



Ye Olde Clock Shoppe Best possible care for your family's heirloom clock

The birth of the mechanical clock dates back to the end of the 13th century. The Dover Castle Clock, c. 1600, is one of the oldest examples that still has its original verge and foliot escapement.

Nearly all early clocks were made for ecclesiastical use, striking the hours and calling people to prayers. Some examples of these early clocks are those of Exeter, Salisbury and Wells cathedrals. Domestic clocks came into use in England around 1600. On the continent in southern Germany they appeared far earlier, in particular weight-driven wall clocks.

Technical advances in clock production

It was the invention of the humble coiled spring which enabled a whole range of spring-driven table clocks to be produced, which had the advantage of being portable.

In the mid 17th century the pendulum was discovered that led to dramatic improvements in time keeping. Longcase clocks (affectionately termed grandfather clocks) were designed primarily to protect and conceal the unsightly weights, pulleys and lines or ropes. Because the pendulum was short, it could be accommodated within a narrow case. Such early Puritan influence clocks were typically black, utilising ebony veneers or ebonised fruitwood.

The earliest longcase clocks were rarely more than 1.98 m (6 feet 6 inches) and had simple classical proportions based on Roman and Greek architecture. Later in the 17th century the clocks were taller, averaging 2.26 m (7 feet 5 inches) including the caddy.

Dials also became larger. Around 1710 an arch was added to the top of the square dial giving more space to place features. These might include a name plaque, strike/ silent regulation or calendar work. Square dials continued to be used well into the 19th century.

Clock case decorations

Veneering on clock cases was most typically done in walnut following the loss of popularity of ebony. From the 1670s clocks were decorated with marquetry and later marquetry, usually floral patterns and often with birds. Chinoiserie or lacquer work (known in the Orient for more than 2000 years) began appearing in Europe from the 15th century. From the 1720s mahogany became popular with its wood-worm resistance and the fact that it was available in long and wide, highly

figured boards, ideal for veneers.

Features in clocks

So-called 30 hour clocks are those which run a little more than a day, the advantage being if you are just a couple of hours late with winding, it will continue to run. Complex clocks are those which chime the quarter hours or play a tune every one or few hours. Some give astrological information. Clocks which went for more than a week were popular; however ones which ran for a month were even more popular between 1670 and 1710. Some clocks were made to run for up to 12 months.

English bracket clocks are a bit of a misnomer, for rather than being rested on a bracket, they typically were placed upon tables, sideboards and mantelpieces. Early examples were architectural in style and typically ebonised. French mantel clocks in the late 17th century were highly ornate compared with their English counterparts.

In England, the production of clocks typically included two trades, the cabinetmaker and the clockmaker. However in France, it was possible to also have to include a sculptor, caster, chaser, engraver, gilder, enameller and porcelain manufacturer. The better clocks were considered works of art and many fine artists were employed in their production.

Wall clocks, of which the more ornate ones are referred to as cartel clocks, typically sat upon an equally decorative bracket. Cartel clocks have been produced since the early 18th century and are usually fire-gilt bronze, beautifully chased and decorated. The earliest English wall clock was known as the lantern, sometimes being hung on the wall by means of a hoop with spikes coming out from its back to ensure correct vertical placement.

Hooded wall clocks were produced from the late 17th century to the end of the 18th century. Tavern or Act of Parliament clocks are large weight-driven wall clocks. The Act of Parliament from which their name is derived imposed a duty of 5 shillings on every clock. People hid their clocks to avoid having to pay, which gave rise to more public clocks including tavern clocks.

Dial clocks started to appear c. 1730, so white dial clocks with a wooden background becoming fashionable thereafter. From around 1800 decorative mahogany cases were popular. Throughout the entire 19th century and well into the 20th century, the simple circular painted dial, spring-driven fusee wall clock was produced in very large numbers. It was used in

public places such as schools, railway stations and offices, and in residences all over the world.

Mystery, novelty and fantasy clocks have been produced with wit and charm the world over. They were designed to fascinate by mystifying or amusing watchers about how they worked, or the manner in which they worked. Often they included automata (moving figures) like the earliest German examples from the 17th century. Another example, the Swinger or swinging clock, was produced in France and America, with the whole clock being a pendulum.

Carriage clocks or travelling clocks were originally made in Germany, then France and Italy. Various types of decoration were employed to make them more appealing. They continued to be made at a relatively high level right through until World War I.

Chronometers or sea clocks necessarily must keep time despite the pitching and tossing of a ship. They are contained in three-tier wooden boxes, supported by brass gimbals so that whatever the movement of the ship, the chronometer remains accurate and functional.

GN Olsson Mastercraftsmen

You can be assured of the very best combination of clockmakers (or horologists) and cabinetmakers to ensure both aspects of your treasure are given specialist attention at GN Olsson Mastercraftsmen. The excellent network of specialists in associated trades ensures highly ornate cases are given appropriate conservation and restoration as well. We spare no detail, including extensive research as required. Ask us to make your custom clock.

Leather cases of carriage clocks can be painstakingly conserved, restored or reproduced. For leather carriage clock cases and pocket watch stands we source as close to original leather, fabric, ribbons and gilding from all over the world. We replicate embossing designs and even reproduce maker stamps.

Clock collecting is fascinating. Trust that your clock repairs are done correctly and that you take best possible care for your family's heirloom clock ■

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Further reading

Derek Roberts, *Collecting Clocks* (Grange Books, 1998)

