

**Review published in Tijdschrift - Netherlands: March 2017**

**Through the Golden Age; Charles Gretton – Clock & Watchmaking  
By Kees Grimbergen and John Selders (horloges)**

The book under our review is a special volume. It was written by Dennis Radage, his wife Laila Radage and (our) Warner Meinen. These authors form an unusual combination; a retired English businessman, living in Canada since 1968, who has collected English clocks from the period 1675-1875 for 40 years, his Finnish wife who owned an interior design company after a professional career in health care, and our well-known Dutch clock-enthusiast Warner Meinen.

Warner's notice in the December 2006 issue of *Antiquarian Horology* (pages 862-863) spurred this book. Warner was seeking information about Gretton explaining that he was working to compile a list of Gretton clocks. He also requested information on the subsidiaries present on his Gretton spring clock. Warner received a reply from Dennis Radage who had 2 Gretton clocks in his own collection. Soon it was decided, together with Dennis and his wife (who wrote the biography of Gretton), to begin the Gretton Project. Now, after 10 years, the notice from Warner culminated in this impressive and beautifully illustrated book about the life and work of Charles Gretton.

Apart from the 1962 article in *Antiquarian Horology*, written by John Stevens, there was hardly any information available on Gretton (1647-1731) and in that light, this book certainly satisfies the need. The book is substantial in size (633 [660] pages, 5kg) and it is the thickest book that I own apart from the Tompion book published in 2013 (664 pages). The book has a lot to offer; **1** Biography (73 pages) **2** Longcase clocks (191 p, of which 30 are reviewed, 120p), **3** Spring clocks (178 p, of which 23 are reviewed, 117p), **4** Lantern clocks (20 p, of which 2 are reviewed, 13p), **5** Watches (103 p, of which 18 are reviewed, 72p), **6** Apprentices (17 p, 8 apprentices including Henry Sully), **7** Workshop, staff and production (20 p). In addition to the chapters, there are 3 appendices (a list with all known extant clocks & watches, published notices of lost or stolen watches and a list of recipients of Gretton's Gift to the Clockmakers' Company).

One of the strengths of the book is the well-illustrated biography of Gretton with descriptions of the turbulent times in London covering the devastation of the plague in 1665 followed by the Great Fire in 1666 when Charles was only 19 years of age. Also the family-life of Gretton is extensively discussed including his 3 marriages and his public functions in the City of London.

The chapter on Gretton's workshop is especially informative and describes the number of staff (2-6), the number of known surviving clocks (132) and watches (29). The chapter gives a thought-out estimate of the total production [of clocks] (426-635). This is supported with histograms, timelines and the rationale for the estimation. A clear view is given on how clocks and watches were produced and how the trade was not only dependent on individual craftsmanship, but was also an emerging industry.

The most extensive part of the book, however, consists of the documentation of longcase clocks, spring clocks, lantern clocks and watches. The chapter covering the longcase clocks starts with an overview of the well-known clocks and their details. The dating system is explained and illustrated with timelines showing the relevant characteristics of the clocks. All the characteristics are described in detail and explained with many photographs.

After the longcase introduction, 30 clocks are individually reviewed and illustrated with beautiful colour photographs of the case, dial and movement.

The same structure is used for the chapter on spring clocks in which the different striking methods and quarter repeating systems are explained with drawings and detailed photographs. 23 individual spring clocks are then reviewed, again with good photographs and many technical details.

The watch section of the book starts with a completely disassembled watch in order to describe and date all the different components. This leads to an interesting interaction between the dated parts. New terminology is introduced; 'outward-facing' and 'inward-facing' for the signature, meaning the topside of the signature is pointing towards either the inside or the outside of the movement.

In the second part of the watch section 28 Gretton watches are reviewed. Every watch in this section is introduced by a large image on a full page with an attractive grey background. The gold champlévé contrasts very nicely with the fashionable grey. Every watch is described and beautifully displayed on 4 pages with five or more photographs.

This is a lovely adventure through the production of Gretton's lifework of 2000 watches.

All in all, this book is of a high standard, very informative and will certainly be a joy for the horological enthusiast. The price of the book relatively inexpensive, just under €200, which is 60% of the Tompion book that only has 30 [4] pages more. The lower price does not reflect on the quality of the book; the design is beautiful, the images are of high quality and the text very easy to read.

The book can be bought in the Netherlands through the MNU.

Finally, it has to be mentioned that to complete the Gretton Project within 10 years is the result of an enormous effort. I deeply respect what has been achieved by 3 individuals, especially considering the fact they were separated by some 7700km (Vancouver- Drenthe). The result is of incomprehensibly high quality!!!