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South London Branch British Horological Institute

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Branch No 25. Founded 1978

Meetings are held on the 1st Thursday of each month

**May Meeting will be at Soper Hall Community Centre,
Harestone Valley Road, Caterham, CR3 6HY.**

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"Work is a necessity for man. Man invented the alarm clock" Pablo Picasso

NEXT MEETING 7th MAY

Rory McEvoy FBHI. Curator Emeritus RGO.

**American and English clockmaking/repairing
processes past and present.**

Our past chairman Rory McEvoy is making the trip from America where he has been the Executive Director of the National Association of Watch & Clock Collectors Inc. for the last four years. He will be bringing us up to date with what is happening at the Columbia Museum headquarters showing behind the scenes details of some of their magnificent exhibit's. How improvements have been made to their school of horology and taking it across the USA.

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Rory's hard work, ideas and influence have been making a positive effect to the NAWCC. He is looking forward to meeting many of our members of the South London Branch of the BHI who have played a part and influenced him in his career and would like to invite you to NAWCC headquarters next year. The Martin Burgess Clock B is now settled and is performing well.



We hope you will enjoy the evening catching up with an old friend and learning what is happening in horology over 3000 miles away. Duncan Greig

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LAST MONTH'S MEETING

"Evans of Birmingham Turret Clocks"

By Stephen Dutfield

Stephen's lecture traced the origins, family history, industrial context and characteristic clockwork designs of W.F. Evans & Sons of Soho Street, Handsworth (Birmingham), demonstrating why Evans movements especially their turret and skeleton clocks are important to horological conservators as well as local industrial historians.

Introduction and research genesis

Stephen opened by explaining how his research began with a practical encounter: during a visit to the ancient Church of St Thomas in Neath he and a colleague discovered a turret movement signed to a local retailer (Davis of Neath) that a member of the group subsequently identified as manufactured by Evans of Handsworth. This prompted broader field research while servicing turret clocks across southern Britain and Ireland, revealing numerous similar Evans movements in situ. Despite the firm's prolific output, conventional histories lacked thorough documentation. Professional genealogical research by Sarah Bryant supplied the essential documentary framework - census entries, advertisements, family records and press cuttings. This allowed Stephen to assemble a narrative linking Evans to the Soho clockmaking tradition.

Soho origins: Boulton and Watt background

To set the industrial scene, Stephen reviewed the Soho works tradition established by Matthew Boulton and his later collaboration with James Watt. Boulton's Soho enterprise combined high-quality ornamental metalwork and precision manufacturing; among various products the firm produced fine domestic clocks and experimented with novel clock forms. Boulton's emphasis on mechanised, high-quality production

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and Watt's engineering developments shifted the Soho works over time toward steam-engine manufacture. In 1805 Boulton & Watt ceased clockmaking at Soho; their Soho Foundry and associated premises continued with heavy engineering. When Soho's clockmaking ended, skilled workers from the operation dispersed; but one such worker, John Houghton, kept the clock tradition alive, setting up his own business in the Handsworth area. Houghton's workshops and tooling would later form the seedbed for the W.F. Evans business.

Family and firm transition: from Houghton to Evans

Census and marriage records set out the family line that created W.F. Evans. John Houghton moved his clockmaking business to Soho Street, Handsworth, by the early 1840s. His daughter Sarah married William Frederick Evans in January 1841. William, originally from a tailoring family, appears to have trained in clockmaking - possibly as a condition of marriage or by practical necessity - and by 1851 is recorded as a clockmaker master employing 18 men and eight boys. Advertisements from the mid-19th century show Houghton and then W.F. Evans advertising Soho clock manufactory premises, with Evans explicitly styling himself successor to Houghton and dating the business to 1805 - linking it by association to the earlier Soho tradition for commercial credibility. The family subsequently ran the business across three generations: William Frederick Evans (the first), his sons (including John Houghton Evans and a second William Frederick), and William Frederick Evans III, who managed the firm into the early 20th century.

Product range and trade-supplier role

W.F. Evans & Sons produced a wide range of clocks: domestic skeleton clocks, marine/platform clocks, school and house clocks, and importantly turret clocks—both simpler two-train hour/half-hour striking movements and less common three-train chime movements. Late 19th-century advertisements indicate in-house castings, forging and steam power for wheel and pinion cutting signalling a vertically capable workshop with the technical capability to produce a diverse catalogue of work. A recurring point of social

and commercial interest is that Evans operated extensively as a trade supplier: many surviving Evans turret movements carry the names of local retailers, jewellers or other clockmakers on their canopies or dials. This practice - supplying finished movements to the trade for retail naming - helps explain why Evans' direct brand is underrepresented in some local histories and catalogues.

Design hallmarks of Evans turret movements

Stephen catalogued the distinctive features that identify an Evans turret movement. Key hallmarks include:

- Cast bed with near-vertical corners and a distinctive ridge profile cast into the bed and carried through to the barrel cap. This ridge and bed geometry make Evans beds visually and technically recognizable.

- Cast box suspension for the pallets and pendulum support in many examples.

- Graham deadbeat escapement almost invariably located at the extreme right-hand side of the frame.

- A standard two-train layout (going and striking) predominates; three-train quarter-chiming examples exist but are less common.

- A distinctive pallet-holder assembly formed by two castings mounted back-to-back linked by a semicircular element; this holds adjustable steel pallets clamped by screws—an arrangement facilitating maintenance and pallet servicing.

- Internal count-wheels are frequently found mounted within the frame rather than externally in some Evans designs.

Case studies and notable examples

Stephen illustrated the points with multiple case studies from his fieldwork:

- St Luke's, Cheltenham: a typical Evans two-train movement with the characteristic bed ridge, box suspension and a Graham escapement with some unusual features (two-handed setting dial and internal count-wheel).

Elvaston Castle (installed by John Smith of Derby, 1868): an Evans movement supplied to another maker/retailer, demonstrating the trade-supply relationship. Although the case and hands resemble Smith of Derby styling, the movement's bed casting and suspension mark it as Evans.

St Botolph's, Barton Seagrave (Northamptonshire): another neat Evans example with the triangular palette clamp and typical bed casting.

North Luffenham and St Peter's, Diddlebury (Shropshire): smaller movements and unusual features such as an expanding fly device on the striking barrel discovered at Diddlebury.

These examples underscore both the geographic spread and the repeatability of Evans designs across different building types and retailing channels.

Mechanical curiosities and maintenance-friendly design

The lecture highlighted Evans' practical engineering solutions. The pallet-clamping assembly allowed relatively straightforward renewal/resurfacing of steel pallets and re-location for wear compensation - an engineer-friendly detail. One particularly intriguing modification/feature observed on an Evans strike barrel was an expanding-fly centrifugal governor similar to domestic clock devices; it allowed the striker's fly to vary resistance and thus equalise the striking speed. Stephen discussed an incident where a fly's spring had been over-tensioned, causing accelerated striking; correct adjustment restored an even strike. He also noted Evans examples with gravity escapements are recorded but rare, and three-train clocks exist though they are less frequent.

Business fortunes, inheritance and closure

Census records, advertisements and probate notices show how the business prospered. William Evans (the second generation) left an estate indicating considerable wealth. William Frederick Evans III continued management into the early 20th century; the firm closed in 1934 on his retirement. While Smiths of Derby later acquired large machinery that apparently originated from the

Soho workshops, there is no clear record of a corporate takeover - rather it appears machinery and contents were sold and transferred to Derby. The closure reflects both family succession realities (the third generation had only one daughter) and changing industrial circumstances.

Conclusions and further research

Stephen concluded that W.F. Evans & Sons represent a significant, under-documented provincial clockmaking firm whose products remain in many parish towers, schools and public buildings. The fusion of genealogical research and field identification has filled many gaps, but further archival discoveries (catalogues, illustrated lists, workshop photographs and late-period technical drawings) and a systematic survey of surviving movements would enrich understanding of production scale, catalogue variety and technological evolution -especially late-period innovations such as gravity escapements and the larger three-train movements. The lecture closed with Stephen's thanks to Sarah Bryant for genealogical research and to multiple contributors for photographs and access to clocks, and with a request for members to report Evans movements or documentary material to assist ongoing research.

John Summers

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions for 2026 are coming in steadily with more than 80% already paid. If you received a renewal form with this newsletter please complete and return to me with payment. I have posted membership cards to those who have paid. If you received a renewal notice but have paid please contact me and I will adjust my records.

PLEASE NOTE if you haven't paid this is your final reminder.

WANTED DEAD or COMPLETELY DISMEMBERED

If you have any broken cylinder platforms or parts could I please have them for an evening class project. Any parts like hairsprings, cylinder escape wheels, balances or complete platforms, damaged or not. They can be given to me at a meeting or evening class or by arrangement. Regretfully, I would like to have them as a freebie but for okay platforms I will consider checking my pockets!

Thankyou Ron Rose 07980 175181 or ronalderose@btinternet.com

ANNUAL PROGRAMME

I have attached/enclosed the annual programme for 2026, with a few exceptions it is complete and we must thank Duncan for all his hard work.

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Soper Hall Community Centre, Harestone Valley Road, Cater-
ham, CR3 6HY.**

FREE ADVERTISING FOR BRANCH MEMBERS

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

If you are wondering about this service, it is usually very
successful with both items advertised last month sold !

www.slbbhi.co.uk