

Bookreview for NAWCC Bulletin

Reviewed by Fortunat Mueller-Maerki (New Jersey)

“All in Good Time”, Reflections of a Watchmaker

by George Daniels,

Published by the Author, Isle of Man (UK), 2000, limited first printing; softcover, 159 pages & numerous plates; available through horological booksellers and at the NAWCC lending library.

While many readers of these pages will be familiar with this author, a few introductory remarks for the others: George Daniels is one of the few people alive today who rightfully carries the title “watchmaker” because he makes complicated, original watches of his own design completely by himself from scratch, including the case, dial, hands and movement down to every single screw. One of his previous books, “Watchmaking” (1981, republished 1998, ISBN 0 8667 497 4), is the superbly illustrated, only –and very readable- modern text describing step-by-step how to make a watch using crafts- rather than industrial-methods.

Now, at age 76, George Daniels has published this autobiography. I always enjoy autobiographies of people I presume to know because I have read their writings, have heard them lecture a few times, and read about them continually in the press. Of course it usually turns out that one does not know the individual at all until one learns about the more private elements of his life, his childhood, his pastimes, his

passions. The book is a case in point, the public George Daniels is a most creative watchmaker combining superb horological craft skills, with extraordinary creativity, and with an excellent sense for aesthetics. He appeared to me as driven maybe even obsessed with his ideas, as aloof or even somewhat arrogant in style. The autobiography does not necessarily change that perception, but it explains it: Few people know that Mr. Daniels had a very difficult childhood and youth, and that the man labeled “a national treasure” in a British TV special, and recipient of an honorary Doctorate in Science, is completely self-taught, as he could not afford an education. He had to fight all the way from abysmal poverty and ignorance to his present, highly respected role in both the horological profession and in British society, and unless you develop a certain “obsessiveness and combativeness” you will just not make it.

A substantial portion of the book is devoted to Mr. Daniels’ big passion: classic motor cars, especially Bentley race cars. He describes the cars he owned and restored lovingly, but -like most of what he did in his life- he also used this sphere of his life to make friends who would prove useful to climb up the professional and social hierarchy.

The centerpiece of the book is the chronicle of his epic 25 year struggle to convince the world’s manufacturers of high grade mechanical watches – i.e. the Swiss watch industry- that the lever escapement that has dominated watchmaking for 200 years was inherently flawed, due to its need for lubrication, and the resulting change in performance over time as the oil degrades. The Daniels Co-Axial escapement, invented in 1976, overcomes that handicap. However inventing and improving his escapement was easy compared with the struggle of Mr. Daniels to get the engineers and businessmen at the helm of huge companies to accept that a lonely, self-taught, single watchmaker had achieved the single most important

horological breakthrough of the century. As watch-enthusiasts know that struggle is now over, Omega launched in 2000 its first wristwatch with the Daniels co-axial escapement, which by the way is described and illustrated very nicely in the text of the book.

“All in good time” will provide fascinating reading for all those who want to understand better what has been driving one of the greatest horological minds and craftsman of the late 20th century.