

Authors and Publishers' Comments on the Book Review by George White

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As the authors of the book *Charles Gretton – Clock & Watchmaking Through the Golden Age* and being encouraged by many calls of support, we believe that a response is in order on George White's review that represent 'his personal views' (AHS) as they include errors and misquotes that have the propensity to denigrate both Gretton and the authors. We are concerned that readers of this review will be left with misconceptions about the book's purpose and content. Since AHS rejected the publication of our comments in AH, we will take this opportunity to correct some of the errors, assumptions and misquotes made in the review.

The review generally ignores the core content of this large volume, which includes Gretton's lifetime achievements, his professional affiliations, as well as technical studies, dating, clock production and illustrations that explicate the development and evolution of the clocks and watches Gretton made over his fifty-four-year working period. This lack of comment on the primary content of the book leads us to believe that they met with the reviewer's approval. The reviewer does praise the book's quality, layout, photographs, research and design but it is a pity that some statements in the review are not entirely accurate. Additionally various details from the book have been taken out of context or are incorrectly or not fully-quoted and the reviewer makes assumptions which are not correct. The following will address these issues in the order they appear in the review;

1. The book weighs ten pounds, not 'a little less than five pounds'.
2. Gretton did not move his workshop to Crane Court, but as we stated, he did move his residence there. He later moved his home to Chancery Lane. The workshop always remained at the Ship. In fact, Gretton owned the Ship for some fifty years until he died, when it passed to his son Thomas.
3. It is suggested in the review that after such an effort, the authors 'in the end, fall a little in love with him [Gretton]'. The reviewer continues, 'This is something the authors are aware of' and he states that we did not propose to comment on the originality of any of the clocks or watches because the purpose of the book is to be 'a celebration of Gretton's life' – this is the reviewer's personal assumption, the authors made no such statement.

The inspiration for creating this book is well documented in its Introduction, where we explain that it was written to identify and catalogue the known work of Charles Gretton, not to address the originality of the various 'components'. Matters of

originality, we made quite clear, would remain as private discussions between the authors and the owners of the pieces, as requested by most owners. The authors feel that the content, structure and layout of the book therefore clearly meets with our objectives. As to the book being a 'celebration', this statement has not been fully quoted; we wrote, on page 246: 'we try to avoid remarking on these issues [condition and originality], since this book is intended as a *study* and celebration of the life *and work* of Charles Gretton, not to focus on what has happened to his clocks throughout their long lives.' Restating this only as 'a celebration of Gretton's life' misrepresents what was written and intended. Whilst we admire Gretton and his work, there is no love story.

4. The reviewer suggests that the photographs in the longcase section were cropped in such a way that the reader never quite sees whether the seatboards are convincing. However, the image captions and the accompanying text are quite explanatory as to what we were actually illustrating. The reviewer is looking for clues relating to originality, but we were not. In any event, the presence of an original seatboard or otherwise can not, on its own, be taken as proof or otherwise of originality.

The review also states that 'just occasionally a modern seatboard can be detected'. The documentation of seatboards was not the purpose of any of these images. We are quite aware that scrutiny of any collection will divulge the occasional modern seatboard in clocks made by practically all of Gretton's contemporaries. This is a fact of life following three hundred years of individual ownership, of environmental implications, of restorers' work and dealers' aspirations. Gretton's extant clocks are as subject to such 'restorations' as those of his colleagues. No general illustration in any horological book could or should be used to determine the originality or condition of a clock. Clearly, if the scope of the book had been to discuss such issues, with the owner's consent, we would have included such matters in the text, with detailed illustrations.

5. Paragraph seven of the review suggests that the issues related to originality would not matter 'if Charles Gretton's business had adopted a recognisable house style'. It is reasonably clear that early makers such as East, Knibb and Fromanteel may well have had certain styles, whereas this was much less the case for makers of Gretton's time. The period from the 1680s to the 1720s saw considerable changes in case style, case veneer, functionality, components, dials and engraving. The clockmakers generally followed what was in vogue at the time. It is therefore inevitable that Gretton, and other London clockmakers, may well have used similar styles and components during their working periods. Our in depth study of Gretton's evolving styles details this, so adds value to the study of horology since it also aids in dating the work of his contemporaries.
6. Paragraph eight continues: 'different dials seem to have been made with different matting tools' and 'while often very similar, some ringing of the winding holes is

clearly made with quite different cutters, further, clock hands on one clock rarely seem to resemble another, as with the case moldings.' This may very well be so. The longcase dials shown for comparison on page 95, for example, cover almost twenty-five years, from early dials of 1680/85 to later dials of 1700/05. How many matting tools, we wonder, wore out or were replaced over that quarter of a century, or indeed how many different craftsmen were involved in the making of these dials?

The spring clock dials shown on page 251 span almost forty years, from 1685/90 to 1720/25. It is inevitable that the individuals who matted these dials, the tools they used and the components changed considerably over such a long timespan. Our research suggests that practically all makers similarly changed or varied their style over this forty year period.

7. Comments regarding two spring clocks, 'one signed by Charles Gretton, the other by a different maker altogether, James Hassenius', makes no point; the reviewer's comment here is confusing. On page 285/6, under the heading 'Batch Manufacturing', we describe *three* almost identical spring clocks, with strikingly similar functionality, layout and engraving. Two of these are signed by Gretton, the third by Hassenius. The reason for our comparison is to suggest the possibility of batch manufacturing and to consider that Gretton may have sold the third movement to Hassenius. Hassenius (from Russia) was in England for only a few years, and it is believed that he did not have his own workshop. It is worth noting that Evans, Carter and Wright, in their book *Thomas Tompion. 300 Years* (page 265), suggest that Tompion at one point likely purchased movements from the workshops of others, such as Jones, Gretton or Cattell. We are quite convinced that even the best makers occasionally bought and sold movements amongst each other.
8. Paragraph nine suggests that Gretton may have been just a retailer. The reviewer partly justifies this theory by Gretton having more than twenty variations in his signature and by there being only one known extant clock that includes 'fecit' after the signature. It is worth noting that Ronald Lee, in his book on the Knibb family of clockmakers, lists Joseph as having eight different signatures, fully half of which did not use the word 'fecit'. John is listed with ten forms of signature, only three are followed by 'fecit'. The available literature indicates that Quare, Windmills, Graham and many others of Gretton's period rarely added 'fecit' to their signature; Tompion was an exception. Fromanteel, Jones, East, Massey and others used 'fecit' less often after the 1680s.

To further support the retailer hypothesis the reviewer also uses a contemporary document that we quoted (from the records held by the Clockmakers' Company in connection with a fake Gretton watch): 'Gretton hath kept a publick watchmaker shop for above 20 years and sold great quantities of clocks both at home and abroad.' The reviewer states that the word 'made' is interestingly absent. The word 'maker' however does appear in this very record, as 'watchmaker', and it also

places Gretton amongst 'Master Watchmakers' (pages 48–9 and Figure 1.57). It is understood that 'watchmaker' and 'clockmaker' were being used quite interchangeably in Gretton's time. Watchmakers also made clocks, and clockmakers also made watches. In fact, Quare, Tompion and others, including Gretton, made (retailed) many more watches than they made clocks, possibly up to ten times more.

Following considerable research, it became our firm belief that Gretton was indeed a clockmaker, as evidenced also by his documented signatures and expressed profession as a clockmaker in the Middlesex Court records of 1697 (page 594), as well as in every witnessed apprentice indenture that he signed (Chapter 6), on his marriage licence, in Clockmakers' Company records and in many additional documents. Henry Sully learned his clockmaking skills from Gretton, as did Farewell and Joseph Antram, all accomplished clockmakers and the last becoming a clockmaker to the King.

9. Paragraph ten then delves into matters of history that 'leap out of the page'. The first example is Figure 1.60 (page 51), which is captioned 'The four percent reduced annuity office of the bank of England.' The reviewer refers to this as the Rotunda then states that although Gretton 'attended' the bank, this Rotunda could not possibly have been known to him, since the bank in his day was based at the Grocers' Company in Princess Street. However, neither Figure 1.60 or the Bank of England, along with its location, are discussed in the book. The figure was added for interest only, as it is one of the few available early images of the bank. We make it quite clear in the picture credits (page 617) that this image is dated 1791, long after Gretton's time – this date likely being missed by the reviewer. The text related to the Bank of England, in this instance, refers only to the Clockmakers' Company's position with the bank, and Gretton's involvement. We indicate that the Master, Sir George Mettings, '[o]rdered that Mr. Charles Gretton one of the Court of Assistants of this Company shall have power to Vote for and on behalf of this Company in the choice of Governor, Deputy Governor and Directors of the Bank of England', an important position that Gretton occupied for several years. The Clockmakers' Company held stock in the Bank of England, as did Gretton himself. It is clear that Gretton was very well respected, and highly regarded, within the Clockmakers' Company.
10. It is suggested that the authors perhaps have a genuine misunderstanding because of their 'kindly desire to embellish the charitable side of Gretton's character'. The example given is that 'becoming patron of All Saints Church, Springfield, Essex, was not the act of generosity it may seem.' The reviewer continues: 'what Gretton acquired through purchase was in fact the right to nominate the rector of the parish, thus securing jobs for life for a number of his descendants.' However, what the reviewer overlooks are our words on page 59, referring directly to this patronage where we state: 'No doubt his [Gretton's] son Phillips benefitted from his father's

generosity.’ There was no misunderstanding about the benefits deriving from this gift. Regardless, Gretton was a wealthy and generous man who funded charities, some lasting over a hundred years and one until the 20th century.

The charities are described in detail in the book, but perhaps a brief summary would help to understand the scope of Gretton’s philanthropy: he created a trust through the Clockmakers’ Company specifically to apprentice sons of deceased freemen in clock- and watchmaking. This endowment, termed ‘Gretton’s Gift’, continued for almost 140 years, and eighty-four boys are documented as recipients. Gretton also gave to the poor of Claypole through the charity named ‘Grettin’s Garden’, which continued to 1909. Gretton funded a school for poor boys of Claypole, which remained until circa 1825. Gretton also became a donating governor of two important London hospitals, Bridewell Royal Hospital and Christ’s Hospital, contributing £200 to each, a huge sum three hundred years ago. Being a donating governor offered Gretton the right to nominate some individuals for training at these institutions. Do these privileges lessen the value of such giving? Should the tax credits we now receive for donations in registered charities taint the value of our own giving?

11. This leads us to what the reviewer terms ‘the more glaring errors’, which does not relate to any the book’s core watch and clock content but to a repairer’s ‘graffiti’ on the back-side of a lantern clock dial. We accept the reviewer’s opinion of this graffiti as we did not research it. Indeed we found it interesting, but not relevant to Gretton since it occurred long after his time. We know that Gretton’s Ship was willed to his son Thomas and was to remain in Gretton’s descendants’ hands for many years, since the instructions in Gretton’s will were that ten pounds a year from the rent of the Ship was to be used to fund the Claypole charities. We assume that Thomas rented space to clockmakers, amongst others, in the years following Gretton’s death. It is obvious from the graffiti dates (1837 and 1828) that Gretton was long gone. The reviewer, however, suggests that we believe Hopkins was a previously unrecorded ‘Gretton journeyman’, even though these graffiti dates are more than a century after Gretton’s death. We also made it clear (on page 407) that Hopkins was not identified in our analysis of Gretton’s workshop staff. We therefore did not believe, nor have we suggested, that Hopkins was a previously unrecorded ‘Gretton journeyman’, nor could he have been.

It became increasingly difficult for the authors to understand the reasoning for such emphasis on these lesser matters.

There is ample evidence in the Clockmakers’ Company records to support the position that Gretton was well respected by his peers and remained a committed Assistant of the Company to the end of his life. After his term as Master in 1700/01, Gretton was nominated to be master six more times, the last being 1730, one year before his death. In addition to this evident stature within his profession, Gretton died a multimillionaire in today’s terms, owning at least nine properties in London and the provinces, including

the ones in Fleet Street, Crane Court and Chancery Lane. He owned stocks and had thousands of pounds in the bank.

Charles Gretton·Clock & Watchmaking Through the Golden Age documents why we, and other horologists, can confidently regard Gretton as a renowned clockmaker and a philanthropist—a strong supporter of his family and friends, of education, of his community, and especially of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. He was clearly in the top tier of clockmakers during his working life, and our book correctly positions him that way.

The Authors

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