

# Turret Clock Tour 2007

*Ian Coote reports on the Ipswich and District Branch's annual tour.*

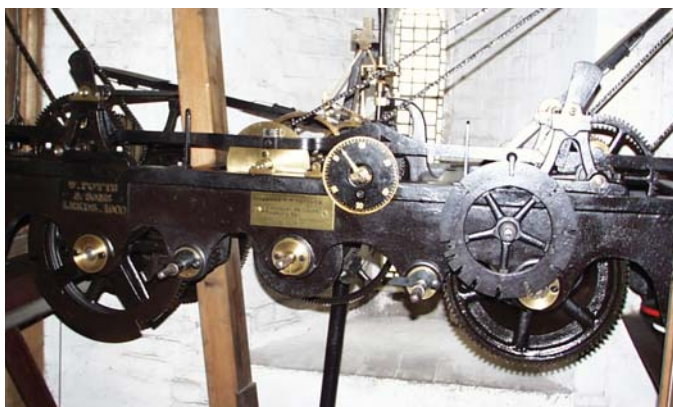
The Essex/Suffolk border is rich in fine churches, mostly financed by the mediaeval wool trade. St Peter & Paul at Clare grew over several hundred years from its early Norman origins to the grand structure we see today. There is an attractive stone sundial dating from 1790 (**Photo 1**) but the clock is a much later addition by W Potts & Sons of Leeds, installed in 1900. It was the first on the itinerary of Ipswich Branch's 2007 turret clock tour. Typical of its period, it is a cast iron flat-bed movement with double 3-legged gravity escapement, countwheel striking and Westminster quarter chimes. It is the less expensive, but more durable model with cast iron rather than brass wheels. It was installed on the recommendation of Lord Grimthorpe, who apparently subscribed to the clock on condition the order was given to Potts<sup>1</sup>. (**Photo 2**) Stoke by Clare is another church with a long history, but the clock is very different from its neighbour. This ancient mechanism (**Photo 3**) was last visited by us as a group in 1996, and an article appeared in this Journal in July 1998<sup>2</sup>. The article is available online<sup>3</sup>.

The wheels are in an unusual arrangement, with the striking above the going train. Originally fitted with a verge escapement, it was converted to anchor; perhaps in the recorded modernisation of 1730. The forged frame with its splayed legs (**Photo 4**) is reminiscent of early continental clocks and suggests a date perhaps as early as 1500. It is certainly one of the oldest working clocks in Britain.

The clock movement at Ridgewell was made in 1790, although it was not installed at Ridgewell until 1891. The setting dial



1. The sundial at Clare



2. Potts movement at Clare



3. Stoke by Clare

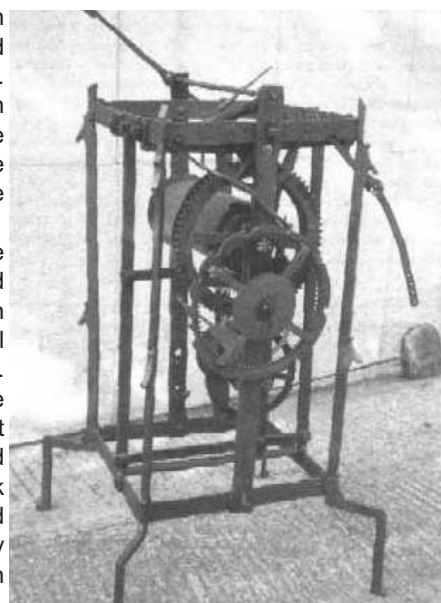
bears the name of the Sudbury dealer who sold it. This solidly constructed example (**Photo 5**), believed to be by Gardiner of Sudbury<sup>4</sup>, is distinctive for its unusual scrolls on the corners (**Photo 6**), and for rack striking with the snail mounted on a star wheel (**Photo 7**). The escapement is dead-beat.

Castle Hedingham church dates back to the 11th century and retains many early features, but, like Clare, it has an early 20th Century clock. This one is by Smith of Derby with pinwheel escapement. Sadly the small, high viewing platform with missing handrail was too vertiginous for this author to manage a photograph, although we enjoyed the view from the top of the tower where the clock bell, dated 1697, is located.

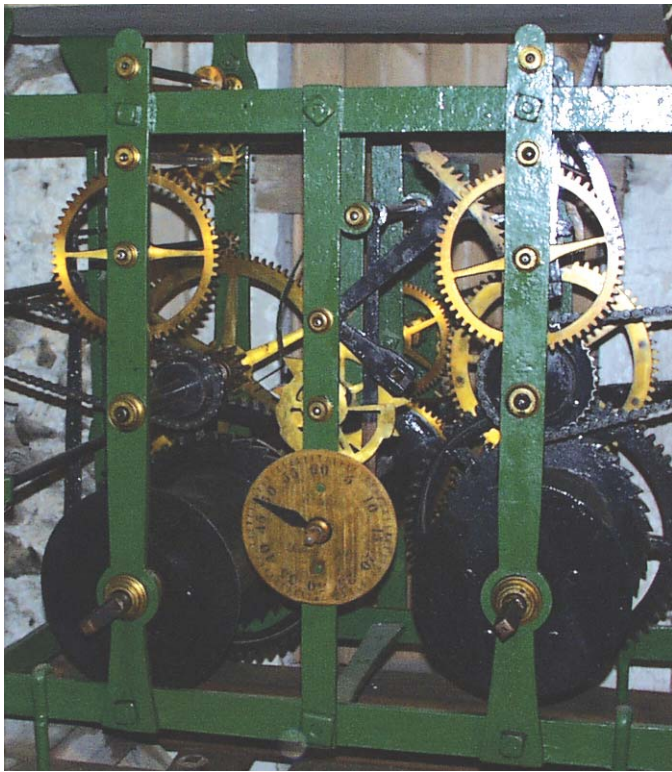
Lunch and real ale at The Bell was followed by a visit to the church at Pebmarsh which had the odd Tardis-like property of seeming bigger inside than out. When the key-holder was eventually located we were able to view the little mid-18th

century clock movement with anchor escapement and countwheel striking (**Photo 8**). The frame is finished with corner scrolls in a different style from those at Ridgewell and the hand-made nuts are distinctively decorated.

The clock at Pebmarsh is the kind that many of us would have liked to accommodate in the living room, unlike the final mechanism of our tour at St. Andrews, Halstead - a large cast iron flat-bed movement with Westminster chimes and gravity escapement. This clock (**Photo 9**) Gillett's Flat bed clock at Halstead was made by Gillett & Co. of Croydon in 1887, Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee year.



4. The Stoke by Clare movement during restoration.



5.. The Ridgewell Clock



6. Scrolls on the frame of the clock at Ridgewell



7. Snail with star-wheel



8. Pebmarsh

**Summary of clocks visited:**

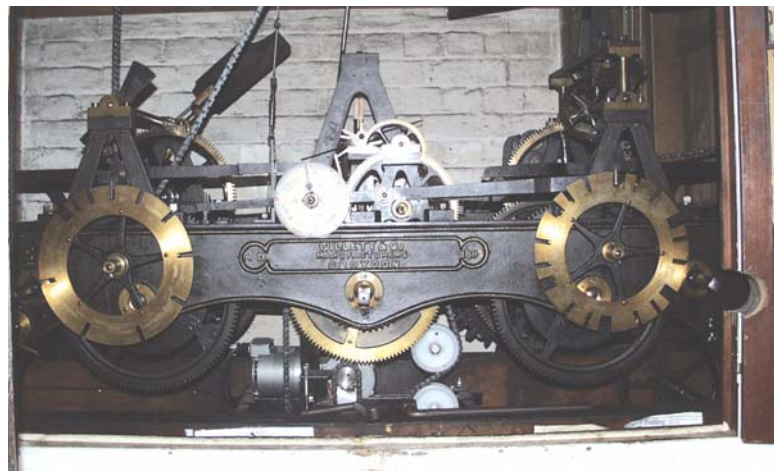
1. Clare, Suffolk. Potts 1900. Double 3-legged gravity. Flat bed. Westminster.
2. Stoke by Clare, Suffolk. Ancient birdcage. Originally verge, converted to anchor.
3. Ridgewell, Essex. 1790. Posted frame. Dead beat. Characteristic scrolls. Possibly Gardiner, Sudbury. Rack striking with star wheel.
4. Castle Hedingham, Essex. Smith, Derby. 1907. Pin wheel deadbeat.
5. Pebmarsh, Essex. Mid 18th century. Small movement. Anchor
6. Halstead. Gillett & Co., 1887. Double 3-legged gravity. Flat bed. Westminster.

Thanks are due to the Church wardens, Clock winders, Vicars and others who made the tour possible, and to those individuals who contributed information and background knowledge.

Ian Coote

#### References

1. Potts of Leeds, Five Generations of Clockmakers. Michael J. Potts, Mayfield Books, 2006.
2. Horological Journal Vol. 140 no.7 pp.230-231, July 1998
3. <http://www.horo-logical.co.uk/stokeby.html>
4. Dr. Stuart Harrison. Unpublished research.



9. Gillett's Flat bed clock at Halstead



10. Part of the group in the ringing chamber.