BRITISH HOROLOGY TIMES, NAWCC Chapter 159, Apr.'93,#1

CHAPTER NEWS

The British Horology Chapter, #159 has been approved by the NAWCC, and separately as a not-for-profit corporation, by the State of Ohio. Membership stands at 50, enough to cover our startup costs, but we will be able to do more projects and provide more services as membership grows. Please encourage your NAWCC friends to join by calling or writing to me* Also, we will hold our first meeting at the NAWCC national convention in Dallas. Time and location should be provided in the convention program. I hope to see many of you there.

*phone 513-8217569

NEWSLETTER & CHAPTER LOGO

This is an invitation to submit ideas or sketches for a distinctive logo to be used by our chapter, for the newsletter,our correspondence, etc. For now, member Sonya Spittler has created a crossed British/American flags motif because the national convention requested one. However this probably needs to be modified, if only because more than 10% of our members are Canadian. Let's get creative! I'll also ensure that future newsletters look more professional. I just wanted to get this one out quickly. Anybody want to be publisher if I provide all of the copy?

WHAT THE CHAPTER CAN DO FOR YOU,by Tom Spittler

With our first newsletter we should describe some of the things that the chapter will do for its members. But first, what would you like? We're small and flexible, so write or call with your ideas and suggestions.

We plan to circulate members' names and addresses, to put you in touch with one another. This list will probably briefly spell out your main description, such as restorer, or collector, but not your phone number unless you volunteer it. If you DONT want to be on this list, please let us know.

Requests for parts or services will be published in the newsletter. please write a good description of what you need and include your phone number. We,ll list clocks/watches/ tools wanted or for sale too, but obviously cant act as agents in any transactions. Nor will our chapter meetings include any mart activity. Remember, the newsletter will publish just three times a year so please be patient.

Another service will be an opportunity to share experiences with the rest of us, whether its a restoration tip, an interesting new find, or some new experience like Doug Cowan's arcticle in this issue. The field's wide open! If it's new to you, it will probably be interesting to the rest of us.

I'm sure that many more good ideas will occur to us later.

MAPS ON AMERICAN & BRITISH DIALS

Most of you are aware that there was a white painted dial industry for longcase clocks in both England and America. Birmingham, England was the center of it, and the first recorded advertisements for these dials appeared in Birmingham in 1772. Just a few years later, British dials were also being used on American clocks. Interestingly, I have found that the world maps that appear beneath the moving moon aperature are different between English and American clocks. I wonder if Canadian clocks are different from both?

Before explaining the typical differences, I will provide some background on the clock dial industry. The period of the white painted dial American and British longcase clocks is roughly between the Revolutionary war (early 1770's) and the American Civil War. (early 1860's).Previously, brass dials dominated the market. In Britain, clockmakers began in about 1772 to order painted dials from Birmingham dialmakers, who generally were specialized firms.

There also was an American painted dial industry, but many if not most of the American painted dials actually came from Birmingham.This was true despite two wars, in the early 1770's, and 1812-14, when trade must have been limited.

Now to the differences in the dials' world maps! Some have been obscured by dial repainting. But, if one finds a sharp original British moon dial with maps, and made for the British market, it will show the British Isles in detail on the right hand map. England dominates Europe and is clearly marked. For dials used in America,whether made domestically or in Birmingham, the British Isles hardly show,or may be missing entirely.

Conversely,the left hand map on American clocks shows a dominant America, labelled and in the center. South America is hardly shown. British clocks show much more of South America,sometimes with North America not even labelled.

You may enjoy looking for these differences in future, and restorers of painted dials should have two patterns available, to use on the appropriate clocks.

If you find exceptions to these observations, the author (Tom Spittler) would like to know. He'd also like a photo-copy of the maps on a good original English painted dial if anyone can obtain one.

I SEARCH FOR THE HOLY GRAIL---A PERFECT BRACKET CLOCK ca 1700

Recently, I had the great pleasure to examine 21 English bracket clocks, made within 10 years in London. That is, between 1695 and 1705. This research was conducted in the hospitable premises of several English specialist clock dealers during the space of only seven days, and with some help from an expert restorer So many useful observations were made, and so much previous dogma about what constitutes a good clock of this age was refuted, that I wrote out my notes on the plane home. I hope that these will be useful to others. The makers of these clocks ranged from the virtually unknown to Quare, Windmills and Tompion.

These notes should help with the evaluation of HOW ORIGINAL IS THE CONDITION OF A ca 1700 LONDON BRACKET CLOCK?

GENERAL When looking at these 300 year old clocks, it is crucial to consider the effects of age and use upon the materials of construction. Steelwork should have an old grey- blue color,with pits and abrasions.Bell mounts should be forged rather than turned on a lathe and arbors and bells should not be the bright color of new turned steel or new bell metal. Veneer should show some age cracks. Screw/bolt heads should show evidence of damage, and threads should be uneven and look hand made. Internal brass parts should be of the same color indicating at least brass of about the same age and composition.

Having said the above, the degree of restoration is a matter of personal preference, so long as done with excellent craftmanship and attention to the original intentions of the maker. All dial chapter rings have been resilvered and pivots,pinions,escapement parts wore out and were replaced. Gears broke when mainsprings failed, and so on.

The work of the best makers is superior to the average in finish (Tompion) or extra design details (Quare,Windmills) but one maker(Clowes) exhibited poorer than average design and workmanship (such as one winding arbor ring partly obscured by the chapter ring.).

CASE Almost always ebony veneer on oak.Rarely, cases were veneered in walnut,olivewood, or were made of ebonized fruitwood which shows more grain than ebony. Virtually all were decorated with top handles,4 finials and brass feet, either flattened bun or flattened claw and ball, always hollow. All but the olivewood case were highly decorated with repousse brass appliques(not castings) on the top, around the front and back keyholes, and elsewhere on the case for design balance. Many of the cases were of the brass basket top type. The thickness of the repousse brass varied, with a double basket top actually using cast brass, for strength. The thinner repousse(always gilt) should show some damage.

ca 1700 London bracket clock, cont'd.

Cases were usually cut at front/top to let sound out,the holes decorated by thin wood or repousse brass frets.Many cases are overloaded with shiny black shellac which now obscures case repairs, not to mention the pleasant ebony woodgrain.This also harms molding appearance.

MOVEMENT Two frequent issues here. First, the escapement may have been converted to anchor, and then back to verge.Second, and worse, the pull quarter repeating trains have often been discarded and more recently replaced.Virtually all of these clocks had pull repeating(or striking on timepieces). This can be hard to spot if the original pivot holes were used in the restoration. Look for new steel. Plugged holes are almost invisible if the brass is brightly polished, though eventually very slight discoloration will appear even if old brass has been used. Many of the decorative pierced backcock aprons are modern additions. See whether this is of the same quality and style as the backplate engraving. The movement should fit the case snugly,sitting on a loose seat board which is "footed" only if spring barrels protrude below the backplate. Fastenings vary, the nicest being two rotating discs on the rear of the dial that turn into slots in the case frame.With this there is some additional support provided to the backplate. Alternatively, there may be tmo large bolts threaded up through the case bottom into pillars.

Finally, shaped steel or engraved brass brackets may bolt the mov't. to the case sides, usually at lower left and upper right. Pillars should be of the center bulb plus four rings shape. The post 1700 ones are a little thicker and heavier looking. Five pillars is the minimum number you will see in a clock--most will have more. All will have rack striking. Pendulum should be solid rod(no crutch) unless there's rise and fall pendulum adjustment, when the spring suspension is needed. Then, the bob will be lenticular instead of the conventional pear shape. These latter were lined with wood, which should be visible where the pendulum enters the "pear". Look for consistency of design within the mov't. If one pivot seems long, are others long too?

DIAL Spandrels always sharply defined cherubs which do NOT overlap the edge of the chapter ring. Winding hole rings after 1700 are common, but may be a later addition to cover damage on earlier clocks. Dials may be signed on the chapter ring between 7&5,in the backplate of the false pendulum,or rarely,not at all. Backplates were always signed and engraved, of course. Calendar aperatures are at 6 or at 12 and post 1700 clocks have false pendulum aperatures. The outer minute ring on the dial gets progressively wider over this ten year period. Some early clocks have half-quarter markings on the minute ring.

HANDS Always reach into their chapter rings but never overreach. They should look shaped, not flat, and tapered end to end.

AS ALWAYS,IF YOU DISAGREE, OR HAVE MORE TO ADD, PLEASE WRITE.

Doug Cowan 110 Central Terrace Cincinnati Ohio 45215.