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South London Branch British Horological Institute

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Branch No 25. Founded 1978

Meetings are held on the 1st Thursday of each month

At The White Hart Barn (Godstone Village Hall)

Godstone Surrey RH9 8DT at 7.30 p.m. for 8 p.m.

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“Quiet minds cannot be perplexed or frightened but go on in fortune or misfortune at their own private pace, like a clock during a thunderstorm “. *Robert Louis Stevenson*

NEXT MEETING Justin Koullapis FBHI “Self-Perpetuating. the Legacy of John Harwood “.

Many of you know Justin as the Editor of the Horological Journal. He is a major contributor to the work at Upton Hall being involved with many projects over the years along with his good friends Jim Arnfield and others, making the 150th Anniversary celebration clock. He is a practical watchmaker, and clockmaker, a fellow of the BHI, and is currently the Renter Warden of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers. He runs a successful business, “The Watch Club” in Mayfair and I am very grateful to him giving up his valuable time to impart knowledge of a watchmaker few remember, but undoubtedly Justin holds dear to his heart.

Continued

The legacy of John Harwood is not often talked about but the English watchmaker identified the principle culprit that made early wristwatches unreliable, which was the ingress of dust and moisture, to make a watch sealed required the invention of a watch which wound itself and had no winding crown but set the time through the bezel. John Harwood tried to achieve this in a moment when business was at a downturn. His watches set the principles in motion for automatic wristwatches which play a major part in the luxury watch market of today.

In the 1950s the horological journal began campaigning for recognition of John Harwood's achievements and these efforts culminated in 1957 when he was awarded the coveted Gold Medal of the British Horological Institute. To date the medal has been awarded just once more – to George Daniels FBHI. Justin has interesting information from Harwood's family and photographs of John's workshop, a record, of this unassuming, diligent, watchmaker living on the Isle of Man.

Duncan Greig

LAST MONTH'S MEETING

West Dean College.

Annual Presentations from students.

Our June branch meeting provided the opportunity for the horology students of West Dean to present their projects to the group, highlighting inspiration and learned skills, with a fantastic cross-section of craft and conservation work from first-year through postgraduate students. The evening demonstrated not only the depth of individual projects but also the supportive, collaborative atmosphere of the workshops.

Overview

The session opened with a brief introduction from Malcolm explaining the format: student presentations followed by questions. The projects ranged from historically inspired first-year clocks to complex conservation jobs and ambitious third-year projects — including a mechanical organ and a Breguet-style ruby cylinder escapement. Across the cohort there was a consistent emphasis on combining historical research with hands-on toolmaking and iterative problem solving. The students demonstrated how traditional horological methods are learned, adapted and tested in a modern workshop environment.

Daisy — A Thomas Tompion inspired First-Year Clock

Daisy's first-year project took Thomas Tompion (17th–18th century English maker) as her reference. Her work centred on emulating Tompion's aesthetic: long, thin teeth wheels with four narrow crossings and a decorative rim line. She described making a tailored fly cutter to produce the wheel form she wanted, pinion holders, mandrels and a filing button to shape pallet boss.

Technical highlights:

- Adapting toolmaking (fly cutter) to get historically influenced wheel profiles.
- Emphasis on proper set-up for cutting: securing blanks, lubrication and slow cutting to avoid shift and error.
- Turning and tapering arbors on a watchmaker's lathe, burnishing pivots and hardening where required.
- Soldering and riveting techniques used in fabricating a tear-drop-style back plate/clock top consistent with Tompion examples.

Next steps: Daisy plans to rivet on the crutch and complete the pendulum assembly, finish motion work (hour and minute hands, shaping hand-pillars), and complete the case/weights to have a running demonstration soon.

Rosa — English Lantern Clock Layout, First Year

Rosa pursued an English lantern clock concept, a challenging choice given lantern clocks' posted frame construction differs from the standard first-year plate layout. After researching posted frames and weighing options, she persuaded tutors she could adapt the standard movement to a posted-style appearance while retaining reliable mechanics.

Technical highlights:

- Re-engineering how feet, pillars and finials are joined (threaded through rather than fixed), enabling later disassembly and finishing.
- Custom cutting of plates with tabs and slots so they could be folded into a frame reminiscent of lantern clocks while still accommodating necessary pinions and back cock placement.
- Carefully planning train spatial layout so the dial would be centred and so that additional functions (pass & strike, alarm) could be accommodated in the volume of the case.

Next steps: Rosa has most of the mechanism fabricated and will now focus on finishing and aesthetic detailing—dial engraving, and case decisions—plus completing the remaining pinions and refinements to ensure reliable running.

Emily — Early Dutch Pendulum Clock, First Year

Emily presented a thoughtfully researched early Dutch pendulum clock, addressing the particular challenge of marrying a historical short-pendulum, crown-wheel approach with the course requirement to build an anchor-recoil escapement. Her solution involved modifying geometry and impulse distribution in the anchor pallets and rethinking pinion leaf counts to shorten the train and obtain the desired pendulum period.

Technical highlights:

- Investigation of escapement types (anchor recoil, tic-tac and continental variations) and adjustments to span, impulse and pallet angles to suit a shorter pendulum.
- Custom pinion cutting with reduced leaf counts (e.g., six leaves on the escape arbor) to alter train ratios and pendulum length; this also required creative machining and hand-filing to correct initial sizing errors.
- Research and construction of cycloidal cheeks (using geometric circle construction) and a double-footed back cock in the Dutch style.
- Experimenting with Huygen's endless rope and pulley arrangements for uninterrupted drive.

Next steps: Emily has a running clock and will turn the pillars into turned baluster form, fit remaining pulley work and develop a velvet-covered dial and dial chapter ring to match her chosen visual style.

Becky — Conservation & Repair Case Studies, Second Year

Becky's second-year presentation focused on clock repair and conservation work done as part of the course, dealing primarily with historic movements from West Dean's collection and work placements. She described a range of treatments from cleaning and pivot polishing to remaking parts and on-site conservation.

Project highlights:

- Longcase movement from Temple Newsam: careful cleaning to remove verdigris, remaking a warped calendar wheel (fly cutter adaptation, vibration control using packing), and aesthetic aging

of newly made hands.

- Fusee and verge and crown wheel work: hand-filed verge palettes and making historically sympathetic screws for improved functionality and authenticity.
- Work placement at Lucas Clocks in Edinburgh: plate straightening, repairing bent and broken front plates, and diagnostic repairs on complicated strike trains.
- Conservation and repair of Westminster-style and French striking clocks, including barrel bushing, remontoire troubleshooting and adaptations for silk suspension combined with deadbeat escapements.

Next steps: Becky is broadening her platform escapement skills in preparation for a negotiated final term project; she is also continuing practice on anniversary clocks to develop competence in a niche repair area.

Jocelyn —Mechanical Organ Project - Third-Year

Jocelyn tackled a highly interdisciplinary third-year project: a mechanical organ inspired by an 18th-century George Pike clock organ. Her work notably bridged horology, woodworking and musical instrument craft.

Project highlights:

- Research and drawing: extensive archival research and visits (e.g., Leeds museum) to document organ clocks.
- Organ pipes: learning hand tool woodworking techniques (chisels, planes) to build a set of pipes, supported by a short course at a specialist organ builder.
- Bellows construction: iterative prototyping with folded paper models, then leather cutting and ironed to shape; sealing and airtightness proved critical and time-consuming.
- Windchest design and wind distribution valves: detailed joinery (dovetails) to create a robust frame able to carry heavy driving weights (25–30 kg).
- Barrel and music mechanism: barrel cutting (very high tooth counts), design of a fly governor and physical layout to couple music barrels to the organ wind supply.

Next steps: Jocelyn is in final assembly and expects months of adjustment and tuning to get airtight seals and reliable action. She aims for a working instrument by the West Dean exhibition on 7th July.

Dan —Breguet-Style Synthetic Ruby Cylinder Escapement - Masters

Dan's project was a tour de force of micro-machining and material science: manufacturing a synthetic ruby cylinder escapement in the Breguet style. His presentation outlined painstaking approaches drawing from George Daniels' methods adapted for modern practice.

Technical highlights:

- Custom tooling: making a hardened, tapered steel drill with a central coolant/abrasive hole to slowly bore the axial hole in the ruby — a process that required extraordinary patience and many hours of cutting.
- Lapping and grinding: use of copper laps and multi-grade diamond pastes (from coarse 25 grit to 1 micron) to rough out and then finish the exterior and the inside profile of the cylinder. Dan emphasised the delicate balance between efficiency and avoiding chipping.
- Final geometry: shaping the entry and exit lifts and obtaining the slight more-than-half-circle interior profile needed for proper cylinder escapement timing.

Next steps: Dan has completed a scale escape model and is polishing the lifts to the finest diamond paste stages he can source to refine finish and performance.

Ambitions, Assessment & Collaboration

Tutors and audience members praised the breadth of student ambition while recognising the perennial issue of time management in craft projects. Malcolm (and other staff) commented on the curriculum expectations across years: clear minimums for passing, while also encouraging ambitious, student-led projects. A recurring theme was the collaborative culture among students: sharing tools, techniques and scrap material has created opportunities to achieve more complex outcomes than any student might have managed alone.

Conclusion

The presentations offered an excellent snapshot of horological training in action and a new generation of horologists balancing historical study, bespoke toolmaking and careful craft. From Daisy and Rosa's historically informed first-year builds to Emily's inventive escapement adaptations, Becky's conservations, Jocelyn's interdisciplinary organ, and Dan's precision ruby cylinder, the projects represented a lively and expert-minded cohort. Each student demonstrated not only technical skill but also research depth and practical problem solving. Look out for the students' pieces at the upcoming West Dean exhibition, to which BHI SL members are cordially invited!

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS

The contributions for 2026 are coming in steadily with more than 90% already paid. If you received a renewal form with this newsletter please complete and return to me with payment.

I have posted membership cards to those who have paid.

If you received a renewal notice but have paid please contact me and I will adjust my records.

PLEASE NOTE I have not sent news letters to those whose payments I have not recieved

FREE ADVERTISING FOR BRANCH MEMBERS

If you wish to place an advert in our newsletter, contact Bill :-
01543 506195 or electricwilliam@gmail.com

If you are wondering about this service, it is usually very successful with both items advertised last month sold !

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