



**BROWN BOOTS IN
EARLSDON**
by
Mary Montes

Revised and Republished 1998



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Booklet No.15

BROWN BOOTS IN EARLSDON

A STUDY OF A WATCHMAKING
COMMUNITY, ITS RISE AND FALL

MARY MONTES

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Series Editor - Eileen Castle

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CONTENTS

ILLUSTRATIONS	3
EDITOR'S NOTES	4
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	4
BIRTH OF A SUBURB	5
THE EARLSDON WATCHMAKING INDUSTRY	9
BEGINNINGS	9
COMPONENTS AND MANUFACTURE	11
(1) Driving Mechanism	11
(2) Transmitting Mechanism	13
(3) Escapement or Controlling Mechanism	13
(4) Indicating Mechanism	14
PREMISES, EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS	15
MAKING THE WATCH	18
AN 'EARLSDON' WATCH?	21
PERSONNEL	22
ERRAND BOYS	23
APPRENTICESHIP	23
JOURNEYMEN	27
CRAFTSMEN	32
MASTERS	34
MANUFACTURERS	37
WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY	43
OUTSIDE INTERESTS AND LEISURE	44
GROWTH OF THE INDUSTRY	49
DECLINE	50
CHANGE OF DIRECTION	53
NOTES:	64

ILLUSTRATIONS

Photographs on front cover:

Three Coventry watches made in the 1890's

1. Gold half Hunter

2. Silver full Hunter

3. Small gold pocket watch

Courtesy of Flinn & Co.

POPULATION OF EARLSDON	6
ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP OF 1889	7
MAP SHOWING THE THREE WATCHMAKING CENTRES	8
A COVENTRY WATCH	12
SMALL TOP SHOP IN MOOR STREET	16
MASTER'S HOUSE IN WARWICK STREET	16
EARLSDON 1870	19
VIEW ACROSS THE FIELD FROM EARLSDON AVENUE	27
ARDEN STREET, showing part of Flinn's row of thirteen cottages	28
WATCHMAKERS' ASSOCIATION	30
JAMES WALKER, far right, on the balcony of the Craven Arms,	35
His house, now demolished, on Earlsdon Avenue South.	35
ROBERT WADDINGTON, his wife and daughter	42
THE WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL	45
THE EARLSDON COTTAGE PUB	45
EARLSDON LANE c 1890	47
A Master, MR.JAMES WALKER and some workers	48
NUMBERS EMPLOYED IN VARIOUS BRANCHES	51
TRADE DIRECTORY ENTRIES FOR 1931	52
ADVERTISEMENT for L.F.FORESTIER, 1907.	55
WATCH PRODUCTION	57
ADVERTISEMENTS from Local Trade Directories	63

EDITOR'S NOTES

The first edition of 'Brown Boots in Earlsdon' proved to be one of the most successful publications in the Coventry and County Heritage series. Such was its popularity that demand far exceeded supply and a second edition has become necessary. This edition follows the current format of the series but apart from a few minor changes, the content of the original pamphlet has been faithfully followed. I am grateful to Mrs. Montes for her review of the original material and to Mr. Hulton for his good offices in preparing the text for publication.

Eileen Castle June 1998.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The City Archivist, David Rimmer and his kind and attentive staff at the City Records Office, Andrew Mealey and Debbie Keene of the Local Studies Department at the Central Library for general help and guidance. Also the staff of the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and Kathy Fletcher for help with technical details.

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Tony Barber for providing general information on the watch trade, Mr. Patrick Flinn and John Leech for cover photographs and innumerable people who have kindly lent or given material or photographs.

Mary Montes 1989

BIRTH OF A SUBURB

Living conditions in the City of Coventry by the middle years of the last century were appalling, with dark, narrow streets, overcrowded courts and alleyways, always filthy, always unhealthy. With no proper sanitation the spread of diseases such as tuberculosis, diphtheria and scarlet fever was inevitable and widespread, with even typhoid and cholera not unknown. A Board of Health Report of 1849¹ reads like a horror story, and families, especially those of the respectable artisan class were desperate for decent new accommodation.

Development on land close to the City was out of the question - that was Lammas or Michaelmas land, sacrosanct to the use of the local Freemen who jealously guarded their privilege. Only by Act of Parliament was the nearby Chapelfields area, in the gift of Sir Thomas White's Charity released for development in 1845². When therefore a small free area of open farm land lying to the south-west of the City, between the two commons, Hearsall and Styvechale, was put on the market in 1852, it was quickly bought up. The purchasers were the Trustees of the local branch of the Freehold Land Society³, an Association formed for just this type of development. The area they bought consisted of eight fields⁴, covering some 30 acres, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from the centre of the City, a well drained little plateau on one of the highest points above sea level in the whole surrounding district.

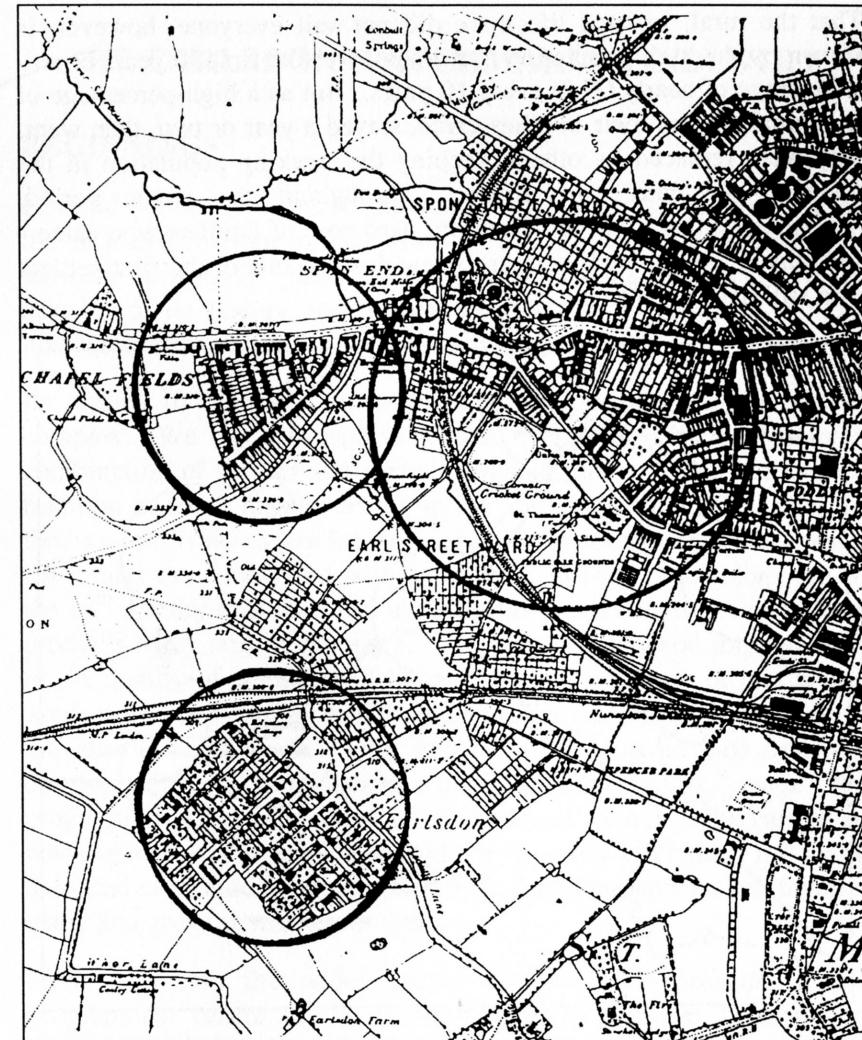
Admittedly it was not as easily accessible to the City as Chapelfields was. That was almost an extension of Spon Street, one of the main routes leading out of the City. It was very handy for the shops and other City amenities, above all for easy business intercourse with the main City watchmaking enclave; consequently it was soon completely built up and occupied. Earlsdon, on the other hand, with the only direct route to the City down a little alleyway which was muddy in winter, dusty in summer and unpleasant all the year round⁵, would appeal only to individuals who could appreciate the comparative isolation and autonomy of the new estate. It was 'without' the City until being Incorporated in 1890, and so, paying no City rates, could manage its own affairs.

Its attraction, apart from the financial one of freedom from City rates, lay mainly in the fact that it was clean; the air was fresh and healthy, with plenty of good light, so essential for the close work of the watchmaker, and, set amongst fields, commons and Freemen's gardens, it was very pretty, earning it the contemporary name of 'Garden Suburb'. As soon as the estate had been laid out into 250 building plots - each with its own piped water supply - divided between the eight new little streets, they were offered for sale, and the first purchasers, mainly watchmakers from the overcrowded Spon Street, Butts area, built their homes on them and moved in. The plots the newcomers chose were scattered at random throughout, a few in Earlsdon Street, a few in Arden Street and so on. Usually on similar estates the plots were distributed by ballot among the would-be purchasers, but as demand was so low to start with, here they were allocated by choice. Many buyers built two houses on their plots, one to live in themselves and the other one to let, providing homes for other families not able or not wishing to purchase their own⁶. Only John Flinn, the watch manufacturer built more, a row of 13 cottages to house his workers.

Gradually the population rose, until in 1861, the year of the first relevant census for the district, 107 houses had been built and were occupied, the number growing slowly, apart from a decline when trade was particularly bad in the late 60s to early 70s, until it reached 121 in 1881.

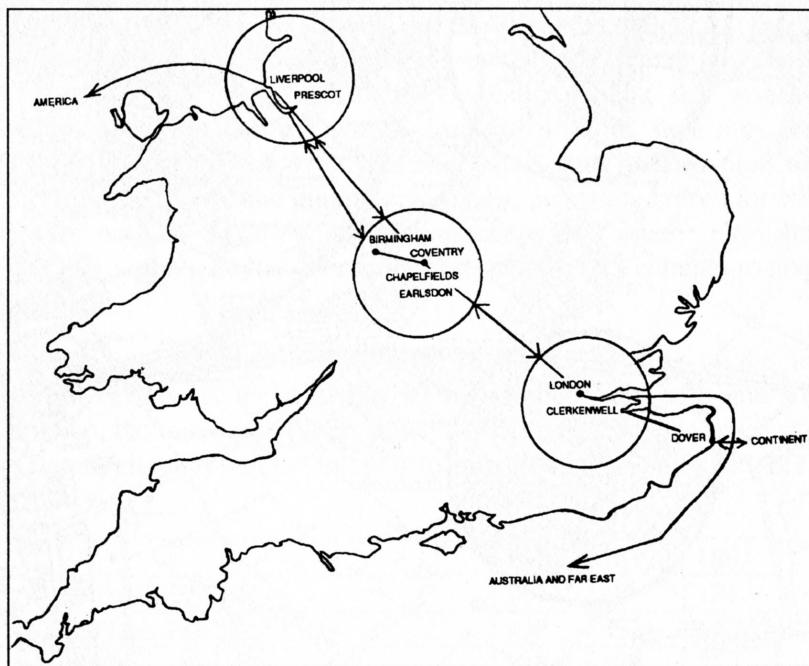
	1861	1871	1881
HOUSEHOLDS	107	95	121
TOTAL POPULATION	492	472	628
MEN	146	136	155
Employed in Watch Trade	100	97	104
WOMEN	158	140	191
In any employment	53	39	55
CHILDREN (14 years and under)	188	196	282
Those already working	20	10	16

POPULATION OF EARLSDON
(Figures from Census Returns)



ORDNANCE SURVEY MAP OF 1889
showing the three principal watchmaking areas of Coventry

That the rural, isolated life there did not suit everyone, however, is shown by the high population movement over the first 40 years or so - an average of nearly 60 % every 10 years. But as a high percentage of watchmakers and their families came, stayed a year or two, then went, they were replaced by others, keeping the working population in the trade at a steady two thirds. Throughout the whole period, nevertheless, there was an important hard core of families who came - and stayed, and indeed there are a few descendants of the first settlers who still live in the area today.



MAP SHOWING THE THREE WATCHMAKING CENTRES
and the
FLOW OF COMPLETE WATCHES, MOVEMENTS, PARTS,
MATERIALS AND MEN BETWEEN THEM

THE EARLSDON WATCHMAKING INDUSTRY

BEGINNINGS

It would not be far wrong to say that the most important element in the life of Earlsdon from its inception in 1852 to the end of the century, covering almost 50 years, was the watchmaking industry, and no account of its history and development would be complete without placing it in the context of the Coventry trade.

Its origins in Coventry are obscure and the reasons for its growth complex. We can only speculate that it originated as a result of a combination of several and various circumstances. There had been a tradition of small metal working in the City since the middle ages, so the basic skills necessary for the production of components was already there, and this, combined with some local interest in horology led in the 18th century to at least two clockmakers at work there, a few of their products being still in existence. Then, with the general improvement in the quality of metals available and in the techniques of production used, it was possible for smaller and smaller and more accurate clock movements to be made. This, together with ideas adapted from the development of sophisticated marine chronometers, made the progression to the production of clocks small enough to be carried or worn on the person inevitable, and the Coventry craftsmen, following the trend of producing these watches, as they were now called, found a ready and growing market for them.

There was also the added bonus of Coventry's position in the geographical centre of the Country, midway between London and Liverpool. Both of these cities were good local trade outlets as well as good ports for overseas trade with the rest of the world, and with the stage coaches and later on the trains passing through, Coventry had easy access to both. It is also significant that by the beginning of the 19th century the Liverpool area and the Clerkenwell district of London were flourishing watchmaking centres themselves, the intercourse between the three centres forming a major factor in the industry, with parts, materials and craftsmen passing freely between them.

Samuel Vale was the first local watchmaker of real note, operating in the City from 1747. The name Rotherham, which dominated the Coventry trade until its demise in recent years, entered the annals at this time. Richard Kevitt Rotherham, served his apprenticeship with Vale and joined him in partnership, later taking over the business in Spon Street on his own account, the firm becoming the major manufacturer of watches and employer of labour in the trade with up to 500 hands, for over 100 years. It was in the area around the Rotherham establishment that the Coventry watch trade enclave grew, spreading out from both sides of Spon Street, northwards to the Holyhead Road and to the Butts in the south.

By 1841, according to the census returns, 474 men and 130 apprentices were employed in the Coventry industry, the numbers growing over the next 10 years to 1,328 men and 141 apprentices in 1851, becoming the second in size and importance to the principal local industry of silk ribbon weaving. It was from these numbers that the majority of the early Earlsdon craftsmen came.

It must be stressed that the type of watch produced locally was the pocket watch. (There is in existence a wrist watch made by Edwin Flinn of Allesley Road as early as 1877, but this was exceptional.) The great majority were key wound, manufacture of the keyless type only being accepted by the Coventry workers after a struggle by the turn of the century. This trait of sticking to the old, familiar forms and traditions and dislike of change and innovation bedevilled this as it has bedevilled other Coventry industries throughout the City's history, and was a major factor in its ultimate failure. Although some watches produced in Earlsdon in its heyday were for the top end and specialised area of the market and won considerable awards for their accuracy in tests at the Kew Observatory⁷, the principal target for production was the middle price range and it was in this area that most of the local workers were employed.

COMPONENTS AND MANUFACTURE⁸

In the actual manufacture of the watch there are two principal components, the CASE and the mechanism or MOVEMENT.

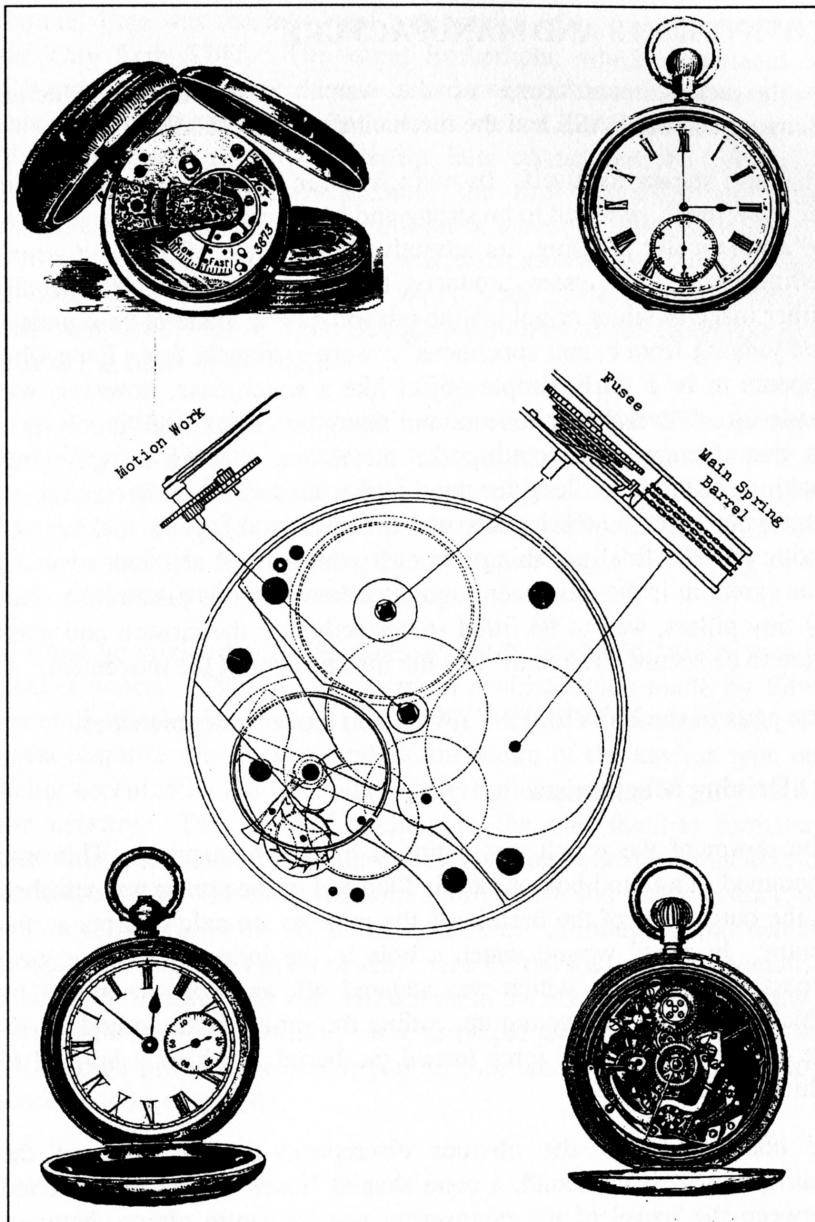
The case speaks for itself. Its main function was of course to protect the movement, so it had to be strong and hardwearing, but also it had to be aesthetically pleasing, its attractive appearance affording a strong selling point. The cases produced locally at this time were usually either made of silver or gold, although some were made of base metals, and judging from extant specimens⁹ were extremely fine. Even what appears to be a fairly simple object like a watch case, however, was made up of several components and many processes were involved in its manufacture, from cutting the metal and shaping it, springing, making the knob and loop for the top (the pendant), engine turning (an engraving process which patterned the case back), glass making and fitting and the final polishing. In every department absolute accuracy was essential if the movement, mounted between two plates held apart by tiny pillars, was to be fitted in correctly and the closure and glass were to be secure. The 'cap' was the inside cover of the movement.

The parts of the MOVEMENT divide into four distinct branches. -

(1) Driving Mechanism

The power of the watch was supplied by the mainspring. This was contained in a round box or barrel. One end of the spring was attached to the outer edge of the barrel and the other to the axle or arbor in the centre. In a key wound watch a hole in the inner watch case gave access to this arbor, which was squared off, and was the means by which the watch was wound up, coiling the spring tightly round it. As the spring uncoiled, its force turned the barrel in which it lay and to which it was attached.

To compensate for the obvious discrepancy in the force of the mainspring as it unwound, a cone shaped 'fusee' barrel was inserted between the barrel of the mainspring and its centre pinion, between which a tiny chain was anchored. This chain, running in a spiral



A COVENTRY WATCH

groove cut in the fusee barrel with its varying diameter, converted the declining force of the mainspring into a constant one. The need for the fusee was obviated later, and the 'going barrel' was introduced, where teeth on the mainspring barrel meshed with the teeth of a small wheel or pinion on the first part of the mechanism, transmitting the power directly to the rest of the movement. This was another innovation which the English makers fought against for many years, continuing production of fusee watches long after it had been abandoned as unnecessary by foreign manufacturers.

(2) Transmitting Mechanism

This consists of 3 axles or arbors each carrying a pinion and a wheel: - the teeth on the fusee barrel or the going barrel forming the so-called '1st wheel', the 2nd or centre wheel, the 3rd wheel and the 4th wheel. These toothed wheels were usually made of brass, while the pinions and arbors were made of steel.

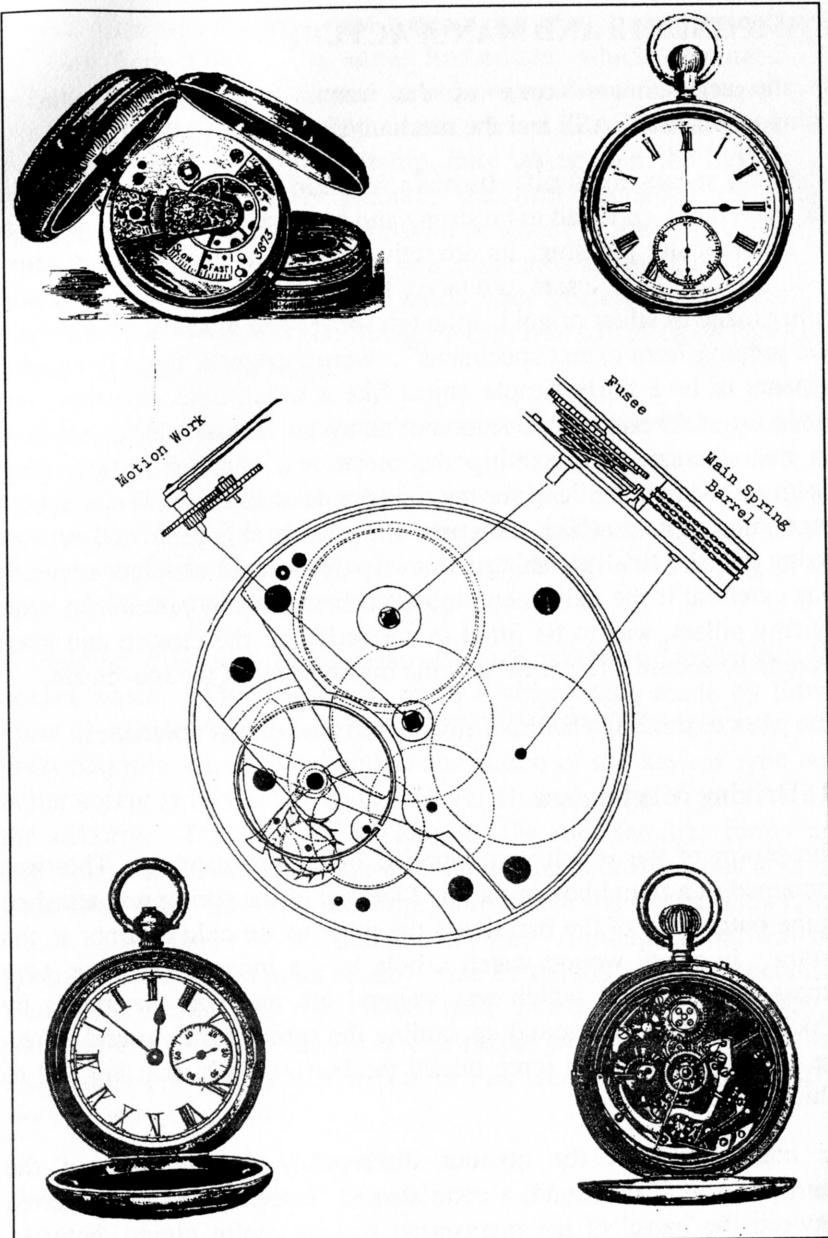
The mainspring barrel was adjusted to turn once in every 8 hours, and the number of its teeth or those on the fusee barrel and those on the pinion of the centre wheel was at a ratio of 8:1, so the centre arbor turned once in every hour. This arbor was in the centre of the watch and was extended through the dial or watch face to carry the minute hand. The ratio of teeth on the centre wheel to those on the pinion of the 3rd wheel was also 8:1, so the 3rd wheel turned in 7½ minutes, and because the ratio of this 3rd wheel to the 4th was 7½:1, the 4th wheel consequently turned in one minute, its arbor extending through the dial to carry the second hand. The transmission mechanism was also known as the 'going train'.

(3) Escapement or Controlling Mechanism

The escapement is made up of three parts:-

1. the escape wheel.
2. the pallet
3. the balance

It was the extremely intricate and important part of the mechanism which regulated the flow of energy or power from the main spring, allowing it to escape slowly and in a continuous controlled way.



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Through the escape wheel and the pallet, its function was also to give impulse to the balance wheel, keeping it oscillating, which together with the balance spring regulated the steady progress of the hands.

(4) Indicating Mechanism

This consisted of the hands, dial and the mechanism directly under the dial otherwise known as the MOTION WORK. A hollow tube or 'cannon' pinion carried the minute hand at one end and the teeth of a cogged wheel at the other. These drove a wheel on a stud to which was attached another wheel driving a shorter 2nd 'cannon' pinion which was fitted over the first like the finger of a glove. This carried the hour hand.

Throughout the mechanism jewels, usually, although not always, rubies, were used to diminish friction and wear in bearings of pivots and on the escapement lever pallets. Before the final assembly of all the parts they were gilded to avoid the possibility of corrosion.

The DIAL was usually a flat round plate of copper, white enamelled with figures picked out in black. Arabic figures were drawn freehand with the finest of hair brushes, and the Roman ones by applying a blob of black enamel and scraping away the surplus with a small ivory or bone stylus. Either way the operation needed a steady hand, a keen eye and much concentration, particularly for the tiny second dial. The watch hands were either made of gold or of steel heat treated sufficiently to give an attractive blue sheen.

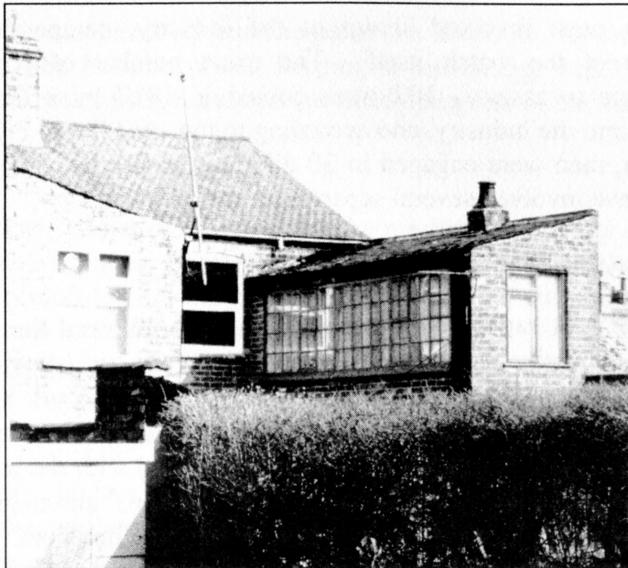
Of course, many refinements and additions were made as required for the many different models produced, and as new methods and inventions came along and were accepted, but the above rough outline of the basic components may help to clarify the part each craftsman played in the production of the finished watch. Because of its complicated nature with so many components and processes involved, it automatically followed that there should be a great deal of specialisation, with workers concentrating their skills on different facets of the trade. No single man would make a complete watch - it would have been economically unrealistic to do so - although undoubtedly there were craftsmen capable, if not wholly, of almost doing so from case to finishing and timing. It was this diversity which

led to a most involved set-up of the industry, comparable to the intricacy of the watch itself. The exact number of processes is impossible to assess - 102 were quoted in 1817 by a Government enquiry into the industry, and according to the 1861/71/81 censuses for Earlsdon, men were engaged in 30 different branches, many of which would have involved several separate operations.

PREMISES, EQUIPMENT AND TOOLS

The work was carried out in premises which followed the mediæval practice whereby a man worked at his trade in his own home environment. It directly followed on the tradition of the ribbon weavers who with the reinforcement of the top or third storey of their homes to take the weight of the heavy looms, and with the insertion of extra large windows, made their work or 'top shops' an integral part of their living quarters. There were however, two differences. One was obviously that with no heavy machinery required in the making of a watch, the reinforced floor was unnecessary. The second and most important and socially intriguing fact was that whereas a weaver's top shop windows faced the street and unashamedly proclaimed the home's secondary use as an industrial unit, a watchmaker's top shop, with the same large windows for maximum illumination, on the other hand, was tucked away at the back, although still attached to and forming a part of the dwelling house. Usually it was positioned on the second storey of a 'wing' which jutted out into the back garden, if small over the kitchen and scullery area, and if a larger establishment, with administration offices and warehouse underneath. From the front street, therefore, a watchmaker's home, be it cottage or substantial middle class villa, appeared at first sight to be just that, with no indication that it was anything other than purely a domestic residence. The social differences which this implied will be discussed later.

Inside the work shop, against the wall beneath the windows were chest high benches divided into 'sittings' where the men sat at their work, just one or two in a cottage top shop to 40 or 50 in a large manufacturer's concern. Here each man worked with his large white apron spread out around him and hooked on to his bench to catch any



SMALL TOP SHOP IN MOOR STREET



MASTER'S HOUSE IN WARWICK STREET

small parts which might be dropped, and each man with his eye glass hung on a cord around his neck. With such close work a good magnifying glass was indispensable and, with his white apron, formed as identifiable a badge of office as a crook to a shepherd. In front of him on his bench were such tools as were needed according to his particular job, and drawing on his memory of his father's bench, although by this time the work being done was just repair work, Mr. A.W. Adams¹⁰ describes it thus:

“ . . . his small vice (in which he) often had a large cork on which to rest the part on which he was working, and on the board behind the vice would be a piece of white paper to show up all the tiny components of a dismantled watch. His own well-tuned watch would be laid there for timing purposes, and then, usually on the right hand side, there was a miscellany of tools; screw drivers in several sizes, brushes, files, tweezers, buff-sticks, a tiny blow-pipe and a bow. This latter item, like a miniature archer's bow, was used to 'turn' minor items of equipment, especially one for off-centre drilling. The work was secured into a V-shaped tool held in the vice, and the drill was turned gently by a forward and backward movement of the bow, with its string looped round a tiny flywheel. Years of practice made it possible to select any required tool by touch, without raising the eyeglass from the eye.

There was a small vessel holding half a thimbleful of thin oil, a tin containing half a cup of petrol and various tobacco or cocoa tins, and perhaps the bowl of a broken wine glass, holding disembowelled watches. At the rear of the board, close to the windows, ran a gas supply, running into two jointed pipes. A naked jet issued from one, and the other rose vertically to a shade and incandescent mantle. These fragile lace-like mantles glowed into a beautiful sharp light, throwing a brilliant cone down onto the white paper.

This description dates from near the end of the history of the industry, the late 1920s and early 30s and so includes one or two innovations - the use of petrol and the gas jet, artificial lighting previously being provided by oil lamps or candles whose light was magnified through a globe of water. The actual tools used, however, were very little changed. The only part which required tools and equipment of any substantial size, and even they by any standard were quite modest, was

the case, and a fascinating replica of a casemaker's workshop, using material from Mr. Trahern's workshop in Chapelfields, has been assembled in the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum and is well worth a visit.

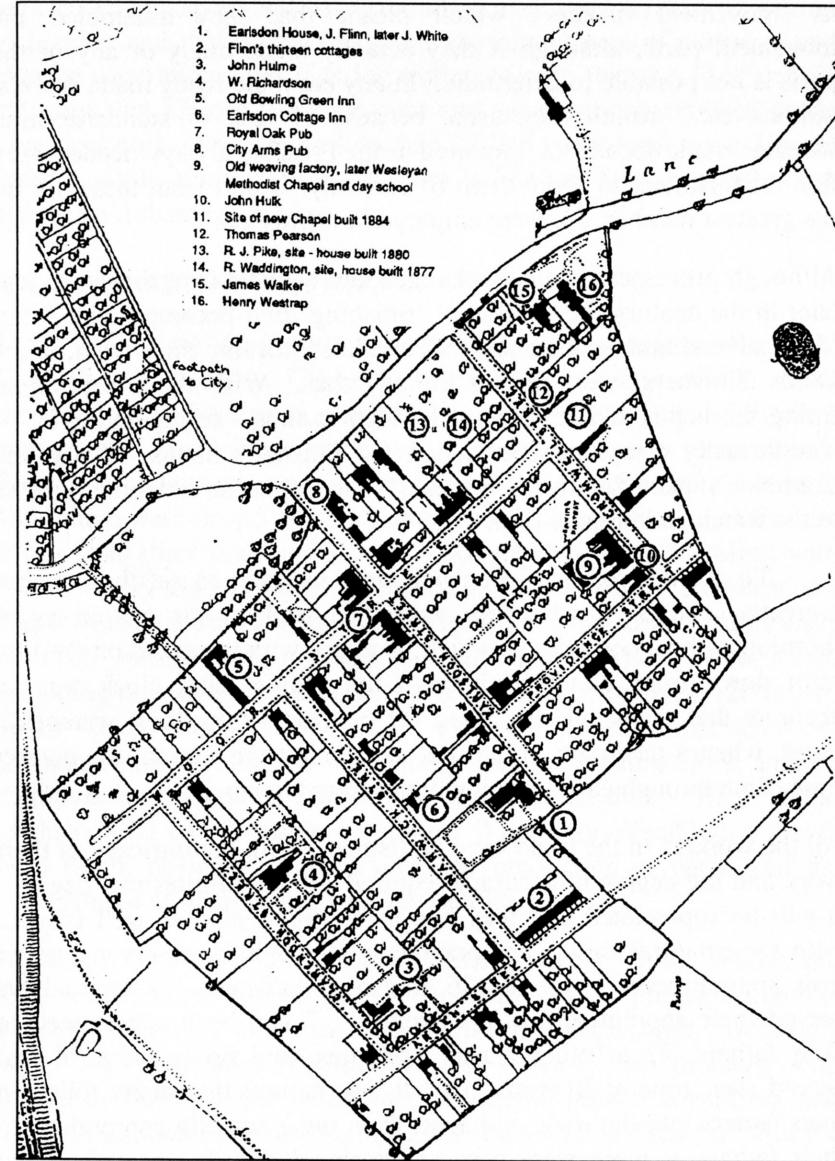
Each man would be working at his own particular part of the whole process, whether at his own bench in his own home, at a sitting rented from a friend or neighbour for a few shillings a week, or in his master's top shop. The man sitting at the bench next to him may have been working on the same process, but more than likely he would be carrying out an entirely different procedure. A pinion maker may have shared his bench with a fusee cutter, next to whom worked a finisher, but they all fitted in with the scheme of things just as the parts they made or assembled fitted into the watch.

MAKING THE WATCH

According to the 1861 census for Earlsdon, 146 men and boys were in some sort of full-time employment, and of these 100 were in the watch trade. Of course this number does not take into account any who commuted from the City to work on the estate, and naturally also there were possibly a few Earlsdon residents who went to work in the City.

Of the 100 in the watch trade, those termed 'manufacturer' were Henry Westrap, John Flinn and George Hammon, and 'makers', more modest producers, included John Hulk and Joseph Richardson, although whether they all produced finished watches, ready for sale, is not known, Flinn and Richardson are the only ones definitely known to have done so. None of them had large establishments, Flinn having the most hands with 14 men and 5 boys actually working on his premises.

James Walker, who employed 3 men and 3 boys was a master case maker, with a further 7 men outworking on the case or the cap - the inner cover of the movement. Ten men were engaged in making parts such as escapements, barrels, fusees, frames etc., with three men jewelling¹¹ the watches, one dial enameller, two who engraved the serial number of the watch and the regulator gradations, and two men who plied the extremely unhealthy trade of gilding the movement. Four men were termed 'watch motioners'. These assembled the 'under



EARLSDON 1870

dial' mechanism which controlled the hands. Four men are described as 'movement makers', which meant that they assembled the movement parts, although if they actually made many or any of the parts is not possible to determine. In any case, the ready made wheels, pinions etc. which they used, because of lack of standardisation whether made locally or imported from Prescot, always needed very fine readjustment to make them fit correctly. Apart from these, by far the greatest number, 36, were employed as 'finishers'.

Although processes gradually changed and evolved over the years, and later in the century the process of 'finishing' first became divided into 'first halvers' and 'second halvers', and later still into three parts, in the 1860s 'finishers' were almost literally that. With the exception of fitting the hands and bringing the watch to time - or regulating it - it was virtually complete when it left the finisher's hands. It was the examiner's, manufacturer's or maker's job to put the finishing touches to the watch and prepare it for sale.

To get the correct Greenwich time in order to set the watches correctly, one of the workers would be sent to the station every morning with a good reliable watch, to check with the guard on the first train down from London, although the Market Hall clock was so accurate that many makers relied on that for setting their watches¹². Later, when a telegraph office was installed at the station, the correct time came through each morning direct from Greenwich.

All the workers in the trade were craftsmen. With the intricacy of their work and the degree of accuracy required - to an infinitesimal degree - it will be appreciated that they had to be highly skilled, well trained, with some natural ability, and practically all would have served a seven year apprenticeship. Of the 36 Earlsdon craftsmen known to have served their apprenticeship in Coventry¹³, 7 had been apprenticed to their fathers, 22 to other master craftsmen and no less than 6 had served their time at Rotherham's. It was natural that many followed their fathers into the trade and apart from the 7 actually apprenticed to their fathers, 9 more were sons of watchmakers. It was a far more prestigious and a better paid industry than silk ribbon weaving, then the principal trade in the City, and many fathers chose it as a career for their sons in preference to their own trade.

Mention has been made of the close liaison between the watchmaking industry in Liverpool and its surrounding area, the Clerkenwell district of London and that of Coventry, and the interchange of materials and men between them, and it is interesting to note that the 1861 census indicates that 17 men had been born and apparently apprenticed in the Liverpool area, of whom no less than 12 had come from the village of Prescot, while 4, although not all born in London, had apparently been apprenticed there.

AN 'EARLSDON' WATCH?

There can be no doubt that between the various centres, Earlsdon, Chapelfields, the City, Clerkenwell and Prescot, there was a lot of competition, with parts, materials, semi-finished and finished movements, apart from craftsmen, passing from one to another¹⁴. Prescot was the major producer of semi-finished movements, where in 1854 there were only 5 Watch Makers, but 120 movement makers, and it was from there that the local trade bought most of its supplies, with 246 Coventry makers dealing with one firm there alone. However, the Prescot manufacturers were more receptive of innovation, and as early as 1866 John Wycherly built a large factory where, with steam providing the power for advanced machinery, he employed 120 hands, 30 or 40 of whom were women. Rotherham's, the most advanced Coventry manufacturer did not install steam power until 1889, and the employment of women came only slowly after that. There is no evidence that any Earlsdon firm, even White's or Waddington's ever used steam powered machinery for the production of parts, and the employment of women will be discussed later.

Although according to their advertising matter, both White and Waddington imply that all parts were made on their premises, there is evidence that they and, ten other Earlsdon makers dealt extensively with Prescot, principally with Mr. James Berry¹⁵ but probably with others as well, buying in finished or semi-finished movements and parts. This means, of course, that even if a watch is engraved with the legend 'Coventry', 'London' or even 'Earlsdon', and there are many still in existence from this period both in museums and private hands, there is no certainty - in fact there is every doubt - that that was where all its parts were made and assembled. Just as misleading is the appearance of a name in a watch. This name in most cases would be

merely that of the retailer or distributor, who probably scarcely touched the watch, let alone made any of the parts or even that any were made in his workshop. This means that only in very few cases can a watch be identified as genuinely and completely the work of the man whose name appears inside it, in fact, bearing in mind the fragmentary process of production, it is virtually impossible.

Again, there is the added problem of unscrupulous makers intentionally marking their products with names other than their own as a sales gimmick, well-known watchmaker's names which, often with a London address, were a strong selling point, 'guaranteeing' a good, dependable product, and there were several prosecutions in the City area for this malpractice¹⁶. All this illustrates the difficulty in finding - and identifying - a genuine Coventry, let alone an Earlsdon made watch.

PERSONNEL

Side by side with the complicated mechanics of the industry (the 'who did what?' part,) was the inevitable hierarchical structure of its personnel. This was a loose, mobile structure up which a capable, hard working craftsman could climb, starting out as a newly qualified tradesman and working his way up to become -providing he had the necessary entrepreneurial skills - a respected, successful manufacturer with his own business. However, should he not aim so high he could still make a reasonable livelihood at whichever level he remained. He was a craftsman, and as such could command a commensurate wage. His income at any level was higher for instance than a comparable worker in the ribbon weaving industry, and Charles Bray¹⁷, writing in 1857, noted that wages on an average were 16s. 6d. a week for the weaver, but 25s. 0d. a week for the watchmaker. Still comparing the two industries, he also noted that, "*The watchmakers generally are provident in their habits - do not marry early, keep their wives at home, send their children to school until the age of 14, belong to Building Societies, Freehold Land Societies and Sick Clubs, and are otherwise well conducted.*" Wives of weavers had to go to work, and their children too at a very early age, to supplement the breadwinners' meagre wages. The watchmaker's image of himself as a man having a

great deal of pride in his craftsmanship is reinforced by his pride in his standing in the community.

This is a generalisation of course, and there were many who fell below the ideal, but if it was in any measure true of the whole Coventry industry, it was particularly true of the Earlsdon enclave where the importance of the Victorian creed of respectability and providence was a by-word.

ERRAND BOYS

On the very lowest level of the hierarchy were the indispensable errand boys. Given the piecemeal structure of the trade, it was necessary to circulate the parts as they were completed and assembled to other workers along the assembly line, and this task was entrusted to the neighbourhood lads. They were usually still attending school, doing their delivery work before and after school hours. The components, if tiny, were packed into pill boxes, if larger (semi-finished movements for instance), into tin boxes, all graded according to the size and quantity of their contents, and all neatly labelled. On warm summer evenings and on bitter cold winter mornings it must have been a hard discipline for those young boys, but at the same time it afforded them a useful insight into the complexities of the industry as they sped - or dawdled - from top shop to top shop.

APPRENTICESHIP

As a general rule apprenticeship for a boy started when he left school at the age of 13 or 14, and because of the high degree of skill it was necessary for him to attain, this usually lasted for 7 years. At, the end of his 'time', provided he had reached the age of 21, he would be entitled to apply for the Freedom of the City, with the privileges this carried with it, including that of having an electoral vote. His time would be served either under the tutelage of a skilled craftsman, who quite frequently was the boy's own father, in the man's own small establishment usually on a one-to-one basis, or in one of the larger manufacturer's work shop such as Rotherham's. If in the latter, he would have the opportunity of experiencing all the different facets of the trade, ultimately specialising in the one in which he showed most aptitude and to which he was most suited. In either case it would

depend on a boy's ability and application as well as on his master's ability and interest in teaching him, how far advanced in the craft he became. Some would never be capable of more than the basic jobbing skills; others, with greater aptitude, when their time was served would be sought after as journeymen by the more prestigious manufacturers who might already be acquainted with the good quality of their work.

Of the serving apprentices named in the 1861 census for Earlsdon, 7 were apprenticed to their own fathers:

Henry Cox	age 14 to his father Benjamin Cox, Finisher
Henry Lee	age 19 to his father Henry B. Lee, Motion Maker
William Burdett	age 19 to his father Joseph Burdett, Finisher
George W. Burdett	age 14 to his father Joseph Burdett, Finisher
John Hewitt	age 16 to his father John Hewitt, Pinion Maker
Thomas Hewitt	age 15 to his father John Hewitt, Pinion Maker
William Shufflebotham	age 19 to his father Josiah Shufflebotham, Maker/Finisher

There was an advantage in a boy being apprenticed to his father, apart from the obvious - that the boy was already on the premises and conversant with the working routine - and that was the fact that there would be no question of a premium having to be paid which might be the case with the larger, more popular employers. The recognised weekly wage for an apprentice was 4s.3d¹⁸ which could be augmented by extra jobbing work.

In 1853 there was some concern that apprentices bound to masters who had moved out from the City to take up residence on the new estate might lose their right to the freedom of the City when they had completed their time, but this was resolved, as the following report from the Coventry Herald of 22nd July, 1853 shows:

"There is a growing feeling amongst apprentices whose masters have removed from within the City to reside in the new buildings at Earlsdon, that this removal will have the effect of depriving them of their freedom; and that therefore they are exonerated from their liability to serve their masters. According to the opinion we have

heard expressed by professional men, this notion on the part of the apprentices is entirely erroneous. Earlsdon, although not within the City Boundary, is within the United Parishes, and is within the Parliamentary Boundary. They are therefore bound to serve 'duly and truly' and such service at Earlsdon will entitle them to the freedom as safely as if they served within the City. As to the difficulty of going backwards and forwards to meals, that is a matter for mutual arrangement and which, with a friendly spirit, may soon be got over."

That it was all sorted out amicably is shown by the following item which appeared in the Coventry Standard on 25th November, 1853:

"On Tuesday evening last a company of about 150 persons sat down to a very excellent dinner, provided by Mr. East at the Bowling Green Inn, in the new district of Earlsdon, near this City, 'to celebrate the Attorney General's decision' in favour of admitting to the freedom those who have served their apprenticeship outside the municipal boundary but within the united parishes of Coventry. Mr. Wilmot and Mr. T. Browett, solicitors, were amongst the company, and the chair was taken by Mr. H. Browett. The evening was agreeably spent in conversationally discussing various topics and in moral and other convivial entertainments."

(The Bowling Green Inn was defunct and up for sale by March the following year and reverted to becoming a private residence.)

By this time, the second half of the nineteenth century, the old tradition of an apprentice living in with his master's family was dying out, although there are five instances in 1861 of this happening in Earlsdon, not unnaturally given the comparative remoteness of the estate:

Francis Webb	age 13 apprenticed to and living, with G.J. Hammon, Manufacturer
Richard Wimsett	age 14 apprenticed to and living with Joseph Atkins Motioner
Henry Atkins	age 14 apprenticed to and living with James Byron, Equipment Mrk.
Samuel Pratt	age 16 apprenticed to and flying with George G. Smith, Finisher
Fred. Townsend	age 20 apprenticed to and living with Wilham Wood, Finisher

In the two cases of Francis Webb from London and Henry Atkins from Prescot, the fact that they hailed from the same area as their master would suggest that it was through the influence of friends or family that they came to Coventry to learn their trade.

In all there were 23 apprentices named on the 1861 census. According to Mr. C.A. Read, Watch Manufacturer of the Butts, Coventry, writing in the Horological Journal of July 1880 on the situation at the time of which we are dealing, it was the custom for new apprentices to be kept at the basic task of polishing the components for a whole year or more before being set on to more advanced work. This Read thought to have been an injustice. He was glad to note, however, that by the 1880s things had improved, and after a day at filing pins and a few days at turning pieces of steel, the apprentices were soon put on to making fusees and barrels and then the larger of the three wheels, the centre wheel of the going train, and also to making such tools as would be useful to them. From then on their development depended on their ability for more demanding work.

For a young lad of middle teens it must have been tedious work in the extreme and there is a contemporary reference to the use of 'Aaron's Rod'¹⁹. While I must admit that I don't quite understand the implication of this, it sounds restrictive if not punitive! However, the Earlsdon boys were fortunate in that there was ample scope for them to let off steam after working hours on the surrounding commons and in the nearby woods where they could ramble at will or organise games of cricket or football, just as local boys have done ever since.

In all, life does not seem to have been all that unpleasant for them, and indeed a writer in 1931, reporting a recent meeting of Freemen said, "*One member, recalling his own apprenticeship asked the question 'Would any of us like to go through our apprenticeship again?' 'Yes!' shouted one of the audience in frantic haste and with a tremor in his voice, and the burst of laughter which greeted his answer had in it the traces of the delirium of pleasurable recollection.*"

JOURNEYMAN

At the end of their apprenticeship most would spend at least a year or two 'improving' and gaining experience, possibly with one of the larger manufacturers as indoor workers, or perhaps staying on as journeymen with their old masters, as Matthew Wilcox did.

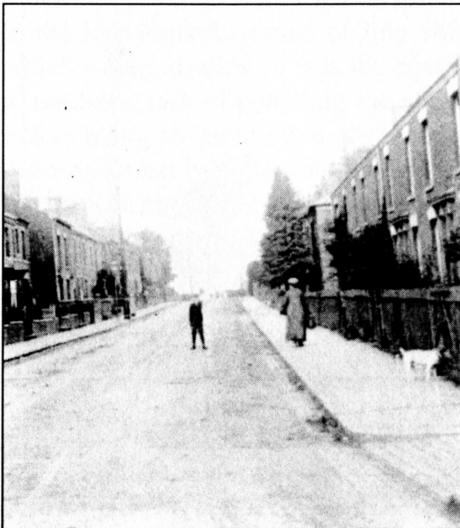


VIEW ACROSS THE FIELD FROM EARLSDON AVENUE

That an apprenticeship in the watch trade was not always the automatic 'open Sesame' to a good livelihood, Wilcox's history as gleaned from official records - such as census returns and burial records, serves to show the other side of the coin.

He had been apprenticed to John Flinn from 1847 to 1854, and we find him in 1861, now aged 28, living in No. 3, Flinn's row of 13 cottages in Arden Street, working as a jeweller presumably for Flinn. He was now married, with a family of four children. (There would have been five had little Walter not been one of the many infant casualties of the time, dying in April, 1855 at the age of 6 months²⁰.) As the eldest child was aged 9 in 1861, her parents must have married in 1852, two years before Matthew's apprenticeship ended, an event much frowned upon by the authorities, and on an apprentice's basic wage of 4s.3d. a week,

plus any extra he could earn by jobbing after normal working hours, this is hardly surprising, and we must surmise that the marriage was an unlooked for necessity in the strict social ethos of the time. With no possibility of birth control, matters were made worse by the arrival of yet another child every two years, and we can only commiserate with the Wilcox's in the desperate struggle their life must have been, even on a journeyman's improved rate of pay.



ARDEN STREET, showing part of Flinn's row of thirteen cottages where the Wilcox's lived

The better his production in terms of quality and delivery reliability, the higher his income. This earning capacity in some measure also, was controlled by his bargaining power, both with the supplier of his raw materials or semi-finished parts - unless of course, these were supplied by the manufacturer, in which case, labour only would be negotiated - and with the manufacturer who he in turn supplied.

In both the City and in Chapelfields most of the industry's day to day business transactions and bargaining took place in the local pubs -

Matthew died in 1868, aged only 35 years, leaving his wife, Sarah with a brood of small children, and the family passes out of Earlsdon's history. With no pensions, family allowance or social security, the outlook for Sarah was bleak indeed, and unless she had a family who was prepared to help her, the workhouse would probably have been the outcome.

The nature of a watchmaker's work dictated payment by piecework, and so his income depended in the long run on his production ability, both in quality and quantity.

combining business with pleasure - and an additional reason for the proliferation of pubs in the Spon Street and Chapelfields areas. In Earlsdon this was much less the custom, as will be discussed later.

In 1858²¹ at a meeting at the Rose Inn, Moat Street, a group of watchmakers, both employers and workers, got together with the idea of forming an Association which would act for the benefit of both sides. With an eye on competition from other quarters and on world trade influences, it was primarily to set and standardise wages at a level acceptable to all involved, with a 'fair day's wage for a fair day's work'. This participation by both sides is interesting and shows the close affinity between master and man which is such a striking feature of the industry, although it must be admitted that at the same time, they were obviously protecting their own interests, indirectly if not directly.

From its committee room at the Rose Inn, the following year the Association issued a list of lowest prices which could or should be paid to finishers, with a view to standardisation which would be of mutual benefit. Apparently it met with general approval and the Association continued to function but on such a diminishing scale that by the year 1900 it had almost lapsed altogether. According to a press report²² of that year '*in recent years so little has been heard of it (the Association) that it may be said to have hardly existed.*'

Apart from this there is little evidence of any section of the industry combining until 1888²³. In that year the journeymen watch cap makers held a meeting at the White Swan Inn, Hill Street, for the 'purpose of discussing their grievances'. According to the report published in the Coventry Herald, there was a large attendance of nearly all the cap makers employed in the City, again with some masters present.

Mr. H. Jarrad, the acting chairman, in opening the proceedings said that it was well known that the journeymen cap makers were receiving and had received such meagre prices for their work that it was 'morally impossible' for them to earn a respectable livelihood. He thought that if their justifiable grievances were placed before the manufacturers, they would receive a sympathetic hearing. Indeed, one at least of their employers was present at the meeting, Mr. W. Furneaux of Earlsdon,

WATCHMAKERS' ASSOCIATION.

THE Committee of the Watchmakers' Association, in the List now submitted to the general body of the Watch Trade, (as passed at a Public Meeting of the Association, held in Saint Mary's Hall, April 5, 1859,) have endeavoured so to frame it as to meet the present great necessity so generally admitted by Manufacturers and Workmen of an uniform rate of payment, for the same class and quality of work, and solicit for it that due consideration its importance so urgently demands, feeling confident that its adoption will be alike advantageous to the Employer and Employed, by affording that security, which, based upon mutual confidence, must prove beneficial to all engaged in the Trade, and demonstrate to each the great value of an established List.

In forming this List the Committee have not, in any case, adopted the highest rate which is being paid in Coventry, but have fixed a *minimum* price, below which they think the work cannot be done honestly and well. It is to the man of average ability (those of superior abilities can generally command a good price for their work,) and the honourable Manufacturer that the establishment of a List would be of most importance; inasmuch as it would shield them from that crushing competition which, in times of temporary depression has a tendency to injure both; therefore, to the Manufacturer who wishes well to the workman as well as his trade they think such a List will be acceptable, and they, (the Committee) hope shortly to be able to announce a Conference of Manufacturers and Workmen to consider the desirability of its immediate adoption.

By order of the Committee,

Committee Room, Rose Inn, Moat Street,
14th June, 1859.

CHARLES SHUFFLEBOTHAM,
Chairman.

FINISHER'S LIST OF LOWEST PRICES

VERGE WORK

a. d.		
That the lowest price paid for finishing a Verge Watch, be	10	0
If jewelled in cock and potance	1	0 Extra
If seconds train	1	0 Extra
LEVER WORK, FULL PLATE.		
That the lowest price paid for finishing a "Grey" Lever Watch, going barrel or otherwise, be	12	0
When given out in Three parts.		
For First part	3	9
For Escapement	3	9
For Finishing off	4	6
When given out in Two parts.		
For First part and pivoting Escapement	5	6
For Finishing off	6	6
If Reversed movement	1	0 Extra
If Screw pillars	0	6 Extra
If Sprung above the Balance	1	0 Extra
Jewelled holes, per pair	0	6 Extra
Jewelled End pieces	1	0 Extra
10 Size Movements and under	2	0 Extra
20 Size Movements and upwards	1	0 Extra
That the lowest price paid for finishing a Glossed-frame Watch, not Glossed Fuses hollow, be	18	0
When given out in Three parts.		
For First part	5	6
For Escapement	5	6
For Finishing off	7	0
When given out in Two parts.		
For First part and pivoting Escapement	8	6
For Finishing off	9	6
If Reversed Movement	1	0 Extra
If Screw pillars	0	6 Extra
If Sprung above the Balance	2	0 Extra
Jewelled holes, per pair	1	0 Extra
Jewelled End pieces, per pair	1	6 Extra
10 Sizes and under	2	0 Extra

* In using the term Grey Work it is to be understood to apply to the making of Pivots and Shoulders, without using pivot polishes.

LEVER WORK, ½ PLATE

a. d.		
That the lowest price paid for finishing a Grey ½ plate Watch, be	1	5 0
When given out in Three parts.		
For First part	0	7 0
For Escapement	0	7 0
For Finishing off	0	11 0
When given out in Two parts.		
For First part & pivoting Escapement	0	10 0
For Finishing off	0	14 6
Jewelled holes, per pair	0	1 1 0 Extra
Jewelled End pieces	0	1 6 Extra
If Capped	0	2 0 Extra
If lower in height of pillars than $\frac{1}{4}$	0	2 0 Extra
10 Sizes and under	0	1 0 Extra
That the lowest price paid for finishing a Glossed ½ plate Watch, be	1	12 0
If hollow pillars and fuses	1	15 0
When given out in Two parts.		
For Escapement	0	12 0
For First half and Finishing off	1	3 0
Jewelled holes, per pair	0	1 0 Extra
Jewelled End pieces	0	1 6 Extra
If Capped	0	1 0 Extra
If lower in height of pillars than $\frac{1}{4}$	0	2 0 Extra
10 Sizes and under	0	3 0 Extra
That the lowest price paid for finishing a Glossed Centre Seconds Watch, be	2	5 0
When given out in Two parts.		
For Escapement	0	14 0
First part and Finishing off	1	11 0

WATCHMAKERS' ASSOCIATION

and, speaking on behalf of his fellow master men, he put forward the suggestion that prices should be graded according to the size of caps being made smaller and medium sizes with 'underneath springing' at 9d. and 10d. and larger ones with the more complicated 'upper springing' at 1s.0d. He thought this would be agreeable to all manufacturers. However, after further discussion it was agreed that 9d. was unacceptable and all sizes apart from the large ones at 1s.0d. should be priced at 10d. or 10s. 0d. per dozen.

As a further illustration of the sub-division of labour in the trade, the above remuneration was to be shared, as Mr Furneaux proposed, between the workers as follows: Fitters 1/4 share, Springers 1/4, Turners 1/4 and material, studs and profit 1/4 share. It was also proposed that an Association should be formed, with a subscription of 3d. for journeymen and 6d. for mastermen, but apart from an account of their first meeting at the Theatre Vaults, Smithford Street in June, 1888, we have no further information of later developments, and it too apparently fell by the wayside.

While we can only speculate on possible reasons for the watchmakers' general unwillingness to act in concert, the impression is of their being strong individualists, each one confident in his own bargaining powers and in his preference to handle his own affairs without help - or interference - from others, even of his own fraternity. After seven years spent in learning his craft, a capable worker must in general have been well aware of his ability and status as a highly skilled artisan in whichever branch of the industry he worked. It gave him a confidence and a cachet which in his opinion set him above his contemporaries in the weaving trade, for instance, highly skilled though some of them were, and Charles Bray was not the only observer to voice his praise. In the opinion of John Gulson, one time Mayor, liberal reformer and City benefactor, they were 'Gentlemen among Artisans.' Apparently poor Matthew Wilcox was very much in a minority.

Naturally his higher earning capacity made it possible for the watchmaker to enjoy a higher standard of living than his weaver counterpart - even to the extent of employing domestic help to assist his wife in the home, which a weaver was rarely, if ever, able to do, and set him and his family at a social advantage, and nowhere was this more obvious than in Earlsdon.

CRAFTSMEN

By his mid twenties, after a year or two improving and advancing beyond the journeyman stage, a man could call himself a fully fledged craftsman, with skills that were always in demand and never at a loss for orders except when the trade had reached rock bottom. It would be about this period of his life that he would marry, setting up his own home where, if there was a top shop, he could carry on his work on his own premises, or if he had no top shop of his own he would rent his 'sitting' from a neighbour for a few shillings a week.

In 1852, at the age of 39, Thomas Pearson, living in St. Nicholas Street with his wife, two sons and one daughter, was already a well established watch finisher in the City. Indeed he had had as one of his apprentices a member of one of the City's foremost Jewish families, Philip Cohen, who later became a prominent manufacturer with his own business in Chapelfields.

The idea of living outside the cramped, unhealthy City on the select new little estate out at Earlsdon apparently attracted Pearson, and he became one of the first settlers there, building a little house with its own top shop where he and his sons could work, on what was then named Cromwell Street, now Berkeley Road South. His house is still in occupation today, having had some modernisation done, solid and unpretentious, a typical artisan's house of the period.

Over the years the Pearson family became greatly respected as one of the most outstanding in terms of its contribution to the local community. Devout Wesleyan Methodists, it was mainly through the efforts of the brothers, Tom and Arthur, both watch finishers, having both been apprenticed to their father, that the Methodist Church took root in 1873 in Earlsdon and flourished and still flourishes today. The influence of the Methodist Church was strong in the development of the estate, and many of the watchmaking fraternity from all strata, from manufacturers down, seem to have formed its backbone, and their names, the Pearsons, Waddingtons, Clays, Danks, watchmakers all, are remembered by many still today.

As strong believers in the then popular Temperance Movement, their influence can be seen in the fact that in the whole of the original estate

area there were only three pubs throughout its history to the present day, whereas in Chapelfields, with a comparable population there were seven or eight. The image of Earlsdon being ultra 'respectable' if not downright 'stuck-up' and aloof which became a tradition and byword throughout the City, was fostered by a subtle difference in the make-up of the other two watchmaking enclaves of the City and Chapelfields and that of Earlsdon. This difference is difficult to pinpoint objectively, but must owe something to the comparative isolation of the Earlsdon estate, to the residents' collective and particular pride in their environment (a Residents' Property Protection Association was formed very early on by an escapement maker, John Hulme) as well as to the religious convictions of many of its leading personalities, not only Wesleyans but Anglicans, Unitarians, Baptists and Congregationalists. Probably more than anything else however, it was due to the coming together of a few compatible and sympathetic personalities who shared not only a common bond in their means of livelihood and faith, but a deep interest in the quality of life obtainable on the little estate, who enjoyed its independence and autonomy, and whose efforts led to the establishment of a local community, the effects of which can still be felt today.

Not that all residents were happy or enjoyed the conditions at Earlsdon. The rate of population movement outstripped both that of Chapelfields and the inner City area of Gosford Street²⁴, over half of the residents, most of whom were in the watch trade, being replaced during the 10 years 1861 to 1871 and again during 1871 to 1881. The reasons were complex and varied. Some, like the Wilcox's, suffered personal tragedy which altered their circumstances, others, because watchmaking was essentially an urban occupation, could not come to terms with the isolated, rural life that Earlsdon offered. They were used to the convenience of plenty of shops and other social amenities offered in the City and sadly lacking on the quiet little estate, and only very few owned a pony and trap to make the circuitous route to the City easier and quicker.

Quiet Earlsdon certainly was, particularly on Sundays, when it conformed to the Victorian ideal of the Sabbath day of rest, when even working in one's own garden was frowned upon. It was a day for 'Sunday-go-to-Meetings' clothes, which for the men included brown boots, an essential part of the respectable artisan's attire. Black boots,

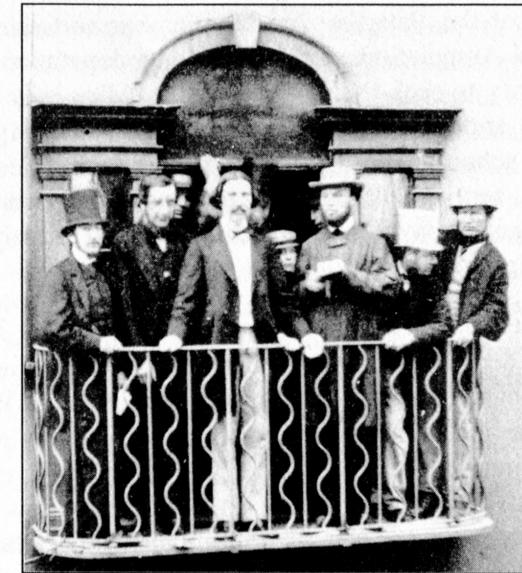
being the accepted norm for wear at work, the possession of a pair of brown ones indicated that the owner had at least 2 pairs of boots, only one of which was for work, the other pair kept purely for leisure time. They were a status symbol, an outward and important sign that the wearer had reached a station in life in which leisure in the company of likewise respectable people played a large part. It was another manifestation of that Victorian belief, merited or not, prevalent among the poor that shabbily dressed folk were not welcome in polite, church-going society. Nowhere was this ethos of respectability more marked than on the little Earlsdon estate, with which, to the City dweller, 'brown boots' became synonymous.

With only three small pubs and with the gospel of Temperance all around, the opportunity for excesses in the 'flesh pots' was extremely restricted and the observance of 'Saint Monday' less of an expectation than in other, livelier parts of the City. In all, life in Earlsdon for many was too isolated and too restrictive. Also of course, some were disillusioned because the job prospects were not up to their expectations or requirements. Possibly they found better prospects elsewhere, or their workmanship did not reach the high standard required by the local manufacturers, or perhaps work in their particular sphere was over-subscribed. For whatever reasons families came - and soon went. But - the hard core of the community stayed.

MASTERS

James Walker, 1825 to 1907, was a watch case maker who had learned his trade in Birmingham, came to Coventry in the mid 40s, married a local girl and settled down first of all in the Butts.

After 10 years he had been sufficiently successful in his business, making both gold and silver cases, to be able to have a solid, double fronted villa built on Earlsdon Lane (now Earlsdon Avenue South), and there he lived with his family for more than 50 years, until his death in 1907. As an Anglican he took no active part in local church life, but he worked tirelessly throughout the years for the benefit of the local community. In politics he was a Gladstonian Liberal, and although he never stood for any office in local government, he was a staunch and



JAMES WALKER, far right, on the balcony of the Craven Arms, with the losing Liberal candidate in the 1865 June election.



His house, now demolished, on Earlsdon Avenue South.

active member of the Party, a founder member and secretary of the Earlsdon Liberal Association. In 1874 he led a deputation to the Rural Sanitary Authority to seek their help in the building of a sewage farm for the estate, and in 1882 was a prime mover in establishing Earlsdon's first school. Throughout his life he took a deep interest in local education, serving as chairman of the school Board for many, many years, regularly visiting the school and frequently presenting prizes to deserving pupils.

His business was never extensive, at most he employed 3 men and 3 boys (Census 1881) but a man of altruistic, genial disposition, he epitomises the character of the local master watchmaker. When each of his two sons married, Walker handed over the business to them they having been apprenticed to their father as case makers, the gold case side to the eldest, Edwin who set up his own home a few doors down the lane from his father, and the silver trade to Arthur, who settled just round the corner in Earlsdon Street.

John Hulme, 1817 to 1900, was of the same mould as Walker. He was a master escapement maker, born in Knutsford, Cheshire, but learned his trade in the Liverpool area. After serving his apprenticeship he married and first settled in Liverpool. Apparently the majority of the escapements he made were shipped down to Coventry for insertion into 'Coventry' watches, and he decided it would make better sense if they were made locally where they were to be used, and so came to Coventry and took up residence in Spon Street in 1849. His business there flourished sufficiently for him within three or four years to purchase a prime corner plot of land on the corner of Clarendon Street and Arden Street on the newly laid out estate and build there a substantial home and workshop. (This house was one of the few in the eight streets to become a casualty in the Coventry Blitz in the last war.)

His business too, like Walker's, was modest, at most he employed 6 men and 4 boys (Census 1871), and again like Walker outside interests played a great part in his life. Although he and his wife had no children of their own, he took a great interest in education, serving on the local school committee, later the school Board, with Walker, acting as superintendent of the Methodist Sunday School at Thomas Street for

over 35 years, and caring for the children of relatives in his own home. As has already been mentioned he was the mainstay of the Earlsdon Property Protection Association which he founded to check and prevent the building of poor, badly drained houses on the estate. According to his obituary notice, published in the Coventry Herald on February 3rd 1900, and probably written by James Walker, he was '*Affable and pleasantly spoken, and agreeable in social life, he made many friends. He was a companion and a man given to forming binding friendships. Though a forcible speaker, his judgements were not rashly formed. His words were always carefully weighed. His naturally energetic character found full scope in the demands of his business, with which he kept in intimate connection practically up to the day of his death (at the age of 83!). He was highly respected at Earlsdon and his many kindnesses and services to the district will not soon be forgotten.*'

Like Walker also, Hulme was a life-long enthusiastic Liberal, and this was not just a coincidence. Liberalism was the most popular political persuasion among the predominantly nonconformist watchmaking voters on the estate, and in the 1863 by-election, for a substitute for the late Conservative Member for Coventry, the Rt. Hon. E. Ellice, of the 46 Earlsdon residents qualified to vote, 26 voted for A.W. Peel, Liberal, 15 for M. Treherne, Conservative (who was returned) and 5 abstained.

Twenty-four years later, W.H. Ballantine, the prospective Liberal candidate for Coventry addressed the Earlsdon Liberal Association²⁵ on several occasions, and after his election in 1887²⁶, there was much local excitement, with a grand tea and entertainment given in his honour and in his presence at the local schoolroom which was suitably bedecked for the occasion.

MANUFACTURERS

At the top of the hierarchy were the manufacturers, entrepreneurs who had reached the summit of the industry and who were now in a position to invest in premises where watches could be assembled and made ready for the market. They had to be capable of organising the complicated set-up, from the provision of suitable premises, equipment, tools, purchase of raw materials or semifinished parts, to

the competent overseeing of the correct assembly, finishing and timing, and finally market research and sale of the completed products.

The first manufacturer to take up residence on the estate, indeed probably the very first settler of all, was John Flinn, 1807 to 1886, another immigrant from Prescot. In 1851 (Census) we find him living in Moat Street in the City watchmaking enclave, with his wife and family of seven children and apparently a very flourishing business. However, from the time it was first mooted he was interested in the new estate to be laid out at Earlsdon, and was one of the signatories to the Petition sent to the City Waterworks Committee in May 1852. His house, actually on Earlsdon Street itself was the largest and most important to be built in the area for at least the next 50 years. At the same time, so that his workers were not faced with the necessity of commuting from the City each day, he bought a plot of land just round the corner in Arden Street, where he had a row of 13 tiny 2 up, 2 down cottages built for them, and of his 14 workers and 5 boys, 12 men with 3 apprentices apparently took advantage of the convenience, one of whom was the unfortunate Matthew Wilcox. It seems probable that the cottages were 'tied' for Flinn's own employees with a very nominal rent if any, with the surplus ones being let to allcomers for a more realistic rent, probably something like 4s.6d. a week. After Flinn moved back to the City in 1868, none of the original residents remained (Census 1871) - did he take his workers with him? - and indeed 6 of the 13 cottages were unoccupied.

We have no information as to why he left the area after his 16 years there, whether it was by choice, because of declining business, the difficulty of intercourse with the main business centre, or for some other reason. We also know very little about his business, apart from the fact that he exhibited a case of gold and silver watches, including an 'Improved going-barrel watch' at the Coventry and Midland Manufacturing, Industrial and Art Exhibition held in the new Market Hall in 1867 for which he gained an illuminated certificate. His name as a local manufacturer is greatly overshadowed by that of his successor in Earlsdon House, Joseph White.

However, we at least have a detailed description of his Earlsdon House, which was put on the market in 1868 and which illustrates the type of home a man of Flinn's status would be likely to occupy in the mid

1800s. The advertisement which appeared in the Coventry Standard on 14th February, with the description reads as follows:

'Family residence and Manufactory at Earlsdon, near Coventry, Earlsdon House, pleasantly situated, and containing a good Hall, dining and drawing rooms, 5 bedrooms, two large attics, best and cooking kitchen, china closet, pantry, cellar, coach house, and two-stall stable, piggery and shedding; also the excellent WATCH FACTORY and OFFICES, together with the VINERY, Pleasure and kitchen garden and paddock.

'The premises are well adapted for any branch of the Watch Trade, or for a boarding school. There is an abundant supply of good water upon the premises, which are situated without the Municipal Boundary, and free from District Rate.'

The 'Factory' - rather a grand description for what today would seem a very modest unit - was the typical structure built on to the rear of the house.

A much less successful manufacturer was John Hulk, unsuccessful mainly one suspects because of his own shortcomings.

He had been born in Coventry in 1831, and apprenticed to Thomas Hill in the City in 1844. In 1853 he took out a mortgage for £250²⁷ from the Coventry and Warwickshire Benefit Building and Investment Society with which he bought a plot of land on Cromwell Street, Earlsdon, and on which he had a house built. This mortgage, considerable at the time, was added to by a further £54.15s.0d. in order that the building could be completed. The repayments on what was then, to a young artisan such as Hulk, a very large weekly expense, must have placed a heavy burden on him, and he would have been hard pushed, with a wife and family to support, to make ends meet. Unfortunately the way out of his difficulties which he chose was bound to fail. There was a tendency among some masters and manufacturers to take on a large number of apprentices, not with the intention of training them to become good craftsmen in their own right, but merely to exploit them as cheap labour - a practice not unknown in other industries - and for which the Coventry trade was notorious.

Hulk took on three apprentices and called himself a 'manufacturer', and one can easily imagine the quality of the watches he produced. His business was doomed to failure, and in October, 1857 he had to borrow a further £150 from an uncle, William Hulk, Beerseller of Coventry. He lasted for a further 6½ years, but in March, 1864 the Building Society was forced to foreclose on his mortgage, his Earlsdon property was sold and John Hulk disappeared from watchmaking records.

Joseph White, 1836 to 1906, of Earlsdon House is probably the best known Earlsdon Manufacturer. (Certainly with 12 children - six boys and six girls - he must have been one of the most prolific!) He had been born in the parish of Foleshill, not then incorporated in the City, and had been apprenticed to a member of the City watchmaking Hill family, Nathaniel Hill in 1851. One suspects that he must have had some private means in addition to what the thriving business he had already built up in Chapelfields brought him, to enable him to take over the Earlsdon House premises at the early age of 32 in 1868. For a comprehensive description of his establishment we can do no better than quote his entry in 'Coventry Up-to-date', a commercial publication of 1898, bearing in mind that this was an advertising exercise.

'The highest excellence of make and finish has been attained in the manufacture of chronometers and watches by Messrs. Joseph White and Son, one of the oldest firms in the Coventry trade. The business was originally established at Chapelfields nearly forty years ago, and a few years later the firm removed to the more commodious and convenient premises now occupied at Earlsdon, one of the prettiest suburbs of the City. The factory, adjoining the handsome private residence of the proprietor, was especially designed for the business and includes offices and warehouse at the entrance, and an extensive range of lofty, well ventilated workshops, the sides of which are nearly all window, ample light being a sine qua non in carrying out the delicate operations of the watchmaker's art. The works are replete with the most perfect appliances for the manufacture of accurate timekeepers; the firm while holding even in the cheapest work they touch that this is the essential thing, are yet second to none in high quality and artistic finish. Specially noticeable are the various apparatus for subjecting the watches to prolonged tests in wide ranges of temperatures, and also in every conceivable position, enabling them

to make their watches perfect pocket timekeepers in whatever climate they may be worn. Messrs White and Son cover a wide range in their manufacture extending from the working-man's watch to the most elaborate and costly chronometers, repeaters and chronographs, making a speciality of their well-known adjusted lever watches in gold and silver cases, keyless and keywinding patterns. Every watch is timed exclusively by the members of the firm, and after being subjected to the most severe tests, many are forwarded to Kew Observatory to receive the official seal of accuracy and it speaks volumes of eulogy in favour of the firm's make that during the past ten years, out of the large number of watches sent up for examination, only one failed to stand the test applied by the authorities, and each year they hold a very high place in the list which is published annually to show the best 30 or 40 watches out of 400 - 500 submitted by all makers. During the past year they have taken a place with no less than 12 watches.'

'Messrs White and Son have been awarded first prize medals for excellence of workmanship and finish in 1867 and 1889, and it should be stated also that the junior members of the firm hold bronze and silver medals from the City Guilds of London Technological Institute for proficiency in horological science. The firm have a wide-spread connection in all parts of the United Kingdom, as well as a considerable export trade and are also manufacturers to the Admiralty. The works are admirably organised in each department under the personal supervision of the principals, who give the closest attention to every detail of the work performed by the numerous staff employed in the various branches of manufacture.'

'In order to meet the convenience of their increasing circle of London clients, Messrs White and Son have open stock-rooms at 101, Hatton Garden, where specimens of their make may be inspected and prices and particulars obtained.'

The business was continued after Joseph White's death in 1906 to a diminishing degree by his son until the early 30s. A watch obviously made for some very special reason or event and which is still in existence is, not surprisingly, a unique one, marked with White's name and made entirely of gold²⁸ - gold plates, wheels, etc., and eased in platinum, a prime example of the craftsman's flair and interest in his trade as an art form.



ROBERT WADDINGTON, his wife and daughter in the garden of their home on Earlsdon Terrace. c 1910

Robert Waddington's name has already been mentioned in connection with the local Methodist Church, for which he was a tireless, dedicated worker.

He had been born in 1845, and was yet another immigrant from the Liverpool area. After serving his apprenticeship there he became a dealer in watch making materials and developed a growing trade with the Coventry makers. He became very friendly with one of his customers and, mixing business with pleasure, brought his family down to stay on several occasions. His wife's health - she was asthmatic - was always so much better when they were in Coventry that it was decided that they should move here permanently, so a house was built on Earlsdon Terrace and they took up residence there in 1878. Waddington had the house built with a workshop at the rear and there he started his business as a manufacturer. He also had an interest in the City trade, being one of the original directors of the Coventry Watch Movement Company²⁹, which was founded in 1889. Twelve years later, in 1901, he became Chairman, holding the post until his death in 1918.

WOMEN IN THE INDUSTRY

So far little mention has been made of the role of women in the trade. This fact, however, is hardly surprising, given that the opinion of Charles Bray would be largely shared by the male population of Earlsdon. In a booklet published in 1857 on 'The Industrial Employment of Women', Bray is unequivocably of the opinion that such a thing is against nature, and not to be considered! '*.. . she has her sphere; let her work be found in it. If she feed us, clothe us, bring us into the world, educate us, nurse us and make a home what it ought to be, this is her work; and if it be done properly, surely she will have enough to do.*' Which, without any labour saving devices she certainly would in those days of coal fires and open ranges, even if, like Catherine White, she had living-in servants.

In any case, apart from this typical Victorian attitude to 'woman's place', there was no need, in the heyday of the industry for wives to work, and as for daughters, if they had to or wished to work, dressmaking and millinery, with domestic service for those lower down the scale, or less able, were considered suitable occupations. It was only later, towards the end of the century that girls began to be employed in office work, while school teaching was acceptable at any time. Only one girl over the years for which we have separate records was employed officially in the trade. Unofficially of course, daughters - and wives - would often help their men folk, usually with polishing or engraving. In 1861 (Census), Harriet Brooks aged 20 was working, presumably for her father who was a finisher, as an engraver, a most suitable occupation for a girl one might think. In fact Charles Dickens for one didn't see why women should not be employed in the trade. In his opinion many of the processes were eminently suitable, as he saw when he visited Rotherham's factory in 1852³⁰. However, this did raise the problem of women usurping men's jobs, which the men saw would be the natural result of the cheapness of women's labour - no equal pay then! - and also a debasement of their craft.

Gradually, however, women's labour did become more and more acceptable, particularly in repetitive processes when mass production got a tiny - a very tiny - foothold in the industry, and only a foothold it remained - and by 1881 in the whole of the City only 150 women were in the trade, rising to a peak in 1891 of 534 - against 3,566 men.

Although we have no separate figures for Earlsdon for 1891, there is no reason to suppose that there could have been more than 2 or 3 at the most. However, after the turn of the century, when the building of Albany Road and later the advent of a tram service in 1905 made access to the City easy, quite a number of local girls went to work for Rotherham's - pioneers again, this time in the employment of women.

OUTSIDE INTERESTS AND LEISURE

The use of the watchmaker's free time, of course, was dictated by his individual interest, circumstances and what was available to him, and also to a large extent by his religion - or lack of it. Sundays and probably some evenings would have been spent attending church and church meetings, Bible study groups, Temperance or, for the younger ones, Band of Hope and Class meetings, and in the summer, church outings, with concerts and social activities all the year round. Indeed the church almost had a monopoly on organised entertainment - and sport. The Earlsdon Rugby Football Club was one of several which saw its beginnings in the local Methodist church. For those not subscribing to Abstinence, there were always the three pubs, the City Arms, the Royal Oak or the Cottage to attend. There, over a pint of Flower's or Harpur's best brew, the fluctuations of local industry, City affairs, the state of the Country and world-wide news would be discussed exactly as they are today, but then the industry was predominantly watchmaking, the two main political parties Conservative and Liberal, and the principal spheres of world interest the Crimea, the States with its Civil War, Khartoum and later the siege of Ladysmith in South Africa.

Mention has already been made of the involvement of a number of watchmakers in politics, principally Liberalism, but the activities of the Earlsdon Liberal Association, in which James Walker, John Hulme and Robert Waddington were particularly concerned, were not confined to celebratory tea parties and weekly meetings. The members were always in full force at City elections and rallies such as the one held on Spencer Park in September, 1884³¹. This was held to agitate for the



THE WESLEYAN METHODIST CHAPEL

Opened in 1884



THE EARLDON COTTAGE PUB

Originally a watchmaker's cottage belonging to Joseph Aston Watkins,
Watch Motioner

extension of the franchise, and was attended by many notable Liberals, including Joseph Arch, who apparently spoke to good effect. Only Robert Waddington of the Earlsdon group, however, was elected to any official position, serving as a City Councillor for a number of years after his election in 1890.

On the rural little estate, where each house, however small had a long back garden, tending it must have been a universal interest, and not only as a hobby. The growing of fresh vegetables - perhaps keeping a pig or two - played an important part in the domestic economy, with fresh supplies almost unobtainable locally - there was only one shop on the estate almost until the end of the century - home grown produce was an essential addition to the larder. The Earlsdon Garden Association was formed very early on, and at the Coventry and Warwickshire Floral and Horticultural Society's Exhibition held annually, at Stoneleigh Abbey, watchmakers such as George Harpur, Christian Mouldon and Robert Pike, were prominent as exhibitors.

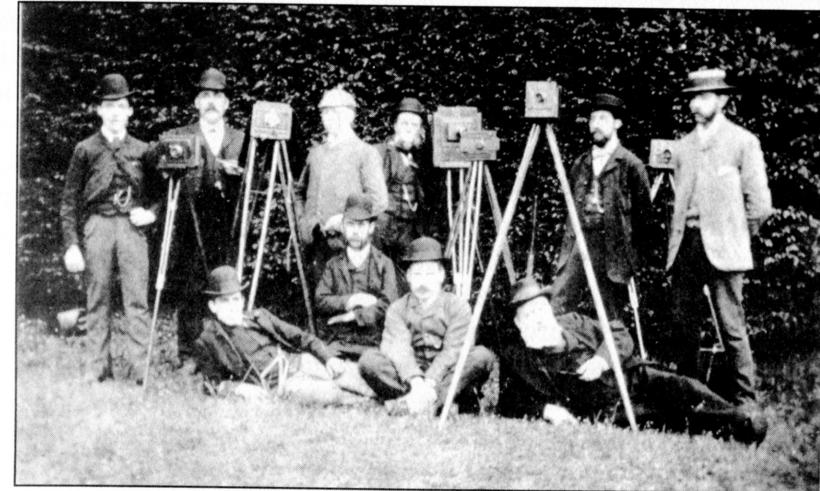
The hobby of one resident has proved more useful and informative - than he could possibly have imagined. The photographs taken by Edwin Walker of the area in the 1890s and early years of the 1900s give us an invaluable picture of the estate and some of its folk at the time. Walker was a founder member of the Coventry and Midland Photographic Society, and in the exhibition at the Old Grammar School, Hales Street in October, 1888 he showed 16 photographs with such titles as 'Summer Foliage', 'Berkswell Church', 'Study from Life' and 'Waterfall at Coombe Abbey'.

Apart from the usual outdoor pursuits of football and cricket, one of the most popular was walking, and in the lovely countryside around the estate there was plenty of scope for it. After his day's work was done the watchmaker was often to be seen taking a stroll over Hearsall Common to Canley Brook or to Allesley Village across the fields, or perhaps over Styvechale common and along the Long Avenue as the Kenilworth Road was then known, possibly calling at one of the pubs on the way back for a game of bowls or skittles, and a summer evening was passed very pleasantly.

J.M.DANKS
1st V.P. 2nd Hon. Treas.

C.AMBROSE
2nd Hon. Sec.

T. OWEN
1st Hon. Treas



T.J.LLOYD
1st Committee

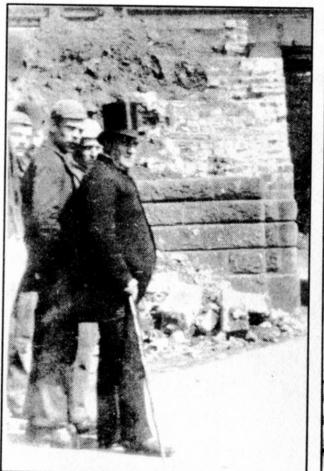
E.J.WALKER
1st Com. 2nd V.P. 3rd H.Treas.

An Early Outing of the Coventry and Midland Photographic Society

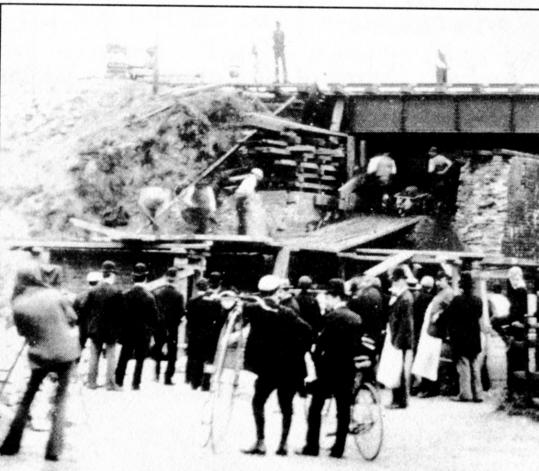


EARLSDON LANE c 1890

For greater excitement there was always the Kenilworth Statis (Statute) Fair held every September, the occasional Waysgoose or outing organised by a manufacturer for his workers, or by a pub, sports club or some other organisation. There were trips to the City to a visiting circus, fair or exhibition, or in those days of cheap rail fares, visits further afield, perhaps to visit relatives in Liverpool or a day trip to the seaside. Life may have been quiet and slow by our standards today, but it seems there was always something 'going on', even if it was only the reconstruction of local bridges or workmen putting in street gas lighting. These events and the obvious interest taken in them by the local watchmakers - recognisable by their white aprons - have been captured for us on some of Edwin Walker's photographs. They also illustrate an additional asset for a man working in his own top shop - he could down tools at any time to go into the street to investigate anything of interest going on in the vicinity, making a welcome break in the hours of concentration on close and delicate work.



A Master, MR.JAMES WALKER and some workers (in white aprons) viewing the rebuilding of the railway bridges in readiness for the construction of Albany Road, 1896.



Yes, there was always plenty to talk about, not over the workbench during working hours when complete silence was *de rigueur*, and any noise would distract from concentration, but when work was over, and wherever watchmakers met. Inevitably one of the main topics, whatever else was going on, was the state of the industry.

GROWTH OF THE INDUSTRY

To cope with the tremendous growth in population over the first half of the century, from 11.97 millions in 1811 to 20.81 millions in 1851, society had to become more organised, more highly structured. Education improved, and with that the supply of reading matter, newspapers, books etc. increased to meet the growing demand. The railways took off and spread from city to city, town to town. Industry expanded to meet the demands of the consumer, bringing more employment and higher wages. More industry meant a greater need for technologists, accountants, lawyers, architects. All this activity required organisation, piecemeal and haphazard though it often was. A project like that of the 1851 Crystal Palace exhibition could not have been effected without a high degree of organisation. Now, with trains to catch, meetings to be attended, appointments to keep, a good watch, to the business and professional man at least, was a necessity, and what became a necessity to a man of standing became a status symbol to the man in the street, the clerk, the shop assistant, the artisan, collier, agricultural labourer, who as soon as he had enough money in his pocket, exchanged it for a watch, preferably one with a large 'Albert' to display across his waistcoat front. In the consumer society which Britain was fast becoming, what the customer wanted, the Market would provide, and the watch trade did its best to oblige, with products to suit most pockets.

In addition to the home market, with improved shipping and communication there was a growing world-wide market and 'Coventry' watches were exported to more and more countries, principally to America and Australasia but also the Continent, to India, the Far East, Japan and South America.

The reasons for the trade taking off in such a big way in Coventry has already been discussed - its situation was geographically convenient,

particularly now with the expanding rail system - there was a core of 'know-how' with a small but growing workforce, augmented considerably by workers from Liverpool/Prescot, London, Birmingham, even the Continent, all bringing their expertise and experience.

Because it offered better prospects, it proved an attractive alternative to the ribbon weaving trade which, while the watch trade was growing, sadly and drastically declined. In 1841 there was a modest total of 474 watchmakers with 130 apprentices in the whole of Coventry. Over the next 20 years this expanded to 1,340 men and 667 apprentices, with 30 females, and by 1881, the peak year, the number had grown overall to 3,410. This may seem a small enough number, but in Coventry's commercial world was significant enough to rate as the City's second most important industry. In Earlsdon it was the principal.

DECLINE

From the end of the 1880s the trade began its sad decline. It had had its day and after 40 years of expansion it was to experience 40 years of gradual decay. By 1891 the number of men employed had declined from the peak of 10 years previous to 3,032, while the number of women had increased to 534, mainly employed in the factories of Rotherham, Errington and Williamson on repetitive, semi-skilled work. Again ten years later, by 1901, the numbers had fallen to 1,937 men but with a rise in employed women to 687. Now the numbers declined very quickly and the Trade Directory for 1921 names only 87, with 61 termed Manufacturers, Makers and/or Repairers, and a further 26 in allied trades throughout the City as a whole. We have no separate figures for the number of women employed. Entries for Earlsdon name two men as watchmakers, J. West of 27, Earlsdon Street and W.J. Greenway of 65, Arden Street, but in addition, both are described as being repairers and the making part of their work would now have been confined to replacement parts for broken watches. West's entries continue until 1924 and Greenway's until 1934. The latter was probably the last watchmaker to be functioning in the eight streets. Three manufacturers are also named in the 1921 Directory: Robert Waddington, Joseph White & Son and Joseph Player & Sons.

	Material derived from Census			Material derived from Directories					
	1861	1871	1881	1894	1903	1911	1921	1931	1933
Manufacturers	3	3	8	4	5	12	2	2	
Makers	2	13	24				3		
Finishers	36	28	21						
Case Manufacturers	1	9	9	3	4	2			
Case & Cap Makers/ Springers	7	9	3	1	1	2			
Engravers	2	2	3	2	1	2			
Movement Makers	4	3							
Escapement Makers	2	4	1	3	2				
Jewellers	3		4						
Fusee/Barrel/ Balance Makers	4	2							
Pinion/Wheel Makers	4	4							
Motioners	4	6	2						
Dials	1	3	3			1			
Gilders	2	2	1						
Examiners	1		4						
Repairers				1				1	
TOTAL	76	88	83	13	14	19	5	3	0

NUMBERS EMPLOYED IN VARIOUS BRANCHES
OF THE TRADE IN THE EIGHT ORIGINAL STREETS OF
EARLSDON

Waddington's business was now carried on by his son Wilfred, who kept the declining business going on the Terrace premises until the early 30s. White's business was also kept going by a son, not now in Earlsdon House, but in premises at the rear of No.58, Earlsdon Street. He too kept going until about 1930. The third manufacturer, Player and Sons shared White's premises. His own business in the Butts having failed in 1910, Joseph Player went to work for a Swiss firm, 'Zenith' for two or three years, returning to act as their British representative, probably using the 58A premises merely as a business address, again until about 1930³².

**WATCH & CHRONOMETER
MANFRS.**

White Joseph & Son, Earlsdon st

**WATCH, ELECTRICAL AND
INSTRUMENT JEWEL
MANFRS.**

LEE FRED & CO., watch, electrical and instrument jewel manufacturers, Dover st. Tel. Address "Fred Lee, Coventry." Tel. 4433

**WATCH MAKERS AND
REPAIRERS.**

Alexander S. & Son, 61 Allesley Old rd

Ball W. A., 170 (back) Spon st
Bench T. J. & Son, 227 Walsgrave. rd

Bench T. J., 69 Queen Victoria rd
Bidmead Jonathan W., 3 Duke st

Bold W. 10 Gloucester st

Bradnick L., 374 Foleshill rd

Bromwich H. & Son, Halee st

Burton W. J., 159 Foleshill rd

Cleaver J. S., 11 Primrose Hill st

Cleaver J. S., 2 Gosford st

Crook T., 153 Stoney Stanton rd

Dewis Thos. 36 Kingston rd

Eden Thos. Hy.. 534 Stoney Stanton, rd

Fairhurst L, 39 Craven st

Flinn & Co., 14/15 Broadgate

Francis J. W., Holbrook lane

GILBERT R. & SONS LTD.,

watchmakers and jewellers 12

Broadgate and 21 Burges. Tel. No. 2014

Golding J., 28 Swan lane
Greenway W.J., 65, Arden st

Grooms J., 3 Charles st

Hall Wm., 31 Drapers Fields

Hands T. E., 599 Foleshill rd

Hawley G. F., 28 Warwick row

Hodierne W. J., 27 Queen st

Jones E. W., 216 Lockhurst lane

Jones W. H., 38 Westwood rd

Pycott G. S., 8 Stoney Stanton rd

Reeves J., 61 Hill st

SMITH ARTHUR L., watchmaker and jeweller, 131 Far Gosford st

Smith Walter F. 5 Bristol rd

Stringer A., 69 George Eliot st

Tarsh J., 19b Smithford st

Taylor H., 1 Paradise st

Thrasher F 23 Norfolk st

Trahern F. T. & Sons, 51 Allesley Old rd

Treen W. E., 196 Sovereign rd

Trickett E., 99 St. George's rd

Warner Charles, 99 Far Gosford st,

Welch & Co., 86 King William rd

Windsor Arthur, 51 Butts

WATCH MANFRS.

Adams W. H., 164 Allesley Old rd

Anstey H. W., 59 High st

Drinkwater Alfred Hy., Jedburgh house, Butts

English Clock & Watch, Ltd., Holyhead rd

Gilbert & Sons, Ltd., 12 Broadgate

HAWEY & CO., manufacturers of

English watches and Importers of

watches and motor clocks, 35 and 36

Cow lane. Tel. No. 4457

MATTHEWS WILLIAM, watch

manufacturer, jeweller and importer of Swiss watches, 52 Holyhead rd

Newsome & Co., Summerland house, 14 & 15 Butts
Player & Sons. Earlsdon st
Reeves J. & Co. 61 Hill st
Rotherham & Sons, Ltd., 27 Spon st
TURNER, THOMAS, watch manfr., 123 Craven st, Chapel Fields
Wootton S. G., 7a St. Michael's Churchyard

WATCH BALANCE MANFRS.

Steer W. H., 25 Allesley Old rd

WATCH CASE MAKERS.

Smith W., 54 Hill st

Trahern F. T. & Sons, 51 Allesley Old rd

WATCH CASE MAKERS (Gold)

Neal W., 13 Allesley Old rd
Richardson Jas. Francis, 26 Norfolk st

WATCH CASE SPRINGERS.

Clarke Jas.. back 17 Spon st

WARD R. H., gold and silver watch case springer and polisher, 90

Kingston rd. Watch case repairing a speciality

WATCH DIAL MAKER.

Lawrenson J., 192 Broomfield rd

**WATCH JEWELLERS AND
JEWEL HOLE.MAKERS.**

Danks & Son. 29 Westminster rd

WATCH MATERIAL DEALERS

Mander H. & Co., 21 Allesley Old rd

WATCH TOOL DEALERS.

Edwards A., Ltd., 11 Spon st

TRADE DIRECTORY ENTRIES FOR 1931
showing the three final entries for Earlsdon

Another very clear indication of the falling off in interest in the trade is in the number of new apprentices taken on. In 1871, the peak year, 239³³ new apprentices were bound in the City as a whole, but from then on the numbers dropped annually. Ten years later, in 1881, there were only 101 new apprentices, 72 in 1891, 19 in 1901 and in 1911, only 10. From then on there was only the odd one or two, with none after 1916. Here again the Earlsdon figures show the same trend. In 1861, 11 boys were bound to Earlsdon masters with a peak in 1871 of 18 boys. Then there was a sharp decline, with only 4 in 1881, 3 in 1891 and the last 2 Earlsdon apprentices taken in 1892, one by R.J. Pike, silver case maker and one by Robert Waddington as a finisher.

Clearly fathers no longer saw watchmaking as holding any great prospects for their offsprings' future, particularly with the new bicycle, machine tools, motor cycle, motor car and all the allied trades obviously heading for a boom. Moreover, with apprenticeship or without, there were opportunities there much more to the youngsters' taste; with apprenticeship there were bright prospects and without it there was good money to be earned even by school leavers. In fact the question is begged whether the boys' preference for these exciting new developments were not an extra nail in the watch trade's coffin. This is all apart from the fact that masters, in the depressed state of the trade, could no longer afford to take new apprentices. Even in the Earlsdon Pearson family only one of Thomas's five grandsons was apprenticed to the watch trade, - to his father, Arthur as a finisher - the others going into general engineering as pattern makers or into the building trade.

CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Earlsdon was incorporated with the City in 1890, and as if to seal the union, the new Albany Road was opened in 1897. This was the first direct route linking Earlsdon with the City, and from then on the little 'village' lost its isolation and became truly a City suburb. Apart from the obvious advantage of easy access to City businesses and amenities, there was a 'boom' in the area itself - a building boom! Between the suburb and the City new streets of rows of terraced houses grew up to accommodate the workers in the new factories and their families. On the countrified south side avenues of detached and large semi-detached

villas appeared for the Company directors, managers, accountants and bankers.

At the same time there was a steady filling in of the vacant plots on the eight streets until the whole area was built up. Obviously the building trade had a field day in the area, and in 1911/12 no fewer than seven builders are listed in the Directory as having their businesses on the estate. In the upheaval the Earlsdon watch trade sank almost without a trace. The only evidence left was a few top shops whose use people forgot over the years. The large windows were replaced by more convenient smaller ones or left to rot until today one has to seek diligently to find the last two remaining intact and unspoilt.

And what of the craftsmen themselves? How were they to earn a living now that the Coventry watch was no longer wanted? A number, with some capital went into the watch and clock retail trade, either locally as Flinn did, opening a shop in Broadgate, (The business flourished in the City Centre and later in Warwick Road but is now closed.) or further afield, as Arthur Pearson did, moving to Hereford and opening a shop there in 1908. His son Percy too followed his example and opened a shop in Nottingham. Some in desperation turned from the watch trade altogether and opened small general shops, with the help of wife and family, converting the front parlour of their homes into a haberdashery, hardware, or provision store, and undoubtedly, that is the way some of the Earlsdon Street retail businesses began. Others who were young and adaptable enough joined the hundreds of newcomers to the City and took their skills into the new industries. They were skilled in precision work, particularly in gear cutting, which was invaluable in the small tools industry to which many firms such as Rotherham's were turning. Others forgot their watchmaking skills completely and took semi- or unskilled work in bicycle and motor industries. But many were too old to change, or as was often the case, had an especial stubborn pride in their craft and would not prostitute their skills by following any other craft than that for which they had trained so long and hard. These men faced real hardship. If they were Freemen they were eligible for a small pension from the Guild, but it would hardly be enough to support wife and family on and with no other income they would have had to apply to the Poor Law for relief. Nevertheless, however hard life became, they still had that streak of pride which kept

them wearing their brown boots on Sundays, even if they had had no breakfast - an attitude which became a byword in the City.

Leon Forestier was a typical watchmaker craftsman. Born in Geneva in 1874 he attended the famous College of Horology there where he was the outstanding student of his year. When he had completed his course - with the highest honours - he was persuaded to come to Coventry to work for Rotherham's. While there he met his future wife and after setting up home for a short spell in the City, then spending a year or two in the new Albany Road, they finally settled in a house on Earlsdon Avenue which they named 'Geneve'. While working for Rotherham's he started to build up a business for himself, finally leaving them to set up on his own account in 1907.

Genuine INVAR (GUILLAUME) Compensation Balances
FOR MARINE CHRONOMETERS, ALSO FOR KEW AND DECK WATCHES.
NON-MAGNETIC COMPENSATION BALANCES.

L. F. FORESTIER, "Helvetica," Albany Road, Coventry.

CHRONOGRAPH AND REPEATER MOVEMENTS A SPECIALTY.
Best Steel CLOSE COIL and Palladium Balance Springs.
Gold Keyless Winding Buttons and Olivettes. All Kinds of Jewel Stones for Scientific Instruments.

ADVERTISEMENT for L.F.FORESTIER, 1907.

From his advertisement in the 'Horologist' in 1907, it will be seen that he was capable of very highly specialised work, in fact at one point he created a record at the Kew Observatory for the timekeeping accuracy of one of his watches, and during the 1914/18 war he made chronometers for the Admiralty. Unfortunately he was too meticulous a craftsman, using only materials of the very highest quality. In taking so long in bringing his work to the peak of perfection he felt essential, whether in making a new timekeeper or repairing an old one, and with work becoming increasingly scarce anyway, he found great difficulty in earning a good living. So much so that he opened a tiny sweet shop in the Working Men's Club building on Earlsdon Street as a sideline, in which his very pretty wife served from 1911 until the war broke out in 1914, after which he lived precariously with ever decreasing custom. Although there are no entries for him in the Trade Directories, he is known to have worked, mainly on repairs to a lesser and lesser degree

until about 1926, after which he left Coventry, dying in Weymouth in the late 1940s.

But why was the market for English hand-crafted watches decreasing so drastically? They were, on the whole, reliable and quite attractive. The short answer is that both the import and export markets were affected by the flood of cheaper watches produced on the Continent, particularly in Switzerland, and in the States. Techniques there were innovative and efficient and ensured that the products were as reliable as the English hand-made ones and - they were half the price! There were home purchasers who still believed in the superiority of the English watches and were prepared to pay more for them. Unfortunately there was an unscrupulous element which traded on this fact, putting imported movements into English cases and selling them as the English made product³⁴. This practice was finally stopped by the Manufacturing Marks Act, passed at the turn of the century, but it had had its share in destroying the integrity of the English industry.

However, nothing could be simple and straightforward in the watch trade, and the reasons for its run down were no exception and were many and varied.

Because the English trade relied heavily on exports it was naturally affected by world events. But it was action at home by the British Government which dealt it its first major blow. In 1860, Gladstone, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, removed the tariffs on many imported goods including watches and ribbons. It was a virtual death blow to the ribbon trade, and although the watch trade was not affected to the same extent, by making foreign watches that much cheaper, a very competitive market was opened up. The American Civil War of 1861-2 had the short term effect of cutting down exports to that country, but more importantly it had the long term effect of stimulating the development of its own watch production, which later led to massive imports into this Country, not only of complete watches but also of movements and parts, and was to prove disastrous to the U.K. trade. The Franco-Prussian war in 1870 also had its effect in cutting down exports to the Continent, although this was somewhat offset by simultaneously cutting down imports from there, if only temporarily.

YEAR	CONTINENTAL	ENGLISH	AMERICAN
1862	2,500,000	164,000	50,000
1872	3,000,000	145,000	400,000
1882	3,500,000	227,000	1,250,000
1892	4,500,000	204,000	2,250,000
1902	6,000,000	226,000	2,750,000

WATCH PRODUCTION

Figures quoted in the Coventry Standard, 15th. April, 1903
By the year 1907 English production had slumped to a mere 74,000

All through these years from 1870 onwards, while the English makers were confident in the superiority of their hand-made products, there was a steady build-up of the Continental, particularly Swiss, and American home industries. There the manufacturers were not hidebound by a structure which had grown up piecemeal from scratch by tradition and the 'We've always done it this way, so it must be right' syndrome. They were able to avoid the obvious errors of the English trade, to centralise production, to be more acceptable, even welcoming of innovation, and, in their growing economies, able to attract investment with confidence. They could afford to invest in factory buildings equipped with machinery geared to mass production.³⁵

By the 5th August, 1892, the Coventry Standard was quoting a local manufacturer as saying "In 18 years I have not known trade to be as bad as it is now." and twelve months later the cry is still the same, with those workers who had any employment at all only working short time. In both cases the cause was said to be the depressed conditions in Australia where considerable business was usually done, but where trade was now badly affected by a dockers' strike. There were also adverse conditions at home, with a dockers' strike at Durham and the generally depressed state of industry throughout the Country - due in no small part, according to the writer's opinion, to the "unsettled

political state of the Country under the present Government." In 1892 the Government was Conservative under Lord Salisbury, in 1893 it was Liberal under Gladstone, but there had to be a scapegoat.

By 1895 things were generally worse again³⁶, with weavers and watchmakers alike suffering hardships, and the Artisans' Relief Fund, in addition to the normal distribution of a few shillings allowed to the most deserving and urgent cases, was kept busy giving out 300 tickets worth 1s.0d. each for groceries, and distributing 1 cwt. cooked meat and 70 lbs. of mutton throughout the City to those in the direst of need. This type of relief, with possibly a few shillings from the Freemen's Guild, the great Victorian institution of 'Charity' and the provision of soup kitchens, was all, short of the Workhouse that the out of work artisan could expect. His savings, if he had any at all, would soon have disappeared, particularly if he had a large family to support.

However, general industry, including the cycle, allied trades and to a certain extent even the silk weaving trade gradually picked up. Not so the watch trade.

In 1889 a group of manufacturers joined together to form the Coventry Watch Movement Company Limited. They included a number of Earlsdon men, Henry Clay, Arthur Pearson and Robert Waddington who, as a Director served until the time of his death in 1918³⁷. All three were leading members of the Earlsdon Wesleyan Methodist Church. The idea in forming the Company was to localise production of the entire watch, without the necessity of buying in ready made movements from other sources, to break the monopoly of Prescot, and thereby cut costs and stimulate local trade. Unfortunately it was too late in the day, and the Company could never attract enough capital to buy advanced machinery to boost production sufficiently, and so had to turn to repetition work for the general engineering industries, including gas and electricity registering gears, motor switches, taps, petrol and oil indicators, etc., finally abandoning the watch making side altogether and changing the name to the Coventry Movement Co. Ltd.

Always there was this problem of attracting capital. Investors who had some money naturally preferred to put it into growth industries, not in what was obviously a dying trade. But without capital the trade could not modernise and develop new production techniques - even when the

workers were prepared to accept them³⁸. In 1903 a casemaker had a certain type of lathe, a pole lathe operated by a foot pedal, which several of his workers used. When he was asked why he didn't equip them with steam power, which incidentally he had on his premises, he said his men wouldn't know how to use them, their grandfathers and fathers had used the same type and to try to change would lead to a severe loss of production. It was this short sighted attitude as much as any other factor which continually bedevilled the industry and made further investment, even if available, uneconomic.

Even the Horological Department in the newly formed (1887) Technical Institute failed to stimulate interest in new methods and ability in the trade. In 1902³⁹ C.H. Errington, a leading City Manufacturer, was complaining that the instructors there had had no experience in modern machinery and techniques - the only keyless watch they had for demonstration purposes had been made abroad. Comparable watches had never been made in this Country and even at that date were obsolete on the Continent. In his words "What use was that to the boys? They only became disillusioned with the whole set-up." When they got to the work bench there were still the antiquated methods on out of date equipment. How different training methods were on the Continent, where boys were taught in highly efficient Horological Colleges in the latest methods of production.

And so the local industry went from bad to worse. Manufacturers in the large City establishments turned increasingly to other products, some even producing bicycles where once craftsmen made watches. In the smaller top shops of Earlsdon this of course was not possible. The three larger manufacturers struggled on, but White, while turning increasingly to the production of chronometers and specialised horological components at his Earlsdon premises, was also for many years Managing Director of the Coventry Machinists Company⁴⁰, and Waddington too, as his Earlsdon business declined, was kept going by his association with the Coventry Movement Company. Even as late as 1945 as the war ended, there was an attempt⁴¹ to revive interest in the local industry. It was apparently thriving in other parts of the Country, ' . . . why should it not take root again here?' But the call received no response.

Gradually all the Earlsdon top shops, now neglected, fell silent. The watchmaker no longer sat at his bench, eye glass in eye and work in his busy fingers. No longer did he put down his tools mid-morning to wander down his garden to inspect his crop of beans. No longer did he put on his billy-cock hat to walk down to the master's shop to confer with him about the batch of wheels and pivots brought to him that morning by the errand boy, and then on his way back stand for a few minutes watching the council workers putting in the new gas lighting on the Lane. The master no longer sat in his little office to enter his transactions in his ledger, or put on his top hat ready to trot down in his pony and trap to his City supplier of jewels, or walk round the corner to the little school to inspect the registers.

In the small top shops tools now lay unused on the workbenches later to be swept aside into loft or garden shed 'out of the way'. The big windows were replaced by smaller, more suitable ones and the now empty rooms became assets as extra bedrooms. Although they were never again to be used as workrooms, these home work shops left the tradition of small local industry which is such a feature of our eight streets today, with each one having its plumbing supplier, repair garage, printing works, clothing factory, electronics firm or some other light industry.

The opening of Albany Road and the subsequent development of the surrounding area was the salvation of Earlsdon. Without it, it could, as the watch trade declined, have decayed with it. As it was, the housewives in the new surrounding streets and avenues wanted convenient good local shops where they could buy fresh food daily and their weekly provisions without having to journey into the City. And so, as the opportunity was seen, a few residents, out of work watchmakers among them, began to offer goods for sale from their own front parlours, where they installed a counter and a few shelves to hold a modest range of goods, using the front street windows for display purposes. As business grew, the house sash windows were replaced by large display windows with the proprietor's name painted large above, and the front door became a shop door complete with jingling bell and enamel advertisements. A few shops, like the Co-operative Society Grocery Store were purpose built in vacant plots between the houses, but the majority were adaptations and extensions.

By the beginning of the last war, the Earlsdon shops, based mainly on Earlsdon Street, vied with the City centre in the choice of goods on offer, from groceries of all kinds and to suit all purses, to hardware, radios, furnishings, clothing for all the family - the list is endless, and Earlsdon the watchmaking district became Earlsdon the shopping centre.

While one views with a certain regret the passing of the old craftsmen, particularly in these days when hand-crafted goods are scarce and consequently more highly valued, it is obvious that the decay of the industry was inevitable, and lessons should have been learnt from the mistakes made then. It is difficult to blame the workers for clinging to their hard won skills, and of course there were always the outside influences which were beyond their control anyway, but the saddest aspect is that this was not an isolated event. It was to be repeated again and again throughout the City, with the cycle, motor cycle and car trades all going through the same 'boom and bust' syndrome, reflecting a strange lack in the ability for local industry to adapt or diversify.

In the surprising mixture of small industries to be found in the suburb today, there would appear to be less fear of a repetition of this blinkered attitude, and one senses with relief a willingness to adapt to the consumer's needs and to the advantages of new opportunities in a market which is growing both in size and diversification. Consequently the suburb today is as thriving and affluent as it ever has been at any time in the past.

It would be a sad indictment, however, if todays' residents failed to recognise the part played in laying the foundation and encouraging the growth of Earlsdon, both as a suburb and as a recognisable community by those old craftsmen. With hindsight, whilst we might condemn them for their obvious mistakes, we should also recognise the very valuable contribution they made to the life of Earlsdon.

Today there are precious few visible reminders of their occupation, but the neat watchmakers' cottages which remain give some evidence of their pride in their homes and their environment. The existing examples of their products also remind us of their craftsmanship, and surprise us with the amount of skill and ingenuity used in their manufacture and with the realisation that they were produced with the

very minimum of mechanical aids, in the most modest of working conditions, for the most part in home top shops.

Stubborn and self-satisfied they may have been and in some aspects very short-sighted, but they made a lasting impact on the life of Earlsdon, establishing a sense of community which still exists today. They had the common bond of their craft, their environment, their outside interests, their religion, their aims towards the improvement of local education and the provision of social amenities, in fact a deep interest in the whole sphere and quality of life on the estate.

The Earlsdon watchmaking industry has gone, but its influence and the impact it made upon the estate lingers on. Long may it continue to do so!

Honorable Mention at the Coventry Exhibition for good Selection of Watch Materials and Tools.

J. HOPKINS,
(LATE F. HOPKINS,)

57, SPON STREET, COVENTRY,
Dealer in all kinds of WATCH MATERIALS, English and Foreign.

AGENT FOR NICOLE GOLD & SILVER BUTTONS.
N.B.—All kinds of WATCH JOBBING for the Trade.

JOHN HULME,
Lever Escapement Maker,
Clarendon St., Earlsdon.

ESTABLISHED 1852.

ESTABLISHED 1800.

J. & H. MAR
 Watch Manufact
164, SPON STREE
COVENTRY.

*Makers of all kinds of Full-Plate, $\frac{3}{4}$ -Plate,
Centre Seconds, and Keyless.*

R. J. PIKE,
Gold and Silver Watch Case Manufacturer,
ENGINE TURNER, SPRINGER, & POLISHER, ENGRAVER.
— MONOGRAMS —
CROMWELL HOUSE,
EARLSDON, COVENTRY

ADVERTISEMENTS from Local Trade Directories
in the 1890s

NOTES:

¹ Mr. Ranger's report to the Coventry Local Board of Health, 1849, Coventry Pamphlets, Coventry & Warwickshire collection, Coventry City Library.

² Coventry City Council Minutes, 1845.

³ John Prest *Politics in the Age of Cobden*, MacMillan, 1977. Chapter on Freehold Land Societies.

⁴ Title Deeds for properties in the area, in private hands.

⁵ The open sewer carrying the drainage from Earlsdon to the river Sherbourne ran down the side of this path. See City General Works Committee Minutes, 1856-1874. Also Rural Sanitary Authority Committee Minutes, 1874-1890. Also Arthur Pearson *How Methodism came to Earlsdon*, booklet published by Earlsdon Methodist Church, 1930.

⁶ For example Title Deeds for 61 & 63 Moor Street, 112 & 114 Berkeley Road South.

⁷ *Coventry Up-To-Date*, trade publication, 1896, also Horological Journal, August, 1984

⁸ Technical information mainly taken from. Willis I. Milham Ph.D., *Time and Timekeepers*, MacMillan, New York, 1923. Also Britten *The Watch and Clockmakers' Handbook, Dictionary and Guide* 1886 edition, with help from Mrs. Kathy Fletcher and the Herbert Art Gallery and Museum, Coventry.

⁹ Items held by the Herbert Art Gallery and private owners.

¹⁰ Bill Adams unpublished article on his Father's business.

¹¹ For a precise description of jewelling work see Coventry City Library Local Studies 68 1.11, transcript of a tape recording by Mrs. Dingley, who worked for Fred Lee, circa 1914.

¹² Miss M. Forestier, oral information, 13th August, 1985.

¹³ Coventry Apprentice Registers, 1800 - 1930.

¹⁴ Horological Journal, August, 1877.

¹⁵ Mr. James Berry, Order Books, Prescot Watch Museum, 874-96.

¹⁶ *Coventry Herald*, 16th November, 1866 (Lowe's Cuttings, 1880).

¹⁷ Charles Bray, *The Industrial - Employment of Women*, pamphlet October, 1857.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Coventry Standard, 7th August, 1931 The Watch Trade a Century ago.

²⁰ Coventry Cemetery Burial Registers, City Record Office.

²¹ *Coventry Standard*, 3rd September, 1858 (Lowe's Cuttings).

²² *Coventry Herald*, 27th April, 1900 (Lowe's Cuttings).

²³ Ibid, 16th June, 1888 (Lowe's Cuttings).

²⁴ Local History Group, Warwick University, *Population Movement in Coventry, 1851 - 1861*, Survey published 1982.

²⁵ *Coventry Herald*, 7th October, 1888 (Lowe's Cuttings).

²⁶ Handbill, February, 1887, (Rev. Heavyside's Cuttings).

²⁷ Title Deeds, 110, Berkeley Road South.

²⁸ Rita Shenton *The Coventry Watch Trade Clocks* (periodical) November, 1984.

²⁹ Coventry Watch Movement Company Minutes 1889.

³⁰ Rita Shenton *Visit by Charles Dickens to a Coventry Watch Factory* (Rotherham's) Horological Journal, January, 1977.

³¹ *Coventry Herald*, 18th October, 1884 (Lowe's Cuttings).

³² Mrs. Betty Breakspear, granddaughter of Joseph Player, oral account.

³³ Coventry Apprentice Registers.

³⁴ *Coventry Herald*, 30th May, 1895 (Lowe's Cuttings).

³⁵ T.P. Hewitt, *English Watch Making under Free trade*, leaflet published 1903.

³⁶ *Coventry Herald*, 8th February & 1st March, *Coventry Times*, 20th February.

³⁷ Coventry Watch Movement Company Minutes *passim*.

³⁸ C.H. Errington, address given before the Manchester and North of England Horological Society, 12th December, 1907.

³⁹ C.H. Errington, *Coventry Times*, 1902.

⁴⁰ Obituary of Joseph White, *Coventry Herald*, 17th March, 1906.

⁴¹ Coventry Evening Telegraph, 22nd December, 1945.



MARY MONTES

Born into a family resident in Earlsdon since the very beginning of this century, and living there practically all her life, Mary has been well qualified to take on the study of Earlsdon, its history and its people. After many years in business and health service work, it was also an ideal retirement occupation.

Little or no serious research had been done on the area, and Mary soon began to build up a considerable archive from the wealth of material available. This was only part of the exercise however; archival material as reference sources is in itself valuable enough, but Mary felt that much of it should be made more easily available to the man in the street, and began to write up the history of Earlsdon, its interests, institutions, industry and its people. Some of her work has been published in booklet form as in the present instance, and a great deal more as articles in various local publications.

She also leads groups in 'History Walks' around the area, puts on the occasional exhibition with the help of a few equally interested friends and gives talks to clubs, groups and societies throughout the Coventry area, not only on different aspects of the history of Earlsdon, but covering various other subjects, including the Coventry watch-making industry of which she has made an intensive study.

With a family of two children and four grandchildren, and with her love of history, literature, music, art and friends, her life, she says, is full of interest, incident and enjoyment.

Her publications so far include:

The Earlsdon Cottage Inn
Brown Boots in Earlsdon
A Centenary History of Earlsdon School
St Barbara's Parish Church
Six of Earlsdon's Best, a collection of short biographies
A Harvest of History, a biography of Mr J.B. Shelton,
in collaboration with Mrs Margaret Rylatt
The Church on the Corner, a history of Earlsdon Methodist Church



The Coventry Historical Association



Coventry Historical Association is a branch of the national Historical Association and locally promotes its aims. The Historical Association is a voice for History, bringing together people who share an interest in the past, to further the enjoyment and study of History at all levels. Its membership includes both enthusiastic amateurs and professional historians and membership is open to everyone who has a love and concern for History.

The Coventry Branch recently saw its 70th anniversary. Membership includes both national subscribers and associate local members. Meetings are held monthly from September to March each year and take the form of a lecture followed by discussion and a social coffee. All meetings, with the exception of the Christmas Social Evening, are held at the Coventry Archives which offers a comfortable venue and on-site parking. Lectures cover a wide spectrum of History: both national and international topics are covered. A summer programme is also offered, usually of two/three outings in May – July. The Branch is delighted to welcome new members.

Since 1964 the Publications Sub-committee of the Coventry Branch has published pamphlets on aspects of local history, researched in depth by reputable historians. Currently there has been an emphasis on medieval Coventry but it is hoped that the next few pamphlets to be published will be based on more modern aspects of the city's past. The Publications Sub-committee invites work from interested researchers and would particularly welcome 19th and 20th century topics as well as subjects relating to the wider county.

Queries: Branch Programme: Tel. 01788 890960
Publications: Tel. 01203 615120