

## AN OLD WATCH AND ITS MAKER.

By TALFOURD ELY, M.A., F.S.A.

The work of art to which I wish to call your attention to-day is an English double-cased gold watch that has been in the possession of my family for nearly a century and a-half, having been given to my great-grandmother, Elizabeth Wallman, afterwards Mrs. Joseph Pattisson, by her parents as a birthday present in or about the year 1751.

The exact date of the watch is not quite certain, but of this more anon.

My first object was simply to lay it before you as a specimen of the goldsmith's art of the last century; but on looking into the matter I found there were certain points with regard to the maker of the watch that suggested further investigation.

This investigation I have pursued diligently, and with, I hope, some measure of success; for which I must thank several friends, and especially Mr. Charles Read, of the British Museum, Sir Owen Roberts, Mr. Henry Charles Overall, Clerk of the Worshipful Company of Clock-makers, Mr. Herbert Rix, Assistant Secretary of the Royal Society, Sir Walter Prideaux, Clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company, Mr. R. W. Frazer, Librarian of the London Institution, and the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol (Dr. Ellicott).

The watch was worn at the waist, outside the dress, with the back outwards, so that the case was exposed to considerable wear. For ordinary occasions, therefore, a case of tortoiseshell was used, placed upon yellow metal so as to throw out its brilliant colours. But on gala-days the good lady wore a case of much greater pretensions, richly dight with figures wrought in gold in high relief.

The style of the day was pseudo-classical; in which a composition originally Greek, but doctored to suit the Roman market, was altered to meet the fancy of the French who then dictated laws of taste to the civilized world.

The back of the case is covered with *repoussé* work,

well executed in the style of Louis Quinze. In the centre a double-winged and partially-draped figure descends to place a wreath on a draped female seated on the right. On the left flits Cupid, with his bow. Two similar urchins crouch beneath the central figure, busied with a garland. In the background are trees. The whole is surrounded by a wide border of ornament, scrolls, garlands and flowers, rich indeed, but to a modern eye too florid. What the subject is intended to be is not so clear, and it might be best to take refuge in the conveniently vague term "allegorical." If, however, we are put to it, we may claim the subject as classical, and compare the case of another watch of similar style by John Ellicott, now in the Guildhall Library,<sup>1</sup> where Hercules is very conspicuous with his club. We may suggest the story of Cupid and Psyche.

The engraver's name, "H. Manly," may be read with a good glass, scratched or engraved beneath the lowest of the figures.

In case G in the Mediæval Room at the British Museum, and forming part of the collection bequeathed by Mr. Octavius Morgan, are two watches with gold outer cases chased in a style much resembling that of the specimens before us. One of the watches is English, made by Isaac Rogers, London, the inner case being hall marked, 1748. The subject represented on the outer case is probably a Roman marriage; possibly it was for a wedding present.

The other is labelled "Dutch watch, 1700-1710. . . . Outer case chased by H. Manly," *i.e.*, by the artist who chased mine. The subject is clearly intended for the sacrifice of Iphigenia at Aulis.

In the adjoining case, K, are three similar specimens—first an "English watch by King about 1730. Presented by Mrs. George Cruikshank"; secondly, an "English watch by J. Thornton"; and thirdly, a part of a case without label, this last being in a style very like that of the case of my watch.

More historically interesting, though perhaps less artistic, is their neighbour, a well-worn silver repeater,

<sup>1</sup> In the central case, in the collection belonging to the Clockmakers' Company.

made about 1770 by Ellicott, London, presented by Sir J. D. Hooker, since it belonged to Jeremy Bentham, the famous Jurisconsult, still to be seen, if not in the flesh, at any rate in his bones, not far off. For in accordance with his wish, his skeleton, dressed in his habit as he lived, and furnished with a coloured wax cast of his face, still sits in a box within the Anatomical Museum, at University College, London.

In the collection belonging to the Clockmakers' Company, at present deposited in a room adjoining the Guildhall Library, there is a watch by John Ellicott, with outer case in the same style as mine, "richly chased with a classical subject," two of the figures representing Hercules and Minerva. Close to it lies a similar case chased by Moser. In the Nelthropp Collection in the same room there are three silver watchcases of the same style.

At South Kensington, in the central or "Lord President's" Court of the Fine Art Department, among watches of the eighteenth century, there is a repeater signed "Gerret Bramer, Amsterdam." Its outer case of gold is *repoussé*, and chased with classic figures banquetting; and bears the inscription "H. Manly fecit."

Of similar style are the cases of four other eighteenth century watches in the same compartment, viz.:—

- (1) Gold case "*repoussé* with figures playing musical instruments surrounded by scrolls and trophies." This watch was "made by Abraham Collomby, London."
- (2) Gold outer case of a repeater by "Jno. Champion, London," 1779, "embossed with a group of classical figures; rococo border."
- (3) Gilt metal watch and case; "the case is *repoussé* with a classical scene of Venus, Bacchus, and Cupid, in a landscape surrounded by scroll and floral patterns . . . . . by Whitaker of Camberwell."
- (4) Gilt metal watch case of English make, "*repoussé* with a group of figures representing the baptism of a Roman emperor (Constantine?) surrounded by scroll and floral patterns."

In the same Court, but forming part of Mr. J. Dunn Gardner's loan collection, there is a gold watch by Grignion of London, the outer case of which is "*repoussé* with Mars and Venus, scrolls and flowers." In style this is similar to those just mentioned, but it is assigned to the middle of the seventeenth century.

In the same collection is a watch of the eighteenth century "in gold case with classical subject in relief." This watch is said to be French, though its style closely resembles the above, and is not like that of the other French watches in the Museum.

There is no reason to suppose Manly was a Frenchman and the name smacks strongly of the British Isles. Yet curiously enough he seems to have had some connection with Holland, for both in the British Museum and at South Kensington we have found his work on the outer cases of Dutch watches. Possibly these watches were finished on this side of the German Ocean. Be this as it may I have searched in vain for any further information as to Manly. His name does not occur in the *Gilda Aurifabrorum* of the late W. Chaffers; and the officers of the Goldsmiths' Company know nothing of him.

The watch itself is a handsome specimen of the Old English verge watch. With regard to decoration the tulip-form of the pillars may be noted. The inner case bears the usual Hallmarks, the Leopard's head crowned and the Lion passant, denoting 22 carat standard gold. The maker's initials; "J. B.," are merely stamped in without any escutcheon or other accessories, in accordance with the simple custom of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> As to these initials it is to be noted that "the first letters of the surname were alone used" till "the Act of 1739 . . . ordered the makers to destroy their existing marks, and to substitute for them *the initials of their Christian and surnames*."<sup>2</sup> Now the initials are clearly J. B., not I. B., and as no conceivable name could begin with a combination of these two consonants, we may presume that they imply a date later than that year; and could not have been employed in 1737, the year to which some have attributed

See W. J. Cripps', *Old English*      <sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*  
*Plabe*, 5th edition, p. 54.

the making of the watch. "J. B.," however, will give us little help in determining the actual name. In the lists of Plateworkers in the *Gilda Aurifabrorum* there are many entries of such initials about the middle of the last century. "J. B." might stand for an endless variety of combinations, from Jacques Bonhomme to John Bull.

As to the "annual letter," denoting the date, we may refer to the Table of Marks on Plate made in London, given by Mr. Cripps; when we shall find that the alphabet used on the inner case of the watch under consideration is that beginning with the year 1736. Some indeed who have examined the annual letter, naturally supposing it stood in the same position as the maker's initials, read it as a "b"; thus making the date 1737. If this were adopted, however, it would involve an alteration in the table given by Mr. Cripps, for the indented form of shield seen in the instance before us does not occur, according to that table, till two years later. But the "loop" being always at the bottom of the shield, the letter must be taken as placed in a direction opposite to that of the maker's initials, and must consequently be read, not as a "b" but as a "q"; the date being therefore not 1737—but 1751. To set the matter at rest I appealed to the Clerk of the Goldsmiths' Company on this point as well as on the history of the makers of the two gold cases. His reply was "that after some considerable research" he was "unable to find anything in the Company's records to throw light upon the watch."

I ventured to call again upon Sir Walter Prideaux, and he was kind enough once more to consult the officers of the Company as to the letter marking the date. The answer was that they inclined to the opinion that it was "q," and not "b." There would seem then still to be some doubt. For my own part, I should fancy the evidence for 1751 to be tolerably strong. But I am not one to rush in where Goldsmiths fear to tread! That family tradition, as embodied in the modern inscription on the back of the watch, points to the earlier date, is of little consequence.

If there is not much to be ascertained about the artist Manly, or the enigmatic "J. B.," and no absolute certainty

as to the date, we may at first sight also feel a little vague as to the maker of the works, though his signature "Jno. Ellicott, London," is plainly engraved upon them; for there were undoubtedly three John Ellicotts in the eighteenth century, and may have been more.

According to the records of the Clockmakers' Company a John Ellicott, whom we may call No. 1, was admitted to the freedom of the Company in 1696. As he must have been at least twenty-one years of age to be so admitted, we know that he was born not later than 1675. In 1732 we find him serving the office of Warden, and in June, 1733, he died in office.

John Ellicott, No. 1, could not then be maker of a watch which bears date 1751, or at any rate some years later than 1733. The Company have no other Ellicott on their books till the admission of John Ellicott in July, 1782.

That there was, however, an horologist of distinction named John Ellicott in existence at the time when the watch was made is proved by the records of the Royal Society, of which he was a Fellow. It is there shown that he was elected on October 26, 1738, and admitted on November 2 of the same year, and that he died in 1772.

This John Ellicott is credited with nine<sup>1</sup> contributions to the Transactions of the Society. Of these, two were on electricity, in which he seems to have made experiments, the first being entitled "On weighing the strength of electrical effluvia"; the second "Essays towards the discovering the laws of electricity"—a title humble enough—though perhaps it might still be employed by the learned of the nineteenth century, or by its successor, now almost knocking at our gates.

In 1736 we find John Ellicott submitting to the Royal Society an improved pyrometer, or instrument for measuring the extension or contraction of metals or other bodies by heat<sup>2</sup>. He also wrote on the construction of pendulums, and he invented a compensation pendulum.

<sup>1</sup> One of these was a letter addressed to him by an acquaintance who wished his name concealed. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, xlv. p. 96.

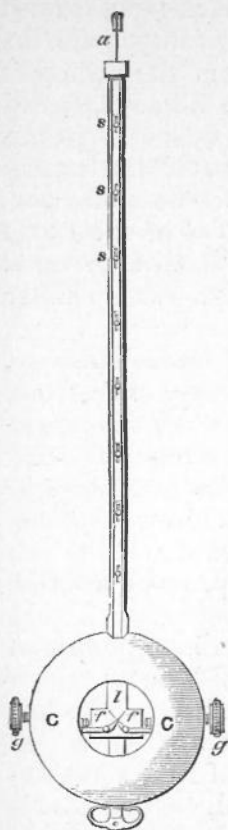
<sup>2</sup> *Philosophical Transactions*, xxxix. 297-9. cf. the *Gentleman's Magazine*, xx. 119-22.

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JOHN ELICOTT.





For the accompanying representation of this we are indebted to Mr. F. J. Britten, who in his *Former Clock and Watchmakers and Their Work*, (p. 107), thus describes it:—

“The bob rests on the longer ends of two levers, of which the shorter ends are depressed by the superior expansion of a brass bar attached to the pendulum rod” . . . “*a* is the suspension spring; *s s s* screws for uniting the steel rod to the brass bar; slotted holes in the latter allowing it to move freely in answer to changes of temperature; *f f* the two levers pivoted to the steel rod; on the shorter ends rests the brass bar; the screws *g g* pass through the pendulum bob *c c*, and rest on the longer ends of the levers. By turning the screws their bearing on the levers may be adjusted.”

According to Mr. Nelthropp<sup>1</sup> and Mr. Britten,<sup>2</sup> Ellicott was born in 1700; but according to the *Dictionary of National Biography* about six years later; and Bromley in his *Catalogue of Engraved Portraits* (p. 401) seems to suggest 1705. His shop “was in Sweeting’s Alley, Cornhill, close to the old Royal Exchange.”<sup>3</sup> Sweeting’s Alley was not rebuilt after the Fire at the Exchange.

Of this John Ellicott<sup>4</sup> at the age of 67, a portrait was painted by Dance, a mezzotinto engraving of which by Robert Dunkarton, belonging to the Clockmakers’ Company, may be seen in their collection at the Guildhall Library. The painting itself, however, is not in the possession of the Company, nor in that of the Royal Society, where I had hoped to find it. I looked in vain for it in the catalogue of the National Portrait Gallery,

<sup>1</sup> *A Treatise on Watchwork*, p. 92.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>2</sup> *The Watch and Clockmaker’s Handbook, Dictionary, and Guide*, by F. J.

Britten, 8th edition (1892), p. 128.

<sup>4</sup> For our engraving of Ellicott we have again to thank Mr. Britten.



and came to the conclusion that if still in existence it must be in private hands, and so it has proved to be; for the other day, I received an invitation from the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol (Dr. Charles John Ellicott), to call and see the portrait at his London residence. It is a three-quarter length portrait of Ellicott seated and leaning with his right elbow on a table, on which lie a diagram, and a volume suggesting the Transactions of the Royal Society. The artist, Nathaniel Dance, R.A., afterwards Sir Nathaniel Dance-Holland, Bart., M.P., was a painter well known in his own day.

John Ellicott the second, the subject of Dance's picture, was celebrated, says a writer in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, "for the beauty and excellence of his workmanship"; and "specimens of his art are much prized." So too says Dubois:—"Les montres et les pendules que fit cet artiste habile sont encore aujourd'hui très-recherchées en Angleterre."<sup>1</sup> They fetched a good sum in his own day, for Horace Walpole writes that the price of a watch and chain by Ellicott was 134 guineas.<sup>2</sup>

In the latter part of Ellicott's life, he had a house at Hackney, where he observed the transit of Venus.<sup>3</sup>

At Hackney he died, leaving a son Edward, who had been admitted to partnership about 1769, and succeeded to his father's business, and to the office of King's Watchmaker. Edward's son, also called Edward, carried on the business at Sweeting's Alley. He was Master of the Clockmakers' Company in 1834, and part of 1835, in July of which year he died<sup>4</sup> without issue. His brother John had an only child Charles, who became rector of Whitwell, Rutland. This Charles also had only one child, Charles John, the present Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, to whom I am chiefly indebted for this account of the family. All other notices of the Ellicotts seem to contain hopeless inconsistencies.

Through the kindness of the Librarian, Mr. Frazer, I have been able to see the clock made by John Ellicott for the London Institution, with a compensation pendulum of his own invention. It was of this pendulum that Sir E.

<sup>1</sup> *Nouvelle Biographie Générale*, xv p. 892.

<sup>2</sup> Letter to Sir Horace Mann, June 8, 1759.

<sup>3</sup> *Gentleman's Magazine*, xxxi. p. 318.

<sup>4</sup> Atkins and Overall, *Some Account of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers of the City of London*, p. 89.

Beckett Denison wrote:<sup>1</sup>—"There is another bad one which is still used in small French clocks, though it has long ago been abandoned in England, where it was invented by Ellicott, a clockmaker in the last century"—and again "I suppose they are only made because they have a kind of scientific look to ignorant people, in clocks made to show and to sell." In spite of this hostile criticism the old clock at the London Institution is a first-rate timekeeper, and all the clocks and watches about the place are set by it. It loses only *one second a week*. How few of us could say the same!

Hearing that another specimen of Ellicott's handiwork was to be found in the London Hospital, I made a pilgrimage from Hampstead to Mile End Road, and was rewarded by finding in the Secretary's office a clock still in excellent condition, and bearing on its metal face the inscription "John Ellicott, London."

John Ellicott was then an important personage. He was the King's Watchmaker in days when watchmakers were rarer birds than they are now. Two of his craft, Tompion and George Graham, were deemed worthy of a tomb in Westminster Abbey, and it was in Ellicott's time that John Harrison, a watchmaker, gained the £20,000 offered by Parliament for a timekeeper sufficiently accurate for ascertaining longitude at sea.<sup>2</sup> As an Oxford or a Cambridge College keeps up its benefactor's tomb, so the Clockmakers' Company has most appropriately undertaken the pious task of tending the monument that marks Harrison's last resting place to the south of the old church at Hampstead.<sup>3</sup>

It is this second John Ellicott then that we must consider as the maker of my great grandmother's watch. My mother used to amuse us by imitating the well satisfied way in which the old lady would refer to her treasured timekeeper as made "by Ellicott, the King's Watchmaker." But curiously enough he is the very John Ellicott who is *not* on the roll of the Clockmakers' Company; though in 1782, ten years after his death, a *third* John Ellicott (no

<sup>1</sup> *A Rudimentary Treatise on Clocks*, 7th edition, pp. 64-5.

<sup>2</sup> Mr. Overall has collected some interesting facts as to this matter.

<sup>3</sup> Portraits of Graham and Harrison,

and also of another famous watchmaker, Arnold, with his family, are to be found in the southern galleries at South Kensington.

doubt the Bishop's grandfather) takes up his freedom of the Company *by patrimony*. Surely then our watchmaker, John Ellicott the second, or at any rate his son Edward, must have been free of the Clockmakers' Company. If he was, there must have been some carelessness in keeping the register, a thing by no means impossible in the easy going eighteenth century. If on the other hand he was not a member of the Clockmakers' Company, we must suppose, (as the present Clerk suggests) that he lived too far westwards to be reached by the Company's powers; though this leaves the question of patrimony in the case of John Ellicott number three unexplained.

Nowadays every schoolboy—aye, and every schoolgirl too—has his or her watch. Watches are turned out by machinery and sold wholesale like eggs. It is pleasant to look back on the days when they were rarities; when a watch was an individual, apart and separate from every other, a personal distinction special to its owner.

In those days watchmaking must have been to many a labour of love, as well as a very profitable trade; and might most fitly be practised by men of the stamp of that worthy Fellow of the Royal Society, John Ellicott, "the King's Clockmaker."