

EDWARD EAST

His only lantern clock

by **Brian Loomes**, UK

A lantern clock came up for auction recently signed on the fret 'Eduardus East Londini'. I gave it only a passing glance. Why? Well, I never take much note of big name clocks. I mistrust them on principle since no faker will waste his time forging one pound notes when he could just as well forge fifties. So clocks bearing famous names seem to me to be far more likely to be faked than those by makers we hardly ever heard of. But also, if they are genuine, these clocks will fall well outside my price level.

The result is that I know all these top makers biographically speaking but I am not experienced in their work. I researched and wrote about East's life many years ago, but I have never owned or examined any East clock myself—till now.

In this instance there were a couple of other factors why I paid no attention to it in the auction. Firstly East is not known for lantern clocks. Apart from this present clock I know of only two others supposedly by East. I know them only from pictures in books and those are

both thought by people who claim to know such things to be fakes. Strangely enough another lantern clock signed 'Edward East' appeared at auction as I

Part 1 of 2

was preparing this article. So the tally now is three we could politely describe as dubious—plus the one pictured here.

The other reason is that clocks

signed on the removable and easily-replaced fret are amongst the most suspect. So for several reasons

Figure 1. This is the East lantern clock with wings as pictured in Britten about 100 years ago. Photograph by Geoff Cox.

I ignored it. And so did a few other collectors I know. I myself, along with a good few others, who should

have known better, assumed this clock was another 'dubious' one. We set out with the blinkered attitude that no lantern clocks are known by East so this cannot be genuine. Did we all get it wrong?

This article is not about Edward East's life, but I must mention briefly his dates for the benefit of those who, like me, can't just pull them instantly through our mental corridors. He was born in August 1602 at Southill, Bedfordshire. He was apprenticed in 1618 to Richard Rogers till 1626 and was made free in 1627 🗡️



Figure 2 (left). The same clock as featured in *Clocks* magazine when sent to auction at Sothebys in 1988, apparently unchanged. Photograph by Geoff Cox.

Figure 3 (above). This signature of East's workshop name on the front fret is the only identification we have of the source of the clock. But is the signature genuine and is the fret original? Photograph by Geoff Cox.



in the Goldsmiths' Company, whose horological members usually trained as watchmakers.

He was married on 8th August 1627 to Anne Bull, the daughter of eminent and prosperous clockmaker in the Blacksmiths' Company named Edmund Bull, a member of a family that included several celebrated makers of watches. He was made one of the first Assistants in the Clockmakers' Company in 1632, then a Warden in 1638 and Master in 1645 and 1653. He very seldom attended meetings after about 1660, in which year he was appointed Chief Clockmaker to King Charles II. He was never Clockmaker to Charles I, as sometimes stated. East seems to me never to have been short of money, and married into and inherited even more. A farmer friend of mine puts it succinctly with the expression 'Muck always falls on t'heap', except he does not use the word 'muck'.

East died in 1697 aged 94, an age all the more astonishing when you

East outlived Fromanteel. The two had co-operated on occasions despite their contrary politics.

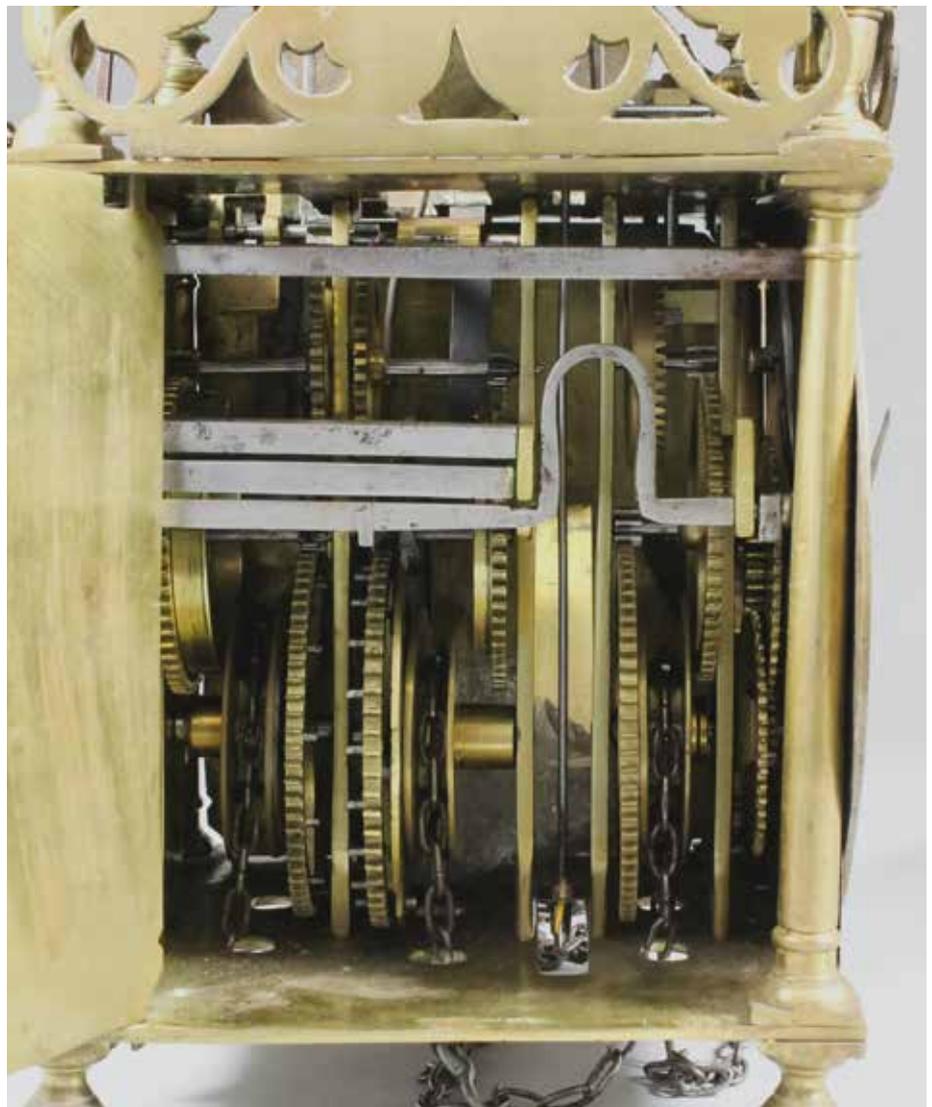
realise that at this time the average life expectancy for men and women was 33! I have a copy of his will somewhere in the office. I recall it contains the unusual phrase 'It is my express will that my executrix bury me privately in the night time and that she give nothing but Rosemary att my funerall'. This implies he may well have been a Roman Catholic, as they held funerals at night to be able to perform their own rituals in privacy.

The East concern had a very large workforce, which could account for the comparatively large number of 'his' works which survive, compared to the very small number (if any) surviving by his associates. If we include outworkers there were well over 50. These included Peter Bellon, David Moody, Benjamin Hill, Michael Cornish, Jeremy East and probably all the other Easts, John Matchett, William Partridge, Evan Jones and their numerous apprentices. A good number of these had French origins or connections, probably putting most of



Figure 4 (below). This East signature on a table clock appears to be by the same hand as that on the lantern clock. Photograph courtesy of Messrs Bonhams Auctioneers.

Figure 5 (right). This view shows the centre pendulum with anchor-shaped bob. The bob and the wings are later replacements. Photograph by Geoff Cox.



them amongst the Catholic / Royalist camp.

The East business house, with its French / Catholic / Royalist leanings, seems to have been in direct opposition to the Fromanteel business with its Anglo / Dutch / Cromwellian inclinations. strangely enough Ahasuerus Fromanteel, born 25th February 1606/07 at Norwich, buried Whitechapel 31st January 1692/93, also achieved a great age dying a month short of 86. In his will written in July 1692 he describes himself as of sound mind but 'antient, weake and crazy in body', which probably means he was crippled or infirm.

But East outlived even Fromanteel. The two had co-operated on occasions despite their contrary politics. Several clocks are known with indications of collaboration, principally in the form of East putting his name where it would take credit for Fromanteel's work. Yet the two must also have been great rivals.

It turns out the East lantern clock was bought by antique clock restorer Geoff

It is now
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Cox, an American based in England. Geoff has been a restorer for a good many years and in recent times has taken to dealing as well, especially in lantern clocks. He has done work for me and he certainly knows what he is doing. We were in contact for a quite different reason when by chance he mentioned this East clock to me and sent me some photographs. I started by assuming it was wrong, but as the evidence piled up, it became obvious it was me who was wrong, not the clock.

Geoff does today what I always tried to do before I stopped buying. He looks closely at those things others don't understand or dismiss too hastily, especially at clocks that appear at first sight to be wrong. There is a special delight in buying from right under their noses something all the 'old hands' and their wives have dismissed, and the more so when you sell it for a profit. Geoff cannot outbid the big hitters, any more than I could, but he can outwit them. They have the money but they

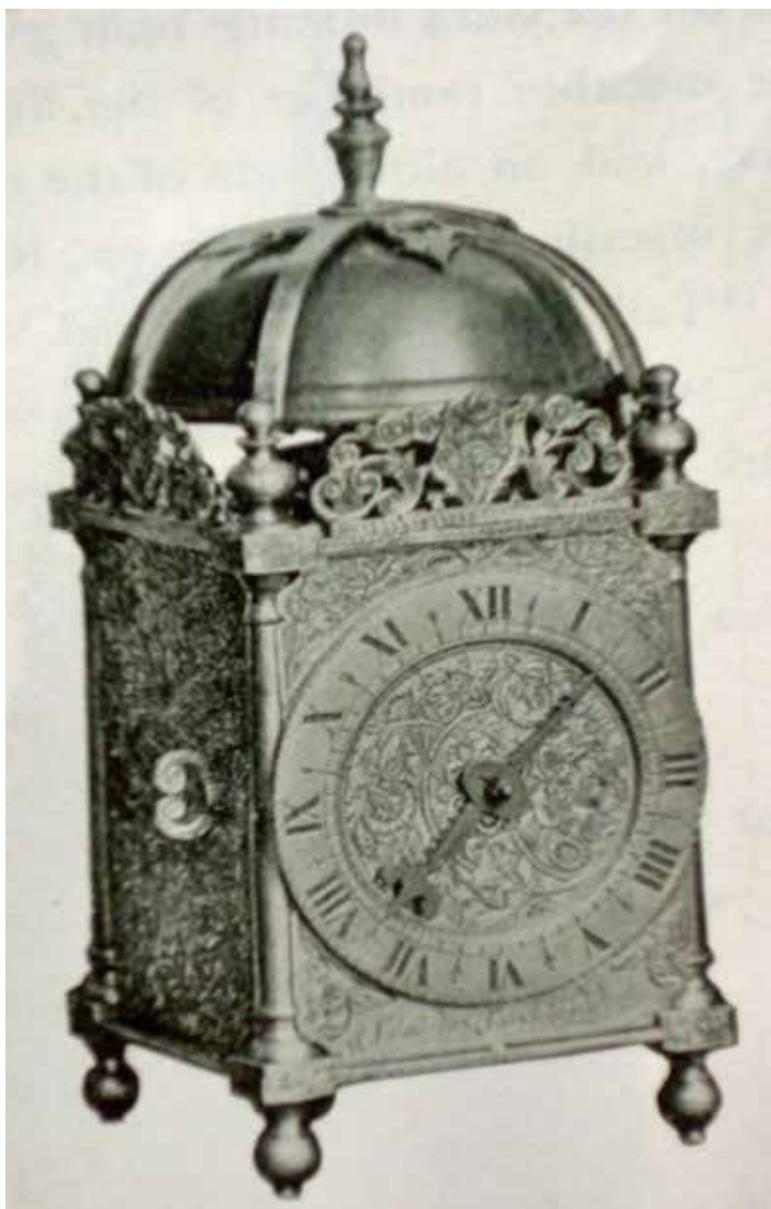


Figure 6. This eight-day lantern clock is pictured in Cescinsky and Webster's 1913 book *ENGLISH DOMESTIC CLOCKS*. It is believed to be in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. Photograph by Geoff Cox.

Figure 7. Another view of this very handsome miniature lantern clock signed 'Edwardus East Londini'. Any connection with East is thought unlikely. Photograph by Geoff Cox.

don't always have the knowledge.

There is nothing more satisfying than to buy something that auctioneers and bidders have failed to recognise. And it happens even in the biggest and best auction houses. It happened again just literally a few days ago when an auctioneer mis-catalogued a good lantern clock as a modern copy when it is in fact a fine late seventeenth century example with a rare form of strikework (a striking system that I have written about!). Geoff spotted it and asked me about it as he could not quite believe his own eyes and knew I was not bidding. He bought it for a tenth of its real value.

Good on him!

This East clock is a two-handed, centre-pendulum clock chiming the quarter hours on a single bell and having a pendulum with an anchor-shaped bob that swings out into wings on the doors. I think I am right in saying that the only lantern clocks made with two hands originally were those that chimed quarters. Many that have two hands today were converted much later from one hand to two and these are easily recognised because the dial is calibrated only in quarters, not minutes. Any quarter-chiming (two-handed) lantern clock is a rare thing in itself. I think the total number we know of would be less

than a dozen. So, although a quarter-chimer is an exceptionally uncommon item, there is nothing suspicious about the clock itself.

But of all the quarter-chiming examples we do know, only a single clock by Richard Greenhill of Ashford has a centre pendulum (pictured in my book *LANTERN CLOCKS*), the others being balance or anchor. Greenhill's is a large clock (18 1/2 in) whereas this clock is of standard size (about 16 in)—quart into pint pot. So this puts it into a far more desirable world of its own.

If it was unsigned it would still be a very special clock. If signed by a known maker, so much the better. But signed



Figure 8. This clock is signed 'Edward East'. Certainly not THE Edward East. Photograph courtesy of Messrs Tooveys auctioneers.

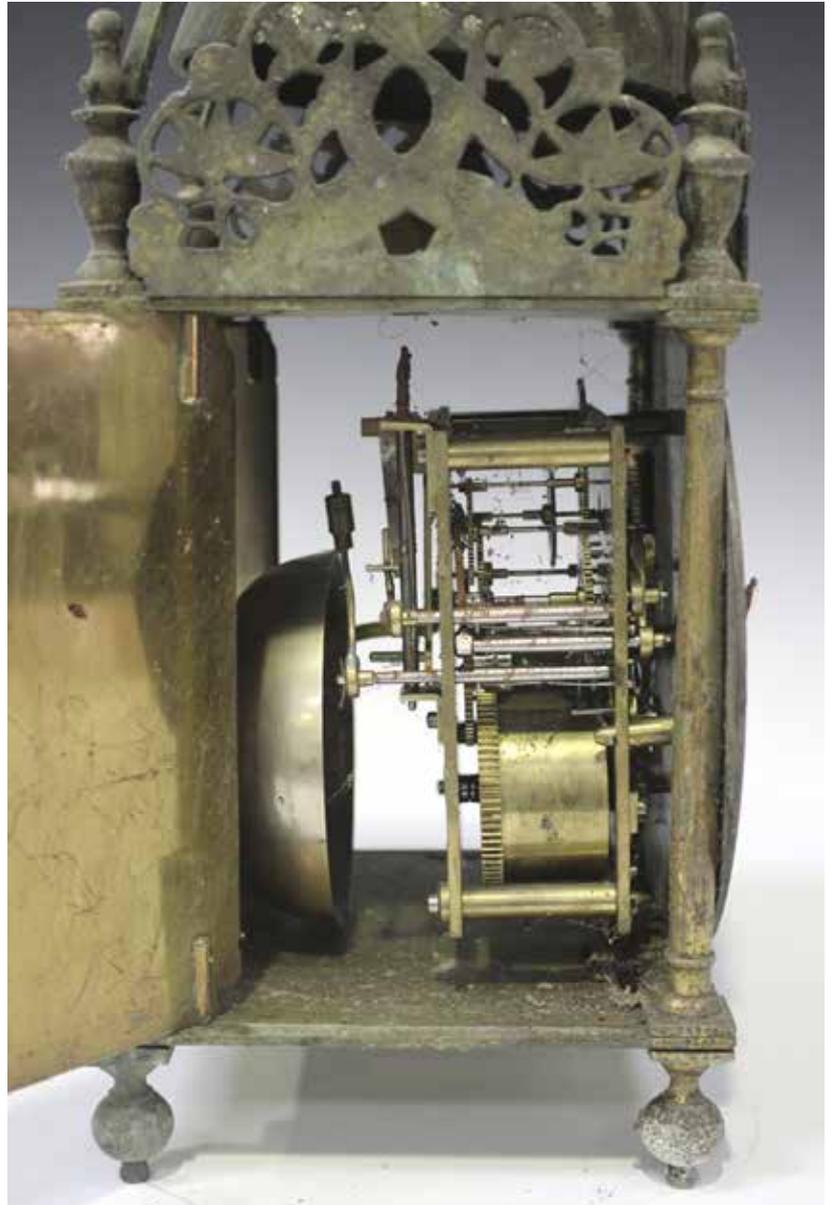


Figure 9. A view shows the original movement of this clock has been replaced by a spring going-barrel clock. Photograph courtesy of Messrs Tooveys auctioneers.

by Edward East ... to say it was unique would be an understatement. Everything depends on whether it really is by East. But can that be established?

The auctioneers knew that the clock was pictured in an early edition of Britten from around a century ago, but these old books are notorious for the number of fakes they show, so this was certainly no proof of authenticity. An unusual amount of paperwork came with the clock, including the following.

- A letter written on 1st February 1996 from Michael Turner, then the highly-respected Head of Clocks at Sothebys, in response to enquiry from the owner at that time, a Dr Chaplain.

Michael suggests they might expect to sell it between £7000 and £9000. He mentioned that they had sold the clock previously (in 1988) for Viscount Hereford at a bid of £5500, making £6050 inclusive of charges. He quotes George White's opinion that wings are unlikely to be original but otherwise sees nothing to suggest it is not genuine.

- A letter dated 14th March 1996 from Sir George White, at that time employed as 'Consultant Keeper of the Collection and Library of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers', which states that he has never seen a clock with wings he believed were of that same period nor an anchor-shaped pendulum bob he found

convincing. Apart from that he found nothing in the photographs to suggest it was anything but genuine.

- A letter dated February 1996 from David Thompson, then Assistant Keeper of Horology at the British Museum, stating there is nothing to suggest the clock is anything but genuine –it 'appears to be a genuine example from Edward East's workshops in about 1680'. He, however, disagrees with White's opinion on wings and states that 'whilst there has been a considerable amount of debate in the past concerning these winged lantern clocks, I think it is now generally accepted that many of them are perfectly genuine'. I myself agree

with David Thompson on that point and I have owned examples where I believed the wings were original. He suggests the owner write to White himself, which he evidently did soon after. It seems the owner did not know of White until that point.

In fairness all three state they have not seen the actual clock, just one or two photographs. Whilst opinions vary on the originality or not of anchor-shaped pendulums and wings, Geoff had already decided for himself by examination that these were a later alteration / addition on this particular clock signed by East. Yet we know they were on the clock over a century ago when its photograph was published in Britten. When you have such a clock in your hand it is usually easier to decide than from a photograph. But more investigation was to uncover proof that these parts were later. Additions are seldom a deterrent as they can always be removed.

As it happens Geoff worked at one time in an occupation involving vibrational spectroscopy for analytical chemistry, a phrase that does not trip easily off the tongue. XRF (or X-ray fluorescence) is a non-destructive analytical technique used to determine the elemental composition of materials including metals, and he just happens to have one or two contacts in the field of metal analysis. He got a friend to examine the components of the brass in the clock, which proved that all parts, including the frets, contain appropriate quantities of the various metals—copper 73 per cent, zinc 22.8 per cent, lead 2.8 per cent, tin 0.41 per cent, iron 0.42 per cent and silver 0.08 per cent—for seventeenth-century brass, *except for* the wings, which contained no tin or silver. The wings contained 65.0 per cent copper, 32.4 per cent zinc, 0.79 per cent lead and 0.17 per cent iron. This is consistent with the entire clock being of the later seventeenth century but the wings of the late nineteenth. This confirms exactly what we suspected but it is comforting to see scientific proof.

The fact that this clock once belonged to a peer says nothing at all about its genuineness. Yet somehow the higher up the social scale we shuffle, the more we feel an item must be genuine. Should we feel more confident if it had belonged to a butcher or baker, a banker, a downsizing museum, a minor peer, a senior peer, HM The Queen? If we assume the high-ups had the best advice, then what about the specialist art museum that displayed a famous painting for years hanging upside down?

And the number of museums that contain duff clocks?

The auctioneers said the clock had previously been the property of Viscount Hereford. It is well known that auctioneers love to quote the owner as a person 'of title', since the source appears to give some aura of genuineness to the object. In reality peers were just as capable of being hoodwinked as anyone else, probably more so as they usually had pots of money and were on a never-ending spending spree. Plenty of famous collections have thrown up duds when offered for auction to today's more informed buyers. I always find such

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things entertaining, especially when the dealer it was bought from is named.

I recall not that long ago a catalogue published by an internationally-renowned auction house of a famous collection which included several items that collector had bought from a particular dealer and that buyers recognised as fakes. In fact I know more than one so-called 'collector', who was often seen at auction buying whatever junk clocks were cheap, those clocks being auctioned later as from his 'collection'. His collection of fakes and junk! We see

these people at auction and what they buy, and soon learn to avoid clocks from suspect sources. So 'provenance' from a certain collection is utterly meaningless except where a previous auction appearance is cited, as the price that may indicate how it was regarded at that time on the open market. When we think about it we know for a fact that so-called 'provenance' should make no difference at all. Yet it does!

The fact that no other genuine lantern clock is known by East obviously means we have nothing to compare it with. But that has no bearing on its genuineness. A few years ago a lozenge-shaped dial turned up at auction signed 'Aha Fromanteel'. No movement, just a dial. It was obviously from a weight-driven wall clock of a type we call a 'diamond dial'. No example of a diamond dial clock is known by Fromanteel to this day! Yet this was believed to be a genuine Fromanteel dial.

'The absence of evidence is not evidence of absence,' they say, when trying to establish whether Bigfoot really exists. What they mean by this slick phrase is that the fact that they can't find him, does not mean he is not out there somewhere. So the absence of another known lantern clock by Edward East does not indicate that they don't exist, only that we don't know of them yet.

When I was beginning as a dealer a year or two back I remember trying to sell a book to a big collector, who scoffed at the idea. He never bought books, he told me, as everything he needed was in his head. An experienced collector told me recently that a craftsman trained in watchmaking could not make clocks, and vice versa, as the skills, tools and practices were so different. Well it occurs to me just off the tip of my tongue that Ahasuerus Fromanteel did, Thomas Loomes did, and Edward East did! At least they sold them bearing their names. I don't imagine any workmaster sat at a bench all day using calloused hands, any more than Mr Marks and Mr Spencer sold their wares in person, once they were established that is.

So with any clock we should dismiss from our minds totally any aspect such as 'provenance', previous ownership, learned opinion, auctioneers' blurb, book illustration, rumour, innuendo, urban myths and hearsay. Let's get down to examining this particular clock for ourselves and see if we can determine whether the East lantern clock is genuine or fake. Did this clock come from the East workshop or not? Can we tell for certain? Can we prove it? 🍷