

AHS London Lecture Thursday 19 September 2019

Geoff Allnutt and Su Fullwood,

'Four Watches, Four Women: Research on Women in Horological Businesses in Britain 1800–1930'

This lecture discusses research that is very much a work in progress. The aim is to uncover the personal stories of women, both individually and collectively, who worked in the field of horology over the past 200 years. The work began after Geoff Allnutt, a watchmaker, first came across watches that had been signed with women's names. This was also the beginning of a collaboration with Su Fullwood who had produced several small publications and exhibitions about gender, ranging from the Roman period to the twentieth century during her work as a museum curator. Certain assumptions have been made in the past about these watches and the lives of the people who made them. Together, Geoff and Su are testing and questioning those theories and wish to share their ideas with the AHS lecture audience.

Through the use of trade directories, census returns and other documents where possible, the hidden histories are beginning to emerge, highlighting the range of horological-related work women were involved in through the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the restrictions or barriers they often had to overcome to do this.

'Having learned the trade, I am able to inform him that I think [watchmaking] is a most suitable and desirable employment for women and feel quite sure were there greater facilities for acquiring it numbers of young women would gladly avail themselves of the opportunity.' So said 'A Female Watchmaker' in 1866 in a letter to The Editor of *The Clerkenwell News* in response to the suggestion that women should not work as watchmakers.

Generally, married women could not own property or stock but unmarried women and widows often seemed to excel in horological businesses or as watchmakers. There are also instances where women were breaking the expected mould and making their own mark in related trades whatever their marital status.

This is a work about individuals and minorities with the aim of adding to our knowledge about those women working within large or small communities across Britain over time. It is an extensive and often difficult subject to research, the challenges of which will be reflected on. The long-term intention is to provide a central database for information about women in horology. We hope to highlight individual stories, deal with some unanswered questions and continue the longer term collaborative work of collation and research for the future.



A watch signed 'Mary A. Sewell, 1874'

TICKETS

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