

LANTERN CLOCKS

with square dials

by Brian Loomes, UK

We are all familiar with lantern clocks in what we usually think of as a 'traditional' form. These were made from as early as about 1600 and were virtually the only kind of household clock in Britain till the first pendulum clocks were introduced by Ahasuerus Fromanteel, as we now believe, a year or two before he advertised his clocks in 1658. But not long after the pendulum's introduction a new shape appeared, being a lantern clock with a square dial. They were very few in number in the earliest years, and in fact were never very numerous. But their occasional appearance is interesting and perhaps puzzling when we try to examine them.

London clockmakers, who led the field, at least in the earlier years, were very traditional. It is as if they hated change, and when innovation came along, they adopted it slowly or not at all. For example many of them continued to make lantern clocks with balance wheel control for many years after the much-more-accurate pendulum was known. So we ask ourselves: why would London clockmakers decide to experiment with a new style of a clock type that was long established? It is a pity they did not think it worth writing down those things which they did as a part of their everyday working practices. So we can do no more than guess.

Well, I can offer only a suggestion. Lantern clocks were poor timekeepers before the pendulum versions made regular appearance, which would be post-1660 at the earliest and, with most clockmakers of the period, usually post-1670/80, even post-1690. *IF* you were to set the time by using a good sundial



Figure 1. This very early example of a lantern clock with a 6.5in (16.5cm) square dial dates from about 1670, possibly even the 1660s. The floral engraved corners are a most unusual departure for a lantern clock and reminiscent of some of the very earliest longcase clocks by the finest makers.

and *IF* you had bothered to take account of the 'Equation of Time' (that is the variation between solar time and clock time), even after that pendulum lantern clocks were erratic timekeepers. We've read accounts of travellers wandering round London in the seventeenth century listening to church clocks striking the same hour at quite different times. That's how accurate they were.

Oh, yes, I have heard keen clock enthusiasts declare that they can get good timekeeping from a balance clock—if they stand over it with an oil can and a tin of lead shot pellets (if not an actual shotgun). I must say I never can. I tested one recently in a controlled-temperature room. It kept spot on time on day one over an eight-hour period. On day two in the same period it gained 20 minutes. On day three it gained ten minutes! Same clock same room, same settings. If I can't make one keep time when I threaten it with a big stick and a few expletives, what chance had the average owner in the seventeenth century? Very little, I would think.

But along with the pendulum came longcase clocks and a few bracket clocks, both of which were much more consistent timekeepers. As Fromanteel himself expressed it when describing the virtues of his new pendulum, they 'keep equaller time than any now made without this Regulator'. And these new clocks, with pendulums, had square dials. So perhaps the attempt by a handful of lantern clock makers to offer lantern clocks with square dials was done to make them resemble the new pendulum clocks, to demonstrate that these were a new and more accurate type of lantern clock with



Figure 2. The dial of this clock is exceptionally handsome yet it is unsigned. The style places this firmly as having been made in London by a very capable clockmaker with up-to-the-minute technical knowledge. Was it perhaps that the maker was dipping his toe in the water gently and withholding his identity until he saw the reaction to the new square dial?



Figure 3. The movement is pictured here before cleaning. It was made with a verge pendulum and was converted to long pendulum at a later date.



Figure 9. Quaker clockmaker Richard Roe of Epperstone in Nottinghamshire made this 7in (18cm) dial verge-pendulum lantern clock about 1690. His dial engraving is based on earlier London styling but develops into his own design.

Figure 7. The rear view of this clock shows its verge pendulum. It has full lantern clock features such as hoop, spurs, doors and frets

Figure 8. This verge-pendulum lantern clock by John Mason of London has an 8in (20cm) dial and dates from about 1690-1700.





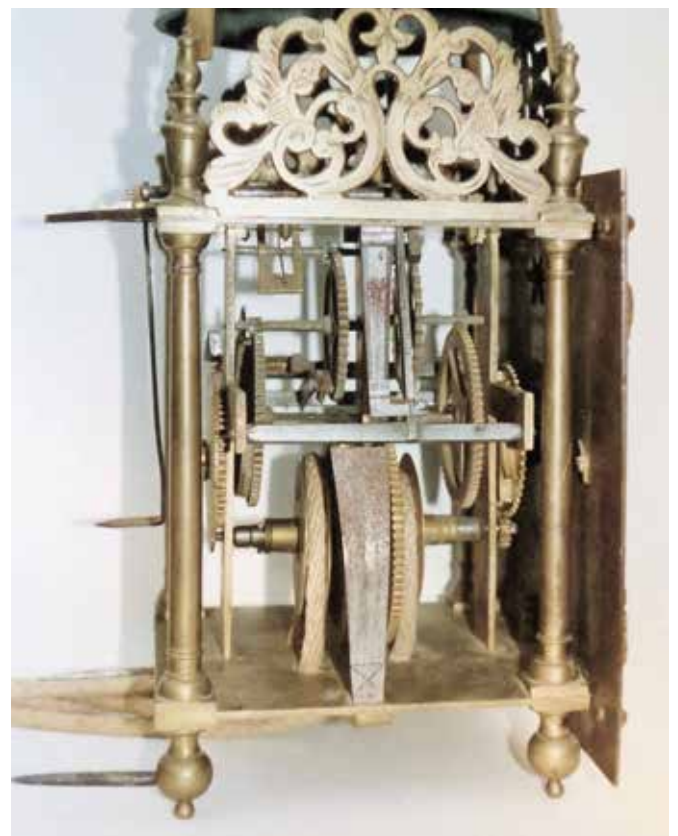
Figure 4. This magnificent verge-pendulum clock is by Andrew Prime, one of the Fromanteel 'clan', being brother-in-law of Ahasuerus Fromanteel. It dates from the 1660s. Here another early maker uses the corners for floral engraving.

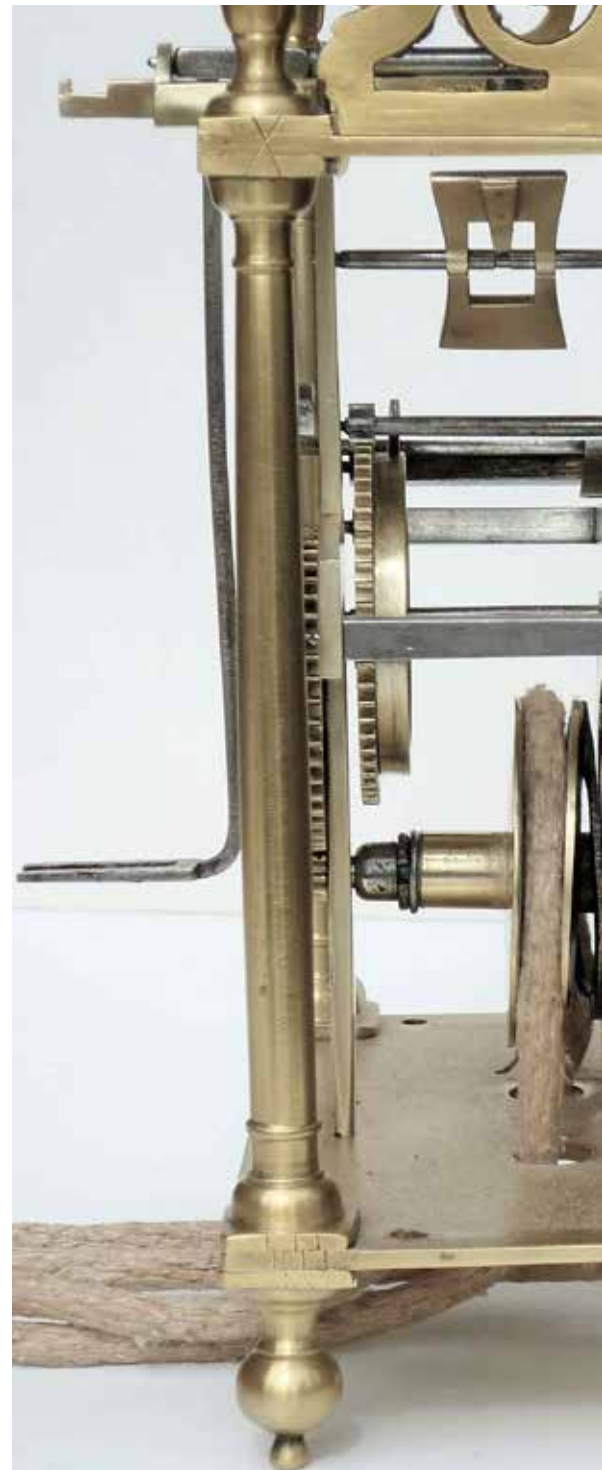
Figure 5. This handsome, 7in (18cm) dial clock by clockmaker and gunsmith Richard Monkland of Worcester dates from the 1690s. By now the dial corners are fitted with spandrels, just like bracket clocks and longcase clocks.

Figure 6. This clock by Markwick of London (probably James Markwick II) dates from about 1700, has a 10in (25cm) dial and looks like a longcase clock. Yet it is a true wall-hanging lantern clock complete with frets.

Figure 10. Henry Druce of Winkfield in Berkshire made this 8.5in (21.5cm) dial lantern clock about 1720, based on earlier London styling.

Figure 11. By now technology has moved on and Henry Druce's clock was built with anchor escapement and long pendulum for greater accuracy. Yet it is still a true wall-hanging lantern clock with hoop, spurs and frets.





pendulum.

As far as I know no balance-wheel lantern clock is known with a square dial. The square dial might have been intended to imply that in being instantly seen as being different from the rest by its very appearance, it offered the same sort of accuracy as the new longcase and bracket clocks. Whatever the reason, occasional clockmakers did make lantern clocks with square dials.

The earliest I can recall seeing on the open market is shown in **figure 1**. It has a pendulum, so we must assume it dates from no earlier than perhaps 1670. It could be earlier, as we know one or two clockmakers who did make exceptionally

early pendulum lantern clocks, though not with square dials. These include Peter Closon, who died about 1661, and Thomas Knifton, who died in 1667.

This happened with some clockmakers despite the general belief that the ‘secret’ of making clocks with pendulums was contained within the immediate kin and associates of Fromanteel himself until about 1670. So to suggest earlier than 1670 might be optimistic, yet even at 1670 it is a very early example of a square-dial lantern clock. **Figure 4** shows an example by one of the Fromanteel family, Andrew Prime, who came from Norwich, as Fromanteel himself had, and had married Fromanteel’s sister in 1646. His clock

therefore could quite possibly date from the 1660s.

A few London-made lantern clocks are known with square dials. But by 1700 the lantern clock was falling from fashion in London, so later examples tend to be almost always provincial. Lantern clocks were never very popular in Northern England, though a few makers produced them. Their popularity lasted in some eastern counties in East Anglia for long after they were extinct elsewhere—perhaps because they were a cheaper prospect than a longcase clock, which ultimately replaced lantern clocks everywhere. 📌



Figure 12 (top left). John Fordham of Dunmow in Essex numbered his clocks. Several numbered examples are known. This square-dial lantern clock, number 505, has a 7.5in (19cm dial and dates from the early eighteenth century.

Figure 13 (above). John Fordham's clock was made with anchor escapement and long pendulum for accuracy but still has all the other attributes of a true lantern clock. These clocks remained popular in East Anglia for longer than in other areas.

Figure 14 (top right). Barnaby Matthews of Aughton near Ormskirk in Lancashire did not always sign his clocks but his style is so distinctive as to be unmistakable. This circle-of-stars engraving could be done by a workman who was not a trained engraver.



Figure 15. Barnaby Matthews's long-pendulum clock is still a true lantern clock and dates from the early eighteenth century. It has many distinctive features of the region including pillars integral with the feet and finials, and an internal iron bellstrap.

