

# BIRMINGHAM DIALMAKERS — Part V

## Factors who Sold Clock Dials

by John A. Robey

The final part of this series of articles discusses a number of people who have usually been regarded as dialmakers, but were actually only factors who sold clock dials, made by one of the larger concerns, but fitted with their own named falseplates. Usually they also traded in other items, not necessarily related to the clock or watch trade. Many of these firms were either very small or short-lived and their dials are not commonly seen. While some were merchants, others primarily worked in other trades, for instance as button maker. All were keen to profit from the expanding business in clock dials during the first half of the nineteenth century, but few survived the recessions of the trade. The earliest examples of dials with falseplates bearing the names of a Birmingham wholesaler rather than the actual manufacturer were marketed by the Nicholas family who primarily sold dials made by Francis Byrne (see Part II). The earliest instances of this practice were in the 1770s when the Warrington clockmaker John Halliwell used dials made by Osborne & Wilson, but with falseplates marked 'I\*H'.

Mainly factors who sold dials with their own names on the falseplates are included here. It is hoped that this information will enable these dials to be distinguished from those marked by the actual makers. Clock dials are discussed here in a very approximate chronological order.

### **Beard & Co**

A couple of falseplates marked 'BEARD & Co' are the only record of this factor who sold clock dials, probably made by Francis Byrne. The firm does not appear in Birmingham trade directories, and as there is no placename on the known falseplates it is an assumption that they were from there. They were probably a short-lived concern. Their quoted date of about 1790 is based solely on the style of their known dials, but one is known with a movement dated 1794, which gives their only positive date. Another falseplate is known with just 'BEARD' on a dial about 30-40 years later. The only possible man in directories is Joseph Beards, broker, listed in 1833-9, but this is unlikely to have been the person marketing clock dials.

### **Thomas & John Bellamy**

A very rare cast-iron falseplate is known marked 'T & J

Bellamy Birmingham' and although Thomas and John Bellamy were japanners it is likely that they sold dials made by a specialist clock-dial manufacturer rather than producing dials themselves. Thomas Bellamy was a publican at 10 Edgbaston Street in 1767-77, then a japanner at the same address in 1780-5. This may be the same man, or a son of the same name. In 1787-1801 he was in partnership with John Bellamy as japanners, still trading from Edgbaston Street, but they were declared bankrupt in April 1801. A partnership between Obadiah, Samuel, Thomas and John Bellamy, trading as O. T. & J. Bellamy, japanners and varnish makers, was dissolved in December 1802. Samuel Bellamy was a japanner who died in 1831, with T. S. & J Bellamy and S. T. & L. Bellamy listed in trade directories in 1808 and 1815-18 respectively. It has not proved possible to determine the relationship between these men, and it is made even more complex by the existence of a Samuel and Obadiah Bellamy trading separately and in partnership as makers of buckles, buttons and other small metal items (known collectively as toys) from the 1750s to 1801. They are likely to be related to the japanners, with more than one generation of men with the same name being involved.

Thomas and John Bellamy are included in an undated list of Birmingham japanners. The only dial known to the author with a T & J Bellamy falseplate is stylistically from about 1810-15, which is later than the known dates of the partnership. It is possible that they were selling dials at the turn of the century and the same falseplates were still being used by a later partnership. As these falseplates are so rare, clock dials can only have been a very small part of their business.

### **Tyndall, Wright & Co and Benjamin Wright**

Tyndall, Wright & Co were factors in Edmund Street, Birmingham, in 1800-5. Dials with their very scarce falseplate appear to have been made by Francis Byrne. Benjamin Wright and Joseph Tyndall were button makers trading as Wright & Tyndall, whose partnership was dissolved in January 1804. They also worked together as Tyndall, Wright & Co, factors, and this partnership broke up shortly afterwards in December 1804. Thereafter Benjamin Wright worked alone as a factor, dealer and chapman, until he was bankrupt in March 1808. He was buying clock pinions from Peter Stubs of Warrington in 1815, and at some time joined up with Thomas Ross as steel toy makers, until that partnership was dissolved in April 1818. He was probably the Benjamin

Wright, victualler, dealer and chapman, who was bankrupt again in June 1819. He may have been the man who died in 1828, aged 55. He sold dials in 1804-18 with cast-iron falseplates marked 'B. Wright & Co, Birmingham'. At least two of these appear to be early Finnemore dials, one by Walker & Finnemore,<sup>1</sup> and another (a moon dial) is known with original Walker & Hughes maps.<sup>2</sup>

### **Alexander Stansbie**

Walker & Hughes dials are known with the scarce falseplate 'Stansbie, Birmingham'. Although Alexander Stansbie is listed in directories in 1801-8 as a pocket-book lock, button and toy manufacturer of Great Hampton Street, by 1808, when he was the administrator of the estate of a deceased attorney, he was stated to be a merchant. He must have sold clock dials prior to May 1816 when he was declared bankrupt, being then described as a merchant, dealer and chapman. His creditors did not receive their final dividend from his estate until nine years later. He is likely to have been the man who died in 1823, aged 59.

### **Hartley Burgess**

Another Birmingham factor whose name is only very occasionally found on a cast-iron falseplate was Hartley Burgess, listed in directories in 1808-18 and who married in 1802. Later he was in business with John Durrod as factors, but the partnership was dissolved in July 1816, and Hartley Burgess, factor, dealer and chapman, was bankrupt in December 1817. He died in 1837, aged 71.

### **Richard Blood**

Richard Blood is an interesting character, being primarily a Birmingham factor who dabbled in other trades and appears to have painted at least some of his own dials. He was a factor in 1788 and first appears in directories in 1800-1 as Richard Blood & Co. He was involved in a number of partnerships: with James Harwood, as factors (dissolved December 1798); with James Good and James Harwood, trading as James Good & Company, gold and metal watch-hand makers (dissolved 1798); with John Christopher Standbridge and John Lillington, trading as Richard Blood & Company, factors, with a warehouse at the Minories, Birmingham (dissolved March 1802); with John Christopher Standbridge and William Cresswell Webb, factors, trading as Blood, Cresswell & Webb (dissolved April 1803); with John Christopher Standbridge, trading as Blood & Standbridge, factors in Bartholomew Street (dissolved February 1804).

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1 A falseplate by B. Wright & Co is known that was originally by Walker & Finnemore with their names filed off the pattern. Wright's name was painted at the top of the falseplate with the cast 'Birmingham' remaining at the bottom

2 Information from J. Webster

No dials or falseplates are known by any of these partnerships. By 1815 he was a jeweller, gold watch-hand maker and factor in Newhall Street, in 1818 a jeweller and factor, and from 1823 just a factor in Anne Street. In 1835-9 he is listed as Richard Blood & Son (Richard junior probably being born in 1806). One of them, probably the son, died in 1846. A very small number of dials are known with his own falseplate marked 'Rich. Blood, Birmingham', but he may have been involved in their actual production as in 1813 the well known Leicestershire clockmaker Samuel Deacon ordered a special dial for a chiming clock from a wholesaler with the instruction 'The dial to be painted by Mr. Richard Blood, No. 41, Newhall St., Birmingham' and he specified the tunes to be named.<sup>3</sup> Perhaps, despite his abilities as a painter, he found it more profitable to concentrate on his factoring business and just paint the occasional special clock dial. Deacon's specific request for Blood to paint a dial was presumably because he had outstanding qualities, but one of the few dials known with a Richard Blood falseplate is an undistinguished square eight-day dial.

### **William Wood**

Wood & Cooke, factors of Bath Street in 1801, bought pinions from Peter Stubs in 1809. In January 1812 the partnership between William Wood and James Cooke,<sup>4</sup> factors, was dissolved, and they then traded independently, William Wood continuing at the same address until 1821. He bought clock pinions from Peter Stubs in 1812-19. He also sold dials with his own falseplate, three styles being known, one 'W. Wood, Birmingham', another 'Wood & Son' and one with 'Wood & Son, Birmingham', although none is very common. On the evidence of the few dials known with a William Wood falseplate they were supplied by the same Birmingham manufacturer who also supplied Edward Hobson.

### **Jones & Carter**

Jones & Carter are listed in Birmingham directories as factors and merchants in 1808-19, but they were actually wholesale jewellers who also supplied the clock trade with parts such as pinions (bought from Peter Stubs in 1812-14), as well as painted dials with their own falseplates, although they are very scarce. The Exeter watchmaker Henry Ellis recorded that in 1814 he started to do business with 'Mr Carter, of the firm of Jones and Carter, of Birmingham'.<sup>5</sup> Whoever made

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3 Loomes, B., 1994, *Painted Dial Clocks*, p58. Two other dials with Richard Blood's name on them are mentioned, but no details are given.

4 He cannot be the same man as Thomas Cooke of Howell & Cooke (see part IV, page ??), who was not born until about 1821.

5 Ponsford, C., 1978, *Time in Exeter*, p131.

their dials, two that are known are of high quality and almost look like Walker & Hughes products.

### **Sargant & Crane**

This was another firm that sold dials with their own falseplate, but they are extremely scarce and this must have been a very small part of their business. Isaac Sargant and William Sargant, probably his son, were iron workers, primarily making tools and associated items for the saddlery trade, working independently and in partnership at a number of different addresses from at least 1767. Some of these different workshops appear to have been operating concurrently, each one specialising in one particular type of item. The partnership of Isaac & William Sargant, edge-tool makers, was dissolved in January 1802. William Sargant was also a partner with William and Samuel Dawes, trading as Sargeant & Co, as grinders and polishers of steel and iron, until that partnership was dissolved in December 1802. These partnerships may have also coexisted concurrently and traded independently, as they were in different, but related, lines of business. Some time after this, William Sargant teamed up with George Crane, and although they do not appear in trade directories it must be during this period that they became involved with the clock trade, as they bought clock pinions from Peter Stubs of Warrington in 1811-12. It is likely that this was the period when Sargant & Crane sold clock dials. One dial with a Sargant & Crane falseplate has been attributed to Kempson & Felton,<sup>6</sup> who were in business just prior to 1811. It must have been a very short-lived phase, as in March 1821 the partnership of James Woolley, William Sargant and George Crane, sword manufacturers, was dissolved on the death of William Sargant, who was described in his will as a saddler's ironmonger. Among his executors were William Chance and William Chance junior, presumably the factors discussed below. Woolley & Sargant were manufacturers of swords, edge tools, etc, in Edmund Street in 1815, and by 1818 had become Woolley, Sargant & Crane, 'sword manufacturers to the Board of Ordnance and the Hon. the East India Company, edge tools, &c' and they are still listed in 1823 despite the partnership having been dissolved two years earlier. By 1829 the firm had become Woolley, Sargant & Fairfax at the same address, with Sargant being possibly William's widow or a son. William Sargant is another example of a Birmingham tradesman venturing from his main line of business into selling clock dials for a very short, and probably unprofitable, period.

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6 Information from Paul J. Foley, USA.

### **Chance, Homer & Chance**

A very scarce falseplate is known marked 'Chance, Homer & Chance, Birmingham', used by a firm of factors. They were merchants in Bread Street (later Edmund Street) in 1808, but in April 1810 the partnership between William Chance, Edward Homer and Robert Lucas Chance was dissolved. The firm had earlier been Chance, Homer & Soden at the same address, but no clock dials are known sold by this firm. In 1812-15 William Chance & Sons (also known as Chance, Sons & Co) were buying pinions for eight-day and thirty-hour clocks from Peter Stubs.

### **Hobson & Todd, Hobson & Hodgkins and Edward Hobson**

Hobson & Todd of Congreve Street, just round the corner from where James Wilson had his manufactory, were factors in 1800-3, and are reported to have sold dials with their own falseplates. They are probably the same as the factors Hobson, Todd & Hodgkins<sup>7</sup> listed in 1808. This partnership between Edward Hobson, Thomas Todd and John Philip Hodgkins, factors of Fleet Street, Birmingham, was dissolved in January 1811. In 1814-15 Hobson & Hodgkins were factors in Fleet Street who bought clock pinions from Peter Stubs, while Edward Hobson was a merchant and factor in Newhall Street. Thereafter Edward Hobson traded alone at the same address until 1823. Hodgkins tried his hand at other trades as John Phillips [sic] Hodgkins worked with button-maker William Elliott, trading as William Elliott & Co, until 1823, then with James Harwood as coal merchants until that partnership was dissolved in 1834. He was still a factor until at least 1841.<sup>8</sup> By 1829 Edward Hobson & Son, merchants and factors were at 43 Newhall Street and Fleet Street, but by 1839 only the Fleet Street address is listed.<sup>9</sup> Edward Hobson the factor is probably the man of this name who died in 1830, aged 63.

Although they are scarce, a few dials are known with a cast-iron Hobson & Hodgkins falseplate. One has shell corners identical to those used by Richard Hipkiss about 1815-20, but it has an original Eli Felton calen-

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7 The directory gives Hodgkinson in error for Hodgkins

8 John Phillips Hodgkins was born in 1780. He is probably the man referred to as John Philip Hodgkins in 1811.

9 In 1818-23 Thomas Hobson was a japanner, while John Hobson was a japanner in 1839-51. There are no known connections with Edward Hobson and neither is known to have made clock dials.

dar disc. As a Felton moon dial is known with Hipkiss maps it is highly likely that Hipkiss was making dials for both firms of factors but a calendar stamped with the wrong name was put on the Hobson & Hodgkins dial by mistake.

The Hobson firm of factors traded from 1815 to 1839 and during this period sold dials with cast-iron falseplates marked 'E-Hobson, Birmingham' and 'E-Hobson and Son', which have sometimes been misinterpreted as 'L. Hobson'. There is also a very scarce falseplate by Wilson & Hodgkins, about 1820, who are not recorded in documentary sources and cannot be connected with James Wilson who had been dead for over ten years.

### **John Balleny**

John Manby, a Skipton clockmaker/retailer, bought dials from John Balleny of 50 St Paul's Square in 1837.<sup>10</sup> James Balleny was a factor at 50 St Paul's Square in 1815-1823, then John Balleny in 1829-39.

### **Joseph May**

John Manby of Skipton bought dials, mainly thirty-hour, from Joseph May of St Paul's Square, in 1832-5.<sup>11</sup> They were a half of the price of dials from dial manufacturers or other factors, so presumably they were of very poor quality. He was a factor at Nothwood Street in 1816, then at 51 St Paul's Square in 1823-39, and at number 49 in 1837

### **Mabson, Labron & Mabson**

In 1833 John Manby also bought clock dials from Mabson, Labron & Mabson (earlier trading as Dunderdale, Mabson & Labron), who were gunmakers and factors

### **James Richardson**

James Richardson of Birmingham bought clock pinions from Peter Stubs in 1809 and in 1812-15 he was a 'web and brace manufacturer, factor, etc', who sold Walker & Hughes dials with his own cast-iron falseplate. Nothing more is known and dials with the Richardson falseplate are very scarce.

### **Landale & Todd**

Another firm, possibly connected with Hobson & Todd, sold dials with falseplates marked 'Landale & Todd, Birmingham'. The only dial known to the author is from a poor photograph and it appears to date to the 1830s. This firm is not included in directories of the

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10 Brian Loomes, *Painted Dial Clocks* (Woodbridge, 1994), p122.

11 Brian Loomes, *Painted Dial Clocks*, p122.

period and must have been a very short-lived concern. There is probably no connection with Landale & Todd, Edinburgh ironmongers who sold Scottish dials with their name painted on the reverse in 1824-9. A cast-iron falseplate is known.

### **John Brasher**

A very rare cast-iron falseplate marked 'Brasher Birmingham' has only recently come to light.<sup>12</sup> This is John Brasher gunmaker and factor, who first appeared in the trade directories in 1797 as Archer & Brasher, factors of Lichfield Street. This partnership, like so many others, did not last long as Thomas Archer and John Brasher went their separate ways in February 1798. Thomas Archer had worked as a gunsmith at various premises in Lichfield Street from at least 1777 to 1818. In 1800-1 he was a gunmaker, sword cutler and factor and in 1818 the firm was Thomas Archer & Son (also Thomas), gunmakers and sword cutlers. In 1800-1 John Brasher was a factor in Summer Row, but by 1818 he had moved to Carline Street, St Paul's (in the 'Jewellery Quarter'). Shortly afterwards in 1818 he is listed as a gunmaker in Caroline Street and then in 1823 as a gunmaker at 13 Caroline Street and also a factor at 19 Caroline Street. He finally appears in the trade directories in 1829-30 as a gun and pistol maker at 19 Caroline Street.<sup>13</sup> He probably died shortly afterwards, although no death or burial has been traced.

Despite there being no positive dates of birth or death of these two men it is likely that John Brasher was younger than Thomas Archer and joined him to sell Archer's guns. Known guns include a 20-bore percussion sporting gun by John Brasher, Birmingham,<sup>14</sup> a pair of flintlock boxlock pocket pistols of small bore by Brasher of London and Birmingham,<sup>15</sup> a brass three barrel flintlock pistol by Brasher London,<sup>16</sup> and a double percussion pistol by Brasher, London, but with a proof mark from Birmingham where it had probably been made.<sup>17</sup> There is a possibility that he was selling these under his own 'brand', rather than being the ac-

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12 Sold on Ebay in April 2011 with a square dial signed for Weare of Wincanton, about 1830. I am grateful to Richard Harper for bringing this to my attention.

13 This confirms that the factor and the gunmaker are the same man.

14 Sold at Christie's, South Kensington, in 1997.

15 For sale by Henry Krank & Co Ltd, Pudsey, West Yorkshire, 2011.

16 Sold by iCollector.com, 2010.

17 For sale by Guns America, 2011.

tual manufacturer. Towards the latter part of his career John Brasher made a fleeting excursion into selling clock dials fitted with his own falseplates. Given their scarcity it appears that he was even less successful at this than the many others detailed here who tried and failed to make money in the clock trade.

### **Conclusions**

This series of articles has attempted to gather together the known sparse facts about those who made and sold painted clock dials in Birmingham from 1772 to the latter half of the nineteenth century. The coverage is not claimed to be complete as there are others listed in directories about whom virtually nothing more is known. Neither are the merchants and factors who sold dials but did not use falseplates marked with their own name included here.

The trade in painted clock dials can be divided into

- a. The major manufacturers who concentrated on dial production and who only occasionally produced other japanned wares.
- b. Japanners of tin-plate or papier mâché trays, boxes, etc, who occasionally made clock dials.
- c. Factors and manufacturers of guns, buttons, etc, who sold dials with falseplates bearing their own names, but actually made by others. Most of these were very short-lived concerns.

What has not been attempted is to put the Birmingham dial trade into a wider economic setting, and to see how the emergence of these firms and their subsequent demise related to periods of growth and depression. It is hoped that this aspect will be considered by a suitably qualified economic historian.