



Life Times

Clock expert Brian Loomes discovers more about the life and times of the maker of a 19th-century longcase clock

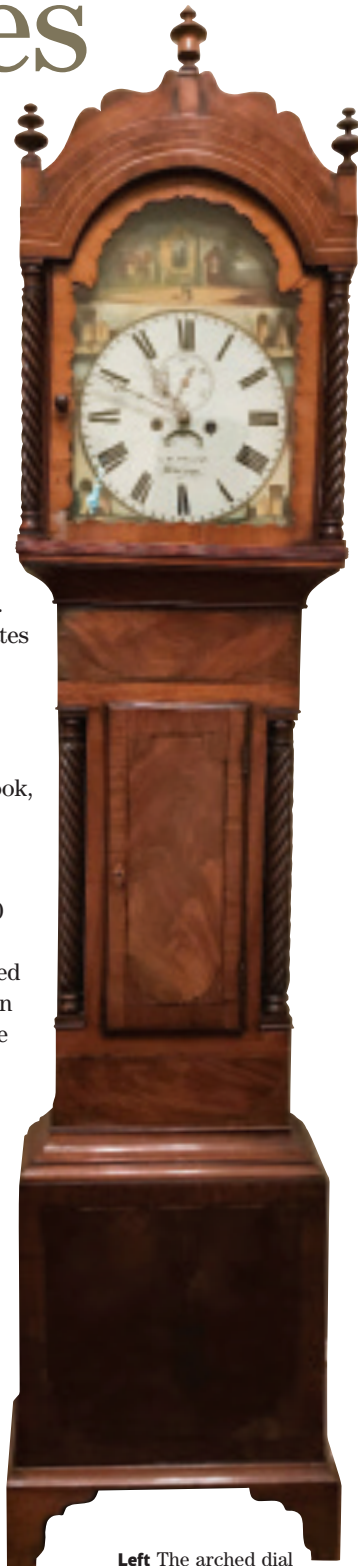
An American correspondent asked me recently if I could tell her anything about the age and maker of her longcase clock, or 'tall clock', as they are known in the USA. The clock has the maker's name of L.W. Price of Brecon on the dial. It is immediately apparent from its style that it dates from about 1840, but we both wanted to find out more than that.

When starting such research, the first place I always check to find out more about a maker's name is in the latest (2006) edition of my own book, *'Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World'*, the clock enthusiasts' 'bible', which records very brief details of all known clockmakers. It is a bit like a telephone directory, listing roughly 100,000 of those working before about 1900. The subject of our investigation, Lewis William Price, was listed there from trades directories as working in Brecon (Wales) from 1835 to 1871. While that was all the information documented, it was a good starting point.

MAKING CENSUS

This period of time is well covered these days by all manner of easily-accessible, online records that assist genealogical research, which means it was not too difficult to uncover more about this man. The census records were an obvious choice, consultable at this period for every decade ending in a 1 from 1841 onwards, so naturally these were another early port of call. However, what became increasingly clear to me as the research progressed was that the results illuminated not just this particular clock and its maker, but many others like them in the same period.

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Left The arched dial of the clock has a conventional seconds dial below XII and a 'mouth' calendar above VI. Photo by Sylvia Potter

Above The longcase clock has the name of L.W. Price of Brecon signed on the dial. Photo by Sylvia Potter

DIAL CENTRE

Birmingham was the centre where almost all such clock dials were made, as well as other objects of japanned ware, including tea trays and decorative boxes (see Richard Blakeborough's list).

Birmingham was just over a hundred miles from Brecon, home of Lewis Price and, as there were no dialmakers in Wales, the Birmingham stockists could cater for clockmakers nationwide.

We see very similar dials used by clockmakers hundreds of miles apart. Sometimes the game is given away by scenes such as thatched cottages on clock dials in areas where roofs were traditionally made of clay pantiles or slate. I have often been told by owners of Leeds clocks that they feature nearby Kirkstall Abbey, when it was painted by a Birmingham dial painter, who had never heard of it.

I found Lewis Price and his wife, Elizabeth, in several censuses. The 1841 census is the least detailed giving ages to the nearest five years and merely the county of birth. Later ones requested precise ages and the exact location of birth. Residents gave these details, sometimes reluctantly, to a census-taker, officially called an enumerator, who knocked at their door and wrote down the answers. In 1841, Price was listed as a watchmaker named plain Lewis Price and he and his wife were both recorded as 30 years old. By 1861, he had become Lewis W. Price, and his age was listed as 52, whereas his wife was now 57. He had, then, somehow acquired a middle name and an age difference of five years between him and his wife had crept in. In 1871, he was recorded as Lewis W. Price aged 62 and Elizabeth was 74, a difference of 12 years. She appeared to be growing older much quicker than he was!

There is an explanation, which is perhaps not obvious unless you are used to these records. People often resented giving out personal information on the doorstep to an enumerator, who was a stranger, or resented it even more if he was local. Some couples felt awkward about age differences, especially with this new-fangled census intruding into personal matters. The result was they often 'adjusted' their ages to bring them closer together. Yet, as they grew older and perhaps more familiar with census listing, this particular couple seems to have lost their earlier sensitivity and told the truth.

LIFE OF LEWIS

Armed with census guidelines, I searched further and found that he was baptised at St. John's church in Brecon on January 17, 1808 as Lewis, son of Lewis Price, shoemaker, and his wife (with a much-altered, hard-to-read first name). It was not until later that Lewis's second (or 'middle') name was included, something which was unusual at that time among working people. Most names in records were written down by other people, such as compilers of trade directories, who wrote in this instance what they thought they heard as William, though it transpired

that it was in fact Williams - Lewis Williams Price. I guessed this was probably his mother's surname before she married and further searching discovered this to be so. His father was married on the May 1, 1797 to Cis Williams.

I could find no apprenticeship record for Lewis, but any training he had would have finished by 1829 when he was 21, then known as the 'age of majority', when he ceased being a minor. Apprentices were not allowed to marry until their term ended, by which point most were keen to do so, as he obviously was. I discovered that he was married on the May 23, 1831 to Elizabeth Lavender at Llanhamlach in Breconshire.

The terms clockmaker and watchmaker were pretty well interchangeable in the period, as practitioners learned the theory of both. In practice, they were all more or less retailer shopkeepers, though capable of servicing or repairing clocks and watches. They would buy dials and clock parts from wholesalers, the latter in unfinished condition, which they would assemble into completed clocks. Watches would be purchased complete from specialist wholesale watchmakers ready-lettered with the retailer's name. The term 'watchmaker' was often preferred simply because the fine nature of watches implied a higher status than 'clockmaker'.

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Below The clock's movement is attached to the dial by a 'falseplate' made by the dialmaker. Photo by Sylvia Potter

PRICE IS RIGHT

The 1871 census for Castle Street, Brecon, shows who inhabited the home of the clockmaker L. W. Price:

- Lewis William Price aged 62 watchmaker born Brecon St. John
- Elizabeth Price Wife aged 74 born Monmouthshire
- Edward L Jones, great nephew age 8 scholar born Brecon, St. Mary
- Charles P Jones aged 6 ditto ditto
- Elen Griffith servant female aged 18 born Newport, Monmouthshire

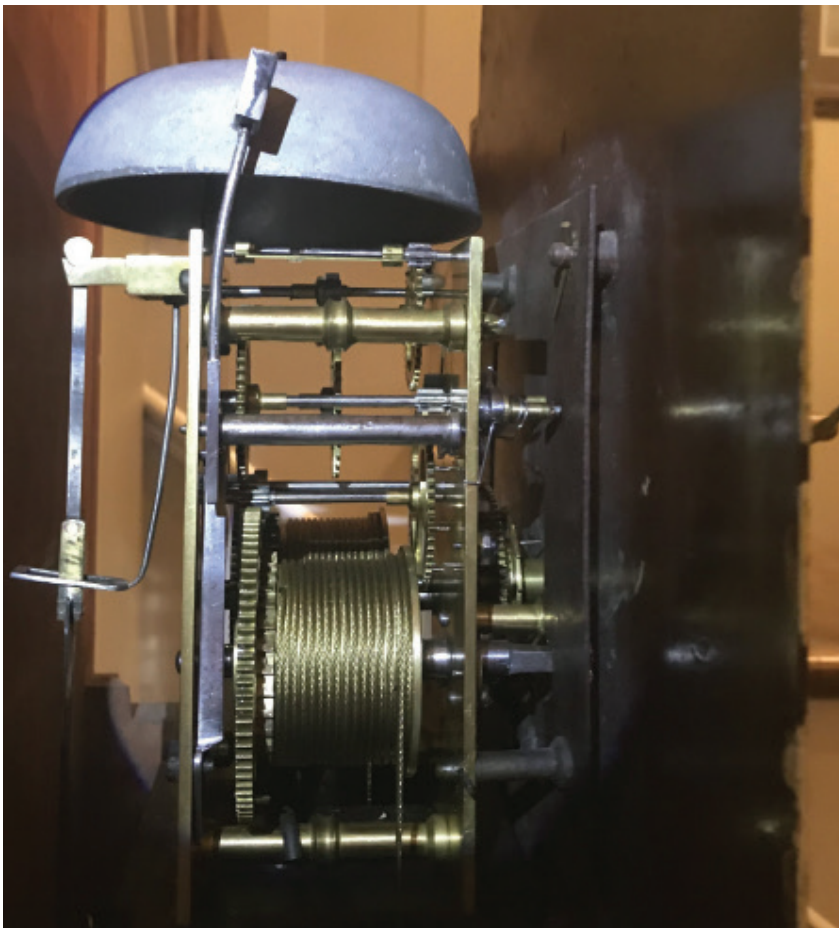
Lewis Williams Price, described as a jeweller, was buried on the April 10, 1873 at Brecon, probate of his will granted at Hereford on June 18, 1873. On this occasion, the name Williams was spelled correctly, perhaps with more care taken because of the legal nature of the entry. The description as jeweller may have been one option, perhaps sounding even grander than watchmaker, as such men trading in country towns such as Brecon sold all manner of household goods. They combined the trades of jeweller, silversmith, goldsmith, ironmonger, haberdasher, gunsmith, cutler, tool merchant, as well as clockmaker and watchmaker.

An idea of the vast range of items such a country store might sell is shown by a rare advertisement I came across many years ago by 'clockmaker' Richard Blakeborough of Otley in West Yorkshire who had a shop there from about 1815 until he died in 1851. Blakeborough pasted labels inside the doors of his longcase clocks showing the multiplicity of items stocked in his shop.

ORIGINAL CLOCK

Lewis Price's clock was made about 1840 and the clock and case are original throughout. The dial is typical of many of this period, featuring romantic scenes of ruins. Owners often believe these to be local monuments, but they are mostly just invented scenes devised by the dialmakers. The painted dial, sometimes called a 'japanned' dial, was purchased by the clockmaker, ready lettered with his name, from a dial-making specialist, the majority of which were in Birmingham.

While some of these dials fitted directly to the movement, dialmakers often supplied dials with a cast-iron attachment bracket called a falseplate. The falseplate made it much easier for the clockmaker to attach the movement without having to modify it to cope with pre-fixed dial 'feet' that might otherwise meet the movement awkwardly. The falseplate offered more versatility of attachment, particularly to the diehard clockmaker unwilling to vary the layout of his movements. Many falseplates have the dialmaker's name cast into them, but this can be hidden in the narrow gap between the dial and the falseplate and only visible when the clock is dismantled. Lewis Price's clock has a falseplate but the dialmaker's name is hidden.



Blakeborough,
WATCH AND CLOCK MAKER,
Jeweller, Silversmith, and Ironmonger,
Grateful for the Support which he has experienced for many Years, begs Leave to
address the Inhabitants of Otley and its Environs, that he
CONTINUES TO SELL THE FOLLOWING ARTICLES,
At Reduced Prices:

Watches, Pins, all Pieces small, do Clocks of all Gold Watch Chains, Seal Gold Bows, Ear Rings, Necklaces and Walling, &c. Gold, Silver, and Steel Gilt and Jet N. Rings, Black Ear Rings, Brooches, Beads of all kinds, Silver, Gilt, Steel, and Gilt Watch Cases, &c. Gold, Gilt, and Silver Silver, Tortoise-shell, Gilt, and T. and Steel Purses, Thimbles, Gold Silver Rings, Gilt, and Table and T. Spoons, Sugar Caddy Spoons, Trimbles, Cases, and Punch Ladles, Plated Tankards, Pints, Cups, and Tea Spoons, Cast-Steel Knives, with Rivers Cantons in Sets, Spoons, Spatulas, Silver, Tortoise, Corks, Jet, and all Steel Pins, Tobacco Cases, Ivory, Small and Pocket Combs, with Leather Pocket Books, Three Purses, Watch Boxes, &c. Flies, Pins, Vials, Brushes, Walking Sticks, and Cases, Mahogany Sewing Looking Glasses, &c. Perfumes, in Gilt Frames Sylver Patent Powder Flasks, Baths, Cases, double and single Bar, Pencils, do, and P Ladies' Folding Cases, do or Steel, do. Blue Glass	Herb glasses, Spect Horse Stam Journal Purses, Socks, Knives, Spoon Spatul Tongs, Pencil Table Sitting and of all Hatch Cases, Shot Gilt, do.	Spring Rousing Jacks, Brass and Japan and Cases. Crooks. Copper Scales and Beams. Beams of all kinds. Weights, Bunches' Traces. Tea Trays, Papered Japaned. Metal Tea Pans, Table and Tea Spoons. Tin Caddies and Tea Chests, Japaned Broad Hairpins, Waiters, and Chamber Candelsticks. Brass and Iron Candelsticks. Knives, with Ivory Handles, and Car vers to match. Dishes, do do. Kettles, with Sugar and Pressed Handles. Pockets and Pankitum. Razors. Scales of all kinds. Wool Shears. Patent do. Pliers and Common Cork Saws. Sugar Nippers. Scissors and Scissor Trays. Black Lead Pencils. Copper and Iron Cold Bores. Copper Tea Kettles, Sauce Pans, Warm ing Pans, &c. Pliers and Common Chisels. Parasols. Fishing Tackle. Best Glass Ladder. Fancy Biscuits. Marble and Soap Ornaments. Wooler Glasses. Proper Glasses. Patent Balloons, for wedding Ser vicemen and Half Serenades. Lany Black Entry, Cases, Pansie Boxes, &c. Brass Locks and Air Vents for Bath do and Stone Traps, W. Tin, Toy Warren's Best Japan Blacking. Brass Pans, of all Sizes. Knives for Doves. Rings and Pins of various kinds. Locks and Hinges of all kinds. Springing and shells, for engraving Brass and Polished Steel Feeders. Green Feeders, with Brass Tops & Balls.	Kitchen do. Pulver and Common Fire Iron. Pans and Baked Irons. Beliers. Bovles, Brown Heads, and Chamber Bovles. Carp, Banister, and Hoard Brushes. Flax and Round Whistles. Best Pliers. Saw and Shoe Brushes. Butter Brushes. Hair and Tooth do. do. do. Black and Bright Angles, Gimbals, do and do. Hammer. Mason's Trowel. Sawdust Flows, Jack Pliers. Shoe Pryer do. Long Pryer do. Saw do. Saw of all Sizes. Hand, Panned, and Riping Saws. Dovetail and Truss do. Butcher do. Cut Steel Patent Scythes and Sickles. Cut Steel Chisels and Gouges. Do. Garden and Turnip Hoop. Cut Steel Plane Irons. All kinds of Tins for Carpenters, Joiners, &c. Gummed, Knives, Razorstones, Locks, and Keys. Irons and Sawers, Balls, Curtain Pins, Rings, Brass Nails, &c.
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In addition to the above List, R. B. has very recently received a fresh Supply of Hard
ware, Jewellery, Silver, and Plated Goods, too numerous for insertion.
R. B. cleans and carefully repairs Clocks and Watches of every description; also Weather
Glasses, Bottle Jacks, Silver Plate, &c.
THE BEST PRICES GIVEN FOR OLD GOLD AND SILVER.
EDWARD BAINES, PRINTER, LEEDS.



BRISTOL FASHION

Clock cases were built by a woodworker, rather than clockmakers who worked only in metal. Those of refined and highly sophisticated and stylised nature, such as this one, were made by expert cabinetmakers who specialised in clock cases. The style of this case is readily recognisable as having been made in Bristol, which, at a distance of seventy miles from Brecon (across the Bristol Channel), was probably the nearest centre of casemaking excellence. Clocks from many surrounding areas were sold in Bristol cases. The quality of cabinetmaking skills seen in such cases was never exceeded at any time, though the style is one which may not appeal to everyone. This particular style and variants was sold between about 1830 and 1850.

One Bristol cabinet maker, who specialised in clock cases in the period between about 1816 and about 1840, was William Cock. On trade labels he pasted inside the back of clock cases, he proclaimed himself as 'Camp Writing Desk Inventor and Manufacturer' (by which he means 'campaign' or travelling desks) as well as clock casemaker. I have only come across one of his cases, on a clock I bought many years ago. This was a case he supplied to a clockmaker named Thorpe in Bath, but it varied slightly in having a swan-neck hood pediment. There must have been other casemaking specialists in Bristol but their work is not yet recognised – perhaps because owners loved to scrape off such trade labels by which we lose a bit of history.

I mentioned this aspect to William Linnard, whose book, 'Wales, Clocks & Clockmakers', includes a number of Welsh clockmakers using Bristol cases. Bill told me he has seen many hundreds of Bristol cases

Above left An advertising label of about 1840 by clockmaker Richard Blakeborough gives an idea of the variety of goods stocked. Photo by Brian Loomes

Above The case of the clock would have been made in Bristol. Photo by Sylvia Potter

but never one with a trade label, other than the William Cock one, which I wrote about many years ago.

PRIZE PURCHASE

A longcase clock was seen by many Welsh married couples as their prize purchase. In the mid-19th century, an ordinary eight-day clock in its case cost about £6.00. This was about a year's wages to a female household servant like eighteen-year-old Elen Griffith, who worked for the Prices at the time of the 1871 census as a servant. By comparison a tradesman/shopkeeper/jeweller like Lewis Price was doing well if he earned £1.00 a week. This clock was above average, and might have cost £10.00 overall.

Owners often ask how many clocks would a clockmaker have made. Well, a hundred years earlier, say in the 1740s or 1750s, a country clockmaker was just that – he made, sold and repaired and serviced clocks, and sometimes watches, too. He was a one-man-band and did nothing else. We know he could make one clock every two weeks, 25 a year, if he got the orders. However, Lewis Price sold all kind of things alongside clocks in his role as a shopkeeper.

Brian Loomes is an author and world-renowned clock dealer with a shop in Harrogate, North Yorkshire. For details visit www.brianloomes.com