

London Meeting Lecture Thursday 15 November 2012

‘Bankruptcy and insolvency in the English horological trade,1720-1849’

by Dr David Bryden

The *London Gazette*, founded in the 1660s, became the official government journal of record. It has been searched for formal notifications of bankruptcies of horological workers. Between 1720-1849 some 400 have been found. Over this period almost 1,300 petitions are listed from members of the clock and watch making trade seeking release from prison under successive Acts for the Release of Insolvent Debtors. 60 per cent of these bankrupts or insolvent debtors were London based. Many are not in standard reference works. Partnerships utilised the columns of the *Gazette* to announce their dissolution. The termination of 350 horological businesses has been noted, of which 200 are non-metropolitan. The talk outlines the legal procedures relating to bankruptcy and imprisonment for debt, noting the advantages of bankruptcy and the crippling affect of imprisonment. Gazette notices allow the progress of a bankruptcy to be tracked. Debtors’ release petitions provide equally useful data.

The material drawn from the *London Gazette* provides additional information about individuals and partnerships involved in the English clock and watch-making trade. Taken together it provides insights into the operation of the trade in London, the provincial supply train, and retail sales activity elsewhere in England. It points to many workers’ involvement in trades in parallel with watch & clock making. There is synergy between ‘clock & watchmaker, jeweller & silversmith’ – ‘clock-case-maker & cabinet maker’ or even ‘undertaker’, and ‘watch-case-maker & turner’. Combinations such as ‘watchmaker and dealer in coals/lemon juice/tobacco/ ’; ‘clock & watchmaker and grocer/licensed victualler/salt manufacturer/.....’ suggest either entrepreneurship or diversification when business was poor. Hard copy of the primary data-base and the various indices will be available. Comment is invited on the presentation/organisation of this data so as to optimise the usefulness to other researchers.



David Bryden spent most of his career as a Museum Curator, moving from the Royal Scottish Museum, to the Whipple Museum, Cambridge, the Science Museum and finally to the National Museums of Scotland. In retirement he continues to undertake and publish research into early scientific instruments.

