

## The Edward Hallett<sup>1</sup> Grandfather Clocks

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 ring<sup>2</sup> 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 18<sup>th</sup> 1?31*. If the date is 1731, then this fits with Edward Hallett's lifetime. If the date is 1831, this would fit with clockmaker Edward Newcombe who was working at that time in Sherborne and might have repaired or serviced it in 1831. However, Paul is confident that Edward Newcombe is *not* the maker.

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

<sup>2</sup> the ring where the hours are engraved

the average person. There is no key for the door to the mechanism, but the resourceful Paul has made one (see below).

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.<sup>3</sup> 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 is 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. Perhaps the clock was a gift from Thomas Medlycott to Edward Hallett; there is an inlay on the casing which was only done in London and it makes sense that Thomas Medlycott, most of his time living in London, could have commissioned this part of the clock there<sup>4</sup>. However, this connection is purely speculative! More research is to be done...

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

<sup>4</sup> See page 9 for further thoughts on where the clocks might have been made.



*Before Paul's tender loving care*









*After Paul's tender loving care*





*Paul made this key to fit the lock!*







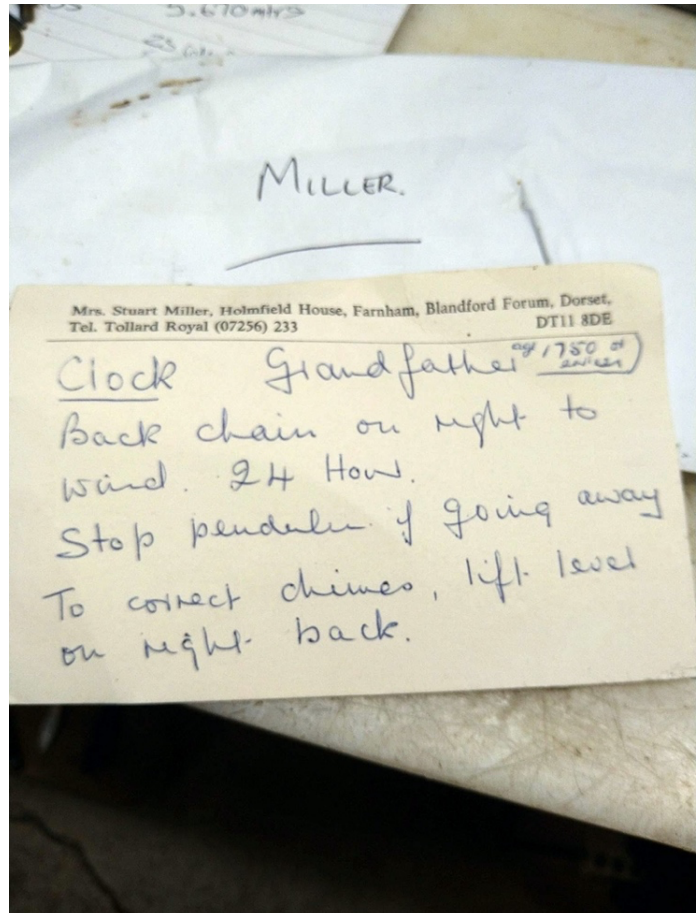
## Second Edward Hallett clock

And as if this all wasn't wonderful enough... At the end of May 2023, Paul contacted us to say that he had found another 8-day Edward Hallett clock up for sale at the auction house in Semley on 10<sup>th</sup> June. His was the highest bid and a few days later he collected it and brought it to village for us to see it, (as well as the dial of the first clock so that we could see it 'in the flesh').

This card, found inside the case, tells us not only how to set the correct chime but also that a previous owner believed that the clock mechanism (not the case) dates from around 1750, which is what Paul had anticipated and which his examination of the dial, spandrels, hands and dial size confirmed.

Close examination of the clock's parts revealed some initials: LH. Usually anything inscribed on the back of the dial indicates when the mechanism was serviced or repaired. There was a clockmaker called Lawson Huddleston from Shaftesbury, 1745-1811, so these could be his initials. There is also a possible J James 74. As with the first clock, Paul is confident that the clock was made *for* rather than *by* Edward Hallett.

Paul believes that both clocks were probably made locally due to the logistics of transportation at the time. With clockmakers in Shaftesbury and Sherborne, they could have come from either town, but Shaftesbury is his best bet. Shaftesbury - or Shaston as it was known then - had many exceptional clockmakers and their clocks are highly sought after.





Paul put the 2<sup>nd</sup> clock together and we took it to the clapper bridge in Lower Kingsbury so that it could be seen in all its glory on a beautiful June afternoon, with the backdrop of the Old Dairy, also 18th century! And we heard it chime – fabulous! It was quite a moment...

You will see from the pictures that the face is quite different from that of the first clock - less elaborate but this time with a separate plaque at the top reading *Edwd Hallet* and with a different spelling again of *Milborn*. Again, they weren't great ones for consistent spellings back then...





*Paul standing proudly next to his new acquisition!*







The clock case - although not the right case for the mechanism, dial or face - revealed some historical details that we were not expecting. For a start, there has been much 'patching up' of a crack running down the back panel with some wallpaper! The date 1842 can be seen written at the top, and some other writing that suggests that some other paper was used that had been used for some sort of accounting audit for some overseers!<sup>5</sup> The back and front of the panel can be seen in the pictures below:

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Historically, the Overseers of the Poor were elected officials who administered poor relief such as money, food, and clothing. The office was created by the Act for the Relief of the Poor 1597, which required two Overseers in each parish to be elected every Easter.





Paul cleaned, re-waxed and re-silvered! He even re-blued the hands! What a beauty.





### *The two Hallett clocks side-by-side*



Paul rehoused the 2<sup>nd</sup> clock mechanism into a case that is still not right date-wise, as the short door puts it after 1800.

We are so grateful to Paul for these two wonderful discoveries that so enrich our knowledge of Edward ‘Two-Clocks’ Hallett, an important figure in Milborne Port’s history. We have also learnt quite a lot about clocks! Paul has also offered to lend the clocks 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  
December 2023*