

## George Calver – Master Instrument Maker

“The instrument maker, George Calver (1834–1927), produced his first mirror in the mid-1860s. Around 1850 he had moved from Walpole, Suffolk, where he was born, to Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, where he worked in the boot and shoe trade for several years. While living in Yarmouth he became acquainted with a Rev Matthews. Nothing is known of Matthews (he may have been a dissenting minister, excluded from Anglican records) except that he had acquired a telescope with a mirror by G. H. With – who made his first mirror in 1862 – and challenged Calver to make a mirror of equal quality. Calver rose to the challenge, and thereafter devoted the rest of his life to the production of instruments. By about 1870 he had moved to Widford, near Chelmsford, and in 1904 he returned to Walpole, where he continued his work into old age.

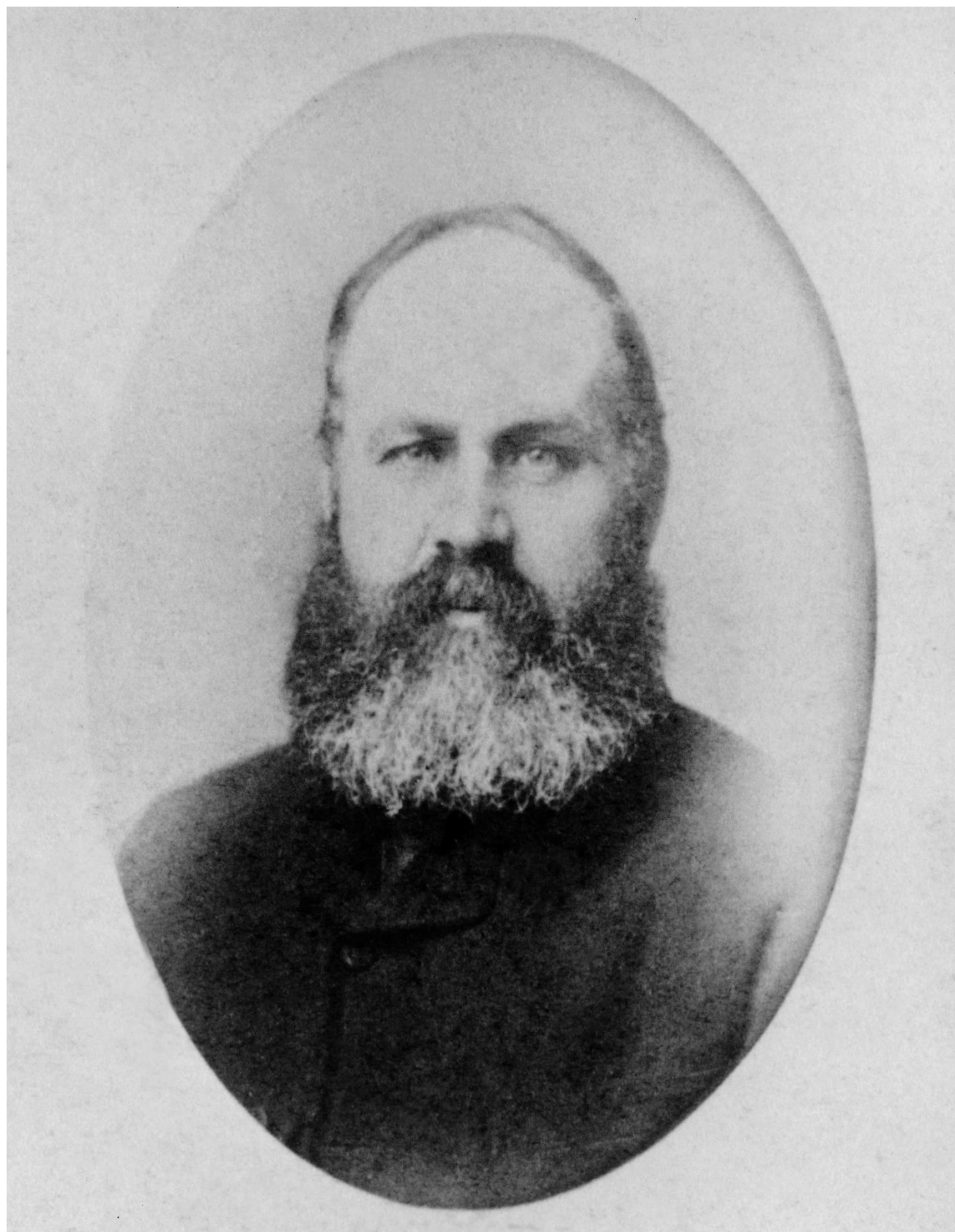
Throughout his long career Calver maintained a business with several employees, and reputedly produced several thousand instruments, including mirrors either made or refigured. Although he designed the stands, they were made by T. Lepard and Sons, of Great Yarmouth, and he was not averse to attaching his name to the work of others if he was involved. He published several editions of his small book, *Hints on Silvered Glass Reflecting Telescopes* – which, in addition to illustrations of various telescopes and mounts, included many testimonials from satisfied customers worldwide – and he accepted orders for instruments of any size. His output included a 20-inch for James H. Worthington, a 24-inch for the Royal Observatory Edinburgh, a 15-inch, and a 30-inch for C. R. d’Esterre, and an 18-inch and a 37-inch for Andrew A. Common. He afterwards made another 37-inch for Common, and the complete instrument later passed to Edward Crossley, of Halifax. (In the early 1890s, Crossley presented it to the Lick Observatory, California.)

Calver’s largest mirror was a 50-inch, made for Sir Henry Bessemer in 1884. Bessemer apparently devised what he thought was a cheap and simple way of producing a paraboloid which Calver agreed to try, but the mirror was not a success. Calver would no doubt have produced an excellent 50-inch mirror by his normal techniques. He was not daunted by the manufacture of large optics, and around the same time, when James Lick offered a prize for a mirror of record size, he quoted for a 96-inch.

Calver was very much involved with the astronomical community. Besides being a factor of instruments, he was also an observer, and contributed numerous articles and letters to *English Mechanic*. He was an Original Member of the Association (those who joined before the end of 1890) and served on the Provisional Committee that confirmed the name of the new organisation and established its first Council.

Calver died on 4 July 1927, three weeks before his 93rd birthday, and his wife died, aged 95, a year later. His gravestone in Walpole churchyard records that he was ‘Kind to the poor and little children’ but does not refer to his life’s work.

The eminent optical practitioner Horace Dall – whose first sizeable telescope was an 8½-inch Calver – corresponded with Calver in 1923, and in 1952 he visited Walpole. The workshop where many mirrors were made still survived, and notes on the progress of telescopes built early in the century were still marked on wall panels, while elderly residents of the village related details of Calver’s early life not otherwise recorded. Dall was born in 1901 in Chelmsford – only a few miles from Widford, where Calver had lived until 1904” [*Journal of the British Astronomical Association*, December 2006]



## **George Calver – Local Benefactor**

George Calver was a resident of Walpole, Suffolk who had no children of his own. After his death in 1927 a charity was set up in his name to administer his personal assets for the benefit of any person in need of financial assistance in the Parish of Walpole and other places in the Hundred of Blything in the county of Suffolk. These assets are expertly managed by the Charity Commission and the Trustees limit the grants in any one year to the sum of the interest.

The term 'Blything' refers to the parishes surrounding Blythburgh, from Aldringham in the south to Henstead in the north and from Cratfield in the west to Southwold in the east. Grants are made as one-off payments and not used for the relief of council tax or any other form of taxation or public funds.

In addition, George Calver had a particular interest in promoting education at all levels and the Charity welcomes applications to support training and educational objectives - for example specialist student materials or adult re-training. The Charity also donates prizes of book tokens on a regular basis to the primary school in Bramfield (since the closure of Walpole School).

Schools, Parish Councils, surgeries, social workers, health visitors, charity shops are regularly made aware of the George Calver Charity and application forms are provided online through our village website or as widely spread as possible. A form is submitted to the Chair of the Charity and then circulated to the Trustees who either meet in person or agree by majority (usually unanimously) a donation online. Often the applicant receives a visit from a Trustee (maybe a Health Visitor, district nurse or social worker) who can assess their need and also signpost any additional sources of help. Any agreed grant is paid to the provider of the item or service direct and not to the applicant to ensure that the grant is properly applied.

Just a few examples of one-off payments include a tumble dryer for the parent of a disabled child, books for a university course in business studies that were beyond reach despite holiday jobs, other help for transport and specialist equipment for photography and textile courses, moving expenses for an elderly disabled man.

Although the Charity is under the umbrella of the Cookley and Walpole Parish Council (which has to ensure it is active and has a committee of Trustees) the Charity is totally independent and draws on a range of members who have local knowledge, professional input or simply fair-minded commitment. The Trustees meet twice a year or more often as applications demand.

We hope that George Calver would look kindly on how we disperse his hard-earned private estate to those in need of financial help in the locality where he lived.