

## AHS London Lecture Thursday 17 July 2014

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### The faking of English watches

Since the beginning of English watchmaking dominance, with the development and introduction of the balance-spring, English watches, particularly London watches, have been the watch of choice for many buyers. As such, similar looking watches, often bearing false names and nearly always 'London' as the place of manufacture, have been offered for sale to the public. The vast majority of these watches are not English made and the literature is full of examples which are nearly always described as 'Dutch fakes'.

A forty year search for evidence to confirm this statement has, mostly, been in vain, and the actual story is far more convoluted and interesting. It has also highlighted the business of naming watches, fakes or not, as well as the part retailers played in promoting what they must have known were watches bearing false

provenance. It has also thrown up the problems surrounding the term 'fake' and just what it can mean when the vast majority of watches bear the name of the retailer rather than anyone involved in their manufacture.

London makers were not alone in being copied this way, and the practice had such strong effects on the business that it played a large part in the decline and ending of both German and Dutch watchmaking in the eighteenth century, the latter never to rise again. The fact that this did not signal the end of 'Dutch fake' watches gives some clue as to the real story.

The faking of watches did not end in the nineteenth century, and anyone interested in wristwatches will know the problems being faced by present day Swiss manufactures - an ironic justice perhaps, as I hope to show.



SAMSON, London. Typical example of a 'Dutch Fake,' circa 1825. Silver paircase bearing false London assay marks, but also bearing the probable stamp of the actual casemaker JDB (cameo), the outer with Danish watchpaper: N KLOTTRUP, Gl Asmild på Viborg. Fullplate fusee movement with balance-bridge, often associated with such fakes, but making no real attempt at looking like English work. Verge escapement with typical French/Swiss adjustment for the drops, another strong non-English sign. Enamel dial with polychrome scene (fired not painted), as often seen on English watches of this period. Later hands. 57 mm diameter.

David Penney has been involved in antiquarian horology for decades, first as an illustrator and then as a writer, dealer and consultant to private collectors and museums worldwide. From 1986 to 1992 he was editor of *Antiquarian Horology*.

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