

Restoration versus Conservation

R E Holmes ponders the future of a Country House 'find'



I AM PROMPTED to write after reading: *Conservation and Repair*, by Colin Ferguson, *HJ*, November 2004 p.389.

I am a Trade Associate Member (Casemaker) of the BHI and was the first of this new membership category. Most of my business is split between manufacturing replica clock cases and fitting new German movements and repairing and restoring existing clock cases. I am sometimes commissioned to make replica cases for existing old movements and will do research to ensure the results are true to the periods and movements. I carry out minimal repairs and servicing to movements and any major movement or dial work is passed on to a specialist repairer.

I believe that due to the long past and potential life of clocks we are only guardians of them and have a responsibility to maintain them in as good condition as possible for future generations. I also believe that they should be properly serviced and allowed to run. There is an argument that very rare clocks should be kept in museum conditions and run intermittently, if at all, but the vast majority of clocks don't come into this category. I believe as much as possible of the original clock should be retained to achieve these aims. Even if some parts are worn they should only be replaced if they prevent the clock from functioning. Any parts that are replaced should be kept with the clock.

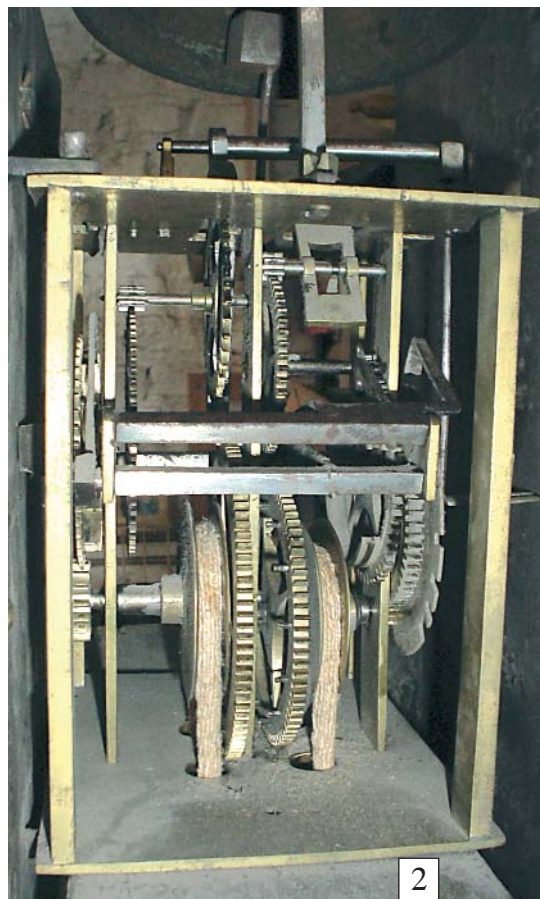
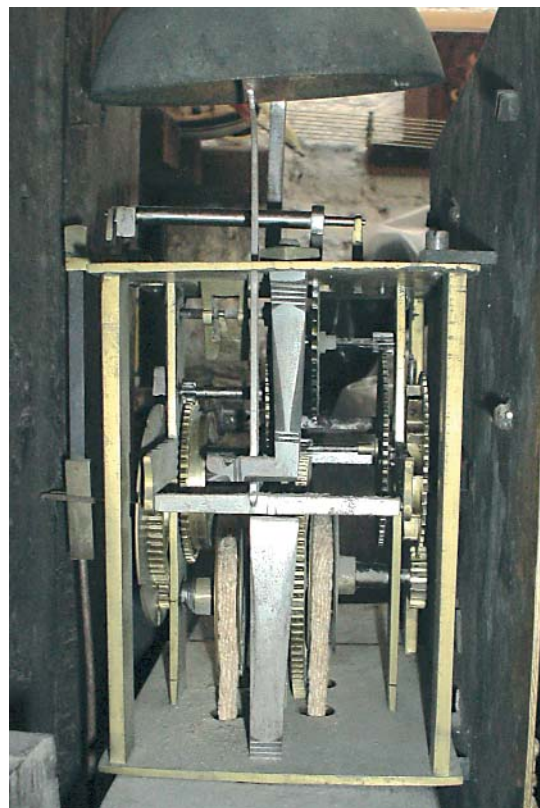
Generally there is no argument about the casework I have to do as usually the cases that are brought to me are in very poor condition and usually require re-gluing, some new parts and perhaps re-finishing. An extreme example is a late Victorian 'Vienna' rescued from a chicken shed complete with some years of guano!

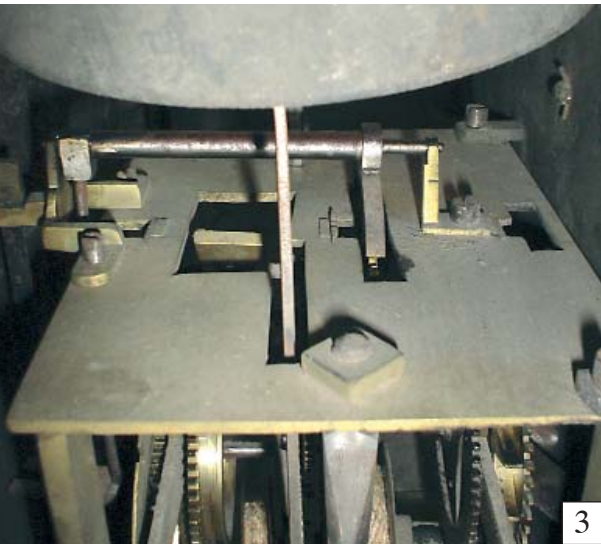
Occasionally I will get requests to do work which, in my opinion, is not justifiable and I decline to do it. An example was a request to strip a fine late 18th century oak long case and stain it a mahogany colour to 'match the rest of the furniture'!

The Clock

Now the point of my writing: I have recently acquired, for myself, a very early long case clock from a country house 'cellar and attic' sale. It is a London clock, 1, and, unusually, the case is oak. It stands 75" high and has an 11" dial (190 and 28cm). It is in remarkably good condition although there are signs of the usual work having been carried out on the pedestal base. It has apparently spent most, if not all, of its life in the said country house, which leads me to believe in its authenticity.

The movement is a thirty-hour, single handed, posted frame in exceptionally good condition, 2. There is very little wear and no signs of major work having been carried out. The anchor escapement, 3, looks original; there are no signs





of its having been converted from a verge. It was covered in dust when I bought it. I blew this away, oiled the pivots and set it going and it runs beautifully.

The dial is signed *Geo Bayford in Upper Shadwell*, 4. The Clockmakers Guild have a record of a George Bayford 'putting himself into apprenticeship with Richard Colston in 1682'. There is no record of him as a clockmaker after that time which is unusual for a London maker so one wonders whether he actually practised as a clockmaker after completing his apprenticeship. Could this clock have been made during his apprenticeship?

There are some points about the clock which raise the 'restoration versus conservation' issue.

The case, as already stated, is in very good condition, but in my opinion is missing original bun feet. The door has the original lock without a key and has had an ugly 'modern' turn catch fitted, 5, to keep it shut. Two of the dial door pillar capitals have been replaced and the remaining originals show traces of having been gilded, 6 (arrow). The whole case has been painted with a brown varnish including the gilded capitals, which gives it a tired and dirty appearance. The fretwork

at the top of the hood has the signs of a silk backing, but this is now brown along with the rest of the case. Interestingly the fretwork is not symmetrical, 6.

The dial is remarkably similar to one shown in John Robey's book (page 494, fig 9.112) attributed to Joseph Windmills, with the same spandrels, plain matted centre and similarly placed signature. It does not have the alarm feature but does have a date aperture. The date ring has been removed and a small section of it, showing the number 4, expertly rivetted in place to cover the aperture, 7 (arrow). The dial reverse shows signs that the date ring did exist at some time – there are 'shadows' where the ring and support rollers were positioned. The chapter ring is unsilvered and the 'Tompion cherub' spandrels are quite tarnished, 6.

The movement, apart from being tarnished, appears to require no work except cleaning and the replacement of the very frayed rope

The Question

Now the big question: how much work should be carried out to put this clock back into good order?

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