British Horology Times

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British Horology Chapter 159 of the National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors, Inc

Another Family Heirloom!

By Dennis Radage (CAN)

Be assured, not all clocks received for restoration are in this kind of condition, however I do tend to be a magnet for such clocks. It seems that every second clock that comes in for restoration is classified by the owner as a family heirloom, a treasure to be cherished! Maybe this is because I tend to focus on English clocks, and many are longcase clocks. The owners have invariably brought the clock over from the UK, or have had it sent over as part of a family inheritance. I use the term longcase since this is indeed the British Horology Chapter 159.

Figure 1: The "Heirloom" as received

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Applications for membership and payment of dues should be sent to the Treasurer (see address above). Annual membership costs $5.00 Worldwide.
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In This Issue…

Clever rhyme found on George Gibson's Virginia watchpaper;

"Wind me with care and treat me well, as I to you the time will tell, if by chance I should stop take me into Gibson's shop"

Next Meeting

Mid-Winter Regional

(February 10, 2017 at 3pm)

"An Interesting Cruciform Watch"

Presentation by David Cooper

See further details on the Events page of our website

President's Message:

As incoming President of Chapter 159, I must extend my thanks to many people who have dedicated many hours of their time to ensuring that our chapter has been able to enhance our members' knowledge and enjoyment of British Horology. All of us are indebted to our outgoing President, Rich Newman, for his enthusiasm and perseverance in ensuring that the programs at our meetings have been varied and informative and the Newsletter has contained many very informative articles. We are all the beneficiaries of Rich's dedication and I am thrilled that he has decided to remain on the executive as Vice-President.

Dennis Radage has decided to step down from the executive. He, too, has been a mainstay of our Chapter and has provided sessions at our meetings and articles for the British Horology Times that were exceedingly informative. Dennis has provided a most interesting article for this issue. In addition, Dennis has co-authored a book on the life and work of Charles Gretton (working 1672 to 1726). This is a very prestigious, 660 page book that describes the history and events of the period, the development and styles of longcase clocks, spring clocks and watches plus the workshop of a period maker. The book has almost 1,000 color photographs, charts, diagrams and tables and is offered in three limited editions. Dennis has graciously offered to provide special pricing to our members. Email Dennis for details at grettonbook@outlook.com and be sure to mention that you're a member of Chapter 159.

Secretary Marion Krajewski, Treasurer Peter Stipanovich, and advisor Frank Del Greco are staying on the executive and I am very grateful that they will continue to provide leadership and guidance to me and to the chapter. As long as I have been a member of Chapter 159, our meetings have begun with a small glass of sherry in true British fashion. Thanks are due to Roger Gendron for providing this at many of our meetings and to Safwat Wahba who also has contributed.

We have some very interesting programs planned for our meetings. At our meeting in Lakeland, at the Mid-Winter Florida Regional in February, Dave Cooper has offered to present a program on an interesting early Cruciform watch. These timepieces are normally associated with Continental makers but Dave has discovered some very interesting connections to British makers while he was restoring this timepiece. Dave is a consummate watchmaker and we are looking forward to his presentation.

John Kirk has recently visited London where the Science Museum has recently opened a new Gallery to house the collection of the Clockmaker's Guild. The collection is a fantastic representation of British Horology as it has examples from the Guild's inception in the mid 1600's to the present. John will be presenting an illustrated talk on this collection at our meeting at the the Southern Ohio Regional in April 2017.

Our Chapter newsletter can only be produced if there are articles to publish. Please share your interest in British Horology with other members by writing a piece for the Times. It doesn't have to be a scholarly work or a complete description of your activities. We are open to submissions of any length and any topic. We are interested in what experiences you have had; what you have seen; what you have in your collection; what you have read or whatever. Don't worry about spelling, grammar, or formatting. Send along a note, paragraph or article and let our editor ready the text for publication. All of us will be grateful.

On a final note, we have received word from a new member, Geoff Dorey. He is researching the history of 18th and 19th century clockmakers in the British Channel Islands of Guernsey and Jersey building a database of their clocks and would be interested to receive information and photos of any of their work. If you can help Geoff and/or are interested in his project (he has co-authored a booklet, already, on the subject) please send an e-mail to britishhorology@gmail.com and we will put you in touch with Geoff.

I look forward to seeing you soon at a Regional or National and remind you that the Chapter needs your input.

Cheerio, Bob

(Continued from page 1)

Many of my "Workshop Notes" articles have focused on restoration topics and have tended to highlight the very poor condition of the clock, including the dial, movement and the case. Of course, I am selecting some of the worst cases just to illustrate what is out there and the challenges of bringing these potentially good clocks back to a condition that allows them to function again as they obviously did some generations back in the past.

Practically all of these clocks have either been seriously neglected, or worse, they have been put in the hands of amateurs who have no training, no skills and no understanding of the functioning of the various components and features of, in this case, an English longcase clock. My workshop is in Vancouver, BC, Canada. The owner of this clock lives in Toronto, Ontario, some 2,100 miles as the crow flies from me. He phoned and described an English longcase, a family heirloom that had been stored for some time but has recently been inherited.
This new proud owner clearly wanted the clock in working condition, apparently just requiring some cleaning and lubrication. I must admit, I have a bit of a soft spot for English antique clocks, clocks that the owner apparently takes pride in, and especially clocks that are described as a family heirloom.

The clock arrived, nicely packaged. Opening the package however, exposed something that I was not expecting. Figures 1 through 3 show the movement as received. This is possibly one of the worst cases I have seen of gross neglect. As can be seen from the different images, all brass parts, plates, pillars, wheels, collets and drums are suffering badly from corrosion, in this case "bronze disease," which is the greenish coppery powdery coating covering all parts. Left untreated, all brass parts would eventually disintegrate.

The brass rack return spring had indeed disintegrated. All steel and iron parts were badly rusted. The pivots have also rusted, some had broken and others were "frozen" in their pivot holes. Adding to the unexpected were cobwebs and layers of dirt that had bonded itself to the metalwork. The owner, I am sure, was quite unaware that this was not the normal condition for a stored clock and that simple cleaning and lubrication would not salvage this clock!

Figure 2: Front of movement as received

The clock dial was not in much better condition (Figure 3). The artwork was fading, the black ink numbering was wearing thin and the whole was coated in dirt that had also etched its way into the painted surface. Simple cleaning would not remove any of the dirt. This was a job for a specialist dial restorer. But first, much of the rust was brushed off from the rear of the iron dial plate. The dial was then packed and sent off to my dial restorer.

This is one area in which I do not specialize. Email reports and photographs were used to educate the owner, and of course to provide details of the work required along with cost estimates. No job is generally considered impossible, but this one presented many challenges.

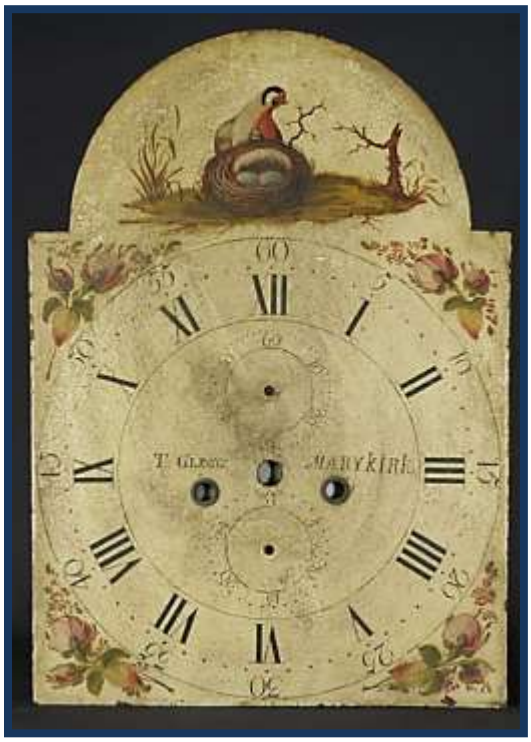

Figure 3. The dial as received

After dismantling, each component was individually brushed, using a brass bristle brush, to remove as much of the dirt and loose corrosion residue as possible. I then use a soak in hot water to initially treat the brass components.

Bronze disease is first treated by a long soak in very hot water, usually 6 to 12 hours or more. Of course, the water needs to be kept hot and possibly changed several times.

After this treatment practically all of the bronze disease can be brushed off, again using a brass bristle brush. At this point it is possible to recognize that all parts are indeed brass.

I then use conventional clock cleaners to finish the job. Since I avoid removing brass, I do not use any other mechanical means to clean the brass.

The brass will be bright but is usually pitted where the corrosion had eaten into the surface. This pitted surface remains and therefore becomes a part of the clock's character and history.

I generally avoid rust removers, but in this case I must admit that I did soak the iron and steel components in such a solution. I also used a "000" grade wire wool on these parts to remove the worst of the rust residue and to add some brightness to the iron parts. As with the brass parts, the iron parts were left with a somewhat pitted surface. I know that some would prefer not to leave the parts in a pitted condition, but when fully assembled, the movement has some character, and there will always be a story to tell as to the history of the movement.

At this point each component is individually inspected and needed repairs are carried out in the normal manner. Pivots are replaced, and any missing or broken/damaged parts are also replaced or made. The movement is then assembled, new line is added, and then the movement is lubricated and placed on the test stand (Figure 4). Adjustments are made and the clock is put in beat and then run for about two weeks while being rated and making any additional adjustments to assure reliability and correct functioning.

The dial restoration can take anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks. Utilizing an experienced expert for this work ensures that the job is always well done and the finished dial is an asset to the clock (Figure 4).

The owner sees photos of the restoration process and receives a detailed report of everything that was done. From photos, the owner also approves the final job before the clock is stopped, repacked and sent back with instructions on how to set it up, put it in beat and rate as appropriate.

Figure 4: The finished job; (left) the restored movement is assembled and functioning on the test stand and (right) with the restored dial attached.

In this case, the owner was very pleased indeed and is now enjoying his family heirloom, once again ticking away and providing the comfort that he remembered as a child.

A Mystery Bracket Clock

By Safwat Whabba (IL)

Clock collecting is a fascinating activity that often involves research and puzzle solving for collectors interested in rare and unusual examples. Sometimes, for instance, interesting clocks and watches are unsigned by the maker or have unconventional designs that make dating and identification difficult. This article is about one such example that has yet to give up all its secrets.

The clock was acquired online based upon two photographs that showed the case and the back plate of the movement (Figures 1 & 2). The case appeared to be a 1780-1800 elegant and rather austere bell-top example with a painted dial signed William Franklin, Stowe. At the top of the dial are two subsidiary dials; the one in the left upper corner indicates strike and silent, and the second, in the right upper corner, displays a rise and fall indicator to assist in setting the accuracy of the timekeeping. Interesting, and unusual for an apparent English bracket clock, is the position of the low winding arbors that indicated that the movement lacked fusees. The back plate is nicely engraved with typical 18th century quality engraving. The online photographs, with the bell in place, concealed any further details about the moment or escapement.

Figures 1 & 2: Dial and movement of unidentified bracket clock, circa 1780 - 1800

As you can surmise, these apparent anomalies did not deter my interest. A few days after the bidding had ended, the clock arrived, was unpacked and carefully examined. Wonderfully, the mysteries continued:

- The case was sturdy, well-constructed, and appeared to be made from solid walnut. Not mahogany or veneered as normally found on late 18th century bracket clocks.
- Immediately noticeable was the six pillar configuration with two massive main springs and no fusees.
- Removal of the bell revealed the biggest surprise of all, a rarely seen pin-wheel escapement (Figure 5)
- The moment is attached to the case with two large screws and washers that go through the bottom of the case and screw into the movement's lower two pillars. This securing technique is found on heavy movements and this one weighs about 11 pounds without the dial, pendulum or bell attached.
- The clock measures 20 cm high and 14.5 cm wide and almost 8 cm deep.

Next, I turned to the name on the dial, William Franklin, Stowe (Figure 4). Unfortunately, "William Franklin" does not exist in any of the standard clock maker reference books. There are several towns named "Stowe" in Pennsylvania, Vermont and also in England. However, pin wheel escapement bracket clocks are extremely uncommon. There is at least one well-documented example of a Philadelphia pin-wheel bracket clock by the renowned American maker Thomas Parker that has very similar features to this clock including going barrels (no fusee) that dates to about 1820 (J. Carter Harris, *Pennsylvania Clocks 1750-1850, A Special Exhibit of the National Watch and Clock Museum*, Columbia, PA, 2002).

The overall quality of the clock is outstanding with five spoke wheel crossings, and the strike levers are very nicely finished with decorative touches on both the steel and the brass work (Figure 3). Continuing with unusual features, the dial is made of 1.8 mm thick sheet brass, not iron, and the pendulum is of an unusual design that does not appear to be of English origin. The winding key is substantial which is understandable given the size of the main springs that require leverage to wind comfortably. As of this writing, I don't know the duration of the clock due to two broken pins on the escape wheel; however, I wonder if it could also be a long duration movement.

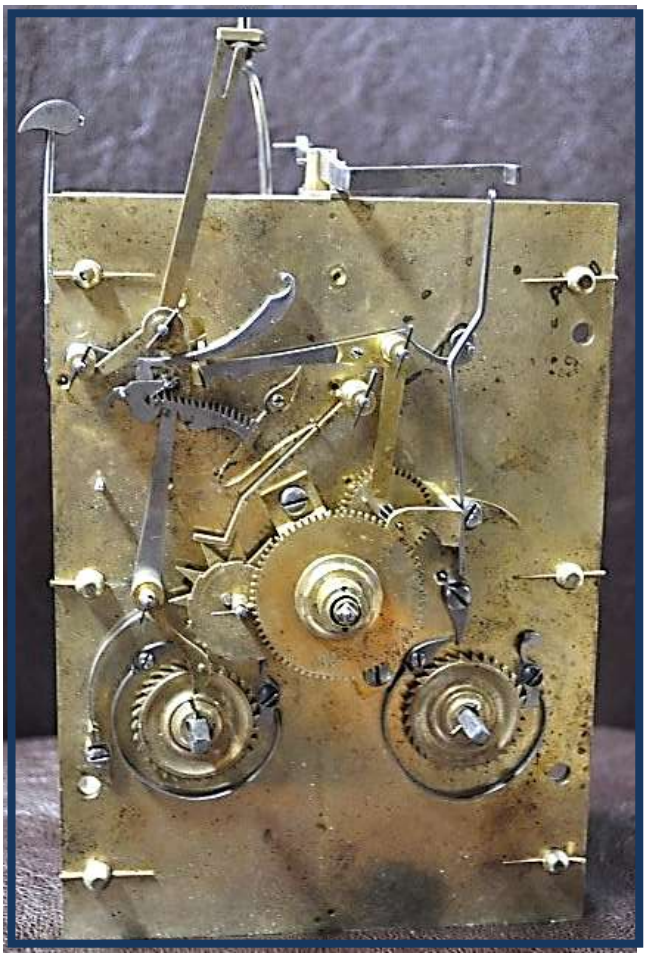

Figure 3: Front of movement showing high quality manufacture.

Figure 4 (top): Close-up of dial signature.
Figure 5 (bottom): Close-up of pin-wheel escapement.

In summary, this clock presents a number of wonderfully unusual features and I surmise that it was not made in England but in America, possibly Philadelphia. William Franklin is not documented, as already mentioned. Was he a maker, retailer or the first owner?

I hope a fellow collector in BH can help identify the origins of this clock. Please write to Chapter 159 (britishhorology@gmail.com) if you have any information to share.