

Philosophical Instrument Makers

Throughout the nineteenth century, skilled artisans, merchants, and craftsmen from Italy settled in many of Britain’s major cities, including in Glasgow and Edinburgh. Among their specialties were finely crafted instruments such as looking glasses, barometers, thermometers, and spectacles – objects that earned them the reputation of respected “makers of philosophical instruments”.

Nel corso del XIX secolo, abili artigiani, mercanti e vetrai provenienti dall’Italia si stabilirono in molte delle principali città britanniche, tra cui Glasgow ed Edimburgo. Tra le loro specialità figuravano strumenti di pregiata fattura, quali specchi, barometri, termometri e occhiali – oggetti che valsero loro la reputazione di stimati “fabbricanti di strumenti filosofici”.



This photograph shows the traditional use of a barometer: three Buckhaven fishermen stand beside the town’s barometer, which they relied on to predict fair or stormy weather before setting out to sea.

First developed in the 1640s by the Italian physicist and mathematician Evangelista Torricelli, a student of Galileo Galilei, the barometer was designed as a scientific instrument for measuring atmospheric pressure and forecasting the weather. As a key product advertised by Italian artisans, barometers served practical purposes for fishermen reliant on weather predictions, while also becoming sought-after decorative items in middle-class homes.

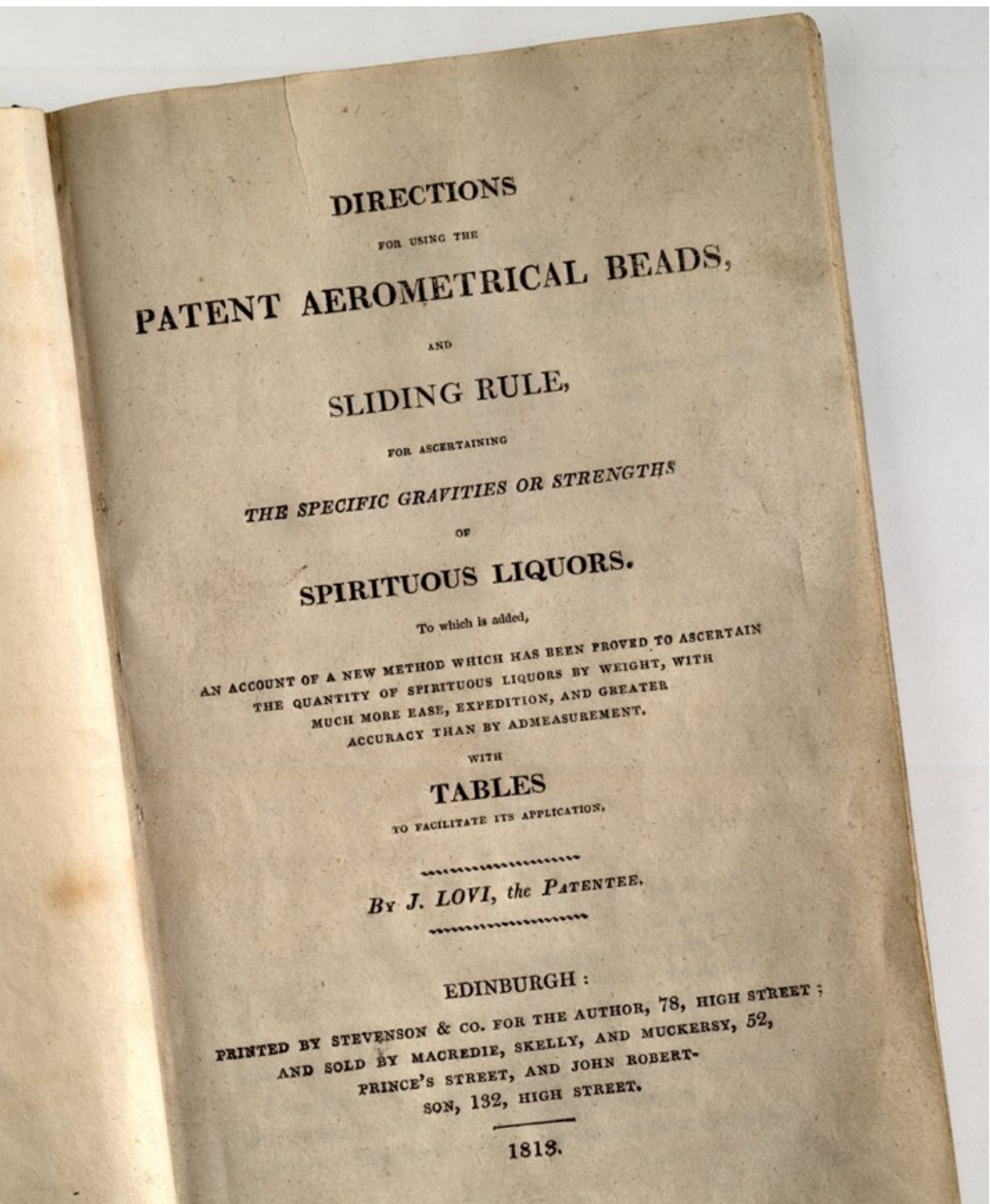
Sviluppato per la prima volta negli anni ‘40 del Seicento dal fisico e matematico italiano Evangelista Torricelli, allievo di Galileo Galilei, il barometro fu concepito come strumento scientifico per misurare la pressione atmosferica e prevedere il meteo. Essendo uno dei principali prodotti offerti dagli artigiani italiani, il barometro svolgeva funzioni pratiche, in particolare per coloro – come i pescatori – che dipendevano dalle previsioni meteorologiche. Allo stesso tempo, divenne molto ricercato anche come oggetto decorativo nelle case di una classe media in crescita.



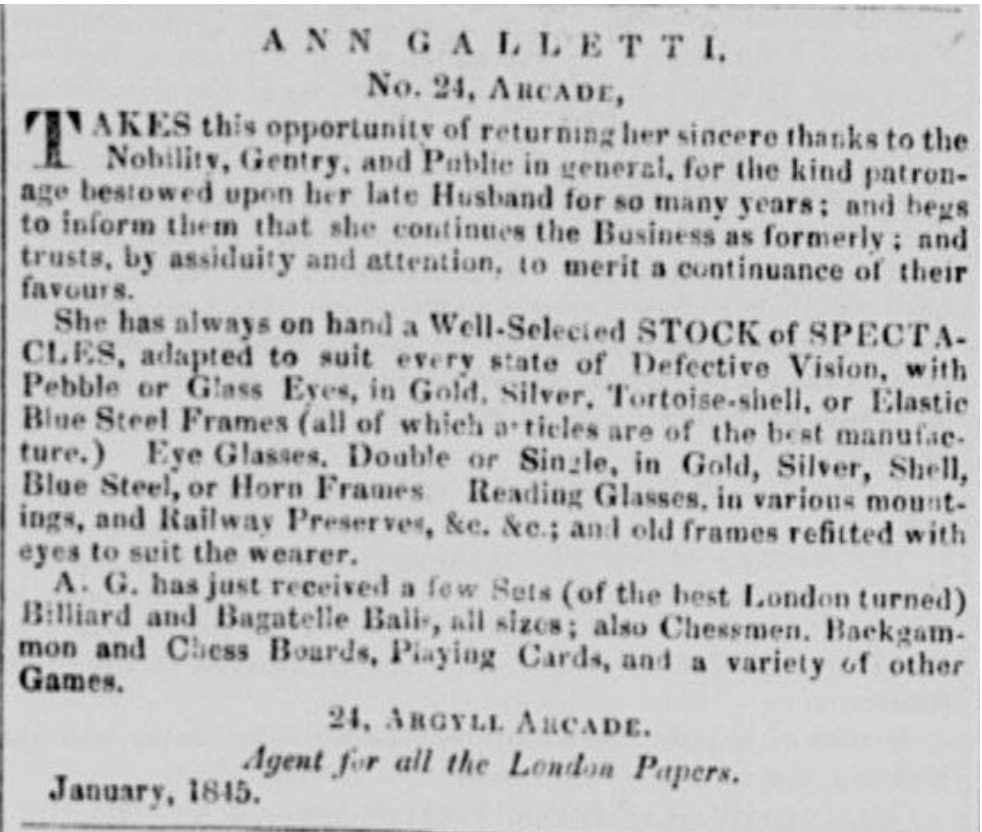
Gravity beads for measuring alcohol content, made c1805 in Glasgow by Antoni Galletti of Milan.



Barometer by Angelo Lovi (c1730–1805), born in Milan and later working in Rotterdam and Harwich. He is recorded in Edinburgh in 1804 as a glassblower.



Instruction booklet for gravity beads, c1810, by Isabella Lovi, widow of Angelo Lovi. She patented improvements to the beads and later published a guide for measuring the strength of spirits.



Clipping from the Glasgow Argus, 1845, showing Ann Galletti, widow of Antoni Galletti, taking over the business after his death.