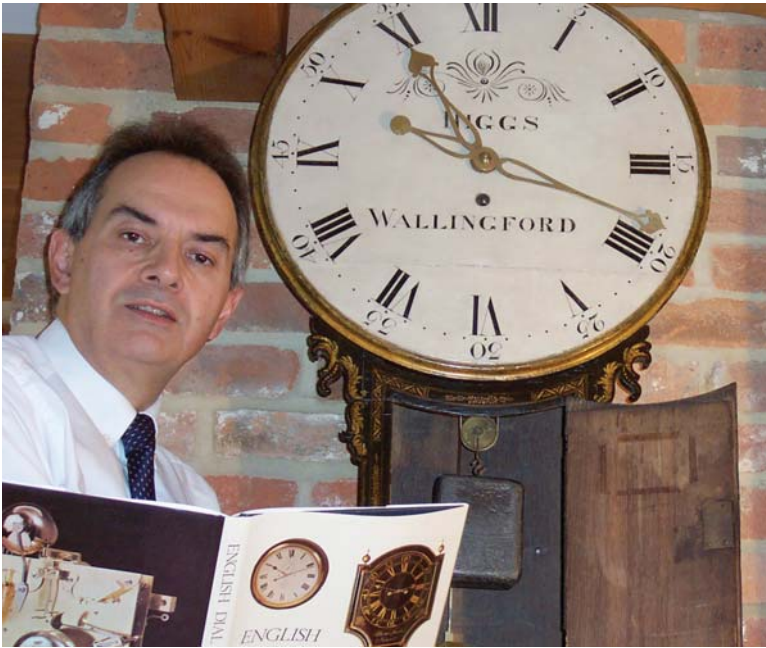


A new website for Tavern Clock enthusiasts

Martin Gatto introduces his new website and gives tips on restoration.



An exciting new Tavern Clock website - Tavernicus.co.uk - has recently been launched complete with Collectors Forum, Gallery, Archives, Restoration, Directory of Artists and For Sale sections.

The site is the brainchild of BHI member Martin Gatto, who has been collecting these unusual clocks for over 30 years, and wanted to share his passion with other enthusiasts. He now hopes other members will come forward with information to help him develop the site further.

Martin's first purchase, over 30 years ago, was a drop-dial clock from a junk shop in Chesterfield called Steptoos. It was made around the turn of the 20th century by Chesterfield retailer, Alfred Lee, and was not in good order - but perfect after some time with Christopher Gamester MBHI. The clock has square plates which are screwed together and by a spooky coincidence the pendulum bob is inscribed with the name of Martin's mother-in-law's school!

Further inspiration came in 1978, with the publication of *Ronald E Rose's English Dial Clocks* (since published in second edition and reprinted in 2000) which encouraged Martin to continue adding to his steadily-increasing collection.

Around 1989, he acquired just the dial from a standard round dial tavern clock of about 1780, which he set to work repairing. He had the missing moulding made, and over about the next five years personally made the case. A movement was made for it at Rosemary & Time in Thame, which is an assembly of bits and pieces from other clocks resulting in something vaguely contemporary. By the mid 90s the clock was to be seen on the wall as yet unpainted but in full working order.

In 2001, he picked up an unusually small round dial tavern clock, in quite a distressed condition, from a remote Cotswolds location, made in 1790 by Higgs of Wallingford. Records of the Higgs family go back to the late 16th century, and Martin started the restoration of this tavern clock which had come back from the USA and was now homeward bound after over 200 years.

After being made redundant, Martin began to find his obsession with tavern clocks taking up more and more time. He started to attend auctions and strike up relationships with case restorers, lacquer restorers and clock restorers. He also decided to sponsor a gifted artist, Glynis Overton, to attend the short course at West Dean College on Japanning and Gilding.

Over the last year, Martin had been looking at ways of turning his hobby into a way of life - and so Tavernicus was born. Tavernicus.co.uk is a virtual business with a web-site which Martin believes is something new in the clock world. Whilst there are some clocks advertised for sale, that is a minor part of the site. There is a Collectors' Forum where you can leave your blogs, tell a clock joke or just be argumentative if you wish, and a Gallery for you to upload any photos of tavern clocks you may have.

Martin is also devoting his time and effort to building a record of Tavern Clocks which he hopes will become a national Archive - he hopes BHI members will help with this - and plans to ensure the Institute's Library has the record to safeguard the information for future generations in years to come.

He has started the Archive with all the tavern clocks he is aware of (and has evidence of) in the Clockmakers tab, while in the Library tab there are a few books relevant to the subject - but he's sure there must be more. The Restoration section is for lacquer artists and he hopes eventually to produce a national directory of talent. Listing of artists is free in exchange for some more pictures for the Gallery. There is also a Links section which includes individuals and organisations who have inspired or helped Martin along the way.

History of the Tavern Clock

Sometimes known as Act of Parliament Clocks and more recently catalogued as Tavern Clocks, these beautiful wall mounted clocks were made for a century between about 1720 and 1820.

The cases were constructed of varying timbers with many parts of the case made of pine, but the doors and dial boards were usually made in oak. The style evolved from the early quite bulky shield designs squared off at the bottom, followed by the more elegant shield with the tapered mouldings in the lower quadrants, and later still came the round dials with the ears at the junction of the dial and the trunk.

After about 1800 the cases were more often veneered in mahogany with a white painted dial. The heyday of the lacquered chinoiserie period would have been the second half of the 18th century albeit examples exist throughout. Most were made quite large in order to be seen in public, about 5ft long with dials of around 2.5ft, and were nearly always 8-day weight-driven timepieces and now often in poor condition due to their exposure in public places.



Restoring a Tavern Clock

Restoring any tavern clock is a voyage of discovery. The techniques are very similar whether the restoration is of the round dial or shield type.

The first thing to do is to remove the movement, which is a simple matter of removing the hands by taking out the locking pin from the minute hand, whereupon the hand comes free. The hour hand is usually locked in place by a small screw.

Once the hands are removed, the dial/shield is removed from the trunk by removing the four wooden locking pegs (although the pegs can be made of iron). With the movement exposed on its seat-board it can be removed either by unscrewing the seat-board clamps which sometimes are screwed directly into the lower pillars. Sometimes the seat-board will just come out complete with movement. The movements are very simple, the vast majority being four pillar four/five train time pieces with anchor escapements. Plates can be rectangular or A-shaped. The pendulums can be located on a back-cock or sometimes on the case itself. Weights can be oval or oblong in order to fit into the bottom of the trunk and produce longer running times. Restoration of movements provides the normal challenges that the restorer faces. The big decision is whether to replace the hands if they are damaged or inappropriate later additions and if so, in what style. There is much reference on this in the Rose text.

The first real difficulty comes with what to do about case damage or loss. If the ears are missing on a round dial, which will be evident from shadow in the paintwork just below the dial, then the restorer needs to make a decision as to whether to replace, and, if so, what shape to make them. Clearly the conservation view would be to leave well alone but the market might dictate otherwise.

Fortunately I have not had to face this decision but I did decide that the ears on the James Higgs, which were largely intact, should have a very minor repair. Ill fitting doors with gaps and damaged hinges will need consideration on the trunk. A common problem with the trunk in all types of tavern clock is that the bottom may be blown out by a catastrophically falling weight.

A chisel style replacement foot is the usual give away. Conservators might argue to leave this alone. The alterations to create a chisel foot that I have seen have been awful so my stance is, where possible, to add the sculpted foot to the clock base without removing the earlier bodge. In that way the evolution can be seen and arguably, if somewhat unlikely, be reversed.



The inspection doors in the upper part of the trunk (usually on both sides) are often missing or replaced. If they are missing they should be replaced in order to protect the movement from dust, with simple doors in the existing openings and either metal or leather hinges. These doors usually have simple overlapping wooden closures which I think are better than brass.

The main trunk door will have a lock which originally would have been nailed in place with hand made nails. You have to decide what to do if the door lock does not work or if the lock is missing. The key will almost never be original and is usually lost. I like locks to work and there is nothing worse than a broken lock in the closed and locked position as getting to it is not easy. I think that getting locks fixed and working is a better risk management strategy for the clock case than ignoring the problem.

Lastly, on the casework, the dials will often have sprung from the frame in the case of shield dials and from the two braces on round dials, with resulting daylight showing through the dial face boards. Again very careful judgements are necessary. On round dials the repair is slightly more straight forward as long as the boards are not warped, which they can be. The remedy on shield dials, which are made like a picture frame, needs real cabinet making skill if it is to look right.





Each case needs to be viewed on its merits and the considerations will depend on the condition of the paintwork in the first place and how much damage will be done to the lacquer in the process of repairing the case. If the splits are not too large then filling is done but large splits cannot be satisfactorily filled and painted. This is where you get much stroking of the chin and sucking of teeth before the best compromise is reached. Leaving well alone is often the answer but a grubby barn-stored

example, with poor lacquer, can often not be left alone if the clock is to have another 100 years of life.

The lacquerwork is the most difficult part of the restoration when it comes to skill involved which is very scarce compared with the other skill-sets. It is not just scarcity which makes it difficult; most of the other restoration is ultimately hidden from the eye once the clock is on the wall, but the skill of the lacquer artist is in full view. The other possible visible restorations will be the hands which are often replacements and also the finials to be found on the top of shield dials. If you have the originals then treasure them; I have yet to find replacements that work for me and prefer to go without. Is there anyone out there who can convince me otherwise?

The lacquer restoration process starts with careful cleaning using the right fluids. Use the wrong fluid and the gilding comes away. Once the first clean has been done much debate ensues about how much of the original decoration survives and how much evolution has taken place over a 250 year period. What then follows will depend on what has been found in the layers. One restorer told me he had found six layers on a dial!


Then there is the issue of whether real gold leaf has been used in previous restorations - cheaper substitutes oxidise and show as darker areas. Very often much of the intricate pattern work is worn or missing through over-painting. The leaf patterns on the lower trunk sides are often over painted and not restored because of cost.

On one clock, which had no such apparent motif, the cleaning revealed the leaf pattern in full by removal of an earlier over-paint on one side of the case. The restorer then painted in a replacement on the other side but from the original design. One side looks slightly crisper than the other but you would be hard pushed to tell. In the end judgements need to be made and no two decision makers would reach the same conclusion.

One tries to do as little as possible but at the same time to produce a result that looks and feels right. Any clock that has no obvious imperfections or flaws or wear or damage is probably a failed restoration. Go too far in the wrong direction and the clock is seriously devalued. Serious collectors place significant value on originality and there is no point losing the originality in pursuit of some kind of 'perfect restoration'. However, if you have a basket case in your workshop then giving it life for another 250 years will sometimes mean stepping over an imaginary line.

Martin Gatto

1966 **G.K.HADFIELD** 2007



JILL HADFIELD NO. 1

will support the B.H.I Annual Show
at Upton Hall 29th & 30th June, July 1st.

All prepaid orders, received by
Wednesday 20th June, will be discounted
by 10%, and may be collected at the show.

SEE YOU THERE!

JILL HADFIELD
President, B.H.I

G. K. HADFIELD, By Appointment at Old Post Office,
Great Salkeld, Penrith, Cumbria CA11 9LW, England.
Tel: +44 (0) 1768 870111 Mobile: 07738 546488
Email: gkhadfield@dial.pipex.com www.gkhadfield-tilly.co.uk

TAVERNICUS
THE SOURCE FOR TAVERN, ACT OF PARLIAMENT
& ENGLISH DIAL CLOCKS

If you are
buying or selling
or addicted to

Tavern Clocks
visit
www.tavernicus.co.uk
or
chat to **Martin Gatto**
07864 986500

 **tavernicus**