

Turret Clock Tour

BHI Ipswich Branch – Part 1

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The Ipswich Branch has organised an annual turret clock tour for many years, the last two of them centred on Braintree, Essex. This article combines the two tours by points of interest, rather than chronologically.



Figure 1. Braintree clock as seen on the 2016 turret tour.



Figure 2. Braintree St Michael's as found.

St Michael's Braintree

Sometime in 2016, a redundant clock movement was taken from the church muniments room, where it had been gathering dust for 80 years, with the intention of disposing of it for scrap. A parochial church council (PCC) member, Rod Davey, refused to allow such a travesty and stowed it safely in his own garage.

He knew nothing about clocks, but realised that this was an interesting old mechanism and began looking for advice. This was where I came into the story. He contacted me through mutual friends and we considered the options for what turned out to be a fine early eighteenth century clock by Thomas Hutley of Coggeshall.

I was familiar with the name from the clock at Paycocke's House in Coggeshall (National Trust), and a 30-hour longcase that had been exhibited at our Branch exhibition in 2004, but I had not seen a turret clock by him before.

The weights were missing and the barrels were crumbling with woodworm, but the clock was otherwise

complete. It was decided to restore it to working order with a view to eventually displaying it in the church.

Our 2016 turret tour began in Rod's garage. By that time, a local woodturner had made two new barrels which were reassembled on to their arbors with new bronze bearings: the originals were iron, and in a poor state.

Apart from re-bushing two or three pivot holes and a new suspension spring, the major job was cleaning. We left the paint untouched, and treated the whole clock with microcrystalline wax.

The pallets had been refaced at some point with an incorrect angle on the entry pallet and the 'scape wheel teeth had suffered some damage from a run-through, but the escapement was working well enough for display purposes and we decided to leave it for the time being.

We revisited the clock at the end of the turret clock tour of 2017, of which more later...



Figure 3. Great Leighs round tower.



Figure 4. Great Leighs clock by Tucker.

Great Leighs

Tucker, of 42 Theobald's Road, London, is often said to be a recycler of clocks, adding his own name plate, but I have only encountered clocks with his name cast into the frame, and with distinctive features.

The charming round tower of Great Leighs contains an example of such a 'pukka Tucker', in this case a posted frame with cast bars in typical style, and with a signature brown paint that looks black in natural light. It has a dead beat escapement and rack striking and dates from 1868.

Incised into the stonework near the south door is a crude sundial, known as a scratch dial, with divisions for the daylight hours and a central hole for a stick to act as the gnomon.

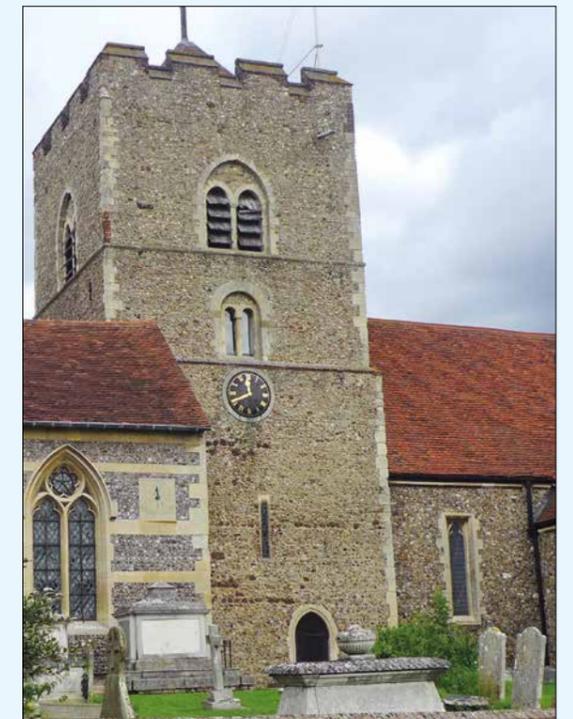


Figure 5. Boreham clock and sundial.



Figure 6. Inspecting the Boreham clock.

Boreham

Another Gillett clock is to be found here, this time a three train Gillett & Co. from 1883.

'OUR DAYS IN THE EARTH ARE AS A SHADOW' is the gloomy inscription on the 1909 sundial.

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Figure 7. Thaxted Benson.

Thaxted

The fine rack-striking Benson in Thaxted's grand parish church is an example of an ideal installation, in the centre of the tower with all-round access and housed in a closed wooden case.

The south and west dials are black with gold numerals and hands, while the north dial is of opalescent glass.



Figure 8. Thaxted dials from the inside.



Figure 9. Chiming machine at Wethersfield.

Wethersfield

Another example of a maker claiming a London made clock as his own work appears to be that at the village of Wethersfield.

On the setting dial is inscribed 'John Richmond - Chelmsford' and the following advertisement appeared in the Chelmsford Chronicle on 16 July 1813:

'John Richmond Duke St., Chelmsford. Wethersfield Church Clock.

Returns his sincere thanks to the Gentry, his friends, and the Public in general for the very liberal support he has been



Figure 10. Wethersfield.

favoured with for a series of years, and respectfully inform them that the above piece of machinery is completed, and may be seen at his house during the ensuing week only; its simple construction, power and neatness, combined with its utility as a parish clock, hopes he will not be thought too presuming in saying, it is not to be excelled in town or Country.'

And yet, can anybody doubt that the clock was manufactured by John Moore of Clerkenwell?

At the base of the tower is a hand-operated chiming barrel, no longer in use.



Figure 11. Terling dial.



Figure 12. Worm drive on the Terling clock.

Terling

Terling is one of the most picturesque villages in Essex, with its ford and pretty church on the large village green. The 1735 brick-built tower houses a clock with a carved stone dial.

The eighteenth-century clock was damaged during the Second World War, and it has been restored, with at least some of the wheel-work being replaced and a visible repair to the going barrel.

The leading-off work is also relatively new, presumably replacing the earlier worm drive. The two-start brass worm is still in place on the setting arbor and the socket where the pivot of the driven arbor would have rested is still there. An unusual arrangement.



Figure 13. Terling Clock Movement.



Figure 14. Great Bardfield's oversize dial.

Great Bardfield

We had no time to visit the Smith clock at Great Bardfield, but stopped briefly to view the huge dial which, in spite of being around 14ft across, is still invisible from almost everywhere in the village. It is, apparently, the second biggest dial in the country.



Figure 15. Finchingfield.

Finchingfield

A good Smith of Derby three-train clock with gravity escapement installed in 1902 for the grand sum of £158.

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Return to Braintree

A year later, we finished our turret clock tour with a talk presented at St Michael's church, Braintree, where the story began.

Since the previous tour, we have had a steel stand made (paid for with a generous donation from the BHI Ipswich Branch), fitted a new suspension spring and set up the clock in the nave of the church, in front of the organ.

It will run for half an hour or so when wound, and strike a few times on the ship's bell fixed to the frame. It is driven by weights kindly donated by Paul Platt.

From a horological point of view there are several interesting features.

The pendulum is suspended inside the frame, with a hinged offset crutch

The single hand was driven by an arrangement of two star-wheels which in turn drove a pinion at the top of the shaft and a contrate wheel taking the drive to the hand. This

mechanism is with the clock, but not installed.

Three studs mounted on the 12 hour countwheel would have let off a chiming, or tune mechanism at four-hour intervals: 12, 4 and 8 o'clock.

One of the frame bars bears a Swedish iron mark which we believe to be the 'hoop L' mark showing the highest grade of iron, namely Öregrund Iron from the Dannemora Mine 30 miles from Uppsala.

The pivots of the striking levers are held in two pairs of plates mounted on the centre frame bars, instead of the much more common arrangement at the sides of the frame.

On the brass plaque attached to the clocks is engraved:

*John Firmin William Searle Peers ChurchWardens
Thomas Hutley Coggeshall Fecit*

Rod spent time at the Essex Records Office and with the church's own records researching the provenance.



Figure 16. The clock at Great Waltham.



Figure 17. Great Waltham's tune player.

Gt. Waltham

Derelict examples of old tune players/chime drums/carillons are occasionally encountered in church towers, but this one appears to be in working order. The wheelwork could well be seventeenth century and it would chime the eight bells from the pegs in the large, solid wooden drum, via a later set of levers.

The pins to let off the chime mechanism are mounted on the countwheel of the two-train Gillett and Johnston clock of 1898.



Figure 18. Felsted clock by John Fordham.

Felsted

The Fordhams were prominent clockmakers in the area in the eighteenth century, with branches of the family in Braintree, Bocking, Coggeshall, Ongar and, in this case, Great Dunmow.

John Fordham, unusually, numbered his clocks. This is number 126 from 1701; nearby Great Dunmow has number 179, dated 1706 (the 30-foot single-span wooden ladder sadly prevented our group from visiting).

The curly finials are characteristic of at least two of the Fordhams (see *H7*, November 2010 p546).¹

There has been extensive renovation to this nicely situated, and well cared-for clock, including a dead-beat escapement.

He discovered that there had been an earlier clock in the tower and that the Hutley clock had been replaced by an electric movement as early as 1936 (it was itself replaced in the 1990s).

It turns out that the two church wardens were only in office together in 1704 and 1705, giving us a very solid date for the clock's manufacture.

Thomas Hutley died in 1726 and was succeeded by his son, also Thomas.

The iron-framed clock, beautifully lit, with its gilded hand mounted on the frame, in front of the Puginesque decoration of the organ case creates an effect far better than anything we had envisaged. The church's PCC is now fully supportive of the project and it has created a great deal of local interest.

More Observations

Terling and Braintree

Terling's cage-frame movement is anonymous, but comparison with St. Michael's, Braintree, suggests it could possibly be from the same stable. The shape of the corner bars and their finial-bearing spikes are remarkably similar; the striking levers are mounted on shaped plates on the centre bars in both cases and they both sport rather unusual leading-off work.

I would tentatively suggest that Terling's clock could be by Thomas Hutley, or his son, Thomas Junior. 1737 is scratched on the setting dial of the clock which would coincide with the rebuilding of the tower.



Figure 19. Bocking chair frame clock.

Figure 20. Bocking pallets on the pendulum.

Bocking

The clock at St Mary's, Bocking is driven by a well-housed electrical installation, but sulking in the corner of the tower is a cast iron, chair-framed movement by Knight of Birmingham, 1859. It has a dead-beat crutchless escapement with the pallets mounted on the cast iron pendulum rod. This is a clock built to last for centuries, but sadly discarded before its time.

Tune Players

It is probable that the Braintree clock would have released a mechanism very like that at Great Waltham, from the pins on the countwheel.

Waltham's barrel is some 200 years older than the clock, but the latter has been modified to trigger the old mechanism.

The time at which the chime would have been triggered is not immediately obvious, but measuring the angles of the pins reveals the pattern was the same for both clocks, chiming at 8, 12, 4 and 8. The 24 hour countwheel on the Waltham clock prevents it from chiming at night. Braintree residents would have been subjected to it every four hours, unless it was turned off in some way.

Whenever I write about turret clock tours, it follows a great deal of discussion and argument about details of the clocks, and much of what I write is a distillation of the knowledge and expertise of my friends and colleagues. I claim little originality and thank them all, especially those who disagree with me, as it spurs me into doing more research to verify the facts. Special thanks are due to John Cook, who researched and managed the tour, and Rod Davey who did all the hard and dirty work on the Braintree clock.



Figure 21. Hutley's countwheel with let-off pins.



Figure 22. Great Waltham countwheel.