



The tower, left, of the Clock Tower Inn complex lists its attractions, including The Time Museum. Exhibits included the fabulous Ingold Clock and other 17th and 18th century European masterpieces, above.

A Brief History of the Time Museum

Anthony Randall tells the story of a fabulous collection that moved to Chicago and died

THE TIME MUSEUM was a privately owned museum in North America, remarkable both for the excellence and completeness of its collection illustrative of the whole history of timekeeping and for the brevity of its existence. It opened its doors to the public in 1970, only to close them again quite abruptly some 29 years later. In October this year following previous sales of parts of the collections, the majority which remains comes up for sale in New York.

The Museum was created by Seth G Atwood, encouraged and assisted by his wife Pat, with a great deal of help from many sources. In particular, William Andrewes, who was the curator during the main period of acquisition and expansion, devoted much of his energy and enthusiasm to the careful selection of the best pieces that became available at the time. Without these three people the Museum would never have existed in the form in which it did.

The Atwoods' home, where the Museum was situated is in the industrial town of Rockford, Illinois, about 100 miles west of Chicago, off the busy I-90 inter-state road. It is a town of some 250,000 inhabitants and is spread out over an area similar to that of greater London. As such it

is a fine example of urban sprawl on the grand scale, but where, without a car, one is virtually marooned!

According to legend, the Atwood family fortune was founded by Seth Atwood's father, who, in 1916, invented a rubber doorstep to prevent car doors from rattling when closed. The invention caught on and as a result the ATWOOD VACUUM MACHINE COMPANY grew into a major supplier of a multitude of different components to the car industry. Seth Atwood ran this firm, but had many other interests including banking and also a large, comfortable motel on the edge of town, called the CLOCK TOWER INN. This motel also became the home of the TIME MUSEUM.

Seth Atwood became interested in time and timekeepers while a student at university. Later, he began to collect certain key pieces illustrative of the history of these subjects. As the collection gradually grew, it became difficult to house in a domestic situation – even a large one. Mrs Atwood also became concerned at the number of interested visitors who came tramping through her house to view the pieces, often requiring sustenance and entertainment as well. The last straw was one Christmas Eve when she received

a request to come and view.

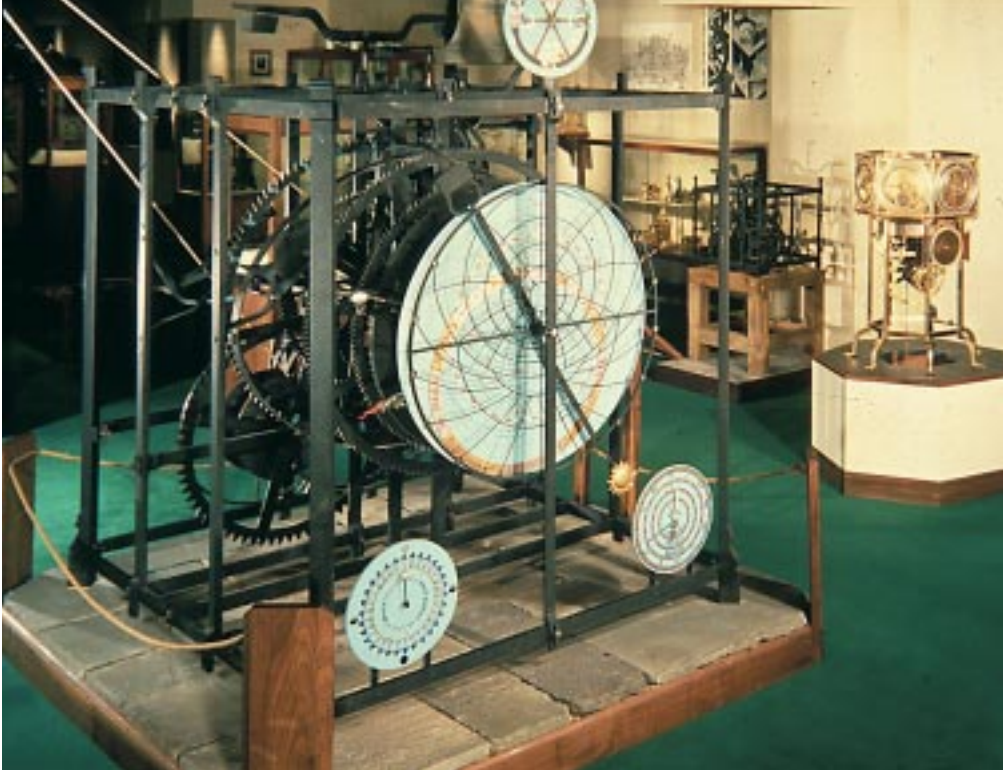
The obvious solution was to move most of the pieces to a room set aside for them at the CLOCK TOWER INN, where security would be less of a problem, visitors could be catered for adequately, and the household could return to normality. However, as the collection continued to grow, larger accommodation became necessary, until finally, in 1982-3, a whole new wing was built to house what had become THE TIME MUSEUM, together with a library, conservation department, administration and a full time curator.

In its heyday the Museum housed something over 3000 pieces, almost all of which were on display, illustrating the highways and also many of the bye ways of horological development.

Wherever possible original pieces were acquired to illustrate each aspect of time measurement, but where this was not possible reproductions were made. In addition, special pieces employing new developments were commissioned. It was as a result of one such commission that I came to know Seth Atwood.

We met in the early 1970s, in the BRITISH MUSEUM, where I was working on its *Catalogue of Chronometers*. Mr Atwood had come to the

Illustrations provided by the author



When originals were not available Attwood commissioned reproductions for his Time Museum. The Wallingford clock and the de Dondi (far right) were researched and built by Peter Haward.

The comprehensive collection included this monumental Japanese Clock.

Students Room where I was working and we got chatting. At the time he was preoccupied with a particular problem. In the Museum at La Chaux de Fonds in Switzerland, he had seen a pocket watch that was supposed to go for a year on a single wind. Intrigued, he had made enquiries to see if another example could be bought for his own Museum. No other example was known to any of the specialist saleroom staff when he enquired, or had come on the market. Could another example be made, and could it be made to go? It was an interesting challenge. No kind of self-winding device, or other form of energy input was allowed and the case and dial were to be of gold. That was the rather stark specification. The

story that followed was told in the *HJ* of December 1974, pages 5 and 6.

After that I received two more commissions from Seth Atwood and was invited to write the catalogue of the Time Museum collection of chronometers. This part of the collection contained no less than 157 pieces including Len Salzer's reproduction of John Harrison's 'H1', Thomas Mudge's timekeeper called 'Green', an early chronometer by Ferdinand Berthoud, his *Montre Marine No 6*, and examples by most of the famous makers and innovators. The rest of the collection was similarly well endowed.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy to overtake THE TIME MUSEUM was the premature death of Seth

Atwood's wife Pat, a very remarkable person, determined and forceful, but utterly charming. She was as devoted to the TIME MUSEUM and all that it stood for as her husband. Much of the interior decoration of the Museum was due to her; she wanted it to be both welcoming and comfortable, much like her own sitting room at home.

Later, when Seth Atwood decided to retire from business, he hoped that one or other of his three children would wish to keep the Museum going. Unfortunately, they all declined, only a daughter-in-law expressed an interest and came forward to run it. For a few years the Museum did continue, before it was closed down in 1999 and the collection was offered to the CITY OF CHICAGO MUSEUM OF SCIENCE AND INDUSTRY*. A financial agreement entered into between the City of Chicago and the Atwoods has since broken down, resulting in the proposed sale in October.

While one can only regret the break up of one of the greatest horological collections, who knows, maybe it will allow the formation of other equally good, but as yet unknown, collections. □

* The collection was offered to the Chicago museum for some \$35 million. This was reckoned to be more than the Museum could raise and an initial sale of key items fetched \$14 million. The museum undertook to raise \$25million but many factors, including the sudden death of its key promoter, Justice Shepro, led to the failure of the campaign – which raised only \$761,000.

OBITUARY

Jim Habgood

James George Habgood known as 'Jim' was born in Billericay on 6th January 1916.

In 1938 he joined SMITHS in Edgeware, London supervising the assembly of instruments and clocks. During 1941 he was directed to the SMITHS factory at Cheltenham, to set up an Experimental Department and in 1953 he became the Chief Horological Engineer in the Watch Factory Cheltenham-2 (CH2). Through the BRITISH STANDARDS INSTITUTE he helped to formulate standards relating to the horological industry and was responsible for many clock and watch inventions that SMITHS covered with patents.

He was awarded a Fellowship of the British Horological Institute (FBHI) in 1959.

In 1974 he left SMITHS and set up his own business in Cheltenham. One of his first commissions was to produce a longcase clock movement

for SINCLAIR HARDING. His business became J G HABGOOD & SON in 1976, and it had a long and fruitful relationship with SINCLAIR HARDING producing high quality hand-made clock components, including fusee clock chains.

In 1986 Jim moved to Barnstaple, where he continued his chain making, ultimately producing a range of five different size chains, which he exported all over the world. By 1997 his eyesight had deteriorated and aged 80, he decided to take 'early retirement'. He died on the February 4th, 2004, aged 88 years.

He wrote in his notebook: 'The whole of my working life has been enjoyable and interesting, as has my leisure-time. And to all this has been added a generous share of good fortune. What more could anyone wish for?' □