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A Sampling of English Carriage Clocks

By Doug Cowan (OH)

This article reports observations about some 235 English carriage clocks, a surprisingly easy number to locate, given that a noted author on the subject estimated that only a few hundred were made. I'm guessing that a thousand or more were made, and that the reason they were easy to find in my books, English websites, auction catalogs, and 15 years of Clocks magazine photos, is that most of them never left the British Isles or were repatriated in excellent condition. I have only closely examined a few English ones during more than 40 years of interest in carriage clocks, but no one could deny that to pick one up and examine it is a really good experience. The clocks have "gravitus." They are superbly finished, heavy

(because of the fuseses and very solid frame and case construction), and look and feel important. Their superior appearance is because they were only made by the best makers, often those used to producing sea chronometers, and also because they were sold to the highest levels of British society – to those for whom only the best was good enough. They were made in small lots, and some may have even been made upon special order. Having said that, they are not rare. As I write this, I am aware of a few currently available for sale in English clock shops. What they are is expensive. In the mid 1800's Dent advertised English carriage clocks at a price roughly double what the best French clocks cost, also sold by Dent, and about 10 times the annual income of a middle class clerk. And they still cost a lot! Last year, Skinners sold a Dent model for \$60,000.



Figure 1: *Type A* clocks by J. F. Cole ca. 1830's (the front winders, top row), and Dent clocks with their travel cases, ca. late 1800's

Officers of British Horology Chapter 159

Richard Newman, President
rpnewman@yahoo.com
630-207-6616

Dennis Radage, Vice President
finelocks@outlook.com
604-921-1666

Marion Krajewski, Secretary
marionkrajewski@comcast.net
219-769-8247

Peter Stipanovich, Treasurer
1305 Aviara Place
Gibsonia, PA 15044
440-476-9776
pstipanovich@gmail.com

Editor

Open position – please volunteer!

Frank Del Greco, Advisor
fdelgreco@aol.com
440-338-8261

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Correspondence and manuscripts should be sent
to the email: britishhorology@gmail.com
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Chapter 159

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Presidents Message:

Dear Friends, just a quick note to inform you of the presentations planned for 2015. Philip Poniz will be speaking on watch ébauches at the Florida Winter Regional, a topic that I do not think has ever been presented before. The Southern Ohio Regional is only a few weeks later and the meeting focus will be member show-and-tell. Please bring an interesting item to share & to display in the exhibit hall! Our last meeting of 2015 will be the National Convention in Chattanooga where Philip Priestley will be presenting his research on the impact of American technology on the English watch trade. Detailed descriptions of all our 2015 presentations are on the website.

Huge thanks to everyone that contributed articles and presentations in 2014, including Doug Cowan, David Cooper, Mark Frank, Laila & Dennis Radage and Frank Del Greco.

Rich



So, to the sample: As a warning, much of the published data is imprecise or speculative, especially from auction related sources. Not all of the clocks are signed. Nonetheless, 235 clocks is a pretty big sample and the data seems to hold together well so we can learn some things. Some 60 retailers and /or makers put their names on these 235 clocks. Within that breakout, emerge the major firms that influenced others, but not to the degree of standardization seen in France. As an example, two Thomas Cole clocks with sequential numbers and almost identical design are not quite the same size. To do this was a whole separate and expensive process for Cole, who cast his case parts by the lost wax process so that only one could be made. To simplify, I have grouped the clocks into four categories mostly covering a time period from ca 1823 to 1914. That is, the Victorian period. Most of the 60 companies were based in London.

Type A. Breguet look-alikes: Figure 1 on Page 1 shows a "clutch" of these by the firms JF Cole and then Jump, ca. mid to late 1800's. However, the first was made by the great craftsman J. F. Cole ca. 1823. Breguet made them as early as 1818 and his family made them at least until the 1830's. Superficially, the clocks look like they all came from the same designer and in a way they did. Of course, the internal mechanisms and specific dial layouts vary even within one manufacturer, again suggesting special orders and/or small batches. One author states that Cole made each clock by his own hands. Problem with that is that the cases and chain handle are sterling silver and I just cannot see Cole learning how to make silver chain. If these clocks could be examined, I'm sure an English hallmark could be found inside those silver cases and that would tell us who made them. In my survey these type A clocks were made by the Cole brothers in the 1820's; Dent and Jump in the 1880's, Arnold, Nicole Nielsen, and Frodsham in the early 1900's. The one Frodsham clock has a hinged handle instead of a chain.



Figure 2: Type B by James McCabe the second, ca. 1850's

Although the measurements of these clocks are seldom given, they are about six inches in height. It seems that they always came with a leather bound travel case--either shaped like the clock or rectangular. 10% of the sample clocks were Type A. They now have several popular names: humpback, mile marker (borne) -- even occasionally tombstones. Most highly prized, they are likely over represented in the total sample.

Type B: Figure 2: These are the more familiar styles with brass or gilt brass metal cases. They usually had brass rear doors with shutter openings. They account for approximately 65% of the sample clocks. Virtually every maker/retailer offered them and they were available as early as the 1830's or even, from J. F. Cole, in the 1820's. Some makers were still making them in the late 1900's most notably T. Mercer.

Incidentally, the Cole brothers made some of these early Type B's with no fusee and running just 30 hours. No mention was made in my references of anyone else making 30 hr. carriage clocks until the small Type D's arrived. Figure 4. The variation in case design of these Type B's (and wooden cased Type C's) exceeds my ability to summarize. They varied from about 6 inches to 12 inches tall (handle up). The only consistent commonality is that most used well finished lever escapements with or without adjustable balance wheels, but there were many detent escapements, some duplex, etc.

I believe that these niceties were prestige driven rather than required. No one needed high complexity by the middle 1800's when these clocks were most popular. They certainly were never meant to substitute for ship's chronometers and everyone who bought these would also have had a quite adequate pocket watch. Cylinder escapements were not found in my data. The weight of these clocks could be substantial-- one Dent example weighed 25 pounds at 12 inches tall. It is quite clear that during the second quarter of the 1800's there was a lot of Franco/British case style borrowing from each other. The previously mentioned J. F. Cole was an obvious example of using French designs, and later one would have had to look twice to determine whether the clock at first glance was English or from one of the early French makers.

Type C: Figure 3: Type C's are mostly the same as Type B's but in wood cases instead of metal ones. They account for about 17% of the sample. Mahogany, rosewood, ebonized or ebony, and later oak were favorites but special woods such as satinwood and kingwood were also used. The back doors tended to be glazed rather than metal paneled. The same makers made them and with the same movements. A few makers, such as Vulliamy and Dent made very elegant and formal looking black clocks with white enameled dials, but most retained the large silvered or gilt dials. McCabe had a good business going in India and some of those clocks had rather fussy looking wooden cases which would certainly have needed the protection of an outer carrying case. As an aside, the McCabe firm was the most prolific of the Types B&C makers, showing more than 16% of those types in the sample. Since they provided unsigned clocks to many retailers, the real percent was even higher. Type C clocks were introduced ca 1840 and were made into the late 1900's.



Figure 3: Type C. Circa 1870's rosewood cased model by the Emanuel Bros. ca 1870's

Type D: Figure 4. Miniatures, 4 to 6 inches tall with handle up. Many of these ran 30 hours though 8 day examples were certainly common. Most did not feature fusees. The movements were usually simple lever escapement types. Thomas Cole was the king of this category and so popular that there are many of these available "in the style of" Thos. Cole to be found. T.C. made some movements, bought in others and had a strong business selling clocks to retailers as gift timepieces. Sometimes a Cole example will only reveal its maker when disassembled. In those cases the highly gilt and cast side panels will show his name mark. I was surprised that these showed up so early, ca 1845, making them a full partner to the development of English carriage clocks during the mid 1800's. Type D's were approximately 8% of the total sample.

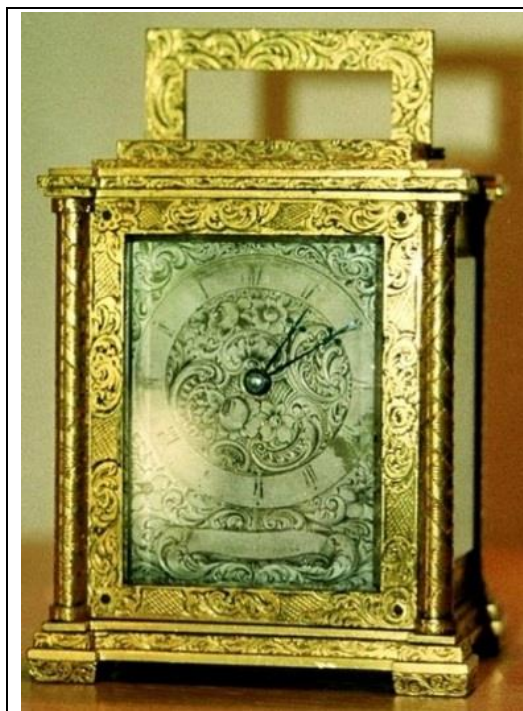



Figure 4: (far left) Type D by Thos. Cole ca. 1850.

Figure 5:(left) Giant quarter chiming shelf clock by Barwise in the carriage clock style, ca. 1860. The tiny French timepiece sitting on top is 2.5 inches tall!

Here are a few pertinent additional points. These clocks were not always called carriage clocks. In 1834 Vulliamy called them "small balance clocks." By 1873, they were "carriage clocks" in a Dent advertisement.

The survey did not count strut clocks, nor giant shelf clocks weighing 60-70 pounds, made in the style of Type B carriage clocks (Fig. 5) - Dent and Barwise made them in the 1860's and later. There were and are many "mixed breed" so called English carriage clocks such as whole (usually gorge cased) French clocks with only an English name upon the dial. Dent did a lot of that. In addition there are many examples of French clocks with English movements and vice versa. These are not "marriages." That interplay between French and English is a separate study.

Sometime in 2015, I hope to publish details of the 60 makers/ retailers found in this sample study. That will likely be in the newsletter of the Carriage Clock Chapter-- another chapter worth joining-- it's free and all you have to do is send an email to Stan Boyatzis at carriageclocks@optusnet.com.au 

2014 UK British Horology Tour

By Safwat Whaba (IL)

Sponsored by #159, the 2014 Horological Tour of UK took place last summer and was a fantastic and memorable time, comprised of education, sightseeing and lots of camaraderie and fun. Philip Priestley was the organizer and we had 31 members. This write-up is just a very brief review of only a few of the wonderful things that Philip arranged as we began the tour in London. After an orientation and fun dinner the prior evening, the tour started with a trip to the British Museum where we saw fabulous 15th and 16th century pieces and chronometers by Earnshaw, Mudge, Breguet and Arnold in addition to a very comprehensive pocket watch and wristwatch collection.

We were then guided through the long, bookcase-lined corridors of the basement to visit the student room, which is quite comfortable, about 30 feet square, and houses the entire collection of clocks and watches that are not on display to the public - - a horologist's dream to see! We sat around a large table as the curator described, and passed around on a tray, watches from the early 15th century that were made of iron to rare 19th century examples. We were able to examine them closely, without touching, and the sound of camera shutters seemed to come from every direction. The last piece was a Waltham pocket watch with glass plates. There were also many clocks to see, including astronomical regulators, and a fine tool collection.

From the British Museum, we were driven to the Guildhall Museum where Sir George White, curator, author and past Master of the Clockmakers Company guided our tour. The collection is very comprehensive and presented in chronological order. Among the outstanding historical pieces on display was a Harrison longcase clock with grasshopper escapement (one of only two made) and an Edward East longcase in a very fine marquetry case. We saw early bracket clocks by Tompion and Knibb, and the chronometers exhibit included works by Mudge, a prototype by Sully, and pocket chronometers by Kendall, Arnold, Earnshaw, Motel and Mudge.

Harrison's H5 was on loan to the Greenwich 300 Year Exhibition, a working copy of H1 was running with its fascinating escapement. We were informed that the Guild Hall collection was moving to the Science Museum later in 2015, which should provide a more spacious environment; the Guild Hall rooms are quite small with few visitors. The move to the Science Museum will allow larger space and many excited school children also visit the museum regularly.

On the second day, we went to the Victoria and Albert Museum and headed straight to the horology display that is mostly comprised of very decorative and early pocket watches and small clocks, many gold encrusted with precious stones, in addition to fine enameled pieces.

A short walk away is the Science Museum where the emphasis is on the technological development of both clocks and watches. The electric clock collection included an Alexander Baines in addition to all known later examples. The astronomical regulator collection was exceptional. One of the most intriguing items is a 10-foot pendulum driven by a verge watch movement! The second oldest tower clock in England, dating back to 1392 and built for Wells Cathedral, was a very impressive sight due to its massive size.

Belmont House is the residence of the Harris family and is located deep in the Kent countryside. We were met there by Jonathan Betts, current Master of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, and Commander Peter Linstead-Smith OBE both also with the National Maritime Museum where Commander Smith is the chronometer record keeper.

It is a magnificent Georgian country structure that houses an excellent collection amassed of the Fifth Lord Harris (1889-1984). Unfortunately, photography is not allowed, but the discussions were excellent and highlights included very elegant and early longcase clocks by Tompion, Knibb, East and Quarre, and many astronomical regulators, early English bracket clocks, European clocks and early American clocks. The collection also has a particularly exquisite collection of small Thomas Cole clocks that were collected by Harris' wife and is on display in the bedroom.

Lord Harris was a tinkerer and one small room on the ground floor is called the "work room." Apparently, aristocrats do not usually perform any manual work; therefore, it is specifically called a "work room" and not a "workshop." We also learned that Lord Harris would carry out minor repair work and adjustments, and if he ran into problems would summon the House of Frodsham to put everything right again - - I'm sure one could tell by many of our expressions that we appreciated that story!



Just a few of the hundreds of rare items seen on the 2014 Tour

The newest clock museum that we visited in London was The Clockworks that is devoted to electric clocks and headed by Dr. James Nye. Dr. Nye is a historian who assembled an unequalled electric clock collection, many never seen previously in public. The collection includes Baines, Riefler, Bulle, and Eureka examples, and many electrically driven astronomical regulators and tower clocks. A very comprehensive library and well-equipped workshop, where all restoration for the museum is carried out, is on full view to the public.

Just one of the highlights of the trip that I want to mention was a formal dinner at the very elegant City of London Livery Hall. All members of the group had a sudden transformation from jeans and sneakers to elegant jackets and ties for the men and fabulous gowns for the ladies. After a few glasses of champagne, the master of ceremony, with a large gavel and clear loud voice announced “Dinner will be served.” This was a British event complete with all the pomp and circumstance, and a very entertaining speech by Nigel Israel, Master of the Pewterer’s Guild.

By design, the tour coincided with 300th Harrison exhibition in Greenwich and all of Harrison’s five original longitude clocks were on display with wonderful documentation and videos about his life and remarkable achievements. We also spent time in the octagonal room at the observatory where the massive year going Tompion clock from 1676, originally having a 13 ft. pendulum and one of two built is located, and visited The Maritime Museum which has the most comprehensive collection of marine chronometers under one roof. The trip back to London, on a very relaxing ride from Greenwich to Westminster, was a perfect time to relax and reflect about the day’s activities.

This tour also included a trip to the Uxbridge Watch & Clock Fair and West Country. Seeing the Salisbury Cathedral that has the oldest mechanical clock in the world dating back to 1386, and built of wrought iron by three men from Holland, was a highlight. Some of the more adventurous travelers climbed the tower’s 332 steps to enjoy the magnificent views. The last museums visited were the Dorset Clock Museum and Cider Museum in Owermoigne. The Dorset Clock Museum was started by two brothers and includes several dozen very fine longcase clocks, including a Tompion, tower clocks, lantern clocks and astronomical regulators. Although the collection is very fine, the lay out and the lighting is work in progress. While I have mostly written about the the collections we saw, the non-horological events during the tour were very enjoyable, especially Portsmouth harbor, Torquay on the British Riviera, Dartmouth, Dartmoor, Bristol and Windsor castle.

This tour was fun! We learned something new, could almost touch what was only before seen in a picture in a book, and every day was a lesson in history. The food was great and pubs did not disappoint. Most of all, new friendships were made and old ones were renewed. Despite the exhaustion, I would go again tomorrow.



The sooner the better! 