

# JAMES CARTER — WARRINGTONIAN, WATCHMAKER AND WESLEYAN

Kit Heald

## Introduction

The joy of local history research is coming upon the unexpected. For a long time there seems to be little connection between certain items of information, then suddenly a source is found which puts events into order: names and dates fall into place, family and business connections are discovered and sometimes an extra facet is added to the work. I have been researching the clock and watchmaking trade in Warrington and have collected copious sheets of notes, lists of clocks and watchmakers, apprentices and watch tool makers and have learnt a little about how some of these very beautiful pieces have been made. However, although I had, for example, several people with the same surname on my lists, I had not been able to find family connections nor gain much insight into the kind of life a watchmaker led. Then Warrington Library Local History Section acquired a notebook of a Warrington watchmaker, James Carter.

The book starts by relating, retrospectively, information about James Carter's parents and details of his birth (1780) and early life. It was then used as a form of diary containing details of his children, his illnesses, arguments with others regarding property, copied letters and wills, his employees and a vast collection of other facts. Sometimes there were many entries in a year and other times only a few. Towards the end of his life the entries became fewer and fewer and the writing more untidy. There is no mention of his date of death but after a gap of 20 years the entries are in a different hand but otherwise continue as before. The death of his wife is mentioned, the winding up of his estate, the marriage of a grandson and the birth of a great-grandson (both in Chicago).

What follows then is the story of James Carter, Warringtonian, watchmaker and Wesleyan.

## The Early Years

James Carter was the son of Richard and Mary Carter. Richard was a boatbuilder in Liverpool. He seems to have been from a large family the rest of whom, so far as are mentioned by James, lived in Lancashire: at Forton, Preesall, Thornton and Poulton-le-Fylde.

It was James' mother's family that gave me the first big surprise: Mary's maiden name was Birchall and she was the sister to at least one watchmaker whose

name I had known previously. Mary's father, Thomas Birchall, lived at Whiston and one of his sons, John, at Cronton but another son, George, set up as a watchmaker in Bridge Street, Warrington in 1793 and it was with George that James boarded when he was at school in Warrington, to him he was apprenticed and whose business he eventually took over. Another Thomas Birchall and a William Birchall may have been uncles or other relations of James although he never specifically says so. Thomas was a watchmaker in Warrington and James boarded with him in 1803 when his father and mother died and William Birchall was a watchmaker in London and James worked with him for 10 years.

But to return to James' birth. He was born on 25th July 1780 in Liverpool. In later years he went to the trouble of sending for a copy of his baptismal register and it is thus recorded that he was baptised on 20th August (No.499 in the register) at St. Nicholas' Chapel in Liverpool.

The family moved to Whiston and lived with his mother's father until James was about 11 or 12 when he was sent to school firstly in Prescot and then Rev. Glazebrook's school in Warrington in 1792. It was then that he boarded with George Birchall, a watchmaker. Two years later his grandfather, Thomas, gave up farming and came to live with the family who now kept a shop opposite the Angel Yard off Hill Street off Buttermarket in Warrington. In the Universal British Directory for 1792 a Thomas Birchall, huckster is listed and also Birchall and Son, watch and clock makers. Later that year James was bound apprentice for seven years to his uncle George who had a shop in Bridge Street, Warrington — almost certainly number 19, which was on the east side of Bridge Street between Market Gate and Dolman's Lane — and lived at Pin Maker's Brow (now Pinner's Brow), Warrington. At that time George had Thomas Townley as an apprentice and Thomas Myles, Peter Ashton, Richard Banner, John Gerrard and others were journeymen. When James' parents died his grandfather moved to live with his son John at Cronton and James decided that he did not want to keep house for himself so sold the furniture and boarded with Thomas Birchall for a while. In the 1805 Holden Directory both George and Thomas Birchall are listed as watchmakers in Bridge Street. In that year William Birchall (possibly

James' uncle) came to Warrington from London and persuaded James to go and work for him later in the year. In August, James went to work and live in the St. Luke's area of London, E.C.1.

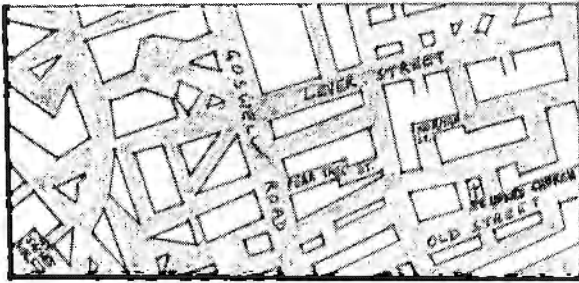


FIG 1 — Map of the St. Luke's area of London (E.C.1) showing places mentioned in the text.

### Growth of Family and Business

In 1806 James returned north to marry Margaret Simcock of Prescot at St. Helen's Chapel. Together they went to London and in the following 8 years they had 4 children who were all baptised in St. Luke's Church — James junior, born 21st July 1807; John, born 8th April 1810; Mary, born 20th March 1812 and Joseph, born 29th April 1814.

We know little about James' life in London except that he boarded with William Birchall at Pear Tree Street, St. Luke's for the initial six months of his stay there and after that went into lodgings at Norman Street in the same area. Britten lists a William Birchall working at 5 St. James' Walk in 1816 and 5 Wellington Street in 1834-42. There is a St. James' Walk only a few hundred yards from Pear Tree Street so this may be the same man.

In 1815 James returned to Warrington to succeed his uncle George Birchall. He took the stock in the shop at a valuation of £240. In 1819 he bought a shop off John Dickinson and Ann Mason for £220 which was almost certainly number 17: so James had his watchmaking business in number 19 and from 1820 Margaret, his wife, had a china and glass shop, the first in Warrington, at 17.

From 1824 he is described in trade directories as a watchmaker and silversmith and Loomes (1976) even has him as a swordsmith but that is a lone reference.

He next ventured into the market in 1827 when he bought 'Leigh's house next door'. This he let to John Maguire, a hairdresser. James bought the house for £240 and let it at 13 gns. per annum. He listed an in-

ventory of nearly £11 worth of fixtures and fittings witnessed by John Green the linen draper who lived on the other side of the Carters near Dolman's Lane. Later that year he bought 2 more houses for the purpose of letting but he had many problems with neighbours. A street map of this time shows why as the area behind any road is a block of houses with yards, shared pumps and middens. As one example of his difficulties I quote a letter from his attorney, Mr. Kidd of Liverpool, giving him some advice:

'I have received yours of yesterday regarding Mr. Watts' improper conduct towards you. If he puts up a door at the end of the passage you must warn the people employed in so doing that Mr. Watts has no right to put a door there and that if they go on with it you will pull it down and you must do so. . .Don't be intimidated by his threats.'

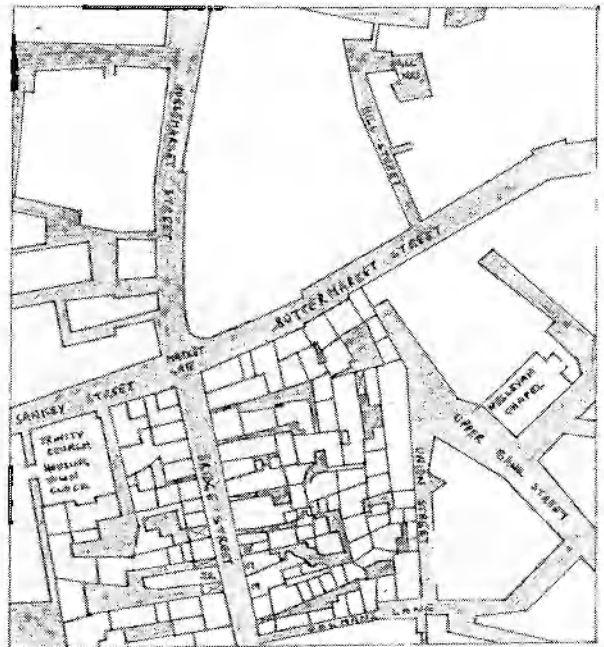


FIG 2 — A diagram based on the 1851 map of Warrington showing places mentioned in the text and the complexity of buildings in the Bridge Street area. The probable positions of numbers 15, 17 and 19 (later 25, 27, 29) and 22 are marked.

During this time the family increased in size with the birth of Richard on 30th November 1816; William on 22nd July 1819; George Birchall on 9th April 1822; Jemima on 7th November 1824 and Josiah on 11th March 1828. All of these children were baptised at the

Wesleyan Chapel in Bank Street, Warrington and also registered at the Parish Church. On 24th March 1828 uncle George Birchall died aged 83 and unfortunately his namesake George Birchall Carter died the following year on 14th February.

Richard and Joseph both began to learn watchmaking in 1830 and in the same year William went to the Grammar School in Warrington. At the end of five years he too started to learn watchmaking. In March 1831 William Cowand was employed not only as a watchmaker but also as an instructor to James' sons. He was given extra remuneration for this and he stayed with the family for nearly ten years. He also oversaw the work of the other men in James' employ. In 1832 Richard was bound as an apprentice to a watch and clockmaker, silversmith and jeweller for 7 years. By this time James junior was setting up in business by himself; on 2nd December 1832 he opened a clock and watch shop in Horsemarket. The following February he married Jane Baker in the Parish Church and by July of the next year he had given up watchmaking to be a bread baker which was his wife's family business.

Second son John was loose from his apprenticeship on 18th April 1831 and two weeks later he went to London where he stayed for a year. Could it be that John was sent to work with William Birchall in London? Whether or not this was so John, like his older brother, did not seem to settle to the watchmaking trade because in a further year's time he went to work for Messrs. Fildes, grocers, in Manchester. On 2nd October 1834 he married Ellen Roby and a year later opened a straw-bonnet shop. He still was not settled but finally in August 1836 he opened a business in Bridge Street as a grocer which continued in the family into the twentieth century.

James had several grandchildren. The first was Margaret, daughter of John and Ellen. She was born on 28th April 1835 but she died when only four and a half years old — unfortunately a common happening in the nineteenth century. In the same year that Margaret died, James junior's first child was born on 30th January 1839 but Mary too died young on 20th April 1841. Fortunately James' other four grandchildren all survived infancy: Thomas Birchall, born 17th September, 1840 and George the sons of James junior and Jane; and John born 29th May 1839 and Samuel born 13th November 1841 the sons of John and Ellen.

All James' sons changed school frequently and at the beginning of January 1836 Josiah moved from Mr. Crowther's school to Mr. Sutton's. In February his

brother Joseph started working for Messrs. Townley and Williams of 40 Renshaw Street, Liverpool where he stayed for eight and a half months. In February 1837 Richard was sent to Townley and Williams to 'work at finishing the new lever watches'. So it seems that just as John was sent to London to give him more experience Joseph and Richard were sent to a large provincial workshop to learn techniques which they would not be able to do at Warrington. Joseph was also sent to London for two months in 1838 but unfortunately James records no other details about this visit. In July 1836 Richard was also sent away again for experience, this time to Mr. William Smith of Huddersfield where he stayed for three years.

James' comments about his daughters Mary and Jemima were few and were mainly related to their going for trips with friends or buying clothes but in October 1839 Jemima was sent to Mrs. Parker's Seminary at Stockport for 8 months. As Jemima was now fifteen this may have been a 'finishing school'.

We do not find out very much about the home life of the Carter family from James. He noted the occasional illness and also the changes of servant that they had in the house. They employed one girl to work for them: in 1833 Sybbel Brereton was 'sent home' after four months; next came Elizabeth Forrster who was with them for sixteen months until a 'bad knee' caused her to return home too; Eliza Platt stayed with the family for seven years; finally Mary Critchley was with them from 1841 being paid £5-10-0 a year.

In 1840 Josiah again changed school and went to Mr. Church's at Frodsham. Joseph too was soon to be moving as Mr. Samuel Quilliam who was in business at 4 Renshaw Street and 20 Ranleigh Street, Liverpool, came to Warrington specifically, we are told, to engage him to assist in the business at Liverpool. What an annoyingly incomplete reference this is that James has left us! Had Mr. Quilliam met Joseph when he was with Townley and Williams four years previously? If so, he must have made a good impression to be remembered four years later and not only did he go to Mr. Quilliam's in February 1841 but his brother William also went there later that year to improve his finishing of lever watches. The final oddity to this little episode is that in an 1873 trade directory the business at 29 Bridge Street is called Carter and Quilliam, Clockmakers and Silversmiths. There is no other reference to this title before or after and all other information points to Mrs. Elizabeth Carter, Josiah's widow as continuing the family business from Josiah's death in 1872 to her death in 1907. It should be mentioned that in 1860 the numbers of the premises

in Bridge Street were altered so that 29 is in fact the old 19 — George Birchall's original shop of 1793 — and 17 became 27 which John Carter used as a flour store.

### The Watchmaking Trade

As well as William Cowand, James also employed other workers. Although the records are incomplete the impression one has is that these workers were either very loyal, staying with him for several years, or left within a very short space of time. To illustrate this: on the one hand there were Nathaniel Parkinson who was with James for eight years from 1828 to 1836 and William Cowand, from 1831 to 1838, and on the other hand there were Edward Garnett who started work on 20th December 1831 and left on 5th January 1832 and William Davidson who came from Scotland on 13th June 1837 and returned before the end of the month. James does not seem to have had more than four men working for him at any one time and these comprised watch and clock makers, watch jobbers and jewellers.

James developed a code which he used when writing amounts of money and sometimes dates and ages in his book. He specifically mentioned it when he started to use it on 8th March 1830 and perhaps it was also used for pricing goods on display in the shops. The numbers one to nine and zero are represented by V L  $\Delta$  X C n a r p £.

James kept his premises in good order and often had repairs and improvements carried out to the shops and the passageways and in 1838 he had gas light fitted to the board at the front of the shop. Warrington itself had been lit by gas since 1821 and the price of gas in 1839 was at the high figure of fifteen shillings (75p) per 1000 cubic feet.

From May 1824 James became the keeper of the Town Clock in Warrington. Market Gate was the centre of the town where the four main thoroughfares crossed. Standing very prominently there, as it still does, was Holy Trinity Church. The steeple had been blown down in 1822 and when it was rebuilt a clock, provided by the Police Commissioners, was placed in the tower. In 1836 the Minutes of the Commissioners reveal that James was paid two guineas for a year's work. (This work was later taken over by son Joseph.)

James occasionally made mention of prices that watchmakers charged in other parts of the country and other information of interest to him as a businessman but he made particular emphasis of the following item. Firstly, the watchmaker concerned would have been well-known to him as he worked and lived in Bridge Street too and secondly, it gave warning of how an everyday occurrence could end up in a visit to court.



FIG 3 — 15, 17 and 19 Bridge Street. George Birchall's original shop of 1793 is the bow-windowed building on the right. From a watercolour sketch reproduced in *The Dawn* magazine, July 1906.

This was a report in the *Manchester Courier* of 8th June 1839. Mr. Bethell, watchmaker of Bridge Street, Warrington appeared before the magistrates to show cause why he failed to deliver up a watch belonging to a country man residing at Croft. The main points of the case were that on a Saturday evening the complainant while walking home 'having been drinking pretty freely. . .yet not so intoxicated as not to know what he was about' lost his watch and on the following Monday this watch was sold to Mr. Bethell at his shop by a person who gave a fictitious name. The magistrates ruled that it was impossible for watchmakers to carry out their business without transactions

of this sort and the watch should remain with Mr. Bethell unless the complainant refunded the £2-10-0 that Mr. Bethell had paid for it. Thus one can see that as well as making watches these men would also buy them secondhand.

Warrington museum has two examples of James Carter's watches. One has an English lever escapement and an index regulator and is dated about 1830-40. The other has a Chester hallmark on the case, so can be dated more accurately to 1823-4. This too has a verge escapement and index regulator.

In January 1839 James had a burglary. Richard Flake from Halifax broke the front window of the shop and stole two gold brooches. He was caught and committed to prison and three months later son Joseph was a witness at the trial.

Another occasion when James was involved with the law was in 1839 when he was a juryman at a Coroner's Court inquiring into the death of James Hockinhull. However, in the following year when he was again called for jury service, he was excused as he was over 60 years of age.

### Town Events

James frequently recorded the deaths of his friends, acquaintances and notable people. Often he attended their funerals and three times he mentioned being executor to a will. In the case of Mrs. Dickinson, James paid the dues of ten shillings called 'mortuary' as she was 'worth more than £40'. He took his work as an executor very seriously. On another occasion following the death of William Bibby he obviously felt he needed expert help and so took the advice of Mr. William Beamont, a solicitor and, incidentally, local historian, and he noted several pages of legal obligations and duties of and executor.

An event which may have caused some consternation in Bridge Street was when a pony took fright, broke the windows of Mrs. Haddock's baker's shop and then Mrs. Carter's china shop, breaking items to the value of £2-3-8½. On another occasion he records Thomas Entwistle's death occurring as he stood at his shop door in Bridge Street.

Another insight into the ways of the town was recorded on 24th June 1836 when Victoria was proclaimed Queen with the proclamation being read by Mr. Nicholson at the top of Church Street, at the bridge and at Market Gate. This event gave James some good business as he sold 2494 coronation medals of which 1800 were small school ones. In 1840 on the occasion of Queen Victoria's wedding to Prince Albert, he only sold 210 medals.

In March 1832 the town had what sounds like the

forerunner of our sponsored events: some people held a day of fasting in aid of those who had cholera in London and shopkeepers who were Quakers closed their businesses for the day.

Another business that James was involved in was 'The Plantation' at Latchford. This was owned by Mr. Richard Barford of London who visited Warrington annually to decide what trees to fell. In September 1832, we have a very detailed account of what trees were there: 926 in the Common Field, half of which would be ready to fell in nine years; 520 in the Small Field; 202 on the Island; 2280 on Bear Lees; 592 in the Osier Ground; 2104 in the Meadows. There were also some inferior trees and some specimens which were to be kept.

### Travel

James' life saw the development of new forms of transport and he recorded the time in June 1832 when steam carriages began to run from the top of Dallam Lane as well as the establishment of the railways — the opening of the Warrington and Newton Railway in May 1831 and the start of the London, Birmingham and Liverpool Railway in 1833. In all journeys up to 1835 when James travelled it was by coach but as the years pass we can follow some of the changes that occurred.

At Richmond Delph, Forton, lived aunt and uncle, Mr. and Mrs. William Carter. James' journey there in August 1835 went thus — he travelled with Richard to Bottoms by railway at a cost of 6/- where he visited a watchmaker friend, Mr. Burrington; they then went inside the coach to Preston then by packet to Garston at a cost of 16/-; this was followed by a six mile walk to Richmond Delph. The next day he travelled the eight miles by way of Cockerham to the home of Mr. Peter Carter who owned a shop at Side Farm, Preesall. This journey was originally to be present at the wedding of James' cousin Agnes Carter of Poulton to Samuel Goddard of Halifax which took place on 12th August 1835 but while they were there, William Carter of Poulton, aged nineteen and a half, was drowned so they stayed in the area, visiting friends and relations until the funeral on 17th August. On their way home they travelled on the outside of the coach to Preston for 11/- and from Preston to Liverpool for 12/-. James seemed to delight in recording people's ages or dates of birth and, particularly when he journeyed to relations, long lists of addresses.

Five years later James made a similar journey in order to attend the funerals of his aunt and uncle, William and Betty Danson, who had died within hours of each other at Preesall. With son William he took

the 5.40 a.m. train from Bank Quay Station, Warrington and arrived in Garstang at 8 a.m. From there they walked the nine miles to Preesall. They visited many friends and relations during their four days. For the journey home they caught the 8.25 a.m. Poulton to Preston train costing 3/- each; from Preston they took the train to Parkside and then walked home. James recorded that this walk saved them 2/6d each! It is pertinent to remember that James was 60 years old and this journey took place in November.

As James recorded his visits to his relations in Lancashire we see his attention to detail in the way he noted seemingly trivial items. His habitual references to the cost of journeys give one the impression that James was careful with money. This attention to detail was common amongst people in his trade: clock and watchmakers were very secretive men and although they passed on the basics of their craft to their workers and apprentices, they kept much of the detailed information to themselves. Robert Garnett, the Warrington cabinet-maker of the nineteenth century, came from a watchmaking family and was initially apprenticed to a watchmaker. He told of his grandfather introducing improvements into the engines used to cut the teeth of watch wheels and in order to keep this invention for as long as possible only the sons, i.e. Robert's father and uncles, were allowed to use the machine and only then when locked into a room.

### Methodism

Although James' notebook gave little insight into his home life, conversely it provided much information about the establishment of Methodism in Warrington. James Carter was a Methodist and was prominent at the beginning of the movement in the town. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had died in 1791 and in the last few years of the century James wrote that he felt a powerful conviction as a lost sinner. James was active both in the setting up of the various Wesleyan chapels in the area and in his work for the church.

The major Wesleyan place of worship was Bank Street Chapel, just behind the block of buildings where James lived. James was a trustee here, as was James junior, and he rented a pew. In June 1830 the trustees voted on whether or not to put an organ into the chapel and, very narrowly, they agreed to. In June of the following year James signed as a trustee of the chapel at Moore and in May 1834 he became a trustee for Appleton Chapel. He made many loans of money to finance the building of these chapels and was visited by people from other areas for his advice in the running of a trust. James became a local preacher and

whenever he visited his relations in Lancashire he preached in their chapels too. Many of his friends were Wesleyans: Isaac Dinsdale was an Excise Officer from Warrington who moved to Thornton and James visited him when he was in the area; Samuel Goddard, his cousin Agnes' husband, was a local preacher in the Sowerby Bridge circuit; and nearly all the other names in the list of trustees of Bank Street Chapel for 1840 were mentioned elsewhere in James' writings.

It was in November 1831 that James joined the Warrington Temperance Society. This society began in Stockton Heath in 1830 as a Total Abstinence Society — in fact the first one in the country — but had split into two later in the year with the total abstainers meeting in Stockton Heath and the temperance people meeting in Warrington. This state of affairs continued until 1833 when a Warrington Total Abstinence Society was set up, meeting in Friars Green Chapel. It may be that James later became a 'Total Abstinence' as in October 1838 he recorded that three of his employees signed the abstinence pledge and in August 1841 he signed for himself and sons Joseph, Richard and Josiah.

James attended, chaired or spoke at many of the events in the Methodist calendar. At most of these collections were taken perhaps for the chapel itself, the school attached to the chapel or some other special fund. Ministers came from all over the Connexion to preach charity sermons and the amounts raised ranged from £3 to £50. One annual meeting was for the Missionary Society. In April 1832 an Indian chief from Canada was present at this meeting; his real name was Rate-Re-Wa-Quon-a-by but they called him 'Peter Jones'! The big event of the Methodist year was the National Conference. James attended some of these. When recording them he noted the name of the President and any changes to the ministers in the local circuit. Some of the weekend meetings in Warrington had several services throughout the day often starting as early as 5 a.m. although on one occasion James added that the service did not actually start until 6.30 a.m.!

There was great joy on 27th May 1839 when the Wesleyan day school opened with Mr. and Mrs. Barrowcliffe teaching the 162 boys and girls who were admitted on the first day. Unfortunately in October, 29 year old Mr. Barrowcliffe died. The annual Warrington Walking Day held on 7th June of that year included 600 Wesleyan Sunday School children and this event still takes place in the town.

Many lectures were presented in the town. In the summer of 1832 there was a series of three lectures on colonial slavery where the middle one was given by a person opposing the view put forward in the other two.

### In Conclusion

1841 marked the end of the well-kept notebook. The next six years had very few entries with the writing deteriorating before improving slightly again. James had certainly been ill but he made no mention of it. The one cheerful event he was able to record in this time was the marriage of his daughter Mary to Mr. John Isaac but all the other entries were deaths including daughter Jemima in June 1847, close friends Amelia Collinson and Mary Heath and, just three months before James himself died, his family doctor James Kendrick.

James was buried on 28th February 1848. His estate was not wound up until after the death of his wife Margaret on 15th January 1868 when the deeds on the conveyance of three properties were signed: 25, 27 and 28 Bridge Street. Number 25, originally 15, was probably 'the house next door' that he bought in 1827 and let out.

The notebook answered many questions but it asked many more. There is still a lot to find out about the life of James Carter.

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