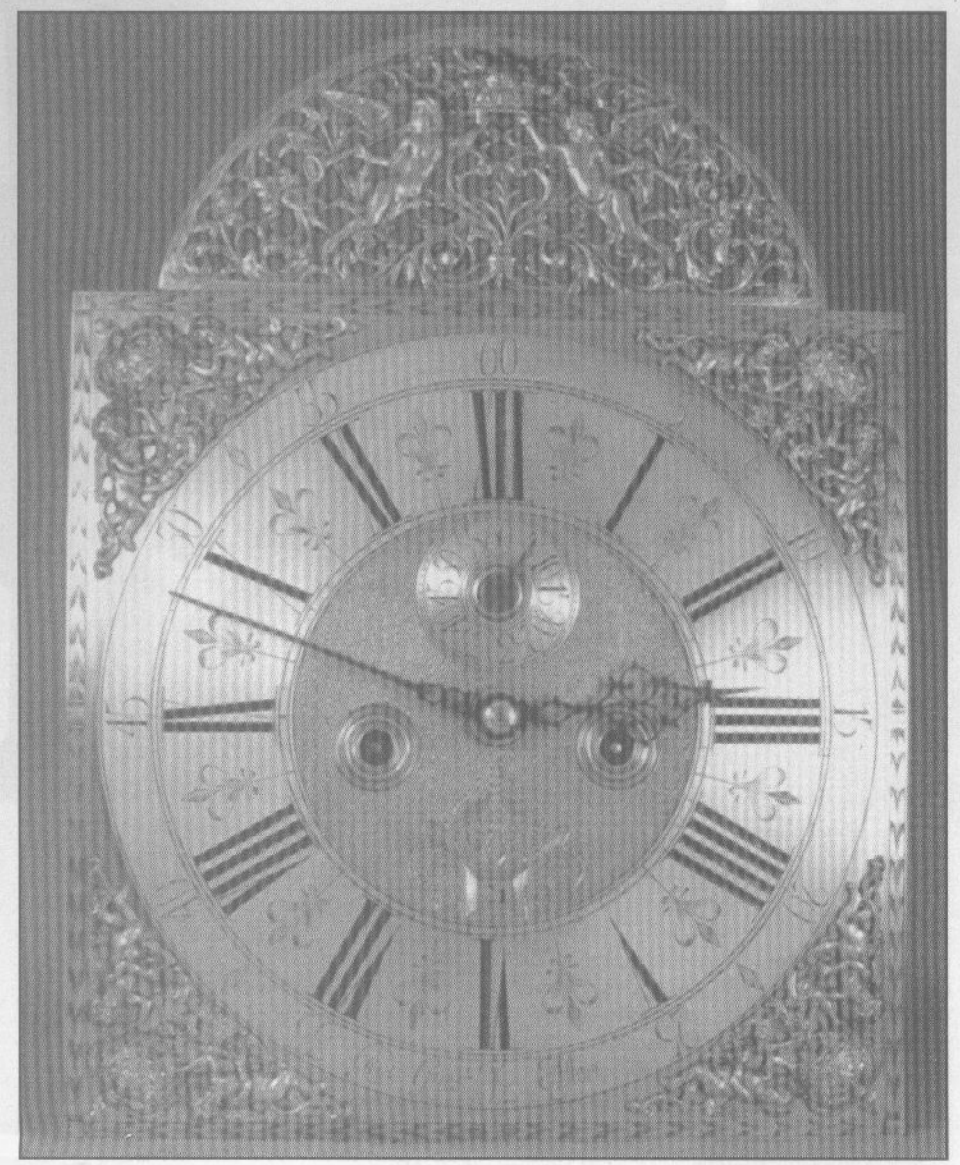
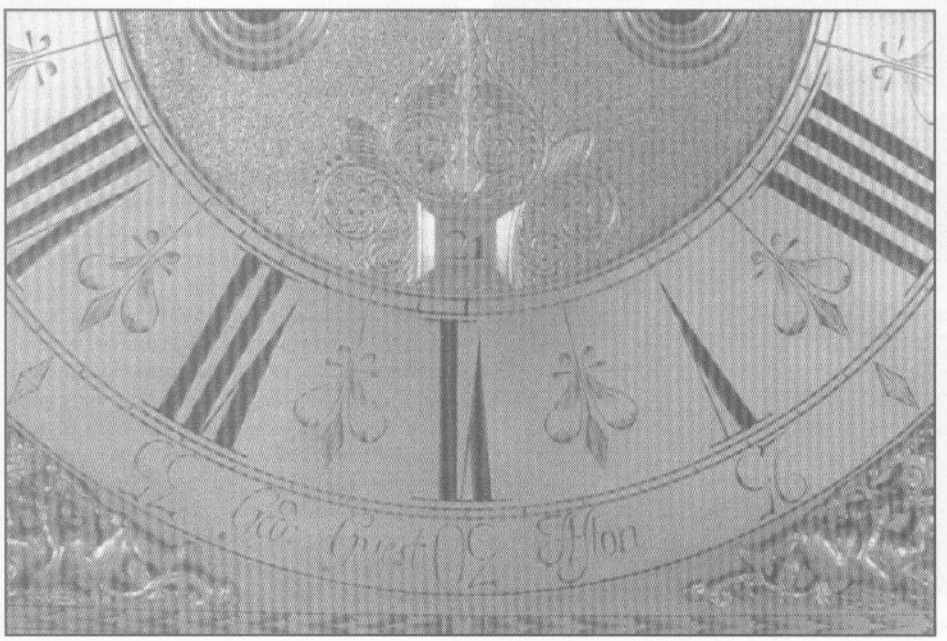


Figure 1. The dial of George Guest's eight-day longcase clock. The hour hand is later.

Figure 2 (below). Close-up of the dial showing the signature, herringbone engraving, half-hour markers and the engraving round the calendar aperture.



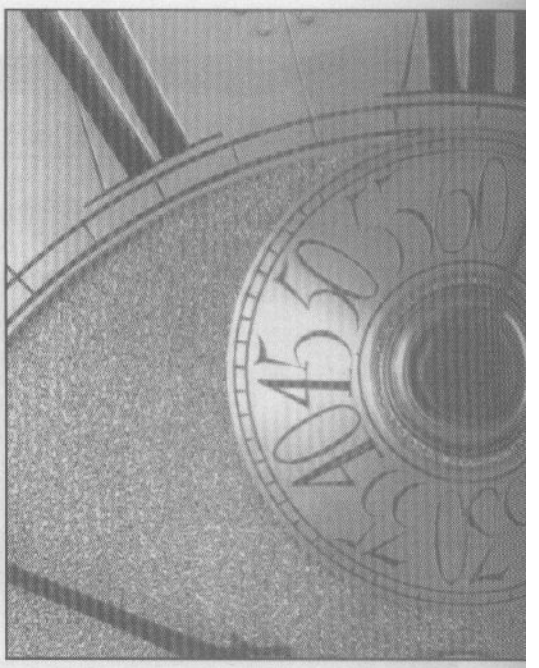


Figure 3. The numbers on the seconds dial are very

A cast ar George

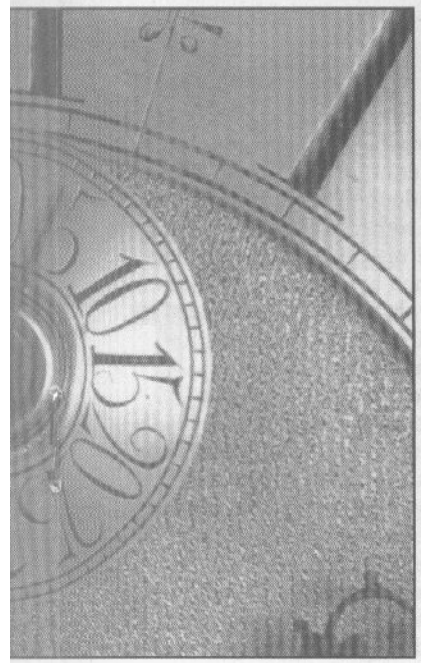
Why are arch castings - like George Guest - so uncomm come across today?

Just over ten years ago Brian Loomes wrote in *Clocks* magazine (March 1986, pages 19-20) about two clocks by George Guest. Until then not even his place of work had been known. Britten's *Old Clocks and Watches and Their Makers* records a 30-hour longcase clock of about 1690 signed 'Georgius Guest', while Brian Loomes's article shows an illustration of a late 17th-century or early 18th-century lantern clock similarly signed, but neither had a placename.

John Robey

The only other clock known at that time was a three-train quarter-chiming clock, also illustrated in the *Clocks* article, this time signed 'Geo Guest, Aston'. This clock had herringbone engraving around the edges of the square dial, ringed winding and seconds holes, and dated from about 1710.

Although Aston is a very common placename in England - my road atlas



very large.

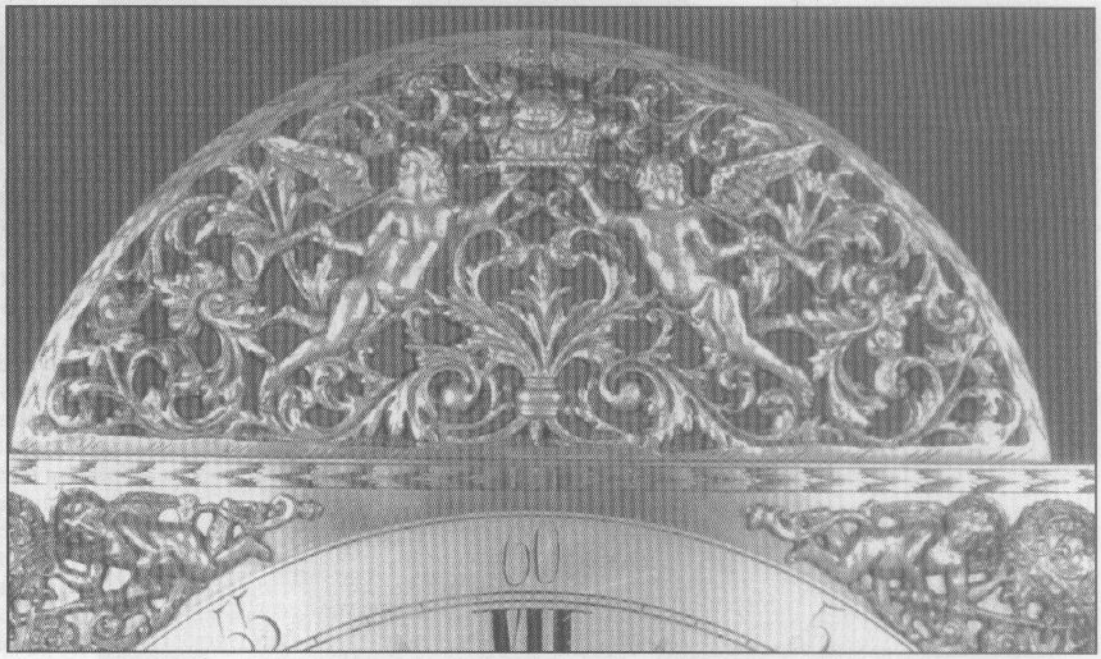


Figure 4. The cast brass decorative arch.

rch by
e Guest

ke this one on a clock by mon on the longcases we

lists 12 such villages, plus another 26 where Aston prefixes the full name of the place - the one near Birmingham seemed the most probable candidate. A George Guest, son of George Guest senior of Bull Street, Birmingham, is known to have been baptised in 1658 and so would have started his apprenticeship about 1672 and finished his training about 1678. Anne, who appears to have been his first wife, died in 1702, but he had moved to Yardley by this time, where he was married for the second time to a Sarah Kimberley.

None of the records mention his trade, so the supposition that he was the clockmaker was (and still is) unproven, as is confirmation that the Aston on the clock is the Birmingham one, but it does seem likely.

Recently I came across another clock by George Guest of Aston, this time an eight-day two-train longcase. The unusual feature of this dial is that it has a decorative cast arch, which I have not seen recorded before (except on a later

Figure 5. The hood of the case with a caddy top and side windows.

Figure 6. The trunk door has a break-arch top, is edged with a half-round moulding, and has a glass lenticle.

added arch) and neither has Brian Loomes.

The dial, **figure 1**, is very attractive with good-quality large-crown and cherub spandrels, herringbone engraving, and ringed winding and seconds holes. There is engraving around the square calendar aperture, **figure 2**.

Apart from the spandrels, the main difference from the chiming clock illustrated in 1986 is that the seconds ring is very wide and the numbers large, **figure 3**. This does give a clumsy look to the seconds ring and to my mind spoils the balance of what is otherwise a most attractive dial. The lozenge half-quarter markers are the same, but the half-hour marks are different.

The engraving is competently done, but not up to the standard of work that would be expected from a professional engraver. There are differences in the capital Gs between the two clocks. Also the s of Aston in the three-train clock is of conventional shape, whereas that on the two-train clock is an early long s - often mistaken for an f.

Despite these differences, as far as can be judged from the illustration in the early issue of *Clocks* the engraving seems to be by the same hand. This dial is one of those instances (much less common that is often supposed) where the clockmaker probably engraved the dial himself. Overall the effect is the work of a good provincial craftsman who has

done most of it in his own workshop, and while not up to the sophistication of a London dial it has a character of its own.

This distinctiveness is emphasised by the cast arch, with two winged cherubs blowing horns and holding a basket of fruit within a background of acanthus foliage. The casting is riveted to the dial plate with two small brass straps, and while it *could* have been a later addition there is no evidence that it is other than original and it fits the case perfectly.

This clock has an early experimental arch, appearing about the time that engraved arches were introduced purely as a decorative feature, just before the arch was used to house a name boss, strike/silent hand, moonphase indicator, or some other subsidiary feature. The clock dates from about 1715, and may be even as early as 1710.

I have come across another use of this arch casting, on a clock by Alexander Gordon of Dublin, about 1760 (see 'Added arches', *Clocks*, September 1995, pages 29-31). This is a much later use and had been fitted to an added arch plate, and not fixed to the dial plate as on the George Guest clock. The surprising thing is that a considerable amount of work has gone into carving a wooden pattern for the arch casting, as there is quite a large amount of detail visible, yet it is so uncommon.

Only the largest clockmaking concerns would do their own casting.

It would no doubt be available, like spandrels and other cast fittings, as a stock item from a supplier or from the foundry itself. Only the largest clockmaking concerns would do their own casting and, like today, components were often obtained from specialist suppliers. But, if it was available off the shelf, why did other clockmakers not use it and why are so few examples known? This lack of use is surprising, as the overall effect is very pleasing.

The clock is in an oak case with a caddy surmounted by three turned wooden ball finials, **figures 5** and **6**. Unfortunately, the case was in a narrow hallway, hemmed in by other furniture - not the ideal position for good photographs.

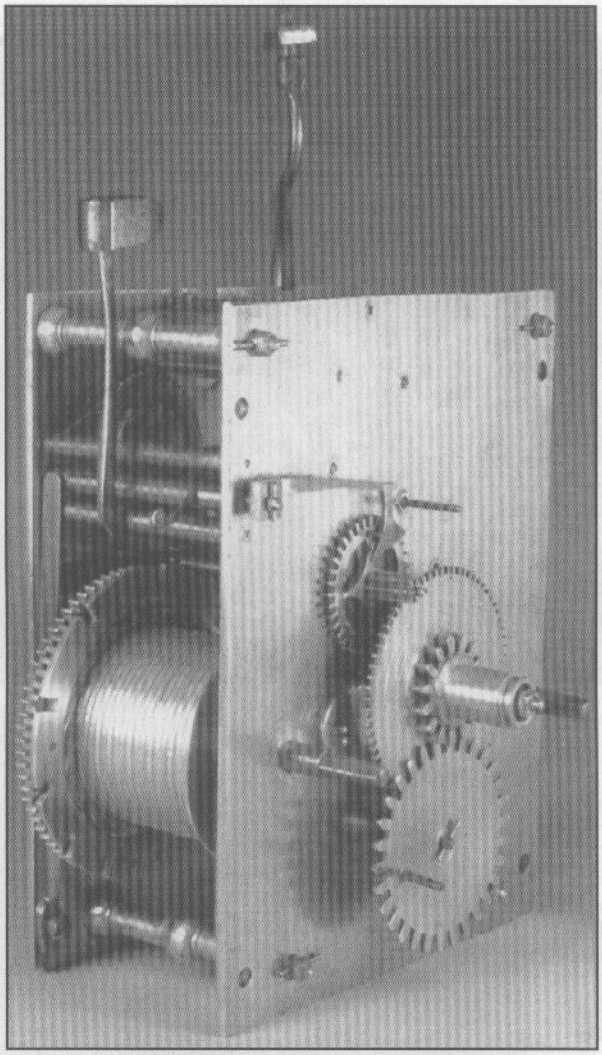


Figure 7. The movement with internal countwheel. The teeth on the calendar wheel are very coarse, as is often the case with early clocks

The half-round moulding around the trunk door is as found on early walnut-veneered cases and one could say that it is a provincial oak version of a walnut case. It has some pretensions at being stylish, but lacks the elegance of a London-made case, and - like the dial - has a more homely provincial feel about it.

Despite the arched dial and the superstructure of the hood, the case is quite short (6ft 8½in tall, plus another 4in for the ball finials), the dial appearing at face height. A glass lenticle in the trunk door is positioned where the pendulum bob swings and so it (and the lock) appear to be low down on the door.

Close inspection (including looking inside it with a torch) revealed no evidence that the trunk or the door have ever been shortened. The lock, hinges, bottom of the door and the join between the trunk and base all appear to be unaltered, so the case was clearly made for a room with a low ceiling.

The well-made eight-day movement has internal countwheel striking, as you would expect for the period, **figure 7**.

The four pillars are not finned and the only unusual feature is that there is no slip washer to hold the hour hand pipe to the hour wheel (and so allowing adjustment of the hour hand independent of the minute hand without remeshing the wheels of the motionwork). The same effect is obtained by allowing the hour hand to rotate on the end of its pipe, but with a slip washer to hold it in place and allow adjustment. On 19th century longcase clocks, particularly 30-hour ones, the hour hand is often a friction fit on the round end of the hour pipe, but the slip washer used by George Guest is a much better arrangement.

The very coarse teeth of the 24-hour calendar wheel is a feature that is often found on early movements. Later in the 18th century the teeth of calendar wheels were cut with the same cutter as used for the wheels of the going train, striking train and motionwork.

A detail that is easy to overlook is a casting mark on the fly, **figure 8**. This is in the form of simple flower, and although almost filed off, is clearly not just a casting fault. Marks like this, sometimes initial letters or numbers, are very occasionally found on wheels and other cast brass components, and are the marks of the brass founder. Careful note should be made of any such marks found on longcase or other clocks. Unfortunately, at the moment, no one has been able to identify the makers of these components.

While nothing further has been uncovered regarding the life of George Guest this additional example of his work is very interesting, particularly the arch casting. And while he may not have been the genius of the earlier article in *Clocks*, he was certainly one of those makers who made clocks that were that little bit different and stamped his individuality on them.

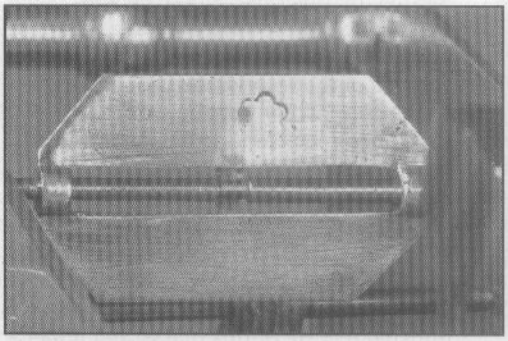


Figure 8. The fly with a casting mark in the shape of a flower.