

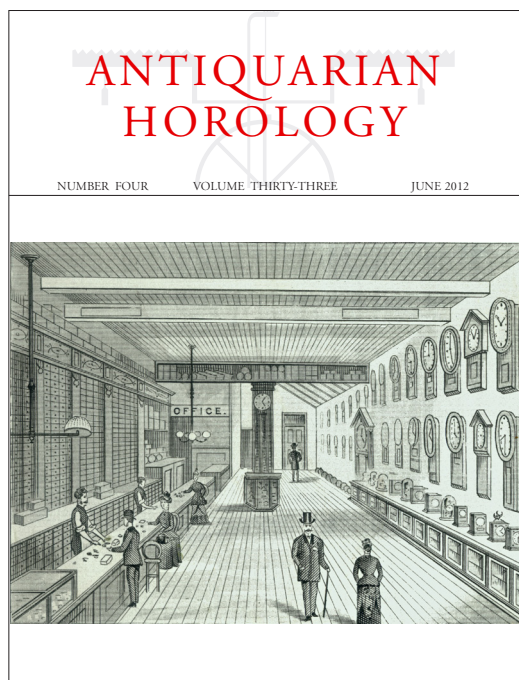
John A. Robey
'MOORFIELDS AND CLOCK-BRASS FOUNDERS
PART 1: THE LONDON HOROLOGICAL TRADES
IN MOORFIELDS'

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Volume 33 No. 4 (June 2012) has 128 pages. It contains the articles listed below, as well as three Notes and the regular sections Horological News, Picture Gallery, Book Reviews, AHS News, Letters to the Editor and For Your Further Reading.

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MOORFIELDS AND CLOCK-BRASS FOUNDERS

PART 1: THE LONDON HOROLOGICAL TRADES IN MOORFIELDS

John A. Robey*

This article outlines the development of the Moorfields area of London, just north of the ancient City walls. After the Great Fire in 1666 it grew from an area of open land into a hive of industry including a wide range of workers in the horological trades. The area was particularly noted for brass founders (considered in detail in Part 2) and one of the principal engravers of clock dials in the eighteenth century worked here. A list is included of all those known to have worked in the watch and clock trades in Moorfields.

INTRODUCTION

This article began as an investigation to discover the identity of the 'IM', 'M' and 'N' casting marks sometimes found on eighteenth-century English clock components. It eventually became apparent that these parts were likely to have been cast in the Moorfields area of London, which has an interesting history and many hitherto unrecorded connections to the horological trades. Hence the research was widened to give an overview of the activities of the various clockmakers, watchmakers, clock engravers, clock brass founders and others working in the region. Part 2 discusses the casting marks and their connection with the Mayor family of clock-brass founders working in Little Moorfields in the eighteenth century.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MOORFIELDS

As the name implies, Moorfields was originally an area of marshy waste ground just north of the ancient walls of the City of London, but partly within the City boundary (Fig 1). After 1511 the southern part of the area, Lower Moorfields, was drained, and in 1605 it was converted into pleasant walks. It remained one of the last pieces

of open land in the City until built over in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. After the Great Fire of London in 1666, when most of the City was destroyed, including Lothbury just to the south and other clockmaking areas, impoverished and displaced people from the fire encamped in Moorfields and eventually settled there. A recent author has described it as

rather like parts of the East End today, with amongst other things, a foundry and open fronted second-hand shops selling old furniture and books.¹

It became home to the poor, with a reputation for its brothels and harbouring highwaymen. In the eighteenth century it became a warren of small streets, lanes, alleys and courts, typical of many parts of the capital. Many of these were described by John Strype in 1720.² Upper Moorfields was transformed in 1777 when Finsbury Square was developed and Lower Moorfields is now Finsbury Circus. There were houses in the street known as Little Moorfields, which ran parallel to Moorgate, as early as 1560, but even by 1677 only houses on the western side had been erected, the eastern side still forming part of the 'Walks of Moorfields'. Little Moorfields became the location for the

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1. J. Betts, 'Pagoda-Style Turret Clocks', in *A Guide to Turret Clock Research*, Monograph No 1, AHS Turret Clock Group, 1991, p49.
2. J. Strype, 1720, *A survey of the Cities of London and Westminster* (available online at <http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype>).

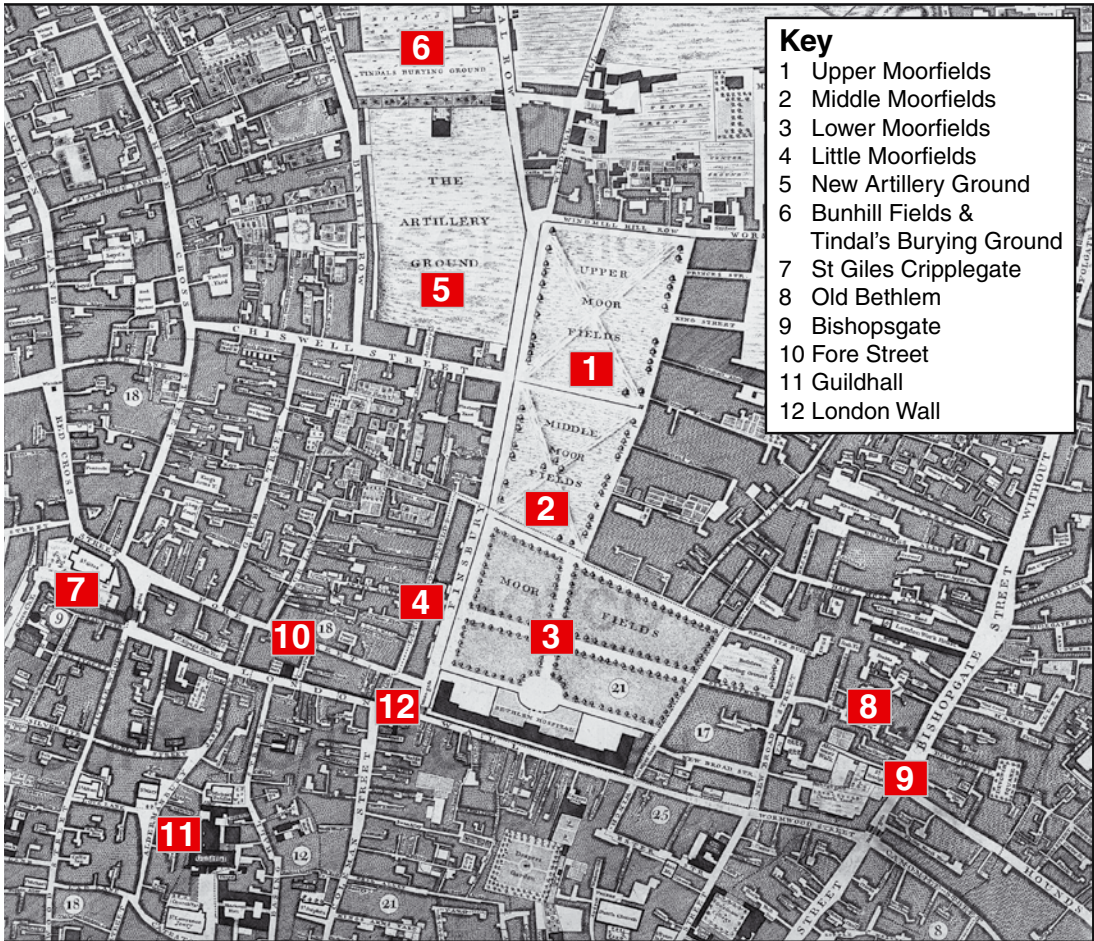


Fig. 1. The Moorfields area from John Rocque's map of London, 1746.

principal brass foundry supplying clock castings in the eighteenth century. It is now known as just Moorfields, and is the site of Moorgate Underground Station.

To the north was the New Artillery Ground and the Government Brass Foundry where cannon were cast, until in May 1716 an explosion during a demonstration when casting French cannon captured during the War of Spanish Succession killed seventeen workers and damaged the building beyond economic repair. This led to the establishment of the Royal Brass Foundry at Woolwich and eventually the Royal Arsenal. The ruins of the Moorfields foundry lay derelict for over twenty years until they were bought by John Wesley in 1739 and rebuilt as a chapel. The first meeting of the Methodist Society took place here in 1740, heralding the start of the Methodist Church.

While there is no evidence that any of

the brass founders discussed in this or the subsequent part of this article were involved in the Government Brass Foundry, it emphasises that there were many experienced founders in Moorfields from an early date.

While there was not the concentration of craftsmen allied to the clock and watch trades that was to be found in Clerkenwell, only a short distance to the northwest, Moorfields had many connections to the industry. Clockmakers, including those making lantern clocks, were working here in the seventeenth century, mostly after they had been forced to leave areas like Lothbury when their workshops had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666. Joseph Lloyd, who is little known as a clockmaker, was apprenticed to the better known John Pennock of Lothbury and made free in 1673. After the Great Fire he must have been one of those who moved, as a lantern clock is known signed at

Table: Clockmakers, watchmakers and other craftsmen working in the Moorfields area

* Those listed as Artillery Ground might be at the site of the Old Artillery Ground at Spitalfields, rather than the New Artillery Ground, Upper Moorfields.

John Adams	1 Dove Court, Moorfields	1766-d1777	watch & clockmaker
George Ansell snr & jnr	Moorfields	c1773-1825	watch & clock-spring makers (see also Prigg & Ansell)
Robert Auber	*Artillery Ground	1717	watchmaker
Joseph Bell	Bunhill Row	c1770-96	watchmaker, bankrupt
Stephen Bence	*Artillery Ground	pre-1723-6	watchmaker
Robert Bertrand	*Artillery Ground	1781-90	watchmaker
Charles Blunt	Bunhill Row	1752-85	watchmaker
Thomas Bourdon	*Artillery Ground	1714-18	watchmaker
Thomas Bradshaw	13 Middle Moorfields	1778	wholesale watch manufacturer, bankrupt
John Brooks	115 Bunhill Row	1777-89	watchmaker
Richard Carrington	22 Old Bethlem	1759-93	watchmaker
Paul Chotard	*Artillery Ground	1732-47	watchmaker
Edward Clark	17 Middle Moorfields	1771-2	watch & clockmaker
Robert Clark	Providence Row, Upper Moorfields	1790	watch & clock-spring maker
Samuel Cleghorn	Moorfields	1781	watchmaker
Thomas Clinch	Long Alley, Little Moorfields	c1730	lacquer clock-case maker
Robert Creed	Little Moorfields	1763	watchmaker, bankrupt, earlier at West Smithfield
Daniel Cresswell	St Giles Cripplegate	1743	watchmaker, bankrupt
Thomas Crossley	7 Featherstone St, Moorfields	1790	musical-clock maker
John Delaney	Bunhill Row	1790	watch engraver
John Downes	Bunhill Row	1793-1808	watch finisher
Griffith Ellis	Little Moorfields	1760-70?	clock-brass founder, trade card known, but not in directories. Related to the Mayor family
John Emerton	Tabernacle Row, Moorfields	1776	watchmaker, bankrupt
John & Robert Farran	Upper Moorfields	1765	watch-chain manufactory & button manufactory
John & Robert Farran	Middle Moorfields	1767	watch-chain manufactory, etc
Robert Farran	9 Middle Moorfields	1768-86	watch-chain manufactory, etc
William Finch	Ropemaker's Alley, Little Moorfields	1761	watchmaker, bankrupt
Fisher & Sons	2 Worship Square, Worship St, Moorfields	1788-1808	wholesale watchmakers
Daniel Fisher & Son	Finsbury	1790-1805	watchmaker
Peter Garon	St Giles Cripplegate	c1690-1723	clock & watchmaker, earlier at St Bartholomew's Lane End
Christopher Gould	Little Moorfields	c1690	clockmaker
Ralph Gout	Bunhill Row	1770-1836	clock & watchmaker, especially pedometers
Samuel Green snr	St James's St, Bunhill Row	1772-1817	watchmaker
Samuel Green jnr	112 Bunhill Row	1787-99	watchmaker
James Greene	Moorfields	1664- pre-1698	lantern-clock maker
Richard Hallier	Moorfields	d1746	clockmaker
Walter Hayes	Cross Daggers, Moorfields	1668-87	mathematical instrument maker
Anthione Herbert	Moorfields	1670	clock & watchmaker, later at other addresses, including Shoreditch

Squire Hewkley	Little Moorfields	1755	Watchmaker, bankrupt
Samuel Highfield	Curtain Row, Moorfields	1804	watchmaker, bankrupt, earlier Artillery Lane, Bishopsgate
John Hilbert	Moorfields	1756	clock engraver
Thomas Hook	Bunhill Row	1793	watch finisher
Robert House	32 Middle Moorfields	1789-90	watchmaker
Thomas Holford	St Giles Cripplegate	1729	clockmaker, bankrupt
David Jones	Bunhill Row	1793	watch-pendant maker
Joseph Lloyd	3 Needle Alley, Moorfields	c1680	lantern clock maker
John Mardin	Upper Moorfields	1794	clock & watch spring maker & dealer in coals, bankrupt
Samuel Marshall	Little Moorfields	1755	watchmaker
Richard Masterson	Dyall, Moorgate	1631-d1653	clockmaker
John Mayor	Five Bells, Old Bethlem	1696-1702	clock-brass and bell founder
Thomas Mayor	Little Moorfields	1761-91	brass founder. Later Jane Mayor & Son (Joseph)
William Mitchell	Bunhill Row	1792	watchmaker
John Morecock & Thomas Pitney	Little Moorfields	1764	watchmakers, bankrupt
Samuel Newton	Founder's Court, Fore St.	1690-d1716	bell founder
Edward Norris, snr	Cross Keys, Bethlem	c1660	clockmaker, later Bartholomew's Lane, near Lothbury
John Pennock	Petty France Gate, Moorfield	1638-d1673/7	clockmaker, in Lothbury 1662
Charles Penton	4 Tenter Ground, Upper Moorfields	1773-d1789	turret-clock maker
Thomas Pitney	Featherstone St, Moorfields	1768-83	watchmaker (see also John Morecock)
Russell Pontifex	Bunhill Row	1800-1	watch-case maker
Prigg & Ansell	Whitecross Alley; Middle Moorfields	1778-91	watch and clock-spring makers
David Rivers	37 Upper Moorfields	1785-90	clock & watchmaker
Robert Romley	Horse Shoe Alley, Middle Moorfields	c1740-d1779	clock & watch bell founder, succeeded by James Green
Barlow Rookes	Fore St, St Giles Cripplegate	1657-d1680	clockmaker
Benjamin Sidey snr	Moorfields	1711-d1790	watchmaker
Benjamin Sidey/ Sibley jnr	5 Pavement Row, Moorfields	1738-97	watchmaker
William Sinderby	Moorfields	1765	watchmaker
William Smith	Upper Moorfields	1749-67	turret-clock maker
Ann Somersall	Wood St, Cripplegate	1760	clock-dial engraver
George Somersall snr	Little Moorfields	1708-d1750	clock-dial engraver
George Somersall jnr	Finsbury, Moorfields	1752-80	watchmaker
George Somersall (son of Richard)	Moorfields	1796	watchmaker
Mandeville Somersall	Fore St, Little Moorfields; Wood St, Cripplegate	1735-d1760	clock-dial engraver
Richard Somersall	Finsbury Place; 2 Short St, Little Moorfields	1781-1806	watch & clockmaker
John Taylor	41 Middle Moorfields	1784-90	watchmaker
Daniel Torin	Moorfields	c1728-61	watchmaker
William Tovey & Co	Upper Moorfields; 53 Middle Moorfields	1778-91	watch & clock-spring maker
John Uffington	53 Bunhill Row	1790	clockmaker

William Vale	12 Bunhill Row; Finsbury	1784-1824	clock & watchmaker
Benjamin Ward	45 Upper Moorfields	1790-4	clock & watchmaker, bankrupt
Walter West	20 Bethlem Court, Old Bethlem	1768-83	watchmaker
John Wheeler	Bunhill Row	1760-4	watch finisher
Edward Wickstead	114 Bunhill Row	1774--1811	watchmaker
John Wise jnr	near Popes Head, Moorfields	1694	clockmaker
John Wright	Moorfields	1661- d c1698	lantern-clock maker

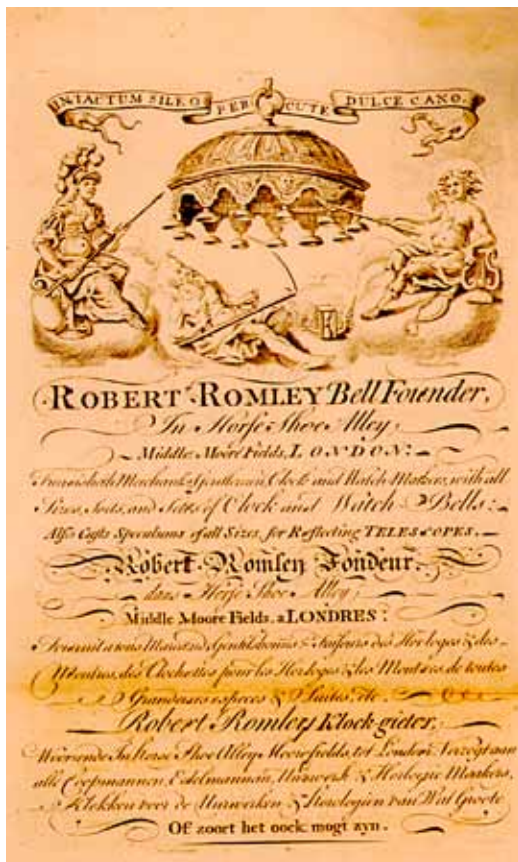


Fig. 2. Multi-lingual trade card of Robert Romley, Middle Moorfields, London, founder of clock and watch bells. (Guildhall Library)

3 Needle Alley, Moorfields. The noted clockmaker Christopher Gould worked here about 1690 as a lantern clock is known signed ‘Christopher Gould Little Moor Fields London’, but by 1701 he had moved to a more fashionable area ‘near the northeast corner of the Royal Exchange’.³

As well as the Mayor family casting clock brass, Robert Romley cast bells for clocks and watches, including ‘Setts of Clock and Watch Bells’, presumably tuned sets for musical and chiming clocks, from premises in Horse Shoe Alley, Middle Moorfields. He issued an elaborate trade card in English, French and Dutch (Fig 2), and advertised ‘BELLS tuned to the various chords of music, to hang round the necks of sheep in gentlemen’s parks, near their country seats’. He died in 1779 and was succeeded by James Green.⁴ A couple of longcase clock are known signed by him.⁵ There were a number watchmakers and clockmakers at Upper Moorfields, Middle Moorfields, Old Bethlem and Bunhill Row listed in trade directories in the 1764-90 period, as well as specialist watch and clock-spring makers, watch-chain manufacturers and also a maker of musical clocks. As well as these there were over twenty watchmakers and others in the trade working in Moorfields and Bunhill Row, who took apprentices from 1714 to 1804.⁶

What is surprising is that two important clockmakers from Upper Moorfields are not

3. B. Loomes, *Lantern Clocks & Their Makers*, (2008), p. 464.

4. He may have been the Robert Romley who was a character witness for a bricklayer from Moorfields, tried at the Old Bailey in 1757 for stealing soap. (*Old Bailey Proceedings Online*, www.oldbaileyonline.org, April 1757, trial of William Simonds, t17570420-50). The location of his workshop is shown in Part 2 of this article as Fig.13.

5. G. H. Baillie, C. Ilbert and C. Clutton, *Britten’s Old Clocks and Watches and their makers* (9th edition, 1982), p. 587 records a moon-dial clock, while a musical longcase clock is in Anglesey Abbey (National Trust), Cambridgeshire.

6. D. Moore, *British Clockmakers & Watchmakers Apprentice Records 1710-1810* (2003).

included in the London trade directories, although it must be appreciated that they are not always complete or were out of date by the time they were published. While both clockmakers produced some domestic clocks, they are mainly known for what has been called the 'pagoda-frame turret clock': William Smith with known clocks dated 1749-67 and Charles Penton 1773-88. William Smith may have moved to Bristol by 1768, where in 1775 he advertised that he was from London. Penton may have succeeded to Smith's business, and he died in April 1789.⁷

There was also a previously unrecorded maker of clock cases, as a handwritten label in a case of about 1730 states:

Thomas Clinch, of 'The Clock Case' Long Alley, Little Moorfields sells all sortes of lackquard [lacquered] work for clock cases, [and] all sorts of varnish.

As a black lacquer longcase clock signed by the otherwise undocumented Thomas Clinch is known,⁸ this emphasises that the name on a clock dial is not always that of a clockmaker.

The Somersall/Sumersall family, whose members all worked in the Moorfields/Finsbury area, was important to the horological trade. Britten records a lantern clock by Mandeville Somersall about 1685, who is not otherwise recorded and he has probably been confused with a later man of this name.⁹ George Somersall was apprenticed in 1701 and free in the Clockmakers' Company in 1708. At least three of his sons (and later their sons) were apprenticed as clockmakers or watchmakers and worked in the Moorfields area. George's son Mandeville Somersall (with spelling variants) was born in 1711, apprenticed to his father in 1726 and free in the Clockmakers' Company

in 1735. A bracket clock signed by George Somersall is known,¹⁰ as well as a walnut longcase clock by Mandeville Somersall,¹¹ but both worked primarily as clock-dial engravers and varnishers, George in Little Moorfields and his son in nearby Fore Street.

As well as engraving dials for London clockmakers they also supplied further afield. In 1744 Mandeville Somersall had been travelling in Derbyshire, no doubt seeking business there, when he lost his pocket book and a spirit bottle. When he advertised for their return he took the opportunity to offer clock dials and his engraving services:¹²

LOST on the Road between *DERBY* and *Burton upon Trent*, on the 23d of May 1744, a *Pocket Book*, and *Stone Glass Dram Bottle*: In the *Pocket Book* is pasted on both Insides, a Printed Paper, on which is printed and also written, MANDEVILLE SOMERSALL, Clock-Engraver and Varnisher in *Fore-street*, near *Great-Moor-Gate*, LONDON, &c. If any Person hath found the same, and will send the *Pocket-Book* only according to the printed Directions, by the Carrier to *London*, shall receive of the Carrier Four Shillings as a Reward for the same; and if they send the *Pocket Book* and *Dram Bottle* whole, they shall receive Five Shillings, to be paid to the Carrier on Delivery in *London*.

N. B. Country Chapmen may be furnished with all Sorts of Clock Dial Plates, ready fitted up, as also Engraving and Varnishing; likewise all Sorts of Tools and Materials, at the very lowest Prices.

In 1750 advertisements appeared in the *Kentish Post* and *The Ipswich Journal*:¹³

7. Betts, 'Pagoda-Style Turret Clocks', pp. 43-9, and personal communication.

8. G. Beard and C. Gilbert, *Dictionary of English Furniture makers 1660-1840* (1986), p. 179.

9. Baillie, et al., *Britten's Old Clocks and Watches*, p. 608. B. Loomes, *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World. Complete 21st Century Edition* (2006) lists him in the Clockmakers' Company from 1680 to about 1720, based on the reference in Baillie, et al, 1982, p. 608, but this is now known to be in error as the earlier man does not appear in their records.

10. *Clocks*, August 2001, p. 36 (auction report).

11. *Clocks*, January 1993, p. 16 (auction report).

12. *Derby Mercury* 1 June 1744.

13. M. Pearson, *Kent Clocks & Clockmakers* (1997), p. 259. *The Ipswich Journal*, 30 June and 7 July 1750. *Antiquarian Horology* September 1974, 915 (letter by J. R. Millburn).

ALL Sorts of Clock and Mathematical Work; also Brass Plates for Coffins, or Inscriptions for Monuments; and all Manner of Brass Ornaments, curiously Engraved, Varnished, or Silver'd, or Plated with Silver, by MANDEVILE SOMERSALL, Clock Engraver and Varnisher, in Fore-Street, near Moorgate, London. Where Country Chapmen may be furnished with all sorts of Clock Dial-Plates compleately fitted up: As also all Sorts of Tools and Materials for Clock and Watch-making, at the lowest Prices.

N. B. The Report of my being dead, was occasioned by my long Illness, and the Death of my Father, Mr. George Somersall, Clock Engraver and Varnisher, of Little Moorfields, lately deceas'd.

Fore Street is at the southern end of Little Moorfields and runs parallel to and just north of London Wall. In 1754 Somersall repeated the advertisement in the *Derby Mercury*, omitting the mention of his illness and the death of his father, but including:¹⁴

N. B. A Parcel of Exceeding fine White PUMMICE-STONES, to be sold, either Wholesale or Retale, very Cheap.

Pumice was widely used for finishing clock dials, movement plates and other components. He was now at 'the Dial and Crown in Wood Street, near Cripplegate', not far from Moorfields. He had died by 1760, when his widow Ann advertised that she was carrying on 'the same business of Engraving and Varnishing of Clocks'.¹⁵

A Kent dial is known with extensive practice engraving by Mandeville Somersall on the reverse side (Figs 3-5), and many clock dials are likely to have been engraved by George, Mandeville and Ann Somersall. As Mandeville Somersall advertised that he supplied 'all sorts of Clock Dial-Plates compleately fitted up', and no doubt his father had done the same before him, the obvious source of supply of the castings



Fig. 3. Thirty-hour longcase dial made about 1750 for Henry Baker of Malling, Kent, by Mandevile Somersall in the typical London style of the period. (Photo: M. Moseling)

for the dial sheet, chapter ring, seconds and calendar rings, spandrels and arch fittings such as name plaques or strike/silent rings, would be the Mayor foundry just round the corner in Little Moorfields (see Part 2 of this article). It is highly likely that many eighteenth-century clock dials, not only those used by London clockmakers, but also London-style dials on provincial clocks, were supplied and engraved by the Somersalls using Mayor's castings, even though the latter's casting marks are only very occasionally found on dial plates, chapter rings or other components of the dial.

There were other engravers in Moorfields, including a John Hilbert, clock engraver, who took an apprentice in 1756, but most engravers in the area were likely to have been associated with the printing industry. Fry's type foundry was not far away, and Grub Street, which became synonymous with hack writers, was also nearby. Although clock-dial engravers were capable of engraving copper plates for printing trade cards and the like, as shown by Mandeville Somersall's practice engraving, this type of work was normally done by specialists in copper-

14. *Derby Mercury* 6 Dec 1754.

15. *Antiquarian Horology* December 1974, 96 (letter by L. F. Miller).

16. Thomas Winstanley, Ashbourne (*Derby Mercury* 5 Aug 1768). Others advertising engraving on a wide range of objects such as copper printing plates and clock dials include: J. Steer in Derby 1766, John Butterworth in Leeds 1769, and Sylvester Forrest in Leeds 1770.

plate engraving. While engraving soft copper is easier than hard brass, copper-plate engravers needed to be adept at forming all the type and illustrations as mirror images, something that was not necessary for a dial engraver. Clock-dial engravers would normally only undertake work outside their speciality if trade was slack. In the provinces tradesmen had to be more versatile and some engravers whose usual run of work was making copper printing plates — and

often also printing them — advertised engraving clock dials, as well as arms, crests and cyphers 'on the outer Case of Watches and the Owners Name within'.¹⁶

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks are due to Brian Loomes, Chris Pickford and Jonathan Betts for information, and to Martin Moseling for the use of Figs 3-5.



Figs 4 & 5. Rear of the Baker chapter ring with practice engraving 'Mandevile Somersall Clock Engraver and Varnisher is Removed from' and 'Isaac Rimington Haberdasher'. Somersall moved from Fore Street, Moorfields, London, to nearby Wood Street, Cripplegate, some time between 1750 and 1754. Rimington also worked in Fore Street from at least 1755. This is probably practice for copper printing plates, which would have been engraved as reversed images. (Photos: M. Moseling)