

A Short History of Church Time-keeping

The following is reprinted from the introduction to the Order of Service for the dedication of the new tower clock, on Sunday February 10th, 1952 by the Revd Canon Edward Tyson, then Vicar of Mottram:

'Long before its division into hours, minutes and seconds, man had been able to measure the larger units of time. Years were noted by the position of the Sun among the Constellations. A month was measured by the revolution of the Moon.. Days and nights would of necessity be known by the light and darkness.

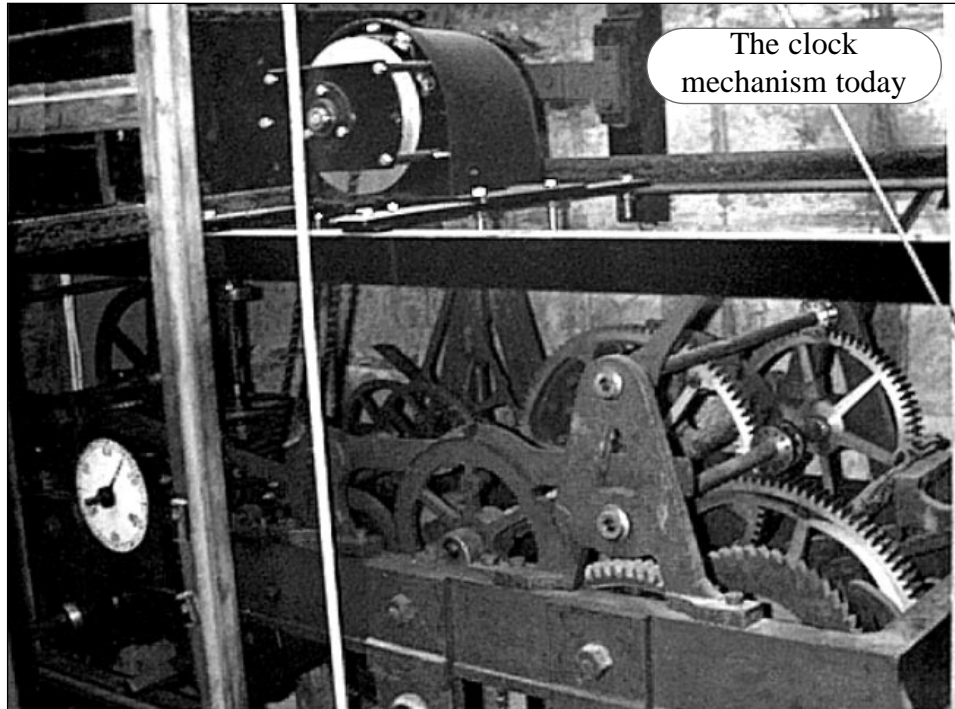
Perhaps the earliest attempt to measure the passage of time was the use of the simple stilus or upright rod. The length and the position of the shadow indicated the time of day.

Sun dials - first on pedestals, and then on walls were a natural development, the latter being probably the first "Church Clocks".

Many churches standing in the 15th century still have their Mass Dials or Scratch Dials. These were really sundials on which a scratch indicated the hour at which the Priest would celebrate the Holy Mysteries. Later forms of Mass Dials had a revolving rod to mark the hour of the Daily Eucharist. When the shadow on the dial reached the "scratch," or coincided with the shadow of the revolving rod the people were expected to be in church for worship.'

Mottram's First Clock

According to Canon Tyson, a clock was first placed in the tower at Mottram Church in 1761. There is as yet no documentary evidence for this date, but what is certain is that the clock was replaced thirty years later in 1791 by one made by Samuel Ashton of Bredbury. Either that early clock was a particularly poor one, or it was much older than Canon Tyson believed.



The clock mechanism today

Mottram's Second Clock

In November 1790, the old clock was in need of replacement, and after paying four clockmakers 5/- each for their advice at a meeting held at Sam Cook's (the Packhorse) it was decided to pay £57 to Samuel Ashton for a replacement. The new clock was fitted in April 1791, and later that year the job was completed when James Chandley was engaged at a cost of £1 6/- to 'beautify' the face.

A description of this second clock printed in the parish magazine of April 1891 reveals that the pendulum was 27 foot long, and made 21 beats per minute. The escapement was Hookes anchor form, which succeeded crown wheel escapement.

By 1808, the face needed repainting, and the hands replacing, the work done this time by John Chandley. During that century, the Churchwardens' accounts contain many references to payments for repainting the face, repairing and cleaning the clock, including a major restoration in 1872 costing over £30. In quoting for that restoration, W. Batty & Son of Manchester undertook to warrant it for 50 years, provided they were engaged to clean it periodically. They also arranged to fit extra weights on wire cords, so that it could be made to go for a week with each winding.

The Clock Face Mystery

Note 'face' in the previous paragraphs is singular, implying that there was only one face originally. A diamond shaped face can be seen on the west side of the tower in an engraving dated 1819, and the square face now on the north side is present in photographs from around 1860. It is recorded that in 1791, the new clock face was fitted higher than the original. From examining the stonework inside the clock chamber, it can be seen that this was most likely to have been the west face. Thus it is probable that the square north face was added later, but when, between 1791 and 1860, is not known.

Mottram's Third Clock

By around 1937, the old clock which had served the parish for 146 years finally ground to a halt, never to go again. Mottram was to be without a public clock for 15 years.