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Editor & Publisher

British Horology Times

NAWCC CHAPTER 159

News FROM CHAPTER 159

Our Mart table at the Cleveland National was a success, thanks in great part to the efforts of Ken and Yvonne Johnston who did a great job of setting up the table with a very noticeable sign, U.S. and British flags and memorabilia from the chapter's history. We signed up a number of new members and regained one lapsed member. The table was also instrumental in signing up additional people for the 2007 England tour. A very special thanks to Yvonne who spent long hours at the table answering questions and making people aware of the chapter and its activities. Ken has already arranged for the chapter to have a Mart table at the Chattanooga National.

The terms for the current office holders will be over at the Chattanooga National. We do have candidates for three of the four offices for terms beginning in 2007. Ken Johnston is running for president, Lee Yelvington is running for Vice President and Dave Kern is running for Treasurer. For personal reasons I will not be running for chapter office. We will, of course, accept nominations from the floor at our an-

nual meeting in Chattanooga but I would really like to see someone volunteer to run for the office of Secretary before that time. The Secretary's job consists of keeping the minutes of the annual meeting, making reports of chapter activities and meetings to the Bulletin and filing the chapter's status report with the Membership and Publicity Committee. Being able to attend all three chapter meetings during the year is a plus, but not a necessity.

Since the chapter was formed in the 1990's we have had an outstanding newsletter. *British Horology Times* has contained articles of significance to those interested in British clocks and watches. The only reason we have been able to publish those articles is because chapter members were willing to spend the time writing them. For some reason our inflow of articles has dried up and Paul Odendahl is hard pressed to get enough together to fill each issue. It certainly can't be that there isn't the potential for interesting informative articles. Just having members tell me about items in their collections and about things they have learned convinces me that there is a plethora of information that would be of inter-

See **NEWS** on page 8

EDITOR'S CORNER

I enjoy being your Editor. The task of gathering the various pieces that make up an issue of *British Horology Times* and knitting them together to form a whole is challenging but I like to do that. Dealing with the printer, keeping him on time and getting him to charge us the correct amount is a game that I can play. Stuffing the envelopes is boring but I get to see the finished printed job over and over and I get to learn your names and where you are.

What I don't like is to sweat the weeks prior to publication date with my "New Material" file almost empty and not enough material to make the next issue. I don't know if there will be an issue or not. Like right now. I do not have enough material to make the next, March 2007 issue (BHT 40).

There is a lot of information out there amongst our members. Tales, stories, memories, tips, questions, adventures, technical stuff - things that we would talk about if we were face to face. If we can talk, can't we write?

Sure, there are members who have contributed and some have contributed repeatedly. We thank them. That's what keeps us going. But we need new material from new people and we are falling short on that.

Look at it this way. If each member contributed something, short or long, only once every five years, we'd have material for about 10 issues per year. That's more than we need. We only publish 3 issues per year.

Now we're almost empty. Will somebody pick 2006 or 2007?

- Paul Odendahl



INTERESTING BRASS DIALS

By **Doug Cowan (OH)**

The truth as well as the puzzle lies in the details.

Lately I have been finding a few early brass dials for English clocks at Regionals and Chapter Meetings. Here are two longcase dials with interesting features.

Figure 1 is an 11 inch dial for a 30 hour two handed longcase clock. The maker of the clock, Taylor Kirby, is not identified in any of my books. The dial looks northern to me and there are at least two Kirbys in the

north: Kirby, Kendal in Westmoreland and Kirby, Moorside in Yorkshire. The dial is nicely made and looks like circa 1750-70 in that the inner chapter ring hashmarks showing quarter hours are gone but the outer minutes circle is still nicely divided into minute segments with 5 minute Arabic minutes outside of that. The maker's signature is by a dif-

See *INTERESTING* on page 3

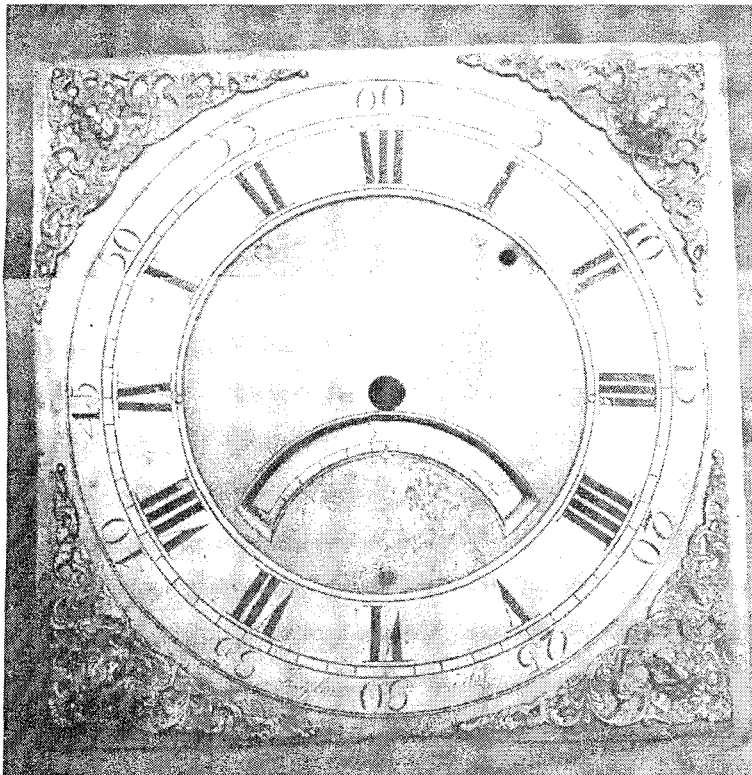


Figure 1, the Taylor Kirby 11 inch 30 hour longcase dial

NEXT MEETING

At the Daytona, Florida NAWCC Regional, to be held between Feb. 21- 25. Please check your program for details.



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INTERESTING from page 2

ferent hand than the engraver of the dial, as might be expected in the case of a small volume clockmaker. Also, it is unusual for a maker to sign just his/her last name during that period. Of course I've looked up Taylor Kirby as a person's name too, with no success.

The most interesting thing is that the "stippled" dial center is patterned in a circle around the center, rather than being horizontal/vertical as is normally the case. In the latter instance the pattern was made by rolling a

male pattern into the plate, usually by hand, I believe. So how was this clock's circular pattern done? Almost certainly not free-hand. I'm guessing that the plate was rotated around its center on some kind of press/roller. Done this way to look a little different or to save money? Does anyone else have a brass dial like this who could steer me to more information about the maker of the clock?

Figures 2 and 3 are of a circa 1690 longcase dial. The dial is slightly under 10 inches square

and is for a longcase clock. What's most interesting is the clockmaker's name at the bottom center. There are two! One is superimposed upon the other by means of a plate on two tiny posts. Both appear to be original to the clock and are from two different engraver's hands though from the same late 17th century period.

The original signature is "Tho. Grimes Londini fecit". Loomes *Early Clockmakers of Great Britain* shows him free of

See *INTERESTING* on page 4

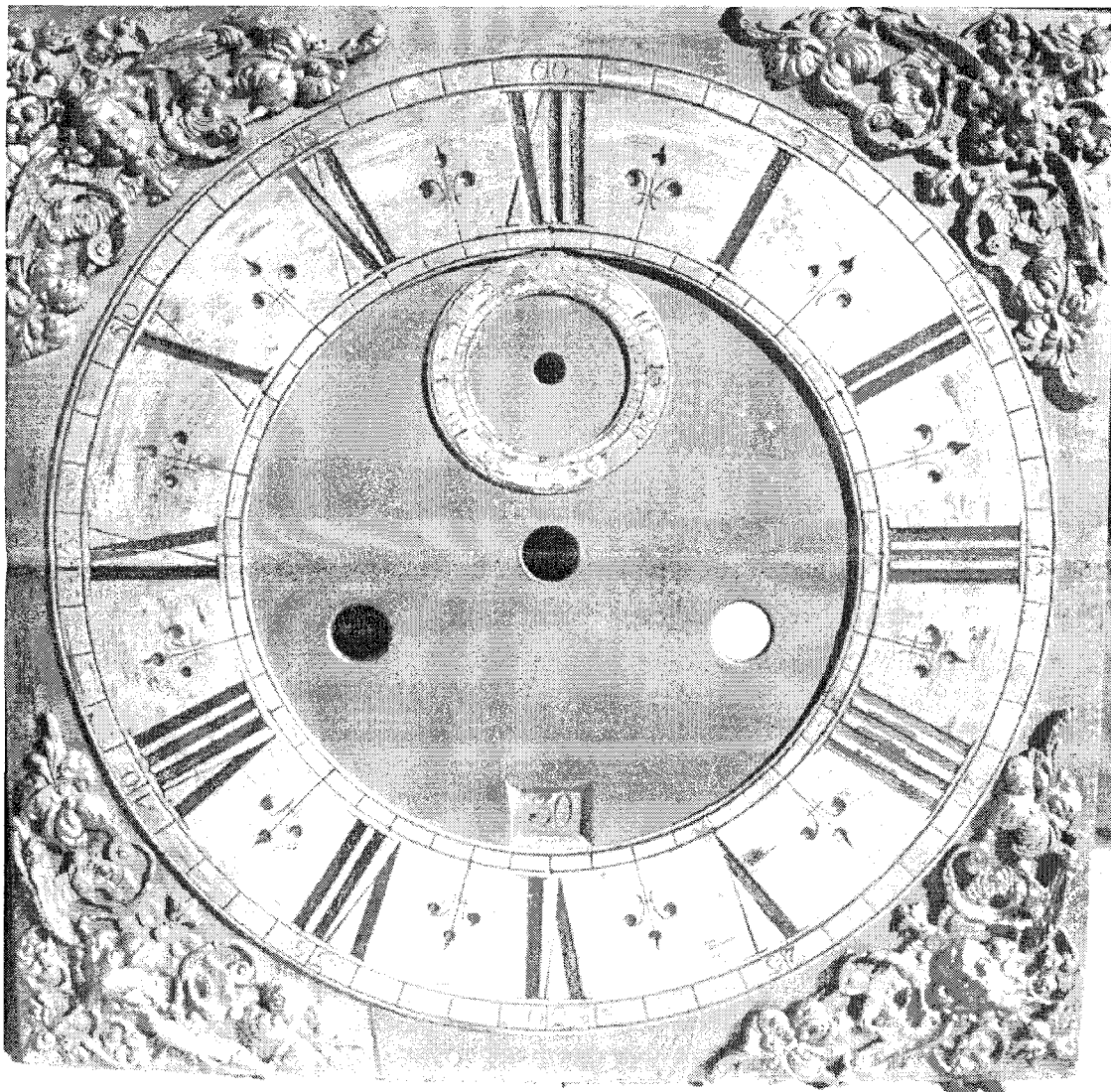


Figure 2, the Thomas Grimes 10 inch longcase dial with the Jeremiah Johnson overlaid nameplate in place.

INTERESTING from page 3

the Clockmakers' Company in 1671 (which was the same day as Tompion "a great clockmaker"). Grimes is not heard of after 1681.

This "Thomas Grimes Londini fecit" dial has an overlaid plate signed "Jer. (Jeremiah) Johnson, Exchange Alley", **Fig. 3**. Loomes reports him free of the Clockmakers' Company in 1668, and an apprentice to Fromanteel (Jr.) among others. He died in 1709, receiving charity from the Company. Believed working in Exchange Alley (London).

Another month going longcase clock with the Grimes signature is known, *but this other Grimes signature is also covered by a nameplate with the name "Edward Bird"*.

So there is the puzzle. Both men contemporary and apparently well regarded. If Johnson simply bought a clock or dial from Grimes or his dial engraver, why not just polish out the old name and substitute his own? The overplate has never been soldered on permanently so was presumably apparent to the original owner. My guess is that Grimes came upon bad health or financial problems and that Johnson took a longcase clock movement from him and sold it on his own behalf. The coincidence with a similar overmarking by Edward Bird of a Grimes clock suggests some unusual situation. Anyone have a better idea? ☺



Doug Cowan

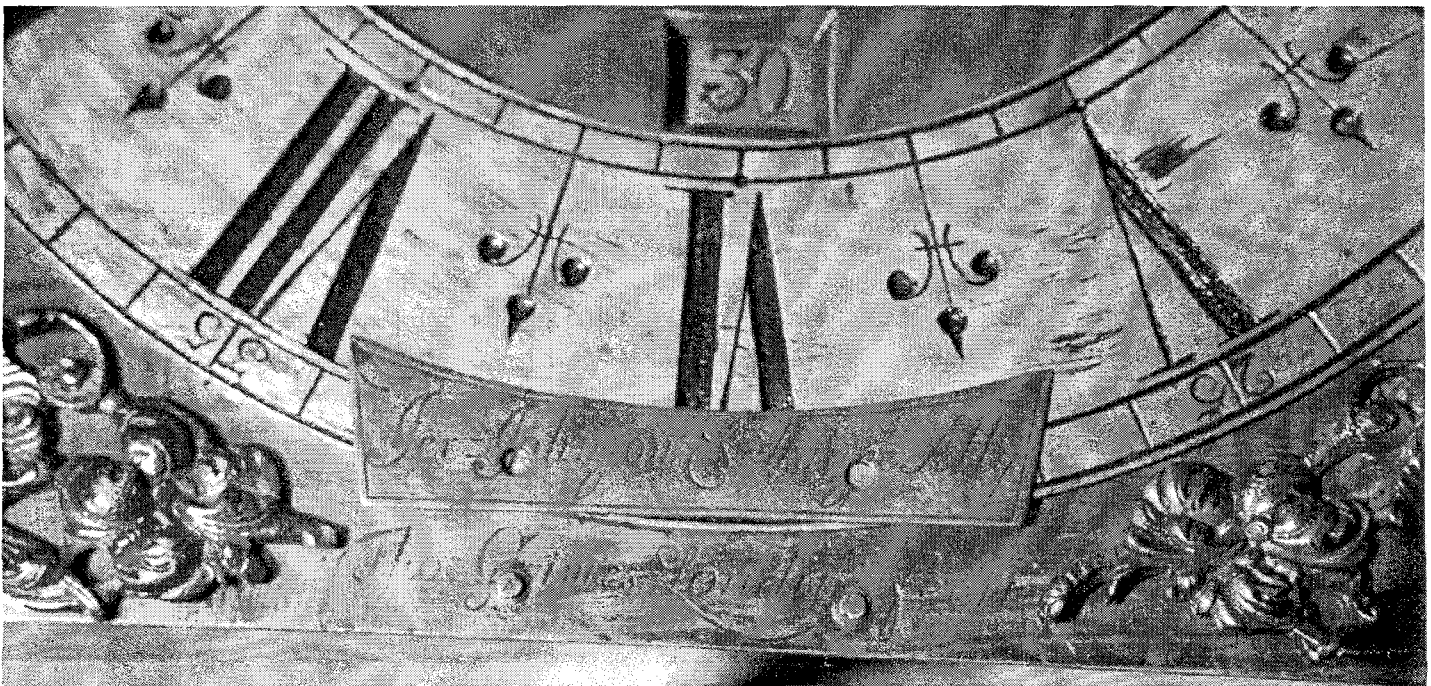


Figure 3, the Thomas Grimes 10 inch longcase dial showing the Jeremiah Johnson overlaid nameplate removed.



Figure 4, closeup of the two signatures.

GUTTING A LONGCASE by Tom Spittler (OH).

Tom cautions: "If you have a weak stomach please stop reading now."

(Images and captions by the Editor)

"Softening New Clock Gut" by Doug Cowan appeared in BHT35 (March 2005). We reprint it here on page 8 as a companion piece to Tom Spittler's article.

No, we're not talking about taking an old movement out of a longcase clock and discarding it in favor of a quartz movement. We're going to explain how I restring an antique grandfather clock with cat gut.

What is cat gut? Early on it may have been the intestines of a cat, but surely for the past few hundred years it has been the intestines of sheep, washed out, stretched and spun raw and allowed to dry. I have no source for the cat theory so it may have actually been cat's guts but today it is sheep's intestines. This information has been passed to me from two material dealers and they say the product is from Germany and only made in the fall of the year. Every year the supply seems to run low and the material dealers have to wait until the autumn production of German sheep gut to stock up again.

Why use gut? Because antique grandfather clocks were made to run on gut. It has a few advantages over modern materials and some disadvantages. It has a slight advantage over some of the metal cables that spring about inside the movement when the weights are removed. It is also easier to thread through the barrel and tie off with knot than some cords and some cables. I'm a traditionalist; I don't replace grandfather clock movements with quartz movements and I use old-fashioned gut.

Is gut safe? Yes, good gut properly installed will last a lifetime or a lot longer. Read on and I will explain why improper installation causes some gut to fail.

What is good gut? Back in the 1970s and probably before, the gut on the market was well behaved,

flexible, hardly ever kinked and was very smooth on the outer surface. It was almost translucent. It looked a little like amber monofilament fishing line. Today's gut is chalky, dry looking. It is stiff and will kink while you're handling it

and it feels as if it has a fine feathered surface rather than being smooth.

What size gut do I use? Thin or thinner. Gut is sold in millimeter sizes and I use 14.5 mm or .057 inches. I also have a roll of 17.5 mm and some

See **GUTTING** on page 6

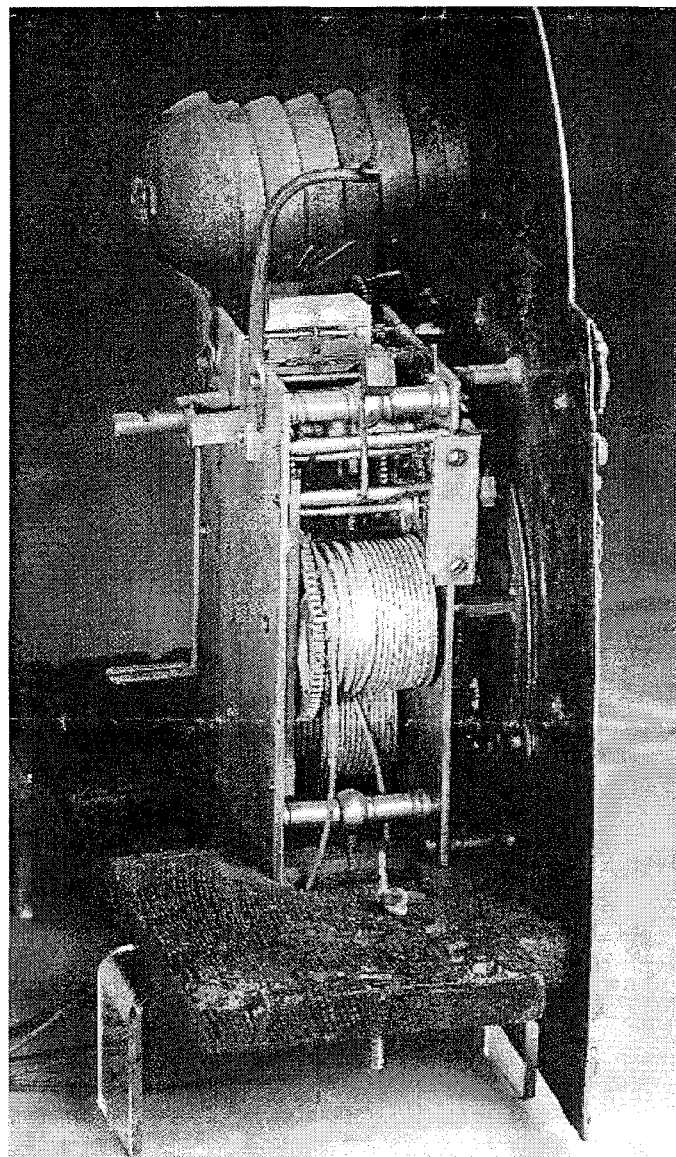


Figure 1. The weight is off the pulley hook on this Fromanteel and Clarke movement (and the gut is springing and may be crossed). Take care in attaching the weight and starting the clock. The weight might jerk as it falls or if the gut is crossed the clock might stop.

GUTTING from page 5

short lengths of 19.5 mm. I like the 14.5 mm. Leave it up to the Germans to produce gut in accurate sizes: 14.5 mm gut measures 14.5 mm throughout its length.

Will thin gut hold the weight? Don't worry, it will. Most Americans are afraid to use gut that is thin, thinking it will be weak, and so most material houses that sell gut handle it in the larger sizes and most repairmen buy it in too large a size. The result - the clock's barrel fills up with the large diameter gut and runs over the end of the barrel creating what can be a dangerous situation.

So now I will explain how I gut a longcase. I do it in the case with the weights on the movement. Well, one of the weights on, as the other has to be off to replace the gut. I do this because it gives the best result and uses just the right amount of gut. No waste. I buy my gut in large bundles and I don't waste any gut with this method. If I have just cleaned the movement I set the movement in the case with the pendulum on to stabilize the movement in the case. For the purpose of the article, we will assume the movement just needs the gut replaced possibly due to a frayed line.

Take the hood off the clock. Get a stool or chair you can stand on next to the clock. Have a flashlight or other good light source available, and a pair of needle nose pliers, a knife and a black magic marker. Take off one of the weights and cut the old gut as close to the barrel as possible. Usually the small piece of gut with the knot will fall into the barrel, but if it doesn't, poke it inside the barrel with a pin. Remove the old gut, pulling it off the barrel and out of the seatboard. Get the pulley and examine it. Pulleys should run true and the shafts should be lubricated. They sometimes need to be re-

At this time all the gut is off one train. Do not cut off a length of gut to use it to restring the clock at this time. Just pull about 10 feet of gut off your bundle but leave that free end attached to the rest of the bundle. Feed the new gut down through the slot in the seatboard from the top, through the pulley and up around the barrel. Caution, everyone who has ever done this job several times has finished only to find that he or she has not put the gut through the pulley. Give a little

thought to make sure you are feeding the gut correctly. Now turn the barrel by hand until the hole in the barrel is about at the 1:30 to 3:30 position and right between the spokes of the great wheel. Now comes the only tricky part of the operation. You are going to thread the gut through the hole in the barrel and out through the larger hole at the back of the barrel which you have aligned in the open position between the spokes of the great wheel.

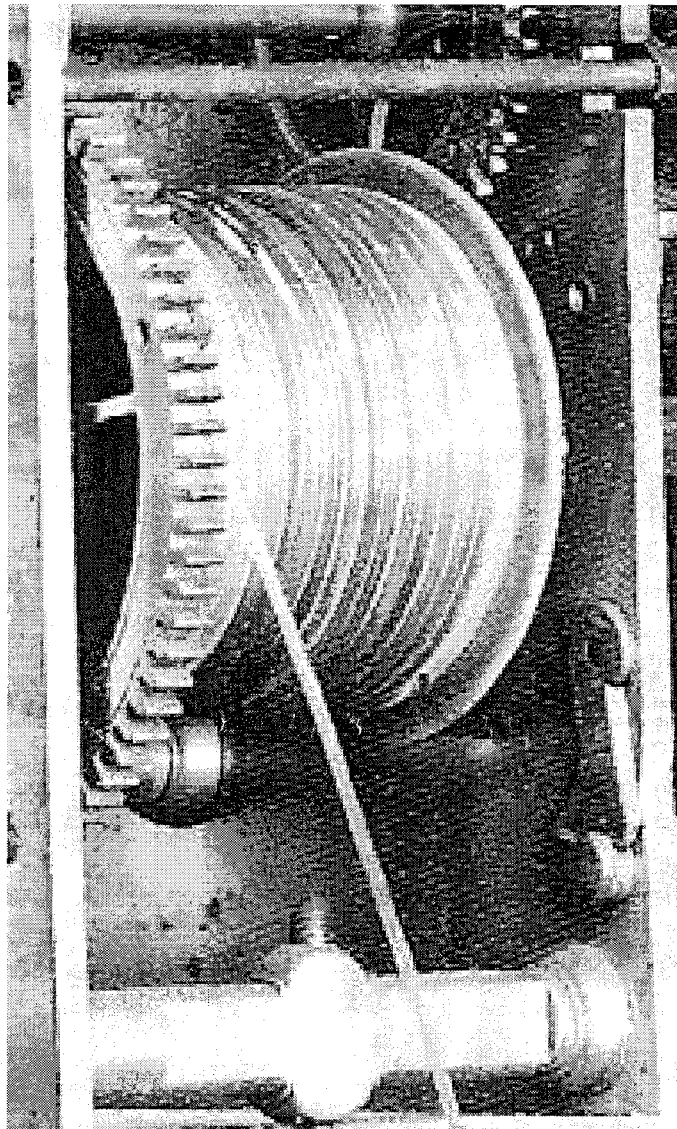


Figure 2. On this Tompion and Banger movement the gut is not vertical. It is supposed to feed down through a slot (not a hole) in the seatboard so it remains vertical as the clock is wound and as it unwinds on the drum. This is not good.

This is how I do it. I wet the end of the gut, about 4 inches, by sticking it into my mouth until I can feel it is just starting to soften, but by no means soft. Then with my fingers I give a gentle bend to the end of the gut, a sharper bend over the last inch. With practice and the proper curve this will poke through the barrel and out through the large hole at the back of the barrel. When I can see $\frac{1}{4}$ inch of gut or more sticking out of the back of the barrel, I hold the gut steady with my left hand and reach for my small needle nose pliers I had pre-positioned on the seatboard. I grasp the protruding gut with the pliers and pull it out the back while feeding it into the barrel with my left hand. When I have pulled about 18 inches out I soften the last 8 inches in my mouth by chewing on it until it is soft enough to tie a simple knot in the end. This knot has to be tight and I use the pliers to pull the end. When I have a good tight knot, I cut the excess cord away very close to the knot. If you leave a free end more than $\frac{1}{8}$ inch past the knot, the free end may work itself out of the hole at the back of the barrel causing stiff winding when it gets between the barrel and the great wheel spokes. I then pull the gut so the knot disappears into the hole at the back of the barrel. I give a good tug on the gut to set the knot while it is wet, but not too hard. It will be stronger after it dries and will not slip apart inside the barrel. The above is the only tricky part and will seem difficult the first time or two you try it.

Now pull the large bundle of gut that is above the seatboard back until the pulley is lifted just off the floor. Put the weight on the pulley and pull the gut again until the weight is just about to leave the floor. Cut the gut about a foot above the seatboard. The key here is to leave the absolute minimum of gut on the barrel. Excess gut is bad. So is not enough. Many clockmakers re-

string a clock at the bench, but allow way too much gut and there are several turns of gut on the barrel when the weight is on the floor. This leads to problems covered later.

Back to where we were. Turn the barrel until just over half a turn of gut is on the barrel. Pull back on the gut above the seatboard until the weight is just about to come off the floor and mark the gut at the point where it is just above the seatboard with the black magic

marker. This is the reference point for the bottom of your knot in the gut above the seatboard. Soften the gut above the black mark and tie a large knot. Or if the hole in the seatboard is very large, tie a knot around an old square nail with the soft wet gut. Your black mark on the gut should be right at the top of the seatboard. Put about another turn on the barrel to bring the weight off the floor to help set the wet knot. The gut will dry and harden the knot.

See *GUTTING*, page 8

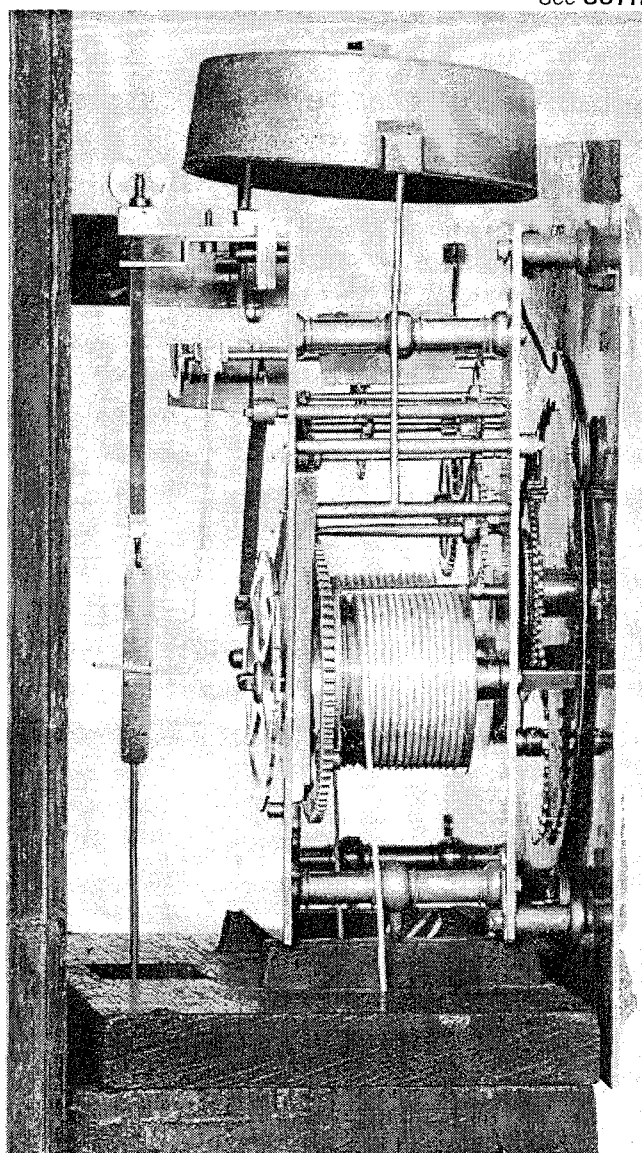


Figure 3. All is neat and as it should be on this Knibb movement (ca 1685).

NEWS from page 1

est to our members. The question is: Why aren't you willing to share your knowledge with the rest of the chapter by writing a short article? I really would not like to see the newsletter shrink to one or two pages of virtually nothing. Would you? Please help by submitting

something.

I am sorry to have to report that Phyllis Yelvington, the wife of our Vice President, died unexpectedly of a heart attack soon after the National. Our deepest condolences to Lee. ☹

-Roger Gendron

CORRECTION

In our June 2005 issue (BHT38), page 2, "The Auctioneer Is Not Your Friend", second column, second paragraph, line 2 contained an error. The word "repeatedly" should have been "reportedly". The Editor apologizes for his mistake.

GUTTING from page 7

Repeat the process for the other train. The total time for both sides is about 30 minutes, if you're good at it.

So why don't we want excess or not enough gut on the barrel? On some clocks the excess winds up and over the click on the barrel and releases the weight allowing it to fall a few feet or all the way to the floor if the click breaks. Even if the click isn't depressed by the gut and released, the action of the gut against the click every week causes the gut to wear and fray. Also there is hydraulic pressure when the barrel is

overfull of gut pushing hard against the ends of the barrel which also causes problems. This also happens on fishing reels causing hard winding. Avoid excess gut on the barrel.

Worse is not enough gut. If your clock winds down and the weight is still off the floor, that means that all the gut has wound off the barrel and the gut is flexing hard at the point where the gut enters the barrel. This will quickly cause the gut to break at that point. If one uses metal cable this will cause rapid failure of the cable for the same reasons.

Most of you will probably not use enough gut to buy it in large

bundles. You will likely buy a length that will do one two-train clock. Cut that length into two equal length pieces. Thread those two through the two barrels and knot them. You can do this on the bench, probably after you have serviced the movement. I still suggest that you place the movement in the case with the pendulum to help secure it. Then follow my procedures to make sure you have just the right amount of gut on the barrel. That is just over 1/2 turn of gut on the barrel when the weight is just ready to lift off the floor.

Good luck. ☹



Tom Spittler

SOFTENING NEW CLOCK GUT

By Doug Cowan (OH)

New coils of gut are very stiff and brittle as purchased. Here are two recipes for softening.

The first is from an old English clock repair book:

"Before inserting into the clock, grip one end of the gut in a vise and pull it to full length. Then with a drop of oil on the gut, slide your finger and thumb along it being careful not to get any kinks in it."

The second suggestion is from member Tom Spittler:

"Moisten the dry gut under warm running tap water. Do not soak it in standing water. When the gut feels pliable, tie one end to something and stretch it out. When the gut is almost dry, but before it hardens again, run your finger along the length (to check for kinks and to lubricate it slightly) and install in the clock before it dries completely hard again."

Given the poorer condition of today's gut compared to the old days, I'd personally use Tom's suggestions.

CONTENTS

NEWS From President
Roger Gendron. 1

An **APPEAL** for articles from
Paul Odendaal 1

**INTERESTING BRASS
DIALS** by Doug Cowan 2

**GUTTING A LONGCASE
CLOCK** by Tom Spittler 5

**SOFTENING NEW
CLOCK GUT** by Doug Cowan 8