

VIRGIN ISLANDS CLOCK

One of the first English lanterns

Recently I came across one of the very first English lantern clocks, which dates from about 1600-15 and which seems to have spent most of its life in the West Indies before re-locating to mainland USA. I came to hear of the clock when the owners moved home in rural Georgia and they came across it lying unused in the basement, almost

Figure 1. This London-made lantern clock dating between about 1600 and 1615 appears to have been taken with settlers to the island of St Croix in the US Virgin Islands very shortly after it was made. Research suggests it was made in the workshops of Robert and Thomas Harvey.

forgotten. How it arrived in the Virgin Islands and when is not known. This is the relatively recent history of the clock in the words of the owner.

'In about 1930, there was a flu epidemic in our home town, Knoxville, Tennessee. My wife's mother, Anna Jo Hawkins, then about 15, was sent by train to Miami, where a relative put her on a steamer to

by Brian Loomes, UK



Christiansted, Virgin Islands, for a year to live with an aunt. Upon arrival, she was met by Nan Cox, a US public health nurse. Nan was a cousin of Jo's mother (Lula Hawkins). She stayed about a year.

'While there she befriended many Europeans. Upon leaving they gave her a number of gifts which were shipped back to the States. We have two Empire-period chairs, some native pottery, and a number of Danish porcelain pieces. Plus lots of pictures. Among them was this clock. It was not operational.

'It was a matter of Nan Cox sending items back to her cousin, Anna Jo's mother. Her husband, Charles Hawkins, considered himself a 'fix everything' man. That's why they sent the inoperative clock. After his death, we found several 'destroyed' watches among his belongings. The clock

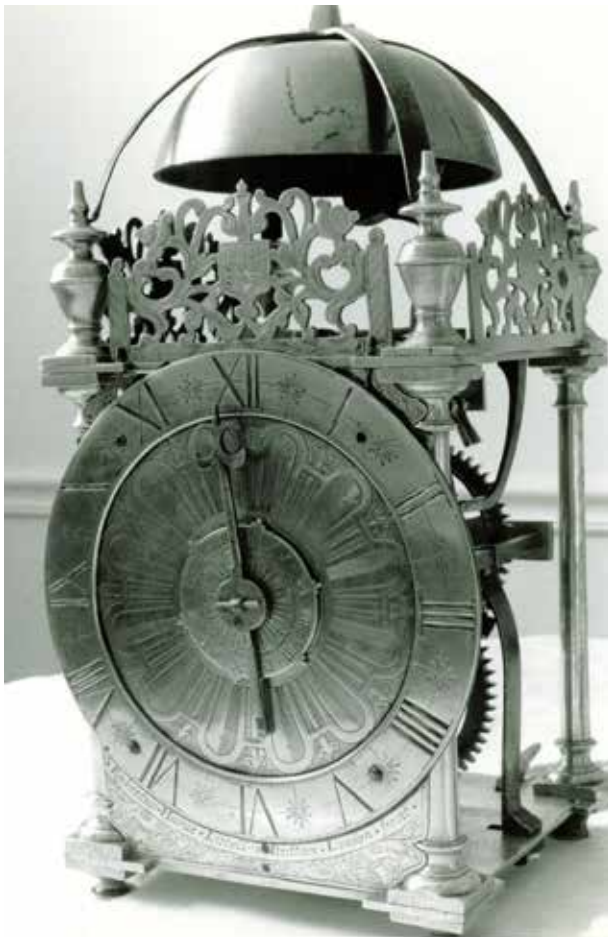


Figure 2. This clock is one of only two surviving lantern clocks signed by Robert Harvey of Little Britain, London, who died in 1615. Photograph by David Todd.



Figure 3. The second lantern clock known by Robert Harvey of London.



Figure 4. The dial design of the Virgin Islands clock is based on a geometrical radiating pattern of wedges each containing stylised floral infill. Original spear-head hand.

remained at the Hawkin's home in Knoxville until I found it about 1970. It then hung in our home in Dunwoody (then an unincorporated suburb of Atlanta).

'When it came to us we took it to a renowned Atlanta clock man who made some repairs that returned it to functioning. I took it to Henry Bowers, a company who have been in business since 1941 and have done much work for us. As I recall, he had to make a gear and solder hinge pins on two of the doors. I made a shelf, but after the first day of operation, my wife asked if I could put a silencer on it. When my wife went on a redecorating spree it was relegated to a box in the basement.'

Christiansted is on the island of St Croix in what is today the US Virgin Islands. It was once the capital of the Danish West Indies. The island was first settled in the 1620s by the English, who expelled the few Dutch and French residents and took over the island. The Spanish invaded in 1650 but were ousted by the French a year later, in whose possession the island remained

till the 1730s, when it was purchased by Denmark, in whose possession it remained for centuries. Cotton and sugar seem to have been the main produce.

There was only one place such clocks were made at this time and that was London. If English settlers took their possessions with them when they moved to the island, this is likely to have been between 1620 and 1650. It is quite possible this clock was taken to the island at that time—then, of course, in its original state with balance control. If settlers felt they had need of a clock then *the* only kind of household clock that existed during the period of English settlement was a balance lantern clock like this one.

No English could have settled in St Croix during the Spanish or French occupation. And by the time the Danes controlled the island there would have been little point in anyone taking an obsolete clock that did not keep time. It was converted to long pendulum much later, probably in the nineteenth century. It is otherwise in amazingly original condition, perhaps because there were no clock jobbers on the island to tamper

with it.

Till about 1615 lantern clocks had dial centre designs based on geometrical patterns radiating from the centre like the spokes of a cartwheel, or a sunburst, a starburst, or a compass rose. Sometimes the 'spokes' or 'rays' were straight, sometimes wavy, sometimes double rays or rays linked together by gadroon shapes. After about 1615 they were usually based on a circle of flowers joined together by floral scrollwork. The change of style took place within a very few years of that date—1615. We know that from the surviving evidence. A very occasional much later clock by William Bowyer and William Selwood of the 1630s and 1640s used geometric dial centres as a carryover of older styling rather than a continuation of it.

It soon became regular practice for a clockmaker to sign his work, usually by placing his name and maybe his location very prominently on the dial. Eventually this became required practice, as for instance once the Clockmakers' Company was established in 1631. Before that only occasional guilds might require it of their members, such



Figure 5. The movement seen from the right shows the conversion to anchor escapement. The straight hammer counter is a very early feature.



Figure 6. The rear view shows the iron countwheel and the distinctive filed cutback in the crossbar arm to allow the strike levers to return. The strike fly, originally positioned in the main crossbar, has been re-positioned to one side to avoid it catching the anchor arbor after conversion to pendulum.

as the Goldsmiths' Company on gold watches. Today we have become so used to seeing the maker's name on a clock that we regard unsigned ones as unusual. But at the time the very earliest lantern clocks were made, say before 1620, there was no such requirement. This means that we need to look at the subject in a different light and expect to see the earliest clocks unsigned with a signed example being a very rare exception.

Robert Harvey was the first lantern clock maker to sign his clocks, probably to advertise his skills, and he was the only one to do that before 1615. It so happens that he died in that year, which gives us an excellent cut-off date. We know of two lantern clocks signed by him and both have geometric-patterned gadrooned centres. His third known clock is not a lantern clock. All the remaining geometric-patterned, London-made clocks we know today are unsigned.

Like virtually all the other clocks with geometric centres the Virgin Islands clock is unsigned and we can date it by

several features to between 1600 and 1615. These geometric clocks are very few in number. I doubt if more than a dozen are known. This very small group of unsigned, geometric-design clocks together with the two signed by Robert Harvey, represent the very first lantern clocks made in London and it is very likely they all came from the same workshop.

Robert Harvey's brother, Thomas, began working officially at the end of his apprenticeship in 1615, but he used flowers on his dials. So did Robert Harvey's fellow-trainee, Henry Stevens, who probably worked for the Harveys initially, starting up in his own right from about 1620. This Virgin Islands clock has a very unusual combination of floral, leaf-like motifs, set within channels radiating geometrically cartwheel-fashion, almost a half-way point between the two styles.

Robert Harvey was the son of John Harvey, a member of the Clothworkers' Company, who died in 1602. No signed clocks are known by John Harvey. John Harvey had been apprenticed from

1571 to 1578 under Peter Medcalfe, also a Clothworkers' Company member, who worked from 1565 till his death in 1592 and by whom no signed clocks are known either. We know that as a youth of about nine or ten Robert Harvey lived and 'worked' under Peter Medcalfe's roof. Another Medcalfe live-in workman in 1592 was Simon Harvey, almost certainly another son of John, freed in 1608 in the same Company as his supposed father and two brothers, which was normal family practice. No work survives by Simon. Both Simon and Robert (described as 'a boy which I keepe') were left bequests in Peter Medcalfe's will in 1592.

John Harvey's life requires more research but we know he worked away from London for long periods at a time. In February 1588/89 his daughter Jane, was baptised at St Nicholas's in Newcastle upon Tyne. The fact that a new turret clock was set up at Newcastle Guildhall in 1586 and that there was no local clockmaker there at that time implies he may have been temporarily living there either to make or install it, perhaps taking the clock from London

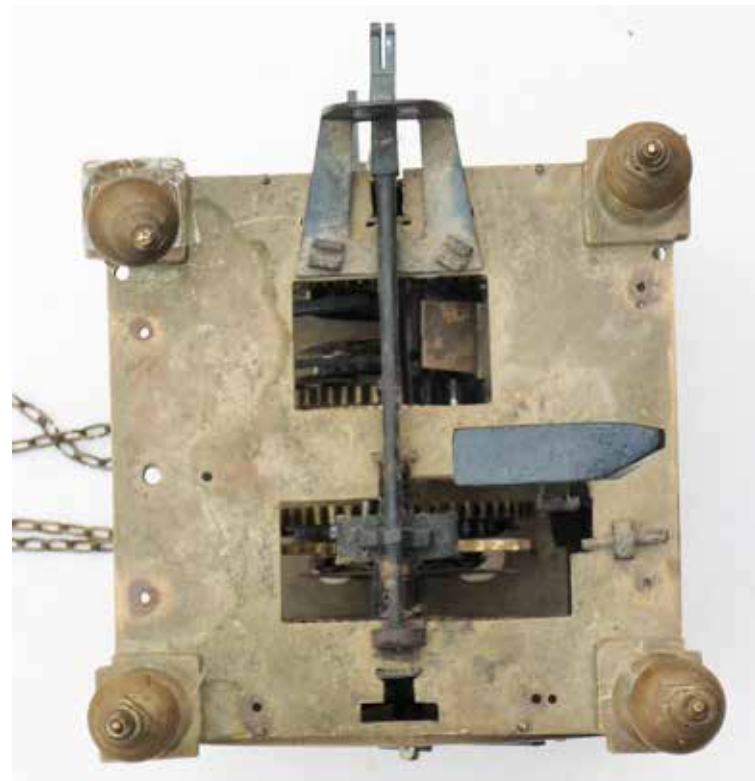
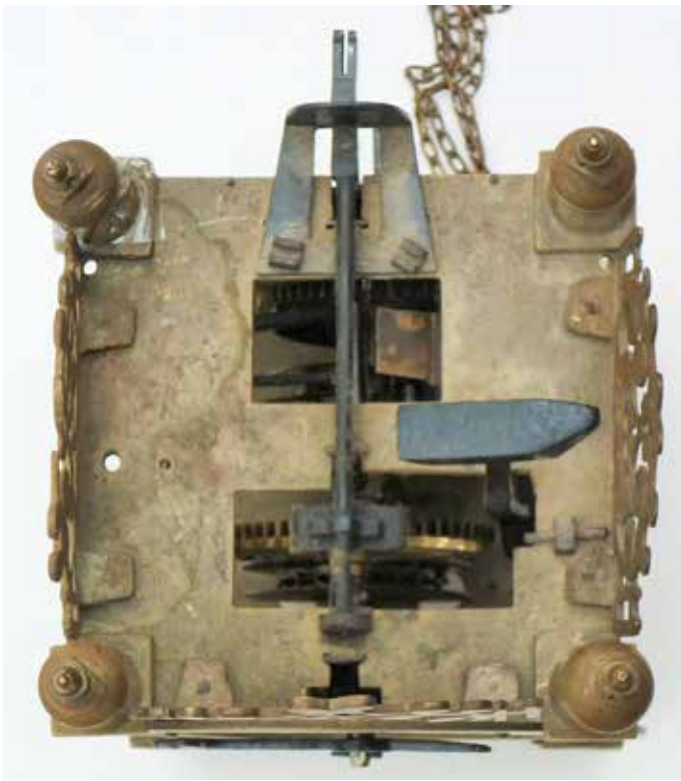


Figure 7. This top view shows the frets in position, held in place by iron pegs, a method known in only one other clock, a lantern clock by Thomas Harvey.

Figure 8. With the frets removed this view shows the peg holes for attachment. The low position of the anchor arbor shows the reason for re-positioning the fly.



Figure 9. The three frets left to right as they fit on the clock. All three have minor repairs yet they still contain the iron holding pegs.

The journey from London to Newcastle at that time was easiest by sea, especially if transporting something as heavy and unwieldy as a turret clock. We know the Harveys worked on turret clocks as Robert Harvey is documented repairing the clocks of several London churches between 1602 and 1614. We know in February 1598/99 John Harvey was regarded as skilled enough to accompany organ builder Thomas Dallam as 'engineer' on a voyage to deliver an amazing organ clock, a gift from the Queen to the Sultan of Turkey. He returned in May 1600.

John Harvey's periodic long absences from London probably explain why his sons, Simon and Robert Harvey, were living and working in Peter Medcalfe's house in 1592. Peter Medcalfe worked in Southwark, a notoriously lawless district, where tradesmen could flout the law without fear of prosecution - and they

did! Southwark was close enough to London to benefit from the massive trade available there but far enough away to escape any attempted enforcement of trading laws by the trade guilds.

John Harvey himself may well have still worked for Medcalfe till 1592, when the latter died. John Harvey presumably then, if not earlier, set up his own workshop in St Botolph's Aldersgate parish, where he died ten years later (in 1602). His workshop produced only three clockmakers we know of: firstly his son, Robert Harvey, who was working from at least 1602 (though not freed till 1604) till his death in 1615; secondly his son, Thomas Harvey, who was apprenticed to brother Robert in 1608 and was working in his own right from 1615; and thirdly John's former apprentice Henry Stevens, who was working from 1599 till his death in or about 1638. If Simon Harvey made any

clocks they are as yet undiscovered.

The sequence of events suggests the following scenario. Henry Stevens became apprenticed to John Harvey from about 1591/92, when Peter Medcalfe became sick enough to make his will (he was not yet 50) and Harvey began to set up on his own. Stevens was freed in 1598. John Harvey went off on his extended trip to Turkey in that year, February 1598/99, aged about 42. His son, Robert, was about 16, too young to run a business or be a freeman, so John Harvey must have left Henry Stevens (aged about 22) to run the Harvey business in his absence.

John returned from Turkey in May 1600 and died two years later, perhaps from some disease he picked up during the long hot summer they were delayed there. When he died in 1602, aged only about 45, his son, Robert, was still not yet a freeman. He was not freed till



Figure 10. The lugged bell seen attached to the bell strap or 'spider' with its finial pinned in place. Very few English bells of this type are known.

Figure 11. The lugged bell dismantled from its spider, showing the casting lug and the finial.

1604, probably because he was not yet 21. So Stevens would still be running the business.

Robert Harvey was freed in 1604 and presumably then ran things under or with Stevens (then about 27) till his own death in 1615. Then young Thomas Harvey was freed in 1615, about 21 years of age, and I imagine that Stevens, aged about 38, left the Harvey workshop between 1615 and 1620, at any rate by 1620, after which we know his three signed screwed-chapter-ring clocks were made. Stevens seems to be the only known maker to have held his dials in place by a chapter ring screw above XII, so much so that some collectors even regard this feature as identifying a clock as made by him.

If Henry Stevens worked in the Harvey workshop, or perhaps even ran it at one time, this would explain the two unsigned screwed-chapter-ring clocks we know of (in Robert Harvey's style and with Robert Harvey's gadrooned dial centres) as being made by or with Stevens at the time before he set up on his own, that is made before 1615/20.

How could Robert Harvey, Thomas Harvey and Henry Stevens emerge from their training as fully-fledged makers of lantern clocks if their master (and his master) did not make them? John Harvey and Peter Medcalfe *must* have made lantern clocks, yet not a single example has ever been recorded bearing the name of either of them. Perhaps we have not recognised them because they did not sign them.

The only other maker of lantern clocks known to us at this very early period was William Bowyer of the Pewterers'

Company, but no clocks by him are known before about 1620, by which time dial decoration is floral. He died about 1653. As for signed examples of their work, three clocks are known signed by Robert Harvey, three by Thomas Harvey and three by Henry Stevens. Many more are known by William Bowyer, perhaps as many as 40. I myself have photographs of 30 clocks by Bowyer.

The very small number of signed clocks from the three 'Harvey school' clockmakers alongside the large number from Bowyer is further cause to suppose that some of their work was sold unsigned. In fact two or three unsigned clocks that have come on to the market in recent years are believed to be the work of Thomas Harvey as are one or two thought to be by Henry Stevens. This seems the more likely when we consider that Robert Harvey's death in June 1615 (when Thomas was still an apprentice and therefore legally unable to sell work bearing his name) left Thomas and his widowed mother, as well as Robert's own widow, with no form of income. Thomas would have been forced to sell clocks but perhaps dare not sign them being still unqualified.


This Virgin Islands clock has interestingly small dimensions, having plates 5½in square, the chapter ring 5¾ in diameter and ¾in wide, pillar height 10in. Dimensions of one clock by Robert Harvey are the same, one by Thomas Harvey the same and another very similar. Hardly any other full-size lantern clocks have chapter rings as narrow as ¾in except for half a dozen very early unsigned, geometric-centred clocks, which probably originated in the

Harvey workshop. By the late 1620s most lantern clocks have a chapter ring 1in wide or more. William Bowyer was perhaps an exception, as he probably just continued what was the norm when he began working.

The Virgin Islands clock has its chapter ring riveted in place. Thomas Harvey's is screwed. So is one by Robert Harvey. Most examples are pinned in place by chapter ring feet, a very different method, which became traditional.

The half-hour marker on the Virgin Islands clock is a star on a stalk. Most of these very early clocks have a star, floating or anchored by a stalk. The clocks by Robert and Thomas Harvey have this. So too do the earlier clocks by William Bowyer and Henry Stevens. By the mid 1620s this half-hour device has changed.

This clock is one of only a handful of very early London clocks, perhaps no more than five or six, which have an original lug-fitting bell complete with original bellstrap and original hollow finial held in place by a pin. There is no doubt that the lugged bell was the first type used on lantern clocks. It is found even before 1600, and was especially popular in mainland Europe. One of Robert Harvey's two lantern clocks has a lugged bell, though today lacking its finial. So does one by Thomas Harvey.

In England the lugged bell was an occasional, perhaps experimental, method used on London clocks only during the first 20 years, say 1600 to 1620. It is not recorded in London after 1628. Most clocks, even most very early ones, have the normal type of bell 

which attaches by a nut to the thread on the finial stem. This became the standard method used throughout the entire period of lantern clock making, probably because it was simpler to make and use.

The frets on this clock are of a strapwork pattern used in the first decades of the seventeenth century by Robert Harvey and Henry Stevens and William Bowyer amongst others. Two frets have repairs but all three are the surviving original frets. Each fret attaches to the top plate of the Virgin Islands clock by two iron pins or pegs instead of the normal screws used by all other clockmakers. This feature is known on only one other clock and that is one by Thomas Harvey. This must surely suggest a link between Thomas Harvey and the maker of this unsigned clock.

The countwheel and hoop are of iron, as with Thomas Harvey's clocks and a few other clocks of this vintage. The original iron hand is of the spear-head type used by both Robert and Thomas Harvey and Henry Stevens.

Because London lantern clocks hardly ever carry the date of making, we struggle to put these unsigned geometric-centre clocks in date sequence. We can set them all as dating between 1600 and 1615, a time when the only name known on London-made lantern clocks is Robert Harvey. The Virgin Islands clock could date anywhere within that period. Only two or three (possibly English?) lantern clocks are dated older than this group and they were very much Continental in type. One is dated 1567, another with worn year '—77' is thought to be 1577, another 1598. All have starburst centres.

Fate probably compelled the Harvey family, not once but twice, to sell some of their clocks unsigned. In 1614 Robert Harvey had been seriously ill for some time, so serious that when he signed his will in February 1615 his signature reveals that he could barely hold the pen. He died in June. He was obviously very aware that with Thomas still an apprentice (and therefore not allowed to sell his own clocks) his imminent death would leave the family with no income for the best part of a year—till Thomas was freed in December 1615. In his will he states that 'having been and still being sick and weak in body' he leaves Thomas 'one of my clocks immediately' as well as all his tools once his apprenticeship is finished. Everything else was left to his wife Mary.

But we can see from the wording that he had several clocks already to hand—'one of my clocks' implies he left more than one. Aware that they might be sold after his death, this may have been a further reason for him to leave them



Figure 12. The dial removed to show the movement. The crossbar, which carries the two strike detent arbors (on the left in this view), does not need filing back at the front, as it does at the back (seen in figure 6).

unsigned.

Oddly enough this very same situation had arisen with John Harvey's death (Robert's father) in September 1602 aged only about 45. Robert could not be made free till 1604, which he subsequently was and which year was presumably when he came 'of age' at 21. So there was a period from September 1602 till 1604 when Robert, still unfree, was not allowed to sell clocks under his own name, again leaving the family with no income. We know Robert was already working then as he is documented as repairing certain church clocks from 1602. But it seems he must have sold unsigned clocks in at least that two-year period.

In summary we can assume John Harvey made lantern clocks, which were probably sold unsigned. His son, Robert, probably sold unsigned clocks regularly, but at least between 1602 and

1604, then maybe again between 1614 and 1615. His younger son, Thomas, probably did the same in 1614-15.

One particular constructional feature of this clock is one that has hardly been commented on previously. The tops and bases of the pillars (and therefore also of the finial bases and feet tops) stand proud as do the top and bottom plates to receive them. In other words the plates are cut back along all four sides of their outer edges except where they meet feet and finials at the corners. This is an exceptionally rare feature practised by only a handful of clockmakers (perhaps only three whose names we know) in the very earliest years of lantern clock making.

This observation relates only to clocks with separate feet and finials, not those where they are integral.

Robert Harvey did this (very awkwardly) on one of his two clocks, not



Figure 13. This early unsigned gadrooned clock from the Harvey workshop has the dial attached by a screw above 'XII', a characteristic feature used later only by Henry Stevens on his signed clocks. Front fret replaced later.



Figure 14. A second unsigned example of a gadrooned clock with the Henry Stevens influence of a screw-held dial, also from the Harvey workshop. Original 'IS' frets.

on the other. Thomas Harvey did it on his clocks. Henry Stevens did it on two of his three clocks (including the one dated 1620), but not on the third.

The cut-back plates occur on two unsigned clocks that have gadrooned centres and screw-held chapter rings and the near-unique frets that Thomas Harvey used, having the 'IS' casting mark on them. This fret is totally unrecorded except on these three clocks and one other unsigned gadroon-centre clock recently reported.

I feel the two unsigned 'IS' clocks are from the Robert Harvey workshop with the influence of Henry Stevens. In fact, as I believe Henry Stevens worked with the Harveys prior to setting up on his own, this amounts to the same thing. Stevens is the only clockmaker whose name we know who continued the screwed-chapter-ring feature on his three later clocks that bear his name.

The identity of the IS brass caster may well be goldsmith Isaac Symmes, who was working from 1604 till his death in 1622, but that aspect requires much more research.

All the above clocks with cut-back plates seem to have come from the Harvey workshops. Apart from these instances I can find this cut-back plate system used on only two other clocks, both early, one unsigned and one by John Hobson. William Bowyer did not do this, nor did other makers, early or even later. It was a system virtually exclusive to the Harvey school.

Another factor may be significant. The rear crossbar of this clock carries the two arbors for striking, one above the other on the right (as seen from the back in figure 6). The right-hand crossbar arm has the top filed down at an angle to allow the drop of the detent, and is done almost as an afterthought. The same

crossbar is used at the front of the clock, where it does not need filing back. I can't claim this to be a definitive feature, but it is very interesting to note that Robert and Thomas Harvey and Henry Stevens did this. It looks as if this was an early Harvey school feature, which would suggest the clock was a product of the Harvey workshop.

All in all the Virgin Islands clock has so many features of the Harvey clockmaking workshop, that I feel it must be by one of them. If we could pin it down, the likeliest would be Robert Harvey between 1602 and 1614 or Thomas Harvey from the period between 1614 and December 1615. But as John Harvey, his two sons, Robert and Thomas, and Henry Stevens all worked together at such times as their lives overlapped, all we can do is ascribe it to the Harvey workshop. 📌