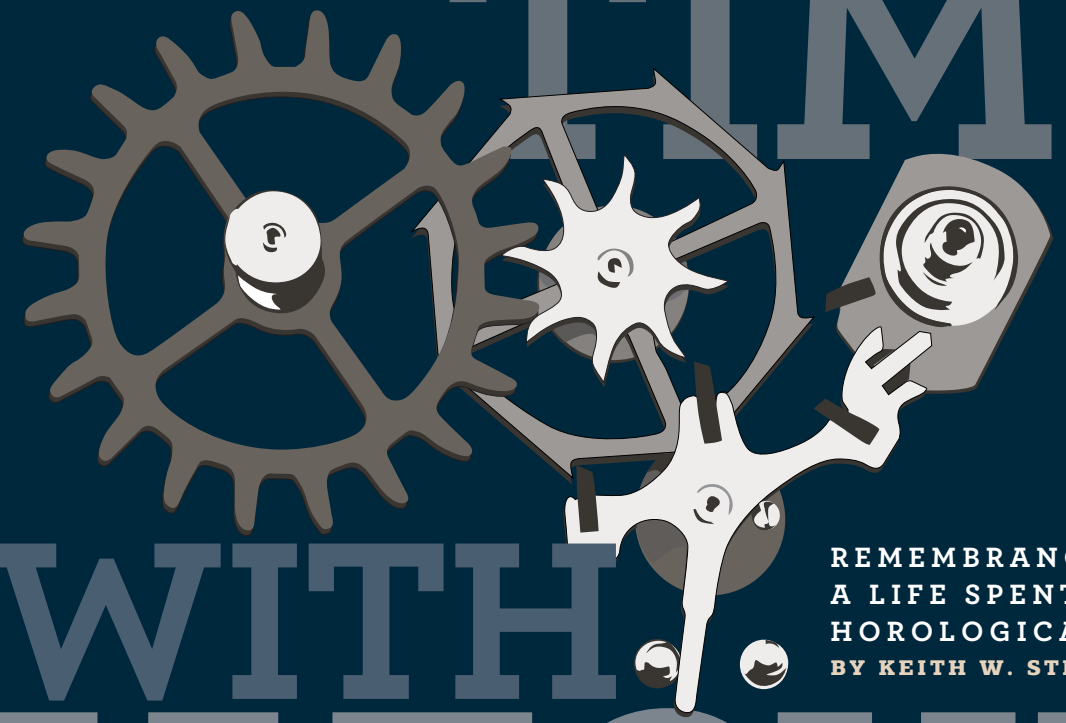


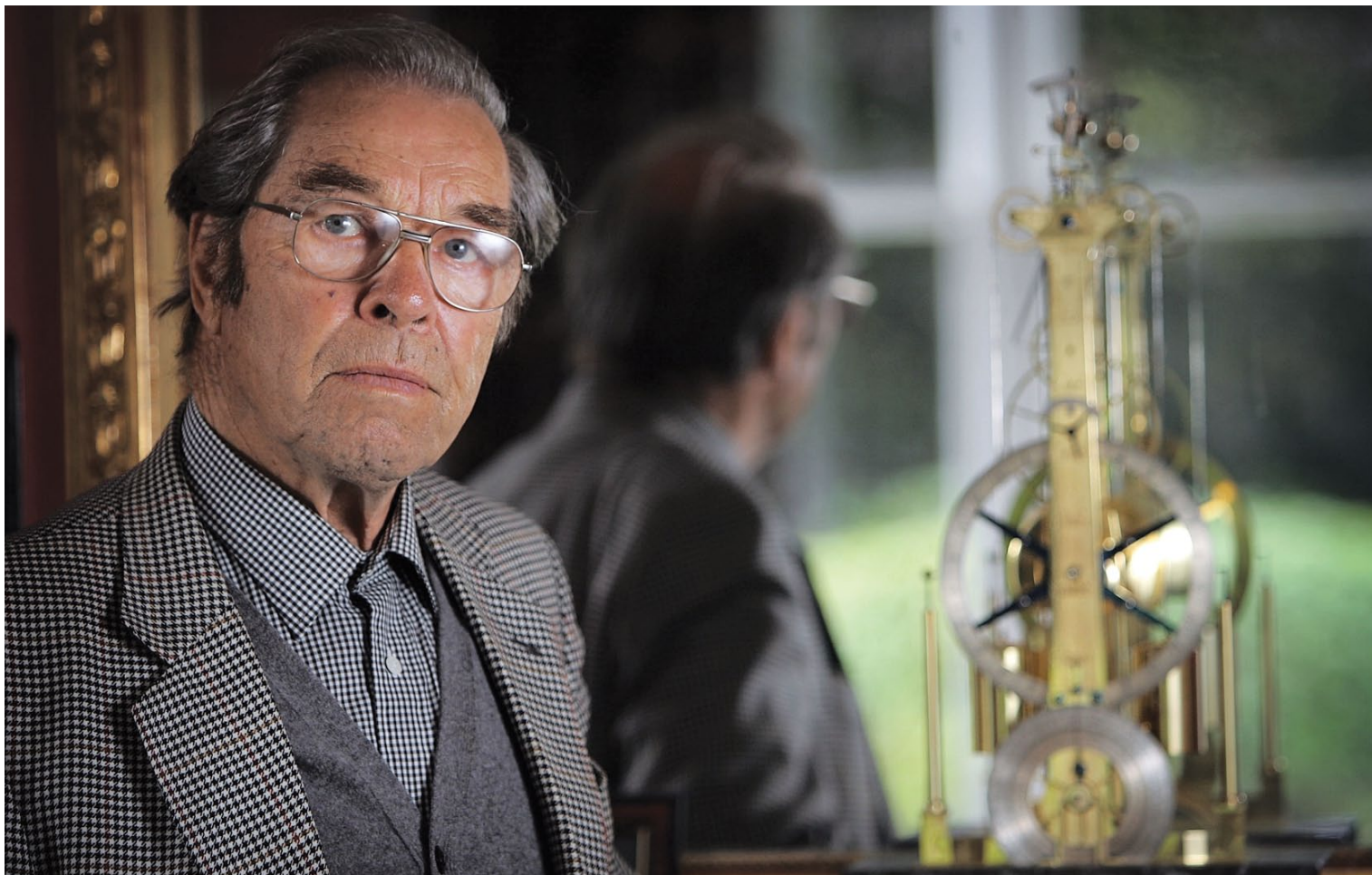


TIME WITH WATCHES



REMEMBRANCES OF
A LIFE SPENT IN
HOROLOGICAL PURSUITS
BY KEITH W. STRANDBERG

DR. GEORGE DANIELS IS WIDELY CONSIDERED ONE OF THE BEST, IF NOT *THE* BEST, WATCHMAKER OF HIS TIME. He had the ability to create a complete timepiece by hand—something only a handful of craftsmen have mastered—and he has an important horological invention to his name. To many, Daniels, who passed away last year at the age of 85, will remain an enigmatic figure who lived in relative isolation on the Isle of Man. To horology fans, however, he is the prodigious, inquiring, tireless, inventive and ingenious master who paved the way for a resurgence in mechanical watchmaking in the late 20th century.



George Daniels

Often cited as chief among Daniels' accomplishments is the invention of the co-axial escapement. Conceived in the 1970s, the Daniels co-axial escapement—which dramatically reduces friction, improves chronometry and lengthens service intervals in comparison to the mainstay Swiss

“HIS OUTPUT OF HANDMADE UNIQUE TIMEPIECES WAS PRODIGIOUS.”

—PETER N. ROBERTS

lever escapement—was a groundbreaking achievement. The escapement has been used by Omega in its high-end timepieces since 1999.

Daniels was always fascinated by watches, having found a cheap watch in a London street when he was just a boy. “I managed to get it open, and I was intrigued with the

workings,” he has been quoted as saying. “It was like seeing the center of the universe. I knew that’s what I wanted to do; I wanted to spend the rest of my time with watches.”

Young Daniels read everything he could about watchmaking while working at other jobs. He got involved with watch repair while in the British Army, and when he left the service, he went to work as a watch repairman. Following horology school at Northampton Polytechnic, he became the foremost authority

and restorer of Breguet watches, and then began making his own watches, by hand, in his workshop (his first watch was completed in 1969).

In order to accomplish this, he had to teach himself case manufacturing, dial making and every other craft involved in producing a watch. He completed a total of 37 watches during his lifetime, excluding prototypes. Daniels' book, “Watchmaking,” was published in 1981, and is considered one of the leading treatises on the subject.

In 1982, for tax reasons, Daniels moved to the Isle of Man and set up workshops there. He was joined on the island by fellow British watchmaker Roger W. Smith, who worked with Daniels on a series of watches using the co-axial escapement. Today, Smith continues to produce bespoke watches made entirely by hand. Smith calls Daniels the greatest horologist of his lifetime or of the previous 250 years. “He was an amazing individual who was always able to view life in his own way, unencumbered by the views of others,” says Smith. “I feel so privileged to have known and worked with George, who was my mentor and, later, my friend. I believe that it will be a very long time before his innovation and his impact on the industry is equalled.”

One of the regrets of my journalistic career is that I never had the opportunity to meet George Daniels. I spoke with him by phone several times, but never face to face. Last year, it was arranged that I would meet both Daniels and Smith. I traveled to the Isle of Man, but when I arrived, Daniels was in the hospital. I never had the honor of shaking his hand.

But there are many in the watchmaking world who knew him well, and many more

George Daniels wristwatch in 18-karat gold with four-minute tourbillon, slim Daniels co-axial escapement and compact chronograph mechanism

George Daniels grand complication pocket watch in 18-karat gold with one-minute tourbillon and Daniels slim co-axial escapement

George Daniels chronograph in 18-karat gold with Daniels independent double-wheel escapement

AUCTION OF A LIFETIME

Sotheby's will hold a sale of George Daniels' personal collection on November 6 in London. The collection includes pieces made by Daniels as well as others that he owned and rare examples of clocks and watches by some of the most famous makers of the 17th through the 19th centuries.

sothebys.com

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“GEORGE’S NAME
DESERVES
TO SIT
IN THE ELITE
PANTHEON
OF GREAT BRITISH
HOROLOGISTS—
TOMPION, GRAHAM, MUDGE,
ARNOLD, EARNSHAW, HARRISON
AND DANIELS.” —PETER N. ROBERTS

The Omega Speedmaster Moonwatch with Daniels co-axial escapement, \$8,700

who have been influenced by his work. Peter N. Roberts is the technical director at the Bremont watch company. He says, “George never suffered fools gladly but was always happy to help aspiring watchmakers. During my teaching career, he would readily come to the school and bring with him many timepieces. He would allow the students to handle the priceless watches. He was always there to support and encourage the next generation of watchmakers.”

“Whenever I met up with George, he would inquire as to what I was currently working on and ask difficult and penetrating questions about why and how I was approaching the challenge,” Roberts continues. “One needed to be totally on form to satisfy his curiosity.”

Peter Speake-Marin, a watchmaker working in the British tradition, remembers meeting Daniels while attending Hackney Technical college more than 25 years ago. “He was a legend even then,” recalls Speake-Marin. “He was the first person in a hundred years to develop a new escapement, and, even during some

of the most difficult periods, he continued to make what are today priceless mechanical works of art.”

Stephen Forsey of Swiss watch manufacturer Greubel Forsey says that he and his business partner, Robert Greubel, consider Daniels a major influence on their work. “Robert Greubel and I have always held George’s work in high esteem, in particular his dedication to the pursuit for perfection, which we also believe in. Through our own work, we understand the challenges and difficulties that George himself must have faced. He has undoubtedly greatly contributed to the renewed interest in mechanical watches over more than 40 years by carving out the path as he did and paving the way for independent watchmakers today and tomorrow.”

Roberts agrees. He concludes, “Thanks to Daniels, British watchmaking has entered a period of great fecundity. In my view, George’s name deserves to join the elite pantheon of great British horologists—Tompion, Graham, Mudge, Arnold, Earnshaw, Harrison and Daniels.”



De Ville Ladymatic chronometer with co-axial escapement by Omega