

# The Longcase Clock and its Case, a symposium in association with the British Museum

13 October

Notable researchers have written on provincial clock case makers, including R.W.Symonds, Tom Robinson, Brian Loomes, Luke Millar, Lindsay Boynton and our lecturer **Susan Stuart**, who spoke on *Gillows' Lancaster Clock Cases*. Gillows, particularly under Richard Gillow (1733-1811) was a manufacturer and seller of cases at a time when longcase clocks were a household status symbol second only to the bed and its hangings. Gillows were known for their high quality workmanship and choice of timber, and the case makers were among the most highly paid staff. Customers were offered the option of choosing a design from Chippendale's *Director* or their own designs.

From the mid-1750s to the early 1760s carved rococo designs or scallop shells were added to the trunk case door tops and these are some of the firm's finest cases. During the 1770s and 1780s some trunk doors were divided into two panels with a thin moulding near the bottom of the door. This enabled shorter pieces of veneer to be used, but in some cases examined it was one long veneer with moulding over the veneer, which suggests it was a fashion feature.

Customers were given a wide choice of woods, hood shapes, carving or blind fretwork, but the two most important facts a case maker needed was size of dial and total height. Gillows employed journeymen cabinet makers to make their cases; some of them had their own businesses in Lancaster. The cabinet makers had access to Gillow designs which they could use to make other furniture for their own customers. Susan Stuart argued that 'Lancaster cases' rather than Gillow cases was more accurate, especially from the 1780s when many Lancaster cabinet makers put their own names on clock dials, their cases indistinguishable from Gillows'. Master cabinet makers such as Jeremiah Sowerby, Isaac Greenwood and Thomas Lister adopted this practice, as did some cabinet makers in southern Lakeland. Susan wondered how widespread this practice was, and asked collectors to check their own region.

Richard Gillow's brother-in-law, the clock maker Thomas Worswick, supplied him with many clocks during the 18th century. The first white dial ever recorded (May 1772) was before they were advertised by Osborne & Wilson, the Birmingham dial makers, in September 1772 as 'entirely new'. Gillows also made cases for circular dials.

The advantages of the port of Lancaster for importing timber from the colonies was reciprocated by the rich West Indies where plantation owners bought furniture direct from

Gillows. Later exports include the Baltic, China and Australia.

**Eric Morton's** lecture, *From Bigamy to Headless Earl: aspects of North-Eastern Clockmaking*, showed interests not so much in quality marquetry cases imported from London but more in the story of regional cases: to quote, 'objects contain absent people.' The families of makers in the North East, such as the Ogdens, particularly inventive at Darlington, produced fine movements in provincial cases. The Waltons of Haltwhistle exemplified a regional design of straight top hood with applied scrolling cornice, the centre space filled with open fretwork. Two marriage dials were also shown, one engraved 'Robert - Margaret Robinson 1785 of Catton', by the maker Thomas Morpeth of Hexham. More rustic cases were shown in pine, a comparison being made with a very similar case from another rural area, with timber sparingly used with pieces of wood dowelled together. Metalwork was economically used, with pin hinges and latches, and interestingly, the doors could be lifted off the case for carrying.

In Weardale, the cases were naively simulated with patterns or wood grain. A rare example showed a tapering hood with freestanding columns at an extraordinary angle! A unique dial by John Swinburne of Hexham, a Catholic Jacobite supporter working for a Catholic client, commemorated the Jacobite rebellion and beheading of James Radcliffe, 3rd Earl of Derwentwater. It had a seconds sweep, moon-phases, and annual saints' days, giving a coded message of support to the 'cause'. This was a quirky, eccentric and intriguing lecture.

With the lecture by **John Cheetham**, *Hindley, York: his cases*, our attention was drawn to this too-little celebrated maker. Research has shown well made elegant cases, some seven to eight feet tall in both mahogany and oak, often with complex movements including trip repeat from either side and some with Dutch striking, and with 'three in two' quarter striking on two trains. Four year-going longcases are known, often with complications. The mahogany cases are more usual in the solid than veneered. The hoods are distinctively taller in proportion to the case, with glazed arched side windows, the columns freestanding at front and back. Some hoods are inset with blue and gilt *verre eglomisé*; interestingly sometimes the mask is solid behind the glazed spandrel areas in these rectangular hood doors. The surround to the hood door, when opened, reveals a chamfered edge on the case and door, instead of the normal straight edge.

John noted one, and possibly another, where the hood was integral to the trunk and whole case, the movement being placed in against the fascia of the mask. Hindley did not want anyone fiddling with the movements, which are dust covered, access for the fitting of the heavy pendulum only gained through opening the side doors in the hood.

**Andrew Jenkins**

The afternoon programme started with a talk by **Colin Brown** on *The Llanrwst Case Revisited*, followed by a talk by **John Robey** on *Uttoxeter Clock Cases*. The second half of the afternoon was spent visiting *The Michael Grange Collection of Provincial 30 hour Clocks* followed by a visit to the *Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly Gallery of Clocks and Watches*.

Colin Brown bought his first John Owen Llanrwst clock from his wife-to-be's shop in Llanrwst 30 years ago. This stimulated his interest, particularly in the Owen family of John and his son Watkin and their prolific output of clocks between 1745 and 1809. Together Colin and Mary Brown recorded about 500 clocks, to include 150 by makers other than the Owen family, which formed the basis for their book, *The Clockmakers of Llanrwst*, published in 1993.

John Owen was apprenticed in Liverpool. He produced fine clocks for 25 years for the affluent gentry in the Llanrwst area. His movements were Lancashire influenced, with particular strike work that was to be used on all Owen clocks until 1815. The cases were made locally, generally of substantial oak, with backboards being adze finished and half an inch thick. His early clocks had narrow doors. Decorative inlay was applied to both the doors and friezes for specific customers. Watkin Owen took over the business in 1776 when John Owen died. Higher output batch production led to poorer quality. Thirty-five cases with chalked dates on their backboards were recorded, the earliest being 1777. The cases became wider with the use of thinner and poorer quality timber, and deal backboards. Panels were applied to the bases and architectural pediments became a feature of the hoods. Styles mirrored the development in Llanrwst furniture during this period.

Since writing the book Colin said he now believed that clock parts and later cases were sourced through a travelling salesman who balanced local need against output and supplied materials accordingly. The materials as well as tools probably came from Lancashire, Liverpool or North Cheshire. Lancashire therefore influenced the style of the clock case. He finished with a rhetorical question as to whether or not the Owens' clock business was financed from Liverpool.

John Robey said that Uttoxeter was an important town supplying clocks to the Midlands and local area in the 18th and 19th centuries. Written evidence from Pigot's *Directory*, White's *History* and other trade directories pointed to there being 29 cabinet makers and 14 clock case makers in the town. Nearby Ashbourne, and in particular Harlow's, were major suppliers of clock movements and brass. Regrettably there were no case labels, documents, accounts or advertisements for apprentices to support this evidence. There was no discernible 18th century case style, although doors tended to be long with no panel beneath, and hoods had straight fluted pillars.

The 19th century saw much more uniformity with the preponderance of oak and cross-banded mahogany cases with swan neck hoods (and stringing around them), shaped doors, fluted quarter columns and applied panels. As the century progressed, doors became shorter and hood columns were bobbin-turned and partly ebonised; This was done with a bitumen-type substance. By 1860 cases became wider and mahogany cases had inlaid and not applied panels. The painted clock dials used throughout the 19th century came from Birmingham with some round dials being supplied around 1840.

**Michael Grange** said that his collection, now housed in the old Horological Gallery, consisted of 50 provincial 30-hour longcase clocks, varying in date from 1690 to 1840. In addition there were 50 30-hour clock movements and another 100 related items. He pointed out a domed case housing a movement by George Holland, which he said was very unusual on a 30-hour clock as they were normally reserved for eight-day clocks. A clock by John Ogden of Darlington, c.1720-30, had a particularly well figured plain elm case. A 30-hour example in an oak case by Thomas Ogden of Halifax, c.1730, was rare as he specialised in eight-day clocks. An example by Samuel Roberts, c.1755 - 74, had a particularly pleasing heavy indigenous Welsh oak case of good colour. Discussion ensued around the carved case of a clock by Isaac Hadwen of Kendal, made for John and Isobel Potter in 1728. Hadwen was thought to be a Quaker. The hood of the case, with well turned pillars integral to the hood door, and hood sides with cross hatching, was thought to be in period while the trunk and base were deemed to be late 19th or early 20th century.

Finally we visited the Sir Harry and Lady Djanogly Gallery, which tells the story of Western Europe's clocks and watches from the medieval period to the present day. There are turret clocks, longcases, bracket clocks, wall clocks, chronometers, astronomical clocks, ship clocks, organ clocks, travelling clocks, cuckoo clocks, pocket and quartz watches, all represented in what is deemed to be one of the finest collections in the world. Of particular longcase interest were ebonised pearwood architectural cased clocks by Ahasuerus Fromanteel, c.1665, and Joseph Knibb c.1675, a night clock by Edward East with a walnut case inlaid with birds and flowers, and a month going longcase by Thomas Tompion, c.1701. The case, in field maple, was probably treated with nitric acid followed by linseed oil and lampblack to bring out the figure in the grain and to simulate tortoiseshell.

*David Hannah*