BOURNEMOUTH CLOCKS

ESTABLISHED 1987

A GUIDE TO

SEDAN CHAIR CLOCKS

Their History, Movements, Originality, Restoration and Care



Figure 1. James Hawke, Bury St. Edmunds, circa 1790, No. 403.
Photograph reproduced with permission, courtesy of Olde Time Antique Clocks.

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A luxury for wealthy owners

Warm mahogany, polished brass and a small, elegantly lettered dial: the sedan clock belongs to the intimate world of travelling timekeepers. These were luxury objects associated with affluent owners and the world of personal carriages, servants and carefully arranged journeys. Less familiar today than a longcase or carriage clock, a fine survivor rewards a closer look.

Time for the journey

Imagine a Georgian evening: candlelight behind tall windows, a silk gown gathered clear of the street, and a waiting chair ready to carry its passenger through the town. Within that world of visits and journeys, a little travelling clock offered something precious: time that could accompany its owner.

Its appeal remains wonderfully personal. A modest hanging ring and a quietly beating balance bring us close to the hands that made it. The clock is small enough to hold, yet its history opens a window onto an age of craftsmanship, privilege and travel. Not merely a miniature clock, but a small object through which the life of another century comes into view.

About me

Clockmaking has been my working life. I established my Bournemouth clockshop in 1987. My experience at the bench spans more than forty years of examining, repairing and preserving historic clocks and their movements.

Much of my work involves mechanisms that are badly worn, damaged or thought beyond saving. I approach each one with close observation, patient craftsmanship and respect for the original maker’s work.

I have been privileged to learn from distinguished figures in horology, many sadly no longer with us. In this guide I bring together the knowledge they generously shared, my own experience at the bench and my continuing fascination with the clocks entrusted to my care.

I am still an avid student of horology, with a particular interest in clock escapements, the mechanisms that release the wheel train in controlled steps and give impulse to the oscillator. I specialise in their restoration. Studying how individual makers shaped and fitted their parts often helps me understand why a movement behaves as it does and what it needs to run properly again.

When a part can be saved, I do my best to preserve it. If I need to make a replacement, I study the surviving work for clues and aim to make the new part as the original maker would have done. I often spend many hours beyond those I charge for, refining a fit or working through an adjustment until I am satisfied with the result.

I know how much a clock can mean to the person who brings it to me. It may have stood in the same room for generations. I am always happy to guide owners through each stage of restoration, explaining what I have found, what can be preserved and why I suggest a particular course of work. I welcome questions along the way.

A timeline of chairs and travelling timepieces

A few landmarks place these objects in their wider world. The dates trace two overlapping histories. They do not establish that the clocks were carried in sedan chairs.

1630s — Sedan chairs arrive in England

The Wilson Museum dates their introduction to this decade. They later become familiar vehicles for private journeys and public hire.

1675 — A major advance in portable timekeeping

The application of the spiral balance spring to watches greatly improved timekeeping and helped establish the balance-and-spring regulation later used in many English sedan timepieces.

1760 — A London journey has a fixed fare

London Museum records a charge of one shilling for a sedan-chair journey of a mile or less.

c. 1790 — The James Hawke example

The English timepiece illustrated in this guide is dated to about 1790 in the information supplied by Olde Time Antique Clocks.

1800–1830 — The Greenway timepiece

The National Trust dates this English example to 1800–1830. Its attached label records service on the London–Bath stagecoach.

c. 1890 — The chair becomes the clock case

The French chair-shaped clock illustrated later is catalogued by Christie’s to about 1890, reflecting the chair as a decorative historical subject.

1904 — The traditional name is questioned

Britten discusses “Sedan Chair Watches”, records the alternative “Post Chaise Watches” and questions the customary association with sedan chairs.

Dates marked c. are approximate. The Hawke date is the attribution supplied for the illustrated example, rather than a date established here from an independent archival record.

Sources: The Wilson, The Sedan Chair; Science Museum Group, early balance-spring watch by Tompion; London Museum A8422; National Trust 118720; Christie’s 4833420; Britten (1904), p. 244. Full source notes appear later in this guide.

About the evidence

This guide combines documented records with observations made at the bench. Of the 42 examples I have personally studied, only four retain their original movements (approximately 9.5%). That finding describes my own sample, not all surviving clocks. Museum and auction records are identified in the text; collecting advice and comparisons with lantern clocks draw on my professional judgement.

1. Character and craftsmanship

To my eye, the circular case, hanging loop at the top and generously sized enamel dial form the iconic image of the English sedan chair clock. Together, these features give it a distinctive character, recognisable even before the movement is examined. Its compact proportions can give it the presence of a much larger antique.

Mahogany brings warmth and colour, while ebonised cases have a different, more restrained elegance. Dials may be silvered or enamelled, with Roman or Arabic numerals. These variations give each example its own character, making the search for the right clock a particularly personal pleasure.

The craftsmanship within

Many English sedan timepieces of the Georgian and Regency periods contain compact, watch-like movements with a chain fusee and verge escapement. The balance regulates the timekeeping without a pendulum. The fusee helps even out the changing pull of the mainspring as it runs down.

The coach-house tradition

A tradition passed down within the craft describes these little clocks hanging in the coach houses of wealthy estates, waiting to accompany their owners. Picture the preparations for departure: harness gleaming, horses waiting, and a clock lifted from its place as the coach is brought out. Carefully wound from the back with a key, the clock would be given a gentle twist to set its balance wheel oscillating. The time would then be set, and its quiet beat would join the rhythms of the journey. Imagine the passenger glancing at the dial as the countryside slipped past. Each minute marked the journey’s progress and brought the day’s engagements closer: a visit, an appointment, an anticipated arrival. The little clock offered a reassuring measure of time, accompanying its owner through the miles and the hours ahead. This coach-house tradition forms part of the knowledge passed to me within the craft. How widely it was followed has yet to be established from contemporary records.

An intriguing name and a wider story

With its balance-regulated movement and a dial large enough for use in a room, the English sedan timepiece could accompany its owner on a journey and serve at the destination. The Greenway example carries a label recording stagecoach use.

Yet the sedan chair connection remains a mystery. To date, I know of no conclusive evidence of use in these chairs, nor a settled explanation for the name. Britten questioned the association in 1904. Perhaps a forgotten letter or diary will one day reveal how clock and chair became linked, bringing us closer to that vanished world.

Who was Britten?

Frederick James Britten (1843-1913) was a watchmaker and an author on the history and practice of clock and watchmaking. His books include Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers and The Watch and Clock Makers' Handbook, Dictionary and Guide. His historical work brought together descriptions of clocks and watches with information about their makers. The 1904 edition is cited here because he questioned the customary association between these timepieces and sedan chairs: a useful reminder that a traditional name does not establish how every surviving clock was used. Alongside 'Sedan Chair Watches', Britten records the name 'Post Chaise Watches' (1904, p. 244). This supports a wider travelling context. I regard coach travel as a likely principal use: longer journeys offered a clearer need for a portable timekeeper than a short chair ride.

2. Rare survivors and collecting

An original sedan chair clock is a small but historically important survivor: its case, dial and working movement preserve the craftsmanship and travelling life of another age. Many cases survive, yet the original mechanisms within them have often disappeared. The Gardiner Houlgate example illustrated in the comparison section, for instance, was catalogued with a later movement. In more than forty years of clockmaking, I have encountered far fewer sedan timepieces with their original movements than lantern clocks. In my opinion, given the evidence I have gathered, these little-known timepieces command surprisingly modest prices in the world of horological collecting, especially the very rare examples that retain their original movements.

Verge escapements and fusees were familiar technology in their day: many people owned pocket watches using them. Sedan chair clocks themselves were far less common. In my experience, fitting an improved, more modern movement was a common response when their original mechanisms became worn or damaged.

Why so many movements were replaced

In my assessment, wear and damage explain some replacements, but the principal reason was the availability of reliable, accurate, eight-day movements with jewelled bearings. These jewels reduced friction and wear; they were practical components, not decoration. Owners gained better timekeeping and less frequent winding. What was a useful improvement to an earlier owner could mean the loss of the mechanism most valued by a collector today. Each clock’s history deserves individual investigation.

My most important buying advice

Establish originality before discussing value. Ask the seller to distinguish original components, later repairs and replacement work. Have the movement’s mounting and dial attachments examined, and request a written explanation of the findings. An attractive case or an old signature cannot settle the question alone. Assess the movement, dial and case together. A verified original deserves serious consideration when its condition, completeness and price are sound.

Future prices remain uncertain. The lasting appeal lies in historical importance and a coherent original assembly.

Occasional winding, lasting pleasure

For these rare original survivors, my preference is occasional winding for personal pleasure. It allows an owner to enjoy the clock while limiting the running hours and wear associated with continuous use. The movement must first be assessed as fit to run: occasional use does not replace proper servicing.

Lubrication deserves particular care. Oil can deteriorate or move away from bearings while a clock stands unused. Capillary action helps draw suitable oil into the narrow clearance around a pivot, but winding does not renew it. After a long idle period, ask a specialist to assess the mechanism and its lubrication. A movement that starts readily may still need attention.

Once the clock is fit to run, winding can become a small pleasure rather than a duty. A quiet Sunday, for example, offers time to admire the workmanship and listen to its beat. Agree a routine with your clockmaker, suited to this particular movement. The purpose is to enjoy what survives while passing it on in good condition. Practical care advice follows in section 9.

3. The elegance of the sedan chair

Two chairmen, one passenger, and a world of privilege

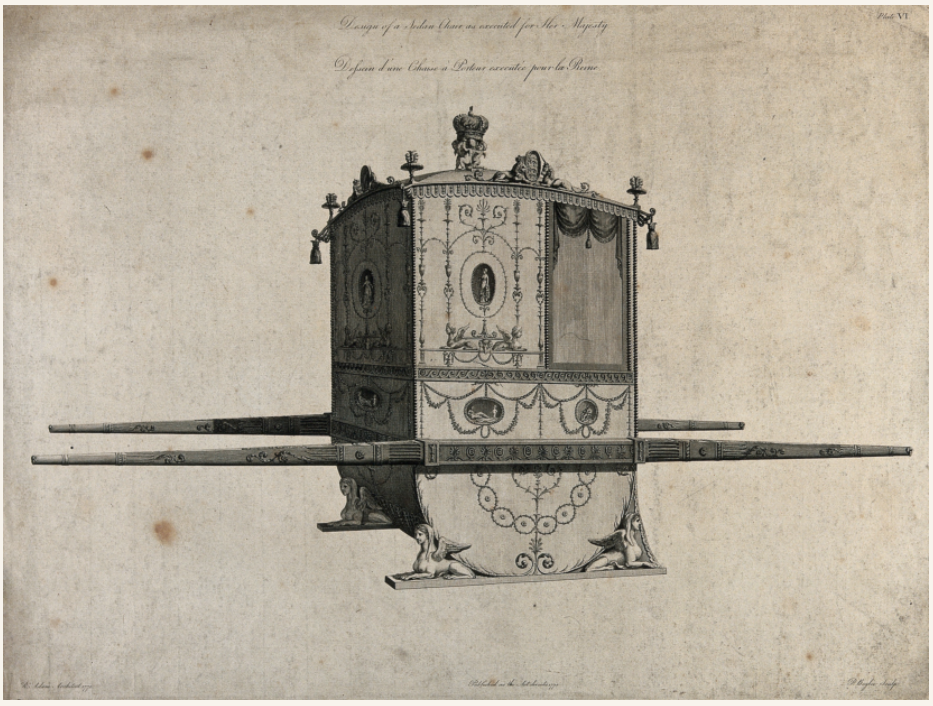


Figure 2. A royal sedan-chair design. Patrick Begbie's 1775 engraving after Robert Adam's 1771 design shows carrying poles, glazed panels and elaborate ornament. Wellcome Library, London, V0041108; CC BY 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Full image reproduced without alteration. Licence: creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.

Why a chair was worth hiring

Sedan chairs offered practical protection as well as elegance. Before modern street cleaning and drainage, town streets and walking surfaces could be muddy and fouled by animal dung and refuse. Fine shoes, long skirts and expensive clothes were ill suited to such conditions. The enclosed chair kept its passenger clear of the dirt, sheltered from rain and away from jostling traffic. Where access allowed, journeys could begin and end indoors. Conditions varied, but cleanliness, comfort and convenience were important attractions. Historical context: Hampshire Cultural Trust, Winchester hospital sedan chair; The Wilson, sedan-chair information sheet.

How the chair was carried

Two chairmen, one in front and one behind, carried the enclosed seat on long poles at about waist height. Windows offered a view; the body sheltered the passenger. In London, chairs could use narrow passages inaccessible to larger coaches.

From doorstep to destination

Sedan chairs reached England in the 1630s and became familiar in towns during the eighteenth century. Some were privately owned; others were licensed for hire. The Wilson Museum records that chairs could even be carried into buildings, with shorter poles used for stairs. The passenger's comfort depended on the chairmen's strength and skill.

4. Small objects, extraordinary stories

Museum records and auction catalogues bring this little-known subject to life. A label, an unusual fitting or an old record of ownership can reveal something that the appearance of a clock alone cannot tell us.

A chair and clock catalogued together

Christie's recorded a Westminster-type leather sedan chair accompanied by a George III ormolu-and-mahogany sedan clock. The chair had a red cotton-lined interior, three sash windows, carrying poles and leather harnesses, with extra brackets for taking it upstairs. Its association with the Dukes of Grafton was described as traditional rather than proven. The chair was certainly in Sir Albert Richardson's collection by April 1925, when it appeared in a drawing. Christie's also records that Richardson occasionally went out to dinner in it, carried by liveried footmen. The catalogue documents a chair and clock offered together; it does not establish when they were first associated.

A shilling for the journey

London Museum records a fare of one shilling for a journey of a mile or less in 1760. Hired chairs were licensed through the Hackney Coach Office at Somerset House, with registration numbers usually shown on their backs. Black-painted leather indicated public hire. Passengers sometimes tipped the chairmen in the hope that they would stay rather than flee if robbers attacked, or to encourage a slower, gentler ride.

The museum's surviving chair even has an adjustable seat and a compartment for the passenger's feet, designed for sufferers from gout. Curtains once provided privacy. Such details make the enclosed chair feel less like a distant curiosity and more like a carefully considered personal vehicle.

The story preserved on a label

The early nineteenth-century sedan timepiece at Greenway has a label linking it to years of service on the London-to-Bath stagecoach. The National Trust describes a chain-fusee verge movement, square plates, a foliate-engraved backplate and a drum-shaped case. The label records a claimed history; it is a valuable starting point for investigation, rather than a complete travel diary.

When the chair itself became a clock

By about 1890, the sedan chair could inspire the shape of a decorative French carriage clock. Christie's catalogued a cast-brass example with an eight-day movement, lever escapement and gong striking. This is a distinct later form: a clock modelled as a sedan chair, rather than the circular English timepiece discussed here. The distinction is useful when searching catalogues, where similar names can describe very different objects. Source records: Christie's 5714597 and 4833420; London Museum A8422; National Trust 118720. Further reading appears in section 13.

5. Understanding the movement

Stored power, carefully controlled

A spring-driven movement stores energy in a wound mainspring. That spring turns the mechanism as it unwinds. Its pull changes during the running period, so early watchmakers needed a way to moderate the force reaching the wheels. The fusee is a grooved cone connected to the spring barrel by a fine chain. Its changing leverage helps compensate for the changing spring force. It is a piece of practical ingenuity, hidden behind an apparently simple dial.

The balance and the escapement

The wheel train carries power towards the escapement and establishes the relationships needed to show hours and minutes. A verge escapement uses a crown-shaped wheel and pallets on the verge to control the release of the train and give impulse to the balance. In a balance-spring movement, the balance oscillates against a fine spring. This provides the repeating motion that regulates timekeeping without a pendulum.

The verge began as a clock escapement: it is the earliest known form used in European mechanical clocks, and was later adapted for watches. Listen closely to an early watch with a verge escapement and, to my ear, it sounds remarkably like a little clock ticking. That familiar tick offers an audible connection between the early clockmaker’s craft and the portable timepiece.

Historical context: Pitt Rivers Museum, Watchcocks donated by Arthur Thomson.

A familiar mechanism in an uncommon object

In the original English sedan timepiece movements I have examined, the plates have always been square or rectangular. In a pocket watch, circular plates allow the movement to fit inside a small, round case. The sedan timepiece had more room behind its dial, so there was no need to make the movement plates circular, even when the case itself was round. Greenway has square plates, but plate shape alone cannot establish originality.

The diamond endstone

A diamond endstone could be fitted at the balance cock to provide a hard bearing surface for the end of the balance pivot. It helps control the balance staff's axial movement, maintaining the intended clearance rather than simply supporting the wheel. Fine contemporary pocket watches with diamond endstones are documented by the Metropolitan Museum of Art. In my experience, these stones are a characteristic feature of fine examples, yet they are often missing. Their value may explain deliberate removal in some cases; absence alone cannot establish why a stone disappeared. Source: Metropolitan Museum of Art, Robert Roskell pocket watch, accession 44.18 (website record 199408).

Reading the mechanism responsibly

For the evidence used to assess an original assembly, see section 7. A signature or decorative plate is only part of the picture: construction, mounting and alterations must be considered together. Mechanical context: National Trust 118720; British Museum 1958,1201.2283.

Inside the movement: following the power

This pocket-watch section illustrates the mainspring, fusee, verge and balance also found in many English sedan timepieces. It explains the principle, not the exact construction of the Hawke clock.

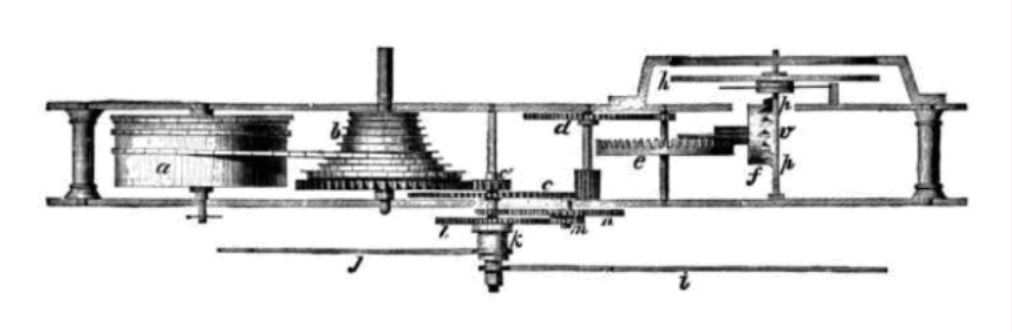


Figure 3. A comparable verge-and-fusee watch movement. From Appleton's Cyclopedia of Applied Mechanics, edited by Park Benjamin (1891), volume 2, p. 903, figure 4217. Public-domain scan via Wikimedia Commons.

From left to right: barrel a holds the mainspring; fusee b moderates its changing pull. The train (the connected wheels and pinions) carries power to crown wheel f and verge v; balance h regulates release. The hands appear below the plates. Not every working detail is shown.

Why the fusee changes the leverage

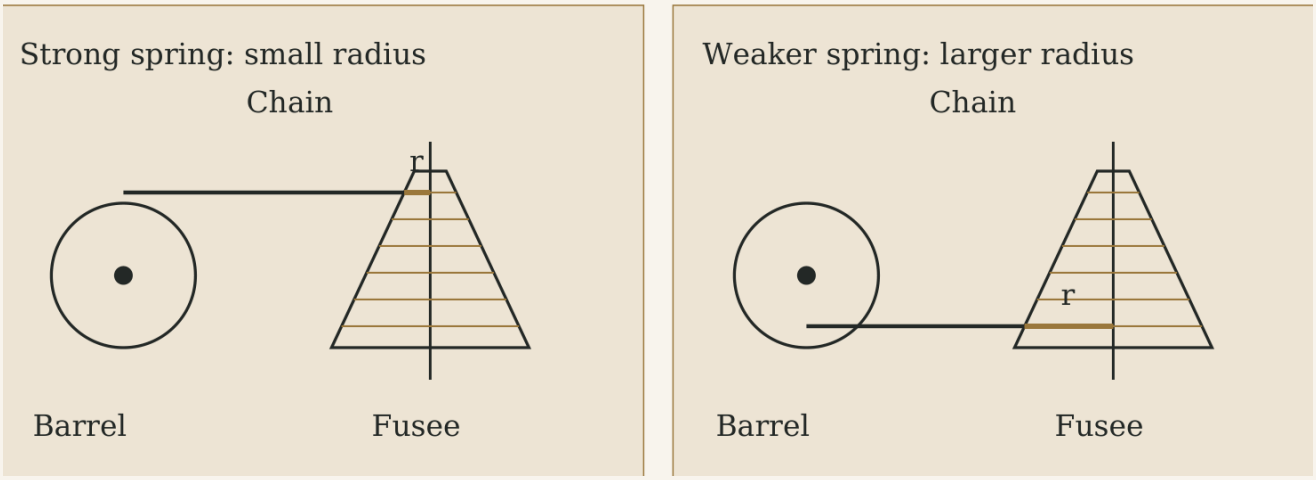


Figure 4. A strongly wound mainspring pulls at the narrow part of the fusee. As the spring weakens, the working radius increases. Small leverage moderates the strong pull; greater leverage compensates for the weaker pull, making the driving torque more even.

In this explanatory diagram, the highlighted line marks the effective radius, r. Torque is the turning effect: chain pull multiplied by that radius. The gold line shows the distance from the fusee axis to the chain's working point. Chain coils and the gear beneath the fusee are omitted for clarity.

The verge: release, impulse and return



Figure 5. Verge escapement and balance. An 1820 engraving from Abraham Rees's Cyclopaedia, "Horology", plate 31, figure 6. Period illustration via Wikimedia Commons. Its original lettering is retained.

The crown wheel has teeth projecting from its rim. Two pallets fixed at an angle on the verge alternately engage those teeth. As the balance turns one way and then the other, the pallets release the wheel in steps; contact with the teeth also supplies the impulses that sustain the balance's motion. In a balance-spring movement, the spring supplies the restoring action.

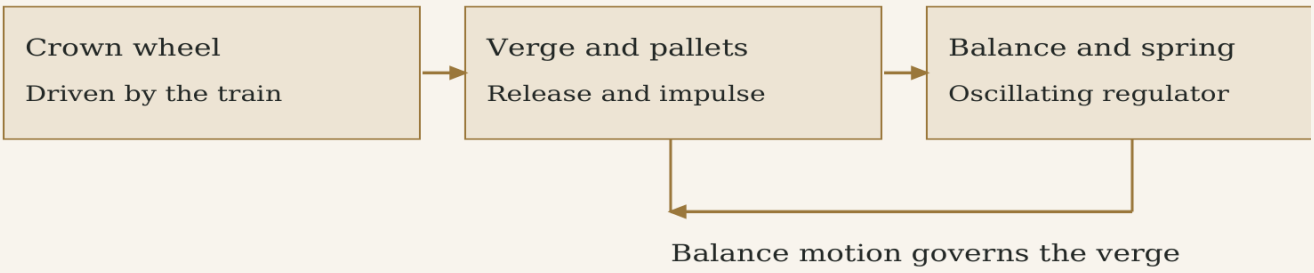


Figure 6. The diagram brings together the two functions we have explored: the mainspring supplies power, while the balance and escapement regulate its release. The arrows show how these functions interact. Here, the verge forms part of the balance staff, so the illustrated components work together as a coupled system. Their repeated exchange of energy turns the unwinding spring into measured time.

The value of a closer look

These drawings help explain why a small movement deserves careful study. Wheel teeth, slender pivots, fine chain links and the relationships between them all demanded precise making and fitting. In an original clock, the mechanism also preserves evidence of how its maker solved the practical problem of portable timekeeping.

6. Craftsmanship hidden within

Precision made beautiful

The finest surviving movements invite admiration even before they begin to tick. Their appeal lies in the union of accurate fitting and decorative finish: brass plates, slender steel pivots (the ends of the wheel arbors that turn in bearings), carefully formed wheels and a fine fusee chain working together within a remarkably small space. Making and finishing these parts demanded patient handwork, specialised tools and a trained eye. Hand craftsmanship did not mean the absence of tools or divided labour; several skilled trades could contribute to a finished movement.

The art of the balance cock

The balance cock supports the upper bearing of the balance staff. In many period watch-like movements it also provides a miniature canvas for the engraver and piercer. Scrolls, foliage and openwork turn a functional support into an ornament. Gilded surfaces, finely cut engraving and thoughtfully finished details can make the movement as rewarding to study as the case and dial. Decoration varies, so an individual example should be described from what actually survives.

A face among the scrolls

Look closely for a grotesque mask worked into the balance-cock decoration: an expressive face emerging among the pierced scrolls. Royal Museums Greenwich records several pocket-watch balance cocks with this feature. One interpretation associates such faces with protection from evil spirits or the evil eye. The Pitt Rivers Museum discusses this protective interpretation as a historical theory, rather than an established explanation for every design. It is a fascinating possibility, not a meaning that can be assumed for each clock.

A miniature gallery of the engraver’s art

These detached watch cocks are comparative examples of period craftsmanship, not components identified as coming from sedan clocks. They show the decorative language shared by watch-like movements: pierced scrolls, engraved foliage, shaped feet and carefully finished borders. Compare their varied forms with the cock on the signed Hawke movement illustrated later in this guide.



Figure 7. Decorative watch cocks, seventeenth–eighteenth century. Gilded brass, British or French. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession group X.190.1–16; illustrated in the catalogue record for X.190.2. Public-domain photograph.

Beauty with a working purpose

The cock supports the upper balance-staff bearing. Its outline and decoration could be elaborate, but the position and security of that bearing remained essential. Piercing removed metal to form openwork; engraving cut patterns into the remaining surface. Gilding enriched the appearance of the brass. A beautiful cock was therefore both a functional component and a small display of specialist skill.

Looking closely at the scrolls

Use the photograph as an exercise in close observation. Compare the outline of each cock, the pierced openings, the engraved borders and the treatment of the fixing foot. Notice how ornament is arranged around the bearing it supports. These details help you describe workmanship accurately; attributing a maker or date requires comparison with securely identified examples and the rest of the movement.

A kinship with the pocket watch

These compact movements belong to the same world of craftsmanship as contemporary pocket watches. A fine example can be remarkably beautiful: practical engineering enriched with engraving, graceful proportions and individual touches. The comparison is especially revealing when the original movement remains in the case made for it. Preserve that relationship and its surface detail; unnecessary polishing or replacement can remove precisely the evidence and workmanship that make the object compelling. Sources: Pitt Rivers Museum, watchcocks donated by Arthur Thomson; Royal Museums Greenwich, No. 919, object 36391.

7. What does original really mean?

An original assembly

For a collector, the central question is whether the movement, dial and case belong together as made. A movement may be old without being original to its present case. Equally, an original movement may contain later repairs. These distinctions deserve precise description: an original assembly with documented repairs is different from an old case fitted with a replacement mechanism.

Repair is not the same as replacement

A repair may preserve an existing mechanism by replacing a failed part. Replacing the entire movement changes the clock more fundamentally. A repaired spring, renewed pivot or replacement hand should therefore be discussed separately from a later movement. The aim of an assessment is to explain what survives and what has changed, rather than attach an unexplained label of originality.

What a specialist investigates

Useful questions include whether the winding position suits the dial, whether the movement mounts naturally within the case and whether unused holes or altered fittings suggest a different arrangement. Dial attachments, hand fittings, surface finish and construction also form part of the investigation. A single extra hole is a clue, not a verdict: old repairs and previous mounting arrangements can have several explanations.

Why the whole object matters

Originality emerges from the agreement of several details. A winding square should correspond with its opening, the dial attachments should suit the movement, and the mounting should make sense within the case. Conflicting clues call for closer investigation. The Gardiner Houlgate example illustrated later shows why this matters: its period appearance survives, but the catalogue identifies a later movement. The case and mechanism therefore tell different parts of its history.

Winding, setting and regulation

Winding the fusee movement

A hinged rear door gives access to the movement, usually secured by an S-shaped swivel catch. Swing the catch aside to release the door. Winding with the key draws the chain from the mainspring barrel onto the fusee, turning the barrel and winding the spring. During running, the barrel draws the chain back off the fusee, driving the wheel train.

Support the clock securely and use a correctly fitting key. Follow your clockmaker's winding instructions and wind gently to the stop. Irregular resistance, or an absent stop, calls for examination.

Why the winding must stop

In a common English arrangement, the rising chain lifts a lever, the fusee iron, into engagement with a stop on the fusee. This limits winding travel and helps protect the chain and its attachments. The stop-work must be intact and correctly adjusted.

The separate silvered regulator dial

A small silvered dial or disc on the backplate records the regulator setting against an index. In a geared regulator, a pinion moves a curved rack carrying curb pins. The outer part of the balance spring passes between these pins. Their position determines its effective working length.

Shortening the effective spring makes the clock gain; lengthening it makes the clock lose. Scale divisions need not represent fixed minutes per day. Regulation cannot remedy dirt, wear or an escapement fault.

Setting the time

Have your clockmaker demonstrate the correct time-setting method for your clock. Occasionally, a key fits a square at the centre of the minute hand; in my experience, this suggests a replacement pocket-watch movement, but is not proof on its own. Stop at resistance, seek advice before setting backwards, and allow any striking mechanism to finish sounding.

What accuracy should you expect?

In my opinion and experience, a daily gain or loss of up to ten minutes is acceptable for an original verge escapement in a sedan timepiece. Its short balance spring supplies the restoring force that gravity provides for a pendulum, returning the balance towards its resting position. Age, wear, temperature, position and travel can all affect the rate.

A consistent daily gain or loss may be improved by adjustment at the regulation dial, provided the movement is sound. Make small adjustments, then measure the rate at the same hour over several days in its usual position. Have your clockmaker demonstrate the correct direction and method.

Sources: David Glasgow, Watch and Clock Making; Fitzwilliam Museum M/P.34 & A-1913; Icon, Clocks. Accuracy assessment is my own professional judgement.

8. Buying with knowledge and confidence

Begin with your purpose

Decide whether you want a verified original survivor, a decorative period case with later works, or an example whose alterations tell an interesting story. Each may offer pleasure, but their descriptions and prices should reflect different qualities. If originality is your priority, make that clear at the outset and seek evidence before purchase.

Request a useful description

Ask for the proposed date, any maker or retailer signature, the escapement type, duration and known alterations. Request clear photographs of the dial, case front and back, and movement where it can be safely accessed by the owner or a specialist. Ask whether the claim of originality refers to the complete assembly or simply to the age of the movement.

Separate condition from timekeeping

A clock ticking during a viewing has demonstrated that it runs at that moment. It has not demonstrated that it is clean, correctly lubricated, sound throughout or original. Ask when it was last serviced, what was done and whether a written report exists. Obtain an assessment of any work required before allowing enthusiasm for the case to settle the decision.

The price of a particular example

Maker, age, originality, completeness, condition and documented history all deserve consideration. A general claim that the type is rare cannot value an individual clock. Seek written descriptions and retain them. For an auction purchase, examine the catalogue, condition report and applicable sale terms together. Compare total costs and likely restoration needs before committing.

9. Care, display and occasional use

Choose a gentle setting

Keep the clock away from direct sunlight, damp and extremes of heat or cold. A working fireplace is a poor neighbour: heat, soot and dust can affect both case and movement. A secure display position should protect it from accidental knocks. If suspended, have the ring, its attachment and the supporting fitting checked; the presence of a ring alone does not prove that it remains safe to bear the weight.

Before winding

Have an antique clock specialist establish whether the movement can safely run. A full mechanical assessment should precede any attempt to return an old clock to operation. Use a correctly fitting key and support the clock securely. Obtain instructions for this particular movement, including winding direction and hand setting. Do not force an unfamiliar or reluctant mechanism.

If your clock stops

First ensure that the clock is wound. If its movement is known to be fit to run, hold the case securely and give it a few short, controlled twists, as though turning a car steering wheel. The balance may need a little nudge, just as a pendulum does. Hopefully it will begin ticking. If it fails to start, stops again or sounds unusual, seek your clockmaker's advice.

Leave the fine work to a specialist

Arrange servicing appropriate to the movement and its condition. Avoid household lubricants, casual dismantling and polishing that removes historic surfaces. Request a treatment record explaining repairs and replacement parts, and retain removed original material when practicable. General care advice is available from the British Antique Dealers' Association.

10. Preserving a clock's story

A history that can be followed

Provenance is the recorded history of an object's ownership and whereabouts. Keep contemporary documents, later recollections and your own observations clearly identified, so that another reader can understand the basis of each account. The practical record suggested on the following page will help preserve this distinction.

Following the scattered sources

Information is scattered across specialist journals, museum records and auction catalogues. The Antiquarian Horological Society's cumulative index lists H. W. Norris (volume 6, p. 524), Anthony Bird (volume 7, pp. 159, 356 and 553), Adrian Burchall and G. C. Rowe. The original discussions remain to be examined for this guide. These references identify research leads, rather than established conclusions.

Knowledge passed from master to pupil

I remain grateful to the experienced horologists who generously shared their knowledge with me, many sadly no longer with us. I pass on what they taught me alongside the understanding gained through my own years at the bench.

Some of the accounts included here have been passed down through generations of horologists. I value that inherited knowledge, but I have found no documentary proof to confirm these stories. I therefore offer them as oral tradition, in the hope that further evidence may one day come to light.

Keep the evidence with the clock

Retain invoices, auction descriptions, correspondence, previous photographs and servicing reports. Photograph the whole clock and any accessible marks, labels or numbers without disturbing fragile components. Date your photographs and record dimensions. If a specialist opens the clock, ask for photographs of the movement and its mounting so that the assessment can be understood later.

The Greenway lesson

The Greenway label illustrates a useful distinction: evidence that an account was recorded is not the same as proof that every detail is correct. Transcribe labels exactly, photograph them in place and note any information about when they were attached. Keep later explanations separate from the original wording. This preserves the evidence for whoever next studies the clock.

An owner's record

Create a file with these headings: description; measurements; signatures and numbers; date and basis of attribution; purchase details; known ownership; originality assessment; condition; servicing; photographs; and unresolved questions. Update it after work or further research. A future owner should be able to see what is known, what changed and why. Becoming a custodian is one of the pleasures of collecting: a modest clock can carry an unusually rich history, provided that history travels with it.

11. James Hawke and a useful comparison

An excellent example signed James Hawke, Bury St. Edmunds, and numbered 403 brings the subject vividly to life. The information supplied for this guide dates it to circa 1790. It is illustrated here with permission and was offered for sale by Olde Time Antique Clocks when this edition was prepared.

James Hawke: case and dial



Figure 8. The complete clock. The dark wooden surround, brass bezel and hanging fitting frame a white dial with Arabic numerals.



Figure 9. The rear of the case. A hinged brass access cover and its fastening reveal another aspect of the construction.

An intimate scale



Figure 10. The dial with its glazed bezel open. The dial and finely shaped hands can be appreciated more closely. These photographs invite the reader to look beyond a charming silhouette and consider the clock as a complete historical object.

Photographs reproduced with permission. Courtesy of Olde Time Antique Clocks. Availability may change.

The craftsmanship behind the dial

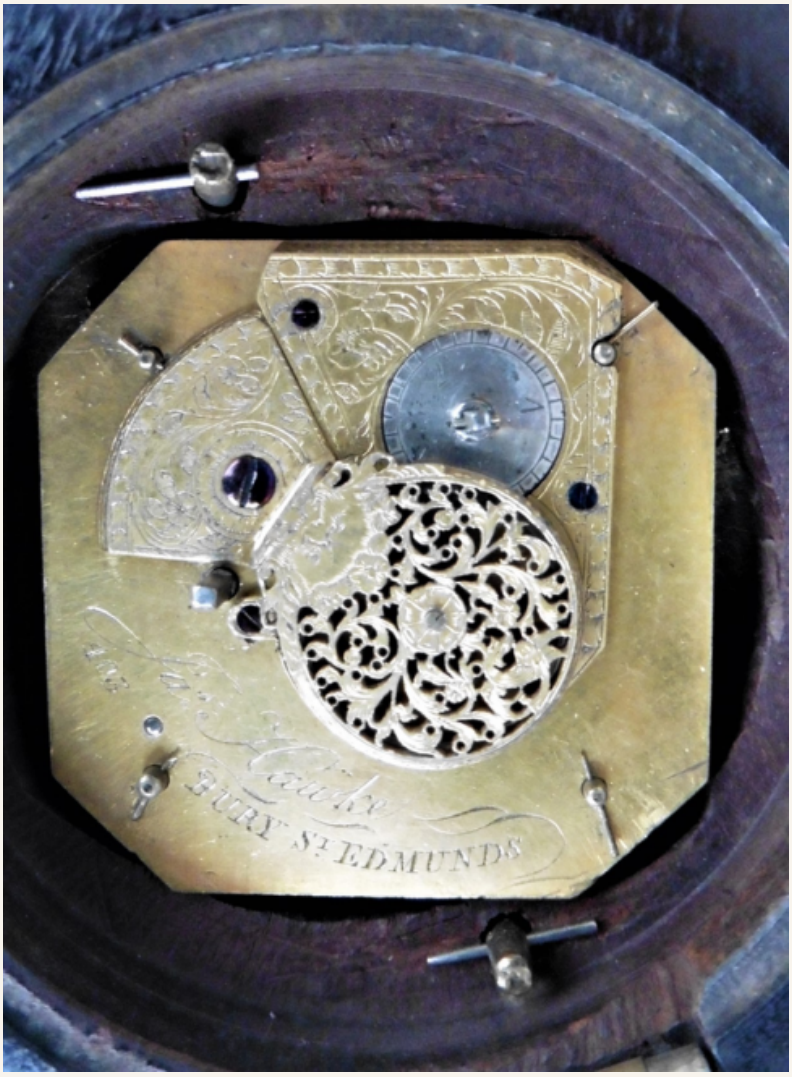


Figure 11. The signed movement. James Hawke, Bury St. Edmunds, number 403. Photograph reproduced with permission, courtesy of Olde Time Antique Clocks.

Details that reward a closer look

The broadly square plate, cut corners, pierced balance cock and regulator scale reveal the workmanship within. The signature gives the clock an individual identity. Its plate shape illustrates my observed distinction between many sedan clock movements and contemporary pocket-watch movements. The shape, proportions and visible fixing points are consistent with a movement made for this clock. On the photographic evidence, I regard it as likely to be original. Examination of the mounting, dial attachments and any alterations is needed to confirm that judgement and assess its condition.

Dealer: oldetimeantiqueclocks.co.uk | Details supplied for this edition, October 2026.

Another example: De Lasalle

I date this timepiece to circa 1790, but its replacement movement was made by James De Lasalle and unusually carries the date 1810. The two dates reveal a particularly interesting chapter in its working life: an older clock fitted with a later verge watch movement.



Figure 12. The De Lasalle example, front view. Roman numerals, slender hands and a brass-framed glazed bezel sit within the dark circular surround. The case also has ribbed brass edging.

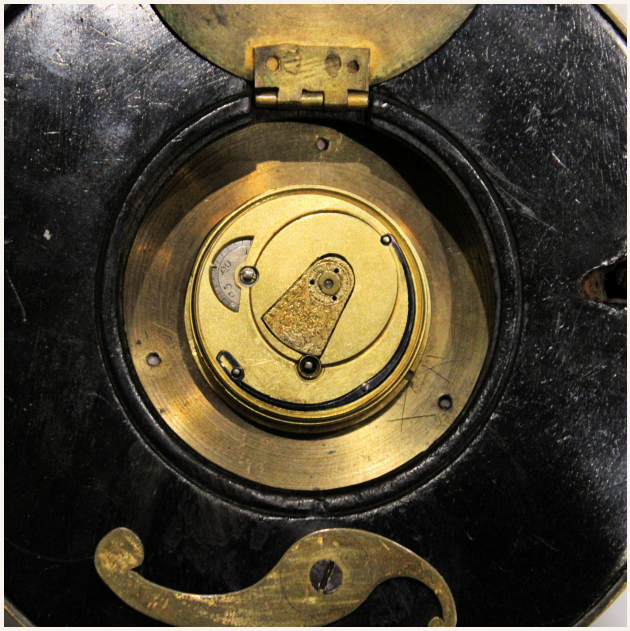


Figure 13. Rear door open. The S-shaped swivel catch, brass hinge and movement cover illustrate the access described in the operating guidance.

A replacement with its own history

To my mind, this suggests that a replacement verge watch movement was considered a better option than repairing the original mechanism. The date 1810 belongs to the movement; it does not, by itself, establish when that movement was fitted to the older case. The rear view also clearly shows the regulator scale, hinged door and S-shaped catch.

Quality behind the alteration

James De Lasalle came from a particularly good clock- and watchmaking family of the period. I regard the engraving on this movement as exceptional. Although it is a replacement, its fine workmanship deserves appreciation in its own right. The circular movement also provides a useful contrast with the broadly square Hawke plate illustrated earlier.

De Lasalle: the movement in detail



Figure 14. Replacement verge watch movement by James De Lasalle, dated 1810. The exceptionally engraved balance cock, balance rim, regulator disc and winding square are visible. Photographs supplied by M. C. Taylor.

The sound of the earlier clock

For an owner today, this replacement has a particular charm: its verge escapement gives the clock the kind of tick its original movement would have produced. A later movement has therefore preserved something of the earlier clock's audible character. This is an alteration with both its own craftsmanship and a sympathetic sound.

A handsome clock, a changed mechanism



Figure 15. Catalogued with a later movement. A mahogany sedan timepiece with a four-inch white dial and a turned, brass-bound surround. Gardiner Houlgate, Fine Clocks & Related Items, 26 February 2026, lot 2501. Photograph source: Gardiner Houlgate.

Why the catalogue wording matters

This attractive example preserves the distinctive appearance of a sedan clock, but Gardiner Houlgate described its mechanism as a later movement. The photograph shows the exterior; the replacement is identified from the catalogue description, rather than from a view of the mechanism. Compare it with the signed Hawke movement illustrated earlier. For a collector seeking originality, the relationship between case, dial, movement and fixing points is crucial. An altered example can still offer decorative and historical interest, but its description and value should reflect the change.

12. Continental sedan clocks: French examples

Across the Channel, the familiar name opens a rather different world. Gilded metal, silvered dials and painted cases offer an appealing contrast to the wooden-cased English examples discussed here. Yet “continental sedan clock” is a broad collecting description, not a guarantee of one construction, period or use. The French examples below show why each clock deserves to be understood on its own terms. They illustrate part of the European story, rather than a complete survey of it.

A small French timepiece with a voice



Figure 16. French ormolu sedan clock with alarm and repeater. Photograph: Christie’s, catalogue record 3885041. Ormolu is gilded bronze.

Christie’s catalogued this compact gilt-bronze clock to the second quarter of the nineteenth century, approximately 1825–1850. Its circular case measures only 10.5 cm across and has a suspension loop. A silvered dial, finely patterned surfaces and blued hands give it the air of a treasured personal possession. The catalogue describes a verge escapement, three-armed balance and engraved bridge. An alarm and pull-operated repeater sound on two gongs. A repeater sounds the time on demand, rather than only at a fixed hour. The signature reads “Julien Le Roy Fils Paris”. The name must be considered alongside the catalogue date and mechanism; an inscription alone cannot establish who made the clock or whether it is original. The balance is an important distinction when considering travel. Unlike a pendulum, it does not require the clock to remain upright in one fixed position. Nevertheless, neither the suspension loop nor the auction description proves that this particular survivor accompanied a sedan chair or coach. That part of its history remains open.

Painted metal and a different mechanism



Figure 17. French painted-metal sedan clock. Photograph: Christie's, catalogue record 5676365. Its much greater size should be considered when comparing it with the preceding timepiece.

A second French example, dated to the first half of the nineteenth century, measures 38.2 cm across and 15.3 cm deep. Its painted sheet-metal (tôle-peinte) case carries oak leaves and acorns around an enamel dial. Christie’s notes that it has been redecorated: surface finish and mechanical originality need separate assessment. Two barrels power the timekeeping and bell striking. The pendulum hangs on silk thread; a notched countwheel controls the number of blows. This pendulum clock needs a stable position for running, unlike the preceding balance timepiece. Its hanging fitting does not prove that it kept time during a moving journey. In its present configuration, this pendulum clock could not have kept time during a moving journey. It would have served as a wall clock in a room, hanging in a stable position.

Perhaps this clock was made in the fashionable form of a sedan timepiece, rather than for travel. I suspect it was intended from the outset as a decorative wall clock. Its painted case would look pretty on a wall, whether or not it had ever accompanied a traveller.

When the chair itself became the clock



Figure 18. A later clock shaped as a sedan chair. French, circa 1890, numbered 594. Photograph: Christie’s, catalogue record 4833420.

By about 1890, the sedan chair itself had become a nostalgic decorative subject. This French brass carriage clock is 28 cm high, with ornamental castings and glazed decorative panels. Its eight-day movement uses a lever escapement and strikes a gong. The chair-shaped case distinguishes it from an earlier timepiece carried by a traveller.

What the examples teach us

Begin by identifying how a clock regulates time: balance or pendulum. Then establish its duration, complications, mounting and alterations. These features are more informative than the collecting label alone. The survey of 42 English examples in this guide cannot be applied to continental clocks. Taken together, the three French examples illustrate portable timekeeping, a pendulum mechanism requiring a stable setting, and a later decorative revival of the chair itself.

Historical source notes

1. Historical terminology and wooden cases

F. J. Britten, Old Clocks and Watches & Their Makers, second edition (London: B. T. Batsford, 1904), p. 244, 'Sedan Chair Watches'. Describes eighteenth-century watch movements with three- to four-inch silver dials in moulded wooden frames. Records the alternative name 'Post Chaise Watches' and questions routine use in sedan chairs.

2. The Greenway timepiece and its stagecoach label

National Trust Collections, inventory 118720, Greenway, dated 1800–1830. Records the chain fusee, verge, square plates and engraved backplate, and transcribes a label linking the clock to the London–Bath stagecoach. The label is preserved testimony about this particular clock.

3. London fares, licensing and construction

London Museum, Road vehicle, sedan chair, A8422. Documents two chairmen, carriage at waist height, narrow-street access, indoor arrival, Hackney Coach Office licensing and a one-shilling fare for journeys of a mile or less in 1760.

4. Chairs in daily life

The Wilson Museum, The Sedan Chair. Records introduction into England in the 1630s, diary references dated 14 February and 19 September 1768, and shorter poles for stairs. Hampshire Cultural Trust, Sedan Chair from Winchester's First Hospital, explains indoor journeys avoiding dirty streets and records hospital use.

5. A chair and clock catalogued together

Christie's record 5714597, A Westminster Type Leather Sedan-Chair. Documents a chair with a George III sedan clock and a drawing dated 26 April 1925. Further leads cited by the catalogue: C. Hussey, Country Life, 8 December 1934, p. 617; The Luton News, 15 August 1935, p. 13; S. Houfe, Sir Albert Richardson, The Professor (1980), p. 50. These publications merit direct examination.

6. Continental mechanisms and later chair-shaped clocks

Christie’s records 3885041 (verge, alarm and repeat), 5676365 (painted case, silk suspension and bell striking) and 4833420 (chair-shaped clock, circa 1890). The last of these cites Derek Roberts, Carriage and Other Travelling Clocks (Schiffer, 1993), p. 115, fig. 6-58, for a related design.

7. Comparative craftsmanship and specialist correspondence

Metropolitan Museum, Robert Roskell pocket watch, 1820–21, accession 44.18: diamond endstone and chain fusee. AHS cumulative index: Norris, vol. 6, p. 524; Bird, vol. 7, pp. 159, 356 and 553; Rowe, p. 254; Neilson, p. 77. Burchall’s entries disagree between pp. 452 and 453; consult the original issue. Index references identify discussions, not their conclusions.

A period design for a sedan chair

This French drawing shows how a practical enclosed seat could become an object of refined design. The original sheet preserves the artist's lines, washes and the marks of age.



Look closely

The large glazed area, shaped roof and ornamental lower panels are clearly visible. Foliage and scrollwork turn the body into a decorative surface, while the enclosed form remains recognisable. A drawing records a design intention. It need not prove that a chair was built exactly as shown. Nor does the sheet establish where a clock would have been carried. Together with the Robert Adam design reproduced earlier, this sheet illustrates the craftsmanship and visual ambition surrounding the sedan chair. Both images are reproduced from their full-resolution source files.

Figure 19. Design for a Sedan Chair. Anonymous French artist, eighteenth century. Pen and brown ink, brush and grey wash, graphite.

Metropolitan Museum of Art, accession 67.720. The Elisha Whittelsey Collection, The Elisha Whittelsey Fund, 1967. Open Access image, CC0; via Wikimedia Commons.

Elegance with a practical purpose

Even the shape of a chair could serve its passenger. The National Trust notes that hinged roofs on Westminster chairs helped protect fashionable tall hairstyles during entry and exit. Its Saltram example has tapered sides that directed rainwater clear of the windows and helped the rear chairman judge the clearance through narrow doorways. Such details bring the ingenuity of this vanished craft into focus.

Sources: National Trust Collections, Packwood 557686 and Saltram 872068.

13. A collector's reference

Useful terms

Movement: the mechanism. Timepiece: a clock generally without striking. Fusee: a cone compensating for changing mainspring pull. Escapement: controls release of the train and impulses to the oscillator. Balance: the oscillating regulator. Bezel: the dial-glass surround. Provenance: recorded history. Balance cock: supports the upper balance-staff bearing. Endstone: limits a pivot’s movement along its length.

Description requires care

Distinguish hanging timepieces from later chair-shaped clocks. Original means belonging to that clock, not merely antique. Eight-day describes duration between windings.

Documented examples

National Trust: Greenway, 118720. London Museum: chair, A8422. Christie's: chair and clock, 5714597; alarm clock, 3885041; painted clock, 5676365; chair-shaped clock, 4833420. Gardiner Houlgate, 26 February 2026, lot 2501: later movement.

Books, archives and conservation

Britten, Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers (1904), p. 244. Roberts, Carriage and Other Travelling Clocks (1993). Antiquarian Horological Society: cumulative index, volumes 6–7, and STRIKE ONE records STR/02/017/007 and /023 (research leads). British Antique Dealers' Association: Antique Clocks. Comparisons: Jason Clarke Antiques, Hutchings clock; Metropolitan Museum, Roskell 44.18; Pitt Rivers Museum, Arthur Thomson watchcocks; Royal Museums Greenwich, No. 919, object 36391.

Further reading

Moebius, Product Catalog: lubricants and oil spreading. James Moss, Concerns regarding the Conservation of Functional Horological Objects (2003): lubrication and non-running movements. Cambridge University Library, ArchivesSearch: Britten biography. Museum and auction numbers identify catalogue records, not manufacturing serial numbers.

An invitation to share your knowledge

Writing this guide has left me with more unanswered questions than ever. These clocks offer a fascinating snapshot of history, yet very little written evidence survives. I hope these pages help readers understand and preserve them.

I am not an author by profession, but a devoted horologist: a movement restorer and clockmaker. I remain grateful to those who shared their knowledge with me, and to the owners who entrust their clocks to my care.

Much of my work concerns movements worn, damaged or thought beyond saving. Years at the bench have taught me where to look, what to preserve and what patient, exacting work can achieve. Restoring a clock when its owner has almost lost hope remains one of the quiet pleasures of my craft.

I offer these pages in that spirit and welcome further information, corrections and shared experience.

“There will ALWAYS be more to learn”

— M. C. Taylor