

The 'Clockmakers'

Several of Joseph Drury's (b.? d.1703) children left the area to be apprenticed to various trades in London and one in particular, James Drury, was a clockmaker as were several of his sons. The clocks made by the family are today extremely valuable with one notable item made by one of his son's selling for £713,000 in 2010 at Sotherby's ([see catalogue entry](#)).

Whilst James was apprenticed as a clockmaker his brother Benjamin was apprenticed into the Plumber's Company in London in 1692 and is thought to have returned to Kenilworth later as he is shown in the burial register in 1745. His elder brother, Joseph, was apprenticed in the Founder's Company in London in 1671 to Richard Meakins and became a founder worker in Hackney, where he himself took several apprentices through that Company between 1681 and 1721. Joseph married Deborah Brooks in 1707, by whom he had a single child named Sarah, born in 1709, who was married in 1728 to Thomas Gardiner but died shortly afterwards, leaving Joseph and Deborah childless. Joseph Drury, the founder, died in July 1738, and his brother James Drury, the clockmaker, acted as executor. However Joseph's widow, Deborah, was herself already seriously ill and she died in December of that same year, 1738. She left only a token bequest to her son-in-law, Thomas Gardiner, and everything else went to the children of her brother-in-law, clockmaker James Drury, i.e. Joseph the leatherseller, John, who continued his father's clock business and Sarah, now wife of Samuel Hoole who was a watchmaker in London. They had at least one son [John \(b.1727 d.1803\)](#) who was a well known translator in London in the late 18th century.

James Drury was apprenticed in the Clockmakers' Company in December 1687 to Francis Hill and freed in April 1695. The 1687 record states that he was the son of Joseph Drury, but that part has then been crossed out. Francis Hill was a little-known clockmaker and his work is known today through only a single example of a lantern clock, yet he followed the clock trade for thirty years or more. Presumably he spent much of his life as a journeyman.

By the terms of his bond an apprentice was forbidden to marry, which for many young men meant that as soon as they had their freedom from apprenticeship, they were desperate to tie the knot. A marriage record on the 21st December 1695, just months after his freedom date, shows James Drury marrying at Allhallows London Wall to Joanna Forby. This was the more likely because in 1695 Francis Hill was recorded as working in Half Moon Alley (of which there were actually seven at that time in London!), being the one located in Cripplegate Without Ward, White Cross Precinct, which was pretty well adjacent to Allhallows parish. It looks as if James Drury was still working as a journeyman for Francis Hill in 1695.

In 1697 James signed the Association Oath of allegiance to the King on the list of Clockmakers' Company signatories. All freemen were required to do this, though a few members of extreme conscience, such as Quakers, refused to sign, as they would not to swear oaths. James was a religious non-conformist or in the words of Wm.Best, the vicar at Kenilworth – a Dissenter – like his brother Richard and presumably his father Joseph.

It was not until 1698 that James took his first apprentice. A tradesman was not allowed to take on an apprentice until he had his own premises, because of course the apprentices 'lived in' with the master's family. There were always exceptions, especially among the wealthier or more powerful members, some of whose journeymen took their own apprentices although still living in their employer's house, a device whereby one master might employ several journeymen each with two or three apprentices - in other words a small factory. But we can guess from this that by 1698 James Drury had set up in business on his own in his own premises. This was probably in Little Moorfields in the parish of St. Stephen's Coleman Street, not far from the home of his former master, Francis Hill.

James's apprentices were:

September 1698 John Sutton

April 1701 Henry Stanbury, son of Robert Stanbury of Berkswell, Warwickshire, miller - freed July 1709.

December 1706 Thomas Woods - free July 1714

April 1708 Samuel Henry Smith - free January 1715/16

October 1713 Thomas Ladbrooke, son of John Ladbrooke of Coventry, Warwickshire, yeoman

April 1717 Peter Crook, son of Peter Crook, Citizen and Carpenter, of London

Date unspecified, his son, James Drury, born about 1699, - free January 1720/21

May 1723 Joseph Goodyear, son of Joseph Goodyear, shoemaker, of St. Bride's parish, London

July 1726 James Loftus, son of John Loftus deceased.

It is interesting to note the two Warwickshire youths amongst them and we often find that masters took on lads from their own home locality, in this case Warwickshire.

His own son, Joseph, born about 1700, was apprenticed in 1714 through the Leathersellers' Company to John Delafield for seven years. Joseph was married in 1722 to Hannah Sutton and died in 1752. He seems not to have been involved in the clock business and appears to have died childless.

In 1728 James was made Master of the Clockmakers' Company. In 1731 he is said to have become clerk to the Company. His work is known through watches, longcase clocks and lantern clocks and his work is sometimes signed 'Jam. Drury London', and sometimes 'James Drury, London'.

On the 11th September 1732 James made his will. He was described as of the Parish of St. Stephen in Coleman Street, clockmaker. Not that he was ill, for he lived a further eight years or so. He died in 1740, his will being proved in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury on the 18th March 1739/40 and his will is available for viewing at the National Archives in London. Like his nonconformity this was probably just a measure of the meticulous nature of a man, who wanted things mapped out as carefully as possible. This was perhaps a trait that nonconformists learned to acquire as they trod their way carefully through a society that was legally and socially hostile to them. The will is disappointingly uninformative, as he leaves everything to his wife, Joanna, "having beforehand made provision for my children", whom, to the great irritation of researchers such as me, he does not even name! He specified he was to be buried in the burying ground at Bunhill Fields ("commonly called 'Tindall's Ground'") at as little cost and charges as may be". Nonconformist James was having nothing to do with a showy funeral, no bequests to buy mourning rings for remembrance. His austerity no doubt arose from his religion, and approached that of the Quakers, who believed in leaving no trace behind at their passing, even to the point of not erecting tombstones, as they saw that as vanity.

The name 'Bunhill Fields' burial ground derives from Bonehill Fields, this being an area of wasteland outside the city where the residual unburned bones of cremated corpses had once been dumped. At the time of the Great Plague in 1665 the London Corporation designated this waste land as a burying place for the surplus corpses as churchyards overflowed, but eventually it was purchased by a Mr. Tindall, and was sometimes called 'Tindall's Burying Ground'. Nonconformists were not permitted burial in consecrated ground. As this land was never consecrated, it soon became a preferred burying place for nonconformists, particularly those from a well-to-do background - there were other nonconformist burial grounds for the poor. James's desire for burial there, confirms his nonconformity and his financial status.

John Drury, son of James, was born about 1699, and was apprenticed to his father in the Clockmakers' Company and freed in 1720. He was a clockmaker and bellfounder and lived in Red Lion Street, in the parish of St. John, Clerkenwell. Presumably the founding business was that passed down from his late uncle Joseph of Hackney and his widow, Deborah. John Drury died in April 1777 a very wealthy man, leaving considerable properties and cash. His son, James, was his main inheritor, together with John's daughters, Margaret wife of John Sturdy, Mary wife of William Trotter, and Joanna wife of Huguenot clockmaker [Daniel de St. Leu](#), whom she had married in 1752 and who died in 1797. His son, James, had been apprenticed to him in 1741 and freed in 1751.

It seems young James was a bit of a tearaway in his earlier years, so much so that when his grandmother, Joanna Drury, left James a bequest of £40 in 1748, it was on condition he be of good behaviour: "I give and bequeath unto my son, John Drury, the sum of forty pounds to keep in his hands until his son James shall arrive at the age of twenty one years and then, if he has behaved so well as to deserve it, to give it to him, otherwise to divide it amongst his other children but of his behaviour I appoint his said father to be the sole judge". James's waywardness when an apprentice may explain the odd fact that although he was apprenticed through the Clockmaker's Company to his father, John, he was then 'turned over' (i.e. transferred) to serve a different master, clockmaker Joshua Hassell. Perhaps it was felt that James would be more obedient living under a stranger's roof than working under his own father at home. Presumably James had reformed as John states that in his will of September 1776: "having given to my son all my stock tools and trade for making bells". James continued the clock and bellfounding business till his death in 1811.

James's son, James Francis, was apprenticed to his father in 1795 and presumably continued the business after his death, a family of at least four generations in the trade.



This lantern clock by James Drury is one of his earlier clocks dating from about 1700 or just before. The alarm disc shows it was originally fitted with alarm work, which was removed later. This close up of the dial centre shows the very fine engraving, which at this period takes the form of entwined foliage. The radiating strokes in the corners and on the alarm disc are unusual and are perhaps a mark of his individuality.

Acknowledgement: Much of the information regarding the Clockmakers has been taken from an article produced by Brian Loomes. In large part I have been unable to verify the information given but have no reason to doubt its authenticity as it does fit with some already known facts and several other articles present on the web.

The 'Clockmakers' Drury Family Tree

