

# BIRMINGHAM DIALMAKERS: SOME BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES – PART II



by John A. Robey

THE success of the new dials pioneered by Osborne and Wilson encouraged others to enter this market.

## THOMAS ASHWIN

One of the new entrants was Thomas Ashwin, who married Mary Price of Droitwich, Worcestershire, at Aston in 1774,<sup>25</sup> and had children in 1775-91, including the eldest son Thomas junior in 1777. He worked as a japanner from 1777 to 1785 at 5 Paradise Street (sometimes known as Paradise Row, and not far from the canal wharfs now known as Gas Street Basin) in premises that had been occupied in 1770-6 by a steel-toy maker. In 1787-91 he traded as Thomas Ashwin & Co, although who the '& Co' refers to is uncertain, as his son would have only been 10 years old in 1787. In 1783 he had a London outlet for his japanned ware (but presumably not clock dials, as he was not making these at this time) at 31 Walbrook.<sup>26</sup> This was the address of Joseph Dyott's wholesale hardware warehouse in 1781-90, succeeded by Lynam & Warwick, Birmingham and Sheffield warehouse, in 1790-1. In 1791 Ashwin & Co's directory entries suddenly change from being simply manufacturers of japanned ware to manufacturers of papier mâché, clock dials, composite buttons and japanned iron buttons, as well as copal varnish, coach varnish and japan manufacturers. Clock dials with falseplates marked 'Ashwin & Co' were produced, and they were exported to America in competition with those by Osborne and by Wilson. Ashwin's dials are of high quality (Fig. 20), although not particularly common, probably due to the calamity that was to soon befall the business.



Fig. 20. Ashwin dial made for Ralph Eden of Liverpool, M.F. Tennant.

The year 1791 was significant in Birmingham's history, when on 14 July a mob gathered outside a hotel in the town to protest at a meeting being held there to celebrate the anniversary of the French Revolution. It quickly developed into a riot, ostensibly supporting the king and opposed to radicals, religious dissenters and supporters of the American Revolution, and lasted for four days, during which time several dissenting chapels and mansions were burnt down. The most noted target during this so-called 'King and Country Riot' was the Rev. Joseph Priestley, Unitarian minister and scientist – famous for

25. His marriage licence states that he was a painter, 'aged 21 years and upwards', hence he cannot be the boy born in 1758 at Stratford-on-Avon, who would have been only sixteen in 1774. A witness was Stephen Coleman, japanner, who is not listed in directories and may have been an employee. Mary Price was born in 1749, and aged 25 when she married.

26. *Bailey's Western & Midland Directory*, (1783).

his discovery of oxygen – whose chapel, house and laboratory were destroyed, and as a result he eventually left England for America. Another victim was Thomas Ashwin. As a property owner with vested interests in the town he had been sworn in as one of about a hundred special constables, but they were quickly routed in a pitched battle with the mob while defending the burning Baskerville House. Eight of the rioters, intoxicated after plundering the wine cellars, perished in the flames, while Thomas Ashwin was badly injured in the fighting, and he eventually died of his injuries on 12 August. *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* reported on 15 August 1791:

Died. On Friday afternoon much lamented, Mr. Thomas Ashwin, Japanner, of Paradise Row, in this Town. The death of the Gentleman (who has left an amiable wife and nine young children to deplore his loss) was occasioned by a wound he received on the head from one of the rioters, during our late unhappy disturbances.

Shortly afterwards the family were assisted by a public subscription:

One Gentleman [Ashwin], who died soon after, leaving a widow and large family unprovided for, recieved at this place the wound which occasioned his death. With a generosity and humanity that does honour to the inhabitants of the town and its neighbourhood, the widow of this gentleman has been handsomely provided for, by a very liberal subscription.

The names of those who subscribed are not known, and it would be of interest to know if they included any of his competitors in the clock dial trade. Thomas Ashwin, probably in a coma since being attacked, died without being able to make a will. Administration of his estate was granted to his widow Mary, with sureties by Thomas Keeling and Onesiphoras Tyndall, both japanners of Birmingham. They may both have worked for Ashwin, and shortly afterwards Thomas Keeling was working in his own right at 12 Great Hampton Street as a japanner in 1797 and as a clock-dial maker in 1800-25. Thomas Ashwin junior was only 14 years old when his father died, so it is likely that

the business was continued initially by Mary Ashwin, then with her son. Later they merged with Francis Byrne.

## FRANCIS BYRNE

The origins of Francis Byrne the Birmingham dialmaker have not been confirmed, but a Francis Byrne (maybe the man baptised on 21 July 1740 at St Clement Danes, Westminster) and John Jordan, merchants of Clements Lane, London, were declared bankrupt in December 1780. Byrne & Jordan were listed in trade directories at Clements Lane in 1780-1 variously as factors, ship and insurance brokers, and linen factors. Francis Byrne may have overcome his financial problems, for he was trading alone as a factor at 4 Shorters Court, Throgmorton Street, in 1783, and then in 1784-90 at St Mary Axe, London. He then disappears from the London directories, but the name occurs shortly afterwards in 1791 at 15 Paradise Street, Birmingham, but with no occupation stated. The next year he is recorded as 'gentleman', and it is not until six years later that he is recorded as a japanner, then again in the following year (1798) with no occupation, and in 1800-3 as a japanner and factor. (A brass founder had occupied 15 Paradise Street in 1770-6, and an attorney was there in 1780-1, but there are no further directory entries until Byrne appears on the scene, so maybe it had been just a residence in the interim.)

None of Francis Byrne's family history has been found which might confirm the London connection, such as marriage, baptism of children or his death, although it is known that his wife Mary died in Birmingham on 21 July 1801, and was buried at St Mary, Whittall Street.

This strong circumstantial evidence of the name disappearing from London directories only for it to reappear in Birmingham indicates that Francis Byrne was a business opportunist, trading in London as a factor and broker in whatever came his way: linen, insurance and shipping. When hounded by his creditors he left the capital for the rapidly expanding industrial town of Birmingham, with virtually unlimited opportunities and where the restrictions of the trade guilds had little effect. The fact that he ended up on the same street as Thomas Ashwin may have been purely fortuitous, but

the unfortunate death of a neighbour gave him the business opportunity he had been looking for. Ashwin's widow, as well as grieving for her husband was left with a business to run, only a young son to help her and eight other small children to support. Byrne appears to have soon turned the situation to his advantage, for from 1792 to 1798 the Birmingham trade directories list Ashwin & Byrne as manufacturers of japanned ware at Paradise Street. The number of the building is not specified, but it is likely that the manufactory remained at Ashwin's existing premises of number 5, with Byrne living at number 15. It is most unlikely that there was more than one clock-dial manufactory in this street.

At this period Francis Byrne was clearly running the former Ashwin works, as he supplied japanned papier mâché and iron trays to Messrs Chamberlain, the celebrated Worcester porcelain manufacturers. The earliest record of these sales is in August 1792 and they continued until at least December 1796.<sup>27</sup> Byrne remained at 15 Paradise Street until 1798, but thereafter his directory entries specify no house number. In 1800-1 these premises were occupied by William Baylis, gentleman, so Francis Byrne may have moved out of number 15 and in with the Ashwins. As the death of Mary Ashwin has not been traced (nor that of her son, Thomas junior), there remains the distinct, but as yet unconfirmed, possibility that she married her new business partner Francis Byrne, as his wife, who died in 1801, was also named Mary.

It is not known when dials with 'F. Byrne Birmingham' falseplates superseded those with 'Ashwin & Co', or whether dials made in 1792-8 when Ashwin and Byrne traded together were produced with either the Ashwin or the Byrne name. No 'Ashwin & Byrne' falseplates are known, nor are moon or calendar discs known stamped with these names, either by themselves or jointly. One Byrne dial dated on stylistic grounds to the early 1780s,<sup>28</sup> is more likely to have been an early product of the Ashwin & Byrne partnership, made about 1792 but in a

rather outmoded design. The latest directory entry for Francis Byrne is 1803, but his dials were certainly being produced in 1806, as one is known with a movement of this date.<sup>29</sup> It may be that Byrne was running the manufactory, and using his own name when selling his japanned trays, rather than that of Ashwin & Byrne, and also selling clock dials fitted with Ashwin falseplates until the stock of them ran out. Until other dials are discovered that can be firmly dated, when the change-over occurred is difficult to determine. Eventually the Ashwin link was broken, Byrne assumed complete control of the manufactory, and dials were produced under his name alone.

The connection between Ashwin and Byrne is confirmed by a study of the hemisphere maps on their moon dials. These maps (when original or restored correctly and not replaced by modern transfers) can provide vital evidence for the origin of a dial. They were applied to clock dials by a similar process to transfer printing on pottery, where an image is transferred from a copper printing plate to tissue paper, which is then applied to the surface of the ceramic, or in this instance the dial. The right-reading image on the printing plate becomes a mirror image when offset onto the tissue, but is reversed again when the tissue is applied to the surface. (This process is quite different to modern water-slide transfers where a right-reading image is moved directly from a substrate onto the surface.) The transfer tissue is applied to the dial before the printing ink has dried, so the whole process must have taken place at the manufactory, and this precludes the use of pre-printed transfers bought in from elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> Hence dials with the same hemisphere maps were produced from the same printing plates (and by inference at the same manufactory), and as the designs vary between the different makers, dials that are otherwise unmarked can be identified. Some dialmakers used more than one design of maps, not only for different sizes of dial, but also periodically updating them, and this provides the potential for additional evidence for determining the age

27. Geoffrey A. Godden, 'English Paper Trays, 1790-1815' *Connoisseur*, (August 1967), 250-4.

28. M.F. Tennant, *Longcase painted Dials* (1995) pp70-1.

29. Tennant, *op. cit.*, plate vii. The dial might have been old stock.

30. This is discounting the very unlikely possibility that dials were sent out for the maps to be applied by another firm or outworker.



Fig. 21. Unrestored and unsigned dial with an 'Ashwin & Co' falseplate, Troy Livingston.

of a dial. It is very important that, wherever possible, original hemisphere maps are conserved and not replaced by modern transfers. No

printing plates used for producing the maps on clock dials are known to have survived.

The maps used by Ashwin (Figs 21-22) and by Byrne (Fig. 23) are quite distinctive, being very detailed, and having the degrees of latitude round the outside, a feature not normally used by other dialmakers until later. The fact that moon dials with both Ashwin and Byrne falseplates have identical maps strongly suggests that they were produced at the same manufactory. It is also map evidence that provides the next phase of the Ashwin/Byrne story.

## THE NICHOLAS FAMILY

William Nicholas was born at Almeley in Herefordshire in 1760, and his younger brother Caleb a year later, to William and Vincentia Nicholas. It is not known to whom William and Caleb were apprenticed, but it may have been to another William Nicholas who was a clockmaker in nearby Kington, and possibly related, maybe a cousin, but not an uncle.<sup>31</sup> By 1780 William Nicholas was a clockmaker in Birmingham, initially at Park Street, then at Smallbrook Street. Caleb had moved to Birmingham by 1786, where he was a clock and watchmaker in the High Street, later in Spiceal Street and then at a number of other addresses. William's sons also became



Fig. 22. Ashwin's well preserved maps are the most detailed used by any of the makers of clock dials, and have latitude numbers around the outside. The western hemisphere includes 'Caledonia disc[overed] 1774', while dotted lines show 'Cap. Cook's Tr[ack]' and 'Ld. Anson's going out'. The latter is the voyage of Admiral Anson of Shugborough Hall round the world in 1740-4. The equator includes 'Degrs. of Long. W from London' and 'Hs. of Time West from London' on one map and East from London on the other. Only one size of printing plate was used, so when used on a 12 in. wide dial, as here, the outside of the maps overlap the moon humps, Troy Livingston.

31. T. Branston, & J.C. Eisel, *Herefordshire Clockmakers & Watchmakers*, (2005) p.123.



Fig. 23. Dial made by Francis Byrne for John Cleever of Chester. The hemisphere maps are identical to those used by Ashwin, and provide strong evidence that Byrne took over Ashwin's dial manufactory.

clockmakers, William jr moving to London and John to Daventry in Northamptonshire. Caleb's son Joshua stayed in Birmingham, being recorded in trade directories as a clock and watchmaker at Bull Street from 1797. Clocks are known signed by William Nicholas and by Caleb Nicholas, by the two brothers jointly, and by about 1825 jointly by William, Caleb and Joshua, despite all three of them apparently working from separate premises. Initially they would have bought their dials from one of the established Birmingham manufacturers, but in at least one instance they used a longcase dial made of vitreous enamel signed W. & C. Nicholas.<sup>32</sup>

After being listed in trade directories as a clockmaker, in 1801 William Nicholas appears as a 'clock and clock dial maker' at 6 Smallbrook Street, the same address as his clockmaker's shop. Dials were produced with falseplates bearing the names 'W., C. & J. Nicholas, Birmingham' or 'C. & J. Nicholas, Birmingham', and as their moon dials (Fig. 24) have the same hemisphere maps as on Ashwin and Byrne dials, it is clear that they



Fig. 24. Moon dial signed for W. & C. Nicholas, Birmingham. The maps, although restored, are basically those used by Ashwin and then Byrne. This dial has a brass falseplate signed 'Ashwin & Co', Allan Smith.

all came from the same manufactory. As there is an overlap of a few years during which time dials with both Byrne falseplates and Nicholas falseplates were being produced, the possibility that William or his brother had acquired the Byrne works is unlikely. It is more probable that they were buying dials from Byrne with falseplates carrying the Nicholas names, rather than making them themselves. This practice was quite common in the Birmingham dial trade, particularly later, and many dials have falseplates with names that are not of the actual dial manufacturer, but that of a factor or merchant. Most of the dials signed by factors were produced in small quantities and are now quite scarce, but the Nicholas ones appear to be the most prolific. One of the problems with any study of painted dials is determining who were the actual makers and who were the factors.

William Nicholas was still listed as a clock-dial maker in 1823, and he then largely disappears from the directories, apart from a single entry

32. B. Loomes, *Painted Dial Clocks*, (1994) p.16.



Fig. 25. Arch dial of about 1815 signed C. Wetherell, Cannock, with a W. C. & J. Nicholas falseplate, but probably made by Walker & Hughes. Typical of the patriotic themes used after the Napoleonic Wars.

in 1835, but only as a clockmaker, and now at 17 Islington Row, near Five Ways, to where he had, no doubt, retired. He died in 1841, aged eighty-one. Despite his name being included on falseplates, Caleb Nicholas is only included in trade directories as a clock and watchmaker and watch-glass manufacturer, and it is likely that the clock-dial side of the business was the responsibility of his elder brother. Caleb's directory entries continue until 1843, and he died in 1845.

A dial of about 1805-10 by C. & J. Nicholas, instead of having the hemisphere maps used by Ashwin and Byrne, has those used by W. Francis.<sup>33</sup> Figure 25 shows a dial of about 1810-15 with a W. C. & J. Nicholas falseplate, which appears to be the work of Walker & Hughes (or possibly Walker & Finnemore). Hence Nicholas sourced their dials from more than one

manufacturer, and not just Byrne. Although some dials with Nicholas falseplates appear on clocks by other clockmakers (eg Fig. 25), most seem to be on clocks signed by the Nicholas brothers themselves. Examples of Nicholas moon dials are known from about 1810-20 and 1830, but as they are without maps no further conclusions can be drawn as to who supplied them.<sup>34</sup> William Nicholas is also listed in directories as a clock-case maker, although he probably did not employ a cabinetmaker, rather clock cases would have bought in and sold on.

As one of the leading suppliers of clocks in Birmingham at this period, the Nicholas family were keen to give the impression that they were the actual makers of the dials, cases and movements of the items that they retailed. They are an early example of the modern 'brand', whereby a retailer promotes and sells a product, such as clothing, under his own brand name despite it having been made by others. This was common in the clock and more especially the watch trade, where the name on the dial was often only that of the retailer, but Nicholas extended it to include dials and probably cases as well.

An added complication is that a dial is known signed by W. & C. Nicholas, but with a Ashwin & Co falseplate made of brass, instead of the usual cast iron (Fig. 24).<sup>35</sup> Stylistically it is pre-1800, so it is likely that it was purchased from either Ashwin or Byrne before dials were marketed under the Nicholas name. The brass falseplate appears to have been a casting pattern used as an actual falseplate during the transition from Ashwin to Byrne, as a means of using up now redundant brass patterns until iron falseplates with the new name became available.

## HUGHES, WALKER AND FINNEMORE

By the second decade of the nineteenth century, with the demise of the Wilson, Osborne and Ashwin/Byrne businesses, a new generation of dialmakers arose in Birmingham. The most important of these were George Walker, Thomas Hughes and William Finnemore, who worked individually and in combination in a number of different partnerships.

33. Tennant, *op. cit.*, page 76, plate viii, where it is dated to 1815-20, but it is more likely to be earlier.

34. Loomes, *op. cit.*, pp.103, 105.

35. In addition to the one on the dial in Fig. 24, two others have been reported.



Fig. 26. Thirty-hour dial by made by Walker & Finnmore for Samuel Deacon of Barton, showing George Walker's use of geometric patterns in the arch and corners, M.F. Tennant.



Fig. 27. Dial made for Joseph Plowman of Chichester by Walker when he worked alone for about a year after 1811, with geometric patterns of overlapping diamond shapes, M.F. Tennant.

George Glover Walker was baptised at St Philip's in 1767, the son of Richard and Elizabeth Walker. Richard Walker had married Elizabeth Glover in Chester in 1764, but within two years had moved to Birmingham. His occupation is not known as there were several men of this name listed in the Birmingham directories of the period. George Walker married Elizabeth Richards at St Philip's in 1799 and their only daughter was baptised at St Martin's the following year. In 1800-1 he is listed in directories as a painter at 27 Ashted Row, where he lived for the rest of his life.

By 1808 he is recorded as working with William Finnmore in Edmund Street as a clock-dial maker. It is likely that the partnership was in business several years earlier than this first directory entry, as a dial is known with a repairer's date on the movement of 1805.<sup>36</sup> Also a couple of Walker & Finnmore dials have been reported that stylistically date to about 1800.<sup>37</sup>

The partnership ceased in 1811, but during its relatively short existence a large number of dials were produced, some of high quality. George Walker then worked alone for about a year, and presumably the few dials known with falseplates marked 'Walker & Co, Birmingham' were produced during this period, but there are no directory entries under this name, nor is it known to whom the '& Co' refers. The style of these Walker dials is consistent with a date of 1811, rather than 1800-1, when he is first recorded as a painter.

A noticeable feature of some dials by Walker & Finnmore (Fig. 26) and Walker & Co (Fig. 27) is the bizarre use of geometric patterns, including radiating lines, repeated circles, diamonds or scrolls, and two medical opinions have suggested that George Walker suffered from migraine and/or schizophrenia.<sup>38</sup> He may have been difficult to work with, hence the break with William Finnmore, and it may be significant that he had

36. Information from Michael Finnmore.

37. *Clocks*, (April 1992), 54-5; Tennant, *op. cit.*, p.86.

38. Tennant, *op. cit.*, p.90.



Fig. 28. Trade card of Walker & Hughes. A Walker & Hughes dial is known with virtually the same illustration painted in the arch, Guildhall Library, London.

only one child at a time when large families were usual. After the break up of the partnership the casting patterns for the falseplates appear to have been divided between the former partners, and were then reused, with each one crudely filling in the other's name until new patterns were made.

After this very brief period of trading by himself he became a partner in the firm of Walker & Hughes. Until recently Hughes's christian name was not known, and there is the added complication that falseplates are known with 'Hughes & Co, Birm' (in two styles, although neither are particularly common), and a very rare one 'Jon<sup>n</sup> Hughes, Birmingham'. The latter is probably Jonathan Hughes, a factor at 71 Northwood Street in 1830, who may have bought dials from the actual makers and sold them with his own falseplates. The scarcity of such falseplates suggests that this venture was not a success. There was also Jonathan Hughes & Co, iron founders and stove grate makers at 25 Whittall Street in 1820-5, and the closeness to the dial manufactories of Wilkes and others suggests that he may have cast falseplates, and could have ventured into factoring dials himself. There are no known connections with the dialmakers Walker & Hughes.



Fig. 29. Walker & Hughes dial made for Ashmead of Newnham, with automata of Adam and Eve in the arch. The overlapping diamond patterns are clearly the same as in Fig 27 and attributable to George Walker, M.F. Tennant.

It has now been established that the dialmaker was Thomas Hughes, whose will provides the main source of biographical information. His wife was Frances and his siblings were John, William, Elizabeth and Ann. He was born in 1770, but as his name is not particularly distinctive, it has not proved possible to establish his origins. While there were several people born in the Birmingham area at the correct period, a family with children having all these names has not been found. He is possibly the man who married Frances Price at West Bromwich, about 4 miles north-west of Birmingham, in July 1802, with children born at Birmingham in 1803, 1815 and 1822.

His early working life is not known, although he may have produced the dials that were fitted with Hughes & Co falseplates during this period. After the break up of the Walker & Finnemore partnership he went into business with George Waker in 1812, initially at 15 Lower Priory, then after 1826 in Fisher Steet, and Walker & Hughes became one of the most prolific dial makers of the Regency period,

manufacturing many good quality dials. They are the only dialmakers for whom a trade card survives (Fig. 28). Some early Walker & Hughes dials continue George Walker's bizarre use of geometric patterns (Fig. 29). Whether George Walker overcame his migraine/schizophrenia or if he concentrated on managing the business rather than actually painting dials is not known, but most of the dials made by Walker & Hughes during more than twenty years in business do not show the features characteristic of his early work. Although both Walker & Hughes and George Walker are included separately in the 1830 trade directory, the former in Fisher Street, and the latter in Ashted Row (Walker's home), there is no evidence to suggest that Walker had left the partnership and was working independently. After George Glover Walker died on 29 March 1834, aged sixty-six, probably a widower, Thomas Hughes may have continued for a couple more years until he also died.

In his will dated 6 April 1829 Thomas Hughes, clock-dial manufacturer of Edgbaston, Birmingham, left his estate to his wife with various legacies to friends and to his brothers and sisters and their children, but as no children of his own are mentioned they may not have survived childhood. His executors were Joseph Marshall, jeweller, Samuel Clinton, varnish manufacturer and Thomas Aston, clock-dial manufacturer, all of Birmingham. Thomas Hughes left 'all my share being one half part and in the Tools and Fixtures' to Thomas Aston, 'for many years a faithful servant to me in the Manufactory which I carry on in partnership with George Glover Walker'. Thomas Hughes of Monument Place (Edgbaston) died on 26 December 1835, aged sixty-five, and his will was proved on 9 February 1837, his wife having died in January 1834, aged fifty-four. Walker & Hughes are last mentioned in trade directories in 1835, but how long Thomas Aston continued the business is

ANTIQUARIAN HOROLOGY



Fig. 30. Moon dial with a Finnemore & Son falseplate made for Muncaster & Son, Isle of Man, with a gilt flower pattern instead of hemisphere maps, and Four Continents corners. Note the face peering from behind the chapter ring below Europe (top left).

not known. As he is not listed under his own name in directories he may have retained the goodwill of the business by trading under the Walker & Hughes name until he died in 1846. He may have been the man aged sixty-six, of independent means, living in Camden Street in the 1841 Census.

## WILLIAM FINNEMORE

William Finnemore was born in May 1766 at Aston near Birmingham, and married Rebecca Whitehouse at St Martin, Birmingham, in November 1787. They had four sons: Isaac, born 1788, William, born 1798, Thomas, born 1800, and George, born 1808, as well as six daughters. By 1800, when he may have been trading as

a dialmaker with George Walker, he would have been aged thirty-four. What he was doing for the first 20 years of his working life is not recorded, nor does he appear in trade directories of the period, but it is highly likely that he had been employed by one of the other established makers of clock dials. After the cessation of the Walker & Finnmere partnership in about 1812, William Finnmere traded under his own name at 4 Edmund Street, opposite the Crown Inn, until 1840.

Although the number of Walker & Finnmere's premises is not stated in directories it is probable that William Finnmere continued to occupy the works used by the former partnership. After 1840 he moved a short distance to 3 Edmund Street. William Finnmere is also listed in directories at Calthorpe Street in 1812-27, but this was his residence, not his business address. In 1812 land on the western edge of the town near Five Ways was developed for successful tradesmen who were looking for a small country house set in a spacious garden. William Finnmere was one of the earliest to take up residency in the area, and he is clearly named on a map of 1833 as the occupier of the first in a row of houses on Calthorpe Road leading to Edgbaston. He built up his business, which, to judge from the number of surviving dials bearing his name, was probably the largest in Britain in the first half of the nineteenth century. The firm produced a wide range of dials from simple thirty-hour ones to good quality eight-day dials (Fig. 30), as well as undecorated round white dials for fusee wall clocks.

Only two of William Finnmere's sons worked in the clock-dial trade, and the other two sought different occupations. In 1823 as well as William Finnmere, japanner and clock-dial manufacturer, 4 Edmund Street was also occupied by '- Finnmere' manufacturing brass, copper and iron tubes for a wide range of application. This was probably Isaac, William's eldest son, who was a 'gas apparatus and brass and copper tube maker' in St Paul's Square in 1830, and died in 1850. Another son, Thomas, was probably the 'brazier, tinman & ironmonger' aged 50, in the 1851 Census.

William Finnmere junior joined his father in the dial business, probably in about 1819, when he would have been 21 years old, and certainly by 1828. In the directories of 1823 and 1830 not only is William Finnmere &

Son listed at 4 Edmund Street, but this was the same address of a cooper and maltster. No doubt many of these premises were multi-occupancy, and maybe the clock-dial business was on an upper floor, to make as much use as possible of the available light. On 5 November 1836 Finnmere & Son advertised in the *Birmingham Journal*:

To clock dial painters. Wanted a good workman in the Ornamental style - Apply to Finnmere & Son, Edmund Street, where superior prices are given.

William Finnmere's youngest son George probably also worked in the family firm, but he did not formally become part of the business until after his father's death in 1838. In his will William senior gave to:

my son William junior my share of the trade now carried out by me under the Firm of William Finnmere and Son with the tools and fixtures thereto belonging on condition that he take his brother George into partnership allowing him one third part or share of the profits of such trade.

Hence it appears that William senior and William junior had owned the business equally, but after his father's death George was to inherit only one third of the firm, with his brother owning the other two thirds. Most of the remainder of William senior's estate was divided equally between his children.

The clock-dial business continued as William Finnmere & Son, then as William & George Finnmere during 1841-7, but George seems to have left the firm as he is recorded as working in Hospital Street under his own name in 1846, with his brother alone remaining at Edmund Street. George Finnmere was a clock-dial maker aged thirty, living in Pope Steet, Ladywood, in 1841, but he has not been found in the 1851 Census in Warwickshire, so he may have died by then. Four styles of falseplate are known: 'Finnmere', 'Finnmere, Birmingham', 'Finnmere & Son' and 'W. Finnmere & Son', but none by either George Finnmere or William & George Finnmere. None of William junior's children appear to have joined him in the clock-dial business, for in 1841 one was a factory apprentice and another a factor's

apprentice. In 1851 William Finnmere was a widower, aged fifty-three, a 'Clock Dial Maker employing three men', living in Victoria Terrace, Edgbaston. This surprisingly small number of workers may indicate that the works were being run down, as it was only to last for another three years under Finnmere ownership. This is the only known reference to indicate the number of people employed in any of the dial manufactories in Birmingham. Despite the large number of painted dials that survive they were probably made in small workshops with only a handful of workers.

When William Finnmere junior died has not been established, but by 1854 the clock-dial business at 3 Edmund Street had been taken over by William and Richard Griffiths, with Richard Griffiths (probably son of William) listed alone in 1867-77. Their previous experience in the clock dial trade is not known and neither men are listed in the 1830 directory, nor, surprisingly, are they to be found in Birmingham in the 1851 Census. By the time that Griffiths took over Finnmere's business the practice of using marked falseplates or stamped names on dials, calendar discs or moons, had largely ceased and no clock dials can be attributed to them. Richard Griffiths is not heard of again in Birmingham after 1877, when the Edmund Street dial works probably closed for good as the area was redeveloped about this period. Griffiths appears to have moved to nearby West Bromwich, for in 1881 a Richard Griffiths, widower, was an 'Enameller & Lacquerer (Iron)', aged sixty-six, born at Albrighton, Shropshire, with his daughter Mary an 'Enamel Polisher (Iron)', but this sounds more like someone enamelling iron castings, rather than painting clock dials. A William Griffiths, aged twenty-four, born in Birmingham, was also at West Bromwich as a '... Gauge Dial Writer (Philos)', so they may have abandoned clock dials to concentrate on other types of lacquered work and dials for philosophical (i.e. scientific) instruments.

## CONCLUSIONS

Although demand for the traditional Scottish gaudy and naive painted clock dial continued to the end of the nineteenth century and beyond,

in England the fashion for longcase clocks with colourful dials began to decline after the 1860s. But this was not the end of the industry in Birmingham, as thousands of fusee wall clocks were made for use in schools, offices, railways and homes, and they mostly had white painted dials. Some have falseplates by Finnmere or by one of the later manufacturers, but most are anonymous, and like their movements, the actual makers remain largely unknown.

By looking at the personal details of some of the key figures in the Birmingham dial trade it has proved possible to shed a little more light on another aspect of horological history. While we still know very little about their personalities, it has been discovered that the industry was started by two very young men, one of whom died at an early age after producing some of the finest dials, another dialmaker was murdered by a mob, one was an opportunist who took advantage of a tragic situation, while another probably suffered mental problems. It is surprising that while there are wills for James Wilson, as well as the later dialmakers, George Walker, Thomas Hughes and William Finnmere, no wills (nor even administrations if they died intestate) have been traced for Richard Wilson, Thomas Osborne, Ann Osborne, James Osborne, Mary Ashwin, Thomas Ashwin junior, or Francis Byrne, all being the sort of tradespeople expected to have made wills. Despite the fact that virtually no business documents are known to have survived, nor are there obituaries (apart from brief death notices) or biographies of any of these people, piecing together their family histories has revealed a surprising amount of detail.

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