



WATCHMAKER'S APPRENTICES learn from a 'great teacher'



Internationally renowned he most certainly is as one of the world's elite craftsmen of handmade watches but when it comes to his two apprentices then Roger W Smith receives other all important accolades when he is dubbed not only a "good watchmaker" but a great teacher.

"Roger is very supportive but doesn't stand over you, he is incredibly patient," says 25-year-old Josh Horton, a former landscape gardener from Ramsey, who became Roger's first apprentice four years ago.

Three months ago a second apprentice, Canadian Charles Birchall, 24, joined the thriving and elite business which has its workshop on the north of the Island. "Roger is just so relaxed and that helps so much when you're learning, I've never seen him lose his 'cool'," says Charles.

The manufacturing all takes place amid a picturesque setting with the workshop often a destination for some of the world's super wealthy who can afford one of the sought after and highly individualistic watches with only 10 such pieces made to be sold each year.

"I saw the job advertised in *The Courier* and applied for it, highlighting the fact that I had particularly good dexterity for working on small pieces as I helped my Dad paint miniature military pieces which he makes," recalls Josh. "I thought my the first interview which was in Roger's kitchen went all right, but at the same time I wasn't too sure and then after a couple of weeks I got a call from him asking me back for a second interview."

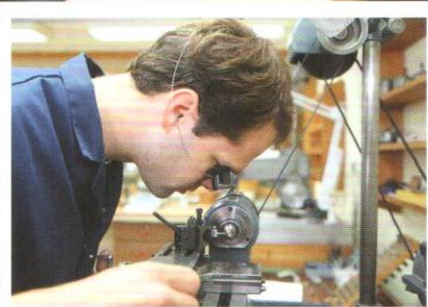
By that time Josh admits that he had done

a considerable amount of research into watch making and was fully aware that Roger was himself once an apprentice, to the highly acclaimed Isle of Man horologist Dr George Daniels, the creator of the Daniels method. It was an apprenticeship which stretched over many years with Roger mastering the 32 skills required to design and make a watch in its entirety by hand. By then Josh knew he so desperately wanted to become Roger's apprentice.

"Three weeks after that interview I got the call offering me the job, was over the moon and four years on I have no regrets, I enjoy coming to work every day," he declares. "I'm now conscious of just what a worldwide name and reputation Roger W Smith watches have, and it's a lot to live up to."

He goes on: "The apprenticeship could be as long as seven years but you never really stop learning, there is just so much to learn. It was about a year before I could make a part that was up to Roger's standard and the most expensive watch I worked on was a Daniels Anniversary Watch which is worth around £180,000. I'm hoping to be soon making my first complete watch and perhaps one day have my own workshop."

New apprentice Charles looks back to when he was in his third year studying politics at university in Toronto. "I was quite miserable. Watches were something of a hobby, not



necessarily the brands but the mechanics, so I applied and got a place at a small watch making school in Switzerland which taught in English.

"By then I was aware of the Roger W Smith brand and the high regard in which it was held and when I heard that Roger was looking for an apprentice I was lucky enough to get an interview and came over from Switzerland for a couple of days. The test was a very difficult procedure and it was a shaky and nervous start so I didn't feel it went as well as it could have done. Luckily for me Roger saw I wanted to learn and offered me this great opportunity."

He adds: "The atmosphere here in Roger's workshop, when compared to the school in Switzerland, is more conducive to productivity, the guys here are more open-minded and want to learn more techniques. I'm immersed in the building of a watch and being pushed to make my own watch. For me it is a unique education and the ambition of every watchmaker is to make his own watch. Currently, my ambition is learning."

Charles, who also lives in Ramsey and for a hobby enjoys restoring old pocket watches,

admits he has fallen in love with the Island. "When I first flew in and looked down from the plane I had never seen an Island with farmland rolling hills. I didn't expect it to be so dramatic. Now I'm settling here I want to get back into my cycling and learn to race."

The final words have to come from Roger Smith himself, the star of the highly acclaimed film 'The Watchmaker's Apprentice'. Based on his determination to be a watch maker and finally become George Daniel's apprentice.

"I'm still learning, 25 years down the line, watch making requires a huge amount of knowledge and there is also the need to have a deep understanding of problem solving," he declares. "Charles has more practical knowledge of the workings of a watch, and the various components but doesn't yet have the same skill level as Josh in terms of the finishing, and perfect watch making is the combination of the two. They are both still some years away before making useable watches and I'm hoping both are going to be here long-term."

Roger, who is currently redesigning the Series 2 watch which he introduced in 2006, is now looking to take on a third apprentice, ideally a school leaver.

"While no knowledge is required it needs to be someone from the Island as I want to build a core of talent here and someone who, at an interview, can show an all important spark of interest."

Anyone interested should email Roger on rogersmith@rsmithwatches.com ■