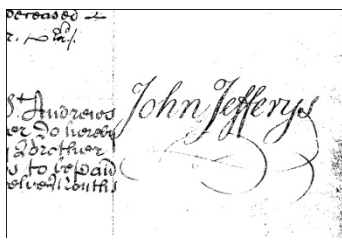


John Jefferys, London; a watchmaker of repute, but did he actually make longcase clocks?



*Watch and Clock maker of
St' Andrews, Holborn*

*Freeman of the Clockmakers
Company of London.*

Born 1701, Died 1754



Sometimes a really interesting clock comes into the workshop for repair and restoration work, in longcase clock terms this one is a bit special and of great quality. There are very few clocks known and signed by John Jefferys, the style of the work in this clock is without doubt grounded in the workshops of Thomas Tompion and George Graham but at this point it is difficult to say if Jefferys went outside his normal speciality of watch making to make this longcase clock.

The longcase clock in question had not run for over 30 years; the owner wanted me to restore it to full working order and research the maker. When the clock came into my workshop in April 2010 it was in a very poor condition, several parts were missing, and the clock was suffering greatly from verdi-gris and brass stress fractures, both these problems needing urgent attention to conserve the clock for the future. The very nice quality English walnut case had, like the movement, been bodge repaired over many years of its life, some of these old repairs now needing further work. This clock was made in the 1740's; note the simplification of the dial for a new age of elegance.



Who was John Jefferys, where did he come from and why so famous?

John was born in 1701, the son of John and Jane Jefferys who lived in a house called Darbies in the village of Midgham in the county of Berkshire, the house probably obtaining its name from the Earl of Derby, Henry de Gosmont who held land here in the middle of the 14th century. John's Jefferys mother Jane, was the daughter of William and Bridgett Yeats, grand-daughter of William and Temperance Smith who had farmed in Midgham from the middle of the 17th century. Although John's father was a Quaker, John junior was baptised into the Church of England at the Chapel in Midgham Park on the 18th March 1701. He had at least five brothers and one sister, three of whom were also baptised in Midgham. William on the 3rd January 1704, and twins Stephen and Benjamin on the 8th March 1705. According to the Will of John's aunt, Jane Tull, there was also a Joseph, Samuel and Mary, although sadly none of them are mentioned in our Church records. On the 4th November 1717 at the age of seventeen, John junior was apprenticed to Edward Jagger, a Clockmaker of Well Close Square, Stepney in London.

In 1723 twenty-two year old John junior must have been amazed when his late grandmother's sister Jane Tull, who by then must have been in her nineties, left him the freehold of Darbies, his parents house in Midgham. It is also from her Will that we now know that John's father was a Wool-stapler (*wool merchant*) and that she didn't think a great deal of him. He was left nothing in her Will and was to receive nothing from her estate. In fact the Will stipulates that the house was to be put in trust and would only become John's property following the death of his mother Jane. After his nine year apprenticeship, John eventually became a member of the Clockmakers Company of London on the 26th of January 1726.

By 1735 John must have been fairly well established, because in April of that year he took on an apprentice by the name of Larcum Kendall, he later becoming a famous watchmaker in his own right. In 1739 a cater-cousin of John's, fourteen year old Jethro Tull of Buttons, Midgham, also joined Larcum and was apprenticed to John for the term of seven years at a cost of forty guineas to Jethro's father Richard.

It was around 1753 that John Jefferys was asked by the now famous John Harrison of Red Lion Square Holborn to make a pocket watch from his own designs, but maybe including some innovations of John Jefferys himself. This watch was so accurate that it turned out to be the prototype for H4, the watch that eventually met the accuracy stated in the Longitude Act of Queen Anne (1714) in the trial at sea of 1761. If you want to know more about this interesting story please read Dava Sobel's book "Longitude," ISBN 1-85702-571-7 or the later feature film of the same name starring Michael Gambon as John Harrison.

Unfortunately John Jefferys never saw the benefits or consequence's of his creation as he died in 1754. After his death, Larcum Kendall took over his business and workshop and continued to work for John Harrison and later the Admiralty. Kendall made several copies of H4, one being taken by Captain Bligh on the ill fated Bounty expedition in 1787.

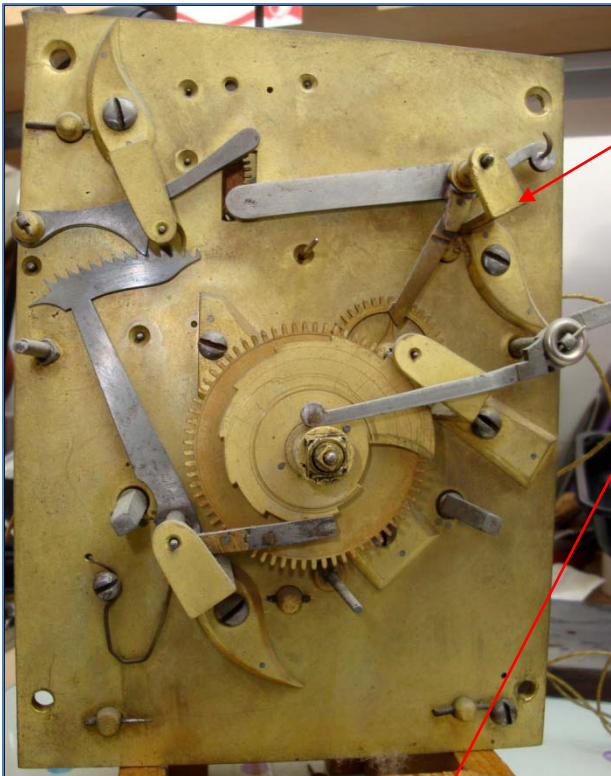
Further details of John Jefferys & John Harrison can also be found on the National Maritime Museum website.

<http://www.nmm.ac.uk/harrison>

My thanks to Derek J. Collier of Midgham, for his help with the Jefferys historical background.

A clock in poor condition

There is not room here to show complete details of all the repairs and conservation work done to this clock, these few photographs will demonstrate to the initiated the difference between this clock and a standard longcase clock movement of the period and some of the problems found.

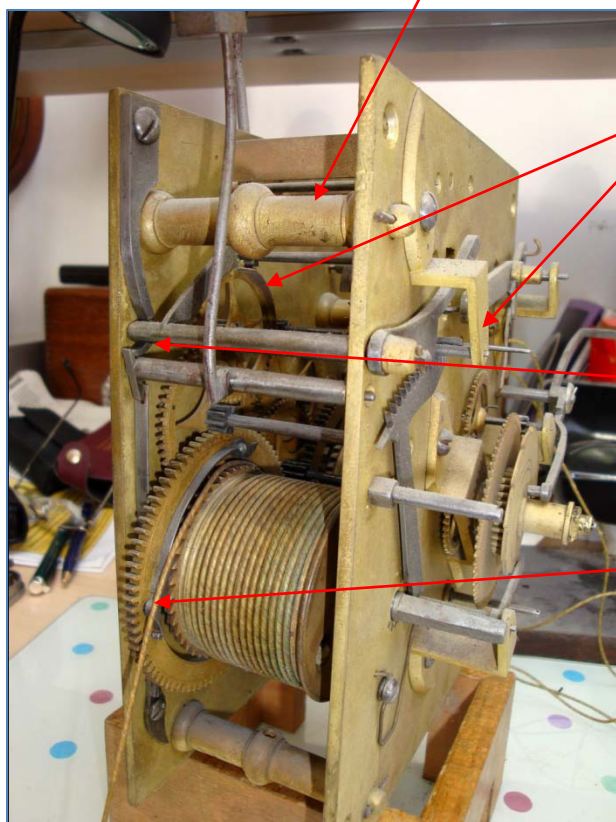


The first thing apparent is the use of comma foot cocks rather than the standard fixed steel mounting posts.

This method of making is very similar to Tompion and Graham's clocks. The plates are very thick and have five heavy pillars, unusually no pillar latches so characteristic of Grahams work.

Several parts are missing, a pull repeat return spring, maintaining power shutters, rack arm follower spring, calendar wheel and flag, also a rack return spring of the correct type.

Note the colour and hue of the brass, evidence of long immersions in ammonia based cleaning solutions during the past.



Note that the gathering pallet is one piece with the arbor. The strike has deep tooth locking into a stop on the hoop wheel, so typical of 30 hour clocks, rather than a just single locking pin.

The strike is quiet, the hammer force balanced so well between the hammer and stop springs.

Well made great wheel ratchet clicks with steel springs

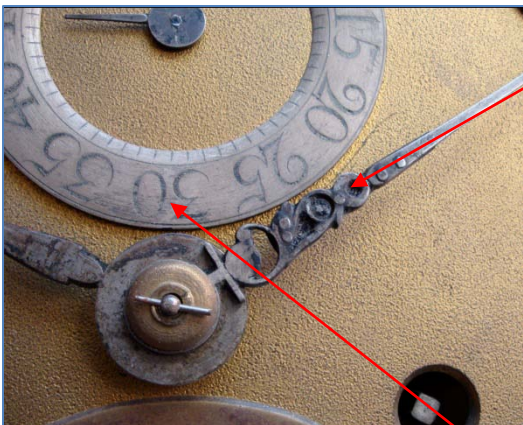
Examples of some of the damage.

You will notice the green Verdi-gris on the back of the dial plate of this clock on page 1. This needs to be stabilised or it will cause further damage. Verdi-gris had also caused damage to the corner spandrels, having got underneath the original mercurial gilding.



Here we see a section of the back of the dial plate after the Verdi-gris has been removed and stabilised. The plate has then been protected by a coating of microcrystalline wax to seal the surface.

The darker patches are where the Verdi-gris had damaged the plate.



An example of an old repair, the minute hand had been broken and riveted together. A nice example of riveting maybe, but it all looked very heavy and spoilt the balance of the hand. This repair was removed and the hand was repaired with silver solder and re-blued. The silver solder was supported by shimming a piece of steel behind the damage.



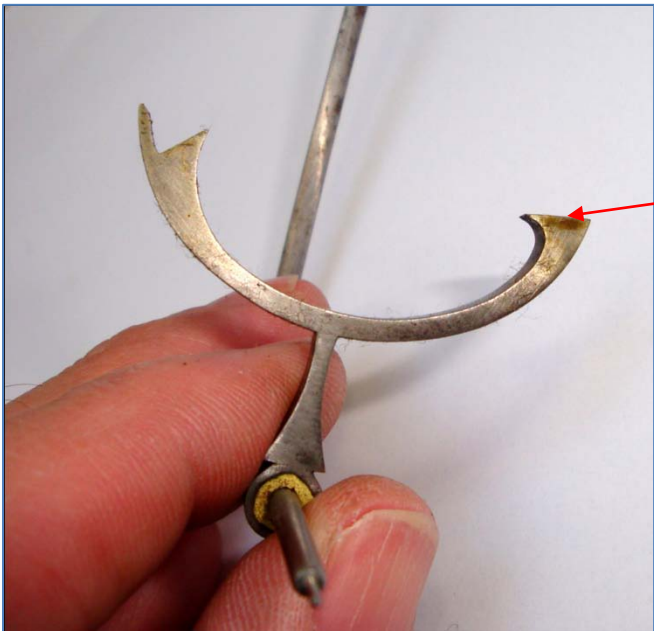
All the silver work, including the chapter ring suffered with loose and very grey black wax. The wax was removed and re-loaded and the silvering re-finished and clear lacquered.



The maintaining power shutters were both missing, these are the new replacements.

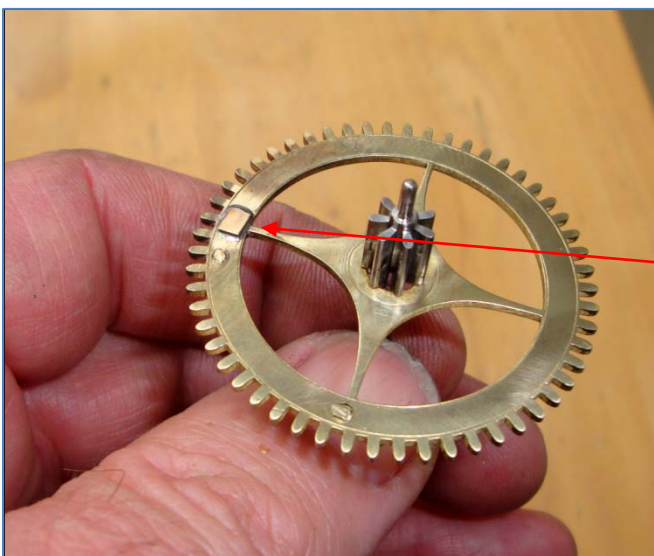
The brass was chosen to match the dial plate colour as near as possible.

I signed and dated these parts to show they are none originals



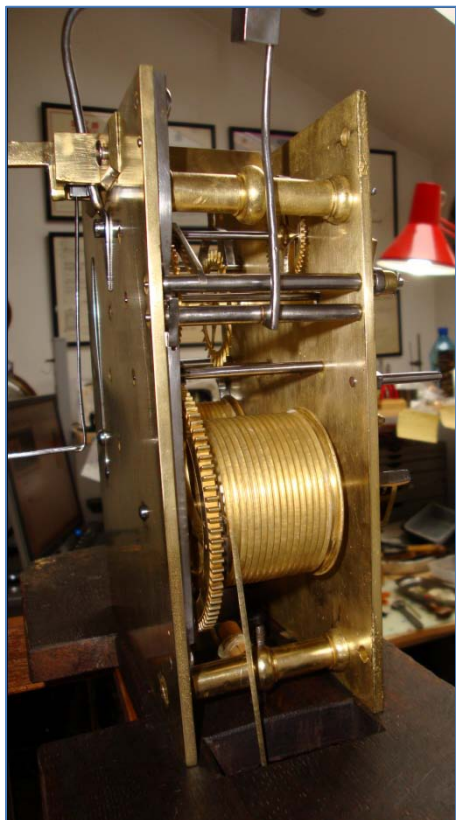
The escapement pallets on this clock are of the recoil type, it would be expected to find Graham dead beat pallets on a clock of this quality with maintaining power.

The pallet faces were worn and pitted, the faces restored with carbon steel micro welding and then adjusted. The action of this escapement is one of the best I have seen.



The sign of a good clock is the lightness of the crossing work on the wheels, this clock has very light wheel work but sometimes this can be a real weak point. The old Ammonia based clock cleaning fluids cause fractures in brass that can lead to failures of the wheel rim and crossing at the narrow point. Here a small brass patch is soldered on to support and strengthen a fracture crack in the rim of this wheel.

After the repairs and restoration work



Here is a view of the strike side of the movement; you can see the difference after the repairs are completed. The steel work has been burnished.

As per good conservation practice I don't polish the brass work as this process does not add to the efficiency of the clock and does remove metal.



The movement now complete and under test. Note the repaired hands, and maintaining power shutters and calendar wheel are now restored. The slight difference in brass colour highlights these parts as new work and none original to the clock.

Here we see the clock complete and working again after many years and firmly fixed to the wall in my clients' home. The English walnut case is now looking resplendent after cleaning and repair.

Many repairs were made to this case, the hood needing quite a bit of work including the removal of the remains of a caddy top, replacement of the blind fret, missing brass capitals, repairs and re-fitting of loose veneers.

The trunk required re fitting and replacement of several loose mouldings; re hanging the door, and fixing and repair of some veneers. The colour has been much improved and finished in wax polish.

This work although expensive has greatly added to the appeal and value of this important clock. The owner is very happy with the result of the many hours of work involved this restoration.

