

# A rare old time!

■ The man behind some of the world's most exclusive watches



Roger W Smith, a successful man with time on his hands

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JUST 60 people in the world own a Roger W Smith watch — making it a very exclusive club to be a part of.

But the man behind the luxury wristwear began his successful career in his parents' modest home in Stitch Mi Lane, Harwood.

As a youngster, Mr Smith had no time for books or school and spent all his time making models and finding out how things worked.

His father's interest in clocks led him to study horology — the science of measuring time.

A visit from watchmaker George Daniels changed his life — and he set about learning the 34 different skills needed to make a watch.

Seven years and two handmade pocket watches later, Mr Daniels, impressed with his work, offered him an apprenticeship.

So Mr Smith relocated to the Isle of Man to work with his mentor before branching out on his own in 2001.

Now, his exclusive, handmade watches can command between £85,000 and £500,000 each and new customers go on to an eight year waiting list!

And to add to his already brimming CV, the 43-year-old has been asked to make a watch for the GREAT Britain overseas trade and tourism campaign that celebrates the best of Britain.

Mr Smith said: "I was always interested in making models when I was younger — I didn't understand school or see the point of exams. I was always interested in practical things. I would build things like model boats or Meccano. I never asked for books.

"I finished school at 16 and went to study horology. My father had an interest in



Roger working at his parents' home in Stitch Mi Lane, Harwood, around 1994/5 when he was 25

clocks and heard about the course and thought it would be a good idea for me to go on it."

While at college in 1987 and repairing watches in his spare time, his course was visited by Mr Daniels.

Mr Smith said: "I wrote to him asking if he would take me on as an apprentice but he said he wouldn't — I'd have to do it myself. So I set about making my first pocket watch. It took me 18

“When I completed the watch I had to show it to George and I got his approval. I remember walking down his drive to the house in the Isle of Man thinking after so long trying to make watches, if he says no I would have wasted the last seven years of my life.

“He looked at all the components and asked if I made them all. I said yes. He said: 'congratulations, you are a watch maker'.

“Six months later he asked me to work with him and I worked there for about four years. We made a series of watches and I learned everything I know in that time."

Mr Smith branched out on his own in 2001. He said: "I decided to make nine wrist watches and tried to sell them under my own name. That coincided with the internet

back to the beginning. I remade it four times within that period." But hard work paid off for the young watchmaker.

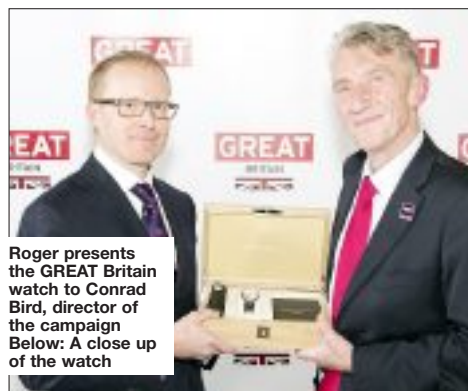
Mr Smith said: "By then I'd started repairing watches at Timepiece in Bolton. I did three or four days a week to pay my parents rent and made the watch in my spare time. They allowed me to take a small room in the house and make it into a workshop.

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Roger presents the GREAT Britain watch to Conrad Bird, director of the campaign. Below: A close up of the watch



taking off so I bought a computer and posted some images on various forums and I got orders straight away."

Thirteen years later just 60 people in the world own a Roger W Smith timepiece, which each take about nine months to make.

“It took about 10 months to make and is worth £180K”  
Roger W Smith

Mr Smith, who now employs seven people, said: "I do have a standard watch but generally clients want a version or a theme. I do bespoke, one-off pieces too.

We normally make 10 a year. We are one of the smallest watchmaking companies in the world.

"I want to start making 12 a year now. It usually makes nine months to make an entry level one from start to finish."

Still living in the Isle of Man with his wife Caroline, aged 40, and their 20 month old daughter, quiet success is something that Mr Smith is content with. But even he cannot help but feel proud of being asked to make a bespoke watch for the GREAT Britain Campaign.

He said: "A year ago I had a phone call from Downing Street who told me about this campaign, which is a worldwide promotion of Great Britain. They said that they felt that my work fitted a few British qualities — inventiveness, technology and creativity."

"After a couple of meetings they asked me to make a watch for them. I did. It took about 10 months to make and is worth £180,000. It is going to be toured around the world as part of this campaign, which is really quite exciting."

The Roger W Smith Great Britain watch will be unveiled officially on April 24 at Watch Club in Piccadilly, London.

## SIGHT

### Group is looking for new friends

VOLUNTEERS are wanted to help the visually impaired for as little as one hour a week.

Bolton Society for Blind People wants to stop those with sight problems from becoming isolated and suffering from unnecessary health problems.

The charity has a befriending service, which requires people to help out for one hour a week. The cause, based in Chorley Street, has found volunteering can make a huge difference to a person's life.

Help can include taking someone for a walk, shopping, reading letters or meeting for a chat. For information call Glen Sheader on 01204 337 896 or email glen.sheader@bsbp.org.uk

## COURT

### Thief seen on CCTV

A DRUG addict has appeared at Bolton Magistrates Court accused of shoplifting.

James Hodgkiss, aged 32, of Peel Park Crescent, Little Hulton, pleaded guilty to stealing batteries and confectionery, worth £78 from B&M Bargains on January 31 and more confectionery, valued at £71.40 from Sainsbury's two days later.

The court heard that Hodgkiss was caught after police identified him from CCTV footage at the stores.

District Judge James Prowse was told Hodgkiss had a severe drug problem but had now stopped taking drugs. He was ordered to pay the stores compensation for the goods he had stolen.

## DOGS

### Free 'chips' for pets

DOG owners in Bolton can get their pet fitted with a micro-chip for free.

There are three sessions where dogs can be chipped, beginning in Moses Gate Country Park, Farnworth, on Friday from 11am to 2pm.

The next is on April 11 at the same time in Leverhulme Park and will be followed by a session on May 9, again at the same time at the Hatfield Road UCAN centre.

Find your new car! The motors section starts on P31