

CLOCKMAKER PUZZLE

Unsigned longcase sparks horological detective work

by Brian Loomes, UK

David, an English correspondent now living in Georgia in the USA, asked me recently if I could tell him anything about his longcase clock, which is pictured here. It was a gift from a relative in Essex to another relative about 60 years ago and was bequeathed to my correspondent's wife in 2017. She had always expressed admiration of the clock from being a small girl, although nobody was ever allowed to open the door to look inside it.

The clock was packed and shipped from Bishop's Stortford, Hertfordshire, to Georgia, USA, by Movecorp Ltd, a company chosen from Yellow Pages. It arrived in a cardboard box lashed to a pallet and not in the best of health. The restoration cost \$3000 and the shipper's so-called insurance offered compensation of a few pennies per kilo in weight. A lesson for anyone selecting a shipper.

David's wife recounted how she felt when she was left the clock:

'I was in two minds whether to keep the clock and whether I could be bothered to ship it over to us in USA but glad I did if only for the age of the clock as it is very rare to see anything of this age.'

'The horologist I found to do the restoration knew quite a lot about clocks etc but don't think he had ever worked on one this old. He has a cabinetmaker that works for him who made new scrollwork for the bonnet as the original ones were broken in shipping and cleaned / retained the cabinet. We have the original scrollwork should a future purchaser want to refit them.'

The big problem was the clock was unsigned. Could we establish how old it was and where it was made?

The dial of this clock suggests a standard London-made eight-day clock with typical strike / silent switch in the arch. It could date anywhere between about 1760 and 1780 or a touch later, as styles varied little between those dates. My best guess would be about 1770. The hour hand and seconds hand could be original. The minute hand is a later replacement dating from maybe 1820



Figure 1. The unsigned clock is here pictured in full. The clock and case both suggest classic London styling but not of the same period. The case appears 40 or more years newer than the clock.

and is too long. The strike / silent lever is original.

The movement is from the same area and period as the dial. Dial and movement both suggest London making but this style spread outwards into the Home Counties and south-east England. The brass-cased weights and brass-rod pendulum appear original to this clock and suggest the same origin.

It was apparent to me that the clock was originally in a different case. The present case is considerably newer than the clock, though we can tell by its style that it is clearly a London-made case. The seatboard the movement it sits on is original to the movement but is too wide for the uprights of this case and too shallow for its depth at the back. This tells us this clock was previously in a different case. It seemed possible the case was purpose-made as a later replacement.

A vital clue came to light when a scrap of paper was found inside the case, **figure 11**. 'It was a surprise to find the parchment in the bottom of the cabinet. My mother (whose sister owned the clock) had never seen it before. The parchment was just a drawing pinned to a piece of 4-by-2 plank. Neither my mother or I had ever seen inside the clock as the cabinet door was always closed but I wished we had so we could have asked if they knew more of its history regarding the dates and inscriptions.'

The 'scrap of paper' is an original certificate of 1790 stating that Christopher Richard Redrick, son and late apprentice of Richard Redrick, Citizen and Draper was admitted as a Freeman of London on 4th May 1790. This is an exceptionally rare document, the like of which I have never seen before.


'Citizen and Draper' means he was a Freeman of the City of London by virtue of being a Freeman of the Drapers' Company. Christopher had the right to trade only after this freedom was granted, which had to be done through a City Company, in his case the Company of Drapers. Was this certificate simply something pertaining to a family named Redrick, who once owned the clock? Or did this imply that Christopher made this clock in 1790 or later? The clock 



Figure 2 (above left). The dial is in all respects typical of London work of about 1770, other than the fact that it is unsigned and the minute hand style suggests it is a replacement taken from a clock of about 1820.

Figure 3 (above). Detail of the hood after restoration showing the key-locking door, brass hinges standing proud, grooved pillars with brass caps and bases—all classic features of London cases and by no means all found elsewhere. The multi-crested pediment is one version of a pediment style, usually dating from the new century, ie post 1800.

Figure 5 (left). The clock arrives in Georgia boxed in cardboard and strapped to a pallet.

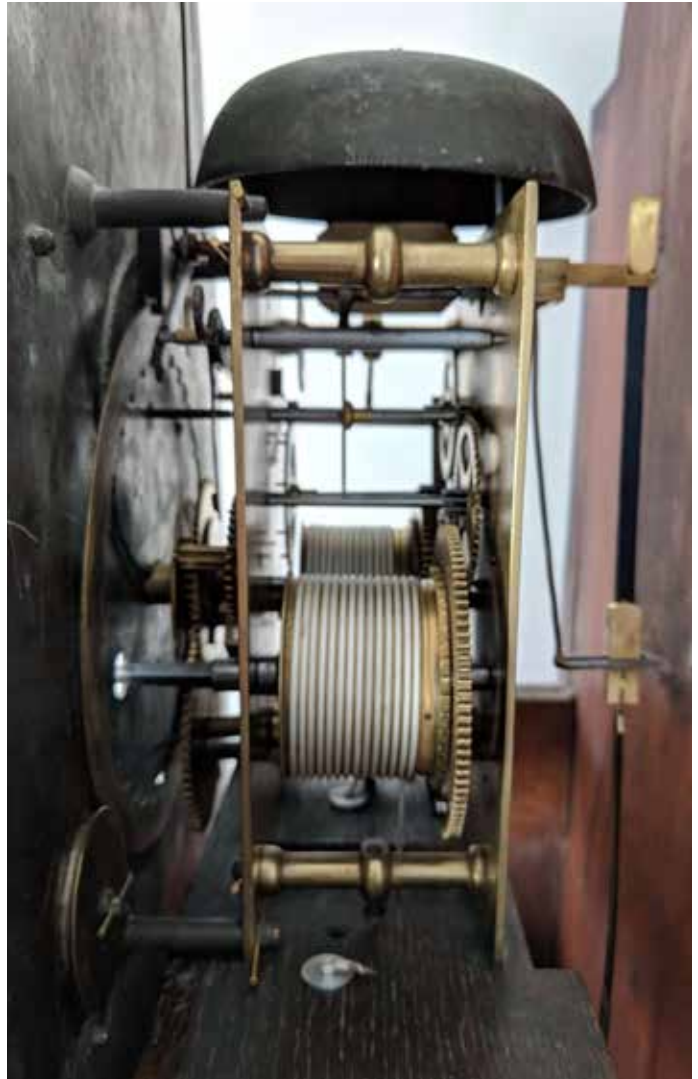


Figure 4. The clock hood as it was in England before being damaged. The crest is a multiple form of what we call 'whale's tail' cresting, often found in a bolder form in clocks in East Anglia.

Figure 6. The movement from the right showing typical London eight-day work.

seems too old to have been made by Christopher.

On searching I found that Richard, the father, was documented in the Drapers' Company records from 1762-1786, taking other apprentices but not his son, Christopher. However the rules could have been different for a member's son, who would probably not have been obliged to enter into a formal apprenticeship with his father. Richard, the father, was recorded as a watch case maker and maker of small silver items. A man's trade might not necessarily have anything to do with the Company name, often not, as here. A youngster sometimes joined a company with past family connections, like some might do with a school.

I love an unusual surname, which can often be a genealogist's dream. I found

that Richard Redrick was married at St Bride's, London, in 1766 to Anne Hayes. Their first child, Christopher Richard, was born in 1767. The parish register records that he was born 12th November 1767 and baptised 6th December 1767. These were obviously the right people.

If Christopher had been apprenticed, that would normally have been in 1781 at the age of 14, due to be freed in 1788. He could have undergone the very same training under his father without a formal apprenticeship. Even if he was not apprenticed, or even trained at all, under his father or anyone else, Christopher would have had the right to take up his freedom by 'patrimony', which means by virtue of the fact that his father was, or had been a Freeman of that Company. But in this instance we know his freedom was delayed till 1790. Such a delay

was not unusual and there are several possible explanations for it. Of course we still don't know what trade he followed, if any, but that would not matter in obtaining his freedom.

I found no trace of Richard after 1786 and it seems likely he died about that time. This could be why his 1790 freedom says *late* apprentice, which could mean former apprentice or could mean formerly apprentice of the late (*ie* deceased) Richard.


It is possible that Christopher took out his freedom to trade soon after his father died, as, if he needed to be the family breadwinner, he could not trade legally in his own right without it. He could previously have worked under his father without this freedom, but having freedom involved paying fees and so many postponed this as long as they could. 



Figure 7. These were the loose pieces found in the box on arrival, the result of damage by inadequate packing.

Christopher was married in 1812 as a bachelor to Hannah Wyles, a widow. He was 45 years old, which in those days was strangely late in life for a first marriage. His father had probably died at a similar age. Other children of Richard were—Mary, Thomas, James, Thomas, Charlotte. My guess is the clock was probably made by (or for) Richard and passed to his son at his death, after 1786 and before 1790. Hence this 1790 freedom paper inside. Of course, we did not, and still do not, know what trade Christopher practised. It may have been nothing at all to do with watchmaking.

David told me that on the inside backboard of the case is written the following note:

*R Redrick
1767
R.R
1810*

This could have had a variety of meanings. Auctioneers, tradesmen and dealers of all kind were very fond of scribbling notes on the backboards of clocks, their meaning lost to us today.

But I deduced that the clock was made in 1767 by, or for, Richard Redrick. We know this is consistent with the style of the clock dial and movement. We now know that was the year of birth of his first child, Christopher Richard, and presumably the clock was made to commemorate that event. A commemoration clock is more usual for a marriage, and some clocks bear a year alongside the names of the marrying couple. But perhaps finances were tight in 1766 and had improved by 1767. Or maybe the clock was made by Richard as a birth gift for his son to keep in perpetuity.

The date of 1810 alongside those same RR initials was perplexing and may suggest that Richard was still alive then and did not die about 1790. I can find no significant Redrick family event in that year, nor can I find any death record for Richard Redrick. So that left things a bit in the air.

The case is later than the clock and could well date from about 1810. It is



Figure 8. This left view of the movement shows the original seatboard, which is over-wide for this case, which it was clearly not built for. It is also too shallow front to back, whereas an original board would reach far enough to touch the backboard.



Figure 9. The writing on the backboard is usually partially hidden by the pendulum, weights and lines and is not easily read.



Figure 10. The backboard lettering seen with the weights and lines completely removed shows the lettering to be "R Redrick 1767, C R R 1810".

clearly a good quality, London-made mahogany case of typical style for that time. So it seems possible that the clock was re-cased in 1810. We know from the style and the seatboard that the clock was originally in a different case. Commemoration of the clock's date of making in 1767 and date of re-casing was deliberately and boldly painted onto the backboard in 1810. We could not know whether Richard himself was still alive in 1810 or whether the 'R.R.' was repeated simply out of respect for him, perhaps by his son Christopher.

Two questions remain.

The first is why was the clock not signed by the maker, as was usual practice? Well, although Richard Redrick made watch cases, he would almost certainly have learned to make clocks too. He could quite possibly have made the clock himself, and, with all his contacts

within the trade, he would certainly have been able to obtain any castings or other parts he needed. But City Company rules were firm and he would not have been allowed to sign a work which was outside the limited sphere for which his Freedom qualified him.

We quite often see unsigned clocks but hardly ever do we know why they went unsigned. It was certainly not by oversight. Sometimes we can make a pretty good guess and over the years I have figured out a few reasons why this can happen. Perhaps the most regular one was that clockmakers, who found it hard to make a living in more remote country villages, would take their clocks to nearby market towns or even cities to sell on market days. In almost all instances that was contrary to local bylaws for outsiders, unless they had freedom to trade there, and that was usually limited

to local traders. Such freedoms were not granted without strict control and payment of fees. Local traders, who had paid for their freedom, were enraged at outsiders poaching their trade. Offenders who could be traced would be fined and their goods confiscated.

I have come across a few examples of clockmakers in that position in the past. One example comes to mind from years ago when I was researching the life of John Sanderson, the clockmaker from Wigton in Cumberland. In 1715 he was caught selling his clocks in Edinburgh, a full 100 miles away. More devious individuals would have left their clocks unsigned to avoid being tracked down. But Sanderson was at one time (though only for a few years) a Quaker, whose beliefs must surely have suggested he avoid nefarious activities. He was fined, his clocks confiscated and he was

made to promise never to repeat the offence—which he didn't. Or at least he didn't get caught again.

And yet we sometimes see clocks of Sanderson's uniquely-distinctive construction bearing the name of Jeremiah Sanderson, and we know for certain that no such person existed! John Sanderson did have a chequered past and always believed, like Jeremiah, that bad things were bound to happen. They did, and were usually of his own making.

The second question is why was the clock re-cased. We can only guess. But we know this did happen now and then with clocks that passed down in the family. It could be a matter of fashion, of what the family felt best matched in with other household furniture they had acquired over the years. On the other hand it is said that ordinary families were not nearly as fashion conscious then as they are today. But it is possible the original case was lacquered, sometimes

of a clue that was staring us in the face all along but that we had all misread. I had seen the writing on the case backboard as a photograph that showed it partly obscured by pendulum, weights and lines. I took it for granted that the lettering was as above as I had been told. But I decided to ask for a better photograph of this for this article. David supplied this and instantly I realised we had misread part of it.

What we had taken as a flourish followed by 'R.R 1810' was in fact 'CRR 1810'. The lettering was painted on the backboard not by Richard Redrick, the father, but by the son, Christopher Richard. That made far more sense. The conclusions were the same except that it now seems to have been Christopher who re-cased the clock in 1810, as he tells us by what we now recognise as his commemorative lettering. His father, Richard, may well have died about 1790 and been long dead by 1810, as I first

records of the Old Bailey on 22nd February 1769—but he was not a villain. It was when John Charter, journeyman to watch casemaker, James Richards, was accused of stealing a piece of marked silver to the value of ten pence from his master. After a tip-off they apprehended the suspect in a local tavern—don't they always? They found the stolen silver 'in his breeches, when they pulled them off there and then, which conjures up an interesting scene. Richard Redrick stated in evidence: 'I have known the prisoner three years; all that time I took him to be a very honest man'. Several other witnesses said the same. Charter was found guilty and was transported.

The name Redrick is very unusual and barely exists in Britain until the mid eighteenth century. Clearly it is not a variant of Rod(e)rick. But with a bit of searching around I did find others.

Joseph Redrick, a watchmaker, was recorded as working in London between



referred to as janned or chinoiserie, and these were notorious for surface deterioration and could soon become very shabby.

But why not buy a complete new clock outright? The answer is that they were very expensive. Such a clock was usually the most expensive single item a household ever bought, exceeded in cost only by a grand four-poster bed. A clock like this could have cost £6 or more, without a case. At that time a tradesman was doing well to earn £1 a week and a dozen mahogany dining chairs could be bought for a few shillings. A London mahogany case, such as this replacement one, was made of the finest timbers that money could buy and could well have cost £10. A good clock would repair for ever and was not discarded lightly but usually was kept for generations.

It was at this point that fate threw a spanner in the works. And it came just as I had finished this article and was feeling proud of myself as the Hercule Poirot of horological mysteries. It came in the form

Figure 11. This document was found in the bottom of the case. It is the original certificate of Freedom of the City of London of Christopher Richard Redrick of the Drapers' Company issued in 1790.

suspected.

Richard Redrick does not appear in any lists of clockmakers but he is listed in Philip Priestley's 1994 book *WATCH CASE MAKERS OF ENGLAND, 1720-1920*. Philip records that his mark was 'RR' and 'R.R'—the very mark his son put for him on the clock case. In 1762 and 1763 he was working 'at Mr. Beucer in St. John Street'. In 1768 he was listed at Aldermanbury, possibly at number 37. I have no interest myself in watches but I knew Philip and often used to swap notes with him in areas where our interests overlapped. Sadly he passed away last year and the world of horology will be much poorer without him.

Richard Redrick's name appears in

1766 and 1808. One William Redrick and wife Elizabeth had a son, William, born in 1763. He was apprenticed 1777 to Hugh Anderson of St Botolph's Aldersgate as a watch finisher and was married in 1794 to Susanna Prescott. William Redrick senior died in 1782.

These three (Richard, William, Joseph) were probably all related, perhaps brothers, as I can't find that name before them (though there was an isolated example of William Redrick, a Quaker, buried in Southwark in 1674 aged 46, trade unknown, maybe even a misreading or misrendering of Rodrick). All three were working in related trades. The name sounds to me to be Germanic or Scandinavian and they were probably immigrants.

I am pleased to say that the results were surprisingly successful in that I did discover who made the clock and where and when—with the help of a few clues that were there all along, but that we failed to understand until our research was well under way. Well done, Poirot. 🕒