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Thos Knifton Lantern Clock - Bonhams NOV2024 Lot 278

A Case for Originality - Lothbury Manufacture C1650-60

An interesting case of misunderstanding by the auction house. This London lantern clock was deemed a modern replica as wrongfully stated per their published catalog description / condition report as follows:

A brass weight-driven lantern clock with verge and balance wheel escapement, probably 20th century

The dial signed for Thomas Knifton, at the Crossed Keys, Lothbury

The strapped bell with later finial over pierced frets and a pair of side doors between slender tapering columns on ball feet. The Roman chapter ring with inner quarter hour track, stylised fleur-de-lyse half hour markers and single hand. Signed in the centre Thomas Knifton at the (sign of the crossed keys) In Lothbury Londini over a florally engraved base.

The weight driven movement with rope drive to each train, the going train terminating in a verge escapement to a plain brass balance, the strike with inside countwheel acting on the hammer above, with elaborately filed hammer stop. 39.5cms (15.5ins) high. £600 - £900

Footnote:

Thomas Knifton was born in Nottingham circa 1614 and in 1632 was apprenticed in London to William Selwood through the Clothworkers' Company. He worked occasionally at the 'Drap (er)'s Arms' but mostly at the Cross Keys in Lothbury, London, until he died in 1667

Please note this is not 17th C but a 20th C fabrication



Having handled, restored, researched, and reinstated balance escapements involving dozens of period Lothbury London lantern clocks (and a few replicas!) over the last 30+ years, I've examined and compared this clock, its components, style, and workmanship with other known similar Knifton examples. A prolific maker with plentiful web accessible images and information make for an interesting and comprehensive comparison. There are many matching features together with and a few observations that can be easily explained.

There are quite a number of Knifton lantern clocks known, many with common themes throughout and a variety of experimental variations of finishing style, similar but with differences that exhibit common feature basis, including dial / dial-plate, top-plate movement layout, cruciform and work style.

There is evidence of moderate wear throughout the clock (and repaired worn great wheel ratchet spokes from endless winding). It's very well run but hardly worn out as typically found. A few new pivot bushings have been replaced, but no train arbors moved.

Such an example would be the hammer stop on this one. Tho the overall geometric design may be unique to itself, the beak and finish filing clearly exhibits commonality to another one (and others) shown. Most of Kniftons feet-column-finial component alignment hash marks of 1-3 (used to identify the four sets) appear on the majority of his lantern clocks and of the same application and style, as does this clock.

Perhaps the most identical and certainly the most obvious Knifton feature amongst his clocks is the signature block (content, placement, and style). There are four additional clocks dial plate engraving shown in this comparison clearly executed by the same hand. The engraving on this example is freehand cut and not etched in any way. The chapter ring and dial plate as objects in their own are similar in every way to any other genuine second period Lothbury lantern clock, as are most of the other components that make the clock (doors, back, hand, strike side pulley cheeks, and correct frets have age but may not be original to the clock and at least some of the pinion arbors).

Many times when lantern clocks with original crown-wheel balance escapements have had early conversion to anchor (to improve time keeping and up to date) the escape wheel pinion and great-wheel arbors move over for convenience and pinion-of-report gearing changed to allow longer winding duration. This one has not but rather accommodates such a gear by fitting a replacement hour wheel of smaller diameter (machine cut teeth are obvious), matching another Knifton converted anchor example shown. The crown-wheel arbor location remains in place, a back-cock post is placed on the top plate behind the front movement strap wedge for the horizontal anchor arbor to swing the long pendulum crutch behind the back. The anchor hangs low enough to engage the escape wheel without the need to modify the original top plate. This clock leaves but a faint outline of such (plugged) of such back-cock post formerly in place.

Operation of the reinstated balance escapement is superb. A nice wide easy balance swing, beautifully done. The balance is a bit chunky etc. (and different work style not of the same workshop as the rest of the clock). I suspect the clock was restored and balance reinstated in the 1960s or a little later. Much of the case-work suffers from golden hot-dip lacquer from 50 years ago (difficult to remove sometimes).

At some stage the column feet on this clock have been filed flat to sit level (!).

The has retained independently wound weights and originated as a period balance escapement fitted clock - typically identified by the hammer striking hardware placement on the right side (when facing the clock).

Comparative features of this Knifton with others from his workshop:

- Identical chapter ring signatures (4) additional Knifton clocks examples shown
- Same engraver all the examples shown
- Identical corner engravings
- Foundry marked chapter ring
- Early cut screws
- Non-uniform thickness hammered / planished cast brass sheet
- Same stepped finial bell strap mount and hole placement

- Identical top plate layout
- Similar hammer stop examples
- One piece pinion-arbors used on some 17th C examples
- Hand filed teeth wheel-work except machine cut hour wheel replacement (earlier anchor conversion)
- Replaced hand (?)
- Identical movement train layout
- Identical top-plate layout
- Correct and similar style steel work
- Matching movement cross strap layout
- Replacement strike work pulley strike side
- Replacement hour wheel 8 leaf pinion (earlier anchor conversion)
- Evidence of plugged holes from earlier anchor conversion back cock (removed)
- Matching hash-mark alignment marking used by Knifton
- Matching smaller round / crisp hinge holes - other examples
- Matching smaller round winding chain / rope holes - other options examples
- Original, matching bell stand layout

*Image Gallery - Scroll thru 18 images below
Note embedded Image Gallery is only
accessible on OS Apple Pages*

The Knifton Clock Discussed - Lot 278





Feature Comparison - Knifton Clock to other Knifton Examples

IMAGE GALLERY



*Scroll through embedded images functions with OS Apple Pages
Otherwise see attached Cloud link to review Image Gallery*

