

The Edward Hallett¹ Grandfather Clock

In March 2022, Paul White, a specialist clock restorer from Essex and childhood resident of Milborne Port, posted in our Facebook group that he had seen a grandfather clock for sale in an auction which he believed could have been commissioned by or for Edward Hallett, as his name appears at the bottom of the chapter ring² where the maker's name would normally be, with 'Milbourne Port' written next to it. Once he had recovered from the surprise of our outpouring of excitement and rapture, and once he had appreciated a little more the possible provenance of the clock, he approached the seller before the auction (knowing that there had been little interest the first time it had come up for auction), made a 'cheeky offer' and bought the clock from a man who had inherited it from his father who lived in Yorkshire, who in turn had bought it from an antiques dealer in North Wales.

Paul discovered that the clock had last been serviced in 2014 and had been in storage ever since but that it was generally in good working order, with its chime intact (a high 'D'!)

Paul has not been able yet to identify the maker (much to his frustration!) but there is a first name and initial on the back of the dial, with part of a date: *Edward N July 18th 1731*. We are assuming that this date must be 1731, to fit in with Edward Hallett's dates. The 1731 date could be when the clock was made, or service or repaired; unfortunately, we will never know.

The clock stands 201cm tall and is made of oak and has only the hour hand, which was typical of clocks of this period, and the movement runs for thirty hours before requiring winding; this probably meant that the clock was wound at the same time every day as part of the household routine. This type of movement was also called a birdcage movement, and although cheaper than an eight-day movement, it still would have cost a minimum of a year's wages for the average person. There is no key for the door to the mechanism but the resourceful Paul has made one (see below).

¹ Edward Hallett was Sheriff of Somerset in 1741 and the most notable resident of Swatchford Manor in Kingsbury Regis, now disappeared; he was the friend and agent of Thomas Medlycott.

² the ring where the hours are engraved

The main dial is made of brass and the engraving is filled with engraver's wax. The chapter ring with the Roman numerals (also filled with wax) is also brass; it has a thin coat of silver on it. The dial is re-silvered using a two-part powder.³ The decorations in the corners are called spandrels and are made from cast brass.

There are misspellings of Hallett - 'Hallet' - and Milborne - 'Milbourne' but we feel confident that this was our Edward Hallett's clock. Spelling was still rather fluid at that time!

At the top of the clock face you will see an engraving of a bird. At first we thought that this might be a phoenix as it rather stylised; we discovered that the hoho bird (from the mythical Japanese version of the phoenix) first started appearing in England in the 18th century on Georgian furniture and porcelain, representing good luck/fortune, longevity, fidelity and wisdom, so it could well be a hoho. It could also be an eagle, which leads us to possible connection with the Medlycotts; an eagle on top of a crown is at the top of the family crest and there are stone eagle sculptures at the top of the gate pillars at the entrance to Ven House. 1731 was a significant year for the family as this is when James Medlycott went bankrupt and died, his son Thomas inheriting the estate. This connection is purely speculative! More research is to be done...

See below for the photographs that Paul has sent us. We are so grateful to him for this wonderful discovery that so enriches our knowledge of this key figure in Milborne Port's history. Paul has also offered to lend the clock to our museum at some point... Needless to say, we are very excited at that prospect!

If you would like to learn more about Edward Hallett and Swatchford, follow this link: <http://milborneporthistory.org.uk/in-search-of-swatchford>

Nathalie Hetherington
23rd March 2022

³ The first powder puts the silver on the brass by a chemical reaction; the second powder finishes the coating and gives it its shine.

Before Paul's tender loving care







After Paul's tender loving care









