

# the Interview

## LEIGH EXTENCE, SPECIALIST CLOCK DEALER

**Q** How did you become interested in horology?

**A** My father & grandfather were both fine antique dealers so I was destined to join the trade in one form or another. On leaving school I was set to join Phillips auctioneers, but the day before I was going to start my father's clockmaker, Frank Pilbeam, persuaded me that I would be better off learning something more practical and I ended up doing a three-year apprenticeship with him. At the end of this time I realised that I may have learnt a fair bit about how a clock works, but I didn't have the aptitude for bench work and so decided the only way forward was to start dealing. After a short period of relative success I was asked by Arthur Lewis to join him within the antique clock department in Harrods from where, after having enjoyed three years of dealing with the rich and famous, I then moved down to Kent to work alongside Derek Roberts in Tonbridge; a most interesting, informative and fascinating period of my horological life and from which I got my love of research.

**Q** Which clocks impress you the most?

**A** Clockwork from the early days, right back to the sixteenth century, intrigues me. How did these makers have the patience to carry-on without guidance from the past, knowing that there had to be a solution somewhere to the timekeeping problems of the day? They were seemingly able to take set-back after set-back until a way through was found. These were the makers who should be most admired.

**Q** Which clocks impress you the least?

**A** Striking American wall clocks, without a doubt.

**Q** What is the most interesting clock that you have encountered?

**A** Whilst working with Derek Roberts, back in the mid-80s, we were lucky enough to handle the seventeenth century Nicholas Radeloff of Schleswig rolling ball clock. Not only was it unusual in the method of power distribution, with the balls moving around the main body of the clock rather in the fashion of a helter-skelter, but it was also both fascinating and mesmerising watching the

Leigh Extence is a specialist dealer in antique clocks who has dealt with many of the world's leading collectors, dealers and institutions. Leigh is also in demand as an independent horological consultant, having worked with the BBC as well as various national newspapers and leading auction houses.



For a number of years Leigh presented and worked on the BBC 2's Antiques Show. Alongside his own business he is also currently the antique clock consultant, valuer and cataloguer for the auctioneers Bearnès, Hampton & Littlewood. In 2004 Leigh was elected a member to the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers, being raised to the livery in 2005.

movement of the arms of the radial cross-beat escapement, being quite hypnotic in its motion.

**Q** Which clock would you personally like to own?

**A** The British Museum's Ahasuerus Fromanteel longcase. It reminds me of my wife; slim, perfectly proportioned and the first time I set eyes on it I was smitten.

**Q** How do you see the antique clock market at the moment?

**A** As both a dealer and a consultant to an auction house I tend to see a number of different perspectives. The lower end of the market has become somewhat stagnant over the last few years, but move beyond that and the better pieces are definitely holding their own or better, whilst at the top of the market I'm not sure it has been as buoyant as this for some years. Less seems to be selling, but what is going out the door makes up for this by being of better quality.

**Q** In this recession which clocks do you consider represent good value at the moment?

**A** If anyone wanted to take a gamble I would suggest buying-up relatively early, well-proportioned, completely original brass dial, oak 30-hour longcase clocks at a few hundred pounds a time and putting them away in storage for a few years.

Otherwise good French carriage clocks of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, by the better makers—Drocourt, Jacot, Margaine to name a few—making sure any example has its original platform escapement and the dial is undamaged.

**Q** What advice would you offer a customer wanting to buy just one clock?

**A** Research, and then research some more, until you are sure of the clock you are looking for. Buy what appeals as you will have to live with it for many years to come, but be sure it is basically original. Don't be afraid to ask a lot of questions of an established dealer and if possible see if the seller will allow the clock to be positioned in your home for an hour or two before committing to a purchase.

**Q** Which three reference books do you find essential?

**A** This is a difficult one to answer as one of my passions is books on antiquarian horology and I now have a library with over a thousand publications in it.

If I was stuck on a desert island I would have to have my copies of the two bibliographies, one by Tardy, the other by Baillie. They are both original proof editions from the Charles Allix library and originally belonged to Malcolm Gardner. It isn't just the content itself that is so wonderful but that they are full of tipped-in papers and the most wonderful annotations, written in the most beautiful handwriting by both men. For my third book I'd have to go with *L'HOROLOGERIE* by Henry Havard, a limited edition French book published in c1880 that I have read and re-read numerous times which doing so has helped to increase my poor grasp of the French horological language and which therefore assisted me in reading nineteenth century French texts when researching the Jacot family.

**Q** Did you have any memorable moments while working on the Antiques Show?

**A** I wrote the script—and supplied the clocks—for David Dickinson's first foray as a television presenter, the 'Buyers Guide to Longcase Clocks'. These guides to various antiques had a regular slot in

the show and he had been chosen as the regular expert. We all met up early one morning in Chiswick for filming and the producer asked me to be sure to stop the cameras if a glaring error was made. As it was, Dickinson was fairly nervous and at the point he had to describe the clock hands he kept calling them fingers. I would step in and correct him, whereupon filming of that section would start again. After numerous takes the sound and camera men started muttering under their breaths as to the need to 'get home before tomorrow's sunrise'. David Dickinson wasn't happy with this insolence and took himself out of the building and off down Chiswick High Street at a fair pace with a panicking producer in hot pursuit. He finally returned and things then all went to plan, but this episode still made it into his autobiography!

**Q** I understand you are researching the carriage clocks of the French clockmaker Henri Jacot; what brought this about?

**A** Very early on in my dealing life I bought a Jacot carriage clock and undertook the normal research using reference books off the shelf. Over the years, as I bought more and more of their clocks, I realised that so much of what was written about them

both, uncle and nephew, was incomplete and/or wrong. I therefore decided to undertake my own research by going back to original source material, including publications from the eighteenth century, census records, family records and archives from both Paris and Switzerland, and what I found was a most fascinating story. In fact I had got so involved in the family that when I finally found the death notice for Julien Jacot's wife, Adèle-Rose Jacot-Descombes in May 1909, I was close to tears!

Alongside the Jacot family research, I now have a database of over 500 Jacot carriage clocks that have been examined in detail and I hope to correlate and publish all this information in the near future, alongside my ongoing research related to the Drocourt family of carriage clockmakers.

**Q** What are your interests and hobbies in your spare time?

**A** My family give me enough to be interested in on a daily basis, but away from them I enjoy a round of golf and the socialising that comes with it and I'm an avid follower of Torquay United football club. Living by the sea, rowing and sailing have always been a large part of my life. ☺

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