

George Daniels – A Master Watchmaker and his Art

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This is, as the press release tells us, 'the first illustrated book of this scale to show Daniels' work'. It is also the first to tell the story of George Daniels' life as told to another author. That author, Michael Clerizo, is a London-based American journalist who has written previously about high-end watches. Although this book covers much of the same ground as Daniels' autobiography '*All in Good Time*', the author exposes aspects of George Daniels' personality and way of life which were not apparent from the earlier work and so this book is complementary to it.

The book does not have a conventional structure, as is clear from the Contents, but is divided between chapters of biography and sections illustrating the watches. The illustrations are very comprehensive, being larger and more detailed than any published before. They are supported by copious descriptions and extracts from Daniels' own notebooks and drawings.

The book starts with a short introduction by the author, in which he gives a précis of the main work. This is followed by the first chapter, '*Life, 1926–1947 Something deeply hidden*'. Covering Daniels' childhood, adolescence and early adulthood, it tells the story of a child born into poverty of a kind which does not exist today in this country.

George Daniels was not unique in his developing in spite of his background, but he clearly shares with others who have done this a toughness and determination which few exhibit. In this chapter the author exposes much more detail and more of the background to Daniels' early life than has been given previously. This chapter also illuminates George Daniels' personality by describing the author's experience of interviewing the man, who could clearly be an entertaining companion and good company. It is here that we learn of his enthusiasm for the harmonica and his love of opera.

'*Life, 1948–1959 Sixteen hours a day... seven days a week*' is the title of the second chapter. This takes up the story from George Daniels' discharge from the army, when he took up full-

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time employment as a watch repairer. During this period there are two strands to the story, as Daniels' modes of transport developed alongside his progress as a horologist. We also learn a little about Hetchins bicycles, Sunbeam motorcycles and (of course) Bentley motor cars. It was also during this period that he completed the three-year course at the Northampton Polytechnic to gain BHI qualification. The course of 1949 cost £1-16s (£1.80p) per year!

The section '*Watches, 1969–1978*' shows the first thirteen watches. Each one is illustrated at a large scale, some images occupying almost the whole, 12" square, page. The movement, dial, hands, case and box of each watch are described fully. The date of completion and history of each one are also presented.

The third chapter of biography, '*Life, 1960–1967, From repairer to restorer*', starts with Daniels' meeting Cecil Clutton, which proved to be a turning point in Daniels' life. His developing friendship with Clutton gave Daniels contact with other wealthy clients and his restoration business flourished. It was during this time that he and Clutton collaborated to produce the seminal work '*Watches*', which was published in 1965 and remains an essential reference for the serious horologist. Increasing familiarity with, and understanding of, the work of earlier masters such as Breguet clearly established concepts which would guide Daniels' own work. His marriage (1964) is mentioned and there are amusing digressions, such as the description of the acquisition of his rose engine from Professor David Torrens.

'*Life, 1968–1983, The foremost watchmaker of the century*' is the chapter in which we are told how Daniels became a maker of watches and how his ideas developed, though the advent of the quartz watch nearly caused him to abandon horology. It was during this phase of his career that Daniels invented his first escapement, the Double Wheel. To sum up this chapter, I can do no better than to quote from the book: 'In the 15 years from 1968 to 1983 Daniels had established his reputation as the foremost watchmaker of the century, written five books, endured two life-threatening illnesses, restored and raced vintage cars, risen to the pinnacle of the British horological establishment and received a trophy cabinet of awards and honours.'



In the section 'Watches, 1983–2011', we see the development of Daniels' watches from the Space Traveller of 1982 to the Omega watches incorporating the Daniels Co-axial escapement. As in the earlier illustrative section, the photographs are of superb quality and convey a great deal of information. Among other notes, there is a table of the trains for solar and sidereal indication accurate to 0.4 seconds a year, useful to anyone setting out to make a clock or watch indicating both types of time. This section shows the 'Martin' watch; the first to incorporate the Daniels Co-axial escapement. It is interesting to note that although the pocket watches became more complex, culminating in the Grand Complication, the case size remained within a millimetre of that of the first watch, the Clutton, at 2½ inches.

'Life, 1975–1993, Outwitting the quartz watch: Inventing the Co-axial escapement' tells that story in some detail. It records Daniels logical process of developing the escapement, followed by years of rejection by the Swiss watch industry. The making of his first wristwatches is described, while diversion is provided by motoring exploits. Finally there was the sadness of divorce; partly a result of stress caused by the frustration of having the Co-axial escapement rejected for spurious reasons (largely 'Not Invented Here' syndrome, also well known in Britain).

The final chapter, 'Life, 1994–2011, Finding a home: Omega adopt the Co-axial', starts on a more positive note: 'Everything was different with Omega. They were not like the others.' The story of Omega's work to overcome the challenges associated with mass production runs alongside that of Daniels' deteriorating health and the start of his association with Roger Smith. Like earlier chapters, this one includes a fair amount concerning motor cars and racing.

The Afterword rounds the book off with a further brief impression of the person of George Daniels; probably not the



George in younger years.

easiest man to get on with, but worth the effort. The final few lines mention the George Daniels Educational Trust, a charity which Daniels set up just prior to his death. This provides support to students of horology and to horological educational projects such as the BHI Distance Learning Course.

Following the main body of the book there are supporting notes, a glossary, bibliography, picture credits, acknowledgements and a comprehensive index.

The outstanding feature of this book is the scope, size and quality of the photographs. Presented on the large, square format of the book, they provide a tremendous resource to those who would study the watches. This is an excellent work; both a fascinating story and fantastic pictures. I recommend it without reservation.

Colin Fergusson MBHI



Bracket & Musical Clock Forum

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