

BALDWIN POTTER

of Stockport and Ireland

How many lantern clocks are known from Stockport? None. How many are known from Ireland? None.

by Brian Loomes, UK

Till now that is, as one came to light recently by a clockmaker who moved from one to the other. That clockmaker was Baldwin Potter, a maker unrecorded in England till this late seventeenth-century lantern clock came to light signed by him 'Baldwin Potter de Stockport Fecit'. But not only is Potter the only man known to have made a lantern clock there, but he is the earliest clockmaker to be recorded at all in Stockport, and I believe also the only clockmaker in Ireland known to have made a lantern clock.

Checking up on the earliest clockmakers at Stockport proved interesting. In this task that recent fine book by the late Edmund Davies, *GREATER MANCHESTER CLOCKS & CLOCKMAKERS*, proved vital. It seems recent, yet it did not surprise me on looking at the title page that, in this 'modern' world, where policemen appear to start working from the age of about 12, to find it was published as far back as 2007.

Edmund and I



often exchanged notes on obscure things such as the names of clockmakers who existed only as names on ancient scraps of paper! One or two exceptionally early Stockport makers are listed in his book, some of them recorded as watchmakers rather than clockmakers, though it is always hard to know whether either term is used indiscriminately by those who wrote these things down.

All of these very earliest Stockport ones are known by name only. In other words no

Figure 1. This lantern clock made in the 1680s by Baldwin Potter hits several 'firsts'. It is the only domestic clock known by him at Stockport, the only lantern clock known from Stockport and the oldest clock of any kind known from that town. It is also the only lantern clock known by a clockmaker who worked in Ireland. It is signed 'Baldwin Potter de Stockport Fecit'.

item of work is recorded by any of them. Martha Brookshaw, a watchmaker of Stockport, was buried on 30th June 1697 aged 88. This means she was born in 1609, and was presumably a watchmaker's widow, though of course she may not have lived there very long. ⚙️

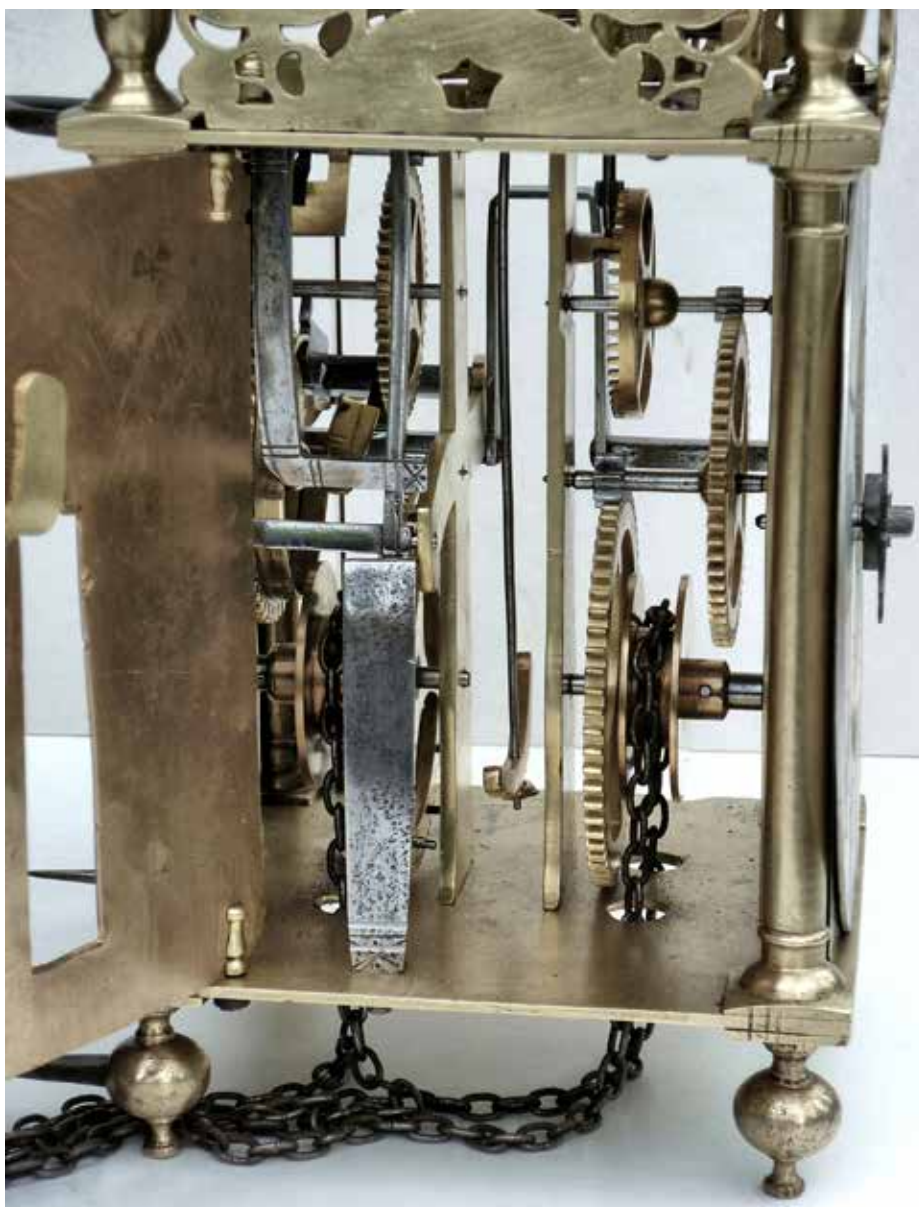


Figure 2. This left-hand view of the movement shows it was made with a 'centre' pendulum, that is swinging between the trains. The open door shows the vertical slot which allows the anchor-shaped pendulum to pass. X-marks filed into the steelwork were believed to protect the object (and household) from witchcraft and are quite often seen on lantern clocks.

On 30th November 1681 watchmaker Roger Hough of Stockport had a daughter baptised there. He died in 1691 leaving a will. Roger is sometimes mis-recorded as Robert. Watchmaker Francis Newton had children born there from 1681 and died in 1694 leaving a will. Ralph Daniel was described as a clockmaker of 'Stopford', Cheshire, (the old name for Stockport) when he was married by licence on 7th January 1697/98 at Manchester to Margaret Smith of Moss Side.

Then we come to a small group of inter-connected, and perhaps inter-related, clockmakers by whom we do know examples of their craft. John Bancroft was working by 1706, and quite

probably earlier, and we know of several longcase clocks by him. Josiah Stringer was apprenticed to him in 1706, freed in 1712, and several longcase clocks are known by him. John Shepley maintained the church clock from 1712 onwards, though in his earlier years he worked at Hyde. William Davenport (sometimes called William Key) was apprenticed in 1728 to John Shepley. Those with alternative surnames were often the result of a birth to an un-married girl, adopting the name of whichever parent seemed convenient.

We know longcase clocks by all those in this slightly 'later' group of early Stockport makers. But none of the earlier or later of these two groups is known to



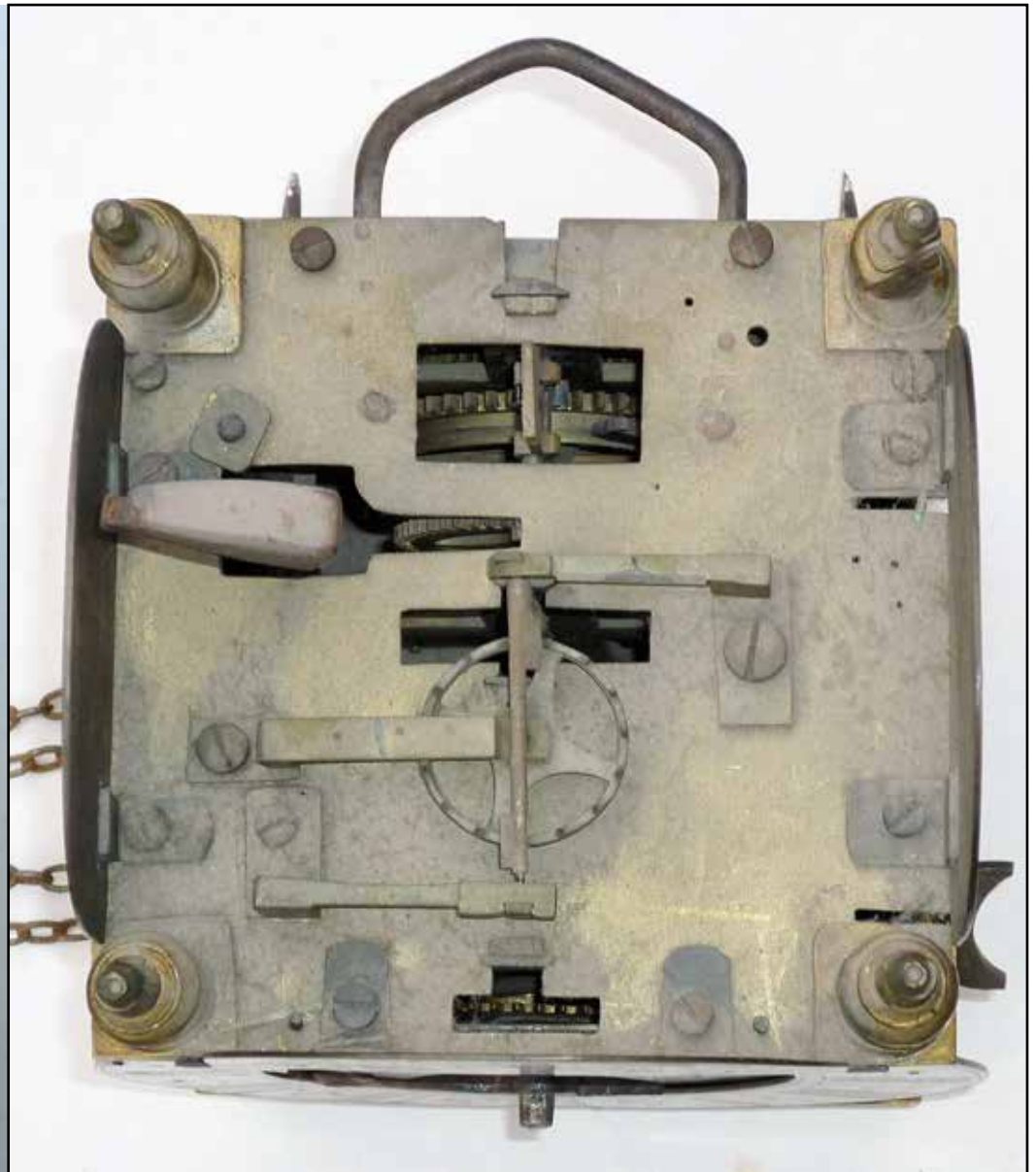


Figure 3 (left). This angled view from the right with the door closed shows how the anchor-shaped pendulum fluke swings through the slot. The angle of swing is exaggerated in the photograph. This type of centre pendulum lantern clock sometimes had 'wings', but not all, as evidenced by this one.

Figure 4 (above). Top view of the clock before cleaning.

have left any piece of work behind as old as Baldwin Potter's single lantern clock. And none of them left a lantern clock.

When I checked I found that Baldwin Potter was recorded in my own book *WATCHMAKERS & CLOCKMAKERS OF THE WORLD* as a clockmaker working at Belturbet in County Cavan in Ireland about 1790. The date proved inaccurate and was modified later, when a record emerged of a sundial made there by him and dated to 1708. It seemed reasonable to suppose that he moved from Stockport to Belturbet and I set about investigating further.

Baldwin Potter proved an elusive man to track down. The parish registers revealed two or three family groups

named Potter, probably all related to each other, living in Stockport from as early as 1600. But there was no baptism there of Baldwin. I was able to estimate later that he would have been born about 1660, and that was a time when parish records were often incomplete or badly kept. His absence from the records of that period was therefore not surprising.

There was an earlier Baldwin Potter who died in 1616 about 30 miles away at Rainhill, who could be a relative or maybe just happened to have the same name by chance. I did find evidence that Baldwin Potter the clockmaker was living in Stockport in February 1683/84 when his daughter, Sarah, was baptised there and he was still there when she was buried



Figure 5. Detail of the fine engraving in the dial centre. The craftsmanship is of the highest order but the design, of large, bold tulips, is very much a style of this region, not London. The finely-cut hand is original.

Figure 6. This 9in horizontal sundial was made by Baldwin Potter at Belturbet, Ireland, in 1708, 'The Gift of Jon: Hamilton'. Photograph courtesy of Wilkinsons Auctioneers, Doncaster.

in February 1686/87. After that there is no further mention of him there, but this gives us a nicely-defined time span in which to date the lantern clock.

The next time we hear of him he was living in Belturbet in County Cavan. In May of 1699, he took William Flemming as apprentice there to learn the trade of clockmaker, including that of a smith (supposedly silversmith). So we can set his move to Ireland as between about 1688 and 1698. He may have gone to Ireland as part of the English army sent by King William in 1688 or as a settler there shortly after.

He is mentioned in *WATCHMAKERS & CLOCKMAKERS IN IRELAND*, a compilation assembled largely by the late William Galland Stuart, who sadly died in 1995. The book was published posthumously in 2000 by his widow, June Stuart, and David Arthur Boles. I used to exchange information with William now and then and he was always generous with his data. However in the typical last-minute editorial panic of compiling the end

pages of one of my own books I failed to mention him in the acknowledgements, a shame I will carry forever.

William recorded two longcase clocks he had come across made by him at Belturbet and dating from around 1720. But he also records a Baldwin Potter at Mullingar in 1739, something we will look at later.

I was able to glean a few snippets here and there from the archives of Belturbet Corporation. In 1703 he was a member of the Common Council and by 1709 was joint Treasurer of the Corporation. In 1704 he was paid £4.10s.0d (£4.50p) as payment 'in full for the town clock'. It has been suggested this was payment for making the clock, but this seems to me not nearly enough and is more likely to have been for repair work on an existing clock. He was later paid £2.10s.0d (£2.50p) a year to maintain it and to perform other tasks for the Council including engraving work. In 1704 he had the right to graze four cows on the commons.

A 9in horizontal sundial is on record made by him there and dated 1708. Strangely enough this same sundial turned up quite recently at auction and is pictured below. It is signed 'Baldwin Potter Belturbett Fecit', 'Lat. 54. 0m' (about ten miles south of Belturbet), and 'The Gift of Jon. Hamilton', then another line of text erased and the year 1708. The line of erased text makes you wonder why. It might have carried the name of the person or institution it was made for, such as a church. Subsequent owners sometimes erased such things, as did thieves seeking to conceal the origin.

By 1722 there were other Potters living there—Thomas, William, Robert and Baldwin junior, presumably all his sons. William became free in 1720 and later became overseer of the highways. Presumably he followed the same trade as his father as he made the town seal in 1725 for eight shillings. Baldwin senior was often referred to as 'Mr Potter', which suggests he was held in high regard. Baldwin senior continued to care for the



Figure 7. Detail of the sundial signature, which also shows the erased inscription we will never know the meaning of. Photograph courtesy of Wilkinsons Auctioneers, Doncaster.

town clock till 1731, when the job was carried on by William till 1742 or even later. It is thought Baldwin died about 1733. He would have been about 73 years old.

In 1734 a Baldwin Potter, presumably Baldwin junior, was appointed constable, but six months later he was replaced by James Stanford as the records say Potter had 'departed'. It seems that Baldwin junior had moved to Mullingar, where in 1739 he was indicted for counterfeiting hallmarks on spoons.

On 13th August 1739 his name appeared on a list of felons ordered to be transported for seven years, being classed as a vagabond. Presumably he avoided deportation, or else returned to the area later, as in 1757 a judgement was made against him for a debt of £1. 18s. 0d. (£1.90p) but he was 'not to be found within the Corporation', which implies he had skedaddled.

The debt was paid (perhaps by a brother?) but in 1757 he was charged with two other debts and a horse he

owned was seized and sold. What became of Baldwin junior after that is not known.

The clock itself was made with a verge pendulum of the type we often call a centre pendulum because it swings in the centre of the clock between the trains. Such pendulums sometimes have a normal pear-shaped bob. Others, like this one, have a bob shaped like an anchor fluke (not to be confused with an anchor escapement), so that it makes a more interesting feature as the clock runs, when it appears first at one side, then the other.

Some clocks of this type have 'wings' on the doors, sometimes called 'bats-wings', but others, like this one, don't. Some argue as to which came first. Some even suggest that all bats-wing versions are no more than alterations to the doors done in the nineteenth or even twentieth century to make them look prettier. I have seen examples with wings that seemed much newer than the clock, and some that didn't. Apples may be red but not all

red things are apples.

The engraving is finely done by a superb hand, and locally I would suggest. Most lantern clocks of this era feature tulips to a greater or lesser extent, usually rising from a central stem above VI, which was probably to keep the whole dial in balance. But these tulips are larger and bolder than their London equivalent and almost have that look of coming from a central vase or bowl at VI, which London ones don't. The Ogdens of West Yorkshire and Henry Webster and his colleagues at Aughton in Lancashire come to mind, and I am sure with a little searching we could soon find others from the North-west.

What collectors enjoy most is to find a 'first', a clock that is the oldest or scarcest or most unusual of its kind. In that respect this clock hits many targets—first lantern clock known from Stockport, first domestic clock of any kind known from Stockport, first lantern clock by a clockmaker in Ireland. In these respects it ticks all of the boxes. 🍏