

THE COLLIER CLOCKMAKING FAMILY

David Collier of Gatley was born c 1721, almost certainly in Heaton Norris, though no baptism record has been found for him or for any of his siblings. They were possibly Nonconformists.

David was the son of Thomas Collier, a yeoman, of Yew Tree Farm, Heaton Norris and his wife, Mary Hollinpriest. Thomas died in 1735, leaving a will, in which he requested that, his son, David, 'be put, placed and bound apprentice to some good place and calling that my executors shall see meet and convenient.'

One of the executors of Thomas's will was his son, Samuel, a feltmaker and on 1st June 1736, Samuel duly apprenticed his younger brother David to J Shepley, clockmaker of Stockport. The rumour that David was apprenticed to Josiah Stringer has no foundation in fact. A Mr Stringer was at one time responsible for winding the clock at Cheadle St Mary, so may have worked with David but the tax registers show quite clearly that David was apprenticed to J Shepley.

David's first wife and the mother of his children, was named Mary. We don't know her surname but one possibility is Mary Downs, who married a David Collier at Peak Forest Chapel 25th August 1745. The chapel acted as a kind of local Gretna Green at the time and couples went from all over the country to marry there, knowing that no awkward questions would be asked. But Collier is a common name, so there is no proof that this is the correct marriage.

However, David and Mary's first child, Thomas, was baptised at Cheadle St Mary in 1745. They then baptised a further 7 children there, though some of them died as infants.

David had a clock-making business on Gatley Green and paid land tax there until his death in 1792, though it hasn't been possible to establish which cottage was his. He wrote a letter from Gatley, dated 1779, giving permission for his son, John, to marry in Eccles.

It has sometimes been suggested that David himself worked in Eccles but this is almost certainly confusion with Etchells, the place where he died in 1792. The burial entry in the register of St Mary's Cheadle, specifically describes him as being 'of Northen Etchells', as do Letters of Administration granted to his second wife (Mary Bayley). There appears to be absolutely no proof of the rumour that David was killed, which possibly arose from the misinterpretation of the word 'Executrix' as 'Executioner' on the Letters of Administration. David did not leave a will though, so it is probable that his death was unexpected.

Two of David's sons, Samuel and John, also went on to become clockmakers and his daughter, Margaret Collier, married John Halliwell, a clockmaker of Bridge Street, Warrington.

David's son, Samuel Collier, born in 1750 became a clockmaker in Eccles, Lancashire, where he married Elizabeth Dearden in 1772. He acted as bondsman for the licence of his Brother John's wedding in 1779 and is buried at Eccles, St Mary, in Church Street.

Samuel died in 1806, leaving a will, in which his son, John Collier, was described as a clockmaker and his late daughter, Ann, as having married a watchmaker, Joseph Barlow of Stockport. It is possible, though unproven, that Samuel's son, David, was also a clockmaker. Samuel's youngest son, Thomas, was still under 21 at the time that Samuel wrote the will but also became a clockmaker, as to him, Samuel left, 'all those my necessary tools in the workshop now used in my business of every description and also what working tools are in my house, together with all unwrought materials as clock-brass, pinions, iron work, bells, dials, hands. And all old and new watches, all watch materials,

as springs, glasses, pendants and all other articles of every description belonging to the clock and watch-making business, to be kept or sold to his own separate use and interest'.

David Collier's son, John, younger brother of Samuel of Eccles, was baptised on 25th April 1762 at Cheadle St Mary and also went on to become a clockmaker in Cheadle. Possibly he worked with or was apprenticed to Samuel, as he married Alice Hampson, daughter of an Eccles shoemaker, at Eccles on 3rd May 1779, when he was only 17 years old but his clocks are clearly labelled 'John Collier , Cheadle' and that is where he appears to have spent his working life.

John was buried on 15th July 1816 at Cheadle St Mary and again left no will. However, three of his children also followed him into the clock-making trade. The oldest son, Aaron (born 1783) declared his occupation to be that of clockmaker when he signed up to the Royal Artillery in 1799 but, from that date on, he followed a military career and no signed clocks are known.

John Collier's fifth child, David (born 1787) also became a clockmaker in Cheadle. He married Mary Leigh in Stockport in 1819 and they had eight children, four of whom died as infants. None of the survivors went into clock-making. David himself died in 1840 in Heaton Mersey. This David is something of an enigma. His gravestone clearly describes him as clockmaker but his death certificate notes his occupation as 'mechanic'. Possibly this was more lucrative than clock-making, a consideration when he had a growing family to support. According to family tradition, David also fought with Wellington and there was certainly a David Collier of the right age, born in Cheadle, who was with the Royal Horse Artillery at Waterloo but recorded as a locksmith at enlistment. This David was discharged in 1816, the year in which John Collier died, so it does make sense that he should have returned home at that point and entered the family clock-making business. Unfortunately all relevant military pension records have been destroyed.

John Collier's fourth child, Samuel (born 1785) continued the clock-making business in Cheadle. His wife, Mary, pre-deceased him and when he died in 1865, he left everything to his sister, Ellen and two nephews, instructing his executors to sell all his, 'household goods, plate, linen, china, books, pictures, working tools and stock in trade' bringing to an end the family clock-making tradition in Cheshire, though descendants of Samuel of Eccles worked in related trades, like watch repairing, in Eccles, well into the 20th century.

The Collier Family of Clockmakers

**Thomas Collier = Mary Hollinpriest
(Yeoman Farmer of Heaton Norris)**

