

# HALIFAX DI

## Part 3: The

This final part of the story of making painted longcase clock dials looks at what happened to John Whitaker after he left Halifax, and the attempts by others to continue the trade in the town after the demise of Whitaker & Shreeve. But before that we need to look at the various names that appear on the falseplates of Halifax dials, and also consider the very readily identifiable hemisphere maps used on moon dials by William Whitaker and his successors.

Numerous examples of Halifax dials are illustrated in *THE ART OF THE PAINTED CLOCK DIAL* by Frances Tennant, so only a few representative examples have been included in this series of articles.

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by **John Robey, UK**

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The Whitaker family made arched dials, including those with rolling moons, and square dials, often with a lunar display above the centre ('12 o'clock moon'), which were popular in northern England but rarely found in the Midlands or southern England. No round, oval or automaton dials by them are known.

Though the earliest Whitaker dials look similar to Birmingham dials of the late eighteenth century and have unsigned falseplates, they can be identified by the characteristic hemisphere maps used only by the Whitaker firm.

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



# ALMAKERS

## final years

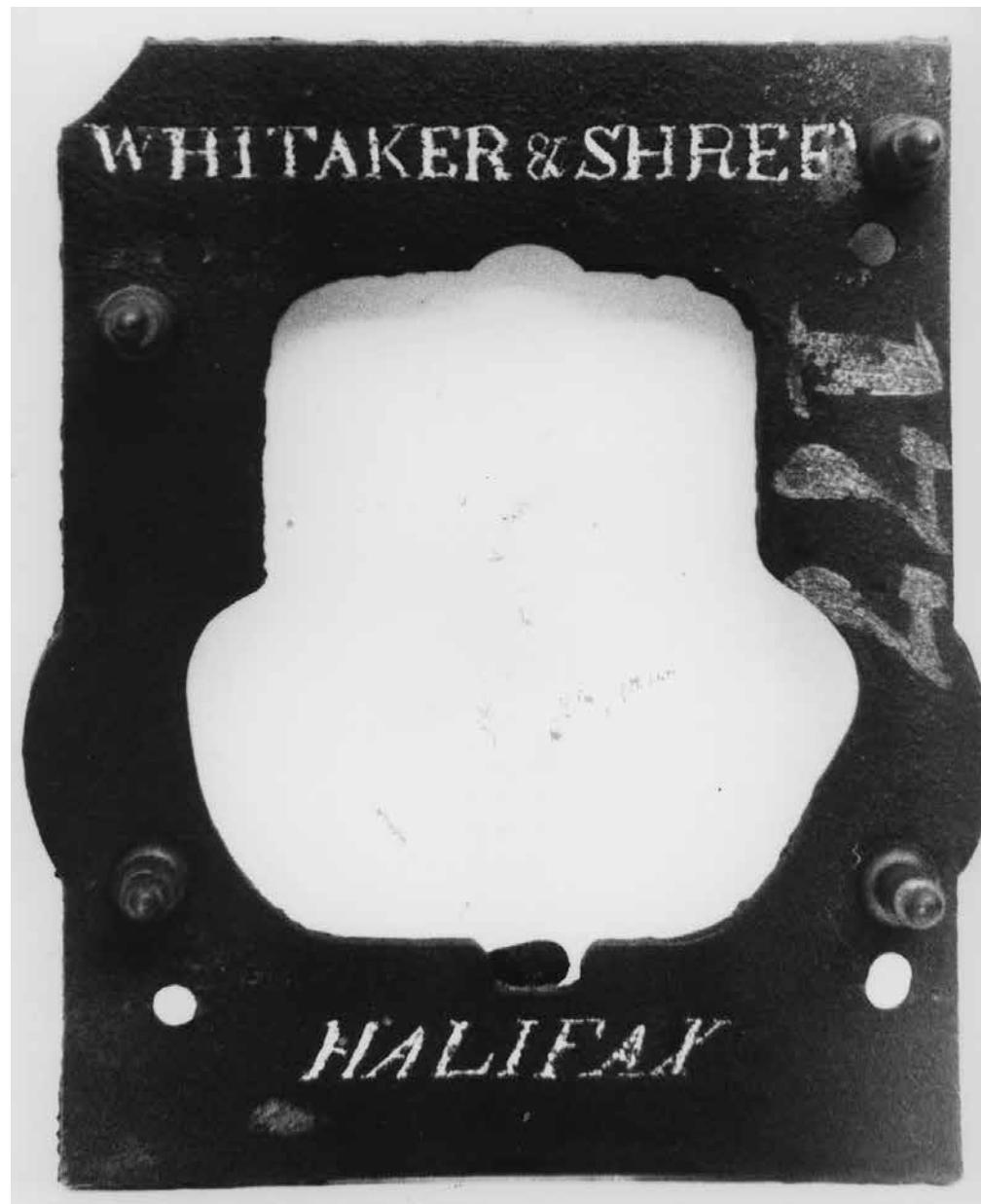


Figure 15 (left). Falseplate used by the Whitaker dialmaking firm about 1800 to 1810. Note the numbers painted on the moon disc. Photograph by John Robey.

Figure 16 (above). Falseplate used by Whitaker & Shreeve about 1810-34. Photograph by M F Tennant.

found on Birmingham painted dials.

- W. W., HALIFAX
- WILL<sup>M</sup> WHITAKER, HALIFAX
- WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX
- BEILBY & HAWTHORN, N. CASTLE/ W. W., HALIFAX
- WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/ BEILBY & HAWTHORN, N. CASTLE
- WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/ [BEILBY & HAWTHORN?], N. CASTLE
- WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/ HAWTHORN, NEWCASTLE
- WHITAKER & SHREEVE, HALIFAX/ HAWTHORN NEWCASTLE

The firm of William Whitaker, both when run by William before 1800 and then under Henry until about 1810, used two different

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falseplates, the one having only initials presumably being the earliest and that with his full name being later, **figure 15**. The Whitaker & Shreeve falseplates were used from about 1810 to 1834, **figure 16**. Dials marketed and sold in Newcastle had Beilby & Hawthorne's name added and date from some time after about 1810 until 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. Alternatively and 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, differing only in the style of the lettering, **figure 12**. 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.

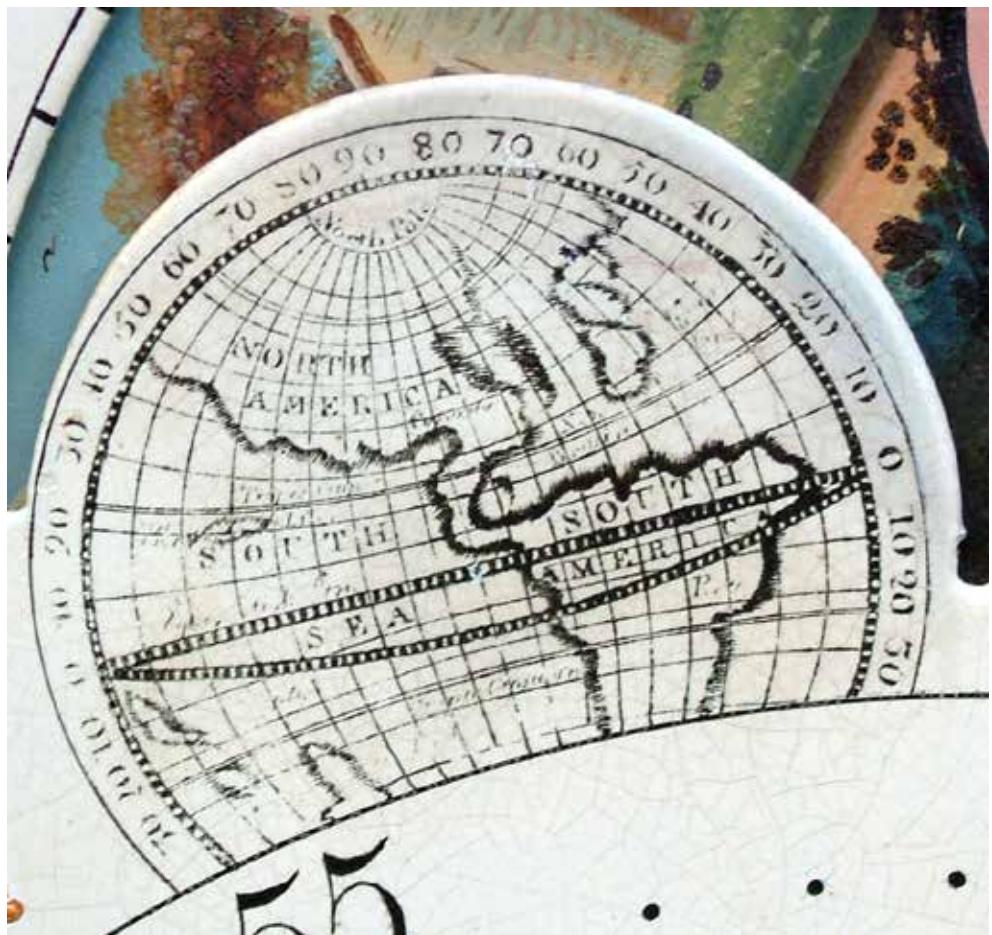
Longcase dials with a lunar display in the arch have two moon faces that appear and disappear behind semicircular humps that usually include hemisphere maps of the world. These maps were applied by a transfer printing process developed in the pottery industry using an ink suitable for non-porous surfaces. This involved printing the maps on to thin paper using engraved copper plates, then transferring the image on to 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 means of identifying the dialmaker. 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. 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, **figures 17 and 18**, and readily recognisable from those used by any of the Birmingham dialmakers. They are among the very few maps that include latitude numbers round the outside. 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 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



*Figures 17 and 18. 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. Photographs by John Robey.*

to suit a smaller dial. This was probably the primary reason for their inclusion, and they were often cut down to make a half map or can appear as a fuller version. They seem to survive better than the maps on Birmingham dials. Smaller maps were used on square dials with a 12 o'clock moon.

As recounted previously, John Whitaker was the eldest son of William Whitaker, baptised at Sowerby Bridge on 20<sup>th</sup> 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.

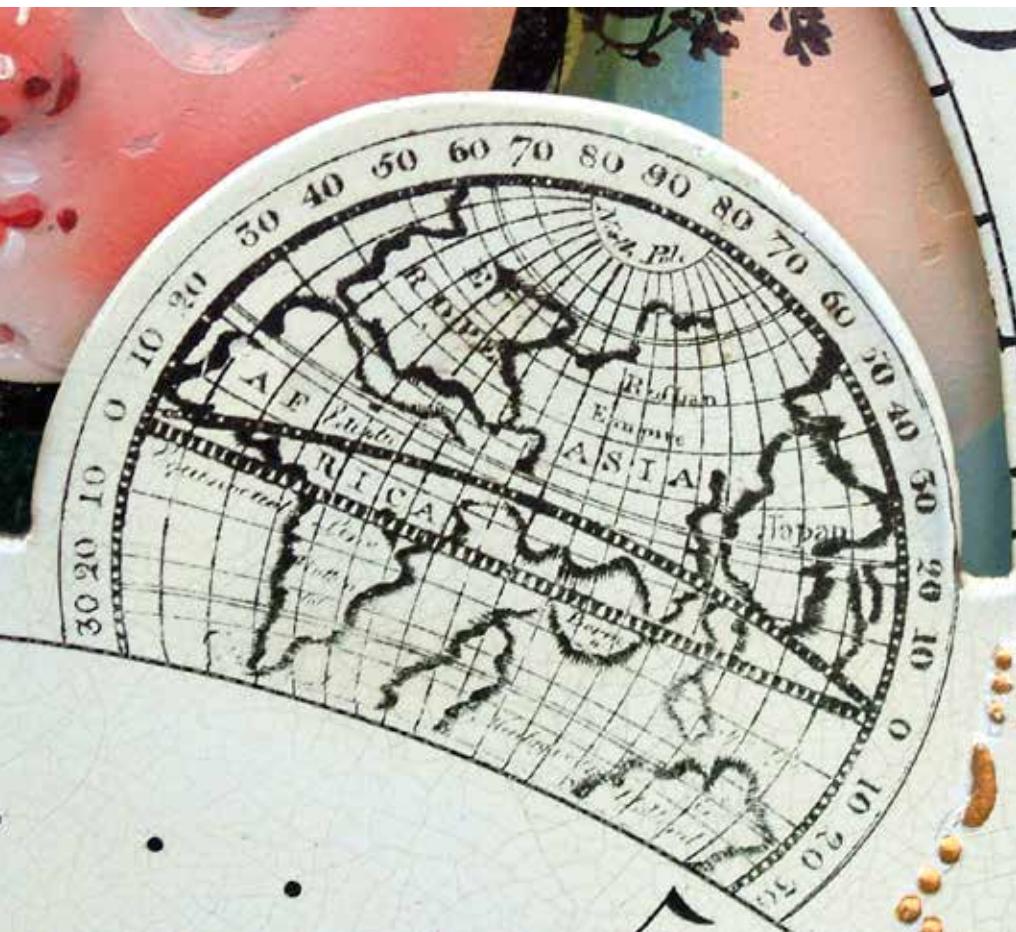
The sequence of events is not known, but it is reasonable to suppose that initially clock dials continued to be made under the William Whitaker brand name until Henry formed a partnership with William Shreeve who had married Leah Whitaker. John probably thought that he was being usurped by his brother-in-law, 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 the *LEEDS MERCURY* 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  
reasonable Terms, and executes Orders to  
any Part of the Kingdom.*

By 1817 he had moved to Trinity Lane, where the *LEEDS DIRECTORY* lists him as a 'house & sign painter, japanner and clock dial maker', 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.*

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.

By the time the *LEEDS INTELLIGENCER* reported 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.*

He may be the John Whitaker buried in the Collegiate Church, Manchester, on 12<sup>th</sup> March 1828, who probably died while on business there.

His widow Sarah continued the business, being listed in *PIGOT'S NATIONAL DIRECTORY*, as a painter and clock-dial enameller at Russell Street in 1828-29, then in White's *DIRECTORY OF LEEDS*

# The manufacture of painted dials in Halifax is a complex and interesting story.

at Infirmary Street in 1830, but again at Russell Street, Park Row, in 1834. 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<sup>st</sup> May], aged 76, Sarah, relict of the late Mr. J Whitaker, clock-dial enameller, Infirmary Street'. 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.

Despite being in business in Leeds for at least 24 years, there are no painted clock dials that can be attributed to either 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 not only were there a few others producing dials in the town but no doubt some dials came from Whitaker & Shreeve in Halifax.

What was happening back in Halifax after the death of Leah Shreeve in 1834? A number of other clock-dial painters are recorded as working in the town, but no clock dials are known with falseplates bearing the names of any of these later dial painters, though some can be dated to this later period on stylistic grounds or by the subject matter, **figures 15 and 16**.

In 1834 John Denniston was listed in *PIGOT'S DIRECTORY OF YORKSHIRE* as a 'painter, enameller, japanner and maker of clock dials at 1 Square', 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 in the *LEEDS MERCURY* 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 of Character will be required.  
Apply by Letter, Post Paid, to John  
Denniston, Halifax.*

Then in October 1837 the *LONDON GAZETTE* 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.*

All debts and receipts were to be dealt with by John Denniston. As the break-up of the partnership took place nine months before its actual 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 dialmakers.

The list of painters in *WHITES DIRECTORY OF LEEDS AND THE CLOTHING DISTRICT*, from 1832 to 1854, includes Thomas Clarkson of Kings Cross Street, not far from Aked Street, the earliest one adding '& portrait' to his entry, while in 1834 *PIGOT'S DIRECTORY* lists him as a portrait and miniature painter. He may also have been an ex-Whitaker & Shreeve employee. 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 the *LONDON GAZETTE*, 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.

This appears to be 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 **figures 19 and 20**, 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.

While the manufacture of painted dials for longcase clocks was not a major industry in Halifax, many high-quality dials were made there and the story of the Whitakers and the Shreeves is both more complex and interesting than once assumed.✉

*Figures 19 and 20. Halifax-style dial with the Crystal Palace of 1851 in the arch. 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. Photographs by M F Tennant.*

