

# THOMAS STOCKTON

## A particularly interesting clock

I get lots of queries from correspondents and they are often of a very routine

nature. But now and then something particularly interesting crops up, and the following recounts one such instance. An American owner of a 30-hour longcase clock contacted me to ask if I could analyse his clock and its age. It is signed by Thomas Stockton of Ellerby, a maker previously undocumented. Various suggestions had been made about its age and quality, mostly wildly inaccurate.

The clock is known to have belonged to the same family since it was first made, his family, the Hansells, who farmed from at least the early eighteenth century at Ellerby in Lythe parish near Whitby in North Yorkshire. The Hansells were tenants of the Marquis of Normandy, and lived at Nineteen Lands, a house then and now owned by the Marquis. Nineteen Lands is about two miles from Ellerby and about two miles from Lythe.

Research had uncovered more than one Thomas Stockton there, but the question was how old was the clock and which Thomas Stockton made it. The attribution of age to the clock was made more complicated because it had suffered during its travels to and across America. But more of the clock later.

I finally established that the Thomas Stockton who made the clock was baptised at the parish church of Lythe near Whitby in North Yorkshire on 18<sup>th</sup> May 1719, the son of another Thomas Stockton and his wife, Mary, nee Mary Allile, whom he had married there on 5<sup>th</sup> May 1718. Thomas Stockton senior was

---

by Brian Loomes, UK

---

of residence may not have been used precisely in the entries, which were not always jotted down with great care. After all, the parish clerk knew well enough which people he referred to and did not think about some researcher struggling to interpret his records three centuries later. If it was used precisely, it implies they moved from Barnby to Ellerby between 1722 and 1724. If used carelessly they maybe lived at Ellerby all the time. Thomas's burial has not been found, but then parish registers are seldom complete and usually contain many errors and omissions.

I know from personal experience how careless clerks can be. I have seen my name written as Zoomes, Goomes, Blooms, and Toomes and Doomes, and I have been driven to stating my location falsely as Pateley Bridge, because when correctly using the adjacent village of Beverley as my address, I found my

mail was sent to Beverley about 70 miles from here. When they failed to locate me at Beverley and returned it 'not known', the postal authorities finally sent my mail to Beverley, or some of it anyway! And this in an age when most people supposedly learn to read and write!

On 27<sup>th</sup> November 1746 Thomas junior, the clockmaker, was married at Lythe to Katherine Postgate, both of Lythe parish. On 18<sup>th</sup> September 1748 they had a son named Isaac baptised there. It is not known what became of Isaac. On 7<sup>th</sup> March 1750/51 they had a son named Francis baptised there. On both occasions they were described as of Ellerby. —

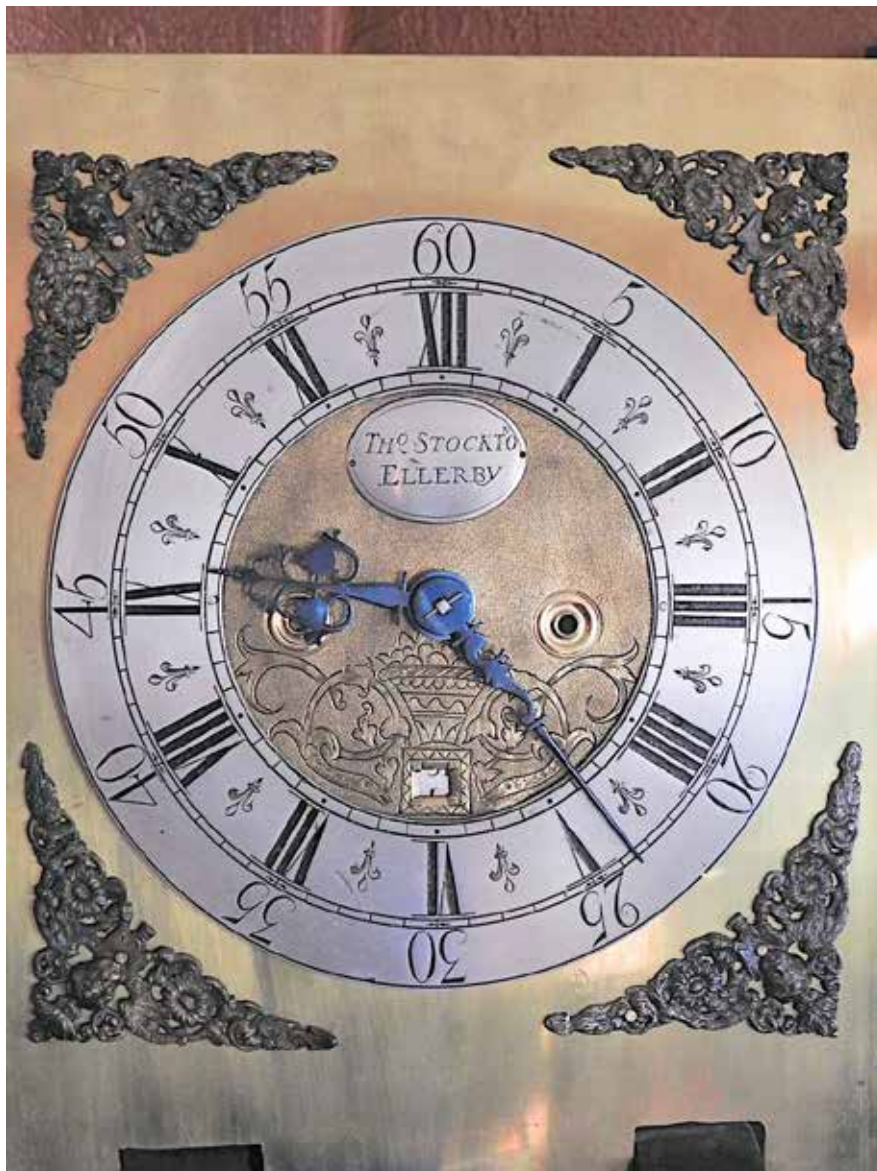


Figure 1. The dial of the Thomas Stockton of Ellerby, the part outside the chapter ring being a modern replacement.

a farmer and there is no evidence that he made clocks. And I did find evidence that Thomas junior made them later, after he moved from Ellerby.

On 22<sup>nd</sup> May 1722 they had a son baptised at Lythe parish church named Isaac. The couple were described as being 'of Barnby' in 1719 and 1722, but when Mary died in 1734 her husband Thomas was still alive and described as resident at Ellerby. Both were adjacent hamlets within Lythe parish and the place

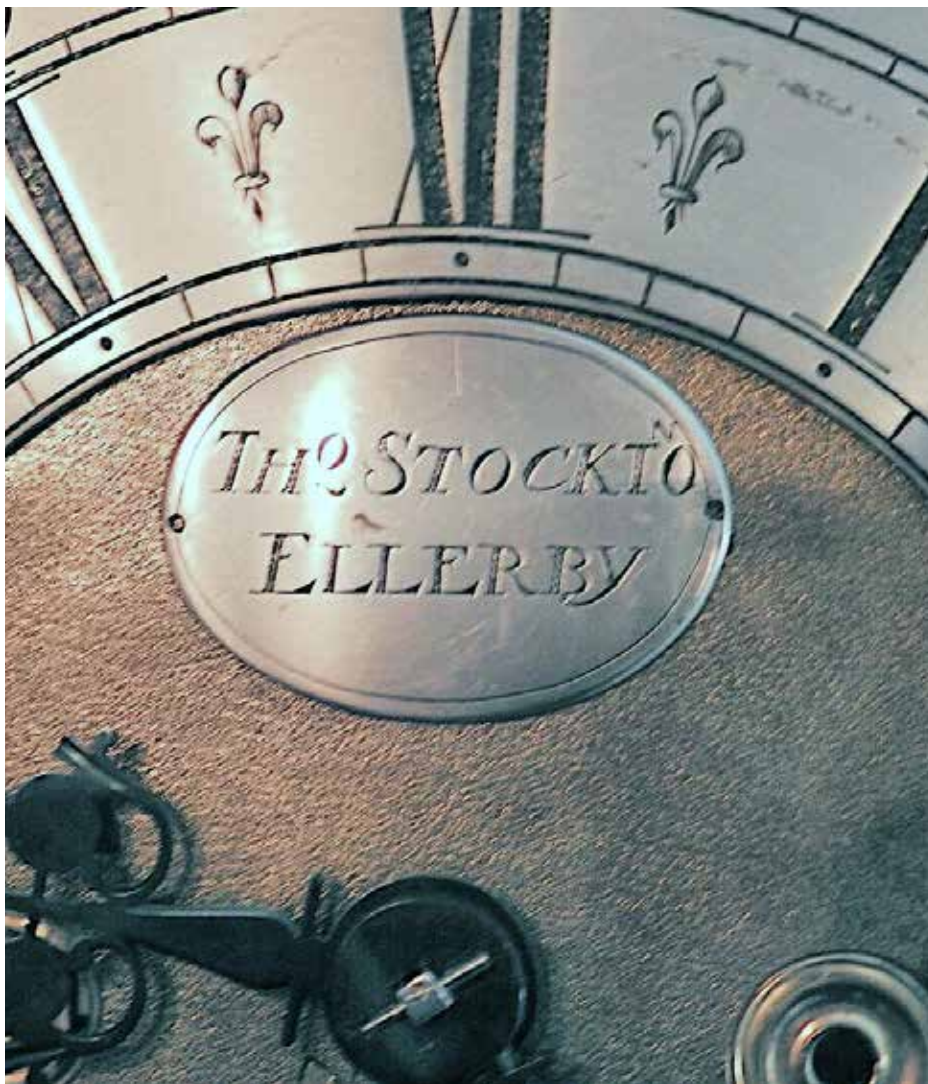


Figure 2. The nameplate showing careless spacing of the lettering.

Then Thomas and Katherine moved to Yarm and numerous clocks have been noted by him signed at Yarm. This made sense as a clockmaker working at the much larger town of Yarm had more potential than one at Ellerby. There a daughter named Mary was baptised to them on 9<sup>th</sup> August 1761 (believed died a spinster in 1817) and another daughter, Elizabeth, on 9<sup>th</sup> April 1767. Trades were seldom mentioned in these early parish registers but we know this was the same couple. Katherine was buried there on July 29<sup>th</sup> 1785.

Then an odd thing happened. Banns were read at Yarm on 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1786 proposing the marriage of Thomas Stockton of Yarm to Susan Simpson of Acklam. But this marriage did not take place—we don't know why. In fact Thomas was married on 20<sup>th</sup> August 1787 to Mary Reynolds, both of Yarm, but married some miles away at Osmotherley. Thomas himself was buried at Yarm on 16<sup>th</sup> September 1794. He would have been 75. What happened to Mary is not known.

Francis, Thomas's son, followed his father's clockmaking trade and married at Yarm on the 19<sup>th</sup> May 1774 to Mary Brown. They had a daughter named Mary born in 1781 and a son, Isaac, born in 1777 and buried the same year. He married for a second time in 1819 as a widower at York to Ann Catcheside, a widow. He was buried at Yarm on 11<sup>th</sup> April 1829 aged 78.

My further researches indicate that clockmaker George Stockton at nearby Stokesley and clockmaker Mark Stockton at Whitby both appear *not* to be related to the Ellerby/Yarm clockmaking family.

The clock itself is much altered. We can ignore the case for now and concentrate initially on the dial. At some time the dial sheet must have been seriously damaged, but we can guess, from the fact that the chapter ring has a diameter of 10in, that it was an 11in square dial. This was more or less the standard size for a mid-eighteenth century 30-hour dial.

A previous owner had the dial sheet (that part outside the chapter ring) replaced with a new outer dial sheet

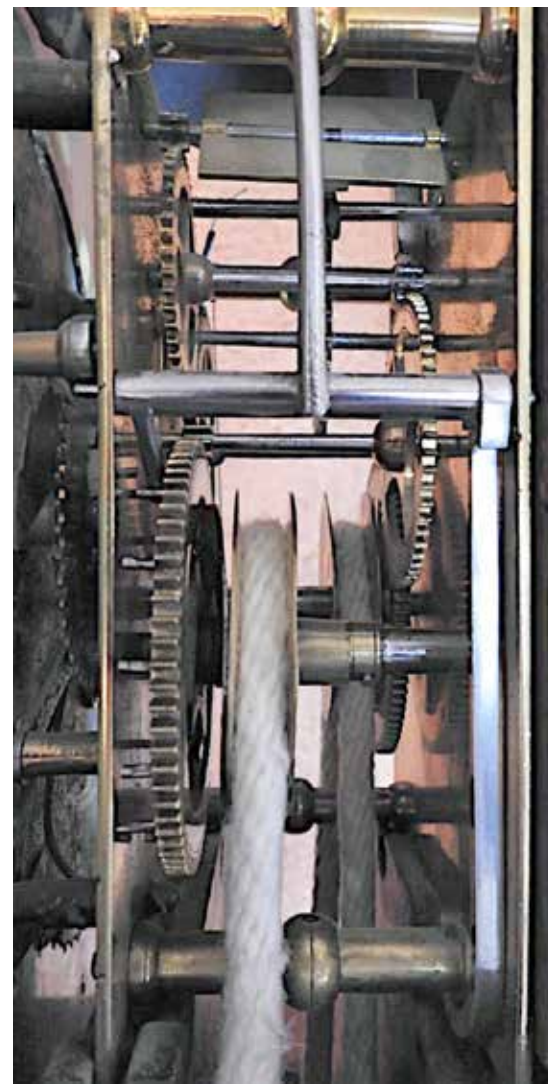


Figure 3. The 30-hour movement is typical of the period but has rack striking.

surround measuring 15in by 13in, and the original spandrels set back into it. This gives the clock an odd appearance, but we need to concentrate on the original dial parts—that is the chapter ring and dial centre.

The dial sheet centre has a matted ground, the matting done quite well though a bit irregularly and occasionally showing the tool marks—typically good work for a rural clockmaker but not nearly so fine as on a London dial. The square date box is surrounded by naive engraving, copying the style of London clocks of a slightly earlier period but not so finely. It seems from this that Thomas Stockton did this work himself. He is copying the London principle, not London quality, perhaps from clocks he has seen in the locality.

The dial centre has two multi-ringed 'winding holes', as for an eight-day clock. This was a fashion on London clocks of 20 or 30 years earlier. But this is a one-day pull-wind clock and does not need winding holes. This was done deliberately by some country clockmakers, especially



Figure 4. The movement from the left.



Figure 5. The 'Westmoreland' calendar wheel seen from the back and showing its numerous repaired teeth.

in northern England, to give the clock a superficial appearance of an eight-day (which cost twice the price of a one-day clock), as well as to avoid the bare look of a plain matted centre.

The clockmaker has put his nameplate below XII, whereas at this period it would normally be signed on the chapter ring each side of 30. This was done on purpose because it can add to the superficial appearance of an eight-day clock, which would normally have a circular seconds dial in this position (below XII). The quality of the dial centre and nameplate and its mis-spaced lettering suggest the work of a rural maker doing his best, which is quite good, but not having the level of skill of an expert engraver. The dial centre suggests a date of making about 1750.

The chapter ring is a different kettle of fish, expertly engraved and far superior in quality to the dial centre engraving, which means that the clockmaker probably bought that in from a specialist engraver. A clockmaker could get by at dial centre work but could not hope to produce a

finely-engraved chapter ring. The style, with quite large minute numerals, inner quarter-hour divisions and half-hours marked by fleur-de-lys, suggests a date of about 1750. The fact that the signature is not on the chapter ring, where it would usually be, also suggests that he bought in the ring readily-engraved.

The cast brass corner spandrels are one version of many patterns that contain a cherub head. The clockmaker could not make these castings but bought them from a brass-casting expert, as he would his (blank) dial sheet itself and all other blank castings, such as clock movement plates and wheels. These suggest to me a date of about 1740.

The movement cannot be precisely dated, but is consistent with a date of around 1740-50.

The offset calendar disc is a system used by some clockmakers in northern England, as it avoided the need for making a calendar drive wheel, and simply knocked on half a unit every 12 hours from a pin or wedge on the hour pipe. I call this a 'Westmoreland' calendar

wheel, as it was often used in that county, but it is found elsewhere in the North too. It was easier and cheaper to make than the 24-hour wheel type normally used on eight-day clocks. The number of repaired teeth illustrates the hard treatment this disc has undergone in the past, probably from careless use.

The clock has rack-repeat striking, which enables the last hour the clock struck to be repeated at will. If set up accurately this can mean that when requested (that is, by pulling the repeater cord) it strikes the nearest hour, striking the approaching hour after about 30 minutes to, and the past hour till about 30 minutes after. Many are set up to simply repeat the hour that last struck. This system was known by London clockmakers by about 1680-90, was increasingly used in table clocks from that period onwards, but was seldom used in longcase clocks in London or elsewhere till after the 1720s.


It is thought it was not liked by earlier clockmakers as abusive tugging at the repeater cord (as, for example, by )



Figure 6. The replacement cherrywood case now housing the clock was made in the 1860s.



Figure 7. Detail of the hood. The unusual size of the replacement dial sheet was presumably made to fit the case aperture.

children) can cause the whole strike system to jam. It was also disliked by country clockmakers, who made principally 30-hour clocks, like this one, because it involved a spring, sometimes two springs, which sooner or later will fail. This is why most 30-hour clocks have locking plate striking from their beginnings right into the mid nineteenth century, as that requires no spring and of course cannot be repeated. This clock was made with repeating-work either at the special request of the purchaser (perhaps for repeating use by a cord at night in a bedroom) or because the clockmaker was showing off his abilities to make something out of the ordinary.

The nicely-blued steel clock hands are very finely made, of correct period styling, but are rather grand for this simple country clock. It may be they are modern replacements.

Given these features of the clock and the fact that we know Thomas Stockton moved from Ellerby to Yarm between 1751 and 1761, I would date the clock to about 1750, give or take a year or two.

The clock is not in its original case, and—very unusually—it is known exactly how that came about. The clock was taken to America when an ancestor of the present owner emigrated to Philadelphia in 1819. This was Thomas Hansell, whose family had lived at Nineteen Lands for several generations previously. It is thought that the clock was made there for a Hansell ancestor, and it is also believed the Hansells were related to the Stocktons by marriage. The clock has always been handed down generation after generation to the eldest son.

The original ship's manifest shows that when Thomas and his wife Ann, nee Collier, and their eight children sailed to

America they took with them 'eighteen boxes and trunks' plus beds and bedding. Stowed somewhere amongst these was the clock. Their ship, the *Clio*, landed in Philadelphia and they then immediately travelled down the Ohio River by flatboat with their possessions to Indiana, their ultimate destination.

Thomas Hansell's eldest son, John, moved house and family from Indiana to the region of St Charles, Missouri, in 1847 taking the clock with him. Their goods were shipped by steamboat and canal on the Ohio river, then the Mississippi river and the Missouri river. The movement was packed separately from the case, which was transported separately packed up like a packing case filled with bedding and linen. The case was lost in transit, probably ending up under water, but the movement arrived safely, though perhaps damaged.

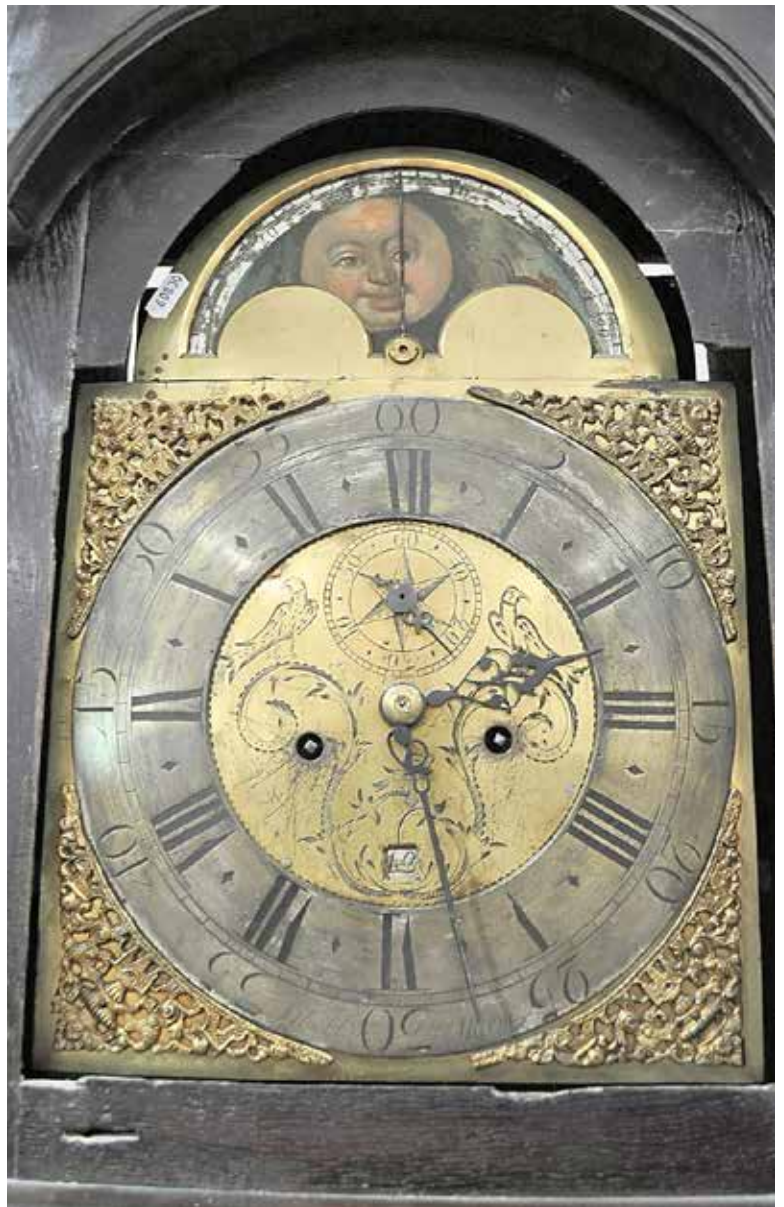


Figure 8. A 30-hour clock by Thomas Stockton of Yarm in its original oak case. Photograph courtesy of Bonhams Auctioneers, London.

Figure 9. An eight-day clock by Thomas Stockton of Yarm. Oak with mahogany trim. Photograph courtesy of Burstow & Hewett Auctioneers, Battle, Sussex.

Figure 10. Dial of the eight-day clock with rolling moonwork. Clearly by this time Stockton could make more sophisticated clocks when called upon. Photograph courtesy of Burstow & Hewett Auctioneers, Battle, Sussex.

The owner at that time is said to have had a new case made about 1860, built in cherry wood from trees grown on the farm of his in-law, John Ewbank senior of Dearborn County, Indiana. This case does not reflect the style of the original case lost on the journey.

What a story this clock represents, involving a journey half way across the world and reflecting the hazards of travel at that time! Very seldom do we come across a clock which still belongs to the family it was first made for. We can see how the family are rightly proud of their inheritance and the saga it reflects of the family's history and journey. 🏡



Figure 11. Nineteen Lands Farm as it is today.