

VISIT TO THE BRITISH SCHOOL OF WATCHMAKING

By Angus Matheson

In February, I was invited to visit the British School of Watchmaking on behalf of the British Watch and Clockmakers Guild.

The School is located in Sale, Gtr Manchester and opened in October 2006, in response to the severe shortage of skilled watchmakers who were able to work on quality watches in the UK.

Funding was provided by Aurum Group (Goldsmiths and Mappin & Webb) Signet Group, Ruddell's, F A Buck, Breitling, Patek Philippe, Richemont, Swatch, Rolex and the Houlden Group.

Students follow the 3,000 hour Wostep Course, which includes 2,400 hours of practical work and 600 hours of theory. The syllabus includes: *Micromechanics, Mechanical Watches, Chronographs, Electronic Watches, External Parts and Organisation of an After-sales Service.*

The B.S.O.W. is the 14th School in the Wostep partnership and currently teaches 6 students per year, who are all employees of the sponsoring companies.

First year students are taught by Malcolm Wadlow F.B.H.I., whose experience includes working for the Goldsmiths Group and running his own retail jewellery business. Prior to joining the British School of Watchmaking, he was the Senior Lecturer in Horology at the University of Central England School of Jewellery.

Second year students are taught by Alan Burtoft F.B.H.I. Alan has 40 years experience of horology, having spent many years working for jewellers and watch companies, as well as running his own trade repair business. He has

also worked as Chief Instructor for the B.H.I.'s Education Trust.

The third member of the team at Sale is Josie Chadwick, who is the School's Administrator.

The B.S.O.W. is overseen by a Board of Directors, which includes Nick Towndrow as Managing Director, Gordon Bryan as Director of Education, Fabien Pellegrini as Finance Director, together with Mark Hearn and Paul Young.

As there was an examination in progress when I visited, I was not able to take photographs, but we have been given permission to use photographs from the B.S.O.W. website, which can be found at www.bsow.co.uk



As can be seen, the facilities are very impressive. The School is housed in a bright, modern office building which has a calm but friendly atmosphere. The latest horological tools are available to the students and the tutors use the most modern teaching aids.

A visitor cannot help but be impressed by the School. It represents a massive investment in the future of horology in the UK by a group of private companies, not all of which are large



multi-nationals. Whilst the output of students will initially be employed by the sponsoring companies, in years to come some will eventually join other workshops, set up businesses of their own, or become the horological tutors of the future, spreading the skills learned here throughout the wider industry.

Levels of investment are impressive, but spend any time in the company of the students at the B.S.O.W. and you cannot fail to come away with a renewed confidence in the future of horology in the UK. These are bright, intelligent young people who would do well in any industry, but have chosen a career in watchmaking.

With a current output of just 6 graduates a year, the B.S.O.W. at Sale cannot, on its own, produce enough watchmakers to satisfy the shortage of horological skills in the UK. Senior Lecturer, Alan Burtoft believes that there will be a need to expand the facility at Sale in the future, or possibly for a second - or even third - school to open in Britain. After a lifetime in the industry, he sees a bright future for skilled watchmakers, nicely summed up by his comment "there's never been a better time to join the industry."

THE GOOD OLD DAYS?

This is a watch paper from a cheap Ingersoll pocket watch in a gun metal case. (Please can we have back the days - or perhaps not, when a watch could be repaired by the manufacturers for 10p)!!



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