

Ipswich Branch - Turret Clock Tour

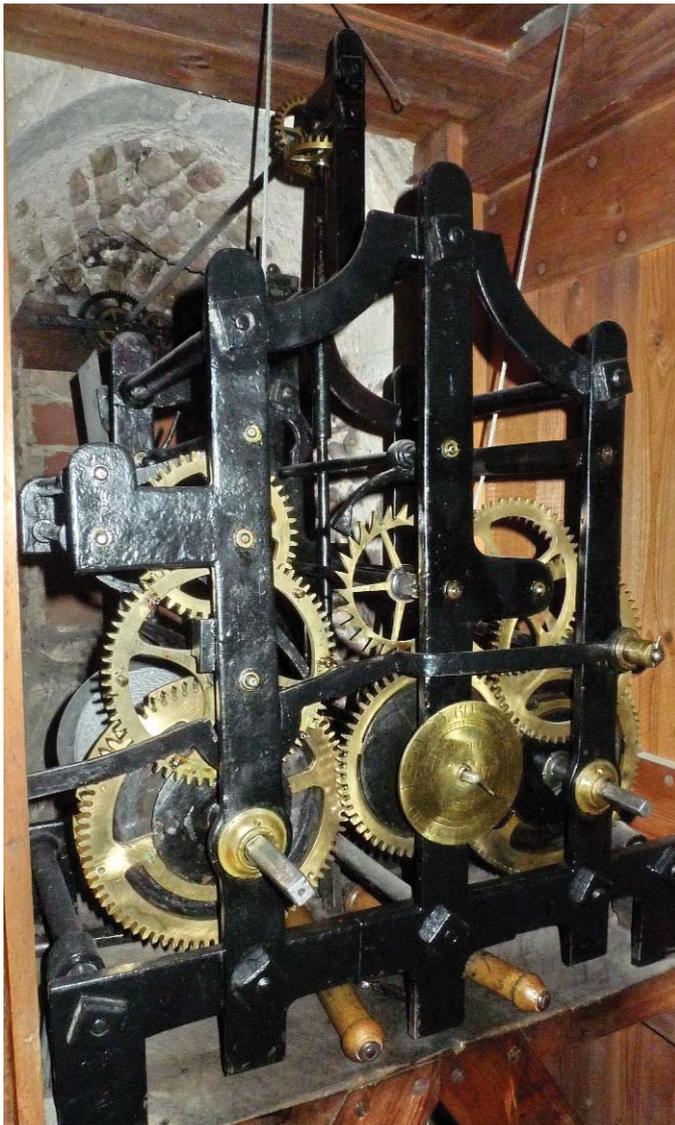
Ipswich Branch has been organising annual turret clock tours for a considerable number of years, but they continue to surprise and delight members old and new – and 2009 was no exception. Ian Coote reports.

St Margaret's, Ipswich

We began with a welcome return visit to St Margaret's church, close to Ipswich Town Centre.

The setting dial of the clock bears the inscription Moore/Jan 1/1778/Ipswich suggesting that it was supplied by Edward and Hatley Moore, following the death of their father, Thomas in 1762.

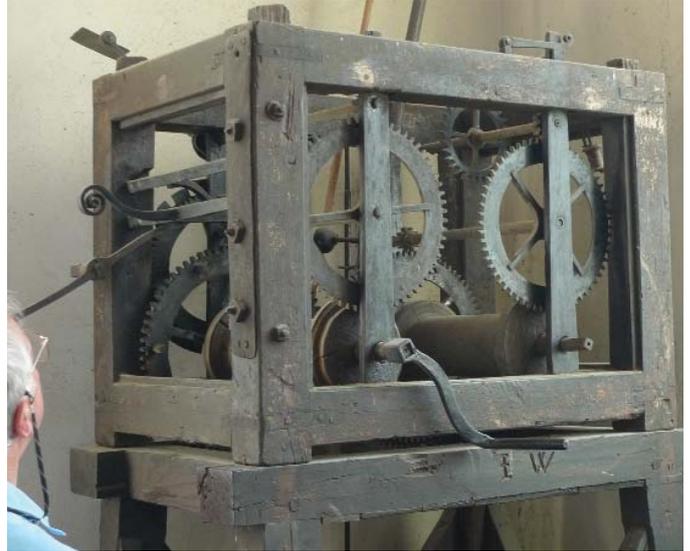
The book on Suffolk clocks by Haggard and Miller comments that; *'this is a very interesting clock ... because of its rather uncommon method of construction and its small size'* and they note the similarity of this clock to the one at Lavenham. In fact there are many more examples of this style of frame around East Anglia. It is a compact wrought-iron framed movement with anchor escapement and countwheel striking with hoopwheel locking. Jonathan Betts has done much more detailed research on these 'pagoda frame' clocks. He has identified at least 35 of them and believes they were made by William Smith and/or Charles Penton of Moorfields, London between 1750 and 1795.



1. St Margaret's.

Coddenham

Standing unused in the church at Coddenham is the ancient wood-framed movement removed from the tower at some time in the past, probably in the mid 19th century when it was reputedly replaced with an Alexander Bain electric movement, driven by an earth battery. According to some of our members, the wiring was still in place until relatively recently.



2. The old Coddenham clock.



3. Pallets of the Coddenham clock.



4. Gillett's synchronous clock. From left: strike let-off switch; time gearbox; synchronous motor; strike stop switch and motor; strike gearbox and countwheel.

The wood frame of the old movement holds vertical bars of wrought iron into which the mobiles are pivoted. It is a simple, cheap and solid construction.

Features to note are the lever at the top which disengages the escapement in order to set the hands; the wheel crossings, which have been made separately and fixed to the rim; the odd shaped anchor pallets and the peg and lever locking.

Up the tower was the working clock movement, of less interest to the antiquarian, but seized upon with alacrity by the electrical enthusiasts. Made by Gillett and Johnston and installed in 1945, it comprises a synchronous motor connected to a gearbox driving the leading-off work. The plate on the motor specifies 60Hz ~ 360 R.P.M.; 50Hz ~ 300 R.P.M.; 40Hz ~ 240 R.P.M. The question arises – did any electricity supplier anywhere ever use a 40Hz supply?

A peg on the main rotor triggers a mercury tilt switch to start the strike, driven by a separate motor and gearbox and controlled by a pinned countwheel which trips another mercury tilt switch when the correct number has been struck. Each strike indexes the countwheel by one tooth. It may be relatively modern, but is nevertheless a rare survivor.

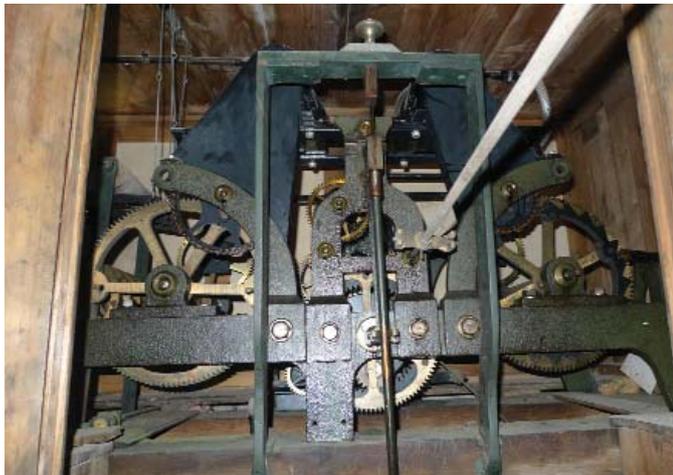
Framlingham

On then, to Framlingham, with magnificent views over the castle and surrounding countryside from the top of the tower. The peal of 8 bells is unusual in being all aligned together. Many towers could not support the possibility of a few tonnes of bronze vibrating synchronously in the same direction. This one must be well-built.

The industrial-era clock movement presented to the town in 1872 by Sir Henry Thompson FRCS in memory of his father, was built by J.W. Benson of Ludgate Hill, London and is a heavy flat bed cast iron construction with deadbeat escapement and Westminster chimes. The bronze pallet frame with replaceable pallets is notable.

There is a large musical chime barrel gathering dust near the clock. Sadly, funds are lacking for its restoration.

Orford



5. Then Benson clock at Framlingham.

The tour was researched and organised by Stuart Harrison, so it was no surprise that our final visit was to his home town of Orford where he and his wife, Susan, were instrumental in the restoration of the bells at the church of St. Bartholomew. The dial of the church clock faces the sea, not the town, in order to give the time to mariners.

Most ringing chambers are dark, poky spaces squeezed into the tower as an afterthought. This light and airy space is very much the exception.

The staircase from the large ringing chamber to the clock



6. The Orford Clock.



7. Orford deadbeat escapement.



8. Unusual rack on the Orford clock.

room is made up of solid quarters of oak logs, apparently stolen in the past from the nearby castle.

An interesting detail of this early 18th century iron framed clock is the foundry mark on the frame corresponding to marks on the bells by Thomas Gardiner of Sudbury (c.1696-1762). Gardiner appears to have been a clockmaker as well as a bellfounder, and it seems probable that he built at least the frame of the clock in 1739, when he cast the great bell. The name on the setting dial is Hildyard of Woodbridge who refurbished the clock in 1874 after the tower collapsed.

It has a deadbeat escapement and there was some argument and speculation as to its originality. Is it an early example of an original deadbeat scape wheel, or was it upgraded in the restoration by Hildyard?

The rack striking, unusual enough in itself, is of a strange form with a separate locking rack on the outside, reminiscent of a Comtoise clock. Susan provided us with an excellent tea and we had a rummage around Stuart's newly set up workshop to round off a satisfying afternoon.

More picture of this and previous tours can be found online at:

<http://flickr.com/groups/turretclockeast/>