

# Restoring a Potts Drum Clock

*A New Life for a Railway Clock*



Michael Potts

In 1897, the Lancashire and North West Railway Company ordered a 4ft diameter drum clock for Llandudno Junction Station from William Potts and Sons in Leeds. The clock must have been considered a success as a second 4ft diameter drum clock was ordered the following year for the same station. In both cases the clock mechanism was a turret timepiece with a pin wheel escapement, which the makers referred to in the business as the 'Doncaster model'. This model was developed by William Potts in the 1860s for railway buildings at Doncaster, and subsequently used extensively in stations, mills, schools and stables where a timepiece was required.

In 2016, I noticed the Newark Main Line Station clock on display at Upton Hall with a description showing it had been restored. It too is a Doncaster model and, until recently, the last Potts clock to be seen working at a railway station.

In the 1960s, a decision was made to dismantle the Llandudno Junction clocks and dispose of them. I only became aware of them when I started to research the family business in the 1980s. During the research, I read an article about the refurbishment of Denmark Hill Station in London after a fire and that a significant part of it was turned into a pub, which was appropriately named the Phoenix. The developer of the Phoenix had acquired the older of the two Llandudno clocks and put it on display as a feature inside the building, **Figure 1**. It isn't working which is a pity, but that can be said of many clocks.

In 2015, I heard that the second Llandudno clock was for sale and I couldn't resist making further enquiries. It transpired that the clock had been stored in a private garage for nearly 50 years and the owner had decided not to install the clock on his business premises. This was an opportunity not to be missed and before long I became the new owner.

It turned out to be too large to have in our home, so alternative places to install it were thought about. With the help of two marvellous friends, Eric Robinson and Tom Precious, **Figure 2**, we mounted an exhibition of Potts clocks at the Armley Industrial Museum for a period of 12 months in 2014–15. It was a great success and after it was over we started to think about where there might be a suitable site in Leeds for the new clock. After discussion and enquiries, I decided to offer the clock to the Middleton Railway, a heritage railway in Leeds. The offer was gratefully accepted and Eric and Tom set about the restoration. The original state of the dial-works and movement can be seen in **Figures 3 and 4**. With the help of the Cumbria Clock Company we managed to move the drum from the Wirral to Cumbria and finally to Leeds. It all came together in May this year when the drum was hung inside the Middleton Engine House and the movement strategically placed on the side wall, with a weight drop which allows the movement to run for seven days and three hours, **Figures 5–7**. The staff at Middleton Railway are building

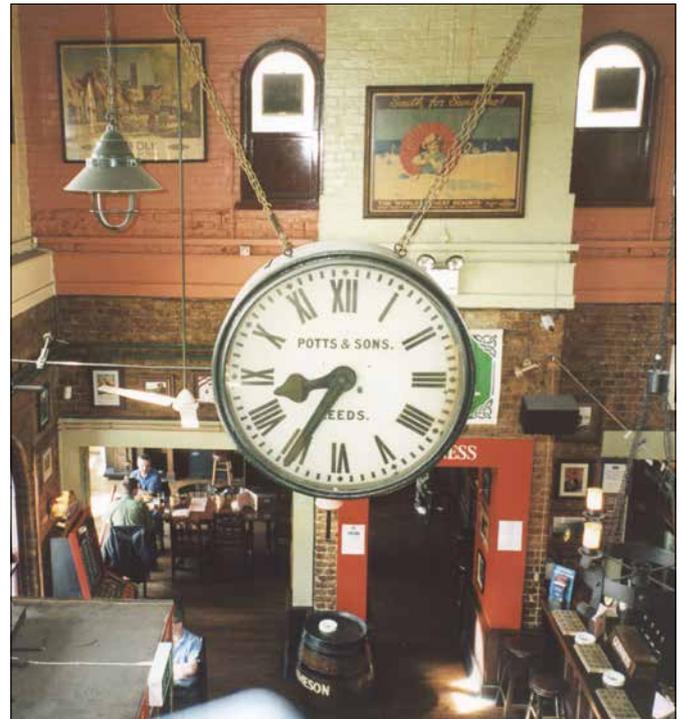


Figure 1. Denmark Hill Station - The Phoenix.



Figure 2. From left to right: Michael Potts, Eric Robinson and Tom Precious.



Figure 3. Dial-works of drum.



Figure 4. Movement prior to restoration.



Figure 5. Bevel gears taking drive to the drum, together with the weight cord and pulleys.



Figure 6. The fully restored movement at Middleton Railway.



Figures 7. Middleton Heritage Railway Engine House.

a case for the movement, allowing for inspection and winding. The public will be able to see the movement and see how the bevel wheels have been fitted to take the drive from the movement to the drum, which was superbly carried out by Eric.

The clock has a new life ahead of it, in a place where it is appreciated, and will be of interest to all who visit and love heritage railways.

### **Author Bio**

Michael Potts was born in Sheffield in 1938 and is a great great grandson of William Potts, the founder of the firm of clockmakers, who started in Pudsey and moved to Leeds in 1862. Michael qualified as a Chartered Accountant in London in 1963 and settled on the Wirral in 1970. His professional career spanned the North of England and after discovering the existence of the former family business in Leeds, he set about discovering his clockmaking roots. For over 20 years he compiled a history of five consecutive generations of his family involved in clockmaking. This has involved travelling throughout Great Britain and overseas looking for surviving Potts clocks. In 2006 his book *Potts of Leeds – Five Generations of Clockmakers* was published.

He retired from professional practice in 1992 and was appointed a Deputy Lieutenant of Merseyside in 2000 and High Sheriff of the county in 2006. He has been Pro-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool and is currently the President of North West Cancer Research, a charity he has been involved with for 25 years.