

JACOB LOVELACE's CLOCKS

THE EXETER CLOCK

A notice concerning the exhibition of a clock, which was undoubtedly Jacob LOVELACE's Exeter Clock, appeared in a London newspaper the General Advertiser on 10th November 1739:

To be seen at the Leg-Tavern in Fleet Street (Never before exposed) A Beautiful and Magnificent Musical Clock, valuable for its structure and the exact Performance of all its parts; with some other Machines by Clock-work; and the surprising power of the artificial Magnet, made by Jacob LOVELACE, of Exeter, who makes and sells all Sorts of Musical and other Clocks, Watches, and artificial Magnets.

Note, Constant Attendance will be given for the Space of five or six weeks from the 6th instant, from the Hours of Ten in the Morning, till Eight in the Evening, or at any other time if particularly desir'd. Price 1s. each.

This provides a date when the Exeter Clock was finished. T.L. PRIDHAM stated that Jacob took 34 years to complete the clock, which would have made him eighteen when he started it. However, most of what PRIDHAM wrote about Jacob is misleading or untrue and this statement probably is as well.

In succeeding years the clock was a valuable source of income to its various owners who exhibited it. The clock was certainly a spectacular sight and someone, who saw it on exhibition in London in the 19th century, described it thus:

The celebrated Exeter clock is not only a timepiece, striking the hours of the day and chiming the quarters, but it is a perpetual almanack, telling the days of the week and month; leap-year when it happens; showing the phases of the moon and its age; moreover, it will be silent if required; and when agreeable, will play a variety of tunes on an organ; Saturn presiding as conductor, and beating time, and Fame and Terpsichore moving to the air. It has also a most musical peal of six bells, with ringers; a moving panorama allegorical of day and night; and a guard of two Roman soldiers, who salute with their swords Apollo and Diana as they appear. The soldiers' heads are actually turned when the bells ring – as well they may be.

A lithograph of the clock by HACKETT was published in Exeter in 1833 and, a little later, a similar one by William SPREAT was published. Both show the clock with the cabinet doors open at the base, on which there were paintings of Exeter buildings, including a very rare depiction of the ruins of Rougemont Castle. Under HACKETT's Lithograph, the movement of the clock is described as follows:

1st. A Moving Panorama, descriptive of Day and Night – Day is beautifully represented by Apollo in his Car drawn by four spirited Coursers, accompanied by the 12 hours – and Diana in her car drawn by Stags, attended by the 12 hours, represent Night.

2nd. Two gilt Figures in Roman Costumes, who turn their heads and salute with their swords as the Panorama revolves, and also move in the same manner while the Bells are ringing.

3rd. A Perpetual Almanack, showing the Days of the Month on a semi-circular Plate, the Index returning to the 1st Day of every Month at the close of each Month, without alteration, even in Leap Years, regulated only once in 130 years.

4th. A Circle, the Index of which shows the Day of the Week, with its appropriate Planet.

5th. A Perpetual Almanack, showing the Days of the Month, Weekly – and the Equation of Time.

6th. A Circle showing the Leap Year, the Index revolving only once in 4 years.

7th. A Time Piece that strikes the Hours and chimes the Quarters, on the Face of which the whole of the 24 hours (12 day and 12 night) are shown and regulated – within the Circle the Sun is seen in his course, with the time of rising and setting by an Horizon receding or advancing as the days lengthen or shorten: and under is seen the Moon, showing her different Quarters, Phases, Age, etc.

8th. Two Female Figures, one on each side of the Dial plate, representing Fame and Terpsichore, who move in time when the Organ plays.

9th. A Movement regulating the Clock as a repeater to strike or be silent.

10th. Saturn, the god of Time, who beats in movement while the Organ plays.



*Jacob Lovelace's Exeter Clock,
first exhibited in London in 1739.
Lithograph by Hackett, 1833.*

11th. A Circle on the Face shows the names of ten celebrated ancient Tunes played by the Organ in the interior of the Cabinet, every 4 hours.

12th. A Belfry with 6 Ringers, who ring a merry peal ad libitum. The interior part of the Cabinet is ornamented with beautiful Paintings, representing some of the principal Ancient Buildings of the City of Exeter.

13th. Connected with the Organ there is a Bird Organ, which plays when required.

Amongst the tunes that the organ could play were The 104th Psalm, The Old 100th, Luther's Hymn, Rule Britannia, God Save the King, The New Sabbath, St. James and St. Stephen.

In *The World's Great Clocks and Watches* by Cedric JAGGER, 1977, he repeats part of the above description and adds:

The LOVELACE clock is said to have turned up in a garret some while after his death, and thence to have passed into the possession of various persons in Exeter and thereabouts. It was frequently exhibited in the nineteenth century, notably in the Great Exhibition of 1851....."

In the absence of a will of Jacob LOVELACE, one cannot be certain whether he sold the clock in his lifetime or left it to one of his children. However, it would be surprising if Jacob's eldest son Rev. John LOVELACE, who was comfortably off, was not aware of the value of the clock and consigned it to a garret. There is no indication where the garret was, when the clock was discovered and who discovered it but one of the "various" owners was said to be a Mr DICKENSON of Tiverton.

Around the year 1821 James BURT of Exeter acquired the clock. According to an article in *The Western Antiquary* in November 1885,

.... after he had got it home and found he could do nothing with it, he placed it in the hands of Mr UPJOHNS, watch and clockmaker, South Street, Exeter, where the clock was taken to pieces and cleaned. The works, as they were taken out, were laid in order on the floor of a room and were at length put together, and it was set going and exhibited on Fore Street Hill, at a shilling a head.

BURT was a dealer in antiquities with a picture and china room on Fore Street Hill. In advertisements in 1820 and following years he offered for sale Old Master paintings and *rare and curious chime and musical clocks*. John UPJOHN (1771-1848) was a member of the well-known watch and clockmaking family, who operated in Exeter from around 1730 to the 1870s.

The year 1824 was a leap year and great interest was shown in Exeter in whether or not the clock would automatically adjust for it. The same article from *The Western Antiquary* continued:

.... doubts were raised by some and bets were made that it would not stop at the proper date. At a little before twelve o'clock at night the parties assembled at BURT's house to watch the result, and when the hand came round and the organ and other instruments began to play, instead of the plate moving on to 30 it unlocked and flew back to 1, the beginning of the next month, much to the chagrin of the losing betting parties.

The triumphal outcome merited a paragraph in WOOLMER's *Exeter and Plymouth Gazette*:

The extraordinary clock, in the possession of Mr BURT, of this city, performed its exclusive movement on the 29th February, being Leap Year. This is singular proof of the accuracy and ingenious nature of the machinery.

The *Exeter Flying Post* reported on 6th February 1834, that the Exeter Clock, having been *put into perfect repair* by W. FROST, clock and watchmaker, Paris Street, in this city, himself a self-taught artist, was removed to London and sold at auction. The sale took place on August 11th at the Exhibition Room, 209 Regent Street, and the clock was catalogued as

No. 45 – the Celebrated Exeter Clock, which has been exhibited to almost countless Hundreds of Admirers, during the present Season, and is accounted, at the Far-famed City of Exeter, a combination of Mechanism so perfect and wonderful as to be without parallel.

The *Western Times* carried a graphic account of the sale:

THE EXETER CLOCK – (formerly the property of Mr Jas. BURT, of St. David's Hill) – The celebrated piece of mechanism, formed upon the model of the clock of Strasburgh, and which has been exhibited for several months past, at 209 Regent Street, was placed under the "superintending care" of that "Monarch of the Hammer", George ROBINS, for public competition The room was crowded with connoisseurs in works of art, whose anxiety to possess this rare and splendid – indeed, we may say unique – specimen of

mechanical power, was manifested during the biddings. The first bidding was two hundred guineas, and after a lengthened and spirited competition this extraordinary proof of the science, ingenuity, and perseverance of an English artist was knocked down for six hundred and eighty guineas It is rumoured that it has been bought for his majesty William IV.

A similar reference to the sale appeared in the Exeter Flying Post on 8th September 1834.

The rumour of royal purchase was groundless. The clock was subsequently brought back to Exeter and became the property of Charles BRUTTON (born Exeter c.1789), an attorney. It was during BRUTTON's ownership that the clock was put on show at the Great Exhibition in 1851. William FROST, the Exeter clock and watchmaker, is said to have reprimed the organ barrel to play fresh tunes, as the old ones were worn out. New dresses were also made for the six belfry ringers. Afterwards the clock was kept at the Judges' Lodgings in Northernhay Place, and it was said that, when the Assizes were on, FROST would go and put all the different parts of the clock in motion to please the judge and his company. In a letter to the press at the beginning of the 20th century, FROST's son, who was then nearly ninety years old, claimed that LOVELACE never completed the Exeter Clock, but that his father did so about 1820. William FROST was born at Moretonhampstead c.1790 and by 1831 had premises at 4 Paris Street and from the 1850s was at 82 Sidwell Street. His son's claim should be treated with some scepticism.

The next recorded owner of the clock was John STONE (born Exeter c.1800), a manufacturing silversmith, jeweller, watch and clockmaker, who displayed it in his shop at 36 High Street, Exeter some time between 1854 and 1874.

JAGGER's book states

..... and in 1888 it was proposed to purchase it for the City of London, but this was not carried through. By the time of the Second World War, it had found its way to the William Brown Street Museum in Liverpool, where it was believed to have been totally destroyed by a bomb. However, of recent years parts of it have come to light again, namely the complicated dial, some of the chiming train, and an ornament from the case. Curiously, it would seem that the clock was never officially photographed during its lifetime as a complete entity, and the only representation of it that is left is the rare lithograph by HACKETT which was published in 1833. It would seem, from comparison with those parts that have been so far recovered, that this rendering must have been fairly accurate.

Mr William Thomas AVIOLET, a watchmaker, writing in the Express & Echo on 16th April 1959, recalled that: *In the early 1890s, the clock was owned by a customer of ours and he offered it, at a price, to Exeter Museum Committee, but it was rejected by the City Finance Committee. He then asked to have it on show in our business premises; my father went out to see it, and declined as it would have taken up too much room, even if we could have got it through the shop door. Eventually it was sold to Liverpool Museum, and later, pictures and a description of the clock appeared in the illustrated press. The City Fathers realised they had missed an asset to the Museum and a bargain. Negotiations were opened with Liverpool, but the price they asked to part with it was considered prohibitive.*

Samuel Anthony AVIOLET, watchmaker and jeweller, 99 Queen Street is listed in Kelly's Directory of 1906.

Mr John James HALL, who died in 1941 aged 95, wrote a paper on LOVELACE and his work, which was published in the 1930s. In this he remarked on the comparative smallness of the main movement of the Exeter Clock. Particulars were furnished to him by Mr F.H. ECCLES, the then custodian of the Liverpool Museum clocks. It appears from these that the clock had a three-train, fusee spring driven quarter-chiming movement, chiming on bells, the dimensions of the frame of this movement being 9 in. by 9 in. – that is, the size of the plates. He went on ... *There is also a larger movement, also fusee spring driven, which plays tunes on a set of organ pipes, the dimensions of this movement being 18 in. by 12 in. by 10 in.*

Liverpool Museums owned the Exeter Clock for approximately fifty years, before it was all but destroyed by enemy bombing in 1941. Whilst an air raid was largely responsible for the clock's destruction, it also fell victim to vandalism in the resulting chaos. Some of the parts were subsequently recovered and carefully restored. These included the dial, a large section of the musical and automata movements and two of the carved and painted decorative figures from the case. Descriptions of the clock and what has survived appears in Liverpool Museums Bulletin, Vol. 12 1963-64 and Antiquarian Horology, June 1966 (Alan SMITH: The Exeter LOVELACE Clock).

Another reference to the Exeter Clock and a picture of it appeared in the Express & Echo of 3rd March 1952.

In 2001 the remains of the Exeter Clock were put on display at the Exeter City Museum. An article in the Exeter & Echo read:



Restored remains of Lovelace's Exeter Clock, exhibited at Exeter Museum 2001 (on loan from William Brown Street Museum, Liverpool)

It may seem strange, but The Exeter Clock which is now on display at the Restored remains of Lovelace's Exeter Clockcity's museum is on loan from Liverpool Museum. It was created around 1739 by city clockmaker Jacob LOVELACE and was renowned for its mechanical ingenuity and the decorative case. "It originally stood some 8ft. tall," said John MUDIN, Curator of Decorative Arts at Exeter Museum. "It is a very important piece historically." It ended up in Liverpool because it was sold by a collector in a Victorian sale. "At this time it was still intact but, unfortunately, it was badly damaged in the war and the decorative case was lost. But we do have the dial plate and a section of the musical automation movement on display."

The Baroque-style case of the Exeter Clock raises the question of the maker's identity. Such workmanship would have been beyond the capabilities of all but the finest of cabinet-makers. However, there are at Powderham Castle, near Exeter, two magnificent rosewood bookcases, which are comparable in design and decoration. They each bear brass plaques inscribed "17 J. CHANNON fecit 40". The maker, John CHANNON (1711-1783), is associated with the grandest style of English cabinet-making, with bold architectural compositions superbly executed and richly ornamented with engraved brass inlays and gilding.

CHANNON had served his apprenticeship in Exeter with his elder brother Otho CHANNON, who was described variously as a joiner and as a chair and cabinet-maker and who also carried out work at Powderham Castle. The family had its origins in St. Sidwell's parish but by the late 1720s Otho CHANNON had moved to St. Stephen's in the city centre, where he and Jacob LOVELACE were fellow parishioners and churchwardens (but not at the same time). Indeed, from 1736 onwards CHANNON and LOVELACE's names appear next to each other on the rating list, which suggests that they were next-door neighbours. From 1737 John CHANNON can be found in London. His premises were on the west side of St. Martin's Lane. If the case of the Exeter Clock was made in John CHANNON's workshop, it may help to explain why the clock was first exhibited in London in 1739 and not in Exeter.

OTHER LOVELACE CLOCKS

Jacob LOVELACE clearly catered for the top end of the trade. His longcase clocks tended to be on the tall side and were evidently made to go into large houses. The dials were lavishly finished and the clocks possessed features, both stylish and subtle, that made them exceptional by provincial standards.



Double-signed dial

The clock is signed "Jacob LOVELACE EXON" both in the centre of the dial and on the base of the chapter-ring. The movement has rack striking and two hammers, one either side of the bell, the larger one striking the hours and the smaller one the half hours with a single dulcet blow. A date of 1715 to 1720 is suggested for this clock.

An early example of his work in a black Japanned case with gold and brown decoration. The main clock stands 7 ft. 3 in. plus a 9 in. dome and a turned finial on the very top, which brings the total height to well over 8 ft. It is always difficult to date provincial clocks on style alone, as fashions lagged behind those of London and the old ways lingered on. In this clock the glass lenticle in the trunk door to show the pendulum is an early feature and so too are the dial spandrels with cherubs supporting crowns. The engraved birds either side of the calendar aperture are a later fashion, as is the relatively broad chapter-ring with fleur-de-lis decoration and diamond shape markings on the perimeter to show the 7½ minute divisions. The 12 in. square dial has wheatear decorations on the sides, with a strike/silent lever above the XII and concentric rings around the winding squares and in the centre of the



Lovelace japanned longcase clock c.1715-20



Hood & arched dial of Lovelace walnut longcase clock with domed top

Another superb LOVELACE longcase, which dates from the 1730 period, has a walnut case and in the arch of the dial is a convex disc signed in italic “*Jacob LOVELACE*” and in Roman capitals “*EXON*”. The seconds dial is unusually legible, although the hand itself is minute. Features of the earlier clock are retained, such as the strike/silent lever above the XII, the rings around the winding squares, and the decoration on the sides of the dial, although the pattern here is herring-bone. The casework is excellent, with fretwork in the arch and an imposing caddy top.

A markedly similar clock of c.1735 is in the Exeter Museum collection. Minor differences only will be noted in the dials. In the museum example a pair of engraved birds in flight flank the seconds dial, and the disc in the arch is signed “*JACOB LOVELACE EXON*.” This clock has rack-striking and the case is of walnut veneered on oak, but without a caddy top.



Hood & arched dial of Lovelace walnut longcase clock c.1735 in Exeter Museum

Other LOVELACE longcase clocks include one with a tidal dial that was illustrated in pre-war editions of BRITTEN’s “*Old Clocks and Watches and Their Makers*” and several seen by J.J. HALL, one of which the legendary collector, Mr David WETHERFIELD, tried to acquire. HALL, writing in the 1930s recalled:

I well remember some 20 years ago, or thereabouts, a man well skilled in cabinet work in Exeter, who had come into possession of a LOVELACE tall case, or Grandfather clock, with arched head shewing High Water at Topsham Bar. I have lately set myself to find that man if possible, and am happy in having done so. When I mentioned the High Water he thought I must have a very good memory. But he tells me, what I did not know before, that, acting on what I must have told him, the late Mr WETHERFIELD sent a gentleman to Exeter to endeavour to secure that clock for his collection. It was on, I am told, “Professor HALL’s word, advice or recommendation”. The applicant, it appears, held out tempting offers up to one hundred pounds, but the owner declined to part with it and Mr WETHERFIELD’s wish was not gratified. The clock in question is tall case with arched head and brass and silvered dial, shewing the moon’s phases (silvered not coloured) and age, and also in the arch and in capital letters: HIGH WATER AT TOPSHAM BAR. It is rack-striking and the train wheels are very light. Indeed the ’scape wheel is a disc and is not crossed out, and the scribings are left. The clock is contained in a very beautiful walnut case It is lettered “Jacob LOVELACE Exon” [on a curved plate on the dial], and the moon’s age and time of high water are indicated by a fixed pointer.

The dial shows this clock to be later in style than those so far mentioned. There are no quarter markings on the inner edge of the chapter ring and the spandrels are of urn-pattern. It could be one of LOVELACE’s last clocks, c.1750.

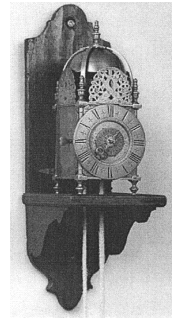
Another specimen of LOVELACE’s work was formerly in the possession of the late Lord WALDRON of Bradfield, Willand. This was an eight-day, hour-striking longcase with square head and brass dial showing time and date only. Once again it was signed “*Jacob LOVELACE Exon*” on the chapter-ring. On the door was the date 1727.

A further longcase clock by LOVELACE, that HALL examined, also had an extremely light ’scape wheel. The striking work was of *peculiar construction*. HALL, in his meticulous way, drew an excellent diagram, showing the wheel diameters and numbers.

In place of a locking-plate with notches on the striking main wheel, there is a count-wheel with raised teeth spaced to allow for the correct sequence of blows. There is only one detent and the system works in the reverse way to the locking plate in that the detent, instead of falling into a notch, rises up the slope at the completion of striking and there remains (at the top of the tooth) till the next warn takes place. It is a sophisticated system and calls for very accurate spacing of the teeth.

The comments of Mr AVIOLET in the *Express & Echo* show how eager J.J. HALL was to ensure that the Exeter Museum should have an example of Jacob LOVELACE’s work.

At the time, a Mr J.J. HALL had come to live in Exeter - his hobby was repairing old clocks. He came across one day, in a second-hand dealer's shop, a very plain cased oak eight-day grandfather with a brass and silver dial with the name Jacob LOVELACE on it, and he persuaded the Museum Committee to purchase it, so as to have a specimen of LOVELACE's work. The price was low, but it did not arouse his suspicions; it was bought, he cleaned it, and it was put in the Museum. He was a friend of ours, but did not tell us about it until it was installed. I went down to see it and a ten-minute examination was sufficient to convince me that the only bit genuine about it was the dial, which had evidently belonged to an old 30 hour clock that only had an hour hand, while the rest was, at the oldest, about 1800. My father confirmed this and we told Mr HALL, but he was incredulous. However, a few weeks later, a gentleman saw it and confirmed our opinion. He was a collector of clocks and an expert. The clock was quietly removed. The late Mr T. DEPREE was on the Museum Committee and he asked Mr HALL to find, if possible, a genuine LOVELACE. We were able to put Mr HALL on the track of a LOVELACE clock that had been in a local sale of furniture, before anything was known of the famous clock. It took him some time, but it was at last traced into Somerset and purchased. This genuine LOVELACE now stands in the entrance hall of Rougemont House and has been there for many years.



Lovelace miniature
brass lantern clock
c.1720

In September 2004 RAFFETY & WALWYN Ltd. of London advertised for sale a very rare miniature brass lantern clock, made by Jacob LOVELACE c.1720. The asking price was £14,000.

LOVELACE WATCHES



Dial of pair-cased Lovelace watch

The BUCKLEY Ms. Index at the Guildhall Library records an 18th century newspaper advertisement referring to a lost watch bearing LOVELACE's name.

Antique watches of the period invariably display craftsmanship of great beauty, lavish care being taken to decorate not only the dial but the parts that would not normally be seen, such as the back of the movement. A particularly fine silver pair-case calendar watch, dated 1718, by Jacob LOVELACE, was in the collection of Mr John MATTHEWS, who supplied the following description:

The watch has a plain silver pair case, casemaker IH, sloping corners to the hinge, movement signed "Jacob LOVELACE Exon", no number, backplate 1½ in. diameter, front plate slightly larger, berrel, fusee and verge, large pierced cock with two dolphins and mask, large pierced foot to cock, decorated edge, the date 1718 deeply engraved below, pierced Egyptian pillars, fine blued steelwork to fusee stop and spring fastener (movement clip into case), good going order. The silver champlève (skeleton) dial is signed "LOVELACE Ex-on" on polished plaques in dial centre, calendar with circular aperture above VI, blued steel beetle and poker hands (not original), movement hinge pin protruding through dial at VI, balance spring very soft iron with 1½ turns, still a remarkable time-keeper though, split bezel with replacement glass.



Movement of pair-cased Lovelace
watch 1718



Lovelace watch movement c 1715-20

A comparable watch movement, unnumbered and undated but c.1715-20, by LOVELACE is in the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter. Mr MATTHEWS said that it was interesting to note the differences in the backplates, the museum example having a watchcock with an ugly face and urn and straight edge to the cock foot, the other with an angel face below two reversed dolphins, with an angled edge to the foot. LOVELACE's engraved signature on both watch movements is similar to his actual signature found on St. Stephen's parish documents.