

# New Recruits



Alan Burtoft and his first six protégés: (Left to right) Steven Lewis, Bryan Aust, Jason Bradshaw, Burtoft, Joshua Peni, Peter Johnson and Mark Kimblin.

## A fresh start for British watch-schooling – but is it enough?

**Timothy Treffry**

The British School of Watchmaking (BSW) was inaugurated on October 17th, when representatives of the founding companies travelled to Manchester to sign the documents of agreement, which authorised the school's establishment. Director of the BSW, Nick Towndrow from Swatch Group UK said this was a "milestone for the industry".

The school will teach WOSTEP's (Watchmakers of Switzerland Training and Education Program)

3,200-hour syllabus, spread over two years. WOSTEP Director Maarten Pieters welcomed the BSW as the 14th member of its worldwide watch-repair training system. He praised the school's instructor, Alan Burtoft, who spent 12 weeks at Neuchâtel, where WOSTEP is based, for its 'Train the Trainer' course and various other programmes. Burtoft, who learned his trade the traditional way starting as an apprentice with a county jewellers in Yorkshire, has had over 40 years' experience in watch repair, having



(Left) Representatives of the sponsoring watch companies, gathered at the opening of their collaborative project.

undergone several factory training courses in Switzerland, worked for major watch companies and retailers, as well as enjoying a successful period of self-employment. He has also taught at Government Skills Centres and has been Chief Instructor for the British Horological Institute's Education Trust. He is looking forward to starting the gradual replacement of the generation of repairers lost when UK retailers stopped training apprentices.

### Fulfilling a need

In the Eighties, as quartz watches took over from mechanicals, most jewellery stores closed their service departments and the existing generation of watch repairers became self-employed or disappeared into sales, where they were better paid anyway. Most of the dealers who provided watch parts also closed their doors. A decade later, as the mechanical watch began to reappear as a high-value consumer-desirable, retailers' ability to have them serviced had largely disappeared; a problem aggravated by the decision of most watch brands to refuse parts-supply to the few independent repairers that still existed. When the WOSTEP-certified training course at South Manchester College closed in 2005,

(Right) Jason Bradshaw settles in at his BSW workbench, where he'll spend many of the 3,200 hours demanded by the WOSTEP syllabus.

UK watch distributors and retailers foresaw considerable difficulties in continuing to provide after-sales service for high-quality watches, and the idea of an industry-financed training facility was born.

The BSW, now underway in Manchester, cost the founders - Breitling, FA Bucks, Goldsmiths Group, Houlden Group, Patek Philippe, Richemont Group, Rolex, Signet Group, and Swatch Group - over £240,000 to set up, not to mention the ongoing running expenses. The first six

students, who range in age from 19 to 34, will certainly make the most of it: a programme of 37.5 contact hours per week for 42 weeks a year probably makes them the busiest students in the UK! At other times, they will gain extra experience in their sponsors' repair workshops.

Although the formation of the BSW will, over time, provide for the servicing of current models, *QP* believes that a crucial problem remains for collectors of classic watches. Although Patek Philippe will, perhaps uniquely, undertake to repair any watch the company has ever made, many brands regard older models as obsolete. The watch-repair environment being developed by the watch companies effectively makes repairers 'bonded labourers'. Here's hoping that the new school's success will support the growth of an independent sector, securing a viable future for the restoration of classic watches. **○**

**Further information:** Details of the two-year BSW course, and how to apply, can be obtained from Nick Towndrow, Tel: 02380 646 800, Email: [nick.towndrow@swatchgroup.com](mailto:nick.towndrow@swatchgroup.com),

