



British Horology Times

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Walnut to Walnut

By Dennis Radage, Vice President (BC)

The first longcase clocks were important functional instruments as well as being prized pieces of furniture. Having a longcase clock would demonstrate your social standing and was possibly the most expensive single item purchased to adorn the homes of the wealthy. When entering a room containing a longcase clock, the most notable features that would strike the viewer would be the clock's stature, its size, the quality of the case and of course the gilt and silver dial that indicated the time.

The longcase clock was introduced around 1660, this was a time of increasing prosperity, the coronation of Charles II, an increasing interest in the sciences, the formation of the Royal Society and the building of the Greenwich observatory, all of which contributed to the advancement in timekeeping.

Some of the most famous names in English horology were now practicing their trade. Case form, movement functionality and dial features were in a rapid state of development. This was the start of the Golden Age of English Clockmaking.

Longcase clocks of this early period were austere in appearance, slim, veneered with ebony and more than likely having an architectural pediment. Ebony was in short supply, and due to the catastrophes in London during the mid-1660s, very few such clocks were made. By the early 1670s, ebony veneered clocks were already giving way to the more decorative walnut veneer.

While ebony cased longcase clocks continued to be made, the 1670s saw the increasing dominance of walnut veneer and cases with simple forms of inlay. Figure 1 (right) illustrates a slim well-proportioned early walnut veneered longcase of the mid-1670s.



Figure 1. An early walnut veneered longcase

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Chapter 159

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Delightful sundial motto recorded in Alice Earle's
1902 book, *Sun-dials and Roses of Yesterday*, that is
inscribed on a verticle dial at a royal residence in
Sandringham, England:

LET OTHERS TELL OF STORMS
AND SHOWERS, I'LL ONLY
COUNT YOUR SUNNY HOURS



President's Message:

Dear Friends,

As 2015 draws to a close, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Philip Priestley and Philip Poniz who presented lectures at our meetings this past year and Doug Cowan and Safwat Whaba who contributed articles to BHT newsletters. Please consider helping out with a lecture or article, we can really use the help! Our editor position is also still vacant. The primary focus of the editor role is to produce this newsletter and the time commitment is only about a day, three times a year. Please contact me if you can help or know someone that may be interested in volunteering.

As a reminder, we will be holding elections for all positions (President, VP, Treasurer and Secretary) at the June, 2016 National Convention in Louisville. Please email **britishhorology@gmail.com** if you are interested - - huge thanks to Bob Pritzker who has expressed an interest in the President role (in accordance with our bylaws, a member can only serve two terms as President and therefore I will be stepping down in June). I'll send out more election details in our March newsletter.

Our next meeting will be at the Florida Mid-Winter Regional which has been restructured and has all the appearances of being a great show. Please note that it will be held at a new location, the Lakeland Center, which is conveniently located close to both Orlando and Tampa and very easy to get to. The Regional features an Exhibit on "Unique & Historical Clocks and Watches", and is packed with two full days of educational lectures. Ours is scheduled for Saturday, February 13th at 1:30pm. Check out our website in November when the topic will be finalized and details posted.

Lastly, thanks to everyone who has sent me advice, suggestions and also "constructive criticism" since my appointment to the Board of the NAWCC in June. Keep them coming! I feel honored to be part of a 75-year tradition that has given us a world-class museum and library, and tremendous knowledge base of information that hopefully endures for future generations to enjoy and appreciate.

See you in Florida!

Rich

(Continued from page 1)

Parquetry inlay would often be in a surround of walnut or olive wood oystering, Figure 2 (right), the inlay being of geometric patterns of stars and fans created with ebony and holly. The case sides and banding would usually be walnut. Just before 1680, parquetry started to be replaced by marquetry, usually of a floral form. During the first half of the 1680s, parquetry inlay and marquetry were often combined on the same clock case. At this time the inlay was in small panels generally to the trunk door and its corners as well as to the base.

The marquetry panels could be in a ground of ebony with a surround of walnut or with an olive wood oyster surround on the best clocks (Figure 3, next page). Oyster veneering is an early feature, rarely seen after 1690.

From about 1685 the inlay marquetry panels became larger and included foliage, fans, birds and frequently an urn. The panels gradually increased in size and becoming closer together, Figure 4, then sufficiently large that they were now touching, Figure 5.

Between 1685 and 1690 the marquetry panels joined, forming just one panel covering the entire trunk door, Figure 6.

By the 1690s detailing of the marquetry inlay had become much more refined. Stylized acanthus leaves, chrysanthemums, birds and even figures were introduced into the decoration. Figure 7 shows a further development where the marquetry inlay was now covering all surfaces including the trunk door, the base, the hood and the surrounding areas.

The next stage in the development of inlay was arabesque marquetry. This was introduced just before 1700 and continued to be used for almost the next two decades. Arabesque is identified by its bold colours, more formal floral designs, grotesque figures and birds. Figure 8 illustrates a fine example of arabesque marquetry applied to a longcase trunk door.

Shortly after arabesque marquetry was introduced, another variation was introduced, similar to arabesque, but usually employing just two wood types and without creatures or figures. This is referred to as seaweed marquetry, Figure 9. An additional form of case decoration of the period was lacquering, the example shown in Figure 10 has a chinoiserie design.


Walnut veneered clock cases however, were always available, but returned to dominate case veneers from about 1715 as marquetry veneers went out of style. A good example of walnut veneering is illustrated in Figure 11. Walnut continued to be the veneer of choice on London clocks for the next forty years. 



Figure 2. Fan and star parquetry with an oyster surround



Figure 3. Early marquetry with small panels on an oyster ground



Figure 4. The marquetry panels increased in size



Figure 5. The marquetry panels are now touching and cover most of the trunk door and base



Figure 6. The inlay on this trunk door has become just one panel



Figure 7. The marquetry is now applied to all surfaces, 6

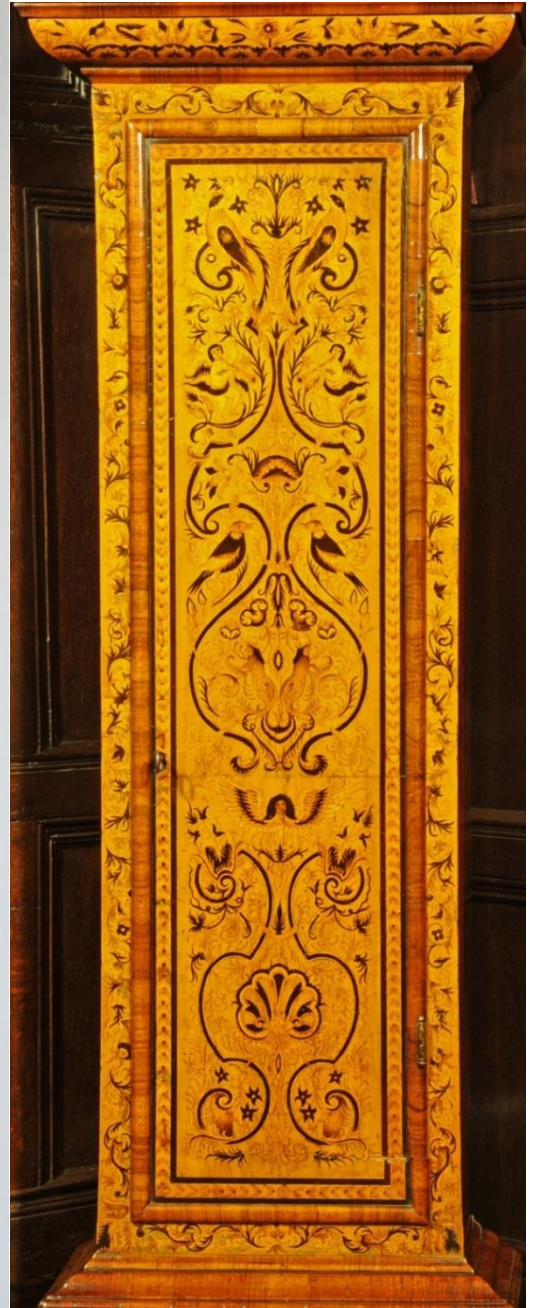


Figure 8. A fine example of arabesque marquetry applied to the trunk door



Figure 9. This case is completely covered with seaweed marquetry



Figure 10. A lacquered clock with a chinoiserie design

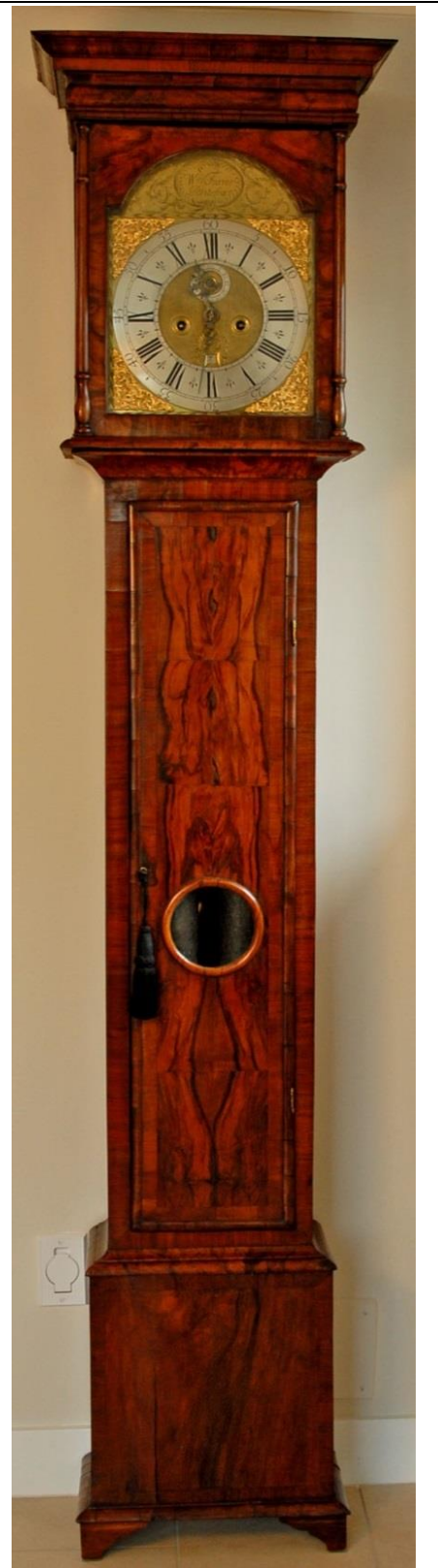


Figure 11. A walnut veneered clock of fine proportion


Tobias Letters

By Rich Newman, Chapter President (IL)

Many members are aware of the outstanding collections at Winterthur (Wilmington, Delaware) that include over 100 clocks and an accurate reconstruction of the clock and woodworking shop of the Dominy family. Recently, I had the privilege to spend time in Winterthur's research library helping to prepare for the Ward Francillon Educational Symposium, "Clocks at Winterthur" that will be held at the Museum October 6-8, 2016.

Among the many historical documents in the archives is a small collection of about 20 letters to Henry and Charles Tobias from various jewelers and watchmakers in America dated 1837 to 1846. Henry and Charles Tobias were located in New York and served as wholesalers and agents for the renowned London & Liverpool Tobias firm(s) that made clocks, watches and chronometers. The letters document orders and returns of (imported) Tobias watches and provide fascinating insight into the trans-Atlantic watch trade including the various options that a watch could be ordered (watch grade, dial, jewelery, balance, case material, etc.) as well as pricing, credit terms, and even mention of watch case making in New York and Philadelphia. Several reference the supply of chronometers and chronometer materials to William H. C. Riggs (ca. 1819 to 1861) who was a well-respected Philadelphia clock, watch, chronometer, and instrument maker.

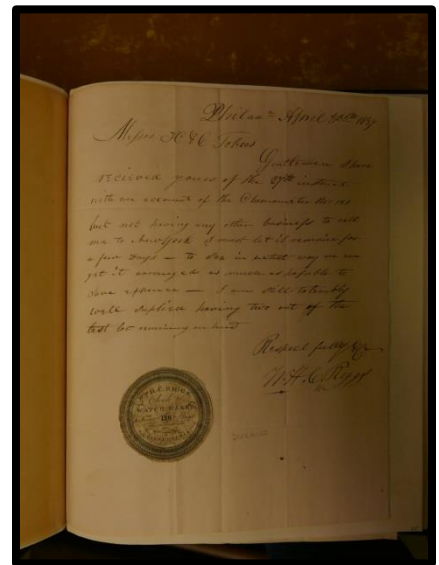
I thought the membership would like to see the contents of one of the letters, a short one that is dated April 30th, 1839 from Riggs to H & R Tobias that apparently evidences that he retailed Tobias chronometers.

The letter features Riggs' own watch paper pasted at the bottom left corner that identifies his address as 126 South Front Street, near the Drawbridge, on the west side of Philadelphia: 

Messrs. H & C Tobias

Gentlemen I have received yours of the 27th instance with an account of the Chronometer No. 121 but not having any other business to call me to New York I must let it remain for a few days - - to see in what way we can get it arranged as much as possible to save expense - - I am still tolerably well supplied having two out of the last lot remaining on hand.

*Respectfully &c
W. H. C. Riggs*



W. H. C. Riggs letter to Henry and Charles Tobias concerning delivery of chronometer No. 121