



SUE NEWMAN, *The Christchurch Fusee Chain Gang*. Amberley Publishing, 2010. Card covers. 234 x 156mm, 256 pages. Black and white illustrations with colour section. £16.99. ISBN 978 1 84868 441 6.

At first sight, in view of the title, this is a surprisingly substantial volume. Whilst not the first to address this sometimes socially sensitive subject, in this instance the author has made an in-depth study, not only of the Christchurch fusee chain-industry, but also the social conditions in the parish at the time, which were germane to its establishment.

Christchurch is situated on the south coast of England, some twenty miles southwest of Southampton. The initial three chapters amply set the scene, describing a very large parish, with relatively poor natural resources. Consequently, it could only support a small population (under 4000 in 1800) many of whom existed around subsistence level. As a result, there was large scale smuggling and frequent petty-crime. The introduction of fusee chain manufacturing around 1790 was to bring at least some relief to many, over the next hundred years or so.

Chapter four, 'A Brief History of Timekeeping', is included to give background interest to the main subject. The reason for the introduction of the fusee in England, and its subsequent decline, is clearly explained.

A more detailed chapter, 'The Fusee and the Chain', follows. Initially, chains were imported from Switzerland, before being first made here in Prescot probably before 1795, the time when production it thought to have commenced in Christchurch, which was to become the major centre of fusee chain production over the following century. There are illustrations of tools and chains, many taken from Diderot's 'Chainetier', with descriptions of chain-making operations.

A substantial chapter six covers the work of the three Christchurch chain manufacturers: Cox & Co. (c. 1790-1885), Jenkins & Co. (1813-1914) and William Hart & Co. (1845-1896).

Of fundamental importance is Robert Harvey Cox, from Wimbourne, apprenticed in Poole, and then set up as a watch and clockmaker in Christchurch, where he was to establish the fusee chain industry. This apparent anomaly (Christchurch being somewhat remote from the main horological centres) is fully addressed, and clear conclusions drawn by the author.

Detailed coverage is given to the fact that Cox, in his earlier years, employed many children (aged from 9 upwards), most of whom were in the local parish workhouses, and some with families, who were trained as outworkers. He paid agreed rates to the parish or family which now seem derisive, but were often more than were paid for children employed on other tasks.

The suggestion that some were blinded by chain-work is considered improbable by the author.

Later, Cox, in line with his competitors, mainly employed young women (as outworkers or in the workshop) who needed to supplement the family income, some continuing for many years.

The peak production of chains in Christchurch was probably reached around 1830-40, when demand was at its highest. Outsourcing, mainly as a cottage industry, gradually diminished, since such work had to be taken to the workshops for finishing and testing, so, as production techniques improved, more work was taken 'in-house'. Whilst the main market was London, Christchurch also supplied fusee chains to

Birmingham and Coventry amongst others. It is also probable that they exported to America.

During the latter years of the industry, production was largely for replacement watch and clock chains, although supplies for chronometers continued until the first world war, when Mercers took over all chronometer chain manufacture.

A final chapter, of interest but not directly relevant, gives details of 'Other Christchurch Occupations'.

A substantial appendix lists all those known to have been employed on Christchurch chain-work, taken from the Census Returns 1841-1891, but these by no means give the full picture. Also included is detailed information, including extracts from Petty Sessions proceedings, relating to some of the employees.

There is then a bibliography, followed by an index.

Much research has gone into this book. Besides the story of the chain-makers, there is almost a complete social history of the Christchurch parish. Within such a mine of information, there are a few errors and anomalies, and there is unnecessary repetition of almost identical maps, but these are minor points.

Perhaps it might have been more appropriate to conclude with a chapter summarising the various aspects of the Christchurch fusee chain industry in its time, at the expense of other occupational details.

That said, this is a significant new work which throws revealing new light on the birth and demise of the industry, and as such it will be of considerable interest not only to horological devotees, but equally to social historians.

Chris Watson



KEVIN & CAROL CHELLAR, *300 Years of Irish Timekeeping*, 2010. 48 pages, 213 x 224mm, paperback, €20 (incl. worldwide postage), published by and available from Timepiece Antique Clocks, 57-58 Patrick St, Dublin 8.

Ireland had many fine clockmakers and watchmakers whose work is largely unappreciated outside their own country and neglected in most horological publications. In an attempt to redress the balance the Irish Section of the AHS

mounted an exhibition of Irish horology at the annual Irish & International Antiques Fair held in Dublin in March 2010, in conjunction with the trade stand of Timepiece Antique Clocks. As well as complete clocks the exhibits included tools, dials, watch movements, etc.

Kevin and Carol Chellar of Timepiece Antique Clocks have produced a high-quality catalogue of the major exhibits, many of which were on loan from private collectors, and this gives a useful introduction to Irish clocks, watches and barometers. Included are eight bracket clocks, nine longcase clocks, three wall clocks (including a regulator), eight pocket watches, eight barometers and a sundial, all from the period 1710 to 1900. Each item is illustrated by at least one colour photograph and is accompanied by an informative nontechnical description as well as biographical details of some of the makers.

*300 Years of Irish Timekeeping* is a useful introduction to the variety of clocks, watches and barometers made in Ireland. It is well printed in colour on a good smooth paper, but there are niggles with the design. Longcase clocks, and to a lesser extent bracket clocks, are of a distinctly tall shape, so why do designers use a landscape format which restricts the size of the otherwise excellent illustrations? Even with this format the inclusion of excessive white space results in smaller than necessary images. The use of an extremely light sans serif typeface makes the text difficult to read, especially as some of it is printed on a light blue ground.

As a result of an interview on Irish television discussing the horological exhibition, attendance at the fair increased by fourfold over the previous year, and the Irish Section of the AHS had interest from twenty potential members. Let us hope that their praiseworthy efforts will be borne in mind by other Sections of the Society as a mean of stimulating interest in horology among the wider public.

John Robey

Editor's note: For reasons of space three paragraphs, with characterizations of Irish clocks and watches and descriptions of some notable examples, had to be cut. The complete version of this review, but with a different last paragraph, was published in the August issue of the *Horological Journal*.