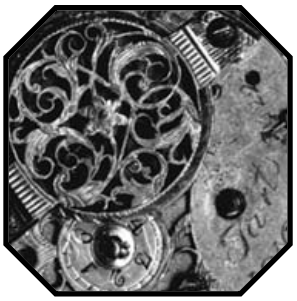


Continental Imitations of 18th Century English Watch Movements

by Jerzy Ganczarczyk (Canada)

Collectors of eighteenth century English watches often face doubts as to whether some items in their collections were really made in England or are Continental imitations of English products. Such imitation watches were mostly—but not always—of somewhat inferior quality as compared with the original watches they resembled, which is why they avoided the attention of the majority of horological researchers, who turned their attention, above all, to well finished, unusual, and high quality watches often having some historical association. Usually, the only information available on imitation watches were warnings that they existed and that collectors should be careful when buying suspicious watches of the period.

Forgery of complete watches, or of watch movements, is usually understood as falsifying specific features of the original object, such as the design, signature, and/or indicated place of manufacture, and thus creating fraudulent imitations. Such imitations, intended to deceive, are often called fakes. Forgery of watches and making fake watches are sometimes considered synonymous. More specific definitions differentiate the terms: "forgery" is making exact imitations of existing watches, and "faking" is making watches "resembling" existing watches. Faking watches has a long history in which a few distinctive periods can be determined. Among these are: the imitation of English eighteenth century watches, often called "Dutch fakes" (which is a misnomer); forgeries/fakes of Breguet's watches; "Swiss fakes" of American watches; and contemporary forgeries of Patek Philippe, Cartier, Rolex, etc., watches. Usually popular and effective quality recognition and the successful marketing of specific watches were the main reasons why these products were faked or forged.

Fake English Movements

Production of fake English movements may have started in the early eighteenth century, possibly with the Dutch practice of putting names of English makers on some movements to improve their marketability. In the second half of the eighteenth century Europe was flooded with relatively inexpensive, but often somewhat inferior, watches, with movements bearing names of English makers (often nonexistant or already dead) and showing London, England, as their place of origin. These movements were usually, but not always, housed in original English-made cases, properly hallmarked and with the real case makers' marks. Although some of these fake English movements have merit, they were forgeries because they claimed English origin but in fact were made in Continental Europe, mostly in Switzerland and also possibly in Southern Germany. They are often called Dutch fakes or Dutch forgeries not only because Dutch watchmakers contributed to this illicit trade, but above all, because they usually reached the British Isles by way of Holland. However, their destinations were mostly other Continental countries such as Scandinavia and those in central Europe. They also found their way to the British Colonies and are now perhaps more easily found in the U.S.A., Canada, and Australia, rather than in the U.K. The practice of some provincial English makers to put London as the place of origin of their watches, because their agents resided in London, and they therefore had a formal association with London, cannot be considered full-fledged forgery.

In general, there were only two important centers for watch finishing in Europe at the beginning of the eighteenth century: Geneva in Switzerland and London in England. Their modes of operation differed somewhat. Geneva's production was based, to a large extent, on parts made locally by highly specialized groups of workers employed in "factories." London producers used mostly raw movements produced in Lancashire by entrepreneurs who obtained the parts mostly from individual out-workers, who worked separately and were perhaps somewhat less specialized than their counterparts in Geneva. With the progress of time, some changes occurred in the Continental part of the picture: an additional center of watch and watch part production developed around Neuchatel,

Switzerland. International trade in watches (and most likely in watch parts) became centered in the large trade fairs of Lyon in France and Frankfurt and Leipzig in the German countries, and new large foreign watch markets opened in the British Colonies, Turkey, Russia, and China. The latter affected both watch manufacturers in Continental Europe and in England but had an additional effect on English trade because a substantial part of the Continental Europe trade to the target markets went through England by transit.

Features of Imitation Movements

To recognize imitation movements one should, at least, direct attention to:

1. **Type of balance cock or bridge in the movement:** The English products usually, but not always (e.g., the famous Harrison movement), used balance cocks; the Continental products, except for the products made specifically "in the English style," used mostly balance bridges. However, the typical Continental balance bridges are different than the bridges found in so-called "Dutch fakes"; the first are almost round with very small ears for the screws, and the latter have large rectangular wings. Unfortunately, there is insufficient information to trace the original development of this style of balance bridge.
2. **Winding site:** The English products were usually, but not always, wound on the backplate (potence plate); the Continental products were usually wound on the dial side. Some English movements, and possibly also some Continental movements, were designed to be wound both on the dial side as well as on the backplate.
3. **Type of backplate (potence plate) decoration:** Some forms of backplate engraving can be considered characteristic for the English products; excessive decoration of the backplate, considered presently to be in bad taste, is more typical, but not exclusive, on the Continental products (especially the Swiss ones).
4. **Dial characteristics:** Some Continental dials, especially the Dutch ones, have a characteristic arched (arcaded or wavy) minute chapter ring. Camerer Cuss wrote: "Such a dial, unless the watch is unmistakably a product of Holland, will either indicate that the watch was made in England for export to Holland or that the watch is of Swiss origin."[4]
5. **Jeweling:** The jeweling of watch movements was invented by a Swiss expatriate, Nicolas Facio, in England. Its importance was recognized in England; the exportation of watch jewels was prohibited to maintain the supremacy of English products. On the Continent, however, movement jeweling was not, initially, considered important, and even some important eighteenth century watches were not jeweled. The presence of jewels (usually balance endstones) in some movements suspected of being Continental imitations of English products may be explained by the intention to mimic the latter with jewels obtained from England by an illicit trade. Another possibility is that these jewels were installed in the inspected movements at a later date.
6. **Type of pillars:** Usually, pillars in the English movements of the second half of the eighteenth century were of the tapered square type or were simply turned. More decorative pillars, used in England in the seventeenth century and in the early eighteenth century, suggest, with some exceptions, the possibility of a movement's Continental origin.
7. **Potence and contra-potence regulation:** The potence in English movements is usually a simple movable plug. In the Continental movements it is often in the form of a complicated block allowing for a relatively easy and precise regulation with the use of two or three screws. Similarly, the contra-potence of the English movements is usually fixed, while in the Continental movements it is possible to regulate it with a screw. However, a different kind of adjustable contra-potence (depthing regulation) was also used at the end of the eighteenth century in some English rack-lever watches and, later on, in early watches with the Massey escapement.
8. **Shape of the locking bolt:** Usually, the locking bolts of the English and Continental movements differed; the first has a flat locking surface, and the latter is rounded. Moreover, the rims of the English cases were usually cut to accept the upper part of the locking bolt; such a cut didn't exist in most of the Continental cases.
9. **Flanges in mainspring barrels:** Continental mainspring barrels often had a visible flange at their lower end to prevent slippage of the fusee chain from the barrel. Such a flange usually didn't have a place in the English products.
10. **Presence or absence of maker's signature:** Since the 1698 Act of Parliament it was a legal requirement in England to have watch movements signed with the name of the maker. If a signature doesn't exist, there is a possibility that the movement is of Continental origin, is of inferior quality, or was a subject of direct export.[6] Use of fictitious names on watch movements was common in the eighteenth century, and it may or may not be a sign of Continental origin. Putting the names of watchmakers who were no longer alive on movement backplates was a time-honored tradition. Landes referred to such a practice as early as 1636 in connection with the restrictive guild regulations.[9]

11. **Presence or absence of a number on the movement, and the numerical size of the number, if present:** Law in England also required the presence of movement numbers, but this law was often broken as was the requirement of having the movements signed. Unrealistic high numbers were used on Continental products that were falsified as English ones. It appears also that it was a typically Swiss practice to put some numbers related to the movement number on the inside of the plates and/or the movement case.
12. **Quality of gilding:** Very often the quality of gilding on English movements was much better than that on the Continental products, however, this reflects on the quality of the movement rather than its origin.
13. **Some features of movements and watchcases:** A specific design style for the watch movement was well developed in England in the eighteenth century. However, quite a few well-known English makers were of Continental origin, and they brought to England design patterns that they learned before settling in the United Kingdom. Many Continental movements of the eighteenth century were housed in English-made cases or cases closely resembling English case style, although the export of empty watch cases from England was prohibited by law.[5,7] A typically Continental style of watchcase making also developed at that time. It eventually evolved into a type of case later called "consular."

English Watchmakers and Faked Products

Participation of English watchmakers in the fake movement trade, because the makers' names and the locations of origin are falsified, is not clear, but there are strong suspicions that some second-quality British products were marketed in this way. Moreover, use of English cases for housing foreign-made movements speaks for itself. Under some circumstances, it was an illegal activity because the act of Parliament prohibited the export of watchcases without movements, making the import of foreign movements to England more likely. In general, very successful marketing of English watches of the period was the reason why these forgeries happened. English horological products, and especially items made in London, were so highly valued during this period that giving such a name to the products of other countries contributed heavily to the ease of selling these products and to achieving attractive prices for them.

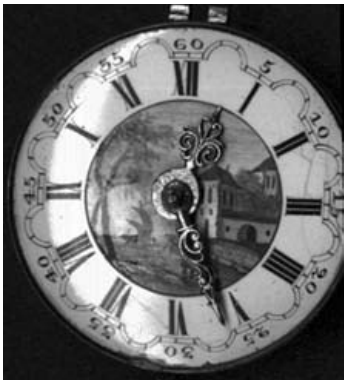
Continental English Style Movements

The Swiss production of watches and watch parts bloomed most effectively in the early nineteenth century, but as Camerer Cuss wrote: "… by the end of the eighteenth century the Dutch, German, and Austrian [watchmaking industry] had been dominated, and the French industry was to some extent at least dependant, on the supplies of both completed watches and unfinished movements from Switzerland."[4,8] Of course, the production of Continental imitations of English watches, called "Dutch forgeries" or "fakes," didn't stop with the end of the eighteenth century. It continued for another 20 years or so, to be replaced later by other "forgeries" resembling the early nineteenth century English products. However, the latter were no longer called "Dutch forgeries."

Faked Watches — A Few Examples

Almost all famous English watchmakers and retailer's names were used on imitation movements, but some of them were more common than others. Moreover, some names are specifically associated with this trade or are strongly suspected to be a part of it. Included are names such as Samson, J. Tart, White, and others. Seven movements from the second half of the eighteenth century are more closely studied here. In chronological order they include a 1758 movement signed by "John Worke" (#1); a 1767 movement signed by "J. Tarts" (#2); a 1770 movement signed in the name of "George Prior" (#3); a 1770 movement signed in the name of "Eardley Norton" (#4); two 1780-1784 movements signed by "D. D. Neveren" (#5 and #6); and a 1796 movement signed by "Thomas Gould" (#7). All of these movements are of the fusee-verge type, with full plate, and use Tompion's style hairspring regulators. Examples 1, 2, 6, and 7 have enameled dials with arched (arcaded) chapter rings. In two of these examples (#1 and #2), the set-up of the mainspring was located between the plates, and in the others it was on the pillar plate. The movements #1, #2, #6, and #7 were not jeweled, but the movements #3, #4, and #5 had functional balance jewels, which were likely installed in these movements at a later date. All the inspected movements were housed in pair-cases, were hallmarked in London, and had marks of London makers, except #5, which was housed in a pair-case without any marks, and except movements #3 and #5, which were found without cases.

The above selection of possibly fake watches and movements doesn't include any movements that could be dated for the early eighteenth century, because such movements were much less common and because at that time the differences between English and Continental products were not yet well crystallized.


Example No. 1. Figure 1, left. Backplate of John Worke's movement No. 12570. **Figure 2, center.** The dial. **Figure 3, right.** The repousse outer case.

Example No. 1 — signed John Worke

Britten and Baillie recorded John Worke as an active watchmaker in London in the period 1760-1785, and noted that he made "many watches in the Dutch style."[2,3] However, Camerer Cuss considers this name to be fictitious.[4] The inspected fusee-verge movement, signed on the backplate (Figure 1) "Jn Worke, London, 12570," has a balance bridge, Tompion style (silver disk) hairspring regulator, worm mainspring set-up between the plates, and tapered square pillars. Its 37 mm diameter dial is painted with a seashore scene (Figure 2), and has an arched chapter ring with Roman numeral hour markers and Arabic numeral minute markers. This movement is housed in a pair-case. The inner case (box) is hallmarked in London for 1758, and bears the maker's mark, "GH below sun," which most likely indicates George Harrison.[10] The outer repousse (embossed) case shows a classical scene (Figure 3).

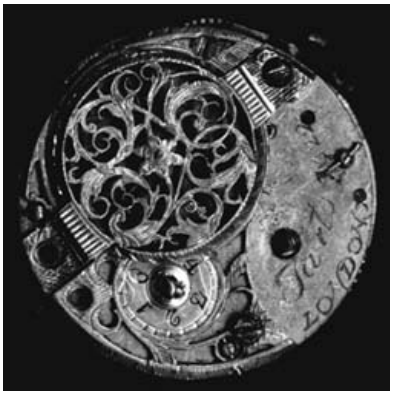
It is difficult to offer any judgment of whether the above movement is English made or is a Continental imitation. Use of the balance bridge instead of cock could be explained by the known fact that "John Worke," if he existed at all, worked for the Dutch market. The same explanation could also justify the use of the dial with arched chapters. Dutch style dials possibly could have been imported by Worke from Holland to please his Dutch clients.

Some suspicion is connected with the relatively high number stamped on the movement. But this number could be an expression of a code that was quite common in the eighteenth century, e.g., it could refer to the 120th movement made up until the year 1757 (one year before its case was hallmarked). However, it is possible that this code was abandoned after some time, as two later Worke movements, examined separately, don't show such regularity and have only four-digit numbers.

Example No. 2 — signed J. Tarts

According to unconfirmed anecdotal information, the movements signed with this name were not Continental imports but second quality products sold by a group of well-established London makers. Britten recorded Tarts as active in the period 1755-1790, and added a comment: "many hundreds of watches for the Dutch market were marked <Tarts, London> or <Jno Tarts, London>; I do not think anyone has been able to trace a manufacturer named Tarts."[3] Baillie wrote in his list: "TARTS, J., London, 2nd half 18c., signed on many watches for Dutch market, probably a fictitious name."[2]

Example No. 2. Figure 4, left. Backplate of the Tarts movement No. 7628. **Figure 5, center.** Dial. **Figure 6, right.** The repousse outer case.



The inspected movement (#2) is signed on the backplate, "Tarts, 7628, London" (Figure 4). It has a balance bridge and a Tompion style hairspring regulator. Originally, it was equipped with a worm barrel set-up between the plates, but this arrangement was later replaced by a set-up on the pillar plate. The movement has tapered square pillars. It went through some primitive repairs and is obviously in a poorer form than the movement previously described. The enameled dial of the Tarts movement also has an arched minute chapter ring (Figure 5). This movement is housed in a pair-case; the inner one hallmarked in London for 1767 and bearing the maker's mark of "S.P" in a cameo #2, what most likely indicates Southern Payne of 17 Bridgewater Square.[9] The outer case is embossed with a classical scene (Figure 6).

Example No. 3 — signed George Prior

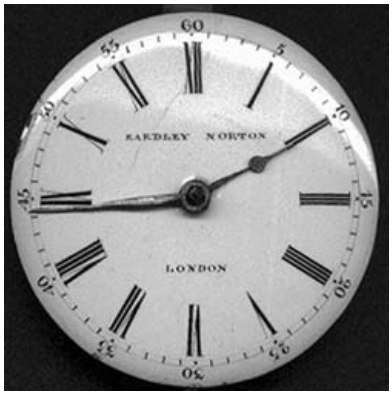
Britten registered three watchmakers named George Prior. The first one was active in the period 1765-1812 in London at various addresses; the second one, son of John, was active in the period 1809-1822, originally in Otley and Leeds, and afterwards in London. He, like his contemporary, the famous Edward Prior, was a maker of watches for the Turkish market. The third George Prior was active in Leeds around 1840.[3] Baillie's list differs somewhat from the above. The period of activity of the first George is shortened to 1765-1810. The George of Otley is separately recorded as active in the late eighteenth century and his birthplace and date is given as Nessfield in 1782. After 1822 he was active in London, and his period of professional activity was 1793-1830. It was also emphasized that he was a maker of repute and that he was somehow associated with Edward Prior. The period of activity of the George of Leeds was given as 1817-1826.[2]

The inspected movement (#3) is signed on the backplate, "George Prior, London" (Figure 7), and no movement number is given. However, in the Swiss style, the numbers "36" and "20" are stamped on the inside of the backplate. It has a balance bridge and a French/Swiss style hairspring regulator similar to Tompion's but using, instead of the silver disk, a metal disk decoratively covered with blue enamel. Its square pillars are unusual (Figure 9) and so is the fusee click. The mainspring barrel has a distinctive flange not common in English movements, and all the pinions are longer than those commonly used in English movements. The potence and contrapotence are regulated like in French/Swiss movements. The dial attached to this movement is in the English style and is signed "George Prior, London" (Figure 8). This movement was originally dated by the author for the third quarter of the eighteenth century, but it may be much later. It is obviously a Continental (most likely Swiss) forgery of an English movement. It is symptomatic that the makers didn't even try to make it "in the English style." Signing it with the name of a well-known English maker, and giving London as the place of its origin, they still retain some of the design features that were not used by English makers.

Example No. 4 — signed Eardley Norton

Eardley Norton, active in the period 1760-1794, recorded by both Britten and Baillie, was a clock and watch maker of great repute.[2,3] He is especially well known for his numerous watches and complicated clocks that found their place in Central and Eastern European collections. The inspected fusee-verge watch movement (#4), signed "Eardley Norton, London" (Figure 10), doesn't show any number on the backplate. It has a balance bridge with a ruby (?) endstone, a nicely cut decoration over the backplate, Tompion's style hairspring regulator, and tapered square pillars. The 45.5 mm diameter dial of this movement is in the English style and also bears the inscription, "Eardley Norton, London" (Figure 11). It is housed in possibly an original pair-case, without any maker's mark or hallmarks. This watch is most likely a Continental imitation of an English product.

Example No. 3. Figures 7, 8, and 9, left to right. Backplate, dial, and pillars of the movement signed "George Prior, London."



Example No. 4. Figure 10, left. Backplate of the movement signed "Eardley Norton, London." **Figure 11. center.** Dial of the same movement. (Note wrong replacement hands.)
Example No. 5. Figure 12, right. Backplate of the movement signed "D. D. Neveren, London." **Figure 13, lower right.** Dial of "D.D. Neveren" movement.

Examples No. 5 and No. 6 — D.D. Neveren

The name D. D. Neveren was adopted by a verge watchmaker of the name Neuren, who also used the name of Neweren and the initials D. B. D. He was active in London in the period 1760-1790. Baillie specifically noted the year of 1784 for one of his products.[2] As the original name of this maker sounds German, a check was made in the Abeler list for information.[1] Unfortunately, this list didn't indicate any maker of this name in the German speaking countries.[1,10]

Example No. 6. Figure 14, lower left. Backplate of the movement. **Figure 15, below right.** Backplate of the movement signed "D. D. Neveren, London, No. 7131."

A fusee-verge movement and a watch with the name "D. D. Neveren, London" on the backplate and on the dial have been inspected (#5 and #6). No number is shown on the backplate of the movement without a case, but on the inside of its backplate there are stamped "42R" and "R 42," and on the inside of the pillar plate is number "12." In addition to that, the number "421" is stamped inside the regulator. The movement in the watch (#6) bears the number 7131 stamped on the backplate. The first movement has a balance bridge with a ruby endstone, tapered square pillars, and Continental potence and contrapotence (Figure 12). This movement is rather roughly finished. Its 45.5 mm diameter dial is a possible replacement. The second movement is cased, has a balance bridge, tapered square pillars, and a Tompion style hairspring regulator (Figure 14). It has a 41.5 mm diameter dial. The pair case housing this movement doesn't have any hallmarks, but it bears a maker's mark of BL over M, which was not registered in any watchcase hallmarking places in England.[9] Both of these movements are judged to be Continental imitations of English products.

Example No. 7 — signed Thomas Gould

Britten and Baillie recorded Thomas Gould as active in London during the period 1750-1788.[2,3] The inspected watch (#7), signed with this name on its backplate, was described before by the Author.[6] It equally may be an English product intended for the Dutch market or a Continental imitation of an English product.

Comparison of the Results

The very small sample of seven inspected watches and movements doesn't allow for any statistically valid comparisons. However, even on this limited basis, some observations can be made. In the table below the specific features/indicators were correlated with the inves-

Example No. 7. Figure 16, left. Backplate of the movement signed "Tho Gould, London." **Figure 17, lower left.** Dial.

tigated watches and movements. The features supporting the possibly Continental origin were marked C; those that were typically English were marked E; those that could be both Continental and English were marked with a question mark (?); and those that were not applicable were marked N/A. Of course, values of the particular indicators are not equal and giving them a specific ranking would be too risky. Therefore, the final judgment will still be intuitive and will depend on the individual experience of the investigator. However, a possible use of the presented table may simplify some aspects of the judging process.

Differences in Quality

Numerous English watchmakers in the second part of the 18th century were also entrepreneurs involved in marketing watches they didn't make but they were in a good position to sell because of the known quality of their own products and the fame of the London production in general. These products, finished or not, complete or only parts, could be of Continental Europe origin or—as most of the "real" London products—could have originated in Lancashire as raw movements (ebauches). Therefore, it is not unusual to find watch movements with the same signature on the back plate but of different quality and somewhat different style. If these watches reached the market from the shop owned by the person who's signature was on the backplate, they cannot be called fakes or forgeries. Fortunately, the practice of occasionally selling products of inferior quality was not too wide spread, as it would at some point become counter-productive and spoil the business of the watchmaker/entrepreneur.

C= Continental
E= English

INVESTIGATED WATCHES AND MOVEMENTS

INDICATORS	#1 1758	#2 1767	#3 ca. 1770	#4 ca. 1770	#5 ca. 1780	#6 1784	#7 1796
Balance cock or bridge	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Winding site	E	E	E	E	E	E	E
Backplate decoration	?	?	C	C	C	C	?
Dial characteristics	C	C	C	C	C	C	C
Locking bolt	E	E	C	C	C	C	E
Flanged barrel	E	E	C	C	C	C	E
Type of pillars	E	E	C	E	?	?	E
Maker's signature	?	?	E	E	?	?	?
Movement's number	?	E	C	C	C	E	E
Quality of gilding	E	?	?	?	?	?	E
Watchcase features	E	E	N/A	N/A	E	C	E

Acceptance of the Imitations

Market acceptance of Continental imitations of English 18th century watches has fluctuated in the history of watch collecting from treating them as equal to other contemporary watches of similar quality, considering them as a special group of watches worth collecting, to almost rejecting them as fakes and forgeries. Currently, some watches openly suspected of being "Dutch Forgeries" are occasionally reaching quite high prices, especially after some "cosmetic improvements," such as additional polishing and gilding done by or for unscrupulous dealers.

Conclusions

Some design features of watch movements, especially the use of cock bridges instead of the typical English cocks, triggers a suspicion that the respective movements may be of Continental origin. Even more revealing is the quality of gilding and workmanship in general. But the above findings are not completely conclusive. Much more convincing are comparisons of the movement date, usually based upon the hallmarks of an original case, and available data on the identifiable watchmaker activity. In some cases, an uncertainty as to whether the inspected 18th century movement is really English, or a Continental fake, cannot be completely eliminated.

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IN MEMORIAM—Martin Swetsky (1928-2003)

It is with much sorrow that I report the passing of Martin Swetsky, FNAWCC. He was a past president of New York Chapter 2 and Brooklyn Chapter 114, current president of Electrical Horology Society Chapter 78, and assisted in the organization of the New York regional meetings. In addition to being one of the experts for the Answer Box, Marty also authored an as-yet-unpublished book on battery clock history and repair.

During the past few years, his activities were diminished by physical ailments, but on those few occasions when he could arrange to attend a meeting, it was as though a king were holding court. He was constantly surrounded by friends and admirers who could not visit him at home but still wanted to maintain contact. Where Marty was concerned, a simple question did not have a simple answer. He gave of his knowledge freely and sometimes at great length, but when he was finished, you knew the answer and the reasoning behind it.

Marty was also an innovative gardener. Lacking acreage and the ability to bend, he could grow a veritable produce stand in pots on every step, using a stool to sit on to tend his precious seedlings. His greatest achievements were miniature tomatoes and full size stalks of corn grown in containers.

Marty will surely be missed by all who knew him.

Our sincerest condolences to his wife, Lou, his sons Mitch and Fred, and their families.

Harvey Schmidt (NY)