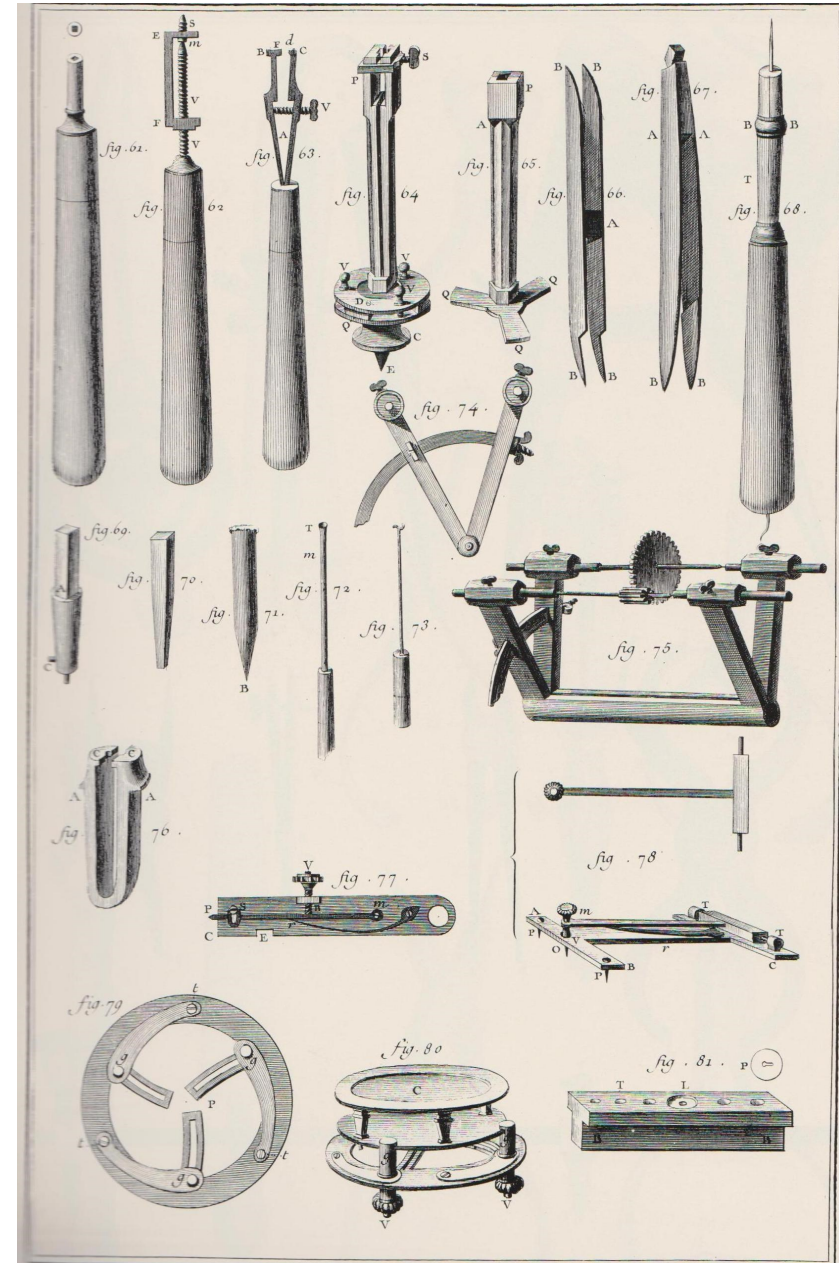
Many people will know of the jewellery retailers H. Samuel. It is still a presence on many of our high streets today and has been a thriving business for over 50 years. However fewer people will have considered that H. Samuel refers to Harriet Samuel who founded the company in 1862.

Harriet Wolf married into the Samuel family of Liverpool and took over her father in law's clock making and silver smith business which was based there. Harriet moved the business to Manchester where she concentrated on the mail order side turning what had been very much a local business into a country wide success accessible to many. Mail order was a relatively new concept at that time beginning when the Welsh entrepreneur Pryce Pryce-Jones set up the first modern mail order in 1861 and Harriet quickly took up the idea to improve her business (it is probably fair to suggest that if Harriet were alive today she may have been at the forefront of internet shopping too). This then enabled her sons to develop the retail stores opening the first in Preston in 1890 and as the business grew they moved to larger head quarters in Birmingham in 1912.



At the peak of the business's history there were over 200 stores nationwide. So although Harriet was not a watchmaker or clockmaker herself she had taken a horological business, thought big and applied new ideas to make it a major success.

Workbench Tools



Ann Piggott

Although we have touched on some of the individual stories in horology there are so many more to include such as Nottingham clockmaker, Ann Piggott. She was born in 1705, daughter of clockmaker, Joseph Kirk. She clearly continued as a clockmaker herself even when she married Nathaniel Piggott in 1738. Their children also continued in horology working under the name Kirk Piggott. Ann died in 1786.

Our aim is to work with others to continue to uncover and collate individual stories about women working in the horological field. There have been so many contributions to working life, innovation and success which have been missed in the past mainly due to lack of information but perhaps also a sense that women played a secondary role and have therefore been less important in the history of the profession. This is not the case and if we take time to discover the hidden histories we find a wealth of characters all providing fascinating and enlightening stories of their own to which we can relate and learn from today.



Longcase clock signed Ann Piggott. British Horological Institute Collection. The clock can be seen on display in their museum at Upton Hall in Nottinghamshire

Fusee Makers

In the 18th Century Christchurch, a small town in Dorset became the centre for making fusee chains. These chains were used in spring driven clocks and watches that were regulated by the conical wheel known as the fusee. They varied in size requiring some skill, a lot of patience and good eyesight to punch out the links and rivet them together.

The entrepreneur and founder of this business was Robert Harvey Cox with his wife Anne. The fusee chain business was successful partly because it employed women and children, many from the work house (the building now houses the Red House Museum and Gardens). This meant cheaper labour and so a more competitive product. However Mr and Mrs Cox were not seen as exploiting the poor of the community, indeed they paid a little better than many of the other industries. At the time it was viewed as a win - win situation. An area with high poverty and little opportunity for generating money welcomed an industry that meant women and children could contribute to the family income. Those in the Workhouse could help pay for their own care and the money they earned also went towards the care of other residents more infirm and unable to work. Although it was a difficult and painstaking job it provided employment for a high number of local women.

The fusee chain making factory run in Christchurch was also quite clearly a business involving a woman at the head alongside her husband. Anne Cox took over the running after Robert died in 1815 (at the age of 60) and although she worked with a foreman, Thomas Barrow, she was very much at the helm, developing and expanding the industry further in the following years. Although this does represent the two extremes of women working in the industry, the general workforce contributing to the daily mass production of a part and the business woman driving things forward, it also demonstrates that horology was not the male dominated work that has often been assumed. Women played a vital part in the production of clocks and watches at that time.

