

Andrew King reviews *Time Restored. The Harrison timekeepers and R T Gould, the man who knew (almost) everything* by Jonathan Betts FBHI.

(464pp, 62 illustrations, 16 colour plates. Oxford University Press and the National Maritime Museum.)

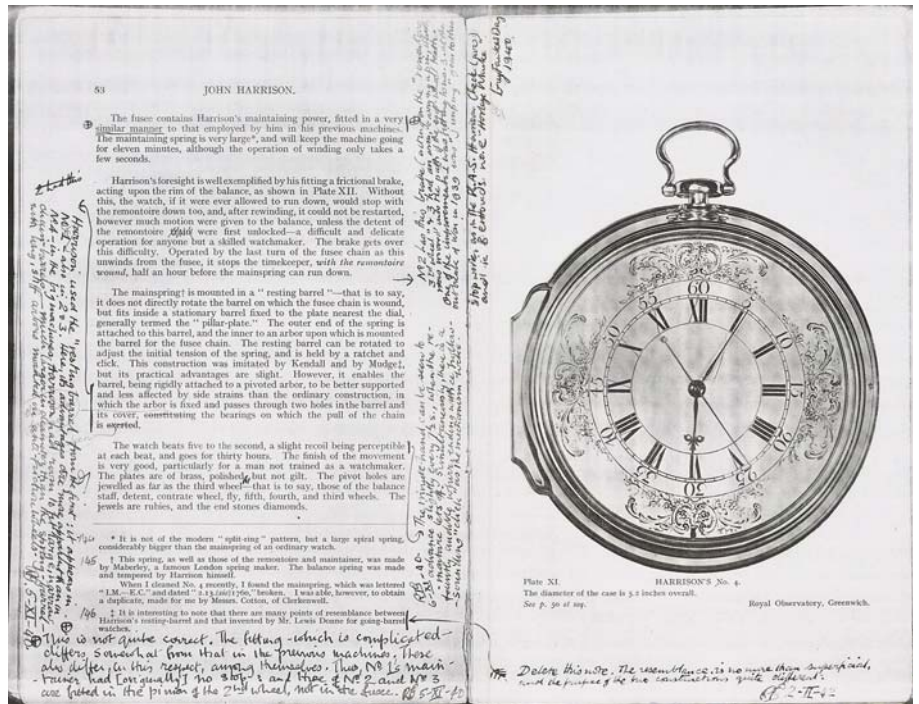
Time Restored has an unusually engaging preface where the author tells us of his commitment to horology from an early age nurtured initially from the family business in Ipswich. However it seems that a defining moment occurred in 1968 when he visited the National Maritime Museum and for the first time saw the 'Holy Grail' of horology, the four Harrison time keepers. There was further enlightenment through the Institute's two year course at Hackney where amongst the recommended reading was, the *Marine Chronometer*. From here there was the gradual emergence of the inspiring story of Gould's discovery, rescue and restoration of the Harrison timekeepers.

Although a biography of Gould had been envisaged and even suggested as long ago as 1948 when Gould died, no one had taken up the challenge. From his initial appointment as Senior Conservation Officer of Horology at the NMM in 1979, Jonathan Betts lived with the world's largest collection of chronometers where the iconic Harrison time keepers are the focal point. Thoughts of a biography of Gould had been forming for some time and indeed he had made a good start when in 1995 *Longitude* appeared written by Dava Sobel. This provided further motivation to complete the tome on Gould.

With the publication of *Longitude* there followed first the documentary, then the feature film and finally the stage play all



Jocelyne and Cecil, with two of Gould's drawings, (Jonathan Betts)



A page from Gould's Marine Chronometer, 'Copy A', annotated in his own hand. Gould desperately wanted to see the book revised and published as a second edition. (Courtesy of Charles Alix. © Sarah Stacey and Simon Stacey, 2005)

with the title *Longitude*. It was the feature film released in 2000 with script and direction by Charles Sturridge which not only further brought the name of Harrison into the public domain but also profiled Rupert Gould in a parallel role. Charles Sturridge was most fortunate because Betts very generously provided the story of Gould in its entirety even to the extent of being able to use some of Betts's own dialogue woven into the film. Once released, the intriguing and often startling story of Gould only created an ever increasing demand for the full biography.

The research for this book is evidently very comprehensive. Every possible avenue has been followed and where appropriate visited and recorded. It was fortunate that Gould's son Cecil and daughter, Jocelyne, were able to not only relate their many reminiscences but also provide many photographs amongst a wealth of archive material. Other material sources so clearly trawled, the Royal Observatory, the Hydrographic Dept at Taunton and not least the library at Upton Hall. Another unique source, the eighteen remarkable note books, maintained by Gould during the years that he restored the Harrison timekeepers, are not only a mine of

information on the timekeepers themselves but also contain very crucially important biographical contributions.

The significance of an historical study and no less biography can be determined to a considerable extent by the references. Here we have nearly thirty pages of them, chapter by chapter, most of them being primary sources; an undoubted testimony to true scholarship. There is a comprehensive bibliography of works by Gould including published articles, letters, illustrations, reviews and even a listing of broadcasts with, where available, a record of any transcripts.

Further appendices cover restoration work on the Harrison timekeepers post Gould and a summary of the contents of Gould's first two books, on unsolved mysteries, *Oddities* published in 1928 and *Enigmas* in 1929. The final appendix, *The Affair of the Queens Watch*, is an account of the scandal, the story beginning in 1920, rumbling on for fifteen years. This is the first time that the full story has been told, a story 'hushed up' at the time involving intrigue and deceit surrounding one of the most important horological artefacts, Thomas Mudge's first lever watch made for

Queen Charlotte. At the centre of this disgraceful episode and certainly the instigator of all the troubles was the erstwhile respected watch maker Heinrich Otto who in his attempt to establish academic priority, sank to the depravity of dishonesty, treachery, barely disguised blackmail and an unscrupulous attempt to blacken the names of those around him, including Gould who remain honourable and certainly blameless despite Otto's venomous attacks. Described as a 'polymath', Gould's intellect was as enormous as it was panoramic. A man of wit, charm and considerable presence standing all of 6ft 4in, he did not suffer fools but neither did he ever play 'the class card'. He could be pompous and perhaps arrogant. On being asked by the first curator of the National Maritime Museum, Capt Maxwell, some naive questions covering chronometers, Gould responded, 'the questions you raise are all answered in a work which expands the subject with minute accuracy, marvellous fullness of detail and superb literary style...it is entitled the *Marine Chronometer*'. Despite this harangue Gould was right, the book he wrote and which was finally published in 1923 is everything he said it is and more. In 83 years no one else has written anything which even equals it, far from surpassing this undoubted masterpiece in

horological literature. It is timeless and despite its faults, and there are a few, the *Marine Chronometer* with the wonderfully idiosyncratic illustrations, by Gould of course, remain an inspiration.

Gould's interest in horology started in childhood when he read a copy of Britten's *Old Clocks and Watches*. Doubtless he read it from cover to cover in the same way as he read in similar fashion through *Chambers Encyclopaedia* followed by *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. It is not so surprising that with his truly photographic memory Gould's knowledge throughout his life was not only so impressive but with a quick wit he could be daunting as well. As a successful BBC broadcaster both of children's programmes with wide ranging subjects under the pseudonym, 'the Stargazer' and on the even more intellectually challenging, *Brains Trust*. Gould became a star, a celebrity. He obviously enjoyed the challenge but could be ruthless. In a radio programme 'Can the Stars Foretell', a panel of debate where Gould was a dissenter, he took the greatest of pleasure in crushing R.H. Naylor, a believer, who in ignorance and in support of his argument, quoted Flamsteed's deliberately bogus horoscope. Gould, of course, knew the truth, and like a bird of prey, swooped on his adversary quoting Flamsteed's annotation to the ►►



Gould with his son Cecil and holding Harrison's prize winning timekeeper H4 (taken in 1921) (used with the permission of Sarah Stacey and Simon Stacey, 2005)



Gould's 'crowning hour', receiving the BHI Gold Medal from the Astronomer Royal, Harold Spencer Jones at Goldsmiths' Hall on 29th October 1947 (Horological Journal)

►horoscope 'risum teneatis amici?' [*Can you keep from laughing, my friends?* - ed] ... and flattened him with it.

But there were other sides to Gould's character; by his own admission he was never at ease with children. Even his son Cecil remarked that, 'his father was only ever affectionate in a formal way, more like a kindly teacher'. Yet behind the microphone as the Stargazer, Gould had an empathy with children who he attracted in droves as devoted fans. Gould was certainly passionate about man's cruelty to animals and never lost an opportunity to vent his views. Whilst he was quite prepared to shoot for the table, he was vehemently against killing animals for any other reason whatever. All blood sports were anathema to him; he would fervently have joined the anti-hunting cause of our times, no doubt his debate would have been erudite and intimidating.

With Gould there is the sense that he could have risen to the heights of any profession or become a major player in industry or maybe even in politics. But this was not to be. Gould suffered from the severest depression. With four major breakdowns in his life when he could be comatose for maybe months on end, Gould had a serious fear of three things: lightning, revolution and Hell. It was 'revolution' that was his biggest problem and it was unfortunate that he lived through a period of history, a century of two major global conflicts, and sure enough two of Gould's mental collapses coincided with both the first and second world wars. Worst of all was the disaster following the breakdown of

his marriage in 1927 which became media gossip leaving Gould ostracised in a very different world of eighty years ago. It was at this period that he took to writing again but unfortunately the proposed major projects, such as the editing of Captain Cook's journals and a full biography of the great explorer and with further biographies of James Clark Ross, the polar explorer, and even of John Harrison all came to nothing, a great loss. The small books he did eventually write on the world's mysteries and later subjects such as 'Sea Serpents' and the 'Loch Ness Monster' although so well researched and superbly written, only provided more evidence for the great works which he could and perhaps should have concentrated upon. This book, although much about the character of Gould is also equally comprehensive in the subject of the subtitle, '*The Harrison time keepers...*' It is an irony that someone with such negligible experience could be entrusted to something so important. Undoubtedly Gould's many successful years in the Hydrographic department of the Admiralty provided him with the necessary introduction to the Astronomer Royal, Sir Frank Dyson. There was not a murmur of criticism from the horological world as Gould took on the mammoth task of restoring the famous timekeepers. Whilst some of his methods are abhorrent to us today with his deliberate mutilation merely to ease access to the machines and the equally painful remarks such as 'and the parts look like new', they have to be accepted in the wider context, the final

achievement speaking for itself. The display of the time keepers all together for the first time, working in the newly founded National Maritime Museum thus putting to rights years of neglect by successive Astronomer Royals.

Gould's lecture in 1935 at Drapers' Hall for the Society of Nautical Research, "John Harrison and his time keepers", undoubtedly Gould's greatest public performance, epitomised the fifteen years of persistence in the restoration of the time keepers, establishing his undoubted authority and at the same time extolling the towering genius of John Harrison. The transcript of this lecture remained in print for nearly sixty years, still revered amongst the more important contributions to horology.

A severe heart attack in 1944 left Gould severely debilitated but this did not prevent him from applying for the Curatorship of the NMM, a position denied him previously due to his social non-acceptance. Tragically although this time successful, Gould remained in the position for just a week before being forced to resign on medical grounds.

However his contribution to horology was yet to be acknowledged, just one year before his death. Although seriously ailing in this final photograph of his life, Gould was awarded the Gold Medal of the BHI on 29th October 1947 which he accepted in all humility as reported in the HJ, 'In fact this was the crowning hour of his life'.

With the completion of this book Jonathan Betts not only searches into the depths of Gould's character, with a fascinating, unique and compelling story but for the first time we are given the true significance of Gould's contribution to horology, certainly one of the very greatest of the 20th Century.

When the *Marine Chronometer* was published in 1923 Gould spent the subsequent years annotating the text for a possible second edition. Although this was never brought to fruition in his lifetime or since, these annotations still exist. Surely now is the time to complete the Gould story. In a tribute to this 'Prince amongst men' is it not possible to bring to publication Gould's lasting wish, 'the Second Edition of the *Marine Chronometer*'? No doubt editing, further annotation and an introduction would be necessary but here in this biography, *Time Restored* we have the author, Jonathan Betts, the unquestioned authority who could be asked to take on the task. Meanwhile, *Time Restored* like the works of the subject, R T Gould, is an important contribution to horological literature. It is very accessible and highly recommended. □