

*Address by Roger Smith FBHI at the Memorial Service for George Daniels on 16 Apr 2012*

We all know of George's meteoric achievements in horology but it was suggested that a few personal recollections from my time working with George would, on a day like this, be more fitting.

I began my work with George in 1998, and the first 9 months were extremely intensive as George taught me the intricacies of making wristwatch scale components by hand. And I must just say that his tuition throughout had a calmness and clarity that was surprising but very welcome to me, the new boy in the workshop.

One of the tasks that I had to master was the making of hands; not easy, when the only tools available were a piercing saw, a few files and a piece of peg wood for steadying the work. My work progressed slowly, especially when told that I had to hand make 50 seconds hands, which along with the 50 hour, minute and calendar hands, all had to be hand pierced from a sheet of 0.3mm thick gold and then filed to a width of 0.3mm whilst trying not to bend them. I started, but due to the finesse of the hand I did not get very far, believing that it was an impossible task.

Telling George this, he sat at his bench and put on his glasses, ushering me to bring him the troublesome seconds hand for inspection. George had very large hands and with ease he picked up the seconds hand and deftly slipped it into his pin vice and with the other he picked up a needle file which was

swallowed by his shovel like hand. What was extraordinary to see was that as he brought the seconds hand to rest on the peg wood, followed by the right, which held the file; there was a fluid change as these rather agricultural looking hands transformed into those of an artist as he began to simply caress the excess metal away. Within half an hour, there sitting before me was a perfect seconds hand, hand finished by George and with a very useful lesson to me.

Another challenge which had to be mastered was engine turning, a trade which watchmakers just do not learn – unless you are George that is. As always the tuition was flawless, but I struggled to get a grip on the finer points of the process for some months and as the growing pile of ruined silver test pieces grew into a small mountain, George simply ignored me, knowing that all I needed was time and practice, although on occasion he could not help but let out a low growl as he passed, while I sat struggling behind the straight line engine.

Fortunately, I did progress and with my growing ability George felt that he could enjoy a couple of weeks away motoring with friends through France in his recently completed 1932 Alfa-Romeo, leaving me with the task of completing nine dials for his return.

They were completed and I proudly laid them out for inspection. George returned and as usual visited the workshop prior to dropping his bag in at the house. He sat down; no cursory hello's, put his glasses on, and asked me to bring him the dials for inspection. He took his time,

inspecting each one for the quality of engine turning and fit of the various dial components. On completion he reached for his red marker pen and put a large red cross on 6 of the 9 dials. Putting the pen down he looked over his glasses and said, 'I think, 'Smith of Bolton', you need a little more practice'. And with that 'Daniels London' stood and left the building.

In the past few years it was a real pleasure and honour to be asked by George to join forces with him on his Anniversary wristwatch project and several weeks prior to George's passing I completed work on the prototype and we set a date for its examination. I arrived and to my surprise George could not find fault with the piece. We sat and chatted about the project for some time enjoying a coffee and one of his favourite Mr Kipling's Bakewell tarts. The forthcoming SalonQP show was discussed and George's participation on the launch night.

All was very cordial and then George's face changed and he asked if I was intending to display just the one piece. I said, with a hint of apprehension 'YES'. George replied saying, 'now come on Roger, this is our chance to show to the world that we are the best in the world and in business to make watches and therefore we need to show people a movement so that they can really see the craftsmanship – I think you need to make another movement'.

I attempted to protest, explaining that I still had three of my own watches to complete for the show – as I am sure you all know, George never allowed a trivial problem such as a

shortage of time to stand in the way of achieving a goal, and therefore I agreed to complete another movement. The atmosphere calmed and we continued to chat about other matters. Finishing my Bakewell tart I told George that I had better get back to my workshop as my workload had somehow dramatically increased!

I was half way to the door when George shouted out – ‘Roger did I say one movement? – you had better make that two after all people need to see both sides! ‘

Since my very first meeting with George at the age of 18 he has had a profound effect on my life and today it is a great personal honour to stand before you all and tell you a little about my mentor and friend, George Daniels.