

GILES LUMBARD

A puzzle and a mystery

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When you first look at lantern clocks as a novice, you can get that bewildering feeling that they all look the same. They don't, of course, but because they all stem from the same concept,

Figure 1. Lantern clock signed by Giles Lumbard of Ilminster, a clockmaker unrecorded till now. The style of the clock is visibly older than that of the dial.

the individual differences in shape and style are less obvious than those found in for example longcase clocks or bracket clocks.

It is a bit like saying cars all look the same because they all have four wheels, a bonnet and a windscreen. With lantern clocks



it is a case of the more you look the more you see—but you do have to look closely. After a while you learn that certain styles occur only at certain periods, and with experience you begin to recognise the period by the style, even in the absence of a maker's name.

That said, with most examples we do have a maker's name that we can look up to help us pin down the period. Even so much of the fun in clocks is to try to estimate the period *before* turning to reference books to look up the maker. Sometimes the maker's name does not agree with the clock's apparent age, and then we ask ourselves why and try to solve the puzzle.


I was put in mind of this just recently when I was 



Figure 2. This close-up shows detail of the wonderful engraving of Giles Lumbard's new dial, superb in design and execution.



Figure 3. The Lothbury movement of the Civil War period has some interesting early features, such as strongly-tapered arbors to the original wheelwork.

offered a British lantern clock signed beautifully on its fret with a quite genuine maker's name and town and even a date in the late seventeenth century, but with everything else indicating the clock was of a more recent age and quite different locality. The answer in this case was that the fret did not originate on that clock, which closer examination showed was made after the maker named on the fret had died!

The clock pictured here is signed 'Giles Lumbard Ilminster fecit'—a distinctively unusual name but, as it turns out, not one recorded in the reference books so no help to be found there. I love clocks with unknown names. They offer a genealogical challenge, which can lead to

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unexpected places and records that nobody has searched perhaps since the day they were written. They are also far less likely to have been faked than those with famous names such as Tompion and Knibb that we see on fake clocks almost every week.

The Lumbard dial is conventional in nature but of a handsome though distinctively unusual style. The theme of flowers emanating from a vase at six o'clock is one found now and then in western England in the later seventeenth century, but especially in the West Country, where Ilminster is located. The dial style and hand suggest the 1680s.

But that is just the dial. When we look at the rest of the clock we see a very different story.

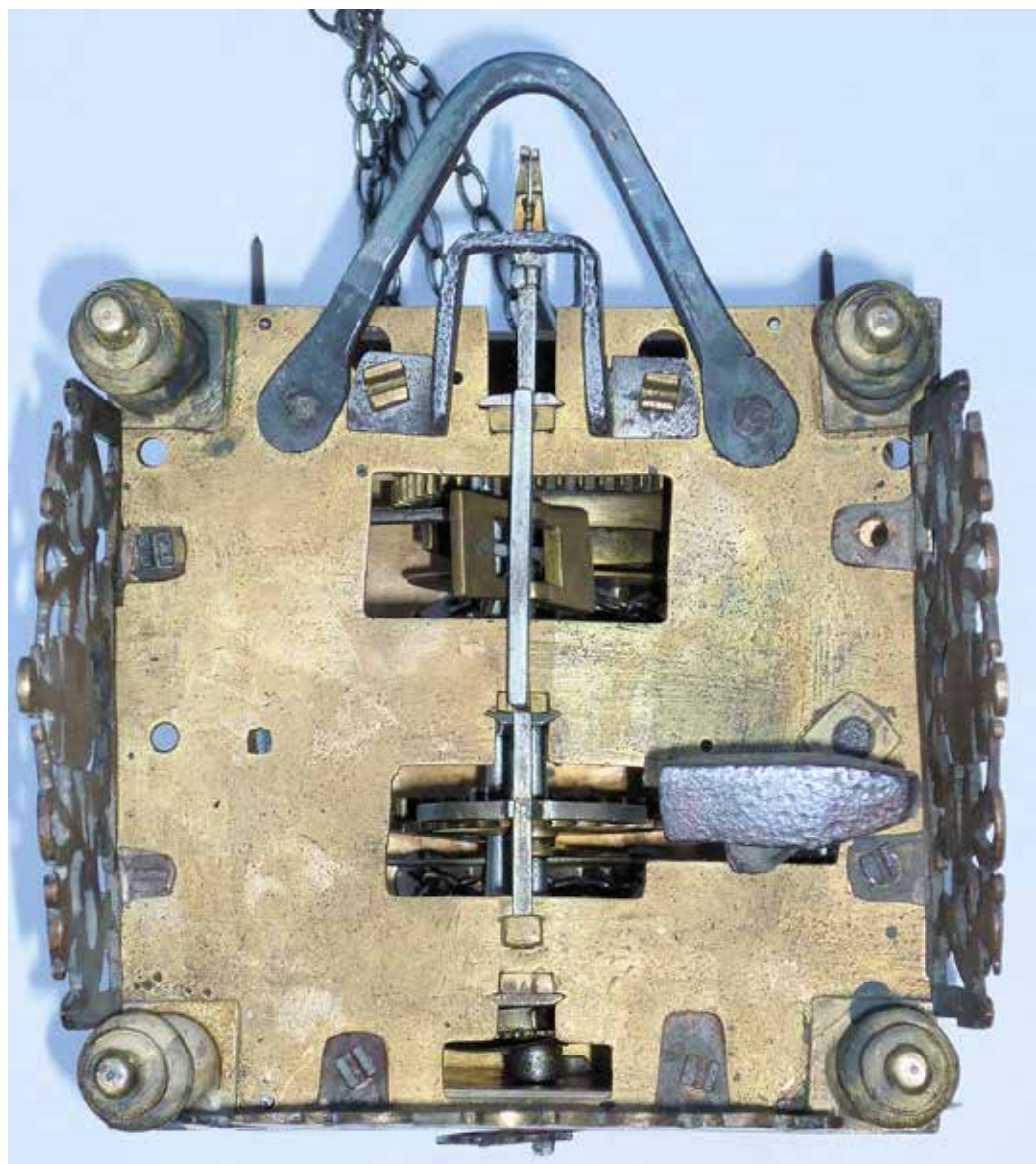


Figure 4. This top view of the movement before cleaning shows the typical signs of conversion from balance to anchor escapement. Note the original frets retaining their original square-headed screws, a type still in use when the clock was converted to long pendulum in the 1680s.


Everything about this clock defines it as being originally a balance-controlled clock of about 1650 made in the Lothbury area of London. Obviously it was converted to anchor escapement and long pendulum at a later date to improve the timekeeping, as were virtually all balance clocks.

The by-then-old-fashioned, 30- or 40-year-old dial was replaced with a superbly-engraved dial in the latest style at some time in the 1680s by Giles Lumbarde of Ilminster, who 'modernised' the clock and probably converted it to long pendulum at the same time. He could presumably then sell the clock as a new clock of his own making. In fact such a clock would show little in the way of deterioration after a mere 50 years, and when polished up and fitted

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with a new dial it was to all intents and purposes new.

Who was Giles Lumbarde? Well by searching local parish registers I found that he came to Ilminster from nearby Chard, about five miles to the south, where he was married on 6th September 1686 to Joan Dudderidge. The couple lived at Ilminster, where their children were baptised: 1687 Giles, 1691 Joan, and 1698 John. Giles senior appears to have been buried back 'home' at Chard on 12th October 1707. He was presumably a blacksmith/clockmaker, though no other clocks seem yet to be recorded by him. The important bit is that this was proof he did exist in Ilminster in the 1680s, the period the clock dial suggested.

On mainland Europe it was very 

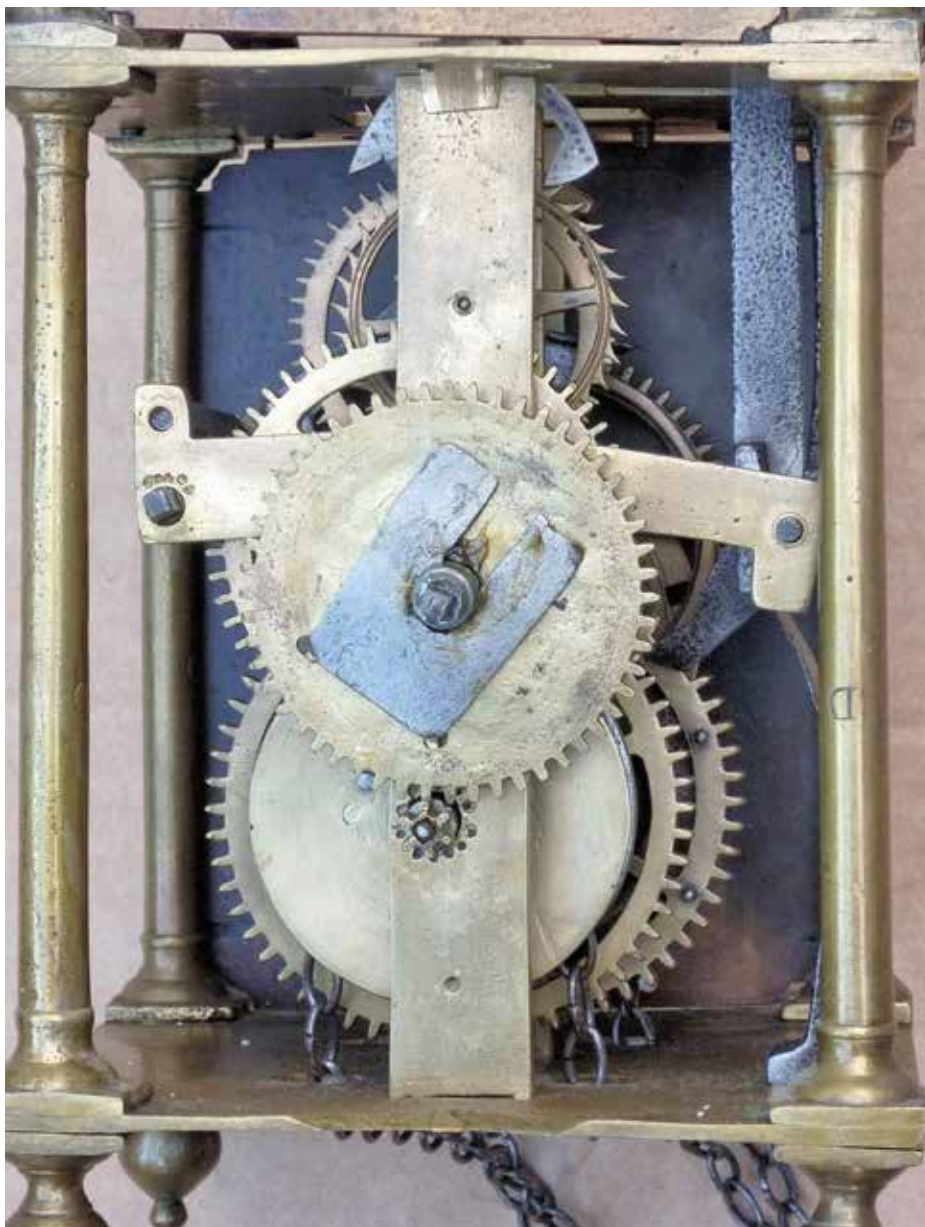


Figure 5. With the dial removed the casting marks can be seen distinctly on the right-hand pillar and just partly showing on the left-hand one.



Figure 6. Close-up of the casting mark.

common for owners to have their chamber clocks 'modernised' by having a replacement dial fitted or the dial repainted. With English clocks we are not used to this, and would usually see such a clock as suspicious, one to stay clear of. But now and then we do find an English clock with a dial replaced for genuine reasons. I have come across several such lantern clocks over the years.

Some of you will be familiar with the well-known example pictured in George White's 1989 book, *ENGLISH LANTERN CLOCKS*, where William Holloway of Stroud had replaced the movement and dial of a continental chamber clock that was then over 100 years old and signed it on the dial 'This Clock new

made by William Holloway of Stroud 1687'. In this case he replaced so much that it might have been easier to make a complete new clock. Perhaps he preserved the frame of the original out of respect for its antiquity—a case of ancient re-cycling.

Why would clockmakers go to such lengths to update an old clock? Well, because a clock was a very valuable item and these lantern clocks were so sturdily made they could be seen to have many years of life still in them, centuries even. The fact that they still work today is evidence of that. I have seen several examples of ancient lantern clock movements re-dialled much later with a longcase dial and serving as longcase clocks to this day.

So Giles Lumbar was doing—about the same time as William Holloway as it happens—what others did too at that period and later. The difference was that he put his name to it when others usually did not.

But there is a bit more to the story than that. Giles Lumbar's clock presented us with another mystery. A few months ago I had a lantern clock by Samuel Davis, who worked in Lothbury in London from about 1648 till his premises were destroyed by the Great Fire of London in 1666. I wrote an article about it in *CLOCKS* magazine for February of this year. His work is little known, only three lantern clocks being recorded by him, of which I have only examined the one.



Figure 7. Rear view of the clock by Samuel Davis of Lothbury showing the same casting mark in the same positions.



Figure 8. Front view of the Samuel Davis clock. This is presumably how Giles Lumbar's clock looked when it came into his possession.

Davis was trained in the Mermaid workshops of the Selwood brothers and in almost all respects his clock is identical to work by others of that school—the Selwoods (William and John), Thomas Loomes, Henry Ireland, Thomas Knifton, and the Norris brothers, as well as a number of unsigned Lothbury clocks of that period. They have pillars of a regular height of a Lothbury clock of that period of 6¼in (159mm) between plates.

There is one aspect of Samuel Davis's clock I did not go into in the article, and that is that the standard-length pillars were cast with a backwards capital 'D' about one third of the way up. The casting mark is positioned exactly where it would be

hidden at the front by the chapter ring overlap, so as not to be unsightly. It was on all four pillars though is less visible on some due to being partly erased by the finishing-off turning and/or polishing.

I have never previously noticed such a casting mark on any other clocks, nor has it been documented anywhere. Nor can I find any observer of such trivia who has seen it before. The implication is that the founder was casting these D pillars especially for Samuel Davis, the D presumably for Davis.

The clock that Giles Lumbar re-dialled has this same casting mark. It looks very much as if the clock he re-dialled was made by Samuel Davis. We still barely understand the relationship between the brass founders and their

clockmaking clients, but the fact that these castings could apparently be personalised puts a whole new light on this aspect.

Why, after over 100 years of collecting and studying these clocks, don't we know already about such aspects of clockmaking as casting marks? Simply because nobody bothered to record such things. Even today I doubt if more than a bare handful do so.

But what sort of divine co-incidence is this, that after all these years of my own observations a feature that seems to be unique is duplicated just a few months later? It seems to be another case of that horological bus-stop syndrome, when, after waiting for ages and ages, two come along at once. ☺