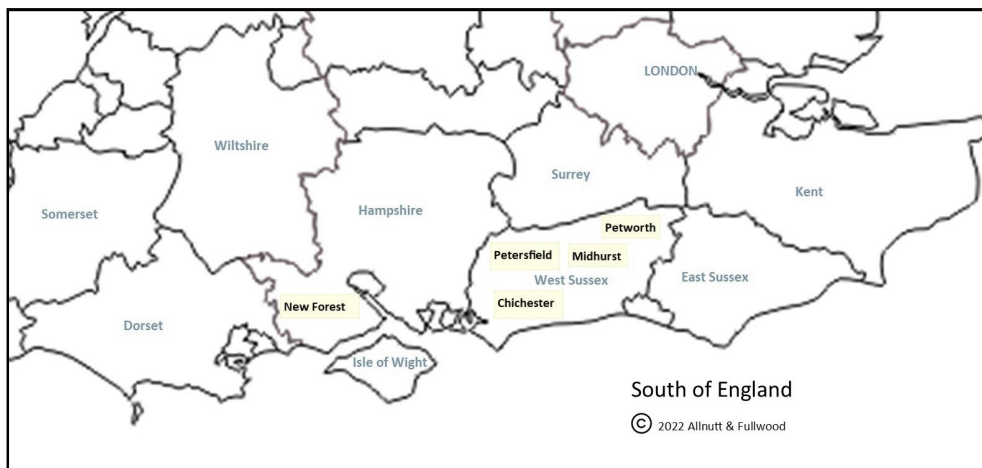


Four watchpapers, excavating layers of history

Su Fullwood*

Exploring how random finds and discoveries can help uncover the lives of those involved in horology at grass roots level. In this example, providing a timeline from a stratigraphy reminiscent of an archaeological excavation which uncovers the history and wider social implications of these often untold stories.



Recently, a group of pocket watches came into the shop of Geoff Allnutt, clock and watchmaker in Midhurst, West Sussex. During the usual examination of the watches, it emerged that one (a silver pair-cased pocket watch, unsigned but hallmarked London 1856) had a watch paper inside the case, probably dating to the end of the nineteenth century, advertising the business of Stedman, North Street, Midhurst. It had clearly lain in the watch case undisturbed for some time. As the watches had come to the shop from some way away in the New Forest, it was a coincidence to discover a local link, and a nice find which pleased the Allnutt workshop team.

Stedman was a familiar name in watchmaking in the area, with horological branches of the family found across Surrey and West Sussex. George Stedman had run a successful business in the nearby small town

of Petworth. His widow Ann, a schoolmistress, seems to have had a good practical knowledge of watchmaking and kept the business going after George died, appearing in trade directories between 1862 and 1867 as Mrs. A. Stedman and Son, referring to her youngest son James. Meanwhile in 1852 her oldest son, Sone Stedman, then aged 21, moved to the neighbouring town of Midhurst, having learnt the trade from his parents. He set up his workshop in Rumbolds Hill, at one end of the High Street, where he stayed until his death in 1897.

Sone's wife, Caroline, took over the business after his death and was celebrated as the oldest resident in Midhurst in January 1937 when she was 96, being described as 'a fine example of a happy and active life, lived in a quiet and homely style and surroundings of the Victorian and Edwardian periods'.¹

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1. *West Sussex Gazette & South of England Advertiser*, 28 January 1937, 12.



The group of watchpapers all from the same watchcase.

Although the writer of the article described her as one of the finest examples of Victorian grace and charm in appearance, manner and conversation, Caroline did seem to embrace modern life, enjoying a ride out in a car, going to the cinema, listening to music on the radio and taking an interest in all national and local news. However she disliked 'jazz' and was very upset and unable to sleep after reading about (in her words) 'this affair with Royalty'. In this she was presumably referring to the abdication of Edward VII a month earlier in December 1936, and she said she 'felt so sorry for Queen Mary'. Like the group of watches, she had also come from the New Forest, being born there in 1841 before moving to Midhurst to become Sone Stedman's second wife.

The 1891 census shows that Sone and Caroline's son, Charles S Stedman, aged 24,

was also in the trade, with '2 rooms of his parents' property for his own establishment', though he later moved to a workshop opposite.

The watch paper had provided a good opportunity to look in more detail at someone who might not otherwise be a research target. However, there was more, as it was obvious there was another watch paper underneath (which is, of course, not unusual). With great care the top one was removed to reveal an even greater coincidence – a paper from Joseph Charles Ketterer, who ran the shop and workshop in West Street, Midhurst that has now been occupied by J. E. Allnutt and Son for the last forty years.

In 1898, Ketterer took over the shop from Mary Ann Lawrence, who has previously featured in our research about women working with horology.² His father had

2. Su Fullwood and Geoff Allnutt, 'Women and Horology. Report on work in progress', *Antiquarian Horology*, March 2020, 95–97.



Joseph Charles Ketterer standing outside his shop in West Street, Midhurst, circa 1910.



Glass door panel to Joseph Charles Ketterer's shop in West Street, Midhurst.



Geoff Allnutt standing outside his shop in 2019. The shopfront remains largely unchanged since Ketterer's time.

emigrated from Germany but Joseph had been born in Frome, Wiltshire, where his father, helped by his mother, was a watchmaker. As soon as he was old enough he moved, first to Chichester, working as a jobbing watchmaker and marrying his wife Fanny, then on to Midhurst. Here he developed the premises as a watchmakers' and jewellers' shop, becoming a well-respected and active member of the Midhurst community.

Contemporary newspaper articles show Joseph to be vocal about his views and a deep thinker. For example, as a young man of 23, while still in Chichester, he had contested the view of an 'expert' lecturer on his evidence about punishments in convents in a letter to the local newspaper, calling them 'vile assertions'.³ The arguments he gave were confident and precise in tone, although not always factually correct. He also showed skill in collaboration and negotiation during a town council meeting, seeking to rectify issues for local people, in this case the supply of gas for lighting to the town.⁴ It seems he was a reliable and able civic leader.

In July 1914 the First World War broke out. Throughout Britain it was a period of unrest, division and intolerance. People became suspicious of those they thought might be allied to the enemy, while former friends or family saw division emerge. Joseph, who was already worried about his business and the renegotiation of his lease, became increasingly paranoid that people were 'calling him a German', taking their business away from him as a result, and talking about him behind his back.⁵ His mental health rapidly declined, and, tragically, he committed suicide on 1 November 1914, aged just forty-nine. The local paper reported in some detail. On the day of his death, he had gone out for a walk, but returned shaking. He asked Fanny to take the dogs out, and when she returned she discovered his body in the scullery of the shop in West Street.

His wife and brother testified that he had often talked about 'ending it all' but that he

was also aware of the consequences for Fanny if he were to do so. With 60,000 British troops already lost by October, and deepening anti-German sentiment, we have to assume the escalating events of the war in recent months had led him to seek this desperate way out. Although his brother suggested that the animosity towards Joseph was not as bad as he believed, he had on 'several occasions' been 'chipped' for being German, so this was not just a case of Joseph imagining local hostility.⁶

This behaviour was quite widespread, and anger towards those believed to have ties to the enemy was real. Although the British government was initially reluctant to impose widespread internment, public anti-German feelings grew rapidly (reaching a peak, after Joseph's death, when the *Lusitania* was sunk by a German U-boat on 7 May 1915), forcing the government to act. Although Joseph and most of his family were British, his German heritage was clearly enough to mark him out for harsh treatment from those around him. While modern society might now understand more of the mental health pressures exerted by highly stressful situations, Joseph's contemporaries were in all probability markedly less sympathetic.

In spite of her desolate situation, Fanny managed to renegotiate the terms of the lease on the shop, which, according to the coroner's report, had been another issue that had caused Joseph many sleepless nights. Later newspaper reports suggested Fanny was a dynamic and astute business woman in her own right. Coincidentally, Fanny was also celebrated as Midhurst's oldest resident in 1953, as Caroline Stedman had been in the 1930s, so she was also a well-known figure locally at that time. Joseph had run the watchmakers' shop also as a jewellers and opticians, but finances had clearly been a struggle – witness Fanny's comment to the writer of the article 'before he became a master man wages were so low'.⁷ Therefore to boost income, during the early days in the

3. *Chichester Observer and Recorder*, 4 April 1888, 8.

4. *West Sussex Gazette*, 25 August 1910, 10.

5. *West Sussex Gazette*, 6 November 1914, 7.

6. *West Sussex Gazette*, 6 November 1914, 7.

7. *West Sussex Gazette*, 22 October 1953, 11.



South Street, Chichester, in 1907, some twenty years after Francis Gandy died, and in 2021.

business in Midhurst and presumably before Joseph was fully qualified, Fanny took over and ran a separate newsagents. She then sold this business as a successful going concern so that she could join Joseph in his shop again. However, the new owners did not do so well and the newsagents began to fail, so Fanny bought it back, rebuilt the business and sold it

on again a second time.

Although Fanny initially carried on running the West Street shop on her own, she was now the sole carer of a disabled daughter, their only surviving child (the first being still-born in November 1891) and so decided to sell the business in 1917. The shop was bought by Ernest Charles Bannister, who was a 'Fellow

of the British Horological Institute' (FBHI) and his two sons. They were also apprenticed to him and both later received their MBHI qualifications. Ernest's second son, known as Jimmy, took over the shop when he died, while his other son moved on to Petersfield to continue his own watchmaking business. Eventually Jimmy's wife Doris inherited the shop which she ran for several years before selling it to John Allnut in 1981, when she retired. Although already working with his father, Geoff took over the running of the shop fully in 2005.

On looking again at the watch case, further investigation uncovered a third paper and this was also Ketterer's. These two records of his work, and the overhaul of the watch, are unremarkable other than they are the tip of a very human and relevant modern story about ordinary people working in a profession, facing all the same challenges of living through major world events.

Unexpectedly underneath, there were more papers. All the watchpapers had clearly been in situ for a long time so the original stratigraphy was not disturbed. The fourth was from clock-and watchmaker Francis Gandy who worked in the cathedral city of Chichester 12 miles from Midhurst. Records suggest that Francis lived and worked from The Kings Head Inn in South Street, Chichester, until around 1861. He then leased a shop/workshop, on the opposite side of the road which belonged to the Chichester Cathedral Chapter and was situated in one of the buildings, originally part of the medieval Vicars Hall. Francis never married, only sharing the rooms in the Inn for several years with his sister who was a dressmaker. Trade directories witness a progression from early advertisements as a clockmaker, then as clock- and watchmaker, and then 'master watchmaker' in the 1861 Census, just as he moved premises, reverting to clockmaker in

1871. Although it is unclear where he was living and working by the 1881 census, it seems he died in 1884 aged 66. Looking down South Street today, the road and its buildings remain largely unchanged since Gandy lived and worked there. Descriptions in contemporary newspaper reports from the late 1800s describe a similar view to the one that visitors would see today, coming into Chichester from the railway station. One such article reported the accidental death of a local farmer who had been thrown from his cart, against the wall of The Kings Head when bringing his produce to Chichester for Market Day. He had just paid his fee at the toll gate when the horse reared up. The Coroner's inquest was held at The Kings Head and possibly because it was where he lived at the time, Francis Gandy was one of the jurors sworn in to hear the evidence.⁸

This article aims to demonstrate how random finds can provide stepping-stones into journeys of discovery which, if not ground-breaking, reveal fascinating relationships between people living and working within horology's past. Such finds might be clocks, watches, names in a census, grave inscriptions or, as in this case, a watch paper. More often than not these people may not have led remarkable lives, but the details of their lives can resonate with our own experiences, and compelling stories can emerge from common ephemera, revealing stories of achievements or tragedy to which we can relate today. There was a final paper in the bottom layer of this horological excavation, with two handwritten names which are yet to be identified and which may possibly lead to more local stories and connections.

With thanks to Geoff Allnut for the find which inspired this article, and to West Sussex Records Office for the supporting evidence, Dr James Nye and Peter de Clercq.

8. *West Sussex Gazette*, 6 May 1858, 3.