

A new three-part series Back to basics with clocks

In the first of this three-part feature I will begin by outlining the shapes and price ranges of the best-known types.

By Peter Wotton

There is no item of household furniture that captures the feeling of integrating into the home so completely perhaps, as an all-mechanical or early electro-mechanical clock. But you should be looking for something really special, something with pedigree and character. Such a piece should not only feel artistically satisfying but also offer that long-term fascination that one always associates with art in motion.

Clocks are usually defined according to the facilities offered. A timepiece has no strike. Or if it

has a strike we call it a clock. There is also a variety of chiming features, particularly on carriage clocks. During this study only standard chiming will be mentioned. Our prime concern will be with clocks below £1,000 and emphasis will be placed on those below about £300.

Part Two will examine the real clock environment showing clocks photographed at recent antiques shows. Discussion will include what to look for, how to evaluate and how to price.

Fig 2. American. As well as copying the European market, manufacturers produced many original, wooden-cased designs that are instantly recognisable.

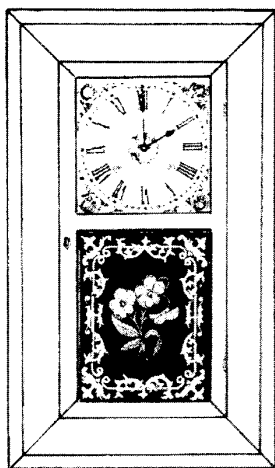


Fig 2 (i) Ogee wall-mounted, picture frame clock with visible, moving pendulum bob. The quality of the picture on the lower glass panel directly affects the price. Weight driven and therefore an excellent timekeeper. Three case sizes were made with 30-hours or 8-days between winding. I have seen prices from £20 to £350.

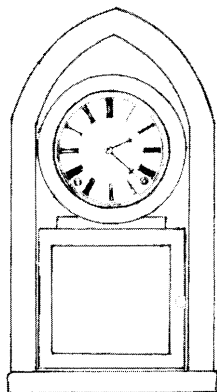


Fig 2 (ii) American Beehive clock. Based on the European Lancet shape. This spring driven clock is a very charismatic showpiece. With strike, prices can easily exceed £200.

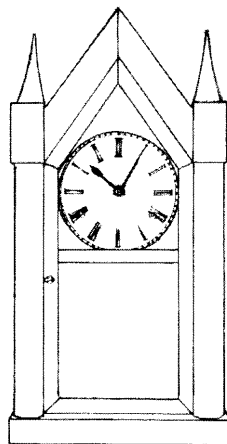


Fig 2 (iii) American Gothic clock. Similar in price and popularity to the Beehive.

Fig 1. Mid 20th Century. Typically these clocks are wooden cased, about £40 for a striking clock and possibly double with chimes.

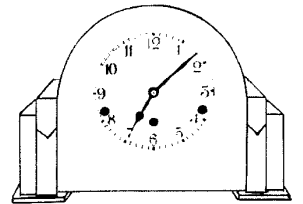


Fig 1 (ii) Mantel. Loosely, a mantelpiece clock of this period and widely represented. The best examples are attractively inlaid appearing in rounded, sharply angled and art nouveau / art deco styling.

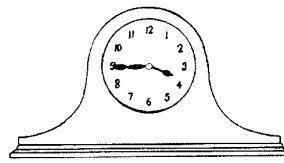


Fig 1 (i) Napoleon Hat. An established old favourite.

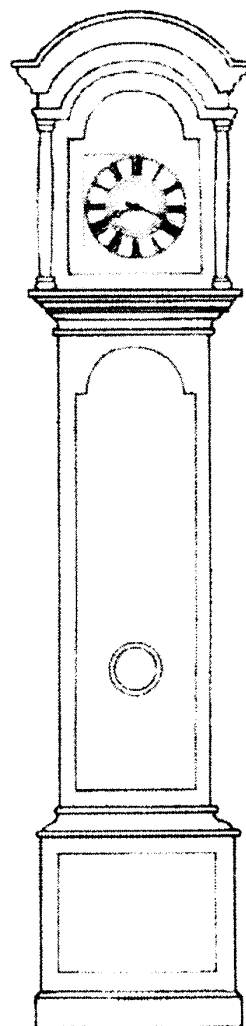


Fig 3 (i) Early English longcase or grandfather clock.

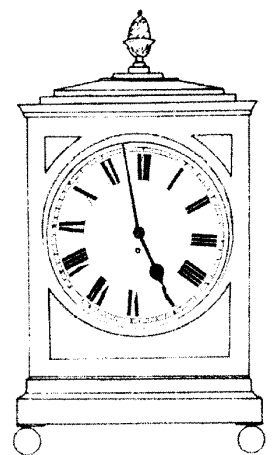


Fig 3 (ii) Early English bracket clock. Originally a table clock but the name is also applied to a wide range of early large wooden clocks.

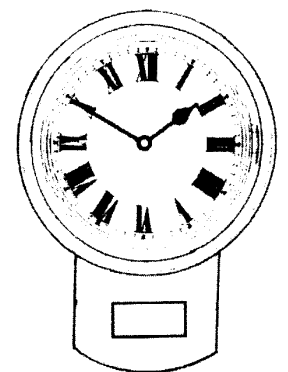


Fig 3 (iii) Early English drop dial clock. Without the lower trunk, this type is known simply as a dial clock.

Fig 3. Early English. These classical clocks are nowadays valuable but fakes and inventive restorations abound, so be careful! Grandfathers, 30-Hour (no dial keyholes) start at about £1,000 and 8-day (with keyholes) about £2,000. English bracket and dial clocks £1,000 and £200 upwards respectively.

Fig 4. Marble. One of the most popular clock types, French in origin and with the earlier examples echoing the architecture of the day. Always to be seen at the fairs and heavily copied by American and German manufacturers. The most common 'marble' is slate but a variety of other stones were used. French slate examples start at about £100.

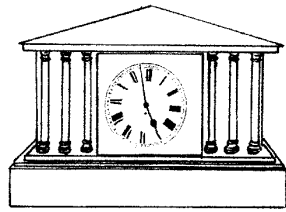


Fig 4 (i) Marble classical clock. Multi-column (with six columns, hexastyle)

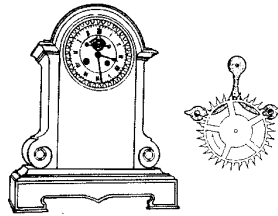


Fig 4 (ii) Marble broken arch clock. Basic strike £200+, with embellishments (moon-phase, barometer, temperature etc) £1500 area. Visible Brocot escapement is popular. (inset)

Fig 6 Electro-mechanical. Less well-known, the range is technically very interesting and in the main expensive. Only examples at the lower price bracket are mentioned here.

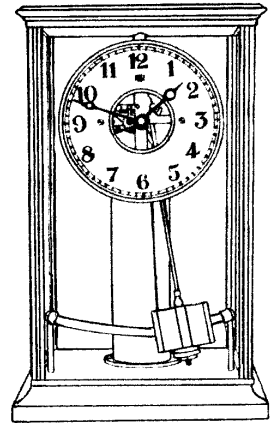


Fig 6 (i) Electro-mechanical bulle clock. French, battery driven, popular and available in a wide range of case styles. Working, upwards of £200 at the lower end. For the four-glass example shown, over £500.

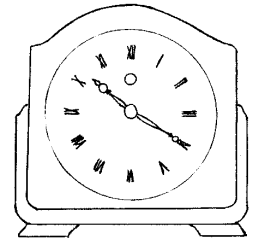


Fig 6 (ii) Electro-mechanical synchronous motor clock. Antiques of the future! Excellent examples can be found between £10-50 (condition as seen). The clock shown is a typical bakelite cased version by Smiths. These mains-operated clocks are old and unless expertly restored can be electrically unsafe, always use an RCD on the mains plug.

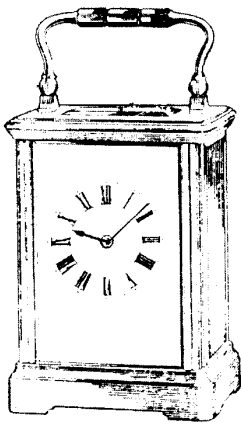


Fig 5 (i) Visual display carriage clock. Visible movement, beautifully made and very popular. A simple French timepiece will be around £200. Above this seek advice. Imitations, some very collectable, abound.

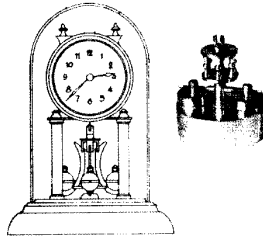


Fig 5 (iii) Visual display anniversary (400-day or torsion pendulum) clock. Enormously popular (wound on a yearly anniversary) and still made (quartz), the main feature being the attractive, slow-moving ball pendulum. A disc pendulum, detailed, is usually found on older clocks. A mechanical, working 19thC example with guarantee would be above £200.

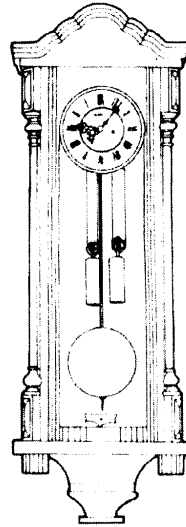


Fig 5 (v) Visual display Vienna regulator. Excellent fakes exist, take great care. From a reliable supplier, about £800, double with chimes. Many of the 'genuine' imitations (rather than deliberate fakes), spring rather than weight driven, and are well worth considering at below £100 (as seen).

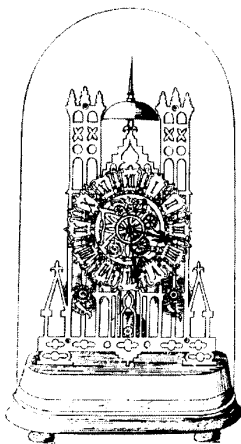


Fig 5 (ii) Visual display Victorian skeleton clock. Very popular but you will not find much that is genuine under £1000.

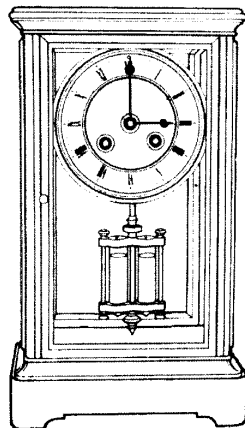


Fig 5 (iv) Visual display 4-glass clock. Case style using glass panels on four sides. Available with many types of mechanism. Brass-framed French example, £300 upwards.

Fig 5. Visible display. Real art in motion, these include some of the most popular styles and at their best are artistic gems.

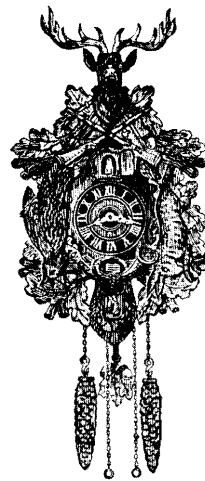


Fig 5 (vi) Cuckoo clock. Price according to quality, size, automata and age.

For readers wishing to expand their knowledge on the above selection we recommend *Collectable Clocks* by Alan & Rita Shenton (Pub. Antiques Collectors Club). For further information on the architectural traditions behind many of the clock types mentioned try *Marble Clocks* by Peter Wotton & Brian Oliver (Pub. Shire).