

AHS London Lecture Thursday 18 January 2024

Darlah Thomas, **The Condliff family: four generations of clockmakers – their lives and business discovered**

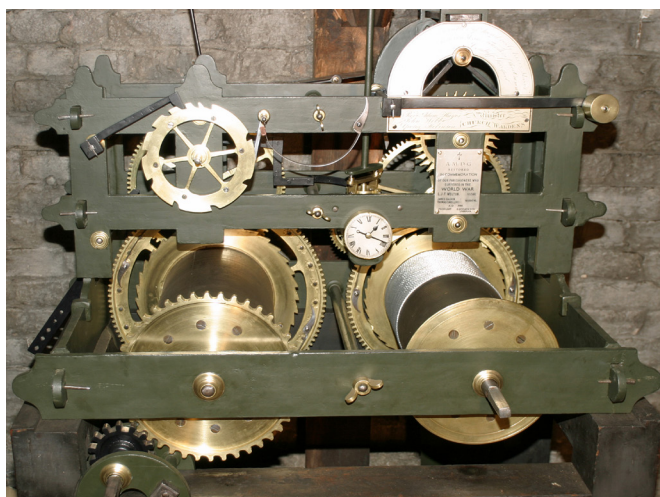
A family whose clocks are admired the world over, whose high-quality output mirrored the successes of the burgeoning merchant classes in Liverpool during the first half of the nineteenth century, has not been studied in any detail either locally or nationally.

It soon became clear that a number of factors had precluded this study. The Condliffs did not advertise or publish catalogues and as they lived quietly, the family didn't attract newspaper reports apart from the births, marriages and deaths columns. One report confirming the survival of workbooks which dated back to at least 1820 and were still in use in the 1930s has been traced. Unfortunately, the Liverpool blitz of 1941 may have played a role in their subsequent loss.

Turret, domestic, regulator, skeleton and longcase clocks and some watches

plus board-room clocks for the many city merchants were on the product list. The skeletons are amongst the most highly prized today for their simplicity and beauty. No two are identical; there was no need for standardisation before 1860 and it may be surprising that this desire for uniqueness is evident in regulators, turrets and maybe even more of the range we have yet to discover.

The talk will bring together the many threads of the Condliff story both historical and horological. The variety of output will be illustrated, and the supply-chain of parts and materials alluded to. Much of the success of the Condliff workshop must be due to the contacts maintained with Liverpool's top retailers – names such as Robert Roskell, Litherland Davies and Joseph Mayer were among a network of top businessmen in the city whose customers spanned the globe.



This type 1 turret clock dating to 1819 is by James Condliff (1). It is located at St Mary's Church, (now known as All Saints'), Edge Hill, Liverpool. The photo was taken soon after the clock's restoration by Phil Irvine.

Darlah and her husband Steve have written several articles for this journal and have published books on The Gloverstone Clockmakers of Chester; Joyce of Whitchurch, Clockmakers 1690-1965 and The Turret Clocks of T. Cooke & Sons of York. They have collected photographs and information on the Condliff family for over twenty years and are currently preparing a book on this subject.

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