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## William Whitaker and William Shreeve: Dialmakers of Halifax, West Yorkshire

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# William Whitaker and William Shreeve: Dialmakers of Halifax, West Yorkshire

John A. Robey\*

*Longcase clock dials ‘in imitation of enamel’ were first made in Birmingham in 1772. While this remained the centre of the industry they were also made in Halifax in significant numbers by William Whitaker and his successors from the 1790s to cater for the northern market. Though he died in 1800 the business was continued by his brother Henry until about 1810 when a partnership was formed with William Shreeve, who died in a tragic accident in 1817. Thereafter Whitaker & Shreeve continued making dials until 1834. By 1810 William’s son John left to make clock dials in Leeds and a couple of dialmakers continued the trade in Halifax until the 1850s. This article provides much new evidence on the relationship between the Whitaker and Shreeve families and other dialmaking businesses in the area. Examples of typical Whitaker dials, falseplates and hemisphere maps are illustrated, including those sold by factors in Newcastle-upon-Tyne.*

The English painted longcase clock dial originated in Birmingham about 1772 and soon replaced the traditional brass dial. Many enterprising manufacturers embarked on their production, mostly in Birmingham, which became the centre of the industry, where it perhaps cornered at least 90 per cent of the market (though this is an estimate as no production figures are available). But painted dials were also made elsewhere, especially in Scotland, and also in Manchester, as well as Halifax and Leeds in Yorkshire.

Instead of there being dozens of dialmakers, as in Birmingham, the Halifax trade was mainly confined to just one concern: William Whitaker (occasionally incorrectly recorded as Whittaker) and his successors. Fortunately his dials, which are of high quality, often have cast-iron falseplates that provide some information, including the change of name to Whitaker & Shreeve. The tragic and horrific death of William Shreeve was widely reported in local newspapers and some of the details have been recorded in horological books.<sup>1</sup>

However, previously published accounts have relied on names on falseplates and a limited range of trade directories, which only give part of the story. It has even been said:

It is difficult, if not impossible, to establish when William Whitaker worked alone in Halifax, when he worked with a painter called William Shreeve, and when he worked in partnership with Beilby & Hawthorn.<sup>2</sup>

Online resources have now enabled the story of the Whitaker dialmakers to be unravelled, and it has proved to be more complex and interesting than once thought, especially as the businesses involved continued to trade under their original names long after the deaths of their founders. Fig. 2 is a simplified family tree of the Whitaker and Shreeve dialmakers. This article includes illustrations of some representative Whitaker dials, while *The Art of the Painted Clock Dial* has a more comprehensive selection.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Brian Loomes, *Yorkshire Clockmakers* (2nd edition, Littleborough, 1985), p. 160.

2. Brian Loomes, *Clocks*, August 1997, 11.

3. M. F. Tennant, *The Art of the Painted Clock Dial* (Mayfield, 2009), pp. 293–310.

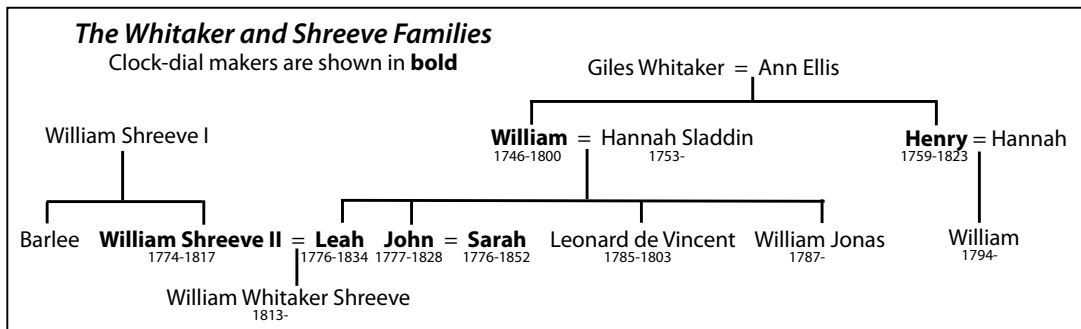


Fig. 1. Simplified genealogy of the Whitaker and Shreeve families.

### William Whitaker (b1748–d1800)

William Whitaker was baptised in July 1748, the eldest child of Giles Whitaker, butcher of Halifax, who then had two daughters, another son, Henry, and a further daughter.<sup>4</sup> Neither son followed his father's trade, as using their artistic skills must have been more appealing than cutting up meat. It is not known how they learned to paint, as none of the people mentioned in this article appear in registers of apprentices.

About 1775 William Whitaker married Hannah Sladdin, who was baptised in November 1753 at Ovenden, near Halifax. They had seven children: Leah (1776), John (1779), Barnett (1779, probably died young), Mary (1781), Sarah (baptism not recorded), Leonard (1785) and William Jonas (1787). They were all baptised at Sowerby Bridge, where the family probably lived, just 2½ miles from Halifax, where the clock dials were made. The exception was the youngest, who was baptised at nearby Warley, which may signify a move to a new residence. Leah Whitaker became an important part in the story of Halifax's dialmakers, while her brother John moved to Leeds, where he made clock dials. None of the other children are known to have worked in the business, though this was clearly William Whitaker's desire just before he died in early 1800, aged 51.

In previously published articles and books the earliest records of William Whitaker have been stated to be about 1809 to 1815,<sup>5</sup> which

turns out to be long after he had died. But from the style of some of his dials, with falseplates signed 'Willm Whitaker, Halifax' or simply 'W. W., Halifax', it had been deduced that he was working as a dialmaker much earlier.<sup>6</sup> Recent research shows that the earliest positive indication of his trade is a newspaper advertisement on 18 April 1796 when the following appeared in the *Leeds Intelligencer*:

#### JOURNEYMEN PAINTERS

WANTED, ONE or Two good Hands at Pencil Work, and One who perfectly understands House Painting in all its Branches, will meet with constant Employment, and Wages according to Merit, by applying to William Whitaker, Painter, Japanner, &c. in Halifax.

At the time of this advertisement William Whitaker was almost 48 years old and would have been a very experienced painter and sign-writer. The inclusion of japanning indicates that he may well have already been making clock dials, as japanner and enameller were the usual contemporary terms used for dial painters. He was likely expanding his business by taking on more staff to increase his share of the increasing market for the supply of clock dials to the significant northern market, which up to then had been dominated by Birmingham dialmakers. It should be noted that 'Pencil Work' was not using graphite or so-called 'lead' pencils, but pencil brushes for

4. All genealogical information is from parish registers available online unless stated otherwise.

5. Loomes, *Yorkshire Clockmakers*, p. 190, listed as Whittaker.

6. Tennant, *The Painted Clock Dial*, pp. 293 ff.



Fig. 2. Early dial by William Whitaker with his characteristic hemisphere maps (see Figs 19–20). Made for Henry Fisher of Preston (recorded 1742–82).



Fig. 3. Rear of the Fisher dial with SP155 stamped on the falseplate, calendar and on the moon, where P and 1 overlap to appear as H.

fine line work when painting signs or clock dials. It is significant that while he was seeking just one man for house painting, one or two men were required who were skilled in using these fine brushes. This advertisement may have also appeared in Birmingham,<sup>7</sup> or Whitaker may have gone there to recruit skilled painters, as it is likely that William Shreeve was taken on at this time (see later). Figs 2–3 show a dial from this period, identified by the hemisphere maps as coming from the Whitaker workshop, and probably made during William’s lifetime.

William Whitaker, painter of Halifax, wrote his will on 1 February 1800 and it was proved two months later.<sup>8</sup> There is no mention of his wife, who had probably died,<sup>9</sup> and his main concern was the continuation of the clock-dial business in his own name. His executors — his brother Henry Whitaker, John Pattison

a noted local clockmaker and Joseph Mason, grocer — were to:

retain as much money as they shall deem necessary for carrying on the trade or business I now follow and which I direct shall be carried on in my own Name and which Trade or Business I commit to the management of my brother not doubting his Care and Fidelity therein and ... he shall first take out of the profits 100 guineas annually together with one tenth of the clear remaining profits as a compensation for the extraordinary trouble ... until my youngest child shall reach the age of 21.

In addition the executors were to

put out my two youngest sons Leonard de Vincent and William Jonas to some trade or

7. The British Newspaper Archive does not include *Aris’s Birmingham Gazette* for this period.

8. Borthwick Institute, University of York, vol 144, fol. 198.

9. Women named Hannah Whitaker were buried in Halifax on 10 March 1789, 7 February 1790 and 18 October 1791, but it is not known which, if any, was the wife of the clock-dial maker.

business requesting that the former of them to be brought up to the trade or business that I follow.

The youngest sons were just 12 and 14 years old and had not yet started an apprenticeship, while Leah and John were in their twenties and probably already working with their father. William clearly had such aspirations for Leonard, who was simply identified as Leo at his baptism, that he named him after one of the greatest artists of the Italian Renaissance. Whether he lived up to his name, or even took any role in the clock-dial business, is not clear as he probably died in 1803.<sup>10</sup> After the youngest child reached the age of 21 William's estate was to be divided equally between his six surviving children:

Provided every one of my children shall out of their fortune pay to my brother £100 apiece for seven years on receiving interest to form a capital for the purpose of continuing the trade or business to be carried on by my brother and my sons John and Leonard de Vincent as long as they can agree about the same. But if they my said sons shall withdraw themselves from the said partnership shall leave to my brother £100 for seven years to be able better to carry on the business on his own account.

If his eldest son John conducted himself in the trade to the satisfaction of the executors he was to receive an unspecified weekly recompense from the estate. This is the will of someone extremely keen, perhaps almost to obsession, to ensure that the business he had founded continued to trade using his own name and under the control of his brother and his (William's) sons. Although it was estimated that the estate would not exceed £600, the impression is that William Whitaker was leaving a thriving and prosperous dial-making business which he was keen to ensure continued after his death.

William's will and relatively early death helps to explain previous misconceptions about the activities of the business in the early nineteenth century. Despite being only given a passing mention it was his oldest child, Leah, who continued the Whitaker clock-dial business for the longest in Halifax, though not solely in the name of the firm's founder. John became a clock-dial painter in his own right after he moved to Leeds.

### Henry Whitaker (b1759–d1823)

William and his brother Henry, younger by eleven years, had, presumably, worked together as clock-dial manufacturers, and when Henry died in 1823, aged almost 64, the local newspaper declared him to be an 'eminent clock-face painter'.<sup>11</sup> He had probably been trained by his older brother and he may even have been the one who concentrated on the painting of clock dials, while William Whitaker may have run the business, attending to sales, ordering the blank iron dial sheets, falseplates and the like. Henry had three children who we can be confident were his and not born to one of the other Henry Whitakers in the area. On 3 August 1822 the *Yorkshire Gazette* reported the marriage 'at Halifax Mr Joseph Thackrah of Leeds, surgical mechanist, to Ann, daughter of Mr Henry Whitaker of Halifax, enameller', the wedding taking place at the parish church of St John on 20 July. She is likely to have been the girl baptised on 6 October 1791 at Sowerby Bridge, daughter of Henry and Hannah Whitaker. Henry's occupation was also given as a painter when a son William was baptised on 23 March 1794 and a daughter Carolina on 3 October 1798. This William may have originally worked with his father, but not as a dial painter, since when he married in 1834 (long after the death of both his father and uncle) he was 'late of Aked's-road, but now of Lee Bridge House, near Halifax', while in the 1851 Census he was an accountant living in the High Street.

Fig. 4 shows a dial made around the turn of the nineteenth century, either when William Whitaker was still alive or when Henry was in charge. Though it is reasonable to suppose

10. A Leonard Whitaker was buried at Ripponden (6 miles from Halifax with Sowerby Bridge halfway) on 6 July 1803. Intriguingly his father is given as 'Devinci', which may be a misunderstanding by the clerk or a mistranscription.

11. *Leeds Mercury*, 24 May 1823.





Fig. 4. Arched moon-dial made about 1800, or a little later, for Holdsworth of Halifax. The rural scene in the centre includes a similar cottage to that between the moons in the arch. Typical Whitaker hemisphere maps but with the latitude numbers cut off to suit a smaller dial and cut down to make half maps.

that clock dials had been made by the Whitakers since at least the 1790s, the earliest actual record as a dialmaker is not until 1809 when 'Whitaker, Wm., japanner and clock-dial manufacturer, Aked's road' appears in a list of painters in what is almost the earliest of Halifax's trade directories.<sup>12</sup> At this date the business was being run by Henry Whitaker, and this is the only instance of the firm being recorded in directories under William Whitaker's name. This is also the earliest record of Aked's Road as the address of the clock-dial business, but it had probably been located there much earlier and continued to the end of clock-dial manufacture by the Whitakers.

Aked's Road once formed the western boundary of the town and was demolished in 1969.

### William Shreeve (b1774–d1817)

William Whitaker's advertisement in 1796 for additional skilled workers is likely to have been fulfilled by William Shreeve from Birmingham. He would have been aged 21, possibly having just finished an apprenticeship with one of the established Birmingham manufacturers of painted clock dials. He was certainly in Halifax by 1802 when (as William Shrieves) he was a private in the Halifax Volunteer Corps of Infantry, along with Henry Whitaker, who was a member of the band.<sup>13</sup> This was one of the many volunteer militias formed throughout England at this time, when there was widespread concern about an invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte's French army. This implies that William Shreeve had lived in the town long enough for him to have become an accepted member of the local community, and adds credibility to the suggestion that he had moved there as a result of William Whitaker's search for painters.

The surname Shreeve (sometimes Shrieve, Shrieves or Shreive) is quite uncommon, with the greatest concentration being in Norfolk, and since it is known from the reports of his death that William Shreeve came from Birmingham, this makes researching his background much easier than that of the Whitakers. He was baptised on 10 October 1774, the eldest son of William Shreeve, a Birmingham toymaker who traded as Smith & Shreeve until the partnership was dissolved in 1791 and then under his own name until he died in 1812. Toys were not children's playthings, but small decorative metal items, such as buckles, for which Birmingham was renowned. When William Shreeve senior of Birmingham died his simple will left all the 'ready money, book debts, stock in trade, both finished and unfinished goods, all the working tools &c.' to 'my second son Barlee Shreeve'.<sup>14</sup> Since Barlee or Barley was a not uncommon

12. *Holden's Triennial Directory*, volume 2, 1809–11. The only earlier director for Halifax, *Bailey's Northern Directory*, 1781, has no reference to Whitaker painters or dial makers.

13. <https://www.blunham.com/big/eng/YKS/WRY/Halifax/HalifaxCorp1802.html>. Transcribed from *The Halifax Guardian Almanack*, 1892.

14. Parochial Court of Canterbury Wills, National Archives.



Fig. 5. The Square Independent Chapel, Halifax, where William and Leah Shreeve were buried and three of their children were baptised.

Norfolk first name this reinforces the likely origin of the family. All the household furniture was to go to his widow Mary, then after her death to Barlee, and if he should die without issue, only then was the estate to be divided equally among the surviving brothers and sisters. We can only speculate as to why William, the eldest son, was not mentioned and did not receive even a token sum. Did his departure from Birmingham disenfranchise him from the family and was William senior rewarding the son who would continue the business (which he and his son did until the 1830s)? Or had William Shreeve junior been provided for earlier, as was sometimes the case with the eldest son, or was he prospering sufficiently in Halifax not to need a legacy?

From this will we learn that William Shreeve senior was actually a watch seal maker, a trade that would be encompassed by 'toy maker'. Watch seals were used to impress a cypher onto wax to seal a letter and were carried on the chain of a pocket watch. They were often made of gold inset with a semi-precious stone into which the cypher was engraved. Perhaps William junior realised that his talents lay in painting rather than working in metals.

Having settled in Halifax William Shreeve junior married William Whitaker's daughter Leah on 11 May 1806, when he was 32 and

she 30 years of age. The marriage was by licence as their first daughter was on its way, baptised on 18 September of that year, but she probably died young. They had three more daughters, born in 1809, 1810 and 1815, and a son born in 1813. William and Leah Shreeve were married in the parish church of St John, and their first two children were baptised there (William being described as a painter and an enameller). But their other three children were baptised at the Square Independent Chapel in Halifax (Fig. 5), and this is where William Shreeve and his wife were buried. When it opened in 1772 it was the largest nonconformist chapel in the country; in 1992 it became an arts centre.

### Whitaker & Shreeve (c. 1806–1834)

After the death of William Whitaker in 1800 the business was continued by Henry Whitaker, assisted by his nephew John and niece Leah. At some period — perhaps in 1806 when he married into the Whitaker family, or about 1810 when John moved to Leeds (see later) — William Shreeve became a partner and the firm's name first appears as Whitaker & Shreeve in 1816, still at Aked's Road.<sup>15</sup> The longcase clock dials made in this period (Figs 6–7) had falseplates cast with the joint names. The two partners appeared in a list of applicants for patents from 28 January to 22 February 1817 as 'Whittaker, H. and Shreeve, W., Halifax, painters'.<sup>16</sup> Since they do not appear in the official list of patentees, a patent (possibly for an improved type of varnish) was never granted, because in February 1817 it was announced that:

The Partnership between Henry Whitaker and William Shreeve of Halifax, Painters and Japanners under the firm of Whitaker & Shreeve is dissolved.<sup>18</sup>

William Shreeve must have continued to paint clock dials for another six months until he died as a result of a horrific accident on 15 April 1817. This has achieved some notoriety in horological history ever since it appeared

15. *Pigot's Commercial Directory*, 1816.

16. *The European Magazine and London Review*, volume 71–72, January–June 1817, p. 179. Available online.

17. Bennet Woodcroft, *Alphabetical Index of Patentees of Inventions, 1617–1852*, 1854, reprinted 1969.

18. *London Gazette*, 10 February 1817.



Figs 6–7. An unrestored square dial with a Whitaker & Shreeve falseplate, about 1810–15. Delicate rococo corner decoration. Signed 'R: Richardson, Lancaster', who is unrecorded.

in the second edition of *Yorkshire Clockmakers* by Brian Loomes, in 1985. This quotes a report from an unknown source that had appeared in 1869, more than fifty years after the event. Recently three contemporary newspaper reports have been discovered that throw more light on what happened. The shorter one records:

On the 15th inst, Mr. William Shreeve, enameler, and painter, of Halifax — His death was most calamitous; he was in the act of making varnish, which took fire, by which he was dreadfully scorched as only to survive a few hours.<sup>19</sup>

The *Leeds Intelligencer* and even the *Stamford Mercury* each gave an identical and more detailed account than the *Leeds Mercury*:

Dreadful Accident. — On Thursday last, Mr. W. Shreeve, a respectable painter, in Halifax, mixed some varnish with a quantity of turpentine, for the purpose of thinning it, and after he had heated it in a copper kettle, he incautiously took it to the door, when from the action of the air upon it, it

took fire, when he was so dreadfully burnt that he survived but a few hours afterwards. He was a native of Birmingham, of a respected family, and has left a wife and 4 children.<sup>20</sup>

We can speculate that he had been making the improved type of varnish that he had unsuccessfully tried to patent. It is worth noting that the much later account in 1869 states that he was 'a house painter, and did business in clock faces, himself being the chief embellisher', but as this is not included in the contemporary reports, it was probably based on local information from those who could still remember the family and their business. This tragedy was included in *The Old Clockmakers of Yorkshire* by N. V. Dinsdale, published in 1946, but for some unaccountable reason the name was given as William Selorice and this was repeated in *Local Clock & Watch Makers [Halifax]* by G. Dent in 1955.

Despite the wide coverage the accident received in both local newspapers and those further afield, no coroner's report has been traced, nor a press summary. This is particularly unfortunate as it might have

19. *Leeds Mercury*, 30 April 1817; and a similar report in the *Public Ledger and Daily Advertiser* [London] of 21 April 1817.

20. *Leeds Intelligencer*, 18 April 1817; *Stamford Mercury*, 22 April 1817.



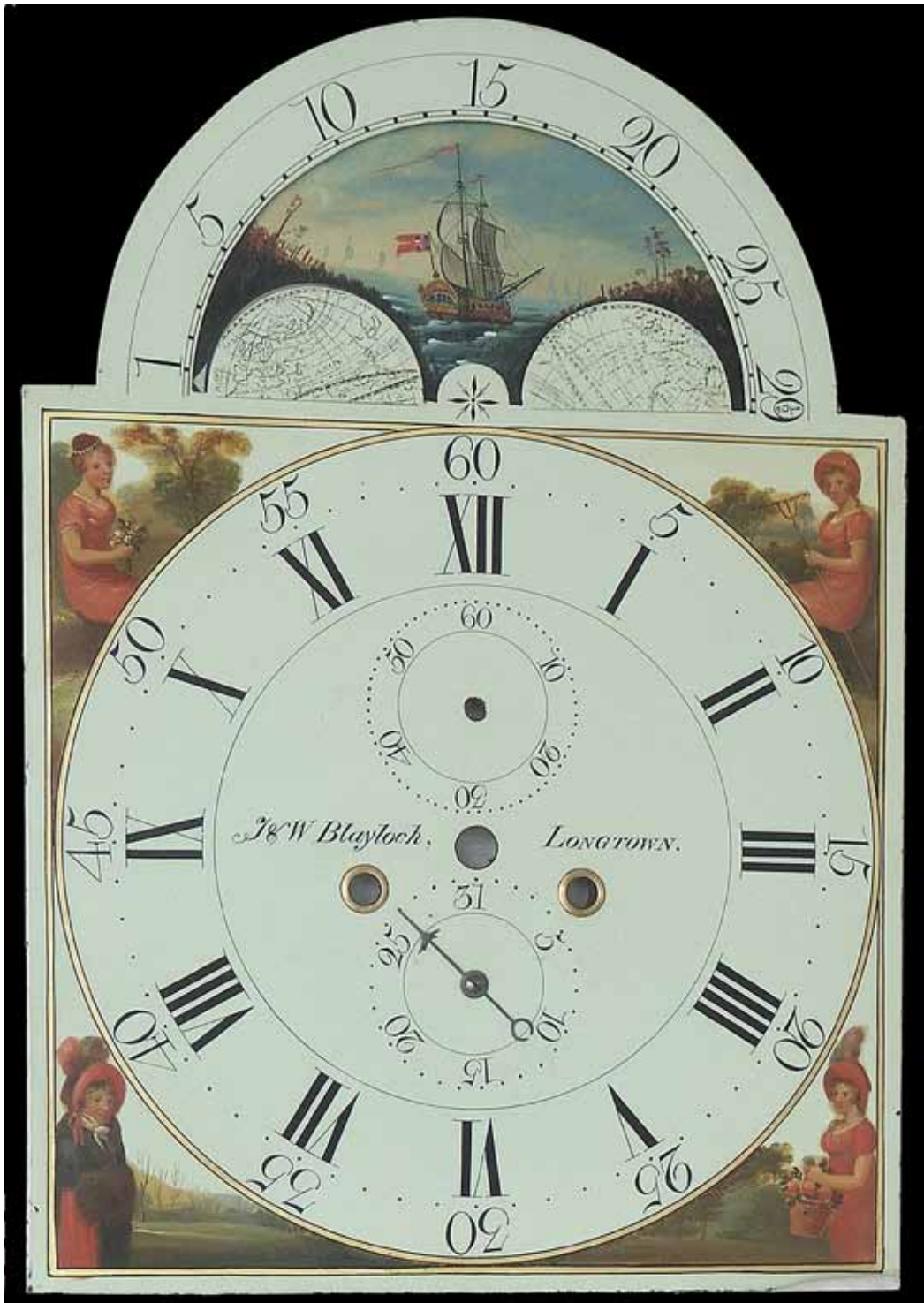


Fig. 8. Eight-day moon dial made about 1810 by Whitaker & Shreeve, Halifax and sold by Beilby & Hawthorn of Newcastle-upon-Tyne to J. & W. Blaylock of Longtown, near Carlisle. Halifax dials often have a gilt band with black edges round the chapter ring and the square part of the dial, running straight across beneath the distinctive half maps. The corners are painted with women in red dresses and large red hats, typical of Whitaker dials. (John Blaylock).



Figs 9-10. Special dial made by Whitaker & Shreeve and sold by Beilby & Hawthorn, signed for the unrecorded P. H. Bell, Gateshead.

he only managed to sign with a cross as his mark. Everything was left to his widow and after her death equally to his four children, but it was not proved until fifteen months later, rather than the usual couple of weeks or so. The reason for the delay is not known. The estate was estimated as not exceeding £400; even if the results of an inquest had been awaited this should have taken place shortly after the event.

Despite the official dissolution of the partnership Whitaker & Shreeve continued to be included in directories for many years afterwards. After William Shreeve's death the firm was probably continued jointly by Henry Whitaker and Leah Shreeve until Henry's death in 1823 and thereafter by Leah. Perhaps the tragic events in April 1817 changed attitudes and she formed a partnership with Henry, reinstating the recently dissolved partnership's name. This would be entirely in keeping with the wishes of William Whitaker for his family to continue the business, now being run by his brother and his daughter.

Whitaker & Shreeve supplied longcase clock dials to clockmakers throughout northern England, especially to Newcastle-upon-Tyne, where they formed a special relationship with Beilby & Hawthorn, the major suppliers of clock

revealed a good deal of information about the business that is lacking: the size of the workshop and the type of equipment such as drying stoves, the number of employees, whether he was working alone or whether others were present.

William Shreeve survived just long enough for a basic will to be hastily drawn up, which



Fig. 11. Whitaker & Shreeve dial sold by James Hawthorn about 1820–5. Signed for Ralph Weston, Wolsingham, County Durham. The replaced hands are of an earlier style. (Ian Beilby)

parts in the north east. The evidence for this trading link comes from the names of both firms being recorded on falseplates, which provide a unique source of information. On a few special dials this information is also included on the front of the dial. Ralph Beilby set up as an engraver in 1765. He was regarded as one of the finest engravers of silver in England and also engraved brass clock dials. He retired from engraving in 1797 to devote himself to making watch glasses. In 1801 he formed a partnership with his brother-in-law James Hawthorn, brass founder and clock-movement maker, as suppliers of clock and watch parts and as a 'Lancashire Tool Warehouse'. After Ralph Beilby died in 1817 the business was continued by Hawthorn until his death in 1831.<sup>21</sup>

The moon dial in Fig. 8 has many characteristic features found on Whitaker dials from the early nineteenth century: young women wearing red dresses or coats and red hats, a gilt band round the chapter ring and round the square part of the dial and beneath the typical



Fig. 12. The WHITAKER & SHREEVE HALIFAX/HAWTHORN NEWCASTLE falseplate used from 1817 to 1831. (Ian Beilby)

moon maps, here being half maps and with the latitude numbers cropped off. The western hemisphere has been placed on the right in error. These women in fashionable red or pink dresses continued to be painted into the 1830s and are likely to have been a speciality of Leah Shreeve.

The dial shown in Figs 9–10, made about 1810–17 by Whitaker & Shreeve and sold by Beilby & Hawthorn, is titled 'VIEW of a Coal ENGINE on the RIVER TYNE, with a PIT at work.'. It depicts a small-scale colliery with a steam winding engine, a horse whim (also for winding), a capstan and horses pulling coal waggons, with Newcastle in the background. While this appears to be technically accurate it cannot be identified with any actual colliery. Since William Shreeve was 'the chief embellisher' at this period it is likely to have been his work, based on published prints and his own observations of collieries in Yorkshire.

A dial made in the period from 1817 to 1831, when James Hawthorn was the Newcastle factor for Whitaker & Shreeve dials is shown in Figs 11–12. This example dates from the 1820s. The arch shows a boy in a red jacket setting a box trap to catch linnets and other songbirds, which

21. Keith Bates, *Clockmakers of Northumberland and Durham* (Rothbury, 1980), pp. 187, 222–3.





Fig. 13. A twelve o'clock moon dial made for Richard Martlew of Ormskirk in the 1820s. (M. F. Tennant)

were sold at local markets to earn pocket money.

The square dial with a so-called 'twelve o'clock moon' was popular in the north of England as it enabled a moon phase to be included on a clock that could fit in a low-ceilinged house. The typical example in Fig. 13 also includes a transfer of 'Whitaker & Shreeve, Dial Makers, Halifax' in the corner and 'W&S' between the hemisphere maps (Fig. 14). The colliery scene (Fig. 10) has 'Sold only by BEILBY & HAWTHORN NEWCASTLE' round the top of the arch, both examples making it clear who was the actual maker and who was the factor.

The Halifax dial manufacturer is included in various trade directories, without any specific mention of the owner, until in 1830 the classified section for painters lists 'Whitaker & Shreeve (and japanners), 2 Aked's Road', while the alphabetical list of proprietors includes 'Shreeve, Leah, painter, &c., h [= house] 2 Aked's Road'.<sup>22</sup> This confirms her continued connection with the business and she had probably lived at this address since her marriage, while her father and uncle appear to have lived in nearby Sowerby Bridge.



Fig. 14. Detail of the name 'Whitaker & Shreeve, Dial Makers, Halifax' and the initials 'W&S'. (M. F. Tennant)

The death of Leah Shreeve in March 1834 aged 57<sup>23</sup> marked the end of the involvement of the Whitakers and Shreeves in making clock dials in Halifax. Her brother John had moved to Leeds by 1810 (see below) where he made dials, while others, possibly former employees, continued the trade in Halifax. Within three months of her death, sale notices appeared in both Birmingham and Leeds newspapers:

To be disposed of, and entered upon immediately, an old established Business in the HOUSE and ORNAMENTAL PAINTING and CLOCK-DIAL MANUFACTURING, consisting of Good-will, Stock in Trade, and Fixtures.

The concern has been established upwards of forty years, and has a good connection attached to it; and affords advantageous prospects for any respectable and industrious man possessed of a small capital.

Apply by letter (post paid) to A. B. at the Post Office, Halifax.<sup>24</sup>

While no name or address is given, it is clearly the former Whitaker & Shreeve business that is being sold, and though the sale included the goodwill, stock and fixtures the property is not specifically mentioned. If 'upwards of forty years' can be relied on, it confirms that the firm started in the 1790s.

22. William White, *Directory of Leeds and the Clothing District*, 1830.

23. Square Congregational Chapel, gravestone transcripts. See also West Yorkshire Archive Services website.

24. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette*, 16 June 1834; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 7 June 1834.

### William Whitaker Shreeve (b1813–?)

None of Leah Shreeve's three daughters are known to have been clock-dial painters, but her only son William Whitaker Shreeve, who was only four when his father died, became a painter<sup>25</sup>(though no examples of his work are known to have survived) and he inherited artistic skills from both sides of the family. He is likely to have assisted his mother in painting clock dials, but he did not continue in the dial trade. Instead, no doubt influenced by his non-conformist upbringing, he travelled the world to gather information for anti-slavery reformers and what little is known about this remarkable young man is worth recording.

In 1847, as 'late acting writer to her Britannic Majesty's commission under the slave trade suppression treatises', he was the author of *Sierra Leone The Principal British Colony on the Western Coast of Africa*.<sup>26</sup> This is a very comprehensive survey of the colony, which had been set up as a safe haven for freed slaves. It details the people, religion, customs, living conditions, trade, climate and many more topics — even the price of medicines. The earliest mention of his six-month visit is December 1842, when he would have been 29 years old. The text reveals that he had visited America in 1835 and 1836 (aged 22/23). He left Sierra Leone in poor health and returned home by the roundabout route of New Orleans and Florida. He was very scathing of New Orleans, probably after seeing for himself the conditions on the cotton plantations. He reached England having 'at last recovered from the effects of a long residence in an African climate'.

In May 1849, after the publication of his book, he was living in Liverpool where he registered as a merchant seaman.<sup>27</sup> His seaman's ticket states that he was a painter with a fair complexion, 6ft 3½in [192 cm] tall with brown hair and eyes and a cut on his nose. It also reveals that he had first gone to sea, also as a painter, in 1836, which is likely to have been the occasion of his first visits to America. This

may have been an earlier mission to make an official illustrated record of conditions on slave plantations, but this is not confirmed. In May 1852 he was a passenger on the ship *Gold Seeker* leaving Victoria, Australia, bound for Launceston in Tasmania.<sup>28</sup> It is reasonable to suppose that this visit was to report on and/or illustrate the conditions of convicts in the penal colony. Nothing further has been discovered about William Whitaker Shreeve,<sup>29</sup> who left the confined world of clock dials to explore the wider world and report on social injustices in Britain's colonies.

### John (b1777–d1828) and Sarah Whitaker (d1852), Leeds

John Whitaker was the eldest son of William Whitaker, baptised at Sowerby Bridge on 20 July 1777. His marriage to Sarah has not been traced and no children can be positively identified. Under the terms of his father's will John and his younger brothers were encouraged to work with their uncle, Henry Whitaker, in the family firm in Halifax. The sequence of events is not known, but it is reasonable to suppose that initially clock dials continued to be made under the William Whitaker brand name until Henry formed a partnership with William Shreeve. John probably thought that he was being usurped by Shreeve, so he decided to move to Leeds in or before 1810 and set up in business there in direct competition with his family in Halifax. If this scenario is correct it would help date the formation of Whitaker & Shreeve to some time between 1806 and 1810. The following advertisement appeared in August 1810:

#### WANTED

In the China-Clock-Face Business  
AN ORNAMENTAL and LANDSCAPE  
PAINTER, who understands the Japanning  
Business perfectly.

Apply to John Whitaker, Kirkgate, Leeds.

J. W. wishes to inform the Trade, that he makes Clock and Watch Dials on the most

25. He is stated to be a painter on his seaman's ticket in 1836 and 1849.

26. Available to download online and modern reprints are available. There was a lengthy review of the book in *The Daily News* [London], 30 December 1847.

27. National Archives, British Merchant Seamen 1835–57, BT1213/233.

28. Victoria, Australia, Outward Passenger Index, 1852–1915, available online.

29. Various anti-slavery museums and organisations have been contacted, as well as the National Library of Australia and a researcher in Sierra Leone, none of whom have been able to provide any additional information.

reasonable Terms, and executes Orders to any Part of the Kingdom.<sup>30</sup>

By 1817 he had moved to Trinity Lane, where he was a 'house & sign painter, japanner and clock dial maker',<sup>31</sup> and six years later, in August 1823, he moved again and advertised for an apprentice:

John Whitaker, Painter and Clock Dial Manufacturer, [has] moved from Trinity Lane to New Bond Street, opposite the Infirmary.

Wanted a respectable Youth as an apprentice — A small Premium will be required.<sup>32</sup>

Within eight months he was advertising again, this time for two apprentices, which indicates that either he had been unsuccessful in recruiting one earlier or that his business was prospering and expanding.<sup>33</sup>

By the time of his death in 1828 he had moved yet again:

On Tuesday week [26 February], suddenly, while on a journey at Manchester, Mr. John Whitaker, of Infirmary-street, in this town, painter and clock face enameller.<sup>34</sup>

His widow Sarah continued the business, being listed in directories as a painter and clock-dial enameller at Russell Street in 1828–9, Infirmary Street in 1830, but again at Russell Street, Park Row, in 1834.<sup>35</sup> This is her last record in trade directories and she probably retired from making clock dials shortly afterwards. She died in 1852: 'On Monday last [31 May], aged 76, Sarah, relict of the late Mr. J Whitaker, clock-dial enameller,

Infirmary Street'.<sup>36</sup> The death notice probably refers to the address of her late husband, while one of these addresses (possibly Russell Street) may have been her residence.

Although they were in business in Leeds for at least twenty-four years, there are no painted clock dials that can be attributed to John or Sarah Whitaker. While they probably made many of the painted dials that were fitted to Leeds clocks, it is unwise to attribute them to any particular dialmaker as there were a few others producing dials in the town, and no doubt some dials came from Whitaker & Shreeve in Halifax.

### Other Halifax clock-dial manufacturers

After the death of Leah Shreeve in 1834 and the cessation of the Whitaker & Shreeve dial-making business, other clock-dial painters, such as John Denniston, Thomas Clarkson and George Mitchell, are recorded as working in Halifax. No clock dials are known with falseplates bearing the names of any of these later dial painters, but some can be dated to this later period on stylistic grounds or by the subject matter (Figs 15–16).

In 1834 John Denniston was a 'painter, enameller, japanner and maker of clock dials at 1 Square',<sup>37</sup> just north of the Piece Hall in the centre of Halifax. The date suggests that he may have been a former employee of Whitaker & Shreeve. In May 1836 he advertised for a worker to paint clock dials:

To HOUSE, SIGN and FURNITURE  
PAINTERS

— WANTED a good steady Workman. who has been accustomed to the Ornamental and Clock Dial Departments. Testimonials

30. *Leeds Mercury*, 18 August 1810.

31. Edward Baines, *Leeds Directory*, 1817.

32. *Leeds Mercury*, 2 August 1823; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 14 August 1823.

33. *Leeds Mercury*, 24 April, 1 May 1824; *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 May, 13 May 1824.

34. *Leeds Intelligencer*, 6 March 1823. He may be the John Whitaker buried in the Collegiate Church, Manchester, on 12 March 1828.

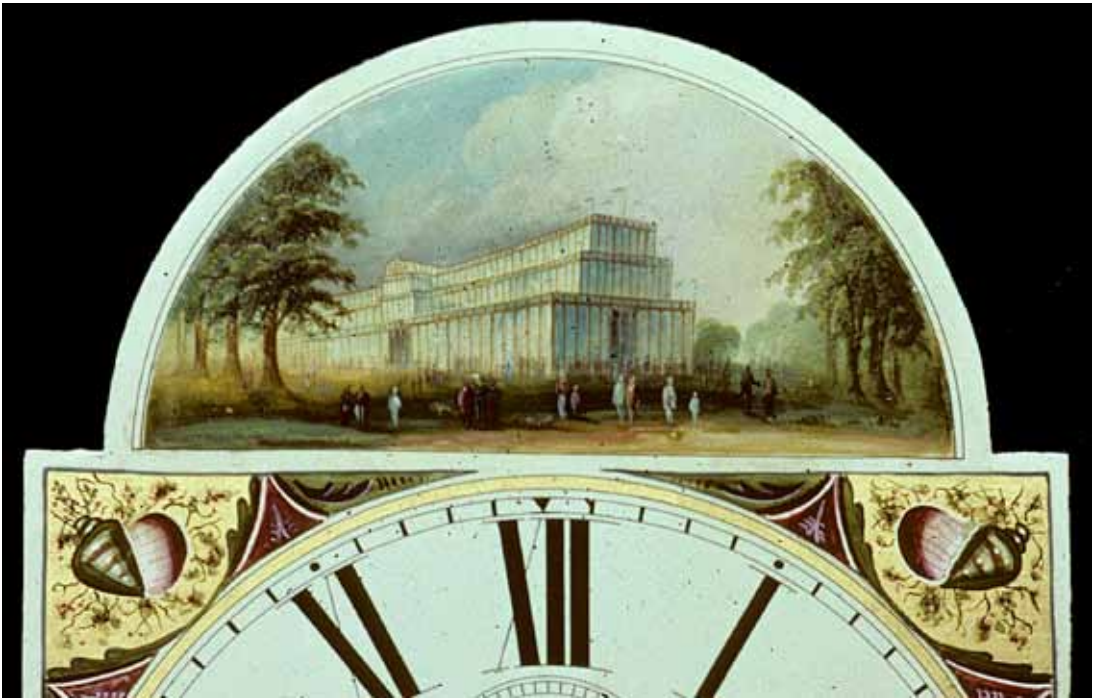
35. *Pigot's National Directory*, 1828–9; White, *Directory of Leeds*, 1830; Edward Baines, *Directory of Leeds*, 1834.

36. *Leeds Intelligencer*, 5 June 1852.

37. *Pigot's Directory of Yorkshire*, 1834.

38. *Leeds Mercury*, 7 May 1836.





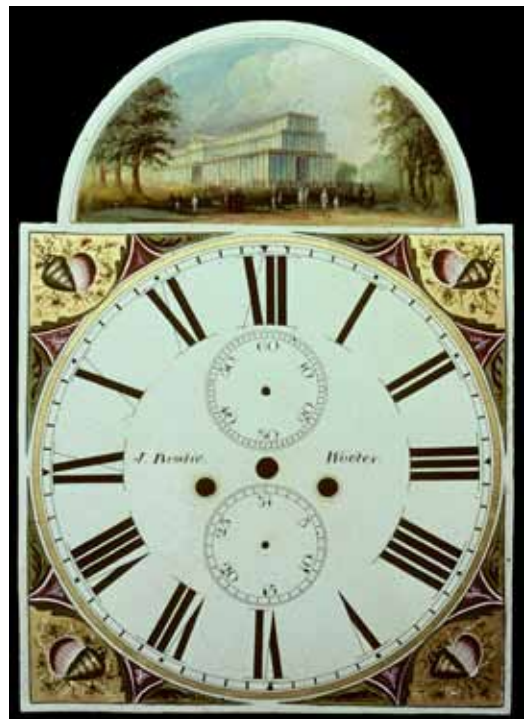
Figs 15-16. Halifax-style dial with the Crystal Palace of 1851 in the arch, copied from one of the many prints made at that time. Corners are shells on real gold leaf with some red and green decoration. Made for John Brodie of Wooler, County Durham. Perhaps made by Thomas Clarkson. (M. F. Tennant)

of Character will be required. Apply by Letter, Post Paid, to John Denniston, Halifax.<sup>38</sup>

Then in October 1837 it was announced that:

the Partnership between John Denniston and Samuel Denniston as Painters and Clock Dial Enamellers, at Halifax ... under the firm of J. and S. Denniston, was dissolved on the 31st day of December last, by mutual consent.<sup>39</sup>

All debts and receipts were to be dealt with by John Denniston. As the break-up of the partnership took place nine months before the announcement, it had probably been an informal agreement until they were advised that it should be on a more official basis.



Nothing more is heard of this firm of clock-dial makers.

39. *London Gazette*, 6 October 1837.

40. William White, *Directory of Leeds and the Clothing District*, 1830, 1847, 1854, 1858.

The list of painters in trade directories from 1832 to 1854 includes Thomas Clarkson of Kings Cross Street,<sup>40</sup> not far from Aked Street, the earliest one adding ‘& portrait’ to his entry, while in 1834 he was a portrait and miniature painter.<sup>41</sup> He may also have been an ex-employee of Whitaker & Shreeve. By 1866 he is replaced by James Clarkson at the same address, after which date they disappear from the records. However, an announcement was made in September 1848 that a partnership between Thomas Clarkson and George Mitchell, ‘Painters and Clock Dial Manufacturers’, was dissolved, with the debts being paid by George Mitchell of 17 Hopwood Lane, Halifax.<sup>42</sup> This appears to have been a short-lived venture and while no clock dials are known that can be attributed to this partnership, Thomas Clarkson is the most likely candidate for the Halifax-style dial in Figs 15–16, which must date to shortly after 1851. Since it was made for a clockmaker in County Durham, Clarkson may have continued Whitaker & Shreeves’s connection with a clock-materials factor in north-east England.

### Dials, falseplates and hemisphere maps

Numerous examples of Halifax dials have been illustrated in *The Art of the Painted Clock Dial*,<sup>43</sup> so only a few representative examples are included here. The Whitaker family made arched dials, including those with rolling moons, and square dials, often with a lunar display above the centre (‘twelve o’clock moon’), which were popular in the north of England but rarely found in the Midlands or southern England. No round, oval or automaton dials by them are known.

The earliest Whitaker dials look similar to Birmingham dials of the late eighteenth century, but have an unsigned falseplate and can be identified by the characteristic hemisphere maps used only by the Whitaker firm (see below). It could be argued that William Whitaker was buying in Birmingham dials and adding his own maps and a plain falseplate,

but this seems unlikely. The dial in Fig. 2 with Whitaker maps has strawberries painted in the top corners and surrounded by gilt gesso, neither of which is typical of Halifax work. This dial has a disc calendar viewed through a curved aperture, which was usual on Birmingham dials, but is only occasionally found on Halifax dials. A similar dial seen by the author, also with large birds in the centre, has floral corners and a pointer calendar, as normally found on later Halifax dials, though even then there is the inevitable exception.<sup>44</sup> These early features may indicate the work of William Shreeve shortly after his move from Birmingham. The dial in Fig 2 has a unsigned falseplate, which appears to be made of a malleable cast iron as clearance gaps have been sawn and SP155 stamped with individual punches (Fig. 3). These also appear on the moon and calendar discs, while a dial with the same maps and stamped SP19 has been reported.<sup>45</sup>

Whitaker & Shreeve also produced special dials, such as that shown in Figs 9–10; another dial with an almost identical scene in the arch is known.<sup>46</sup>

The eight known different styles of falseplate are listed below. No Halifax dials are known with names stamped on calendar or moon discs, as commonly found on Birmingham painted dials.

1. W. W., HALIFAX
2. WILL<sup>M</sup> WHITAKER, HALIFAX
3. WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX
4. BEILBY & HAWTHORN, N. CASTLE/  
W. W., HALIFAX
5. WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/  
BEILBY & HAWTHORN, N. CASTLE
6. WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/  
[BEILBY & HAWTHORN?], N. CASTLE
7. WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/  
HAWTHORN, NEWCASTLE
8. WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/  
HAWTHORN NEWCASTLE

41. *Pigot’s Directory of Yorkshire*, 1834.

42. *London Gazette*, 29 September 1848.

43. Tennant, *The Painted Clock Dial*, pp. 293–310.

44. Tennant, *The Painted Clock Dial*, p. 305, Fig 12/57.

45. Information from M. F. Tennant.

46. Brian Loomes, ‘A coal-miner’s clock?’, *Clocks*, August 1997, 11–12.

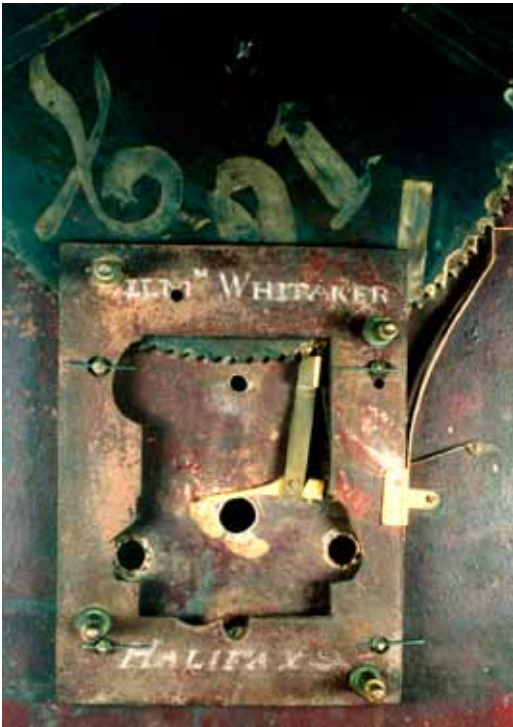


Fig. 17. Falseplate used by the Whitaker dial-making firm about 1800–10. Note the numbers painted on the moon disc.

The firm of William Whitaker, both when run by William before 1800 and then under Henry until about 1810, used two different falseplates, the one having only initials presumably being the earliest and that with his name being later (Fig. 17). The Whitaker & Shreeve falseplate was used from about 1810 to 1834 (Fig. 18). Dials marketed and sold in Newcastle had Beilby & Hawthorn's name added and date from some time after about 1810 to 1817, when Ralph Beilby died. A few falseplates have the factor's details obliterated by filling the incised words in the pattern with putty or something similar. The placename is recognisable and the rest of it is likely to have been Beilby & Hawthorne. This falseplate might have been made just after the death of Ralph Beilby and before new patterns had been made bearing only the name of Hawthorn, or more likely the iron founder had mislaid a Whitaker & Shreeve pattern and used a temporarily modified one with the joint names instead. After the death of Ralph Beilby, James Hawthorn traded under his own name until 1831 and used two designs of falseplate,



Fig. 18. Falseplate used by Whitaker & Shreeve about 1810–34. (M. F. Tennant)

differing only in the style of the lettering (Fig. 12). Merchants and factors in Birmingham who sold dials made by others used falseplates bearing their own names alone to falsely imply that they were the actual makers, while the Halifax dials include the names of both the manufacturer and the factor. Halifax dials often also have large letters and numbers painted in white on the rear of the dial, moon disc or falseplate, the significance of which is not known. It should be noted that W&S stamped on the rear of some dials is Wilkes & Son of Birmingham, not Whitaker & Shreeve as sometimes stated.

Longcase dials with a lunar display in the arch have two moon faces that appear and disappear behind semi-circular humps that usually include hemisphere maps of the world. These maps were applied by a transfer printing process developed in the pottery industry using an ink suitable for non-porous surfaces. This involved printing the maps onto thin paper using engraved copper plates, then transferring the image onto the dial. Since these transfers had to be applied while the ink was still wet, they had to be made on the spot just before application. Each dialmaker had his own individual designs of maps so they provide an almost unambiguous



Figs 19–20. The characteristic maps with latitude numbers used by the Whitaker dialmakers. The western hemisphere has only the continents and oceans named, while the eastern hemisphere has a long serpentine Mediterranean, large Madagascar and Japan, but no British Isles. These are fuller versions of those often found, which can be cut down to form half-maps.

means of identifying the dialmaker.<sup>47</sup> Each dial usually has a map of the western hemisphere on the left showing the Americas, with Europe and Asia on the right, though they are occasionally transposed in error (Fig. 8). It is essential, of course, that only original maps are considered when using them as a diagnostic feature, not modern replacements.

Fortunately, the maps used by William Whitaker and Whitaker & Shreeve on arched dials are very distinctive (Figs 19–20) and readily distinguishable from any of those used by Birmingham dialmakers. They are among the very few dialmakers whose maps include outside latitude numbers. Only North America, South America and the South Sea are named on the western hemisphere, while the eastern hemisphere has a few more places named. Some of the land masses and seas have very distinctive shapes, in particular the Mediterranean is very long and serpentine, Madagascar and Japan are very large, while the British Isles are absent. William Whitaker used these maps on his earliest dials (Fig. 2)

and the same printing plates continued to be employed throughout the existence of the business. Only one size of map was used, though the latitude numbers might be trimmed off to suit a smaller dial (Figs 4 and 8) — this was probably the primary reason for their inclusion — and they were often cut down to make a half map (Figs 4 and 8) or can appear as a fuller version (Fig. 2). They appear to survive better than the maps on Birmingham dials. Smaller maps were used on square dials with a twelve o'clock moon (Fig. 14).

### Acknowledgements

The author would like to acknowledge the encouragement of the late Frances Tennant, who identified the characteristic features of Halifax-made dials and included numerous examples in her book *The Art of the Painted Clock Dial* (2009). Thanks are due to those credited in the captions for the use of illustrations; the other dial images are by the author. The anonymous reviewer made several useful comments, which have been included in the final text.

47. John Robey, *The Longcase Clock Reference Book* (Mayfield Books, 2nd edition 2013), vol. 2, pp. 685–700.