

English horological workers brought to Versailles, France by Henry Sully (1718-20)

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According to Julien Le Roy, writing in *Règle artificielle du temps* (1737), the Scotsman financier John Law (1671 – 1729) , who was playing an increasingly important role in the financial affairs of France through his influence with the Regent, “*was charged to deliver funding [to Sully] himself, and had gone to see [Sully] on this occasion. Works that he saw in his house, the keenness of mind that he noticed in his discourse, joined to all the good that he had heard about him, and made him believe that he would be very well suited to lead a horological factory*”. Indeed, as part of his financial initiatives in France at that time, Law endeavored to create several factories on French soil, where skilled English workers would be brought in and paid to setup those manufactures, and impart knowledge on topics such as horology, metallurgy, wool processing, glassworks, to French workers, thereby increasing the quality of manufacturing processes in France.

The following text appeared in *Le Nouveau Mercure*, Janvier 1719, p. 141 (Journal de Paris section):

In February 1718, Mr. Sully conceived the design and created the project of an establishment aiming at placing horology on a better footing than it has been to date in France (...) He addressed himself to Mr. Law, for him to make the proposal to His Royal Highness the Duke of Orleans, Regent. This prince approved it and charged Mr. Law to assist Mr. Sully in executing his project. (...) The objective of this establishment is the good of the State, advantaging French horologeurs (watch-clockmakers), Masters as well as workers, and the perfection of horology. (...) An assortment of the best English workers in every branch of horology was brought into France at great cost, they were established in Versailles in Royal houses with considerable benefits, to make their stay more comfortable, and attract others that could later be needed. Also employed are good French workers that are willing to comply with the rules of the establishment. Young people are also brought in to learn all aspects of horology, to whom is taught both the theory and practice of the art. This establishment is thus both a factory able to produce objects of the current standards of beauty and perfection, and an academy able to instruct skilled and intelligent workers for the future.

A key source of information about the factories setup in France under John Law, from a historian who has consulted the archives in Kew, is:

Harris, J.R., *Industrial Espionage and Technology Transfer: Britain and France in the Eighteenth Century*, Routledge, 2017.

The list below was obtained from the one featured in this recently discovered online summary record at The National Archives in Kew (Reference: SP 35/25/52, Description: Folios 95-100). The original

document is dated 6 February 1721. I am thankful to the archivist at Kew who took the time to transcribe the names for the record, and for those of us who can't easily travel to Kew to do research.

<https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C17354441>

Many of the names are likely not watchmakers employed by Sully either at the new watchmaking factories at Versailles, or later at Saint Germain en Laye. They could have been steelmakers employed by William Blakey in the factory he setup at Harfleur, also under the John Law regime. Other factories setup under Law were in Chaliot (foundry for gun-making, run by Gun Jones), and Charlaval or Charleville (woolen works run by John Pagett).

All in all, 27 names on the list are found to be watchmakers listed in the Clockmaker's Company Masters-Apprentices list, with another 12 possible matches from Loomes (*Watchmakers and Clockmakers of the World, 2006*). Generally, Sully is said to have brought "around 60" London watchmakers (and their families) to help him start up the Versailles manufacture. These skilled workers were provided with dwellings in Versailles and somewhat generous benefits (used to entice them to leave England in the first place). So this list of 27 provides well over half the names, which is pretty impressive. Further research into some of the remaining names may find more of them to be associated with the English horological trades as well. However, lack of mention in Loomes suggests that the remaining names were of people brought in to work in factories other than the horological one in Versailles under Sully.

A further fact-finding exercise will be to identify where the watch-clockmakers masters operated their business, hence where the apprentices were located. It will be interesting to see how far afield from London Henry Sully went in finding men ready to join him in the Versailles manufactory project in France. Another effort will be to arrange the list alphabetically.

(Note: A follow-up letter in the Kew archives, from Sully to Lord Carteret [Secretary of State for the Southern Department], dated 10 March 1721, describes the "establishment, progress and destruction of the manufactures". In this letter, Sully makes the interesting claim to have worked as a translator between notable aristocrats in Vienna and France. This is the first time a reference to his role as a "translator" has ever come up in the past literature on Sully, and underlines the linguistic skills that he had acquired, since relocating to Holland after his apprenticeship with Gretton, in London. The description below is what was entered by the archivist at Kew Archives.)

SP 35/25/105 1721 Mar 10, Folios 201-205. To Lord Carteret. Place: London.

Memorial of Henry Sully relating to the establishment, progress and destruction of the manufactures lately carried out in France by English artists [artificers]'. Mentions: arriving in France after the Treaty of Baden in 1714, and his work as a **translator** for Prince Eugene of Savoy, Marshal de Villars and the Duke of Arenberg; a presentation to the Royal Academy in Paris, and an audience with the Duke of Orleans, via Lord Staires [Stair]; acquaintance with and criticism of Mr [John] Law; the involvement of Sir Robert Sutton, [James] Craggs [the younger] and Mr Pulteney; Wm [William] Blakey, his brother Richard Sully, and the iron and steel manufactory at Harfleur; the manufactories of Chaillot, Versailles and St Germain; and John Pagett, director of the woollen manufactory in Charleval [Charleville].

Legend:

“x”: not found in CC Master/App list (only selected those instances of names that were either masters by the time Sully would have been rounding up interested men in 1718, or partly engaged in their apprenticeships). In some cases, more than one possible match was found so multiple possibilities are suggested. One date indicates the starting date of the apprenticeship; when two dates are present they are the starting and ending dates of the apprenticeship.

“wm”: refers to watchmaker.

“app”: is short form for “apprentice”.

“y”: denotes this name not found in Loomes or “L” .

Copy of a ‘*representation of the directors of manufacturies in France*’, outlining the manner in which [ambassador] Sir Robert Sutton has expended funds to entice artificers to return home.

(1) A list of persons of whom the manufacturies were composed, mentioning: Henry Sully, Wm [William] Blakey, Richard Sully, and John Pagett;

- **John Anderson**; wm app to William Gilbert 3:8:1696
- **Shelton Barret**; wm app to Alexander Warfield (**BARRETT**. Skelton.) 7:8:1710
- **Henry Batterson**; wm master to app OLDSWORTH. Stephen. 30:4:1712
- **John Birdwhistle**; wm app to Lewis De Roumieu 2:7:1711 6:10:1718
- **George Cartwright**; wm master to app EVANS. Thomas. — 26:10:1720
- **John Davis**; wm app to Thomas West 4:12:1699
- **John Dobson**; x
 - L: John Dobson London app. 1698 CC 1714-1744
- **John Ferre**; x
 - L: John Ferrers(Ferrars), London 1715-19
- **John Hall**; x
 - L: John Baptist Hall, apprentice London 1669-1705
- **William Halstead**; wm app to Anthony Dunn 8:11:1715 14:1:1722
 - A legal document found online suggests that Halstead and Sully were quite close, and that he married the latter’s sister-in-law
 - Tardy’s dictionary states that Guillaume Halsted had a work address in Paris between 1741-43 on Rue de Condé, and that he had come to France with Sully.
- [blank] **Hanson; (George S.)** wm app to Mary Hanson 2:3:1718
- **Robert Hodgekins**; x
 - L: Robert **Hodgkin**, London circa. 1705-1720
- **William Hunt**; x
 - L: William Hunt Exeter (Devon) 1698 c.1731
- **William James**; x
 - L: Two William James apprenticed in London in 1696, 1698
- **John Jennings**; x

- L: John Jennings, Poole, Dorset circa 1710-1740
- **John Lee**; wm app to Richard Harrold 7:2:1703
 - wm app to William Jaques 4:4:1709 7:3:1719
 - wm master to app HEMSLEY. Richard. 2:4:1722
- **John Love**; wm app to William Finch 23:2:1697 5:5:1707
- **John Marshal**; wm master to app STEPHENS. Thomas. 4:1:1693 7:9:1702
- **John Martin**; wm app to Thomas Lumpkin 2:4:1705 7:3:1714
- **Henry Mestayer**; wm master to app BOURSEAUX. James. 15:7:1715
- **William Neeld**; x
 - L: son of George Neeld, a blacksmith who repaired a church clock in Kenilworth
- **William Palmer**; wm app to John Johnson 1:5:1699
- **Thomas Parker**; wm app to Thomas Roycroft 21:5:1713
- **James Pitan**; wm master to app DUBUSC. James. 16:5:1711
- **John Robinson**; wm app to James Markwick 7:2:1698
- **John Rogers**; wm app to Henry Lawrence 19:5:1715 3:4:1732
- **John Smith**; wm app to Joseph Boulton 11:10:1714
 - wm app to Thomas Boyce 8:5:1702
 - wm app to Joseph Tilley 1:8:1715
- *John Sully; (related to Henry and Richard?)*
- **Thomas Taylor**; wm app to Thomas Bradford 1:7:1700
 - wm (son) app to Thomas Taylor 3 2:7:1705
- **George Topping**; wm app to William Grimes 29:9:1691
- **Thomas Trever**; x
 - L: Thomas Trevor London app. 1696
- **Philip Vick (Vyck)**; wm app to William Speakman 3:12:1694
 - According to Augarde (*Ouvriers du Temps*), Philippe Vyck was in Versailles in August 1720. In 1733, he was working in Paris at abbaye Saint-Germain-Des-Prés. Augarde supposes that Vyck returned to England during 1720-33 since his daughter was married there, and there is a watch signed “Philippe Vyck à Londres”
- **William Wallis**; x
 - L: London CC 1715
- **William Warham**; x
 - L: William Wareham, London, app. 1699
- **John Watson**; wm app to Cornelius Harbert Jr 7:7:1712
- **Peter Whittel**; x
 - L: Peter Whittle probably London pre-1759
- **Thomas Wilkins**; wm app to John Howse 1693?
- **John Wood**; wm app to Langley Bradley 11:11:1713
 - wm app to John Nash 20:1:1689 7:4:1701
 - wm app to William Webster 3:6:1717

Also mentioned are manufacturies at: Versailles, Harfleur, St Germain, Charleval [? Charleville]; and Chaliot.

The following list of names are those which one can exclude from being part of the watchmakers, based on lack of mention in either Clockmakers Company list (x), or in Loomes (y).

- William Akers; x, y
- Peter Brevant; x, y
- John Acred; x, y
- John Cutter; x, y
- Daniel Bennet; x, y
- John Arch; x, y
- John Gibson; x, y
- Abraham Guest; x, y
- Robert Arch; x, y
- Charles Gammon; x, y
- Thomas Pagett; x, y
- Thomas Mason; x, y
- William Vanderhagen; x, y
- Charles Spicer; x, y
- Bat Keen; x, y
- John Kelsal; x, y
- Alexander Strutton; x, y
- William Sanders; x, y
- Thomas Bretton; x, y
- Elisha Barnes; x, y
- Frances Mallard; x, y
- Gideon Perrigal; x, y
- James Halford; x, y
- John Crow; x, y
- Michael Thompson; x, y
- Samuel Tyas; x, y
- Edward Carlton; x, y
- William Friend; x, y
- John Strutt; x, y
- John Rochester; x, y
- Robert Trever; x, y
- John Leadcart; x, y
- Roger Shields; x, y
- William Hilly; x, y
- Henry Clement; x, y
- John Cockland; x, y
- William Miller; x, y
- William Franks; x, y
- Thomas Wagstaff Motte and apprentice; x, y
- Mathew Beaver; x, y
- Nathaniel O'Brien; x, y
- Robert Atkins; x, y
- Henry Carns; x, y
- Duncan Cambel [Campbell]; x, y
- John Winnel; x, y
- Peter Foubert; x, y
- John Colly; x, y
- John Peake; x, y
- Samuel Ballard; x, y
- Jonathan Abram; x, y
- William Lacy; x, y
- John Black; x, y
- John Moor; x, y
- Mathew Mucklow; x, y
- Thomas Kirkum; x, y
- William Hanson; x, y
- Cuthbert Proud; x, y
- Thomas Sanders; x, y
- Jeremiah Agett; x, y
- Edward Compton; x, y
- James Clement; x, y
- Andrew Wall; x, y
- William Sanier; x, y
- John Brags; x, y
- William Thomas; x, y
- Dixon Hill; x, y
- Malachy Dudeney; x, y
- ?Mrs Muggray; x, y
- John Witherly; x, y
- William Peek; x, y
- William Denn; x, y
- Jacob Hall; x, y
- Thomas Hayer; x, y
- Eleonar Strumbull; x, y
- Elijah Wood; x, y
- Alexander Parsons; x, y
- Henry Wake; x, y
- Katherine Bruen; x, y
- Jonah Johnson; x, y
- William Allen; x, y
- John Abram; x, y
- Thomas Joncy; x, y
- Thomas Green; x, y
- Edward Forrester; x
- Richard Haden; x, y
- Michael Baithe. x, y