



British Horology Times

NAWCC CHAPTER 159

NEWS FROM CHAPTER 159

Here are some interesting short items. I've listed them under headings:

1. **Vulliamy lives!** While in Arizona I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Gerold Vulliamy, the descendant of not one but two famous English clockmaking families, namely Justin Vulliamy 1712-1797 and Benjamin Gray 1676-1764. By the way, he pronounces the name so that it sounds like Vull-ya-mee with emphasis on the Vull. Unfortunately Gerold is not a master clock or watchmaker. He grew up in the New Orleans area and didn't find out about his horological heritage until later in life. I was hoping for some tidbit of family lore but he wasn't able to tell me much. Nice man, though. Justin Vulliamy and his successors Benjamin and Benjamin Lewis Vulliamy are "hot" with English collectors right now and their clocks/watches were always well made. Justin was a Swiss immigrant and the son-in-law of Benjamin Gray, watchmaker to the King from 1744.

2. **West Coast Museum.** A determined group of west coast NAWCC members have arranged to have a permanent horological display in the Whatcom County Museum in Bellingham Washington. They are asking for cash or timepiece donations, and are wisely holding out mostly for complete attractive items, rather than accumulating parts and poor quality items. How do you feel about our Chapter donating a verge watch to the cause—and does anybody have a decent one that they would part with for about \$100? You can donate it to Chapter 159 and we'll pay you

\$100, with the balance of its value as a tax deductible contribution. This group of people should be encouraged. They are going to do this right and will be supported by the Columbia Museum when the appropriate paperwork has been done. Please note that such a contribution will be voted on at our annual meeting in Philly.

3. **British Museum Project.** Recall that I asked for details of any Tompion or Graham watches or movements in order to help Jeremy Evans of the British Museum compile his book about every item these men made in the late 1600s and early 1700s. Our members responded with 4 items, two of which were previously unrecorded. Mr. Evans sends his thanks and asks for more, so please keep your eyes open. Member David Penney has the same request, concerning Thomas Mudge watches. Just send the info to me—I'll do the rest. So far we have "found" 5 previously unrecorded watches/movements for Jeremy.

4. **New Book.** Philip Priestley has authored *Early Watch Case Makers of England 1631 to 1720*, published by the NAWCC. This excellent book complements his 1993 book covering case makers from 1720 to 1920. This book is a must for serious watch people and the NAWCC only published 600 copies, so don't delay if you want one.

5. **Our annual meeting** is at the NAWCC National Convention on Friday July 7. Please check your convention program for the time and place, but right now it's 9AM. Mr. Geoffrey Darkin, noted British horologist will present a talk about one of the few lantern clocks known to have its original balance, by Samuel Stretch, from the 1660s.

-Doug Cowan

NEXT MEETING

At Philadelphia during the National Convention on Friday July 7, 2000. For details please consult your program upon arrival.



EDITOR'S CORNER

Who reads this editorial stuff anyway? You will if it's short enough. And interesting enough. So you might like this announcement. In the next (November) issue of BHT we'll begin a series about the adventures of a 17th century clockmaker from his days in Cromwell's army (before he was a clockmaker) until he established himself in London. His name was Henry and we'll follow him down the path of history through the period when English clockmaking was in full flower. Stop, Odendahl! This is supposed to be short. The interesting part comes next issue.

A JOSEPH KNIBB LANTERN CLOCK ca 1672

In detailed photos and words [Douglas Cowan \(OH\)](#) describes this rarity.



Fig. 1. The 17th century Knibb lantern clock.

I've had this file for two years. It was sent to me by previous member Jim Black of Vancouver BC, and is so large and complete that I didn't know what to make of it all. However, the upcoming presentation by Geoffrey Darkin at our next meeting in Philadelphia has given me enough enthusiasm to tackle this now, so here goes. First Jim's slightly edited cover letter.

My dealings over the years in watch and clock repairing have shown me many different types of clocks. The majority were English, but there were also French and American ones. One style that rarely came my way was the early English lantern clock. Most lantern clocks I've worked on were reproductions such as the Thomas Moore, Ipswich weight driven ones, fake Tompions and Grahams, and of course the fusee spring

driven ones from the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

"Early this year on a visit to Vancouver Island I looked up a friend who had been collecting clocks for 40 years. He asked me to make some parts for the miniature lantern clock by Joseph Knibb. It was missing the frets, doors, back, count and wheel gear and locking plate, weight pulley, and all alarm parts."

Jim did repair the clock after studying and photographing it intensively. Some of his photos are included in this article, but he sent me many others. If you are looking at a similar clock, I might be able to help you with photos of parts, etc. Don't hesitate to ask.

Now let's look at it:

Fig. 1 is a front view. The frets are missing, as is the alarm disc which would have filled the blank circle within the central engraving. Note the bent front foot. The hand is old but not the original, and the chain was originally a rope. The pulley wheel is correctly spiked for rope. This clock is small, measuring 9.25 inches high, 3.125 inches wide, and 3.375 inches deep, but not really a miniature, or travelling clock size. (Miniatures are 7.5 inches tall or even smaller.) This clock was trained to run 30 hours, striking the hours and incorporating an alarm, now missing.

Fig. 2 is a closeup of the dial. It is signed Joseph Knibb, Londini and must have been made soon after he moved to London since it retains the narrower chapter ring of the earlier "second period" 1640-1660



Fig. 2. The Knibb dial.



lantern clocks. Also the half hour markings, "tridents", are typical of the early part of the so-called "third period" clocks. The tulip motif of the engraving is definitely third period. Remnants of the original fire gilding are apparent under the chapter ring and on a few other parts. This was one good looking clock when new! The signature looks just like Knibb's and the dial seems original to the clock, so it probably is a true Knibb—albeit heavily messed about with over the years as most early lantern clocks were.

Fig. 3. A view from the back shows the pendulum and cross shaped plates. The front movement plate is also that shape. A short pendulum crown wheel escapement regulates the clock and it is believed that all Knibb lantern clocks (both John and Joseph) used this system, so beware of any that don't! As already stated, the strike control mechanism is missing, as is the back plate covering the movement. This would have been of iron or brass, with spikes rivetted on to hold the clock away from the wall.

Fig. 4. A top view, showing the typical Knibb hanging loops and bent brass crown wheel cock, though the latter has been repaired, so may or may not be original. The arrows in the photo point to empty holes, probably from the missing alarm work, but I haven't been able to find a photo of a Knibb top plate to compare.

Fig. 5. A side view showing the good quality steel work. When you look at these very old clocks there should be lots of wear in the pallets of the verge, and gear pinions. This one mostly passes that test but a few pinions look too unworn. The good news is that the clock is small, so that the usual trick of replacing worn parts with 18th century 30 hour longcase gearing is a lot less likely. These ones are probably legitimate repairs.

I've used two main references to study the clock: *The Knibb Family Clockmakers* by Ronald Lee and *English Lantern Clocks* by George White. They do not agree on the importance of Joseph Knibb as a lantern clock maker. Lee says that the Knibb lanterns showed no

innovations and were merely good average quality replicates of others' designs. White claims that Joseph Knibb was the best English maker of lantern clocks. Interestingly for our clock White also states that many small Knibb lanterns were gilded, with traces still remaining today—as in our example.

17th century lantern clocks are an endless study. They are hard to find and almost all have been modified to a serious extent. If that bothers you—find something else to collect or you'll suffer too much. This one seems better than most despite its many faults. Jim was lucky to get the opportunity to examine it so closely. He even sent me wheel counts, etc., so write if you need more information. ☺

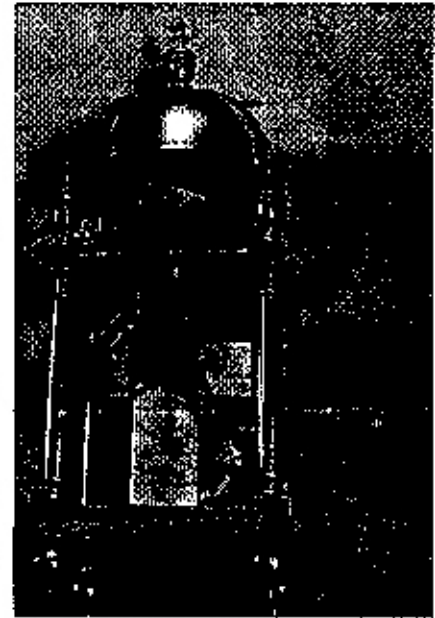


Fig. 3. Back view of the Knibb clock.

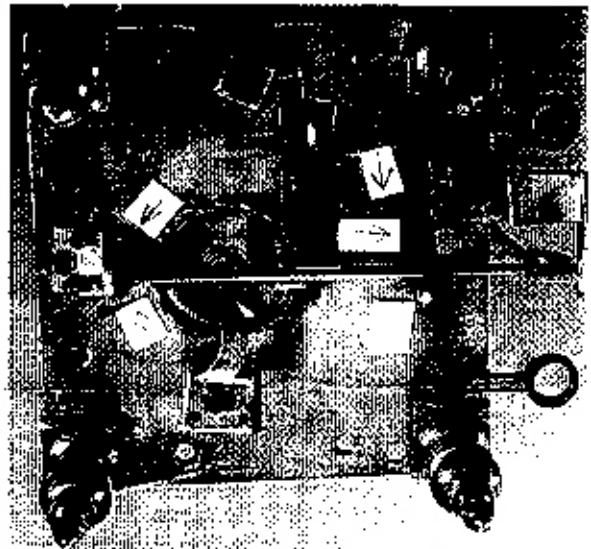


Fig. 4. Top view of the Knibb lantern clock.

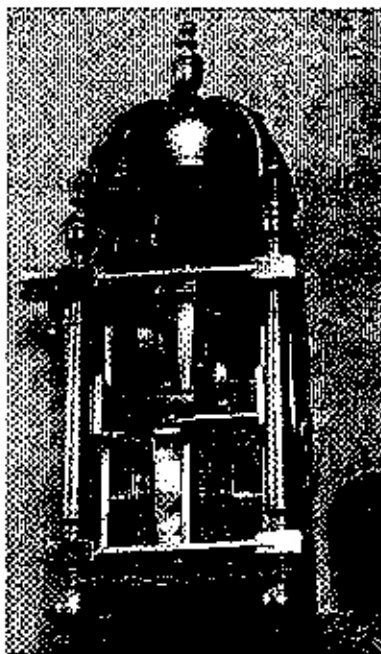


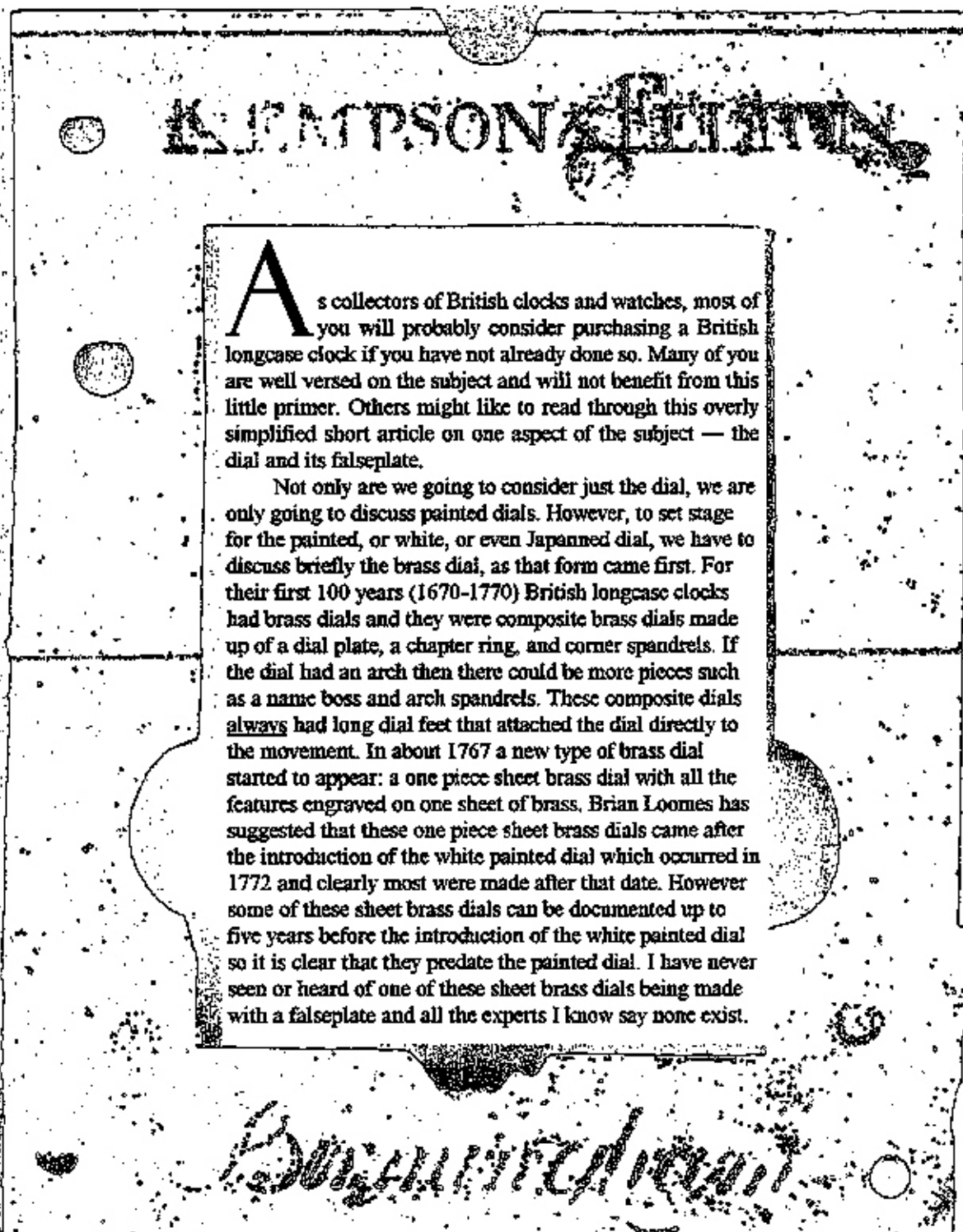
Fig. 5. Side view of the Knibb clock.



Doug Cowan, NAWCC's First Vice-President finds the time to research and write articles amidst his NAWCC duties.

FACE FACTS

The history and role of falseplates as analyzed by Tom Spittler (OH).



As collectors of British clocks and watches, most of you will probably consider purchasing a British longcase clock if you have not already done so. Many of you are well versed on the subject and will not benefit from this little primer. Others might like to read through this overly simplified short article on one aspect of the subject — the dial and its falseplate.

Not only are we going to consider just the dial, we are only going to discuss painted dials. However, to set stage for the painted, or white, or even Japanned dial, we have to discuss briefly the brass dial, as that form came first. For their first 100 years (1670-1770) British longcase clocks had brass dials and they were composite brass dials made up of a dial plate, a chapter ring, and corner spandrels. If the dial had an arch then there could be more pieces such as a name boss and arch spandrels. These composite dials always had long dial feet that attached the dial directly to the movement. In about 1767 a new type of brass dial started to appear: a one piece sheet brass dial with all the features engraved on one sheet of brass. Brian Loomes has suggested that these one piece sheet brass dials came after the introduction of the white painted dial which occurred in 1772 and clearly most were made after that date. However some of these sheet brass dials can be documented up to five years before the introduction of the white painted dial so it is clear that they predate the painted dial. I have never seen or heard of one of these sheet brass dials being made with a falseplate and all the experts I know say none exist.

A Kempson & Felton, Birmingham falseplate

However I have seen quite a few of these sheet brass dials from the Bristol area as late as 1820-1830, so at that very late date it just might be possible that some were made with falseplates. Other than that cautious caveat, we must remember that all sheet brass dials have long dial feet that attach the dial directly to the movement just as with the composite brass dial. We will see that painted dials could be attached to their movements in two ways.

This gets us to the meat of this article and the one main topic I wish to drive home: falseplates. What are they? When were they used? What were they made of? What is the meaning of the names and places found on these falseplates?

When the white painted dial was introduced by Osborne & Wilson in Birmingham, England in 1772 it could be purchased with or without a falseplate. The basic problem with the painted dial was that the dial feet had to be secured (riveted) to the iron sheet before the dial was painted. The earlier brass dial had the advantage that the dial feet could be attached at any time, even moved, and the ends of the brass feet that showed from the front of the dial could be engraved over or masked in some way so they would not be seen from the front of the clock. Moving the dial feet was not possible with the painted dial since once the dial was painted the dial foot was there to stay unless one wanted to repaint the dial. As stated above the white painted dial could be purchased with or without a falseplate. There were, however, two options in obtaining a dial without a falseplate and with the standard long dial feet to attach it directly to the movement. It could be special ordered or obtained off

the shelf. If special ordered with dial feet in the exact location to fit the movement, there was no problem for the clockmaker other than the longer wait for the dial. If the dial without a falseplate was taken as a stock item then the clockmaker would have to make his movement to fit the dial. The third option was to purchase the dial with a falseplate which did cost a bit more. The falseplate was an intermediate surface between the movement and dial. When new, *it was always made by the dialmaker, not the clockmaker.* The dialmaker provided four short feet from the dial to the falseplate. The clockmaker could then select any location on the falseplate to place three or four longer feet (which should be called falseplate feet, but they aren't) to connect the falseplate to the movement.

So there you have it. If you see a falseplate, it should be connected to a white painted dial and it would have been supplied with the dial to the clockmaker. Most early falseplates (1772-1800), are cast iron and they are heavy, often cast with the dialmaker's name and place in them. Over half of the dials from this early period have falseplates. The next 30 years saw a slight decrease in falseplates to about half the clocks and the introduction of some sheet iron falseplates when they do exist. By the way, we are talking about 8-day clocks; 30-hour clocks seldom had falseplates. A quick review: when clocks have falseplates, cast iron falseplates dominate early dials and thin sheet iron falseplates are seen on later dials. Most early clocks had falseplates; few late clocks had them.

Right from the start dialmakers realized they could cast

their names and locations in cast iron falseplates and many, say two in three, are so marked. "Wilson, Birmingham" is a common example. Often the name that appears on the falseplate is the only name that appears on the clock and it is a useful guide in dating the clock. Loomes provides dates for dialmakers in his excellent book *Painted Dial Clocks*. Sometimes a falseplate has two names on it, one on each side. Usually one is very faded and the other sharp. There are many theories as to why these two-name falseplates exist, one of them being that these were second generation castings. Experts agree that the sharper name was the maker of the dial. The fact that most of these painted dials came from Birmingham, England has confused collectors and dealers for years. It has been assumed by many that if the dial came from Birmingham, so did the movement. This is incorrect. Many American tall clocks with American movements have British dials with British falseplates marked Birmingham. They mostly do not have Birmingham or even British movements. In all my research and the research of others in England, I have not seen the recorded sale of a movement with the dial—complete. It always is one or the other, or both, listed separately such as "14 Japanned 8-day dials with arch, 12 inch, 6 with moons in the arch and two of those with center seconds and 2, 8-day movements." Even when a "retailer" bought the dial, movement and hands, he assembled the pieces. He did not buy the package preassembled. ☺

A true student of horology, Tom Spittler has the experience of having lived in Britain.



HOROLOGY AND HIBERNIA

A whole new chapter in British horology is opened up by **Killian Robinson** and his Irish interests.

Ireland has a long tradition of clock and watch making with records of the earliest tower clocks dating back to medieval times. Those early tower clocks have not survived although others from the 18th and 19th centuries are still common in Irish towns. Domestic clocks, both longcase and bracket, as well as watches appear relatively frequently in the marketplace. The quality of the workmanship is often very fine and reflects a

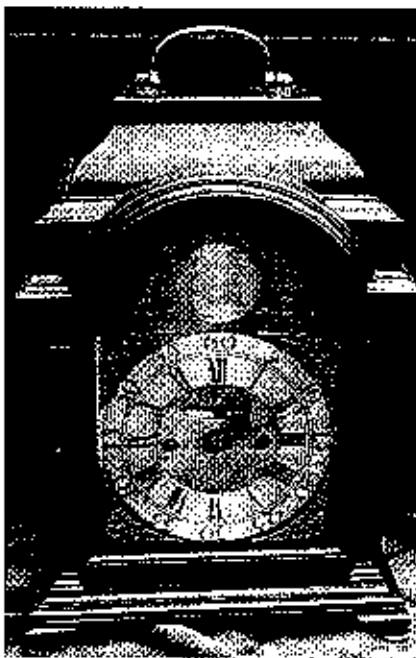
long experience of formally organized guilds for goldsmithing and metalwork which, in Ireland, date back to the 13th century. The later Irish cabinetmakers of the 18th century produced work of a very high standard. Additional interest in these appealing and well-made timekeepers is provided by the color of the makers:

many were English or Scottish in origin but some were immigrants from Protestant-persecuted France and others came from Germany. Many Irish makers themselves emigrated and there are records of

several here in the United States. Then there are the colorful personalities: those who, when unburdened by horological concerns, had additional roles as pipers, rebels or revolutionaries.

An interesting area to be sure, but not one about which a great deal has been written. To redress this,

future issues of British Horological Times will contain articles relating specifically to horological items with an Irish flavor. Any reader who wishes to contribute to our knowledge in this area, in pictures or in words, would be warmly encouraged and may make valuable contributions to a field which still remains relatively uncharted. ☺



Bracket clock by Charles Craig, Dublin ca 1770. Twin fusee, verge escapement.

Photo Doug Cowan



new material on watches and clocks for publication. Can you help by sharing your knowledge? Photos and/or text will help.
Send to Doug Cowan, 11 Diplomat Dr., Cincinnati OH 45215

MART

MART ADS are free to members and should pertain to British or Anglo-American horology.

Tom Spittler needs the following AHS publications: Indices III, V and VI; Journals Sep '62, Mar '63, Dec '85, Mar '87 and Winter '98. He also has some for sale. He will buy or sell at \$3 each. 937-845-9032 before 9PM eastern.

Tom Cushman needs a chapter ring for a grandfather clock about 10" in diameter and about 2-3/8" wide. 800-298-0646.

contents

NEWS

Five news items from Doug Cowan. 1

EDITOR'S CORNER

The Editor announces a new historical series to begin with the November issue. 1

A LANTERN CLOCK

From the 17th century workshop of Joseph Knibb is detailed by Doug Cowan. 2

FALSEPLATES

The how, what, when, where of these important but obscure parts of clocks are laid bare by Tom Spittler. 4

IRISH CLOCKS AND WATCHES

Killian Robinson introduces a new horological subject. 6

MART

6