

INVESTIGATING

by Sked

by John R



Figure 1. Small 30-hour clock signed 'Charles Skedje Norwich'.



Figure 2 (top). Signature on the chapter ring.

The two-handed 30-hour clock in **figure 1**, with an iron posted frame and a small brass dial, was probably originally housed in a hooded wall case. The dial appears to be from the first half of the eighteenth century; about 1740 would be a reasonable estimate. However, the movement, **figures 12** to

17, is much later, from the end of the eighteenth century or early nineteenth century. Yet the dial has never had another movement, while there is no evidence that the movement ever had a contemporary dial, either painted or brass, fitted to it. This is the enigma we need to solve, by investigating the

details of the dial, the movement and the name of the clock's 'maker'.

The dial is quite small, being only 6⁷/₈in (174mm) square, in an early style with a plain matted centre, and signed 'Charles Skedje NORWICH' at the bottom of the silvered brass chapter ring, **figure 2**. The early cast-brass

ING AN ENIGMA

ge of Norwich

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Figure 3 (bottom). The small cherub-head spandrels.

small cherub-head spandrels, **figure 3**, are of a design that was used on very early longcase clocks and bracket clocks, but was fitted here as it was one of the few readily available patterns small enough to suit this size of dial. Decorative features do not always fit into a rigid chronology, and especially



Figure 4. The iron posted frame and brass movement bars.

outside fashion-conscious London, including a feature that was 'retro' was often something the owner would readily accept. The chapter ring has the usual inner band of quarter-hour divisions, as well as an outer band, numbered every five minutes. Hence it had been made for a two-handed clock, and the hands

are of a similar period to the dial.

With a few notable exceptions, the posted-frame construction of 30-hour clocks was primarily a feature of the southern half of England, being a development of the lantern clock, which originated in London. By the end of the eighteenth century the plated-

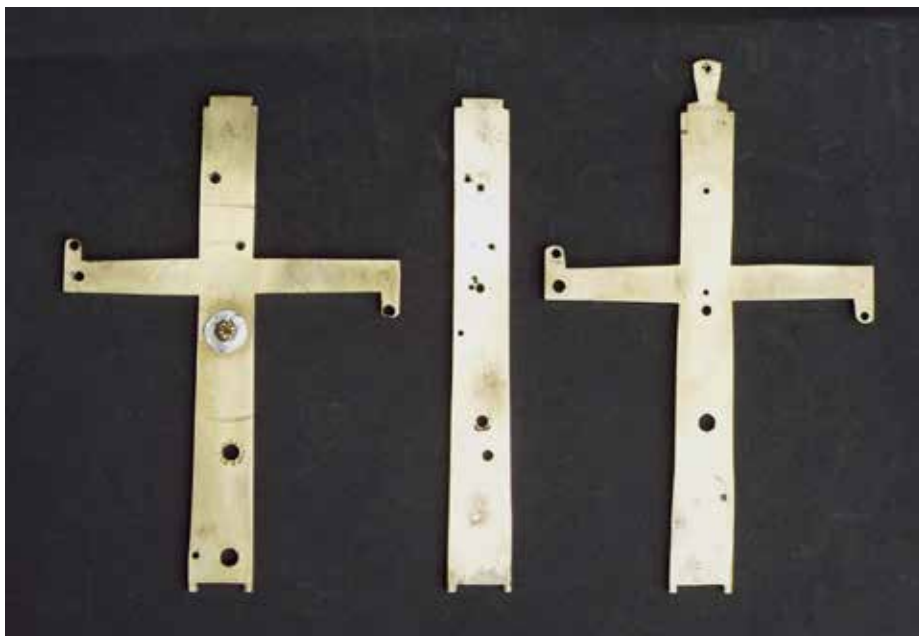


Figure 5. The movement bars.



Figure 6. The going train and motionwork.



Figure 7. The striking train.

frame clock had largely superseded the posted frame, even in the southernmost counties, mainly due to the easier attachment of painted dials. But East Anglia was a notable exception, where posted-frame movements were favoured to at least the 1830s.

Peter Stubs of Warrington in Lancashire is mainly known as a file manufacturer, but he also had a considerable wholesale business selling to the clock and watch trades. This included clock movements and castings made by firms such as Samuel Harlow of Ashbourne, Derbyshire, clock pinions and other ironwork, clockmakers'

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and watchmakers' tools, and also watches, to the trade throughout both Britain and in America. In 1809, Joshua Bullen, a Norwich ironmonger who sold clock parts and movements, including pinions and clock ironwork which he obtained from Peter Stubs, wanted '30 hour Forged work for bar frame clocks' as 'they make no flat frame clocks here'. When Stubs could not supply these Bullen bypassed him to buy eight-day movements directly from Wigan, but found that 'bar frame 30-hour movements are not known in Lancashire'. Of course, 'bar frames' are what we now call posted frames, while

'flat frames' are plated movements. Who Bullen eventually got to supply him with posted-frame movements, or who actually made the movement discussed here, is not known.

The small movement is lightly made, with the frame, **figure 4**, having very slender rectangular-section iron pillars only about 6.9-8.5mm wide and 3.8-5.0mm thick riveted to iron plates. The top plate has separate slots for the hammer and the anchor pallets to pass through, but the fly sits low enough not to need a clearance aperture. The brass movement bars, **figure 5**, have the characteristic English style of cruciform arms on the front and rear bars, with downturned ends for the hammer arbor and upturned ends for the two strikework arbors.

The movement has the 'feel' of being batch-made for the trade, rather than a bespoke movement made from scratch by a working clockmaker. But trade movements were still made by hand in small workshops and definitely not mass produced in factories using machinery. The wheels of both trains have four crossings, while the wheels of the motionwork are solid, **figures 6 to 7**. The chain pulley for the Huygens' loop winding has a pivoted click and a small brass spring, **figure 8**, that causes little wear to the crossings of the striking greatwheel. It is much more practical than the traditional type of strong circular spring click found on lantern clocks and early 30-hour clocks, where the crossings of one or both greatwheels can be almost worn through. The one-piece countwheel and gear has the slots cut into a cast ring **figure 9**, while the hoop for locking is cast integral with the second wheel. The pallet arbor, **figure 10**, pivots between a vertical extension of the front movement bar and a conventional cast-brass backcock. The wheel counts shown in the panel give 59.888 beats per minute, almost, but not exactly, a one-second beat.

The warned striking has conventional strike-work, apart from the hammer **figure 11**. The L-shaped hammer spring is screwed to the front of the rear movement bar. The flat end of this spring presses against the lower part of a short vertical bar on the hammer arbor, with the upper end acting as a simple hammer stop. The complete movement is shown in **figures 12 to 17**.

Not very much is known about Charles Skedge, who is only listed in Clifford and Yvonne Bird's otherwise comprehensive *NORFOLK & NORWICH CLOCKS & CLOCKMAKERS*, as being known from a single report of a brass-dial longcase clock in a black lacquer case. This



Figure 8 (above). Chain pulley with a spring-loaded pivoted click.



Figure 9. Countwheel with integral slotted ring and gear teeth.



Figure 10 (right). Pallet arbor, anchor pallets and crutch.



Figure 11. The strikework, hammer, spring and bell stand.



Figure 12. Top of the movement showing the pallet arbor, with no aperture for the fly.

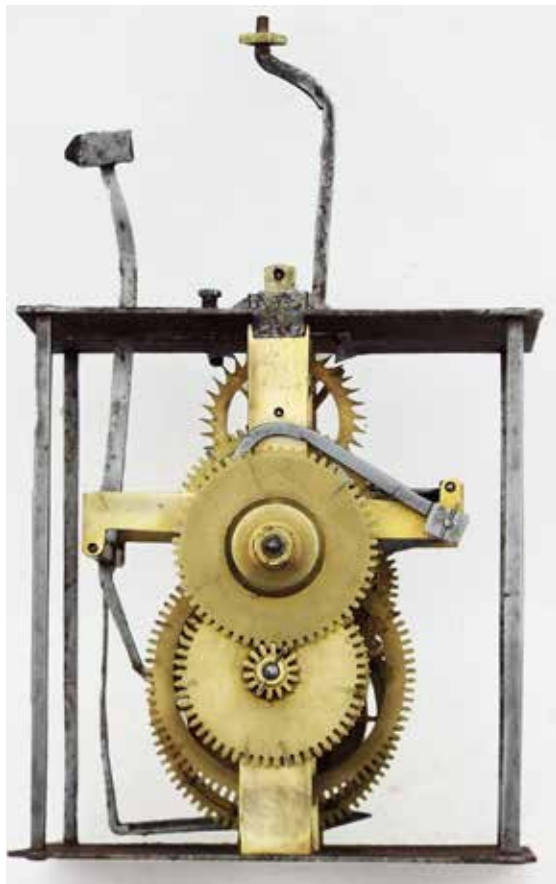


Figure 13. Movement from the front.

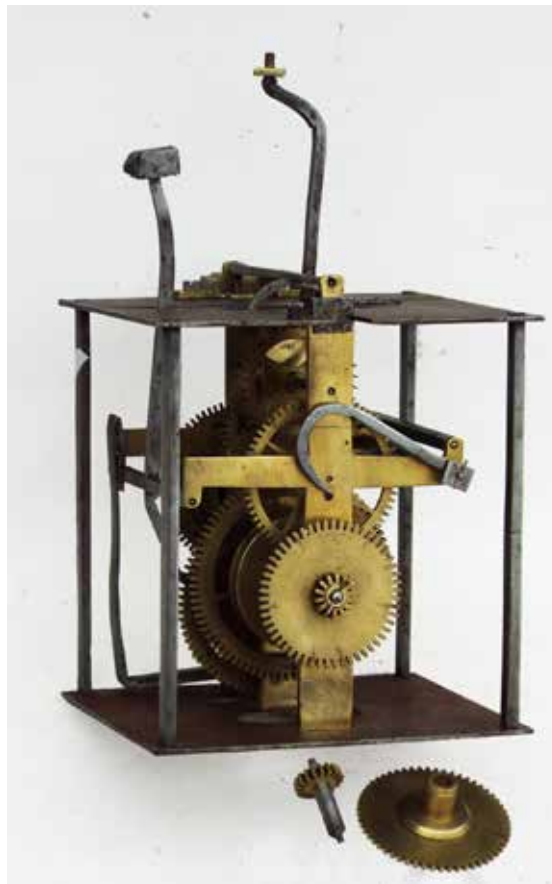


Figure 14. Movement with the hour and minute wheels removed.



Figure 15. Rear of movement.



book was published in 1996, before the advent of online internet genealogy and other websites that now provide easy access to parish records and other information that has revolutionised research. A quick search reveals that a silver verge pocket watch, made about 1740, and a mid-eighteenth century black lacquer eight-day longcase clock (possibly the same clock reported by the Birds) were sold in the last few years.

Skedge is not a very common surname and is mainly confined to Norfolk, so this makes researching the clockmaker somewhat easier. He was probably the son of Thomas and Ann Skedge, baptised on 2nd March 1693 in Norwich, but which of the city's many parishes is not stated. The clockmaker's wife was definitely Elizabeth, but the next couple of references are rather confusing. On 15th February 1718 a Thomas Skedge, father Charles and mother Elizabeth, was baptised at St Augustine's parish, but he died 18 months later. Then on 17th May 1718 the 25-year-old Charles Skedge married Elizabeth Kirby, at St Andrew's, Norwich.

Figure 18. Rear of the dial.

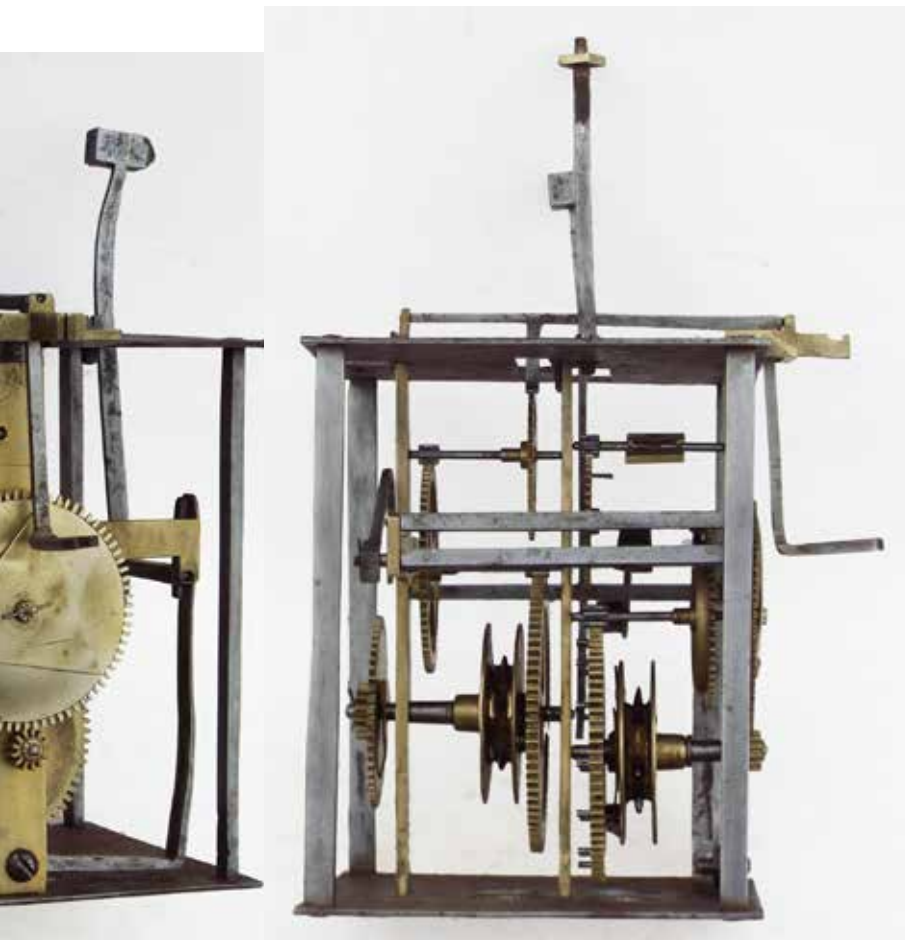


Figure 16. Right-hand side of the movement.

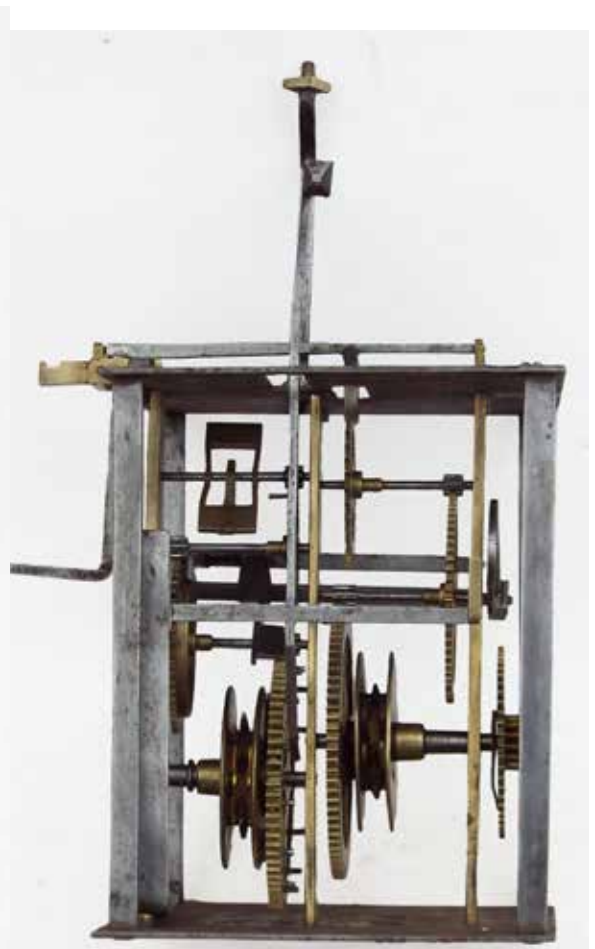


Figure 17. Left-hand side of the movement.

There are two possibilities: either they are a different couple, though there is no evidence for this, or they moved parishes to avoid revealing that they had an illegitimate child. It is most likely this is the clockmaker, particularly as the short-lived baby Thomas would have been named after his grandfather.

The next child was Charles (junior) baptised on 23rd May 1725 at St Saviour's, which became the family's resident parish. Then came Elizabeth, baptised on 26th September 1726, but she probably died young, as another Elizabeth was baptised on 6th October 1734.

Then he moved from the City of Norwich to the village of Elsing, about 14 miles to the northwest. This is recorded in a settlement certificate, dated 2nd January 1741, regarding Charles Skedge, clockmaker, Elizabeth his wife and their child Elizabeth, who would have been six years old. The certifying parish (where they had come from) was St Saviour, Norwich, and the parish of residence (where they had moved to) was Elsing. This was a requirement of the Poor Law, which was designed to prevent beggars, paupers, and those without means of supporting themselves

The people entitled to poor relief were those who probably did not need it.

becoming a burden on the established residents of the parish. In effect, it meant that if a newcomer needed to apply for poor relief, then their previous place of residence accepted responsibility for any benefits they might claim. But the law was only haphazardly administered at a local level, and these certificates, which were just loose pieces of paper kept in the parish chest, often do not survive.

The conditions for settlement were designed so that the people entitled to poor relief were those who probably did not need it. This settlement certificate does not necessarily mean that the Skedges were poor or destitute, as the Poor Law applied to all those moving to a new parish, but how rigorously the rules were applied depended on how keen the parish overseers were to protect the interests of the established residents. Nor does it necessarily mean that the Skedge family moved from Norwich in the middle of winter, and they might have been in Elsing for some time before officialdom caught up with them.

Why Charles Skedge took his family from the city to a distant village is not known. He would have been in his late 40s and unlikely to have made enough money as a clockmaker to have retired. —

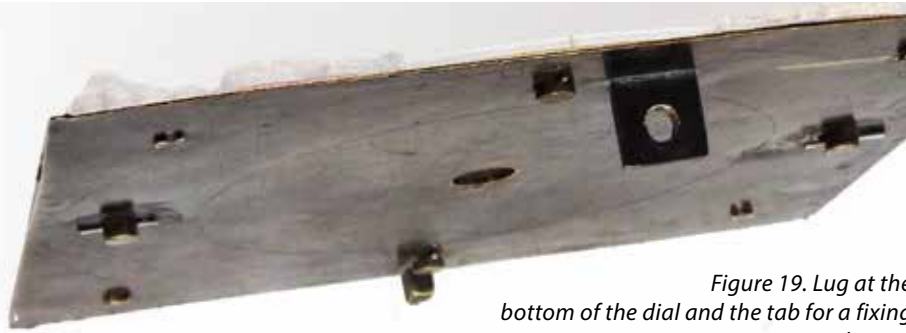


Figure 19. Lug at the bottom of the dial and the tab for a fixing screw near the top.

WHEEL COUNTS

Going train

escapewheel	35	6
second wheel	66	6
greatwheel	84	14
hour wheel	56	
minute wheel	18	
drive wheel	54	

beat = 1.00 seconds

Striking train

fly	7
warn wheel	42
hoop wheel	54
greatwheel	78
countwheel	78
hammer pins	13

At this period retirement was not an option for most working people, who continued their trade until forced to stop work due to illness or infirmity. Perhaps, since there are no clockmakers recorded in Elsing, he thought that there was an opportunity to clean and service the community's watches and clocks, which otherwise would have had to be taken to the nearest town with a resident clockmaker. This is probably the trade he followed in Norwich, being a repairer and retailer, rather than an actual maker.

His son Charles junior, who would have been 15 years old, did not accompany his parents to Elsing. He was probably in the early years of an apprenticeship, but in what trade is not known. He would not have been apprenticed to his father as a clockmaker, or he would have moved with the rest of the family.

How long Charles Skedge stayed in Elsing is not clear; perhaps there was not enough business for him there, but he moved back to Norwich, and was buried on 22nd April 1764, followed by his widow just six months later. Both were buried in St Augustine parish, where their first child had been born.

Having uncovered some of Charles Skedge's background, one issue remains: how did a dial made about 1740, and signed for an obscure

Norwich clockmaker, end up with a movement made at least 60 years later? The obvious response would be: it's a marriage. If a marriage is regarded as a clock with its worn-out movement replaced by a new one, or an old dial replaced by a later one, such as a painted dial, to make the clock look more up-to-date, the evidence is lacking.

The dial is fixed to the movement by a lug at the bottom fitting into a hole in the lower plate, as used on lantern clocks, while a tab is held with a single screw to the top plate. The back of the dial has no signs of having been altered, **figures 18 and 19**. The only thing to note is a small amount of hammering behind the IX, which has marred the matting slightly. In any event any modifications in this area are unlikely to concern the fixing of the dial to the movement. Neither the tab or the lug show any signs of being anything other than original, with no filled holes or other modifications of any sort. Likewise there is no evidence for an alternative dial ever having been fitted to the movement.

How can this conundrum be explained? There are several possibilities.

- The movement is contemporary with the dial, but with the later items, such as the pivoted winding click, the hoop cast as part of the second wheel and the

countwheel with an integral cast ring for the slots, being replacements. This is extremely unlikely as all the wheels have the same appearance and were slit with the same cutter.

- All the wheels were replaced. This would only be necessary if there had been very severe wear, but there has been no rebushing, nor signs of significant wear on any other parts.

- The movement bars might have been replaced along with the rest of the components, but again this is extremely unlikely. It would have been far easier and simpler to replace the whole movement, for which there is no evidence.

- A new movement was made to fit exactly between any existing fixing points on the dial that had been used for a 1740s movement. It is unlikely that a nineteenth-century clockmaker would go to such lengths to obtain a perfect match.

- An off-the-shelf movement had been bought, that by pure coincidence, had precisely the same distance between the plates as a previous movement. Again, this is unlikely.

The most logical explanation is that this was a previously unused old dial fitted with a new movement in the early nineteenth century. A similar situation was described in the August 2018 issue of *CLOCKS*, where a French clock had been made about 1740 by Dujardin of Versailles with a new dial, fret, wheels and other parts, but fitted into a Gothic-style frame made in the previous century that had never previously been used.

We can only speculate as to why the Skedge dial had been made, but then never fitted to a movement. Perhaps the customer changed his mind, or found that he could not afford even a small hooded wall clock, or conversely received an inheritance and decided to go up-market and invest in one of Charles Skedge's London-made lacquer longcase clocks, or he might have died before the clock could be finished. The now redundant dial, which was too small to fit any other type of clock, languished on a shelf or under a bench until it was disposed of after Skedge's death. Eventually it was acquired by an unknown clockmaker who found a customer who wanted a small wall clock, but was not concerned about having the latest style of dial. He may even have preferred the brass dial to a fashionable painted dial. It is very unlikely that we will ever learn the full story of this clock, but it is an interesting example of the use of 'new-old-stock'. 📌