

Early Industrial Espionage: George Sorocold, John Lombe and the  
Italians.  
"The History of Derby" by historian William Hutton (1723-1815)

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Introduction

In discussing the identity of one of the Italians, Nathaniel Guardavaglio, and his possible contribution to the successful construction and operation of the Lombe silk mill in Derby completed 1722, the important role of civil engineer George Sorocold can sometimes be overlooked. Perhaps also, as a result of the eighteenth century historian William Hutton's writings on the history of Derby, the efforts of the Italians mentioned in the design and construction of the mill are somewhat overstated.

In fact there is little doubt that apart from John Lombe himself, of whom there is of course already much written commendation, the engineer George Sorocold (b. 1666) must take much of the credit for the whole operation.

According to wikipedia at: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George\\_Sorocold](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/George_Sorocold)

"Sorocold achieved national fame, and could be considered Britain's first civil engineer. He was called the Great English Engineer by two of his contemporaries and was the first non-military person to be styled "engineer"". Details of his overall achievements are included in the aforementioned website.

Additionally, the complexity of the operations involved in the construction of the Derby silk mill, are described by wikipedia at:

<https://historyofinformation.com/detail.php?entryid=3734>

It then becomes clear that the construction work could not have been designed and carried out without the expert guidance and hands-on experience of a qualified civil engineer, in this case George Sorocold. At the same time, there is no evidence of any of the Italians having such claim to engineering knowledge.

And whilst records now confirm that Nathaniel Guardavaglio, previously at Derby, was later involved in the construction of the Stockport silk mill, records now show that mill was small-scale compared to the Derby mill and took until 1743 to be completely operational (see below). In short, John Lombe along with the Italians, brought secrets of the Italian silk mills back to Derby, but records indicate it was George Sorocold who played at least an equal part in turning those secrets into a fully functional and successfully operating silk mill.

### Nathaniel Guardavaglio

Following information generously provided by [Mr. David Purdy](#) including further BMD records, this update supersedes previous articles by the authors regarding Nathaniel Guardavaglio and Willam Hutton's account of the “two Italians” who came over with John Lombe around 1717 prior to the construction of Derby's Silk Mill completed 1722. Two further records in particular suggest Nathaniel and Ignatio Guardavaglio to be one and the same person, rather than brothers, who stayed in Derby until 1732 before moving to Stockport ; that the person known in Stockport as John Guardavaglio was most likely Nathaniel's son, baptised 1726 at St. Alkmund, Derby. And that John, the son, had already taken over some of Nathaniel's work prior to the latter's death, 1747.

The two records in question are as follows:

#### 1. Hannah Guardavaglio (nee Endsor) Burial:

8<sup>th</sup> July 1729: “Buried Hannah wife of Nath Guardivallio”, St. Alkmund, Derby

#### 2. Sarah Guardavaglio (nee Gaunt) Burial

November 1761: “Buried Sarah the widow of Nathaniel Guardivaglio”, St. Alkmund, Derby.

Yet the respective marriage records for Hannah (1724) and Sarah (1730), as shown below, both give their husband's first name as Ignatio.

And also interesting is that both Hannah and Sarah were buried in Derby, suggesting neither of them moved permanently if at all to Stockport.

Meanwhile, certain secondary records give the date of the second marriage to Sarah Gaunt as 13th January 1729, a date that would precede the burial of first wife Hannah (nee Endsor) on 8th July 1729, also suggesting Ignatio and Nathaniel to be two separate people, probably brothers.

In fact, in a recent successful search for the original record, its ordering in the St. Alkmund BMD listings indicates the second marriage having taken place a year later, on 13th January 1730.

There is one further significant record, details provided also by [Mr. David Purdy](#) . An extract from Derby Silk Mill Copy Book states that **Ignatio** Guardivaglio “who formerly left here to work at Stockport” was buried 29<sup>th</sup> March 1747 having previously been forced to leave Clayton's mill company as a result of bad eyesight - his burial following the burial of his grandson, Nathaniel, around six weeks previously, 13<sup>th</sup> February 1747.

Yet whilst people at the Derby Silk Mill, according to this document, knew him as **Ignatio**, strangely the Stockport burial record gives his first name as **Nathaniel**, also the name William Hutton used in his book.

#### Background on the Hutton book.

According to William Hutton and referring to John Lombe's espionage and escape from Italy, "he (Lombe) took with him two natives who had favoured his interest and his life at risk to their own"

Then, after Lombe's return to Derby, Hutton alleges the following took place, "An artful woman came over (to England) in the character of a friend, associated with the parties, and assisted with the business .She attempted to gain (the confidence of) both the Italians and succeeded with one. By these two, slow poison was supposed and perhaps justly to have been administered to John

Lombe who lingered two or three years in agonies and departed. The Italian ran away to his own country; and Madam was interrogated but nothing transpired except what strengthened suspicion."

Also on the question of the Italians, Hutton adds, "In 1732 the patent (on the Derby mill) expired. A mill was immediately erected at Stockport, in Cheshire, which drew many of the workmen from that of Derby and, among others Nathaniel. Gartrevalli, the remaining Italian, who, sixteen years before, had come over with John Lombe; him I personally knew; he ended his days in poverty; the frequent reward of the man who ventures his life in a base cause or betrays his country."

Extracts from: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk\\_industry\\_of\\_Cheshire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk_industry_of_Cheshire)

"Lombe's patent had been fiercely contested by artisans in Stockport and Macclesfield who looked to supply the Spitalfield silk weavers. When the patent expired (1732) a partnership of six was formed in Stockport, which in essence was a joint stock company, to build a water-powered mill in a bend in the River Mersey, next to Logwood Mill".

John Guardivaglio was recruited to manage the new technology. John Clayton, a future Mayor was the partnership leader.

It took until 1743 to cut the tunnels to obtain extra water from New Bridge. Seven years later the silk mill owners bought the neighbouring Logwood Mill and converted that to silk. As this was only 23 feet (7.0 m) square it could only be used for ancillary processes.

Other mills were (later) built in Macclesfield (1744) and Congleton (1753)". .

Also see "THE STRUGGLE FOR WATER SUPPLY TO THE MILLS OF STOCKPORT, by Tony Bonson at

[https://www.themeister.co.uk/hindley/stockport\\_silk.pdf](https://www.themeister.co.uk/hindley/stockport_silk.pdf)

This article details how the initial mill built in Stockport was small-scale, far smaller than Lombe's, and that development of the mill continued through to 1743 when the project was finally completed.

The following BMD Derby and Stockport records offer clarification regarding Nathaniel aka Ignatio Guardavaglio.

<u>Nathaniel aka Ignatio Guardavaglio</u>		
<u><b>Nathaniel / Ignatio Guardavaglio</b></u>	<p><u>Marriage 1:</u>  <b>"Ignatio</b> Guardavaglio &amp; Hanna Endsor" married 27.9.1724 St Peter's Derby.  <u>Hannah Burial:</u>            8<sup>th</sup> July 1729: "Buried Hannah wife of <b>Nath</b> Guardivallio", St. Alkmund, Derby.</p>	<p><u>Children</u>            bp. John 31.1.1726, St Alkmund, Derby. From original baptism record: "son of <b>Ignatio</b> Guardavaglio, a native of the Kingdom of Sicily".            N.B. Piemonte (Piedmont) in Northern Italy, was then part of the Kingdom of Sicily.</p>
	<p><u>Marriage 2:</u>            "Married <b>Ignatio</b> Guardivallio and Sarah Gaunt", 13.1.1730, St Alkmund, Derby.  <u>Sarah Burial</u>            November 1761: "Buried Sarah the widow of <b>Nathaniel</b> Guardivaglio", St. Alkmund, Derby.</p>	<p>Record of one son bp. Nathaniel, 25.4.1732, "the son of <b>Nathaniel</b> Guardavaglio," St Alkmund, Derby</p>
<u><b>Death of Nathaniel / Ignatio.</b></u> =>	<p>"<b>Nathaniel</b> Guardivaglio, of Stockport, labourer , was buried 29<sup>th</sup> March 1747",</p>	<p>Many thanks to <a href="#">Mr. David Purdy</a> for generously providing an extract from a Derby Silk Mill Copy Book record stating Ignatio</p>

		Guardivaglio buried that day, 1747. Also that Ignatio had previously been forced to leave Clayton's Park Mill company as a result of bad eyesight.
<u>John Guardavaglio son of Nathaniel aka ignatio Guardavaglio by Marriage 1</u>		
<u>John Guardavaglio</u> "son of <b>Ignatio</b> Guardavaglio", bp. 1726, 31.1.1726, St Alkmund, Derby.	Married Mary Spencer 18.5.1746, Stockport..  Mary buried 6.8.1774.  <u>Death</u> <u>John Guardavaglio (son</u> <u>of Ignatio)</u> buried 14.5.1788, Stockport.	Below: their children (grandchildren of Ignatio and Hannah).
		Baptised: Nathaniel, 19.10.1746, St Mary, Stockport.
		Buried; "Nathaniel the son of John Guadivaglio of Stockport was buried the 13th day of February 1747", Stockport..
		bp. Charles, 29.11.1747, St Mary, Stockport.
		bp. Nathaniel, 19.8.1750, St Mary Stockport. Buried 27.11.1751, St Mary Stockport.
		bp. Fanny, 9.8.1752, St Mary Stockport.
		From Cheshire bp. records: "Sarah daughter of John Guardovaglia of Macc."  From secondary records: "bp. Sarah Guardavaglio 2.3.1755, father John, St. Michael, Macclesfield". Shows possible connection of John Guardavaglio to Macclesfield mill built 1744.

<u>Other Record</u>		
<p>“Joseph Guardivaglio of Stockport Labourer was buried 3rd day of February 1756”, St Mary, Stockport.</p> <p>Could this be Nathaniel, bp. 25/4/1732, the son of <b>Nathaniel</b> Guardavaglio and Sarah Gaunt (marriage 2) ?</p>		

Other information.:

William Hutton born 1723. Became resident in Birmingham 1751 after absconding from his second apprenticeship as a silk stockinger in Nottingham, 1741, to visit Birmingham, then a town.

Information as revealed from these records:

1. Hutton wrote, "I personally knew Nathaniel Gartrevalli". This is possible because Hutton (b. 1723) in his book, "The History of Derby" wrote, "My parents, through mere necessity, put me to labour before Nature had made me able." So one can reasonably assume Hutton was working at the Old Silk Mill as a child. However, it would seem from an extract taken from the Derby Silk Mill Copy Book (see above), the Italian worker was known as Ignatio rather than Nathaniel.

2. John Guardavaglio, the son of Ignatio and Hanna, was born 1726 so too young to have been the "John" Guardavaglio in the original partnership. However, the baptism of Sarah Guardavaglio, daughter of John and Mary (Spencer) at St Michael, Macclesfield, 1755, is evidence John Guardavaglio played a part in the building of the silk mill at Macclesfield, 1744, 12 miles away from Stockport. This mill built one year after further developments and completion of the Stockport mill in 1743 and with John Clayton still in charge.

