



# An antiquarian Australian

**D D West talks to George Hamburger, founder and proprietor of one of Australia's most prestigious new clock shops.**

**G**OOD NEWS for Australian horologists! A new centre selling clocks, watches, barometers, musical boxes as well as offering a specialist restoration service by a resident craftsman has recently opened in the historic waterside suburb of Hunters Hill, Sydney. As George Hamburger, the Munich born chairman of Hunter Douglas and now proprietor of Clocks of Distinction explained, 'I wanted to make a business for my retirement and as I had been an avid clock collector for many years this seemed to be a natural choice'. Anyone who has come in contact with George Hamburger and noted his tremendous drive and enthusiasm will be amused by his talk of retirement. It is doubtful if he knows the meaning of the word! In order to realise his dream he acquired land in one of the oldest parts of Sydney, overcame the problems of complying with local building requirements in what is virtually a conservation area, supervised the building of the premises and combed Europe for

suitable items to provide his opening stock. What would take many people a lifetime was achieved in a few months.

Upon coming to look at some of the clocks and other items on sale it is quickly realised that the claim that this is probably the first time that such a fine collection of rare items have appeared on the Australian market in these circumstances is more than justified.

The oldest clock in the shop is German and dated c1580. The case is heavily engraved with scrollwork, beasts, and griffin and two sea horses while the steel balance wheel movement has an internally toothed count-wheel, an unusual hammer linkage and a posted frame with rectangular corner posts. The dial plate is stamped with the Munich town mark. The clock is attributed to either Ulrich or his son Alexius Schniep, Royal Clockmaker to Herzog Wilhelm V. Although it has undergone some restoration it is still a highly desirable clock (see figure 1).

Among the English longcase clocks can be seen a George II black japanned clock with 12in brass dial (signed Willm Beavis, London). Standing some 7ft 8in high, this is an imposing piece. Slightly later but of interest for those of Scottish origin there is a longcase signed Adam Boyd of Montrose in mahogany case with swan neck pediment, fluted columns and a shaped waist door.

Other clocks around the walls of the shop include several comtoise clocks, ▷

George Hamburger with a small selection from his stock. The two framed drawings are by David Penney.

Figure 1: A rare German weight-driven wall clock, the gilt dial with I-XII and 13-24 rings, single hand and an alarm disc.

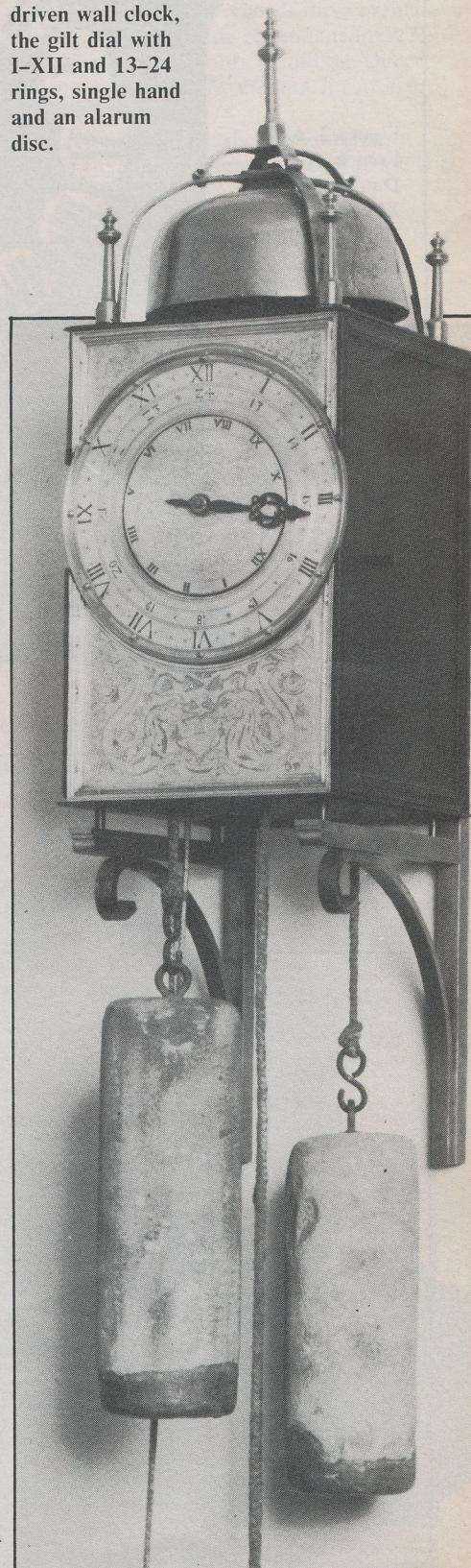




Figure 2: A French Daudron Louis XIV bracket clock so called 'Religieuse'.

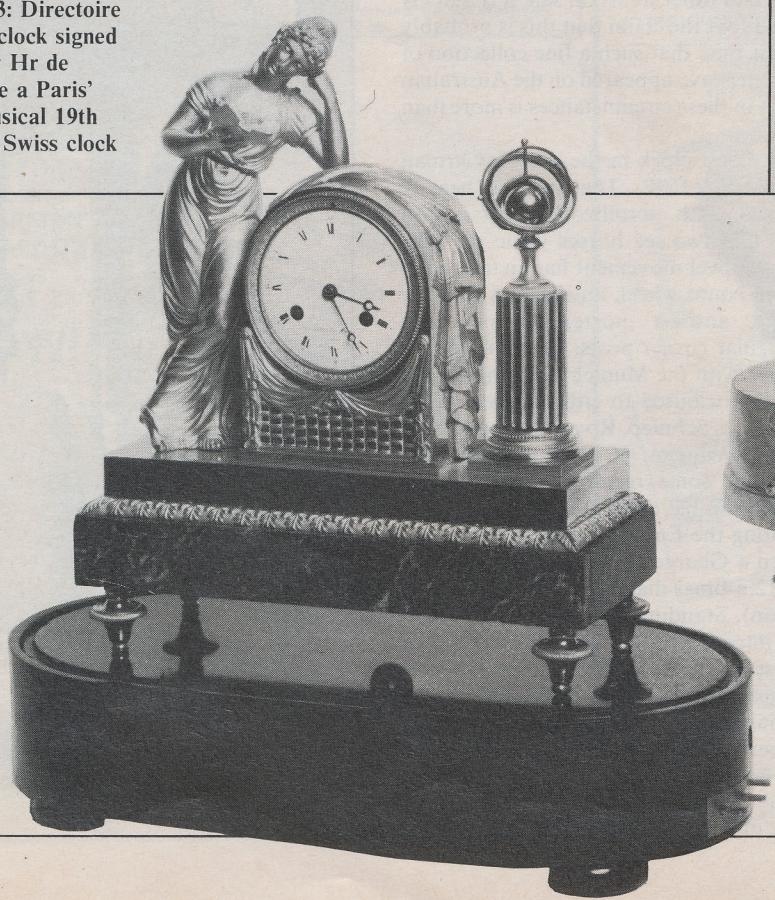


Figure 3: Directoire mantel clock signed 'Le Roy Hr de Madame a Paris' with musical 19th century Swiss clock base.

Dutch clocks, American drop dials and two Japanese timepieces. One, a Yagura Dokei, c1730, is a very early Japanese lantern clock. It has a foliot movement. Operating on temporal time, the clock has adjustable weights. Also from Japan is a 19th century stick clock.

French clocks have most assuredly not been neglected and include a large gilt carriage clock (10in high) by Berthoud with pivoted detent escapement, train remontoire and up-and-down dial, plus a number of table clocks and small novelty clocks. The Louis XIV clock seen in figure 2 has a wooden carcase with brown tortoiseshell and ormolu mounts (signed Gaudron a Paris). The movement, now with anchor escapement, strikes the hours on one bell. The directoire mantel clock seen in figure 3 is in its original condition and has an eight day movement with anchor escapement, silk suspension and

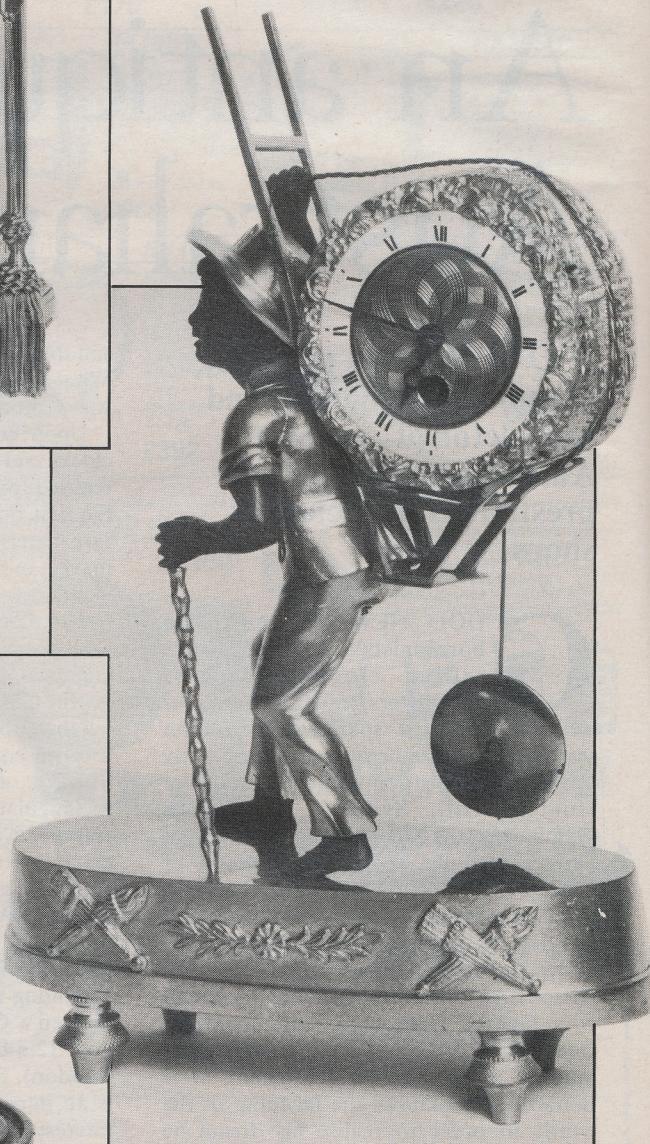


Figure 4: A miniature ormolu directoire mantel clock, so called 'pendule negre'.

strikes the hours and half hours on one bell. The early 19th century Swiss Empire oval mahogany clock base has a keywound movement by LeCoultre and plays two airs.

The miniature ormolu pendule negre seen in figure 4 is in the form of a negro carrying a bale of cotton and a walking stick – a theme that reflects the cotton trade between France and America's southern slave owning states. The movement is of three days duration with an anchor escapement and silk suspension (c1800).

Mention must be made of the turret clock by Charles Frodsham. Having decided that a focal point was needed for passersby the architects incorporated a small clock tower into the design. This can be seen in figure 5. The search commenced for a suitable clock. Initially it was hoped that a small timepiece made by Gillett and Johnston would be suitable but unfortunately through importation difficulties this idea had to be abandoned. However, a visit to the Gillet and Johnston works in Croydon, London, followed by a

hectic hour or two in the storeroom digging and delving through eons of dust and grime resulted in the discovery of a Frodsham clock and case. Standing over 8ft high the movement was housed in a Gothic style mahogany case – not an unusual feature for Victorian turret clocks and admirable for the purpose intended for this particular example. Now fully restored it proudly stands in the showroom with the lead off work going unobtrusively to the dial in the tower. The bonus on this clock for George Hamburger was the 'Royal' provenance of the clock. Recourse to the Local History Collection in Tower Hamlets, and editorial in the local newspapers substantiated the information that the clock had originally been at Saint Mark's Church Cadogan Terrace, Victoria Park in the East End of London. Apparently on one of her few

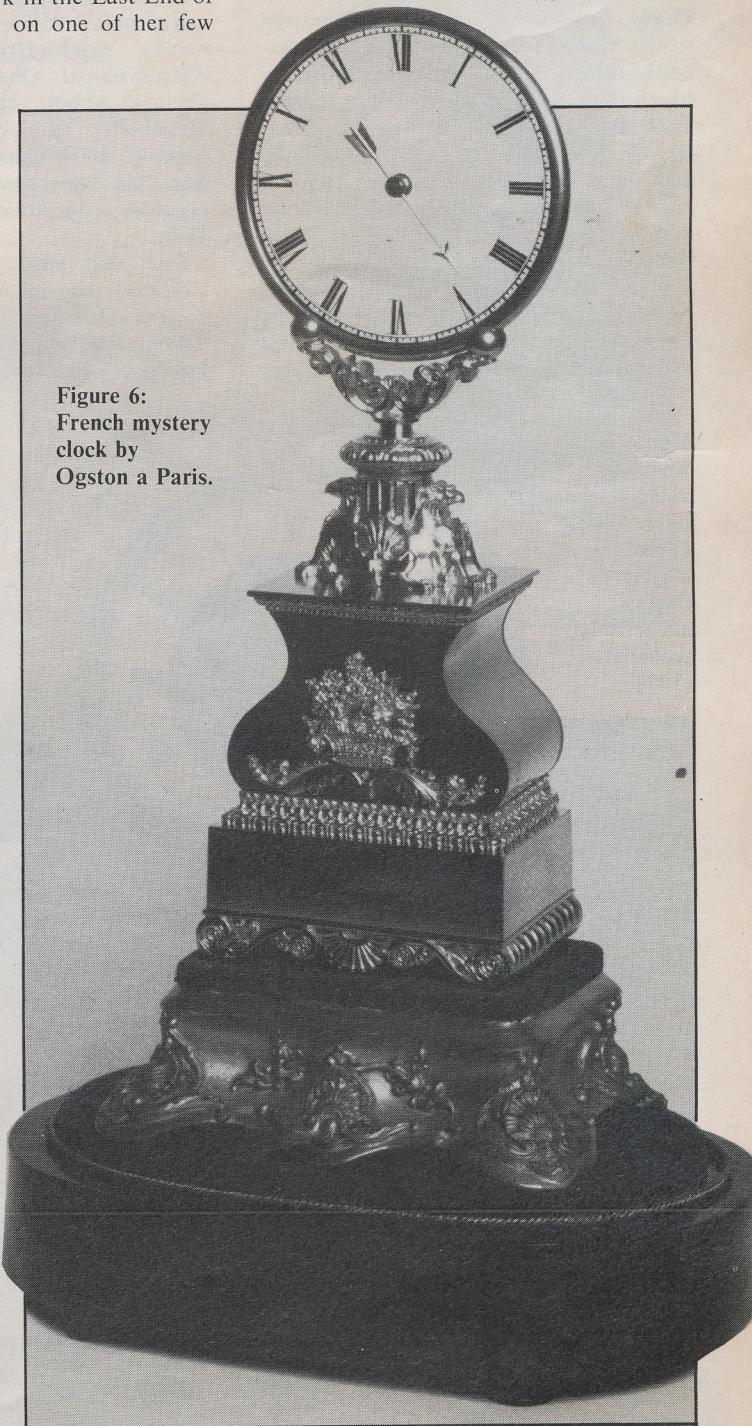
visits to the nether regions of London, Saint Marks had been the first church passed by Queen Victoria. She had been visiting the newly opened Victoria Park. For reasons unrecorded she had decided to make a presentation of a tower clock for the church and the commission was duly received by Charles Frodsham as Clockmaker to the Queen. The clock was duly installed amid great celebrations and dignified ceremonies. A brass plaque on the case of the clock records these events. The church was made redundant in 1973 and the clock was sold. Would the Queen have been 'amused' by the final location of her gift?

There is a particularly good example of a mystery clock (see figure 6), by Ogston a ▷

**Figure 5:** Overall view of the newly opened Clocks of Distinction, Hunters Hill, Sidney, Australia.



**Figure 6:**  
French mystery  
clock by  
Ogston a Paris.



Paris. The eight-day movement with silk suspension striking the half hour and hours on a bell with countwheel. The principle upon which these clocks operate is attributed to Robert Houdin (1805–1871). Strictly speaking the swinging cherub clock seen in figure 7 is not a mystery clock but with its unusual escapement by Farcot which allows the pendulum to swing from back to front and not side to side it certainly is attractive.

With more than 150 items on display it is impossible to mention more than a few. Mention must be made finally, however, of a small bracket clock by Francis Abbott, Derby. Francis Abbott, 1799–1883 (see 'A treatise on public clocks', *Clocks*, July 1985) is listed in the Australian Dictionary of Biography as having been born in Derby, England and possibly apprenticed to the Whitehurst family. He is most certainly recorded as working in Derby between 1821 and 1831 and marrying there in 1821. By 1833 he was working in Manchester. It appears that the Abbott family was already working in the area as Manchester Directories for 1828 list a John Abbott, watchmaker, 17 Stanley Street, Salford (later at 9 Blackfriars) and in 1832 Thomas Abbott, watch and clockmaker, bellhanger and engraver and so on, 1 Smithy Door. The year 1833 saw Francis Abbott listed as the occupier of this address so pos-

sibly he took over a family business following the death of father, brother or other relation. By 1838 however he had moved to 50 Market Street (opposite the railway station) and it was while at this address he published the second edition of his *Treatise on the Management of Public Clocks*.

As readers of last month's issue will already know, much of the content discusses the 'Different Kinds of Time used by Astronomers' and gives details of how to obtain accurate time by means of sundials, transit instruments and so on. This publication ran to a third edition (enlarged). Herman H Knie in his article in the summer 1978 issue of *Antiquarian Horology* draws attention to Abbott's professional skills being sought by Ebenezer Henderson when seeking an astronomical clock and beater for the newly opened (1837) Liverpool Astronomical Observatory. By 1841 Francis Abbott appears to have left Manchester (the premises now being occupied by William Stone a bookseller who had been recorded as sharing the premises with Abbott between 1837 and 1841).

The next entry regarding this man indicated that in August, 1844 he was sentenced to seven years transportation for 'Obtaining Two Watches Under False Pretences'. Reference to the transcript of

the actual trial elicited that Abbott had been taken into custody in Bristol (Montague Terrace). In February of that year he had called on a Thomas Singleton, watchmaker of Myddleton Street, Clerkenwell, and having presented his card (Francis Abbott, watch and clockmaker, No 6 Queens Terrace, Fulham Road, Chelsea) he had asked to take several watches on what would today be called a sale-or-return basis. The watches were subsequently found in a local pawnbrokers. Abbott pleaded that he had only temporarily pawned the watches while awaiting his customer's return from the country and that he had gone to Bristol to take up a situation there and was endeavouring to obtain money to redeem the watches. The comment had been added to the trial records that there had been 13 charges against the prisoner. In the days when the theft of a hankerchief could result in transportation for ten years Abbott could have been said to have received a light sentence! He arrived in Hobart Town, Australia in 1845 served one year on the gangs in Oyster Cove and three as a servant and received his ticket of leave on 27th March, 1849, when he apparently started up a small business as watch and clockmaker. His wife and family (seven children) were granted free passages and joined him.

His business flourished and he returned to his interest in astronomy – much of his work was published. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society in London, and the Royal Meteorological Society. He became one of the leading astronomers in Australia and collected a large philosophical and scientific library. He died leaving an estate of £3070. His son Charles carried on the business and subsequently his grandson P C Abbott.

The bracket clock in question – it must be admitted – is no more than a typical example of its period, although extremely well made and finished to an exceptionally high standard. The break-arch case is of mahogany with brass stringing, bun feet, handle and side frets. The two-train movement has 'Francis Abbott, Derby' engraved on the backplate. Found by George Hamburger completely by chance the clock has now been fully restored and in view of the provenance and the fact that this is the only known bracket clock by Abbott (there are numerous public clocks found carrying his name) its appearance on the market caused much interest. It has actually been sold – undervalued according to newspaper reports of the purchase – to the Australian Heritage Fund and will go into one of the Government homes in Sidney. Whether the clock dates from Abbott's early days in Derby and was brought out by his family or whether it was made in Australia and signed 'Derby' for reasons of nostalgia could be debated. The former possibility is by far the most likely. A nice historical item to have as part of one's opening stock. □

**Figure 7:**  
Alabaster  
swinging cherub  
clock with  
Farcot  
movement.  
Dial is  
attractively  
skeletonised,  
c1870.

