

## SPECIALISMS OF THE WATCHMAKING CENTRES

Some counties or districts dominated in the production of watch parts. The major watchmaking areas were located in Lancashire (the Liverpool<sup>1</sup> and Prescot<sup>2</sup> districts), Middlesex (all the ancient parishes of the City of London and beyond, all north of the Thames) and Warwickshire (Coventry was the number one centre, but Birmingham, Aston, Leamington, Rugby, Kenilworth and Stratford also played a part).

Trades with the greatest number of workers, in alphabetical order

1. Case making (including makers, engravers, turners, pendant makers, case springers and case finishers), 683 in total. Coventry dominated with half of the makers, followed by Middlesex with 206 and Lancashire with sixty-two (all Liverpool and district, but none in Prescot and district).
2. Dial makers, 179 in total (including painters, figurers, cutters, examiners, sinkers, writers and enamellers). Warwickshire dominated with ninety-two of the total of ninety-five working in Coventry. Middlesex followed with fifty-nine. There were twenty-one makers of dials in Liverpool and district, but none in Prescot and district. Essex and Surrey had four between them.
3. Escapement makers (including lever, duplex and chronometer escapement makers). 123 makers were found in total. Of these, seventy-six (62%) were located in Middlesex or the north part of Surrey, all Warwickshire escapements came from Coventry (thirty-one) and just five from Lancashire (none from Prescot and district). The remaining few were in Essex, Hertfordshire, Kent and Yorkshire.
4. Examiners, 213 in total. The largest number was located in Middlesex (102), fifty-nine in Warwickshire (50 of which were in Coventry) and with twenty-two in Lancashire (all but one in Liverpool and district); the remainder were scattered around twelve different counties.
5. Finishing, totalling 2,482. Coventry dominated this trade, with 1,678 finishers living there; just under one hundred more were to be found in the rest of Warwickshire. Scattered throughout Middlesex were 263 finishers and another 244 were living in Lancashire of which 181 were in the Liverpool district. Only three finishers were found in Prescot itself, but a total of eleven more were living in the Prescot area and working as finishers.
6. Frame makers, forty-nine in total. 88% of these were working in the Prescot area. Three were located in Warwickshire and one each in Middlesex, Kent and Hertfordshire.
7. Hand makers, 143 in total. Lancashire dominated this trade with eighty-seven makers all of whom except one (in West Derby, Liverpool) were in the Prescot area. Thirty-two makers were in Warwickshire, with Birmingham and Aston having the most. Only nine hand makers worked in Middlesex.
8. Key makers, including making, stamping, polishing and finishing, fifty-nine in total. The Midlands, especially the Black Country had long dominated the locksmithing industry, so it is not surprising to find all the watch key makers were located in this area, with fifty-three in Birmingham and Aston (counted together because of their proximity) and two in Staffordshire.

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<sup>1</sup> For our purposes, Liverpool included the city itself, Garston, Litherland, Toxteth Park, Wavertree, and West Derby (Kirkdale, Everton, Woolton, Walton)

<sup>2</sup> The Prescot area includes: Prescot, Cronton, Eccleston in Prescot, Hale, Halewood, Huyton, Rainhill, St Helens, Sutton, Warrington, Whiston, and Widnes

9. Jewellers, including jewel hole makers, totalling 463; these are very difficult to count in the census, see table above. Warwickshire tops the list (308) with the largest percentage being in Coventry. Middlesex takes second place with seventy-eight and the Liverpool district is third with forty-seven, the majority were living in Liverpool itself and none in Prescott and district. Jewellers were scattered in other counties, none with more than five each.

10. Motioners, motion makers, and motion polishers, 145 in total. Coventry housed 77% of this trade with 112 workers. Middlesex was home to twenty-two motioners with other counties having fewer than five each. (There were none in Prescott.)

11. Movement makers, fifty-five in total. Thirty-seven of these were located in the Prescott area of Lancashire. One was in Everton, West Derby, Liverpool, but he had been born in Prescott. Of the fourteen in Warwickshire, five had been born in the Prescott area. Five others lived in Middlesex.

12. Pinion makers, 104 in total. Of these all but four lived in the Prescott area, which represents 97% of the trade; the two pinion makers living in Coventry were born in Prescott and the only other one was located in St Luke's Parish, London.

13. Polishers, 223 in total. 75% of these were located in Warwickshire, mostly in Coventry, Birmingham and Aston. Thirty-seven polishers were based in Middlesex and fifteen in Lancashire, mostly in the Prescott area.

14. Tool making, totalling 110. Of these eighty-two were located in Prescott, twenty-two in Warwickshire and the remainder were scattered in Essex, Lancashire, Middlesex, Staffordshire and Surrey.

15. Wheel making, seventy-nine in total. Seventy of these were located in Lancashire, of which sixty-four lived in the Prescott area. The remainder were in the rest of Lancashire (6), Middlesex (4), Warwickshire (2), and Cheshire, Surrey and Yorkshire with one each.

The three major watchmaking areas in summary:

Areas which were dominant in the watchmaking trades (Fifteen trades with the greatest number of workers)		
Warwickshire / Coventry	Lancashire / Prescott	Middlesex
Case making	Frame making	Escapement making
Dial making	Hand/index making	Examiners
Finishing	Movement making	
Key making (Birmingham/Aston)	Pinion making	
Jewelling	Tool making	
Motion making	Wheel making	
Polishing		

A number of other people were employed by watchmakers to enable the smooth running of their businesses. The most numerous of these were seventeen managers. They were all male and were involved for example with managing warehouses, a watch key maker's business, watchmakers' and jewellers' shops and a watch import business. Two male watch and clockmakers were described as assistant overseers, but no clue was given about what they were supervising. Several described themselves as watch warehouse assistants including sisters Ellen and Sarah Allen of Coventry. There were eighteen clerks, three book-keepers, a cashier and several agents, including an agent of a watch manufacturer in St Pancras, and Lawrence W Zimmerman (24) who described himself as an English watch manufacturer and agent for a Swiss watch manufacturer. Ann Clare (57) was a watchmaker's store-keeper, two teenage boys were errand boys for watchmakers and fifty-seven year old William Martin was a messenger for a watch case maker in Hackney. Elizabeth Dickinson (27) was housekeeper at the

English Watch Company's factory in Birmingham and several workers classed themselves as factory hands. Elizabeth Kelson (55) was the only woman who appears to have been employed in a post of responsibility - she was forewoman at a watch factory in Bow, London. There were many women in managerial roles, but they were managing their own businesses, most often as widows continuing their dead husband's business, for example:

- Martha White (40), widow of Ebenezer, former watch case and dial manufacturer, was recorded as a gold and silver watch dial manufacturer employing four men and two boys in Coventry.
- Ellen Boyall (49) of Louth, Lincolnshire was a widow and watchmaker. Her first husband, Teft Lawrence, was a watchmaker employing two apprentices in 1861, but had died by 1871. Her second husband, name unknown had died by the time of the 1881 census when one of Ellen's sons, Edward Lawrence (16) was an apprentice watchmaker.
- Sarah Drielsma (62) of Toxteth Park was recorded as a watch manufacturer. Her husband, Maurice Drielsma (63) watch and chronometer maker, died on the actual census day<sup>3</sup> - as he was not alive for the night, he was not recorded on the census. He had a watchmaker's shop in Castle Street, Liverpool which he ran in partnership with their son David. The week following his death, the shop's entire stock in this high status street amongst the city's top chronometer makers and jewellers, was advertised at greatly reduced prices. Whether the business continued or whether Sarah kept her own business after the death is unknown.

In an article entitled *The Demise of the Coventry Watch Trade*,<sup>4</sup> Joseph McKenna looked at decline in the Coventry workforce between 1851 and 1861. In the context of 'the worst [*period*] the watch-trade had ever experienced',<sup>5</sup> a comparison of 1861 with the 1881 figures is confusing, as the numbers of workers in most trades had increased dramatically. This can be explained by the grouping together of workers into factories of varying sizes in Coventry and the increasing need for production of most watch parts in-house. Almost five hundred watchmakers who had been born in Middlesex and the Prescot and Liverpool areas of Lancashire had been attracted to Coventry to work, maybe by better prospects and there were new opportunities for female watchmakers. Four figures stand out dramatically: the number of workers involved in finishing watches in Coventry had increased since 1861 by 112%, jewellers by 254%, watch case makers by 434% and the number of females working in watch trades had increased by 583%. Conversely, the severe decline in the number of apprentices from 667 to 115 represents a fall of 480%.

Most trades in Coventry showed similar rises, although the number of fusee makers and movement makers both fell. Christchurch and Prescot had kept their hold on the fusee and fusee chain making trades and large numbers of movements were bought-in from Prescot throughout the 1880s. Steps had to be taken to guard against shortages when the Lancashire Watch Company was founded in 1889 as it was expected to consume all Prescot's output of movements<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Liverpool Mercury, 6th April 1881. The 1871 census has him as Mozes Jonas Drielsma, born Groningen, Netherlands, 3rd April 1817. Many of those who were born overseas Anglicised their first names and as the First World War approached, many changed their surnames as well.

<sup>4</sup> Clocks Magazine, April 1988, Vol 10., number 10, pages 26-27.

<sup>5</sup> Horological Journal, February 1880 page 73. There was thought to be little hope of an immediate revival.

<sup>6</sup> Coventry Herald, 19th April 1889. A short report stated: 'The Coventry Watch Movement Company, recently formed to counteract the Prescot syndicate, has commenced the manufacture of movements at premises in Hillcross under the management of Mr Charles Scarisbrick, of Prescot.' In 1881 he was a watch movement manufacturer at West Street, Prescot, employing five men and four boys.

Numbers of workers in watch trades in Coventry 1861 and 1881 compared (1861 figures, trades and listing from J. McKenna)								
Total numbers of workers: 1861 = 2,037      1881 = 3,711								
Trade	1861	1881	Trade	1861	1881	Trade	1861	1881
Manufacturers	90	138	Case springers	42	98	Watch glass mkr	4	7
Clerks	8	3	Cap makers	36	80	Escapement makers	17	31
Finishers	794	1,680	Hand makers	3	12	Movement makers	11	7
Motioners	74	112	Index makers	6	11	Engine turners	18	22
Watch jewellers	72	255	Pallet makers	3	14	Joint finishers	4	7
Engravers	37	93	Balance makers	15	53	Fusee makers	4	2
Gilders	28	57	Dial makers	33	92	Apprentices	667	115
Case makers	38	203	Pendant makers	3	2	Females	30	205

## AGE DISTRIBUTION WITHIN THE TRADES Key trades

The distribution of ages within the different watch trades (lowest average age first)						
Trade involved	Total number of workers	Number of females	Females as % of total	Range of ages	Median	Average Age in years
Polishers	223	125	56%	13 to 69	25	27.9
Jewellers	452	45	10%	13 to 75	29	29.9
Key makers	59	20	34%	11 to 75	24	31.8
Dial makers	179	12	7%	13 to 78	32	34.9
Finishers	2,493	45	2%	10 to 84	33	35.5
Case makers	683	18	3%	13 to 85	33	36.06
Frame makers	49	4	8%	14 to 68	38	36.5
Motioners	145	4	3%	15 to 76	35	36.9
Movement makers	55	19	18%	14 to 71	35	37.5
Wheel makers	79	6	8%	13 to 71	38	37.7
Pinion makers	104	2	2%	13 to 73	36	38.2
Tool makers	110	2	2%	14 to 75	35	38.4
Hand/index makers	142	6	4%	14 to 75	41	39.7
Escapement makers	123	5	4%	13 to 83	39	40.7
Examiners	213	0	-	15 to 78	40	41.6

The most marked result shown in the table above is that in most cases, the higher the percentage of female workers in a trade, the lower the average age. Those involved in making movements reverse the trend; they show an older average age than would have been expected from the percentage of females involved. The one trade with no female workers (examiners) has the highest average age of all.

## SPECIALISATION - Following the family tradition

In many cases, children followed their father's trade. In some families this is very apparent, especially if it continued through several generations.

- The Pendleton family in Prescott were renowned for their manufacture of watch hands; hand maker Peter, aged 67 employed five men. His son Peter (44) and grandson Edward (21) both made hands as did his brother John (60).
- The Preston family also from Prescott had nine members, aged from seventeen to seventy-five who all made watch or chronometer hands; two of them specialised in seconds hands.
- In 1881, there were seventeen watchmakers with the surname Yardley all born and bred in Coventry. However they are difficult to place into immediate family or sibling groups owing to the repeated use of the same forenames. One family is certain: four sons all followed their watch case making father, John<sup>7</sup>, into the same trade: Joseph (44), Richard (40) master, George (35) and William (32). Richard's sons had also become case makers: Richard (18) and William C (15). There were two other case makers named Yardley who may be related: John (29) and Harry E

<sup>7</sup> John Yardley senior was deceased by 1881.

(14). Five watch finishers named Yardley were born and bred in Coventry, but their relationships have not been traced.

- Three generations of the Bickley family were living in Coventry making watch dials. The first, Robert (75) was born there and was described as a dial painter. His son Joseph (49) born in Liverpool, was described as a dial maker, as was grandson Joseph (26) who was born in London. Robert may have moved to Liverpool to further his career as did his son with his move to London; whatever the reason, all three were in Coventry making dials when the census was taken.
- Lifelong Coventry resident Susan Hewitt (73), widow of dial maker Matthew (died 1879) was painting dials in 1881; her son Matthew (45) was a dial maker and her grandson Charles (32) was a dial enameller.

#### DIVERSIFICATION within families

Not all watchmakers chose to or were able to follow their father's trade. Some families are found where the children undertook different trades from their father but still within watchmaking.

- Two daughters of Richard Adkins (66), a watch finisher born and bred in Coventry had become watch polishers whereas his two sons followed their father into his trade.
- In another Coventry family two of five sons followed their watch motioner father Charles Ansell into his trade, but two others became watch finishers and the other was a watch balance maker.

It is rare to find more than two generations of watchmaker families all living and working in the London watchmaking areas.

- James J Stockwell(45) was born in Kidderminster,<sup>8</sup> and was possibly apprenticed to his watchmaker father.<sup>9</sup> He relocated to London as a young man and married in Islington in 1858. His two sons, both watchmakers were living with their parents in 1881, possibly employed by their father who was recorded as a watch manufacturer.
- The jobs of the Sharkell family in Clerkenwell follow a different pattern where none of the sons followed their father's trade. Joseph Sharkell (52) was recorded as a watchmaker shop keeper. His two elder sons, Samuel (26) and Henry (22) had become watch examiners, and the youngest, Robert (20) was a watch examiner jobber. All three still lived in the family home but may not have worked there.

#### TAKE ON MORE THAN ONE JOB OR MAKE DO?

It has been shown earlier that 1881 was not a prosperous time economically and that a number of people struggled to make ends meet. Some found a solution by taking on another job either within the watchmaking industry or outside. The most obvious extra jobs were clockmaking and jewellery retailing. Closely associated were those who included silversmith or goldsmith in their descriptions; there were also several opticians and photographers and a nautical instrument maker in this mix. Retailing is evident when looking at the addresses, as over 500 people lived at an address in a High Street, and approximately 150 in a Market Street or Market Place.<sup>10</sup> These key retail addresses would have been expensive and were the homes of few, if any, of those involved in making watch parts. Other retail second jobs included stationer, outfitter, milliner, leather seller, bookseller, draper, tobacconist, ironmonger, grocer, provision

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<sup>8</sup> In other censuses the surname is spelled 'Stockall'.

<sup>9</sup> 1851 census at Cleobury Mortimer, Shropshire.

<sup>10</sup> Sixteen 'watchmakers' resided in very high status addresses such as Bond Street, Oxford Street and Regent Street and Sloane Square in London.

dealer, greengrocer and baker. A number took on varying grades of official roles, such as postmaster, stamp distributor, letter carrier, registrar of births, marriages and deaths, rate collector, Inland Revenue collector, school attendance officer and inspector of weights and measures. There were a number of china, furniture and fancy goods dealers and coal merchants. In the difficult times of the 1880s, the five watchmakers who boosted their income as pawnbrokers would have been busy. There were many licensed victuallers, innkeepers, lodging house keepers, cooks, beer sellers, four dentists, two housekeepers and a club manager. Three recorded second jobs as teachers of science, shorthand and music; a few were pianoforte tuners and one tuned musical boxes. There were some who were also farmers, gunsmiths, a farrier and a seedsman, several insurance agents, ten local preachers, several organists and musicians. Hairdressing was one of the most popular second jobs, but just one watchmaker was recorded with each of these occupations: picture frame maker, gas fitter, French polisher, sewing machinist, electrician, reedhook maker and bronze manufacturer. Enoch Siltberg<sup>11</sup> (24) from Sweden, was a telegraph installer first; watchmaking was his second job and Thomas Keeling (43) of West Ham, Essex described his second job as a telegraph instrument maker. Other unique second job holders were Benjamin H Merchant (52) of Shepton Mallet, Somerset who recorded his second job as pyrotechnist; Joseph Welch (53) of Redditch was a fancy needle case maker; Isiah Round (37) of Kingswinford, Staffordshire tended a colliery engine; Pakenham Williams (35) was a missionary and Seward Edgell (25) of Kilmersdon, Somerset made miners' safety lamps. The awards for the greatest number of additional jobs go to:

- William Randall of Holt, Norfolk (48) who described himself as watchmaker, gun fitter, bellhanger and engineer.
- Thomas Withill (65) of Hotham, Yorkshire whose jobs were watchmaker, cabinet maker, plumber and land surveyor.
- George Woodcock (43) of Coventry, whose jobs were solicitor, bicycle manufacturer, watch manufacturer & hotel proprietor. He must have been a very busy man.

## HARD TIMES

The census gives records of unemployment, paupers needing shelter in workhouses, homelessness, those with mental health issues in lunatic asylums as well as those in hospital and working long into old age.

Old age pensions were not available to the majority before 1908, but there was some provision specifically for the support of elderly watchmakers in the Clock and Watchmakers' Asylum at Colney Hatch, Hertfordshire.<sup>12</sup> A fortunate few benefitted from this charity founded by the Clockmakers' Company in September 1853. The completion of the first phase of building was reported in the first edition of the *Horological Journal* of September 1858. Clock and watchmakers were urged to subscribe one penny a week, (or five shillings per annum). The selection of residents was democratically decided by a vote by subscribing watchmakers; in early years the names of all those shortlisted, the votes and the result were all published. The Company provided a pension of £20 per annum to men and £13 to widows plus home, light and fuel.<sup>13</sup> Once established, demand far exceeded supply, so votes were held whenever vacancies occurred and fundraising continued to finance more accommodation. In addition to those listed in the table below, there was a warden, his wife and child and two chronometer (clock) makers making eighteen households altogether.

<sup>11</sup> There was also a James E Siltberg (24) also a Swede, lodging at a different address in St Pancras who was described as a telegraph instrument maker. Were they brothers, or cousins?

<sup>12</sup> asylum: this is used in its old meaning, ie. a sanctuary or inviolable place of refuge and protection, eg an almshouse. The Clock and Watchmakers' Asylum should not be confused with the Middlesex County Pauper Lunatic Asylum which was also situated at Colney Hatch from 1840.

<sup>13</sup> Islington Gazette, 6th June 1857.

Watchmakers and widows of watchmakers living in the Clock and Watchmakers' Asylum in 1881			
Name	Age	Birthplace	Former occupation
Ann Bedford (widow)	71	Batley, Yorkshire	No occupation recorded
Rosetta Cox (widow + grand-daughter)	68	Clerkenwell	No occupation recorded
Thomas Hulme (+ wife)	69	Clerkenwell	Gold watch case maker
Edward East	66	Clerkenwell	Watch case maker
William Schooley	76	Bishopsgate, Midx	Motion maker
Richard Killey (+ wife)	73	Liverpool	Finisher
William J Lloyd	78	Clerkenwell	Watchmaker
George McCormick (+ wife)	73	St Luke's, Midx	Watch case maker
James Moffatt (+ wife)	78	Lambeth	Watch case maker
William Harvey (+ wife)	75	Shoreditch	Motion maker
John Nelson (+ wife)	78	Prescot	Escapement maker
James Robins	77	Islington	Finisher
Elizabeth Secker (widow)	71	London	Pensioner
William J Thitchener	73	St Luke's, Midx	Watchmaker
Martin Wilkes (+ daughter)	78	St Luke's, Midx	Finisher

Other charities existed to provide accommodation for the elderly; those recorded in the census housing watchmakers included:

Sutton's Hospital, The Charterhouse, in the borough of Islington was the refuge for Thomas Carter, watchmaker. He was Coventry-born but was already in London when the 1851 census was taken; (he was lodging in Clerkenwell with his wife Susan and two children). This ancient charity was home to seventy-three poor brothers in 1881 who came from mostly the professional, merchant, and skilled working classes. Thomas died aged 86, in August of that year.

The Aged Pilgrims' Friend Asylum in Islington was founded by the Aged Pilgrims' Friend Society in 1807 and provided a home, an annual pension of ten guineas, coal and medical attention when required for aged and infirm people. There were no watchmakers resident on the night of the census, but the census recorded Sarah L Osborne, a seventeen year old watchmaker as a visitor staying in the asylum.

In addition, there were funds providing small pensions to some, including: The Clockmakers Company, which paid out £224-2-6 annually in pensions, The Watch and Clockmakers' Benevolent Institution, £216-11-3 and The Pension Society, £219-12-4.<sup>14</sup> There were also local charities providing funds for distressed people in their neighbourhoods, for example the Clerkenwell Benevolent Society, the Coventry Watchmakers' Association<sup>15</sup> and the Prescot Watch Trade Association which looked after their members' interests.

Destitute watchmakers who were unable to benefit from almshouses or charitable funds could resort to the workhouse. The Poor Law Union Act of 1834 had led to the expansion and improvement of the provision of workhouses throughout the country. Numbers fluctuated as finances or prospects of inmates changed and others arrived. Overall 141 watchmakers and possibly their families slept in a workhouse on the night of the census. The single workhouse with by far the greatest number of these was in Coventry, but as the city had the greatest concentration of watchmakers, this is no surprise.

Other places were used for overnight accommodation by the homeless such as Liverpool born William Finney<sup>16</sup>, aged 35, who sought shelter with two other 'tramps near to the Furnace' at Colton, near Ulverston. This former iron works closed in 1850, but its name continued; a bobbin mill was opened there some time afterwards. The census records that all three men were there in search of work. Another watchmaker, Arthur J Sidney (36) was one of seven people who spent census night at the 'Tramps'

<sup>14</sup> *Horological Journal*, The Annual Soirée, 1st September 1870 page 10.

<sup>15</sup> The Coventry Watchmakers' Association had mixed fortunes. Originally founded c.1858, it was born again in 1888.

<sup>16</sup> It is not known whether he was related to Joseph Finney, the famed Liverpool clockmaker.

Lodging House, Dawlish, Devon.<sup>17</sup>

Sixty-two unfortunate watchmakers found themselves institutionalised in mental asylums. The majority were at the major watchmaking centres, ie Middlesex(8), Warwickshire(7), Rainhill near Prescott(5). Matthew Cook, watchmaker aged fifty-eight, was incarcerated in the Broadmoor Criminal Lunatic Asylum. He had been transferred there from York Castle Prison in 1871 where he was tried for the murder of his wife and found insane. He died in the asylum in 1885.<sup>18</sup>

Twenty watchmakers spent the night in a hospital or one of the infirmaries attached to a workhouse. The census does not state the reasons for their admittance but two were having trouble with their eyes as they were patients at the Birmingham & Midland Eye Hospital and the Royal London Ophthalmic Hospital.

Forty-five watchmakers were imprisoned for unknown offences and terms; almost all were convicts, ie they had been tried in a court and convicted of a crime. However, William Cowley aged sixty-five was detained at Spilsby Police Station on the night of the census; his crime is not known but several minor offences were recorded in his name in the Lincolnshire press from 1874 to 1887. William Greenwood, aged thirty-four, a convicted felon was recorded in Nottingham Prison and was apparently employed there as a watchmaker. The two prisons with the greatest number of convicted watchmakers were at Warwick and Clerkenwell; both housed four watchmaker prisoners on census night. Parkhurst, Dartmoor, Wormwood Scrubs, Strangeways and Walton prisons all held watchmakers as did many less well known institutions such as the HMP House, Correction Hill, Kendal and the Woking Invalid Convict Prison in Surrey.

One hundred and thirteen watchmakers were recorded as unemployed, just 1% of the total. The largest number as expected was in Coventry, but the figure of twenty-seven measures only 1% of Coventry's total number of watchmakers, but represents 23% of the total unemployed English watchmakers. Thomas James Hux (53), described himself as an unemployed watchmaker, but had taken a job as housekeeper at the Royal Astronomical Society's HQ at Burlington House, Piccadilly. Others described themselves as 'former' watchmakers, for example John McCormick (37) of Toxteth Park, Liverpool was formerly a watchmaker but had taken a job as a railway porter and Edward Goff (46) who was formerly a watch finisher, had taken a job as a paper varnisher and label maker. Others used the words 'former' and 'formerly' in place of 'retired'.

Unemployed watchmaker trades, locations and ages				Total unemployed = 113
Simply described as watchmakers	62		Polishers	3
Finishers	26		Escapement makers	2
Watch case makers	5		Other trades (1 each)	15
Located in Coventry	26		Located in Birmingham	4
" Clerkenwell	2		" Liverpool	1
Aged under 25 years	33		Aged 41 - 55	22
Aged 26 - 40	25		Aged over 50 years	37

CONCLUSIONS - what can we learn from this census?

The census can be criticised as the information it contains was supplied by each individual, sometimes with questionable accuracy. It also contains errors made by enumerators who sometimes spelled names and technical jargon incorrectly and whose knowledge of geography was not always precise. Inevitably

<sup>17</sup> Ten years later this house was referred to as the Common Lodging House. This house had been licensed for the accommodation of 'travellers', but attracted so many at times that it was regarded as a public nuisance, (Totnes Weekly Times, 5 May 1894). The 'nuisance' continued for many years.

<sup>18</sup> Reading Mercury, 28th March 1885. Report of inquest.



some individuals escaped the count and those away from home on census night were not recorded where they should be. It was open to error, especially where birthplace, age, occupations and relationships within households were concerned. Having said that, it remains the only virtually complete source of information on the nation as a whole. There is no other set of statistics on the watchmaking trade which can be searched and analysed. It has produced some fascinating detail on life in the late Victorian era. The move of population from country to town which had begun with the industrial revolution many years before was still evident, with the major watchmaking centres, cities and county towns attracting large numbers. The number of immigrant workers from every continent on the planet was surprising as was their spread throughout England. The census has highlighted changes in the organisation of the watchmaking trade especially the decline in apprenticeships and the growing need for technical education to take its place. It has also shown that women were a significant part of the trade; they were mostly involved in the jobs requiring a lower skill level, but were also present in some highly skilled trades such as finishing and case making. The presence of fifty-seven children aged ten to thirteen is surprising to modern eyes. The Education Act of 1876 had made school attendance compulsory up to at least the age of ten years; once over that age, children who possessed a School Certificate could take up employment.<sup>19</sup>

What would be interesting would be the comparison of the data from two censuses, say 1851 and 1881 so that the actual decline could be seen. Another route for future research would be to follow through the events of the next decade which are outlined below.

The census confirms that watchmaking remained a large industry in 1881 and was of major significance in the traditional centres: Coventry, Prescot, Clerkenwell and Liverpool. The 'unprecedented and prolonged depression of trade' experienced throughout the 1880s<sup>20</sup> led many skilled workers to seek employment in other industries. As the decade began, there was already competition for the skilled workforce employed in watchmaking in Coventry as the burgeoning sewing machine and bicycle building industries attracted many with higher wages. It was no accident of fate that caused motorcycle and car manufacturing to develop in the Midlands a few years later - a highly skilled workforce of watchmakers was becoming available as their industry declined. The Prescot workforce had fewer possibilities for employment elsewhere in their immediate area. In 1889 the opening of the Lancashire Watch Company was motivated by the need to provide work for struggling watchmakers in the Prescot area. This was quickly followed by the defensive establishment of the Coventry Watch Manufacturing Company and the Coventry Watch Movement Manufacturing Company to ensure that the supply of movements and parts did not dry up as a result of the changes in Prescot. In a study of the census of 1891, or 1901 and 1911 individuals from the 1881 census could be tracked through the years to discover whether the trend to move to the new industries continued in Coventry; it may show how successful the Lancashire Watch Company was initially, and might reveal changes in Clerkenwell of which we are currently unaware.

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<sup>19</sup> The Factory Act of 1874 had raised the minimum employment age to nine years and limited the working day of women and young people (aged under fourteen) to ten hours between 6am and 6pm, with a total number of hours not exceeding 56½ hours per week. The Education Act of 1876 meant that the minimum employment age rose to ten years.

<sup>20</sup> *Horological Journal*, September 1885, page 12.