

# Taking the longcase view

*A digital display of the time of day is almost impossible to escape. You will find them on the microwave, the DVD player, the car dashboard, the computer screen, the cooker — even your phone.*

*Antiques expert Brett Tryner looks back to the days when a clock in the house was a novelty and a luxury.*

Antique clocks possess a particular appeal, combining both beauty and utility.

Domestic clocks have been made in Britain since about 1600. Clocks for churches were made here much earlier but were products not of specialist clock makers but of heavier metal workers who combined clock making with their trade as blacksmiths, locksmiths and bell founders.

There was however, some demand for domestic clocks in England before 1600. European craftsmen from France, Germany and the Low Countries serviced this small, exclusive market. The timepieces they made were more costly than they were accurate and are perhaps best viewed as that period's executive toys.

Being the preserve of royalty and men and women of leisure, the timekeeping capabilities of watches and clocks would have been less important than the novelty aspects of these lavishly worked instruments. Such timepieces not only measured the passage of time but entertained, by playing a merry tune, showing the position of the stars, or delighting with automated figures of human, bird or animal form.

The earliest wall clocks made in this country were lantern clocks. There seems no definitive reason why they were so called, except for the slightly tenuous explanation of a similarity to the shape of a lantern.

In simple terms, a clock measures time by a system of interconnected wheels (the word gears is not used in horology circles). The whole system of wheels is called a train and it is set turning by the force of either an uncoiling spring or a descending weight. The speed of rotation of the wheels has to be regulated and the pace-setter, which does this is called an escapement.

