

THE EARLIEST LA

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Figure 1 (above). Gilt-brass Renaissance case of the so-called 'Anne Boleyn Wedding Clock' (Royal Collection).



Figure 2 (right). Weight-driven clock by Francis Nowe, London, dated 1588 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

Figure 3 (far right). Nicholas Vallin's carillon clock, dated 1598 (Trustees of the British Museum).

Lantern clocks were the earliest domestic clocks made in Britain and first appeared towards the end of Queen Elizabeth I's reign. The country was prospering, with a growing elite of wealthy manufacturers, merchants, bankers, lawyers and other professional people having money to spend on luxury items to show off their wealth. Clockmakers, who up to then had made turret clocks, realised that there was a large potential market for attractive and reliable domestic clocks to replace the

ANTERN CLOCKS

cursor clocks

Part 1 of 2



old-fashioned iron Gothic clocks imported from continental Europe.

So it is not surprising that horologists have been interested in the origins of the first lantern clocks made in this country. Several clocks have been proposed as being precursors or experimental English lantern clocks, especially in horological books published in the second half of the twentieth century. However, none of them withstands close scrutiny as being made

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in England before the earliest-known lantern clocks. They are either not true lantern clocks in the accepted English style, or they are later than claimed, or they are of Continental origin, or their movements have been replaced so that it is not possible to determine what was there originally—and often with a combination of several of these factors.

A clock that is still quoted as being the earliest English lantern clock with a gilt-brass Renaissance case is shown in **figure 1**. It has become known as the 'Anne Boleyn' 

Wedding Clock', supposedly given by Henry VIII as a wedding gift. However, it is first recorded in the sale catalogue of Horace Walpole's collection at Strawberry Hill House in 1842, when it was bought on behalf of Queen Victoria. The royal connection was concocted by Horace Walpole, the politician, writer and antiquarian, to give the clock a false provenance. It does not appear in any of the royal accounts. The full story of this clock is recounted in Cedric Jagger's book, *ROYAL CLOCKS* (1987, pages 232-40). It is actually a Continental clock of about 1530 with a movement of about

1870. Despite this it is still sometimes claimed to be a very early English lantern clock, and even the current Horological Conservator at Windsor Castle repeated the same incorrect information in his interview in *CLOCKS*, January 2023, page 17.

The well-known weight-driven clock in **figure 2** is signed and dated 'francoy Nowe fecit a London A.o Dmo: 1588'. Francis Now (with a variety of spellings) was one of a number of skilled Flemish clockmakers and watchmakers who emigrated to London in the late sixteenth century.

This clock has some similarities to a seventeenth-century lantern clock, and has been claimed to be the earliest surviving English example. But only the outer case, internal pillars, finials and feet are original, the bell, bell strap, chapter ring, astronomical dial and movement are later, as described by Ernest L Edwardes in *THE STORY OF THE PENDULUM CLOCK* (1971, pages 164-6 and plates 28-33). Even the Victoria and Albert Museum say there is not sufficient evidence to regard it as being a prototype lantern clock.

Another well-known clock that is often cited as the earliest English lantern

Figure 4. The movement of the Vallin carillon clock, with iron pillars, movement bars and wheels (Trustees of the British Museum).

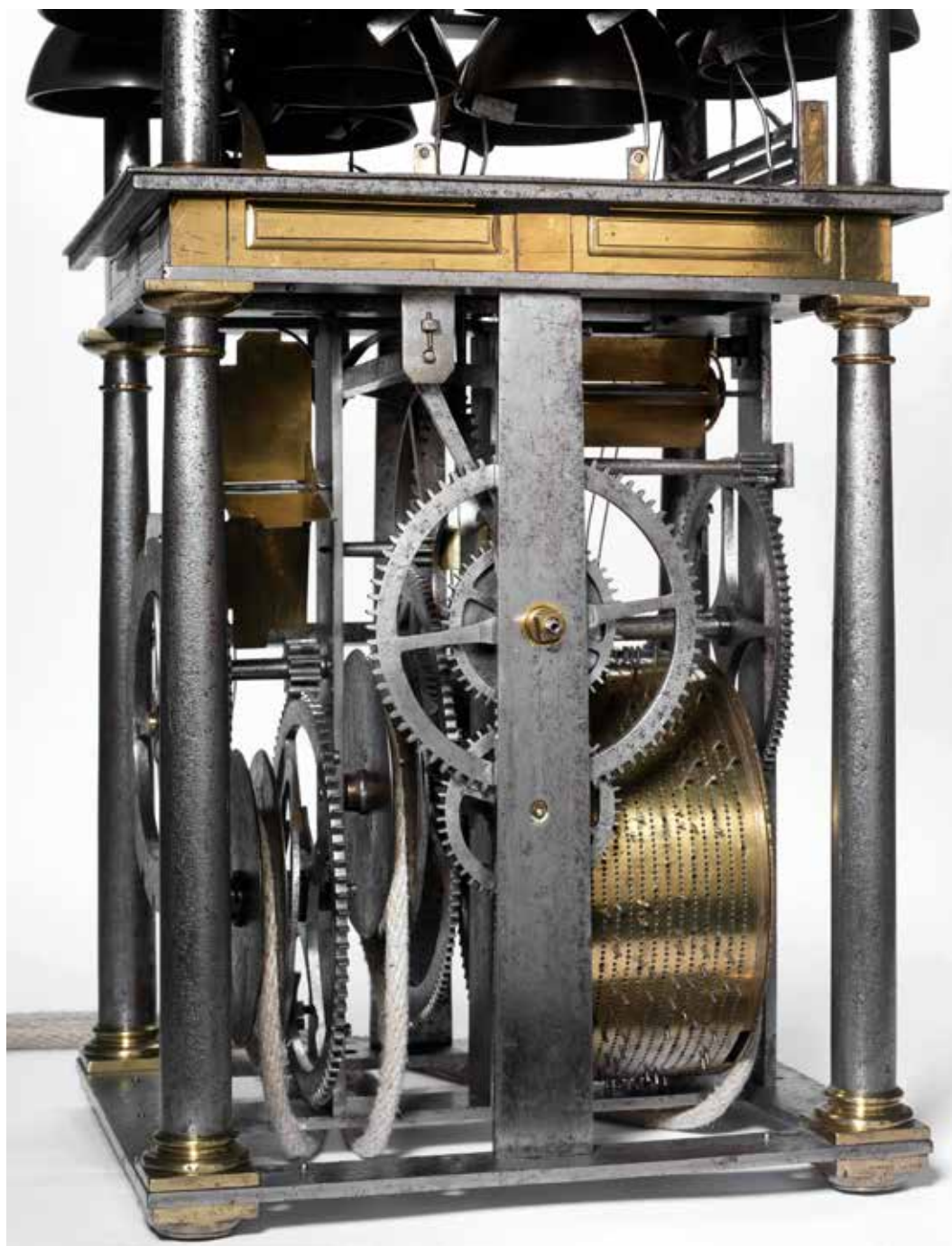


Figure 5. A brass lantern clock with a naïve sheet brass frets.



clock, is the carillon clock signed 'N. Vallin 1598', **figures 3 and 4**. Nicholas Vallin moved from Flanders to London about 1580, so he was well established in London when this clock was made. Though there is a brass dial, brass finials, triangular brass pediments to the bell frame, and a silvered chapter ring, the rest of the movement is made of iron. The frame, pillars, movement bars and wheels are made of iron. Its turned pillars with Doric capitals and finials give it a passing resemblance to a lantern clock, but these features as well as the open top and bottom plates,

transverse wheels and carillon are not found on early lantern clocks. It has more in common with a Flemish chamber clock than an English lantern clock, and was most likely made in Flanders. The most comprehensive description of the clock is by Jeff Darken in *ANTIQUARIAN HOROLOGY* (March 2008, pages 695-703).

A couple of clocks were claimed to be precursors of the English lantern clock in more recent times. Brian Loomes was sent photographs of an unsigned lantern clock, **figures 5 and 6**, with a very worn date that was interpreted as 1577. It was

included in his book *LANTERN CLOCKS & THEIR MAKERS* (2008, pages 12-15) where it was claimed to be a prototype lantern clock. However, not only was the date interpreted as a century too early, it was assumed to be English, when it is actually French. It is a brass lantern clock with a naïvely engraved dial, a large alarm disc, sheet-brass frets and side covers. The hammer and strikework pivot between angled and buttressed brass Gothic corner pillars. There is warned striking. A large bell has been fitted at some time, which has necessitated the frets to be splayed out. The front

ly engraved dial, large alarm-setting disc and

Figure 6. The movement with the strikework and hammer arbors pivoted between typical mid seventeenth-century French Gothic pillars.





Figure 7. Weight-driven clock with a lunar and astrological dial, iron pillars, plates and movement bars and brass feet and finials (Brian Loomes).

fret bears a date that has been almost obliterated by over-polishing and only '-77' is faintly discernible. It has been claimed that this date is 1577 but it is almost certainly 1677. Its French origin is confirmed by the dial including two fleur-de-lys, the symbol of the French monarchy. This type of frame with late Gothic-style pillars, usually of iron rather than brass, was sometimes used on mid-seventeenth-century French clocks. It is not a precursor English lantern clock.

Figures 7 and 8 show a clock that was discussed and illustrated by Brian Loomes in *CLOCKS* (February 2007, pages 9-14), and then included in his book *LANTERN CLOCKS & THEIR MAKERS* (2008, pages 41-4). It was claimed to be an English prototype lantern clock, but is another example that is not English and made in the mid-seventeenth century. The dial has both lunar and astrological displays, while the frame has iron plates and movement bars without side arms,



Figure 8. Rear of the movement showing the extensive use of

brass finials and ball feet. The strikework pivots in brackets on the square-section iron pillars. Many of the stylistic and technical features are not typically English. The restored iron balance hangs from a cord, the hand is fixed with the strike let-off from the going greatwheel, and the iron bell strap clips on to the top plate rather than on the finials. This type of dial with an astrological display, is not found on any known English weight-driven clock, despite it indicating times of



iron (Brian Loomes).



Figure 9. A mid seventeenth-century French clock with a modern dial, bell and bell strap to make it look like an English lantern clock (Trustees of the British Museum).

high tide that correspond to London. Also there is warned striking, although the two strikework arbors are concentric. Despite it having been called the 'Precursor Clock', it is likely to be later than the first lantern clocks and probably made about 1640 in France, Flanders or Italy, and has been much restored.

The weight-driven clock shown in **figure 9** was illustrated and discussed in books such as *A HISTORY OF ENGLISH CLOCKS* by R W Symonds (1947, plates

16-17), *THE WORLD'S GREAT CLOCKS AND WATCHES* by Cedric Jagger (1977, page 99) and *EARLY ENGLISH CLOCKS* by P G Dawson, C B Drover and D W Parkes (1982, pages 56-7). Though these publications claimed that it was a transition between a Gothic clock and a lantern clock, it is now largely discredited. It was probably made in France about 1650. The brass dial, bell, bell strap and balance escapement were added in the twentieth century to make it look like an

English lantern clock, and it is no longer on display in the British Museum.

The six clocks shown here were once alleged to be prototypes or precursors of the typical English lantern clocks, but none of them stands up to close scrutiny. This was the situation until 2020 when a miniature lantern clock was discovered that changed the story of the earliest English domestic clock as is told in Part 2 of this article. ■