

Women and Horology. Report on work in progress

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In 2018, at the instigation of Geoff Allnutt, a project was started to collate the names of women associated with clock and watchmaking in Great Britain from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. We began with those already recorded in secondary sources such as directories and other contemporary documents, and in inscriptions on the clocks and watches themselves. This initial research yielded over a thousand women's names from which a database was created, and the field has now been widened to include census returns, newspapers and other documents, which is giving us a fuller picture of the roles of women within horological businesses.

The Women and Horology project was originally inspired by our interest in the watches we found that were signed with women's names. This intrigued us. The historical consensus so far seems to be that if such watches are paired with a date, they are likely to be commemorative pieces, rather than being signed with the name of the retailer or maker. This is clearly backed up by several contemporary written records which describes this tradition. From a sample of forty references, mainly in newspapers, by far the most popular place to inscribe a commemorative name (for both men and women) seemed to be on the inner case of the watch, but several were also described as being engraved on the 'inside', 'the movement' or 'the name plate'. One of the earliest extant examples we have been notified of, which seems to demonstrate this tradition, is a watch from the early seventeenth century engraved with a man's name, although this does need to be confirmed.¹ There are also existing watches and written references to others that have both maker and owners names on the 'inside' (for example names on the barrel bridge and cap). As the data



This trunk, possibly used for carrying watch samples, was owned by Mrs E. Upjohn, whose husband was a watchmaker at 11 St John Square Clerkenwell. The name plate is headed 'M^{rs} Upjohn'. With kind permission of Leigh Extence. Photos: Leigh Extence.

accumulated to date suggests, where there is a name and a place only engraved on the movement, there can often be found further documented evidence that this is the name of the maker/retailer/business owner, such as in the case of Eliza Andrews and Rosetta Hess.

We have now formalised the research into an ongoing 'Women and Horology' project. Its aims are as follows:

1. To create a publicly accessible database of all women involved in horology from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Those names collected from secondary sources will be checked and the nature of their inclusion confirmed. For example, the case of Hepzibar Dover, who has previously been described in a list as a watchmaker² but during further research was found to be the daughter of a watch and clockmaker who became the plaintiff in a trial in 1748. There is no further evidence that she became a watchmaker herself but her inclusion remains of

1. With thanks to David Penney.

2. Brian Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of The World*, Complete 21st Edition.



Postcard showing women working in the factory at Rotherhams, Coventry c. 1910. Allnutt Collection.

interest because of what her story can tell us about the lives of women and girls associated with the trade at the time.

We will then build on these lists by looking at a diverse range of primary sources such as census returns, advertisements, newspaper articles, wills and probates, correspondence and other documents and ephemera. We will also look at clocks, watches and associated objects that have a connection with a woman's name.

2. To sort into categories the names of women appearing on clocks and watches in order to reach some conclusions about ownership, commemoration, retailing and making, and test a theory that these categories can be broadly identified by the engraving format.
3. To collect and analyse statistics from this growing database in order to look for patterns and trends. Our early research showed us how difficult it is to do this accurately due to the variety of types of record available, changes in the clock and watchmaking trade, and changes in laws relating to women. This variation means that statistics are not easily comparable across the centuries and from region to region. With more data, and a consistent approach to recording it, we hope to address this challenge and offer new insights.

4. To research the personal histories of women associated with horology, including the highlighting of individual stories that may widen our knowledge of how women were involved in horological businesses and provide an overview of women working within the field in different periods and in different situations.
5. To make available original documents and primary sources via the AHS website, transcribed in full to provide further data for research.

Once we have a significant amount of data we will attempt to analyse the statistics from more detailed, distinct and restricted samples. The aim is to focus on such areas as individual regions and factories including Rotherhams, Smiths or Ingersoll, related industries such as the radium dialpainters, and smaller horological businesses such as watch and clock repairing workshops and retail.

This project and the research was introduced in the AHS London Lecture 'Four Watches, Four Women, women in horological businesses 1800–1930' on 19 September 2019 at the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors. The report and further details of this lecture can be found



Pocket watch engraved 'E Andrews, Cornhill, London' on the movement. Other extant watches signed with this name are also known. Directories show Eliza Andrews as a goldsmith and watchmaker at this address in 1802 and later.

in *Antiquarian Horology* December 2019, pages 467–8 or under the London Lecture section of the AHS website. Unusually, this is a research project that is very much in its infancy. The aim is to develop a collaborative approach that includes an exchange of information and ideas to provide an insight into an area that, so far, has not been extensively or systematically investigated. Although the lecture was restricted mainly to evidence from the nineteenth century, the project has encompassed information from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries.

The aim of this short article is to make an appeal for help in gathering data and information for this long-term, ongoing project. We are providing the spreadsheet in which we have listed all of the names so far gathered from secondary sources. The spreadsheet does include watches with names on but it doesn't yet include the names we are finding from the census returns starting in 1841 and other sources.

If you have any information about women who are associated with horology in some way or names found in context with

horological items dating to between 1600 and 1980 we would be very grateful if you could contact us with the details either by email (womenandhorology@ahsoc.org) or by writing to 'Women and Horology', Antiquarian Horological Society, 4 Lovat Lane, London EC3R 8DT.

Please do include any reference found in either primary or secondary sources that is not already included on the list. This can then be added and the name verified as far as possible. Although we are particularly interested in women who worked within horology in a practical capacity, we are also interested in watches which may have the name of the first owner on them and which may add to an overall picture of women associated with the trade and skills. We are, however, excluding women who are listed as wives or daughters of watch and clockmakers unless there is evidence of further involvement. The reason for this is that there seems to be a distinction between those women who saw themselves as part of the business or as watch or clockmakers themselves and those who saw themselves mainly in a domestic spousal role.

We would like to thank you in advance for any information you can share with us, and we will report on the progress of the project periodically through the AHS journal and website. You can find the spreadsheet of names together with further information at www.ahsoc.org/resources/women-and-horology

Acknowledgements

Many people have already helped in this project and have been mentioned during our lecture. We are very grateful to all those who are continuing to look for and send us new information to add to the spreadsheet, too many to mention here. A special thank you to David Wood-Heath, David Penney and Paul Myatt for their regular input. We would also very much like to thank Dr David Rooney, Dr James Nye, Dr Peter de Clercq, Jeremy Evans and the AHS Council for their continuing and constructive support in regards to this article and the ongoing 'Women and Horology' Project.