

## Old Berkshire Clockmakers.\*

By ERNEST W. DORMER.

THERE are few folk who do not confess to a weakness for a "Grandfather" clock, and this weakness is to a large extent inherited. In the first half of the Nineteenth Century, when collecting had not become a popular pastime, few were the cottagers who could not boast their long-case clock. In the majority of instances it was a simple example in a plain oak case by the local carpenter, and a thirty-hour movement assembled by the local horologist. (In a few instances he was also the village blacksmith.) But nevertheless it was an honest piece of workmanship and kept excellent time, as all "grandfathers" must do from the method of their construction. It represented, to the primogenial owner, many minor joys denied; many scrapings and parings from the humble menage; and came to be the pride of the kitchen as well as the trusted monitor of the family breadwinner. It is a strange fact that until within quite recent times it has been possible to purchase a plain thirty-hour "grandfather" clock for considerably less than its original cost. It should be stated for the uninitiated that a "thirty-hour" clock needs to be wound up every day, while an "eight-day" only requires this operation performed once a week.

Berkshire, in common with other counties, had its dozens of clockmakers, some of whom became members of the Clockmakers' Company, an ancient and honourable assembly, and it is strange to read on ancient brazen dials names of craftsmen living in such retired spots as Arborfield, Silchester and Warfield. There was not the need in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to fly to towns on the wings of the wind to obtain even the minor necessities of life, and each village was practically a self-contained community that had little interest in or need of its neighbours. The names of these old-time craftsmen are now almost forgotten, and only the parish registers and the brass dial keep them from entire oblivion.

---

\* Will any of our readers who possess 'grandfather' clocks, send me the names of the makers, so that a list can be made.—J. Hautenville-Cope, Esq., Finchampstead, Berks.

The Royal County no doubt produced fine clocks possessing all the qualities desired by the connoisseur ; clocks in walnut, marqueterie and mahogany ; movements playing sweet old airs or the chimes of cathedral cities ; but its main output appears to have been the simple examples of the cottage type. The earliest clocks had a circle or oval of " bull's-eye " glass in the centre of the door, with hempen rope or chain winding, and in the majority of instances the cases had very narrow waists. Occasionally one finds holes cut in the sides of the case to allow room for the pendulum to swing to its full escapement. In rare examples these holes have been covered by dome-like pieces of wood called " ears," but it is unusual to find an " eared " clock later than the reign of Charles II. Almost without exception the earliest long-case clocks were square-headed ; the arch-dial did not come into vogue until Georgian days, while the high " receding-moulding " hoods are of the time of William and Mary or Queen Anne. Other signs of early make may be traced in the movements, such as brass dials, sometimes with silvered hour-rims, and cast triangular ornaments in the corners displaying Cupids, crowns, or a fanciful device at the whim of the maker. Concentric rings around the winding holes also speak of early construction. There is usually no door to the bonnet, and the latter has to be lifted off. A chiming movement is seldom, if ever, found in an oak case, but the workmanship is always excellent and true.

Berkshire clockmakers were in existence long before the advent of the " grandfather " clock. Richard of Wallingford, Abbot of St. Albans, who flourished in the fourteenth century, constructed a clock which in its time had not its peer in Europe ; and Leland refers to it as showing the course of the sun, moon and stars, and the rise and fall of the tides. A very early clock-maker of repute was Henry Seymour, of Wantage, who, in the first half of the sixteenth century, made a clock for the church at East Hendred which still remains. One of the earliest Reading clocks seen by the present writer was an hour hand " eight-day " by Luke Wise, who was a member of the Clockmakers' Company in 1694, and was making clocks some ten years before this.

The case was of pearwood or cherry, a common timber for cases, with spiral twist columns of ebony flanking the bonnet and concentric rings around the winding holes. There seem to have been two early makers of "Lantern" clocks in Reading, one named Richard Whiteheare, 1648, the other J. Hoddle, 1688. If one may believe the statements of Man, in his History of Reading, there does not appear to have been a clockmaker in Reading in the first quarter of the seventeenth century, for the churchwardens of St. Mary's were obliged, when they desired to set up a clock in the tower of that church, to contract with a clockmaker of Windsor. His work, however, does not seem to have been very faithfully executed, for notwithstanding that he was required to give sureties for the keeping time of the clock, it was necessary to instruct the sexton "to set it so as to go and strike, as near as he could, at due hours."

But the chief Reading clockmakers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were the Hockers and the Dickers, numerous examples of whose work still remain scattered up and down the County. The Hockers, of Reading, were originally yeomen, and the earliest reference to them records them as holding the manor of Woodley in 1609. Mrs. Cope, in her "Original Yeomen Pedigrees," published some years ago in the *Reading Mercury*, gives some interesting details of this family. There was a John Hocker, clockmaker, in Reading in 1682, and his son, presumably, was apprenticed to John Martin and turned over to Edward Joslin in 1728. He was made a member of the Clockmakers' Company in 1729. There is an interesting little inside indicator dial in the Reading Museum, which is recorded to have come from the old clock in the tower of St. Lawrence's Church, and which bears the following inscription: "Hocker fecit 1733. Tho. House. Edm. Pain, Churchwardens. New Dialwork and hands by Rt. Mann, 1816." There seems every likelihood that this was the John Hocker who became a member of the Company in 1729.

Of the Dickers, examples from their hands are widely distributed and almost as numerous as the Hockers; but the family seem to have migrated to surrounding villages. A plain

“ eight-day ” by Thomas Dicker, of Mortimer, and another by a Dicker of Silchester, have been seen by the writer ; while single-handed “ thirty-hours ” by Dicker, of Reading are, common. The best example of this family that has come to the writer’s notice in recent years was lately in the hands of a Reading dealer. It had an “ eight-day ” movement, with date calendar, and in the arch was a rocking ship with the inscription “ The Terrible Captain Death.” The case, again, was of pear, the intention probably being to send it to the East to be “ Japped.” A red “ lac ” Act of Parliament clock by Thomas Dicker, of Reading, has also been seen. So much for the Dickers. A Reading collector should have little difficulty in finding a Hocker or a Dicker clock. William Wise, of Wantage, was making clocks as early as 1660, and John Lord, of Faringdon ; Thomas Jones, of Windsor ; Edward Caudwell, of Blewbury (?) ; William Gunn, of Wallingford (the writer possesses an example by him) ; Peter Godlyman and Benjamin Cotton, both of Hurley ; and Bunce, of Wantage, are names of other eighteenth century clockmakers in Berkshire. Mr. Rowland Kent, solicitor, of Reading, has an early eighteenth century “ thirty-hour ” by Jos. Kember, of Shaw, and another later example, with white enamelled dial, by John Player, of Reading. There was a Thomas West, of Reading, who was making clocks in 1780, and a “ thirty-hour ” by him has been located. There was also a Thomas Wild, of Reading, working about the same time. In an old inn at Thatcham is, or was, a white enamelled dial by W. Randall, of Reading, dating from about 1780. The writer possesses two clocks made by one of his ancestors, John Lee, of Cookham : one, a “ thirty-hour,” the other an “ eight-day.” There was a maker named Horsnaile, traditionally said to have been a blacksmith, working at Warfield in 1730. The village of Arborfield had a clockmaker in the middle of the eighteenth century of whose labours an “ eight-day ” with brass dial, in a fine green lac case from the East, was for sale a few years ago in the window of a Reading shop. One is led to the conclusion that the presence of a name on a dial is not indisputable evidence that the movement was actually made by the man. No doubt many movements

were ordered from Clerkenwell in the eighteenth century and assembled by local clockmakers.

The following clockmakers were in active work in the County about a century ago :—

Newbury : Gunnell, Bramley, Joyce, Packer, Smith and Webb.

Windsor : Barrs, Coules, Goldsmith, Hanson, Lamb, Merrick, Morris, Pain and Grant.

Wantage : Allen and Belcher.

Wallingford : Cross, Howes, Payne and Player.

Reading : Ballard, Botly, Butler, Carter, Coxhead, Harris, Lickert, Oliver, Player, Smith, Stone, Tight, Trendell, Wale, Wallen, Walsh and Winch (two of these names are familiar).

Wokingham : Boulton and Porter.

Maidenhead : Coster, Trendell and Winch.

Lambourn : Hill and Thatcher.

Hungerford : Raymond and Woodham.

Faringdon : Monnoa, Kirkpatrick and Straus.

Abingdon : Meyer, Payne, Pitt, Pond and Witham.

Theale : Charles Maddeford.

Pangbourne : Allen.

In common with the practice of most provincial museums, there should certainly be a typical Berkshire-made clock in the Reading Museum.