

POCKET CHRONOMETER 912

BY JOHN ADAM MANGAAR



by Tony Proctor

IT is not often that one comes across a watch that could have been made by the grandson of a king. Even less often does that watch take the form of an early pocket chronometer. The pocket chronometer discussed here (Fig. 1) was made by John Adam Mangaar (1746-1809) of Maiden Lane, Covent Garden, London, and it is the only pocket chronometer, or indeed any watch, by him that I know.

Data relating to known surviving eighteenth-century pocket chronometers made in the United Kingdom indicate that by far the largest number are attributable to John Arnold and Thomas Earnshaw. From published sources it is possible to confirm the existence of at least twenty-six Arnold pocket chronometers.¹ Randall provides information on early pocket chronometers and specifically gives detailed information on those of Earnshaw.² He points to around a dozen or so other Earnshaw pocket chronometers produced before 1800 and two pocket chronometers produced by Earnshaw bearing Wright's patent punchmark and signed 'Jessop' and 'Tomlin' respectively. A number of other makers produced pocket chronometers before 1800 and these included Margetts, Emery and Brockbanks as well as lesser known makers. It is hard to gauge the actual number of pocket chronometers produced prior to 1800 because watchmakers' numbering systems for chronometers were apt to combine both larger marine chronometers and pocket chronometers.



Fig. 1. Pocket chronometer 912, made by J A Mangaar. Diameter over the paired cases 63 mm, over the stem and bow as well 86 mm.

In addition some makers simply included the numbers assigned to pocket chronometers in with the numbering for their ordinary pocket watches. However, Mercer indicates that some six hundred or so instruments were produced by Arnold alone.³

1. Publications used include T. Camerer Cuss, *The English Watch 1585-1970* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Antique Collectors Club, 2009); A. G. Randall & R. Good, *Catalogue of Watches in the British Museum, VI. Pocket Chronometers, Marine Chronometers and Other Portable Precision Timekeepers* (London, 1990); H. Staeger, *John Arnold, John Roger Arnold, Arnold & Dent and Arnold & Frodsham. 100 Years of Precision Timekeepers from John Arnold to Arnold & Frodsham 1763-1862* (Filderstadt, Germany: Eigenverlag, 1997); M.E. Cattermole, 'Arnold 75 revisited', *Antiquarian Horology* 26/1 (2001), 42-51; *English Pocket Chronometers. An exhibition of English Pocket Chronometers from the 18th to the 20th Century* (Bobinet Ltd, Kent House, 87 Regent St. London W1, 1-10 December 1976); Stanley H. Burton, *The watch collection of Stanley H. Burton: 'warts and all'* (London: Batsford, 1981), p.40; *Antiquarian Horology* 16/2 (1986), 178. <http://www.invaluable.com/> was used for an online search of past auctions.
2. A.G. Randall, *The Time Museum Catalogue of Chronometers* (Rockford, Ill.: Time Museum, 1992) and idem, 'Thomas Earnshaw's numbering sequence', *Antiquarian Horology* 17/4 (Summer 1988), 367-81
3. T. Mercer, *Chronometer Makers of the World* (London: N.A.G., Press, 2004, revised)

Many of the pocket chronometers made before 1800 are now in private collections. Unfortunately due to accidental damage and non-reporting of pocket chronometers one cannot be exact about the number still in existence. Confusion can also exist when assigning dates because hallmarks on cases and actual numbers on movements may not be chronologically linked. In addition, movements may have been re-cased or cases produced well before the movements which they contain. In terms of numbers of surviving pre-1800 pocket chronometers, it seems that one should be thinking in terms of double figures rather than triple figures. This estimate is based upon documents, books, records of sales at auctions and by Internet dealers over the past two decades.

JOHN ADAM MANGAAR (1746-1809)

John Adam's father, Colonel John Mangaar (born 1718), was a Dane resident in London, and is claimed to have been a son of King Frederick IV of Denmark by a morganatic marriage. His mother, Martha Sidney (born 1722), was the third daughter of Captain Marlow Sidney, 2nd Royal Dragoon Guards.⁴ John Adam was the fourth of ten children from this marriage.⁵ The youngest, Jeremiah Marlow Mangaar (1755-1819), became a pawnbroker in the city⁶ and John Adam seems to have had a close affiliation with him, especially during the last years of his life.

John Adam was born on 28 February

1746 and was baptised on 28 March 1746 at St Pauls, Covent Garden.⁷ He served his apprenticeship as a watchmaker with Joshua Hassell and completed it in 1763.⁸ Hassell had been apprenticed to William Elkins who in turn had served his time as one of John Ellicott's apprentices.⁹ The skills of watchmaking had thus been passed down to John Adam Mangaar from a very reputable source.

Colonel John Mangaar is recorded as a haymaker¹⁰ and he and his family were resident in Maiden Lane in 1756; the exact address is not known. Around 1760 he appears to have run into financial difficulties, witness a notice of his insolvency.¹¹ The need for good financial management was thus learned by John Adam at a relatively young age. However, this was not the only time in his life that he was to encounter this lesson.

He entered into a partnership with John 'Junior' Kentish during the 1760s, later expanded to include William Allman.¹² The partnership was active at Storey's Gate, Westminster, London but was subsequently dissolved in 1772. This was probably just as well from Mangaar's point of view, because in 1774 Kentish was declared bankrupt.¹³ However, John 'Junior' Kentish was still working as watchmaker in 1798.¹⁴

On Christmas Eve 1774, John Mangaar married Elizabeth Marsh at St Clement Danes, Westminster.¹⁵

Whether Colonel Mangaar's family continued to reside at Maiden Lane is unclear. Nor is it clear where John Adam and Elizabeth took up residence after their marriage. They had no

4. B.S. Durrant, *Memorials of the Sidneys [and] the Woolletts*, edited by Captain M.S.J. Woollett (Liverpool: Cartwright Brothers, Cork Street, 1911), pp. 6-7.
5. Family Group Information (F751) www.tolliss.com
6. Guildhall Library, Records of Sun Fire Office MS 11936/452/846414 10 July 1810 Contents: Insured: Jeremiah Marlow Mangaar, 11 Wood Street Spitalfields, pawnbroker.
7. www.tolliss.com
8. Charles Edward, *The Company of Clockmakers Register of Apprentices 1631-1931* (Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, London 1931).
9. As previous note.
10. www.tolliss.com
11. *London Gazette*, 11 September 1761 p.33: notice that John Mangaar, formerly of Maiden Lane but late of the Parish of St. Stephen Coleman-street, London, was imprisoned on account of insolvency.
12. Baillie, *Watchmakers and clockmakers of the World* (Robert Hale, 1976), p. 208.
13. Baillie, p. 178.
14. B. Loomes, *Watchmakers and clockmakers of the world* 21st edition (N.A.G. Press, 2006), p. 442
15. www.tolliss.com.



Fig. 2. Trade card for Mangaar engraved by Darling and Robinson of Great Newport Street showing Mangaar's address as Maiden Lane, Covent Garden © Trustees of the British Museum

children. Figure 2 illustrates a trade card for Mangaar at the Maiden Lane address.¹⁶ It is signed Darling and Robinson, Great Newport Street. As the partnership between William Darling and John Robinson, engravers, was dissolved on 16 July 1785,¹⁷ this indicates that John Adam Mangaar was undertaking his watchmaking business in Maiden Lane from at least as early as 1785. It will be noted that the actual number shown on the address appears to have been altered.

Mangaar was recorded at 38, Maiden Lane as a coal merchant in 1794,¹⁸ and Britten has him as a watch and turret clock maker and

coal merchant at this address for the period 1790-97.¹⁹

One can only speculate about John Adam Mangaar's watchmaking activities after the breakup of the earlier partnership and his marriage to Elizabeth, but it would thus appear that he kept them alive until 1797 at the address 38, Maiden Lane. In July 1799, however, he appears to have run into financial problems, witness a bankruptcy notice in the London Gazette which records him as living in York-Street, Covent-Garden, with occupation Victualler, Dealer and Chapman.²⁰ The next month, we read of the obligatory sale of the

16. Trade cards Heal 39.61, Prints & Drawings in the Heal Collection, British Museum

17. *London Gazette*, 2 August 1785, p.372

18. *Kent's Directory for the Year 1794. Cities of London and Westminster, & Borough of Southwark*

19. E.J. Britten, *Old clocks and watches and their makers*, 9th edition (London, 1982)

20. *London Gazette*, 16 July 1799, p. 727

property at Maiden Lane.²¹ Some two years later a further notice indicated that he had managed to resolve his bankruptcy.²²

John Adam Mangaar died in 1809 at the age of sixty-three. He must have been ill for some time, as his will, drawn up the previous year suggests that he was aware that his end was in sight. At the time he was living near his youngest brother Jeremiah in the area of Highgate.²³

POCKET CHRONOMETER 912

The inscription (Fig. 3) indicates that the chronometer was made while John Adam was at the Maiden Lane address in Covent Garden. There are no hallmarks on the white metal pair cases and they have not been tested to establish whether or not they are made of silver.

The general characteristics of the watch would suggest that it dates from the period towards the turn of the century. Mercer suggests a date of 1800.²⁴ There are no other recorded pocket chronometers or chronometers produced by Mangaar as far as I can establish. Britten records Mangaar as a fine maker of duplex watches, but there is some doubt about his claim as he refers to a watch made by Mangaar as late as 1834!²⁵

In putting an exact date on the watch, one could take into account the probability that Mangaar adopted a new numbering system after 1774 when the early partnership with Allman and Kentish was dissolved. In the absence of any information to the contrary one might argue that the pocket chronometer featured here dates from



Fig. 3. Plate on the movement reading 'J A Mangaar Maiden Lane COV' GARDEN 912'

some time earlier than 1800, perhaps prior to 1797 in line with the evidence presented in the pre-1785 trade card and Britten's dates indicating that Mangaar resided at Maiden Lane from 1790 to 1797.

The instrument features a flat balance spring and an Earnshaw spring detent escapement under the bottom plate. There is a regulator fitted as well as three balance screws to adjust the timekeeping. One will also notice a very large diamond end stone on the balance cock (Fig. 4).



Fig. 4. View of the movement showing the large diamond end stone on the balance cock.

21. *London Gazette*, 27 July 1799, p.761. The property was noted as a leasehold estate to be sold by auction at that time in the possession of Mr. William Thompson, engraver, at a rent of 40s. per annum, held for an unexpired term of 17 years.

22. *London Gazette*, Saturday April 25th to Tuesday April 28th 1801, p.459.

23. Will of John Adam Mangaar, Saint Pancras, Middlesex, 1808. Source: Documents Online (images of documents from The National Archives).

24. Mercer, *Chronometer Makers of the World*, p.198

25. E.J. Britten, *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers* (London: Spon, 6th edition, 1932), p. 794



Fig. 5. Watch paper of John Carter, Chronometer Maker.

The balance itself has three arms. The watch has now been adjusted to provide reasonable time-keeping (-20 secs a day upright, + 40 secs a day face up) which it appears to be able to produce very consistently. Prior to recent times the watch had not apparently been run for over twenty-five years. Further improvements in accuracy are no doubt possible, but given the age of the chronometer and delicacy required in making adjustments it is best to leave the watch in its now newly adjusted state.

The watch contains a watch paper (Fig. 5) produced for John Carter, 61, Cornhill, Chronometer Maker to the Royal Navy. John Carter (1804-1878), civic activist and Lord Mayor of London (elected 1859) was born of an established Southwark family on 8 March 1804. He was left as an orphan at a young age and was apprenticed to a chronometer maker. In 1838 at the annual trials of chronometers at the Royal Observatory and in competition for rewards offered by the Government for the best chronometers, he obtained a greater number of rewards than any other chronometer maker. The Royal Observatory also noted that several chronometers constructed by Carter, either belonging to the Royal Navy, or on trial for

purchase by the Government, had been rated at the Royal Observatory as extremely good.²⁶

By 1840 he had established his own business in the City and was noted for the excellence of his instruments, serving as a juror at the Imperial Exhibition at Paris in 1855. He was Master of the Clockmakers' Company in 1857, 1860 and 1865 and Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society. He died at Stamford Hill on 8 May 1878. The connection between the paper and the watch is not certain, of course, but it could well be that the chronometer by Mangaar was handled by Carter in the 1830s in connection with his dealings with the Royal Navy.

CONCLUSION

The London watchmaker John Adam Mangaar (1746-1809) is mentioned in Baillie ('active 1763-1799') and Britten, but not much is known about him. The Mangaar 912, the only pocket chronometer made by him that I know, could be earlier than the 1800 as Mercer has dated it. This would make it of interest as an early example of an Earnshaw spring detent. Information found about Mangaar's life would seem to corroborate a pre-1800 date, as it would seem that he lived at the Maiden Lane address in his signature for an unspecified period between 1774 and 1797; however there are uncertainties about these dates, and for some or much of this time, he may not have been (primarily) a watchmaker. I would like to hear from readers if they know anything else about Mangaar or surviving timepieces by him.

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26. Royal Observatory, Greenwich, Oct. 22, 1838. In a statement made by G.B. Airy and quoted in an advertisement placed by Carter in Captain James Barber, *The Overland guide-book; A complete vade-mecum for the overland traveller to India and Egypt* (H.C.S., second edition, London: Wm. H. Allen and Co., 7, Leadenhall Street. 1850), unnumbered page towards the end of the book.