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All in Good Time (Revised)

Author: George Daniels

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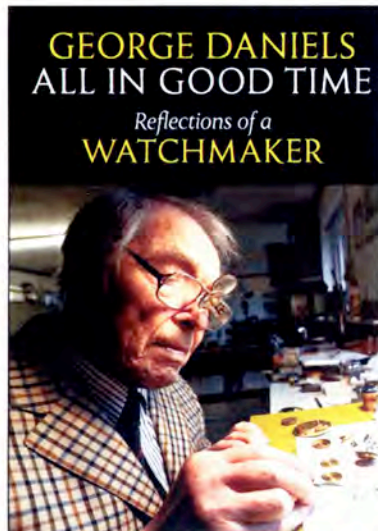
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This is a new edition of the autobiography of George Daniels, who died in 2011. This edition is in a slightly smaller format than the original, but is a hardback with a dust jacket rather than the earlier paperback. Not only did Dr Daniels revise the text; there is additional material by Roger Smith and David Newman. There are also a number of illustrations which did not appear in the first edition, which was published in 2000 and was reviewed by Timothy Treffry in *HJ November* of that year, page 378.

In his introduction, Dr Daniels says that he wrote and published his story in response to inquiries about how he started. He describes himself as having too much curiosity, optimism and opportunism to be miserable, and having never been bored, inactive or profoundly despondent. He also mentions his love of motor cars, his writing of several books and his involvement with the watch industry.

The first chapter of the book describes a miserable childhood, spent in poverty with thoroughly unpleasant parents. One of eleven children, George had to share beds and clothing, was often cold

and seldom well-fed. From an early age he worked, having a number of part-time jobs. Another feature of life was frequent moves, as housing was clearly a challenge. He describes the family going between houses, taking not just their little furniture but also the curtains and even the lino for the floors. Such a family would now be a target for social workers, though whether this attention would encourage or discourage the development of a modern-day George Daniels is debatable.

In his second chapter, we are told how George first became acquainted with the workings of clocks and watches. Though the chaotic pattern of life continued, with frequent moves, part-time jobs and gleaning for food, George discovered a library with horological books and so extended his understanding. At the same time he started to repair watches for his schoolmates, earning some extra money. At the age of fourteen, in 1939, he was working in a mattress factory and came to the decision to take control of his own life.

Chapter three tells of several jobs, each contributing to George's knowledge, skills and understanding of business and mechanical matters. The Tyre Services company, which diversified into repair of Wellington boots and the conversion of film projectors for sound (you'll just have to read it!) was followed by an apprenticeship as an electrician; not a satisfactory phase. The next major change came in 1944, when George was called up into the Army. He describes the pleasures of having a proper bed and regular meals, along with a variety of escapades and experiences, including service in Egypt. During his time in the Army, George had



The first Space Traveller watch.

developed his watch repairing skill and earned money by doing so. As a result he was able, on being demobbed, to take up work as a watch repairer and obtain accommodation of his own. He continued to read horological books and in 1949 started evening classes at the Northampton Polytechnic. Going to the College on three evenings a week while doing full-time work and homework was obviously a strain, but in 1953 George passed his final examinations, was awarded the Skinner's Prize and became a Fellow of the British Horological Institute. It was also during this period that he tried different cars, culminating in the purchase of his first Bentley. About this he says: 'But the car vastly increased my circle of friends. Bentley owners were much more sociable than watch repairers, who seemed to take a very parochial and gloomy view of their profession. After ten full years practising as a watch repairer, I had not one social companion in the trade.' Are we still like that?

The fourth chapter, entitled 'Watches versus Bentleys', describes several changes of home and car, along with very hard work. Not surprisingly, this caused George to suffer from migraine, which forced some relaxation of his driven lifestyle. It was also during this time that he met Sam Clutton, a significant contact who not only gave him work and encouragement, but also introduced him to other collectors of antique watches. On a lighter note, he tells of various escapades with Bentleys, his enthusiasm for the Leica camera and the dawning of his



Daniels White.

determination to resuscitate the manufacture of high-grade watches in England.

George's involvement with the House of Breguet is the first subject of chapter 5 and he tells how he nearly became the agent for the marque in this country, but preferred 'Daniels of London' to 'Breguet of Paris' as the inscription for his work. The writing of his book 'The Art of Breguet' is covered in some detail. In this chapter he also tells of his marriage, some sailing experiences and setting up home. A significant meeting was that with Professor David Torrens, who donated the dial and casemaking machinery which facilitated the development of the distinctive Daniels style.

'The First Daniels Watch' is the title of chapter 6 and he discusses the reasons for the features of it. He says: 'It could not look like any other watch, nor be seen as a copy of another watch', an objective which he certainly met. He also explains why it has a tourbillon and his philosophy of perfection in every respect. In this chapter he describes how he learnt to make his own cases and the subsequent sale of the watch to his friend Sam Clutton. This was the first of a series of six watches, during the making of which George developed his design, each one being an improvement on the previous model. A digression within the chapter describes how, suffering from chronic back pain, George designed himself an orthopaedic brace which was of benefit to him and a few others but was not taken up by the medical profession because he was not medically qualified. Clearly 'Not Invented Here' (NIH) syndrome is not unique to horology! It is in this chapter that George describes the development first of the double wheel and then of the co-axial escapements.

Chapter 7 is entitled 'Developing the Co-axial Escapement' and describes this process in more detail, with reference to a succession of watches made between 1970 and 1999 (though not in chronological order). These include the first watches with the



Daniels Anniversary Movement.

double-wheel and co-axial escapements, along with the two Space Traveller watches. In this chapter George explains why his early watches were key-wound and outlines his method of design, which includes use of the backs of envelopes (he tells us that Breguet preferred old playing cards). The majority of this chapter is devoted to his very negative experiences while trying to interest the Swiss watch industry in his Co-axial Escapement. This is a long and sorry tale, involving NIH at almost every turn, but culminating in the successful adoption of the escapement by Omega. Sadly, I know of plenty of people who are sufferers of NIH and who consequently achieve less than they would if they had been receptive of others' contributions. The eighth chapter explains, very clearly and without jargon, the working principles of the double-wheel and the Co-axial escapements. It is entitled 'Not Too Technical' and lives up to its name. It is brief and to the point.

In chapter 9, 'Alfa and Omega', George covers a number of topics including his health problems, the start of his relationship with Roger Smith and his involvement with the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. He also describes moving to the Isle of Man, his divorce and his work as Consultant Horologist to Sotheby's, a post which he held for over thirty years. The vicissitudes of applying for a patent and having to deal with individuals who have power without understanding, are described with some justifiable rancour. The final chapter by George, 'Wheels', is about his transport activities. Starting with bicycles and progressing to motorcycles and then to a succession of cars, his anecdotes are highly entertaining. Although a large part is devoted to the works of WO Bentley, he also gives us his approach to motorsport (for enjoyment) and describes the various vehicles which had been in his collection. He believed that the cars should be used (I had the pleasure of watching him drive the Birkin car at Silverstone) both for his own pleasure and for that of others. The only drawback is that some of the cars

have prodigious thirst, which makes them very expensive to use now.

There is a postscript, written by George in the year of his eightieth birthday, 2006. In this, he makes it clear that he intended to continue working, which he did.

The first additional chapter, 'Working with George' by Roger Smith, gives us another view of the man and his work. Although determined that only perfection was good enough, it is clear that he could be patient with a pupil who shared his passion. Roger is clearly continuing in the path set by George.

The Afterword is contributed by David Newman, George's friend for over fifty years and now Chairman of the George Daniels Educational Trust. David also gives an alternative view of his character. In particular, David describes the activity prompted by the award of the CBE in 2010 and the consequences of this. The final item in the book is a list of the Complete Watch and Clock Production of George Daniels.

The book gives an impression of a man who was single-minded to the point of obsession and probably not always easy to get on with, but was surely the greatest horologist of the 20th century. He took great pleasure in his work and in his cars, which he enjoyed almost to the end.



Demonstrating the Birkin Bentley.

The standard of illustration in the book is excellent, with more photographs and drawings than were in the earlier edition. All are very clear and there is plenty of information for those who wish to follow in George's footsteps. This is an inspiring book; one which should be owned and read by anyone who has an interest in horology. One of George Daniels' final acts was to leave a significant legacy for the setting-up of the George Daniels Educational Trust which, among other beneficiaries, provides bursaries for students of horology. If for no other reason, I encourage the reader to buy this book in order to contribute to this worthy cause.

Colin Fergusson MBHI



The first Daniels watch.