

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.

Branch Membership subscriptions are nearly complete with only 10 memberships not received so far. Membership cards have been sent out to members who have paid (check the envelope if you didn't see it). If you received a membership form with this news letter it means I have not received your contribution yet. **If you have paid but not received your card please contact me.**

01543506195 or electricwilliam@gmail.com

Epping Forest Horology Club

EFHC are running a number of courses covering all aspects of Horology. Full details available at shortcourses@efhc.org.uk

South London Branch

OPEN DAY

SLBBHI. will be holding an open day on the 5th of October 2024 full details to follow.

FREE ADVERTISING FOR BRANCH MEMBERS.

Is there something you require, an obscure tool or clock/watch part. We can try and help we have had great success in the past. Just contact Bill: -
01543506195 or electricwilliam@gmail.com

www.slbbhi.co.uk



South London Branch British Horological Institute

Newsletter No. 541 April 2024

Meetings are held on the 1st Thursday of each month

At The White Hart Barn (Godstone Village Hall)

Godstone Surrey RH9 8DU at 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m.

"Punctuality is the thief of time." Oscar Wilde

Next Month's Meeting 4th April

**Stephen Phillips, B Eng, C Eng, MIET
'The Antikythera Mechanism
and a Modern Reproduction'.**

"I am a chartered engineer with a degree in mechanical engineering from Sheffield University, I did a thick sandwich degree course funded by the Ministry of Defence, working at RAE Farnborough, NGTE Pyestock, Rolls Royce and then the Royal Ordnance Factory, Leeds, working on the Shir 2 tank which subsequently became Challenger. I then did a Fellowship in Manufacturing Management, post graduate course at Cranfield, and moved into electronics, initially at Systime Computers in Leeds, then Schlumberger Test Equipment in Dorset, and finally at Lucas in Cirencester, fully retiring in 2018, from what had then become part of ZF.

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Free
advertising for
Slbbhi members

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continued

I have always made things in my workshop at home, and in 2015 embarked on making my first orrery which led on to the Antikythera Mechanism, several more orreries and clocks, the most recent of which are stepper motor driven with Raspberry Pi or Arduino micros to drive them. I am not an expert on Astronomy but will try to describe the solar and planetary motions related to the Antikythera mechanism before going on to examine the original mechanism and my later reproduction in more detail.

The Antikythera Mechanism was on board a ship laden with fine bronze and marble sculpture and glassware, which sank within a few years after 70 BC off the island of Antikythera, between Crete and the Greek mainland. The shipwreck site was discovered by Symiote sponge divers in 1900, and salvaged by them, under Greek government supervision, in 1900-1901. In 1902 fragments of the Mechanism were noticed among unsorted bronze pieces from the wreck at the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. Since then, a number of scientific investigations have been carried out on the mechanism to try to understand its purpose and functionality. One of the most recent of these was reported in ISAW Papers 4 (February 2012) "The Cosmos in the Antikythera Mechanism" by Tony Freeth and Alexander Jones. This work proposed an overall arrangement and functionality for the mechanism based on deduction from the surviving parts of the mechanism. The BBC made a good documentary on this charting the investigations and some of the models made.

The frontage – dismantled by contractors who could only work on Sundays because of the volume of weekday traffic in Cheapside – eventually arrived in the USA on December 4, 1929, later being rebuilt in a heavily adapted two-storey configuration that still stands at The Henry Ford Museum today, and serves as an ice cream parlour, Dr Rooney said.

After leaving Cheapside, Sir John Bennett Ltd kept its Kensington High Street shop and leased a premises Poultry, about 100 metres east of the Cheapside site and a shop in New Bond Street, backing on to the Royal Institution, which became the company's retail flagship.

But the firm struggled financially. In June 1931, it posted a loss. Soon after, it was bought out by Marks Viner, a director of Sheffield-based cutlery, silverware and plate manufacturing and retailing conglomerate Viner's Ltd, and two colleagues, which led to the management team of John Hill, Isidor Abrahams and Alfred Page resigning just months later.

Marks Viner returned Sir John Bennett Ltd to its Cheapside roots, and closed the New Bond Street shop, which had never turned a profit. In 1935, Viner closed the Kensington shop – so that in 1938, after 92 years, the Bennett firm was back where it had started – in one shop at 65 Cheapside.

By July 1940, it was in voluntary liquidation, finally being wound up by the following June.

The firm resurfaced in March 1955, when Marks Viner and his daughter's husband, property tycoon, Henry Oppenheim, announced the opening of a Sir John Bennett shop in New Bond Street. But this version of the business did not deal in horology or jewellery – it sold knitwear, handbags, and other leather goods, and lasted only nine years, closing in 1963, Dr Rooney added.

Mike Dodd

director George Russell retired, to be replaced by company secretary Horace Beard, and in January 1924, the death of chairman Henry Lofthouse, who was succeeded by chartered accountant John Hill.

After Regent Street the company moved two miles west, to Kensington High Street, trading from a single shop in the frontage of the imposing Royal Palace Hotel. It stayed in the shop, which never showed a profit, for 14 years, leaving in 1938. One of Sir John Bennett Ltd.'s shareholders was leading rainwear and clothing magnate Isidor Abrahams, who joined the board in 1927, shortly after acquiring the clothing firm Aquascutum. Almost immediately he sacked managing director Horace Beard.

Abrahams, chartered accountant Alfred Page and managing director John Hill were to steer the company through its most unusual period, when it sold the frontage of the Cheapside shop to American car maker and multi-millionaire Henry Ford, who had decided during a holiday in London that he wanted it for a science museum he was building at the Ford plant in Dearborn, Michigan. By 1929, the Cheapside building had become dangerous, and Abrahams and his fellow directors had been pondering whether to rebuild or sell the freehold - so Henry Ford's offer to buy the frontage and its attachments, was welcome.



Sir John Bennett shopfront re-erected at The Henry Ford, Dearborn, photographed in 2003 (Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, Balthazar Korab Collection, LC-DIG-ppem-00383).

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

2024 South London Branch BHI AGM

Chairman's Report

I've been in the position of Chairman for one year now. When I took over this role the branch was just beginning to recover from the disruption and uncertainty caused by the COVID 19 pandemic. During that difficult period our attendance numbers dropped considerably and therefore also our monthly income at the door. I am happy to report that during 2023 attendance at these meetings has grown steadily and we are pretty much back to pre-covid levels.

Since last year's AGM meeting, we have also added two new members to our dedicated committee team:

Mike Dodd has joined us and assists Michael McDonnald and Duncan Greig with monthly newsletter writeups. He also handles most of the formal correspondence that the South London Branch sends out thanking people for donations etc.

Peter Rendle has taken up the position of Webmaster, which I am personally grateful for as he takes this role over from me which greatly assists in freeing up some of my time for other branch related matters.

One of standout successes of the past year was the "Show and Tell" meeting that we held in August. Many members brought personal projects that they have been working on along to the meeting. It was wonderful to see such a varied display of projects and the creativity and ingenuity that had been put into them. That meeting was a true testament to the wealth of knowledge and skill that exists within our branch. It's something to be very proud of.

We also had a variety of successful courses and events last year that were enjoyed by many of our members. This included:

- 1/ Numerous beginner lathe courses with Alan White.
- 2/ Screw cutting and tool sharpening with Sid Lines.
- 3/ John Ward returned for another of his very popular dial clock construction courses.
- 4/ Finally, Ron Rose very kindly organized a trip to Upton Hall which was a great success.

Looking forward to the rest of 2024, our flagship event this year will be the branch open day in the Soper Hall. The date has been set and the hall booked for Saturday 5th October. This year we have created a special subcommittee to handle the detailed arrangements that need to be made and to try and relieve pressure on Ron who historically has taken the majority of the burden for organizing this popular event. If anyone would like to get involved as a volunteer in any capacity, please let me know and we would welcome your help.

Before I finish, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank all of the members of the branch that help and get involved in so many different ways throughout the year. The simple act of attending branch meetings on the first Thursday of each month keeps the lifeblood of this association flowing. This is your branch and the more we all put into it the more we will get out of it.

Trevor Keast Chairman

company - in the first two years of trading profits were just £1,500 a year. Moreover, Bennett was managing director in name only - despite being paid £600 a year he had done no work for the company but had retired to Hastings. He had also taken his purchase money in cash, not shares - and so had no incentive to support the fledgling firm, shareholders heard. The meeting launched an investigation into the company's management which four months later produced a damning report on the conduct of Bennett, his advisers and the new concern's directors, adding that 'the statements of the prospectus had been most flagrantly inaccurate from the beginning to the end'. Far from making a profit of £8,000 a year, profits were less than £1,500 a year in the three years before the firm's incorporation, the investigators said. But they believed the firm could be a success again 'if it could be managed with efficiency and economy and with a spirit of enterprise'. The company immediately began pulling in its horns, introducing cuts and economies, and surrendering the lease on 64 Cheapside.

By July 1892, the exuberant, gadget-covered, double-width shopfront which had amazed the crowds since 1865 had been torn down and replaced with a smaller frontage, although it still featured the clock and various automata. In 1894, the firm a further management reshuffle, with former Sheffield brewer and Bennett shareholder Henry Lofthouse chairing the board and long-standing Bennett manager George Russell as managing director - these two ran Sir John Bennett Ltd for the next 26 years.

Bennett, the firm's founder, died on July 3, 1897.

By the start of the 20th Century, the firm's Cheapside shop, reduced in size and status, was becoming lost in a cacophonous retail scene of advertising, signs, placards, awnings, slogans, and lavish window displays. In 1908 the firm stepped into the West End of London, taking a shop at 105 Regent Street, near Piccadilly Circus - a possibly ill-timed change because of plans for a comprehensive reconstruction of the area, which meant it had to move out in 1924, Dr Rooney said. The early 1920s also saw the end of a long era of continuity when managing

In April 1865, Bennett remodelled his enlarged Cheapside premises, rebuilding the entire façade and roof to include his huge, illuminated projecting clock, with a life-sized automaton of Father Time which struck the hour bell in an upper-level niche. Huge brightly coloured figures of Gog and Magog, the City's traditional guardians, sounded the Cambridge chimes on the quarter-bells from a lower niche. A time ball, triggered by the signal from Greenwich, was fixed on the roof, and a fine regulator, corrected automatically by the same Greenwich signal, was installed in the new shop window. For several years afterwards, Bennett's Cheapside emporium, covered in horological theatrics, was rarely far from the pages of newspapers around the country,' Dr Rooney said.

Crowds packed the street outside his shop every day to watch the automatons in action – it was good for Bennett's business, and the money rolled in. In 1869 Bennett bought the freehold for 65 Cheapside, which until then he had been leasing.

Two years later, in October 1871, he was elected a sheriff of the City of London and Middlesex. He was knighted in March 1872. But by 1889 Bennett, now 75, was in serious financial difficulties – and it was no coincidence that in March that year he incorporated his firm as Sir John Bennett Ltd, said Dr Rooney, adding: 'It was a deal that saw a surprising amount of cash flow in his direction. 'The prospectus claimed a net annual profit for the firm of just over £8,000. It had capital of £90,000. and Bennett was one of the new company's directors, having agreed to serve as managing director for five years.' But financial problems immediately appeared. In December 1889, a shareholder issued a writ alleging misrepresentation in the prospectus. Nearly two years later, in April 1891, it emerged at the second annual meeting of Sir John Bennett Ltd that the annual £8,000 net profit the prospectus claimed the business made under Bennett had not materialised for the new

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

Dr. David Rooney

“Sir John Bennet – His Impact on Horology”.

Watch and clockmaker Sir John Bennett combined radical marketing techniques with a flair for self-publicity to establish what was at one time advertised – by the firm's own managers – to be 'one of the most important and successful concerns' of the 19th Century.

At the height of his career Bennett attracted huge attention – but after retiring in 1889 and quitting Cheapside, where he had made his name, he faded from public view, dying in obscurity in 1897, David Rooney told the South London Branch meeting on March 7.

Bennett's work cast a long shadow, which lasted more than 50 years after his death, with the company he started in the City of London early in Queen Victoria's reign moving to the West End before returning to its Cheapside roots, and being run by the Aquascutum empire, then the cutlers of Sheffield, before finally closing down in the New Elizabethan era, said Dr Rooney, a former Curator of Timekeeping at the Royal Observatory Greenwich and Keeper of Technologies and Engineering at the Science Museum.

Bennet was born into a two-generation watchmaking family in Greenwich in 1814. His father died when he was about 15, after which he joined the family business as an assistant, working for the next decade and a half with his mother and her staff of watchmakers.

In 1846 the 32-year-old John Bennett set up his own business in the commercial thoroughfare of Cheapside, in the City of London.

The firm traded on that site – apart from a four-year gap in the 1930s– until it was wound up in 1940, only to re-emerge later, for a few years and in a different guise in New Bond Street.

Bennett, whose achievements included helping found the BHI, was noted for his radical views on the watchmaking industry, his promotion of foreign manufacturing methods, and his willingness to sell imported clocks and watches despite the English trade being insular and highly protective of its own traditions, Dr Rooney said.



*Looking west along Cheapside, with Bennett shop in foreground, c.1906
(Raphael Tuck & Sons postcard 4751, courtesy of Tuck DB Postcards).*

But he was also notable for the public face of his business – and the lengths to which he went to attract publicity and custom. He opened his first shop, 65 Cheapside, in 1846, immediately demonstrating the flair for promotion that was to mark his career.

Soon after he moved in, the five-storey building's bow display windows flanking a central recessed doorway were topped by a large sign inscribed 'Bennett', complete with a crest, while the windows were full of clocks, watches and plate, and the place was festooned with signs about his wares and services. The shop front also took pride of place in the full-page advertisement Bennett placed on the back of the catalogue of the 1851 Great Exhibition at a cost then of £750 – more than £100,000 today. 'This was a huge amount of money to spend on an ad – but he made it all back and more,' Dr Rooney said.

By March 1852, Bennett had refurbished and expanded the façade, installing a large projecting clock at second-storey level, as well as a

wind dial connected to a vane on the roof– the first of a series of gadgets he would use to turn the shop into a tourist attraction. By now, said Dr Rooney, Bennett was attracting International attention for his advertising, marketing and publicity activities.

In December 1859, needing to expand, he acquired the leasehold of the neighbouring building. But Bennett did have competition –clockmaker Jacob French was also seeking to become the public face of London horology. In 1854 French established himself at 62 Cornhill – a few minutes' walk from Bennett's shop, emblazoning his premises with eye-catching attractions including a large projecting clock and signs proclaiming, 'French's Chronometer Manufactory' and 'City Observatory'. Two years later, its crowning feature, a 5.5-foot diameter zinc time ball, was installed on the roof. The device, triggered by an electrical signal sent from the Greenwich observatory, via the Electric Telegraph Company which was also used to correct a regulator in the shop window, enabled French to boast that his new time service was 'the true standard for Greenwich time'. The following year, French offered the public free admission to his premises to 'inspect the apparatus and the discharge (by electric current from Greenwich), of the time-ball at One o'clock' – causing crowds to throng the street day after day. But French's success was short-lived – in late 1859, in a case widely reported in the press, he was jailed for a month for indecently assaulting a 17-year-old girl on a train.

Further setbacks, in the form of a couple of thefts, followed, leading to his quitting the retail trade in 1860 and retreating to the family business in Clerkenwell. John Bennett immediately grasped the opportunity by buying French's premises, consolidating his hold on the horological retail scene in London and acquiring two major assets– the so-called 'City Observatory' title, which he applied to his own Cheapside business, and the time ball and electrically set regulator. He kept the shop he set up at 62 Cornhill for only four years.