

GUERY OF PARIS or London ... or both!

by **Brian Loomes**, UK

The clock discussed here came into my email in-tray as a query from its owner in New Jersey, who was puzzled by the way it is signed. And so was I at first. But when I began to investigate it seemed so interesting that I thought it worth writing up in detail as an article. I hope you agree.

It turns out the clock is evidence of a practice we knew existed but never before have I seen a clock that summarises it so neatly.

At first sight this appears to be a French clock typical of many. Yet it has a couple of very strange features I have never seen before. It is

Figure 1. At first sight this clock appears to be a normal Paris hanging lantern-type clock, formerly with alarmwork now absent. Maximum possible use of iron. Height about 10in. Photograph by Thomas Meyer.

signed 'Guery AParis', the A and P run together as was a regular habit with many Paris makers. But also 'London'. The clock presently resides in the USA but we have no clues as to when or how it got there.

The age of these clocks is a bit difficult to pin down because the French sometimes used features very similar to ours but at periods

different from ours—such as this armorial fret pattern. The head with feathered headdress and the relatively sparse floral engraving suggest to me that a date around 1700 might be a fair guess, or perhaps a little earlier.

With a bit of searching around I located

four French lantern clocks signed at Paris, one by Guery, three by Michel Guery, names not recorded in our books. But Tardy's book of French makers gives what seem to be two named Michel working in Paris from the 1720s to the 1780s. In fact Tardy gives much later

dates for Michel in Paris than the clocks I have seen. This clock may, or may not, have been made by Michel, but Michel's clocks do at the very least show that the Guery family are known to have sold clocks in Paris in the eighteenth century.

Like most Paris-made clocks these clocks are signed 'AParis', that is they share the upright stroke of the P with the right-hand upright of the A. (rather than 'A Paris', meaning 'at Paris'). What they do not do is what this clock exceptionally does and that is to spell Paris as Pariss! That is something I never saw before. Every Frenchman, and even most Englishmen, could spell Paris. It is so blatant it could not even be an engraver's slip. This suggests that Pariss is deliberately there for a purpose, as if trying to tell us something.

Not only could the French spell Paris but they said it as only the French can, with 'is' pronounced as 'ee' (Paree), while the English called





it Pariss. Adding a second 's' made it obviously Pariss, pronounced the way the English said it, ending in a positive hiss. But why would anyone do that? Another unique oddity about this clock is the placename, London. London was the envy of the world in clockmaking.

Figure 2. Close examination of the lettering reveals that London was squeezed in later as was the second 's' in Pariss. Photograph by Thomas Meyer.

So much so that some clockmakers in mainland Europe (for instance in France, Holland, Austria) sometimes faked signatures on their clocks to make them appear London-made. Some simply signed their clocks with the name of a known London clockmaker. Others signed with a name that could easily be mistaken as a London maker. A couple of examples of that are pictured on these pages. Sometimes a maker in mainland Europe might pretend to also have a London 'branch'. But when this was done in France, the word used for London would be 'Londres'.

Some London clockmakers took advantage of this and did sell their clocks in mainland Europe. Richard Ames of London sold clocks into France and

Figure 3. The verge escapement has curved support cocks, typical of French work. Photograph by Thomas Meyer.

added half-hour striking on his 'export' models, something never popular in England but much liked in France.

Lantern clocks made by early London clockmakers Thomas Loomes and Peter Closon were already in mainland Europe within a very few years of being made. We know this from a few examples that show repair work or alteration in the Continental manner from very early in their lives. This implies they had direct markets there, probably brought about by their close working connection with Ahasuerus Fromanteel, who had family there, sold his own clocks there and by 1668 had established a branch of his business in Amsterdam.

It is well known that Fromanteel had



brought the pendulum clock to England about 1658 or a year or two earlier. What is less well known is that it is believed that pendulum clock construction was limited to his family and close associates for at least the first ten years. Thomas Loomes married Fromanteel's daughter

Figure 4. The Guery movement from the right showing the verge escapement set-up. Photograph by Thomas Meyer.



in 1654, and thereby became 'family', though oddly he stuck almost entirely to balance control lantern clocks. Peter Closon's connection is unknown, yet there must have been one as pendulum clocks are known by Closon, who was dead by 1660.

The explanation I have that seems to cover this clock is that French clockmaker, Guery, who hitherto had sold clocks in Paris, upped sticks to London and took some residual stock with him. Once there he added 'London' to the dial, which already carried his name and 'Paris'.

I assume that Guery moved to London in a hurry. If they were religious refugees they had to move rapidly, taking with them whatever tools and work-in-

Figure 5. This back view shows he used an exceptional amount of iron, probably to keep the price down. Photograph by Thomas Meyer.



progress they could. In Monsieur Guery's case they included at least this one dial plate, and maybe others too. But, once there, as he was now working in London, he added that city to the signature on the dial. And he added 'London' in its English form as his customers were now English. If he had continued working in Paris and wanted to claim he had a London 'branch' too, he would have added the French version—'Londres' or 'ALondres'.

The 'London' looks a bit squashed into a space barely big enough for it, and on close inspection can be seen to be engraved in a different hand from the other lettering, confirming that it was added later. But why the double 'ss' ending to Paris, which everyone



Figure 6. A more conventional verge pendulum lantern clock with alarmwork signed 'Guery A Paris'. Date around 1700.

Figure 7. This lantern clock is signed 'Michel Guery A Paris'.

knew how to spell. If you look carefully you can see the second 's' has been added, trying to copy the first, but also in a different hand. So Paris was changed to Pariss so that Guery could impress his clients with his knowledge of English pronunciation—though he got it wrong.

It was guesswork but it seemed to make sense. Pursuing this theory led me to this train of thought. Where did French immigrant clockmakers often go to in London—Spitalfields. At this period there was nowhere else in England where French was spoken in the street. The name derives not from anything to do with spittle but its location near a former hospital. I checked the records of the French Protestant Church, which

had catered for the French-speaking community of London since 1550. There I found one Jean Guery newly from France was married to a French girl in 1705. Children Jean and Henrietta were born to this couple in 1708 and 1709.

The entries are all in French, the writing and spelling antiquated. I would not claim to be totally fluent in early eighteenth century French but this is what I make of it.

"French Protestant church

'Du 8 Juillet 1705

'Par Monsr. Baignon minister de cette eglise

'(An ester Berry ?) le mariage de Jean

Guery avec Henriette Cru:

'1 July 1705 Jean Guery (avec Henriette – erased) fils de Jacques Guery et femme Susanne Barie (illegible) de la province de Poitou en France avec Henriette fille (de fen?) Jean Cru et de Janne Guillets de la Rochelle pays daunix en France après les publications des banes par trois dimanches en cette eglise sans qu'il y ait en dempenchement ny opposition at aussy sur les certificats qu'ils nous ont fait apparoir de la publication de leur banes dans les eglises angloises de Stepney, et Lothbury (d'Eument?) Signiez Colny de Stepney par William Portman Clark et Colny de Lothbury par Robert Wettwood



Figure 8. This lantern clock is signed 'Spic Kmane Londane', presumably trying to pass itself off as being by one of the well-known London clockmakers called Speakman.

clark date le'un du 1 Juillet et lautre du 2
 enpropence des tesmoings subz signe
 '???? Henriette ??
 'SarraCardon
 'Pierre Cardon Jean Tesnon Pierre
 Rapiat
 Jeanne Turtarbibal'

This means briefly that Jean, son of Jacques Guery and Susanne (née Barie) from Poitou was married to Henriette, daughter of Jean Cru and Janne (nee Guillet) from La Rochelle after banns having been announced without objection on three successive Sundays in this, the French Protestant church, and after certificates had been received confirming the same from the English churches of Stepney and Lothbury. No trades were stated of course, which was normal, so I was not disappointed in that.

The Poitou reference takes us a long way from Paris. But perhaps the minister meant that the father was from Poitou, or that Jean was originally from there, or was born there, or lived there before or after his spell in Paris. He clearly knew what he meant but I cannot claim that as an Englishman I can really know what was in the mind of a Frenchman 300 years ago.

I had better explain the old English custom of reading the banns, as some

may not be familiar with it today, when the custom of marriage itself seems to be in decline and many couples prefer to live together as just good friends. Many who are familiar with banns may not know the full requirement of what later became law. Before being married the intention to do so was announced on three, usually, but not necessarily, consecutive Sundays in the church of intended marriage as well as in the local parish church of the prospective bride and groom in order to allow objection from any spoilsports. This ritual did not become law until over half a century later, but luckily for us it seems it was practised in this area at this time. Immigrants were often keen to get things down in writing in case they later might need to confirm their legal status,

The fact that one party was resident in Lothbury (the name of the street and the parish) was a gift I never expected. If they it had been any other parish it would have triggered no reaction. But Lothbury was no ordinary residential street. It is believed that Lothbury had been so named as deriving from the word 'loathe' or 'loathing' (Loathbury) because it was a loathsome place to live on account of the noise coming from the conglomeration of workshops.

A description written over a century

earlier by John Stow describes it as follows. 'This street is possessed for the most part by founders that cast candlesticks, chafing dishes, spice mortars, and such-like copper or laton [sheet brass] works, and do afterwards turn them with the foot and not with the wheel, to make them smooth and bright with turning and scratching (as some do term it), making a loathsome noise to the by-passers that have not been used to the like, and therefore by them disdainfully called Lothberie.'

Lothbury was a street of noisy metalworkers, hammering and banging all day long—and most especially a street of clockmakers! When the Clockmakers Company attempted to count all those in the trade in 1662, more than one in every three clockmakers lived and / or worked in Lothbury! Why would Jean Guery live there unless he was a clockmaker?

Out of interest I asked six colleagues what they made of it. All said it looked French, a few suggested it had a faked 'London' added. Only one suggested the doubling of the s in Paris might make it seem like a surname with Guery as a first—'Guery Apariss'. I could not see that myself.

There is one mechanical aspect that is odd and that I think we can explain

with help from a colleague who is a very experienced restorer. He is a most helpful anonymous mentor and often saves me from my own mechanical goofs. A particular genius is called for when making deductions about things that are missing and leave evidence only in the form of a few empty holes. I can usually spot the evidence but sometimes need help in interpreting it.

Those accustomed to lantern clocks will recognise points that tell us this

Figure 9. This lantern clock appears to have been made in France, trying at least to pass itself off as the work of London maker Marcos Peres—but signed as Perres.

clock once had an alarm, or at least was designed to have one. These include a blank zone around the dial centre, once covered by an alarm disc, and a hole in the dial above 'XI' and a corresponding one on the back plate, to carry the alarm trip, as well as other less obvious signs. But it has no alarm now.

There is more than one explanation. First it is possible that the maker changed his mind and didn't fit one. More likely is that the clock was made as a timepiece (a clock that did not strike) with alarmwork but when the maker finished it in London he replaced the alarmwork with the hourly strikework it now has. Perhaps the maker felt a clock that was a striker had a better chance commercially than a non-striking alarm. Was that perhaps a London preference over that of Paris? Or did the customer who bought it specify that factor?

I found no record of anyone I could identify as Jean Guery after 1709. But those who wrote down foreign names in England were inclined to take no prisoners when slaughtering spellings, so it is perhaps not surprising. Nor are any other clocks by Guery known with London as the placename. The



Figure 10. The clock is signed 'Perres ALondini', a form I have never seen before, and claiming to be made by someone based in London but working in Paris. Was it Marcos Perres or someone using his name in vain?

implication is that he was not around for very long. Perhaps he went back to France. But attempting to find that out would be a whole new research task. 🍷

