

## The Ronchetti Family

The Ronchetti family was an important firm of Manchester barometer makers and formed part of the early local Italian community. The Museum's collections include examples of scientific instruments by members of the family.

### Giovanni Battista Ronchetti ('Baptist')

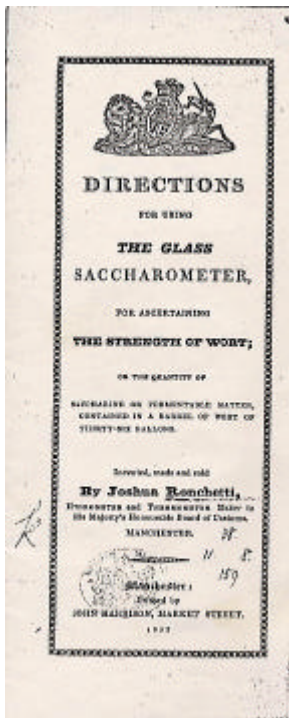
Baptist Ronchetti emigrated from the village of Tavernerio, near Lake Como in Italy, and came to Manchester in about 1790. He set up a business as a weather glass (or barometer) manufacturer at 15, High Street. In the first few years of the nineteenth century, he moved to 51, Spear Street, an address which appears on barometers signed by other Italian migrants. This communal location may have reduced the makers' costs and so made it easier for them to work in Manchester during the difficult depression years.

In about 1805, Ronchetti sent to Italy for his son Charles Joshua, then aged about 15, and his relative, Luigi Antonio Casartelli ('Louis'). Little is known of the three men's movements for the next 10 years. However, Charles Joshua left Manchester, probably because of the lack of business. In about 1811, he married Frances Whitworth, the daughter of an excise officer of Bury, and their first son, John Baptist, was born a year later. The couple then moved to Liverpool where Charles Joshua set up a business in about 1814. Meanwhile, Baptist Ronchetti had retired to Italy and his business had been taken over by Louis. Soon after, Charles Joshua exchanged businesses with Louis and came to Manchester.

### Charles Joshua Ronchetti

When he returned to Manchester, Charles Joshua Ronchetti initially worked with Vittore Zanetti, a carver and gilder with large premises in Market Street. In 1816, Zanetti promised him a partnership but gave the partnership instead to one of his apprentices, Thomas Agnew. Ronchetti's financial backing for the partnership may have come from his father in Italy. When the agreement failed, he used the money to open a business at 29, Balloon Street, where he sold barometers, thermometers and hydrometers.

In the late 1820s, Ronchetti expanded his business to include the sale of optical and mathematical instruments which may have increased his income. He moved several times before locating at 43, Market Street by 1835. On one side of the shop doorway he kept a barometer or thermometer 'for the benefit of the public'. Ronchetti had a rain gauge at both his Cateaton Street and Market Street premises, and sent weekly rainfall summaries to the local press. His son Joshua continued this service until 1851. Ronchetti's skill lay in glass blowing: most of the instruments he made were of blown glass and he advertised that he blew glass for 'Philosophical Experiments'. He obviously acquired a good reputation for the quality of his instruments. By 1829, he was 'Hydrometer and Thermometer Maker to His Majesty's Honourable Board of Customs'. He also made a barometer for John Dalton.



Ronchetti also made improvements to instruments. By 1829, he had invented an improved saccharometer 'to measure the amount of saccharine or fermentable matter in a barrel of wort' (a malt infusion for fermenting into beer). Previous saccharometers had been made of metal which was liable to variation in weight due, amongst other factors, to corrosion. Ronchetti's instrument was made of glass and was entirely self-contained, not needing any 'additional weights to adapt it to the strength and temperature of the worts'.

He also introduced a new chlorometer, an instrument for measuring the strength of bleaching powder. John Mercer, a calico printer and partner at the Oakenshaw Print Works, in Manchester passed the principle of this test to Ronchetti. Ronchetti also invented a new hydrometer for measuring the density of liquids varying 'from water to the strongest Oil of Vitriol'. However, none of these new instruments were protected by patent.

Ronchetti brought some of his children into the business. Joshua and Elizabeth joined him in the late 1830s, while John Baptist had presumably done so earlier. In about 1842, Charles Joshua handed over the Manchester business to John Baptist and Joshua, and set up a business as a waterproof fabric manufacturer on New Cannon Street, off Market Street, an area primarily concerned with textiles. In the late 1840s, he built a chemical works in Clayton. Ronchetti emigrated to the United States in 1854 and opened a business making thermometers, saccharometers and other blown glass apparatus. In 1865, the Clayton works was listed as a tar distillery and asphalt works and it is likely that it would have been such under Ronchetti. The increasing number of gasworks produced coal-tar as a waste product but this could be distilled to produce the raw materials for a number of industries, including dyestuffs manufacture.

### John Baptist and Joshua Ronchetti

John Baptist and Joshua Ronchetti, and probably Elizabeth, acquired a thriving business in Market Street, trading as opticians, barometer makers, and philosophical and mathematical instrument makers. However, at the end of the 1840s, John Baptist went to London and set up a business trading as Ronchetti Brothers, hydrometer and thermometer makers, at 13, Fleet Street.

In 1851, the Manchester instrument-making firm was sold to Joseph Casartelli following his marriage to Joshua's sister Harriet. Joshua and Elizabeth then worked with their father in the chemical business and took over when he emigrated. However, a few years later, they also moved, probably to London, and sold that business to Joseph Casartelli. The firm of Joseph Casartelli & Son became very successful and traded until the 1960s.

*For more information:*

*Read*      Wetton, J. *Scientific Instrument Making in Manchester, 1790-1870.*  
                 Manchester, UK: The Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, 1993.  
*Visit*      The Museum's Manchester Science Gallery