

Joyce of Whitchurch. It's one of these names that crops up frequently in the horological world. Like Potts of Leeds. Like Smith of Derby. All of them well-known makers of turret clocks, and all of them from the English provinces.

But unlike Potts of Leeds, Joyce has never had a whole book devoted to it. Until now, that is.

JOYCE OF WHITCHURCH CLOCKMAKERS 1690-1965, by Steve and Darlah Thomas, addresses this oversight. It is a substantial volume—over 650 pages and more than 1500 illustrations—packed full of the sort of information that is meat and drink to horologists, particularly those that are interested in turret clocks.

The Joyce family firm made clocks for over 300 years, from 1690 until the business was acquired by Smith of Derby in the 60s. Even now the name continues within the larger concern. Originally the clocks made by the Joyce family were for domestic settings: longcases, wall clocks, regulators and so on. But in the nineteenth century the family started producing the turret clocks for which they have since become famous.

The Joyce dynasty appears to have begun with William Joyce of Cockshutt, Shropshire. No records of this man's apprenticeship survive but William lived and worked in Wrexham, North Wales, eventually moving back to Cockshutt where he lived until his death in 1771. It was some time in the second half of the eighteenth century that the first Joyce clockmaker set up shop in Whitchurch, this being James Joyce, a grandson of William Joyce. It was this man's son Thomas, who seems to have moved into turret clock making in a big way. Many of his clocks still survive and details of them appear in the book, which goes on to trace further generations of the family down through the years.

As indicated above, this is a book that is packed with illustrations, all of a reasonably high standard. Each set of illustrations is accompanied by a table giving the clock a reference number and essential details of the mechanism. Take clock number TJ/2-23, for example. This, we find, was made in 1849 and is housed in Denbigh Library, Denbigh, North Wales. It is a two-train clock with a double frame, dead-beat anchor escapement and locking plate strike. It has a single dial and the disc-bob pendulum beats $1\frac{1}{2}$ seconds. Before it was dismantled in 2013 it was hand-wound: now it has auto winding. This level of detail is applied to all of the clocks depicted, which must number well over 100.

Many books, even horological books, tell a story, the story of a clock type, for example, or of an individual clockmaker. While the first half of this book does that for the Joyce family—sort of—the second half—up to the beginning of the numerous appendices—is all about the clocks. No bad thing, in my opinion. 😊

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