

Harrison's Wooden Clock at 300

A Visit to Nostell Priory

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To celebrate the 300th birthday of their John Harrison wooden clock, Nostell Priory, wanted to really put it in the spotlight. They have certainly achieved that and widened its appeal to old and young alike.

For many years the clock has stood in a fairly unassuming spot within the Priory where only the eagle-eyed would realise its importance. That has all changed and the clock, one of only three surviving wooden examples by Harrison, is now at the centre of a new exhibition celebrating his skill in the place where he was born. In a custom-made display, the clock is shown without its case to highlight the beautiful wooden parts, lighting drawing the eye to the delicacy of the piece, **Figure 1**.

Alongside the clock, visitors can also watch a specially commissioned film about Harrison and view a series of displays which celebrate his work. These include a rarely seen section of the original case, complete with calculations in Harrison's own hand, kindly loaned by The Worshipful Company of Clockmakers.

In a breakaway from the long-held assumption that National Trust properties are 'look but don't touch', there are the parts of a clock displayed in a way that they can be held, examined and appreciated, **Figure 2**. Of particular interest to me, especially in these times of questioning 'Conservation or Preservation?', there is a board asking for input from visitors on their thoughts regarding the care and preservation of the clock. Specifically, they ask whether worn parts should be replaced so that it can continue to run or if it should be allowed to stop so it is preserved in its original state. Based on the comments posted it is definitely a question that has divided opinion.

Once you have been awed by this piece of history, you can head next door for a lighter take on Harrison's contribution to horology. *Harrison's Garden* was conceived by artist Luke Jerram and comprises over 2,000 working clocks, **Figure 3**. It engulfs an entire room on the ground floor of the Priory and, despite my initial reservations, soon draws you in. With clocks of every description, the child in me first wanted to decide which was my favourite. After settling on three or four close contenders, I was flashed back to 'time gone by' as I recognised a clock as the same as one my school friend had in her kitchen. I can imagine that many working horologists will be transported back when recognising a particularly tricky repair or much-loved present they worked on. Of greatest surprise to me was the noise. I had expected it to be much louder – with 2,000 clocks in close proximity you would think the noise would be deafening. However, the sound of running water comes to mind and, with all the clocks set to different times, it was rather enjoyable trying to discern which clock brought me out of a trance-like state when it struck the hour! *Harrison's Garden* is at Nostell Priory until Sunday 9 July, after



Figure 1.



Figure 2.



Figure 3.

which it will go on tour and appear at Castle Dogo in Devon, Gunby Hall in Lincolnshire and Penrhyn Castle in Gwynedd.

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