



Est 1858

# South London Branch British Horological Institute

Newsletter No. 552 MARCH 2025

Branch No 25. Founded 1978

*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.*

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"Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We have only today. Let us begin". *Mother Teresa*

## NEXT MEETING 6th MARCH Annual General Meeting FOLLOWED BY Dale Sandeson MBHI MA

**Horological highlights of the Russell Coates Museum.  
The Joseph Dodds nautical watch with constant force  
escapement.**

The first part of this meeting will be the AGM, providing an update on your branch's status. There will be a treasurer's report on the South London Branch workshop delivered by our chairman Trevor Keast and a treasurer's report on the South London Branch delivered by Barnaby Smith. You will have the opportunity to meet members of the committee standing for a further year of office and briefly discuss any issues that you may have.

### GODSTONE SINKHOLE

A large sinkhole has appeared near the venue, but the White Hart Barn is open for business. Diversions are detailed on page 3

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## Dale Sandeson MBHI MA

Dale Sandeson Is a clock maker and horological conservator in West Sussex. Working from the Midhurst area. Dale trained at West Dean College and gained a Master of Arts Degree in conservation in 2019, he is an ICON accredited conservator. Some of you will be familiar with the short presentations he gave us when he was a student, and we warmly welcome him back. Now married and he had recently become a father. He has been persuaded to come and tell us about the Horological highlights that he found at the Russell Cotes Museum in Bournemouth. Dale was particularly interested in the Joseph Dodds constant force escapement watch and has done some further research along with Jonathan Betts into the story of this fine London clockmaker.

I recently interviewed Dale on what took him down the horological path, and he felt there was something missing with schooling. Dale said he was always very good on the analytical side specifically Maths and Science, but there was not the opportunity of being taught to work with your hands. He had several jobs, including being a landscape gardener and a window fitter in the 10 years from leaving school. Dale's father introduced him to a friend in his own words “an old boy horologist who had an interest in turret clocks”, he caught the horological virus. Dale applied and was accepted to the West Dean foundation programme. He had also applied to the Birmingham City university BHI horological course.

Duncan Greig.



## GODSTONE SINK HOLE

The A25 is closed at Godstone High Street just north of the Godstone one way system.

The White Hart Barn is open as usual.

Diversions are in place and access to the White Hart Barn is as follows.

### **From M25**

Leave the M25 at Junction 6 and follow the A22 south towards Eastbourne.

At the roundabout on the A22/A25 junction continue to follow the A22 south towards Eastbourne.

At the next roundabout turn right onto the B2236 Eastbourne Road.

Continue north on the B2236 Eastbourne Road onto the southern end of Godstone High Street.

The White Hart Barn and White Hart pub will be on the right hand side, with the pond and car park to the left.

### **From A25 East, Oxted Road.**

At the roundabout on the A25/A22 junction turn left and follow the A22 south towards Eastbourne.

At the next roundabout turn right onto the B2236 Eastbourne Road.

Continue north on the B2236 Eastbourne Road onto the southern end of Godstone High Street.

The White Hart Barn and White Hart Pub will be on the right hand side, with the pond and car park to the left.

### **From A25 West, Bletchingly Road.**

Follow the Bletchingly Road into Godstone and turn right on the Godstone one way system, continue south on Godstone High street.

The White Hart Pub and White Hart Barn will be on the left hand side, with the pond and car park to the right.

### **From A22 Eastbourne Road**

Follow the A22 Eastbourne Road north, pass through South Godstone.

At the next roundabout turn left onto the B2236 Eastbourne Road.

Continue north on the B2236 Eastbourne Road on to the southern end of Godstone High Street.

The White Hart Barn and White Hart Pub will be on the right hand side, with the pond and car park to the left.

# February Meeting

## THE ENGINE TURNERS OF CLERKENWELL.

### Seth Kennedy.

The speciality of Seth is in the making of pocket watch cases which drew him to the skills of the engine turner. To ensure we were all wide awake, he commenced to describe a brutal murder! March 1831 Clerkenwell Green, rumours abound of a murder in Percival Street. Mr Deacon engine Turner, who lived at number 14, and a Henry Dawson gold chaser. Henry came home drunk one night, assaulted Emma Dawson his wife, and jumped on her. She was heavily pregnant and gave birth a few days later. Both the child and the mother died resulting in a court case for her murder. In the Coroners' Court the Doctor's evidence suggested Emma had a weak heart and as a result the jury concluded she died of natural causes.

Having composed ourselves we were then given a description of ornamental engine turning, where the left hand rotates a handle manipulating the object and the other works the cutting tool, taking fine shavings and leaving engraved facets glistening in the light. Patterns were also engraved with hand held engraving tools shaving into metal surfaces. Census records, advertisements, the archives of the B.H.I. and those of Vulliamy were other sources of valuable information. Case makers and polishers were also researched. Engine turning started early in 18th Century mainly by immigrants from Switzerland and France but this later declined in the 19th Century. In 1785 William Pitt, then Prime Minister, received a gold and enamelled box containing the Freedom of the City of London, made in England of such quality it was as good as any European example. Sebastian Gurren from Switzerland employed three apprentices including Henry Gilling who later married Gurren's daughter and became qualified as an engine turner. Gillings son Henry Slater Gilling later took over the business enlarging it to such an extent that he employed about eighteen men plus family members in the

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making of cases and engine turning. In spite of a fire in 1852 the business thrived. Swiss competition and the introduction of women to work in London led to the decline in local trade and as a result some businesses were put up for sale due to impending bankruptcy. The H. S. Gilling family business moved to Hammersmith, where Henry lived in a more affluent home while continuing to manage his business. His sons Marston and Percy continued the business in Clerkenwell as Francis, his other son became an actor. Father was claimed to be the first engine turner in England. In 1772 he had 3 apprentices one being Richard Prosser. Valentine Knight was an engine turner and dial maker who worked up to eighteen hours a day to satisfy demand for his designs in America. He later became the first President of the B.H.I. in 1865.

It was not possible to hallmark objects after engine turning, as punch marks on the surface would damage any prior engraving. Henry Gilling senior was apprenticed to Sebastian Guering and later married his Master's daughter Catherine, and worked for his father in Law. Henry Gilling was in 1851, now a resident within two adjoining houses in Upper Charles Street. These properties would have been in multiple occupation by some 25 residents and workers on various floors. There was a report of Fire at No 2, owned by Henry, the engine turner. A number of fire engines eventually put out the fire although there was considerable damage.

In 1856 Henry advertised for an engine turner a watch case springer and an engraver. In 1835 Henry's son Henry Slater marries Marianne Marsden and was engaged in his father's trade. Sir John Bennett suggested the introduction of women as cheap labour into the trade which was met with stiff opposition, although Swiss competition combined with poor demand was pointing to a time of austerity for the trade. The Clock and watch makers Asylum in Southgate, for trade workers or their widows, was where Henry Gilling was involved and later in 1856 took up residence, thanking those who had voted for him to be accepted.

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To give an idea of their value in 1806 two rose engines were advertised for £420. Engine turning could also be employed for document printing to prevent forgery of money. The Company of Field house in Red Lion Street, were reputed to be the best makers of rose engines, and copper plate engravers. In the 19th century the most expensive machine in the watch workshop was the rose engine, where the skills were passed down the generations. Rental of a 24-rosette engine per annum could be £200. A Vulliamy pocket watch would cost 38gns and the engraving a further 2gns. It might take up to 3 days to do the engraving. With a worker's annual wage of £150 pa. fierce competition was coming from Birmingham and Henry Slater's three brothers Leopold, Sabastien and Napoleon were all engine turners in the late 1850's. Leopold became a publican and moved to Hammersmith, Sebastian moved to Coventry and Napoleon continued in the trade until he was declared bankrupt in 1868. John Groom took on disabled girls and employed them to make flowers for charity. Engine turning was kind to the family and by their success gave the ability to finance the charity which is now a part of Liveability.

There were many first names repeated in the family generations which created difficulties and confusion in research. Martin Matthews when writing his book on engine turning received two letters from Len Tidy born 1912, who worked for J. Fountain and Sons, the sons being Frank and Frederick, enamellers and engine turners who closed in 1977.

This was a most detailed lecture on a subject rarely covered. Our audience was delighted to learn the detail of those who, in past generations mastered this skill.

After question time, Duncan thanked Seth for his lecture and the audience concurred with arousing applause. (Plus a special lubricant)

# LATHE FOR SALE

This is a Myford ML7 240v single phase in excellent condition,  
Serial number K39008

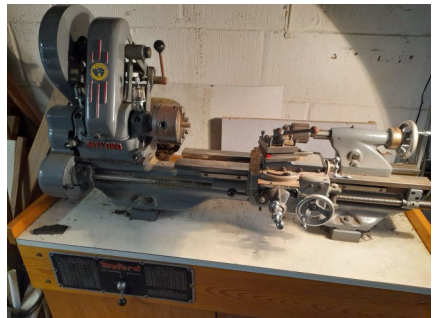
It looks to have been fully refurbished some time ago and had  
little use since.

Mounted on a home made wooden stand with a Myford  
reversing switch built in.

Comes with a three jaw chuck, four jaw chuck, tailstock chuck, set  
of change wheels, vertical slide,

Catch plate, face plates, parallels and a selection of cutting tools  
plus tool steel.

Price £550 Please contact Norvin 07922813998 or  
novin@astoolhire.co.uk



## **GEORGE DANIELS DINNER**

This years **George Daniels dinner** will be on Monday 24th March at Addington Palace Golf Club. I have enclosed/attached the menu and details. If you wish to attend please complete the form and return it to Alan Westgate at the address on the form or bring it to the next meeting

## **ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS.**

Branch Membership subscriptions are still coming in at a steady rate with around 75% already received. Membership cards have been posted to those members who have paid, 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. March is the cut off for renewal, after this you will only receive the email version.

**Be aware that if you have not paid the £30.00 you will no longer receive the postal version of the newsletter**

## **FREE ADVERTISING FOR BRANCH MEMBERS**

If you wish to place an advert in our newsletter , contact Bill :-  
01543 506195 or [electricwilliam@gmail.com](mailto:electricwilliam@gmail.com)

[www.slbbhi.co.uk](http://www.slbbhi.co.uk)