

OSBORNE & WILSON

Osborne's M

by **John Robey**, UK



Figure 24. A dial with an Osborne falseplate, made for Thomas Griffis of Birmingham. Photograph by M F Tennant.

Figure 25. The hunting scene in the arch of the Griffis dial. Photograph by M F Tennant.



Figure 28. A dial made for William Ellis of Wrexham about 1790, with a landscape in an oval frame in the arch, gilt gesso on either side and flowers in the corners. Photograph by M F Tennant.

Before discussing the next phase of the Osborne and Wilson story, it is worth reiterating that while the Osborne family are recorded in the Sutton Coldfield parish registers, this is not the case after Ann Osborne took her family to Birmingham. Apart from the first announcement in the local newspaper that Thomas Osborne would be working independently, virtually the only records are

the firm's inclusion in trade directories with no family records or wills. The other records, of course, are on the numerous clock dials and falseplates that carrying the Osborne name.

The Osborne & Wilson partnership had developed the longcase painted dial and shown that it was a viable alternative to the traditional brass dial. But the joint venture only lasted for five years, when it was dissolved in September 1777, and in January 1778 Thomas Hadley Osborne announced that he 'intends to carry on the Manufactory of Clock Dials

N OF BIRMINGHAM

Manufactory

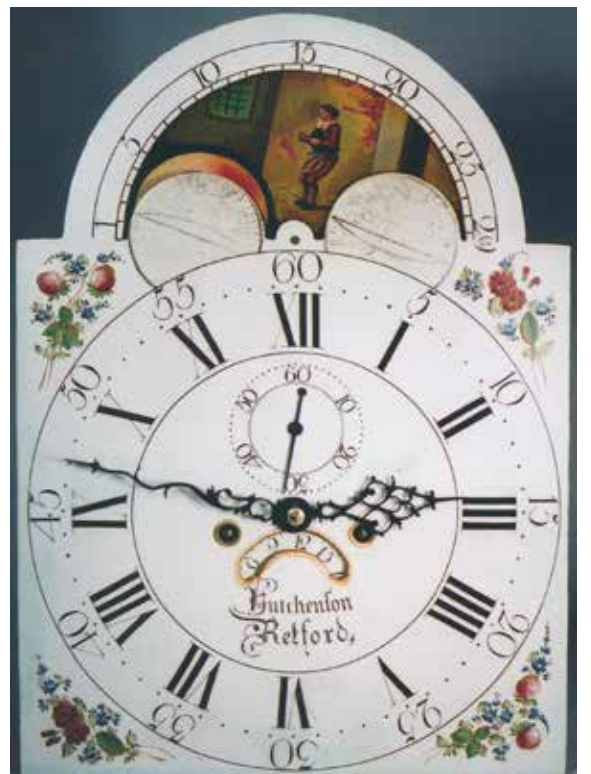
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Figure 26. Osborne dial made for James Robertson of Dundee about 1785, with a square date aperture. Gilt gesso in the arch and corners. Photograph by M F Tennant.

Figure 27. Birds painted in the centre, with flowers in the arch and corners, of an Osborne dial made for J Winstanley of Holywell, about 1785. Photograph by M F Tennant.

Figure 29. Moon dial made for Hutchinson of Retford, Nottinghamshire, with strawberries in the corners. Photograph by J Robey.



As usual' at 20 Cherry Orchard, which is more usually known as Cherry Street.

Events then seem to have overtaken Thomas Osborne as, despite this announcement, he was never listed in directories in his own right. He did not trade from Cherry Street for very long (if at all), for within two years the business was being run by Ann Osborne. Thomas probably died about this time, when he would have been only in his mid-20s. Though four Thomas Osbornes died in Birmingham in 1785, none have Hadley as a middle name, and the death of

the dialmaker remains undiscovered. He probably produced very few dials while trading under his own name. **Figures 24 to 25** show a very high quality Osborne dial that is likely to be from this period.

There is no evidence that Thomas Osborne ever married and Ann Osborne was almost certainly this mother, not his widow, as was once assumed. ⚙️

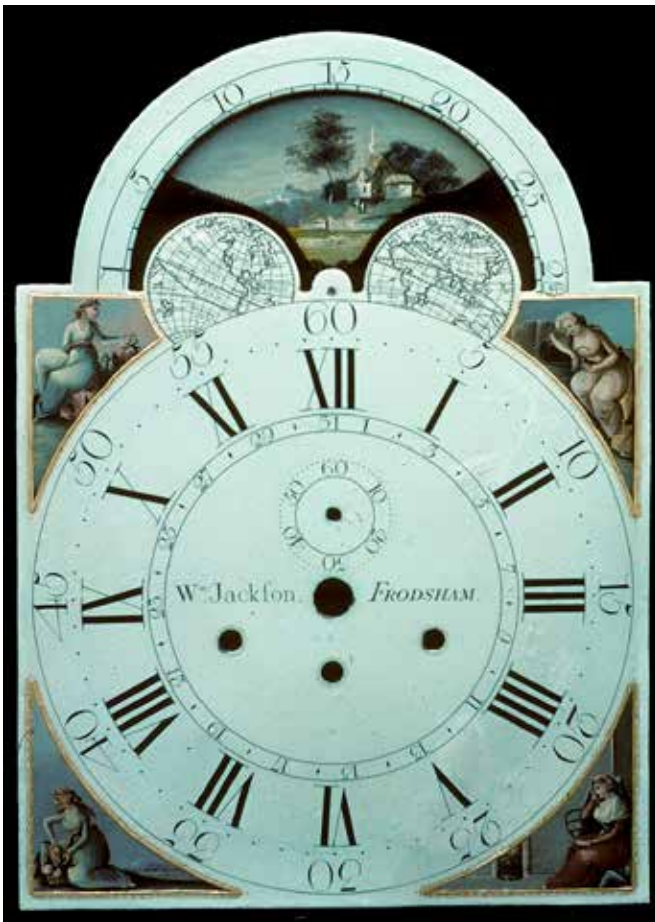
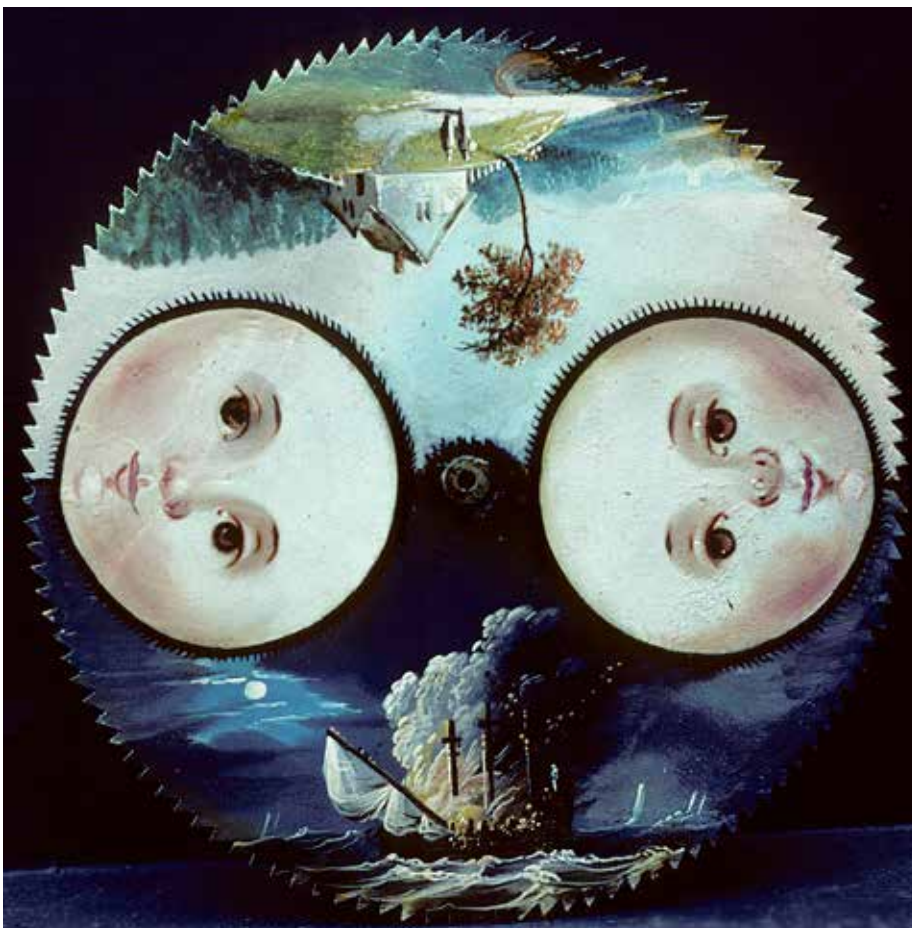


Figure 30. An Osborne arched moon dial made for William Jackson of Frodsham, about 1795, with Four Seasons corners. Photograph by MF Tennant.



Figure 31. An Osborne dial made about 1790-1800 for James Ashton, Tideswell, Derbyshire, with centre seconds and centre calendar. Gilt gesso decoration in the arch, women representing the Four Seasons in the corners, and the centre filled with a riverside scene. Photograph by J Robey.

Figure 34. Moon disc of the Wignall dial with a night scene of a ship on fire and the masts and yardarms forming three crosses. Photograph by MF Tennant.



The business was continued by Ann Osborne, briefly at Great Charles Street in 1779-80, before moving to 9 Whittall Street, St Mary's Square, in what is now known as the Gun Quarter of Birmingham. The premises would have been relatively newly built, and making clock dials continued there for the next 30 years. The firm is variously listed in directories as Ann Osborne & Co, Ann Osborne & Son, Ann & James Osborne and finally as just James Osborne.

James was aged about 25 in 1787, when Ann Osborne & Son first appears in directories. Whether Ann and James Osborne were also painters, like Thomas, or if they employed other artists, or if Ann's daughters also worked for the firm, is not known, but the large number of surviving dials suggests that there must have been a number of workers. They would have prepared the dial sheets by applying multiple coats of base paint, painted the decoration, applied the raised gilt gesso, while dial writers applied hour and minute numerals and other blackwork (now sometimes called the 'graphics'), and



Figure 32. An Osborne dial made for William Costen of Kirkham, Lancashire, about 1805, with all-Arabic graphics and Four Seasons that extend to the edges of the dial. The arch has the lunar date and high water, with a winter scene on the moon disc. Photograph by M F Tennant.

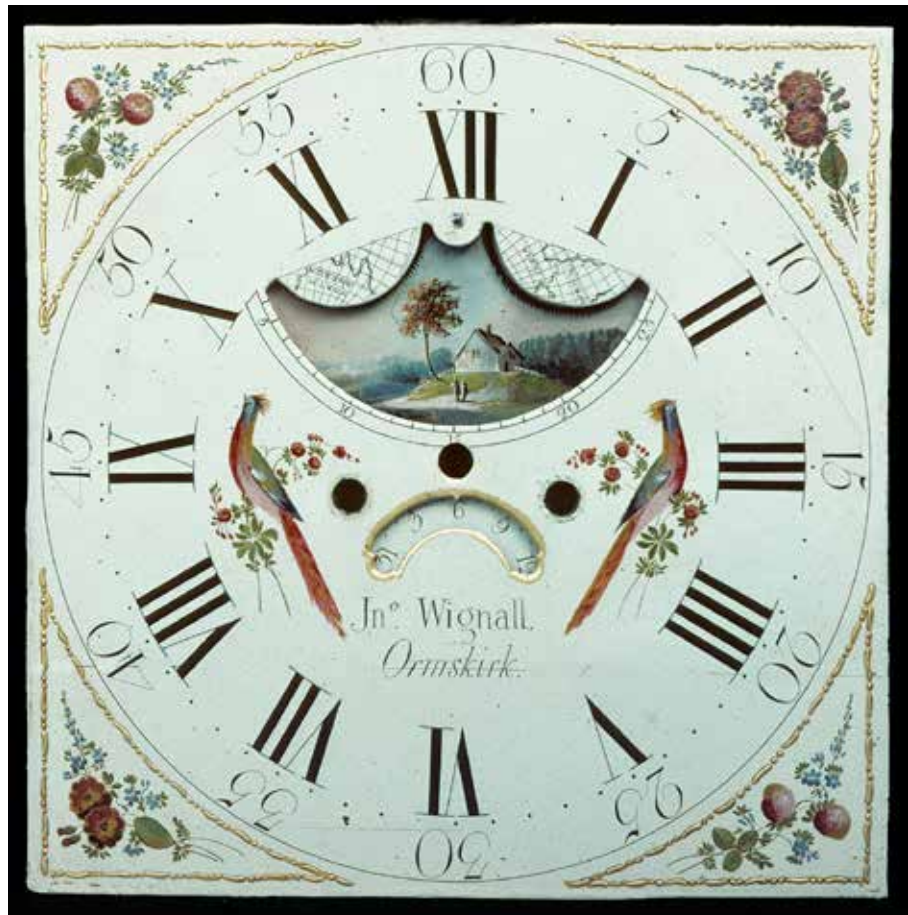


Figure 33. A square Osborne dial with a 12 o'clock moon, made about 1795 for John Wignall of Ormskirk, with birds in the centre, and strawberries in the corners. Photograph by M F Tennant.

Ashted was just the sort of place a successful dialmaker would have moved to, so as to be out of the smoke of the town.

on moon dials printed maps were transferred on to the hemisphere 'humps'. With so many operations necessary to produce a finished dial, it is clear that there was the potential for a significant workforce, but how many is unknown in any dialmaking concern.

The firm was listed in directories as Ann & James Osborne until 1808. Ann probably died about this time, and she may have been the Mrs Osborne of Ashted Row, who died on 23rd May 1809. Ashted was developed from 1787, aimed at prosperous business people and manufacturers, just the sort of place that a successful dialmaker would have moved to, so as to be out of the smoke of the town, just a short carriage ride away. George Walker of the dialmaking firm of Walker & Finemore, also lived here.

Although the Osborne dialmaking business was no longer included in the 1815 directory, a James Osborne, with no occupation, was living at Ashted, and is additional evidence that Ann Osborne and her son James may have moved there. The business was continued

by James Osborne until 1812, after which he may have retired or sold the business. Neither his death nor marriage have been established, and any records are likely to have been in the missing parish registers of St Mary, Whittall Street.

Falseplates were used with the words 'Osborne' or 'Osborne's Manufactory Birmingham' cast into them with at least eight variations of style, some with decorative borders. The ones that include 'Manufactory' may be later than the others, and these were certainly used from 1785 to about 1795 on Osborne dials exported to America. At this period Osborne seems to have had a larger share of the American trade, but later Wilson dominated that export market.

Later Osborne dials, **figure 32**, while of good quality are not of quite the same high standard as those painted by Thomas Hadley Osborne during the Osborne & Wilson partnership. A representative selection of Osborne dials is illustrated here, while a comprehensive survey of their dials

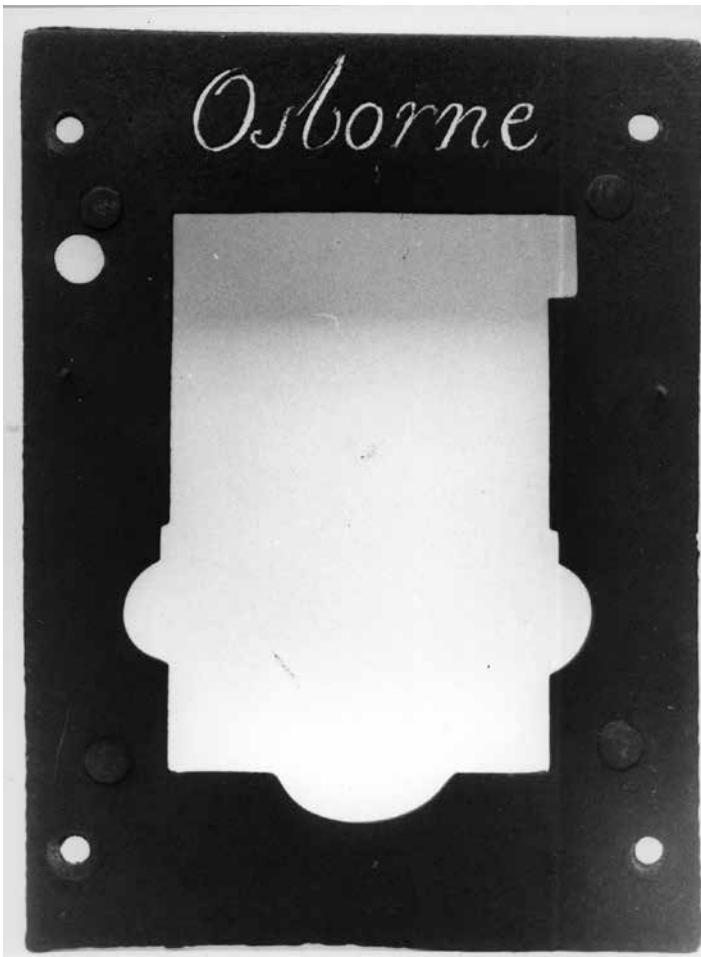


Figure 35. Cast-iron Osborne falseplate.
 Photograph by MF Tennant.



Figure 36. Osborne falseplate with decorative scrolling.
 Photograph by MF Tennant.



can be found in *THE ART OF THE PAINTED DIAL* by M F Tennant, published in 2009.

The story of Birmingham's early dialmakers continues in Part 4, when we discover James Wilson was more than just a maker of high-quality painted clock dials. 📖

Figure 37. Cast-iron falseplate by Osborne's Manufactory.
 Photograph by J Robey.

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