

Clock Watching...In Elham

Elham has a long-standing love affair with clocks and watches which might be worth revisiting.

Derek Boughton has, of course, done lots of research in this field, inspired, no doubt, by his friendship with Mary Smith the schoolteacher who was the great granddaughter of S.E. Dunn who was a watch and clock maker who lived at "Wise Follies" in The Square, opposite the church.

However, Elham's early enthusiasm for time keeping may have started way back in the 1290's when, Derek tells us, the north and south aisles of the church were completed, and a clock was installed. This was one of the very first clocks to have been installed in an English parish church, described as an 'orologium' it was paid for by Merton College, Oxford (whose association with Elham has been highlighted by Derek many times, and I'm sure we will hear of them again in more detail with their links to Parsonage Farm at North Elham). It must have been an expensive and prestigious acquisition at the time and indicates Elham's importance in the area.

Delving through [*Britten's Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*](#) we find an entry for **Silke, Jno.** (*John*) Elmsted. With reference to a Lantern clock made in about 1670.

From the Elham's Churchwarden's Accounts of 1756 we find

"Feb. 22 nd	<i>Paid Mr. Hambrook for railing up the Workhouse 0-0-6</i>
26 th	<i>Paid Baldock for Stoping the Sink Hole 0-0-6</i>
March 16 th	<i>Paid the Boys for Sparrows Heads 1-9-4</i>
(? date)	<i>Paid John Silk's Bill for Cleaning of the Clock 0-7-6</i>
	<i>Paid John Silk for Mending of the Sun Dial 0-1-0"</i>

Derek remembers a John Silk longcase clock in the King's Arms in The Square. He says it had a brass face which said "Elham" but he doesn't know what happened to it.

The Elham charitable brief identifies John Brice as an Elham resident in a list of contributors. In the brief c.1740, he appears as 'John Brice clocksmith'.

John Brice is also listed at Sandwich in 1741 in G H Baillie's *Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World* but not shown in Britten, which has a watch listed for William Brice also at Sandwich in 1784. Possibly John's son?

The charitable collections were organised by the church to give relief to various people/good causes and were generally retirement collections at the

church. For special events collections were held around the village and in that case a list of donors was created, hence the brief.

Next we find **Stephen Scott (1725 – 1798) (Elham and Denton)**

Reported in the *Kentish Express* of 1907 in *George H Brocklehurst's "Elham Echoes"* (perhaps prone to typos – check the dates):

“Watchmaker – Stephen Scott, whose business was considerable and profits large, possessed a good knowledge of mathematics and mechanics. He plied his trade in the same house in the Square in which the business is still carried on, and lived to the advanced age of 94 (!); being buried on 13th November, 1798. His infant sister, Margaret, who was buried on 8th December, 1705, was the last to be buried in woollen, according to the Act

*passed in 1690 to further encourage the trade, whereby “No corps shall be buried in anything other than is made of sheep's wooll only; or be put into a coffin lined or faced with anything made of any material but sheep's wooll on pain of the forfeiture of £5.” By a strange coincidence, James Dun, who was buried on 6th August 1678 – an ancestor of **Samuel Edward Dunn**, who carried on the business for some years and died on 10th August 1872 aged 74 – was the first to be thus buried in Elham; according to the Act passed in that year.”*



Stephen Scott, Denton Long case clock

Also in The Square was [Henry Prebble \(1749-1819\)](#) whose death was reported in the Kentish Gazette of 24th September 1819. He died on September 20th at Elham, a watchmaker aged 70 and was buried on 26th September, 1819.

Elham's Square was a magnet for clock and watchmakers – who must have been the high-tech gurus of their day.

In 1820 a watch and clock maker's business was established by [Samuel Edward Dunn](#) – mentioned above – in a property, now known as Wise Follies, next to the Kings Arms and he was there until his death in 1872.

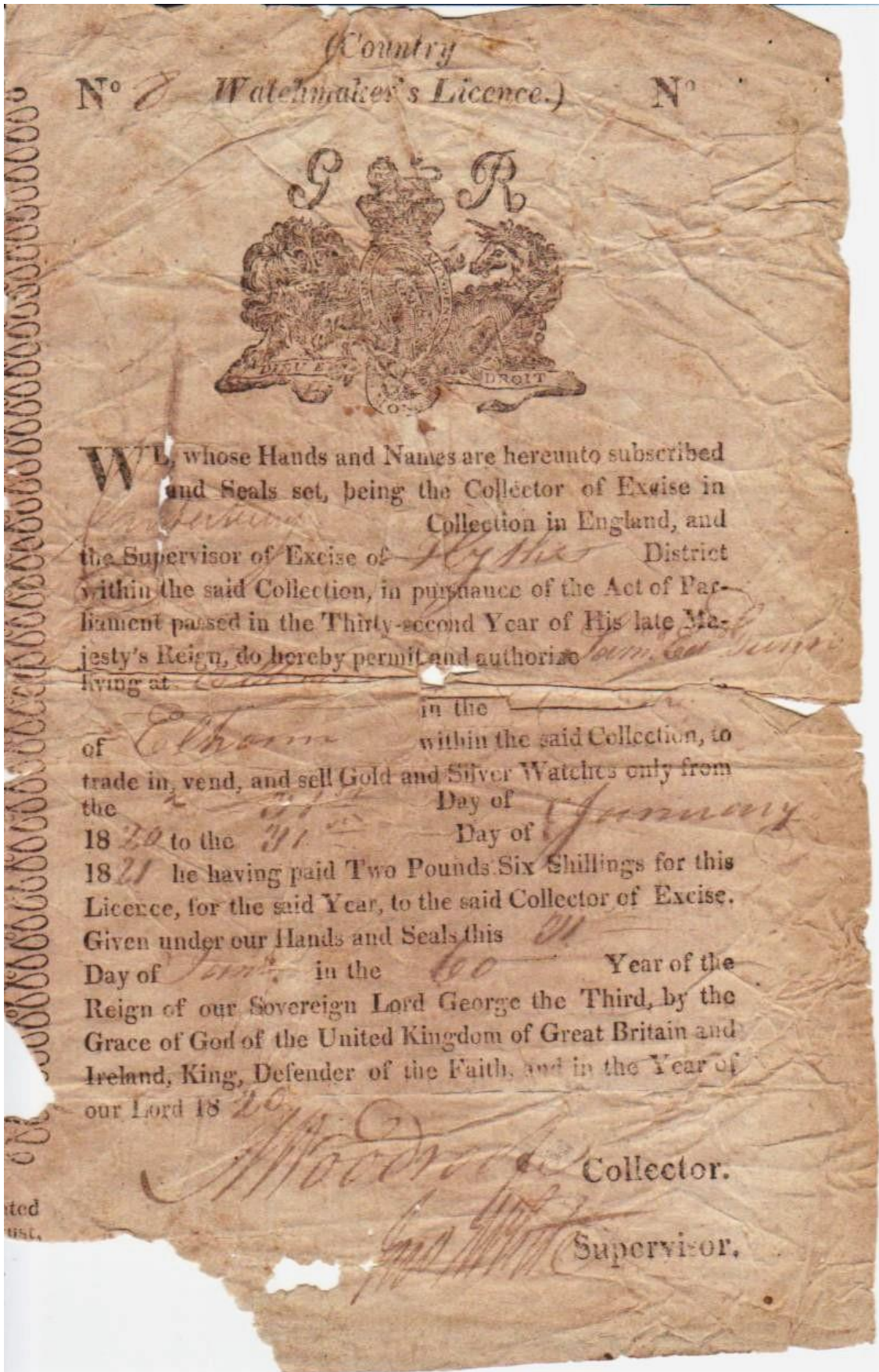


Judging from his accounts the Papillon family at Acrise Place were big customers.

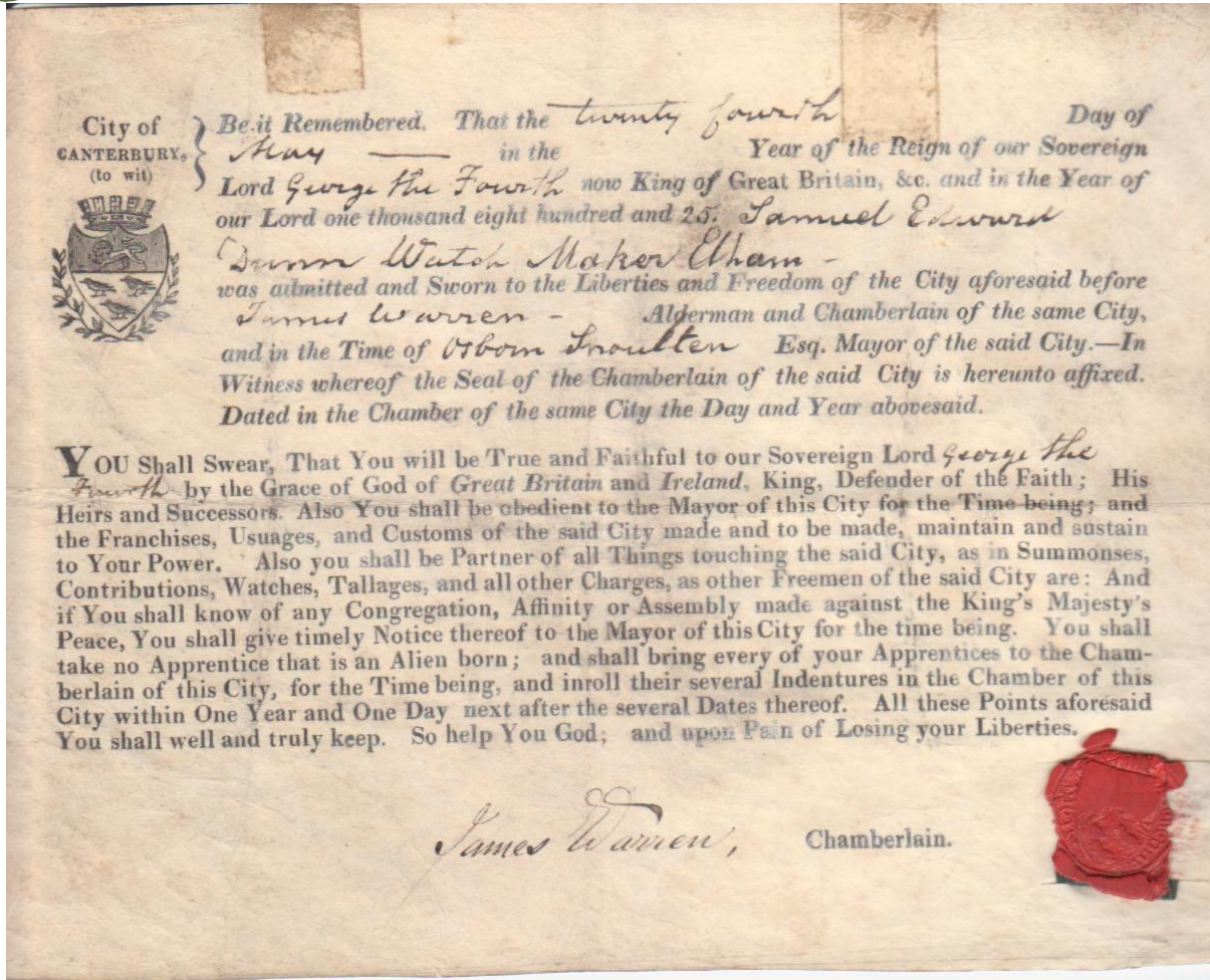
“Thomas Papillon's 1827/8 account of £10-4-11 was quite exceptional. It included 'A double Bottom Gilt Hunter' at £5-0-0, as well as the frequently recurring 'Repaired Coffee pot...6d' and 'Repaired toast rack ...6d.' On 11th May 1832 is an entry 'Repairing Squirrel Toy ... 1.0 for Thomas Papillon junior. Miss C Papillon's 1835 account 8-6 (8shillings and 6p?) was not settled until 1837, but he had many worse payers than that.” (Derek Boughton)



S.E. Dunn and family in the garden of what is now Wise Follies



Watch Makers Licence for S.E. Dunn from 31st Jan 1820 for one year.



Samuel Edward Dunn was granted the “Liberties and Freedom of the City of Canterbury

Derek now owns the wall clock that Mary Smith, S.E. Dunn's great granddaughter had once owned.



S.E. Dunn's longcase clocks are still around. Brian Hart, author of several local books with a special interest in the Elham Valley Railway Line, owns one pictured below.



Brian's longcase clock was once owned by S.E. Dunn's great granddaughter Mary Smith.

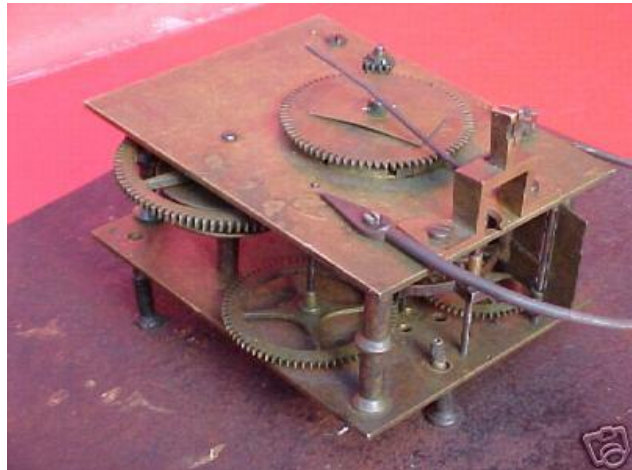
Bryan Badham has another.



Below are two pictures taken after its restoration by Anthony Gray Clocks in 2010.



S.E. Dunn clock movements have very occasionally been found on eBay as shown below.





S.E. Dunn maintained the church clock up until his death in 1872. This work would have been a complex task as the clock had a carillon which played tunes such as *The Bluebells of Scotland* and *There is No Luck About The House*. Unfortunately, there are no images of the Elham carillon clock, however this YouTube [video](#) gives you an idea as to how it worked and what it might have sounded like.

The barrel part of the Elham mechanism remained in the garden of Wise Follies well into the twentieth century.

The present church clock was made by J. Bailey & Co., Manchester and the inscription on the case reads "New Church Clock Oct. 16th, 1873, George Sutton, Stephen P. File, Church Wardens." Up until 1912 the wooden clock face was black with gold numerals; the 1912 replacement had a white face and black numerals. This clock face was replaced in 1986 by the fibreglass version we see today, in memory of Margaret Smith, Mary's sister. The 1912 clockface still exists in the village as a garden feature. The winding mechanism was converted to electrical operation sometime around 2010.

After his death his daughter, [Sarah Smith](#), took over the business and ran the Post Office, the clock makers and a stationers from "Wise Follies". She was assisted by her sons Edward and William, and when she died, in 1908, Edward moved the Post Office to King Post, next door, and [William](#) (known as Pally) carried on the clockmakers business until his death in 1947.

So it was that [Mary Smith](#), daughter of Edward came to live in King Post and who's 1940's diary became the framework for Dennis Knight's book *Harvest of Messerschmitts*. How often, I wonder, did she look across The Square from the upstairs window at King Post to the church clock opposite and reflect on Elham's ticking heritage.

