Hood Safety

A Cautionary Tale

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One of my longcase clocks was made in Wales by John Rees of Mydyroilyn. It is a simple 13in wide painted break arch dial clock with a 30-hour movement. The total case height measures 7ft, and 4ft 9in to the case mouldings supporting the hood.

It is of thick oak and very heavily constructed – unnecessarily heavy. It is some years since I removed the hood on this clock, an operation I have done on this and many other clocks over the years. On replacing it, attempting to position the back edges of the hood on the front edges of the case mouldings I lost control of it. The hood pivoted forwards and the glazed door hit me on the head. The glass was violently broken leaving me with a hood around my neck resting on my shoulders. I quickly sank to my knees and carefully removed the hood from my head, trying to avoid the sharp projections of the broken glass.

By this time the domestic 'nurse' had come at high speed. Blood was dripping freely from unknown sources and when prevented from spilling everywhere a good wash down in the sink revealed the primary source: the top edge of my left ear was slashed plus a few minor scrapes. Pressure was applied but it took about five hours before the ear bleeding was quelled. If Van Gogh had known just how much blood a slash on the ear can release he would probably not have attempted to cut his off!

I have since repaired the glass and weighed the hood. It is 20 pounds (9.2 kg). This compares with about 10lbs (4.6kg) for a 30 hour brass dial case hood and about 12½lbs (5.7kg) for an eight-day break arch dial veneered case hood. Clearly this hood weight is unusual but not unique.

This short article attempts to review good practice in this area and hopefully prevent this happening to you. I had a very, very lucky escape since the outcome could have been very much worse.

Holding the Hood

The process of replacing a hood for me usually consists of holding it high enough to locate the bottom corners of the hood and then push it back along the case mouldings, fully into position. I adopt the practice of holding each side of the hood, with each hand holding both the pillar and the side of the hood provided that the case is not too tall.

It is tempting to hold the hood using the two pillars but these may not be secure if their attachment is poor. A check prior to trusting them is advisable.

My pillars are secure but my error was to hold the hood at positions close to the bottom, just above the moulding, whilst manoeuvring the rear corners of the hood into position on to the supporting mouldings.

I had already attempted to manoeuvre the hood into position by holding at the top but had failed to locate them so moved my hands lower to improve control.

Because both hands were now both close to the base of the hood they were lower than the centre of gravity. The outcome was a hood which, when it started to fall forwards was one that, because of its weight, I had no chance of recovering. It swung over very rapidly.

If I had positioned one hand much higher than the other this would have given me a reasonable chance of preventing it tilting forwards. The larger the separation between the hands the better, depending upon the height of the hood and case.

Some cases may well be much taller requiring a modified approach. Standing on a chair is not recommended since it gives less chance of recovering if there is some out-of-balance and it is not as easy to put the hood on the ground after removing it. Much better with tall cases to make this a two-person operation.

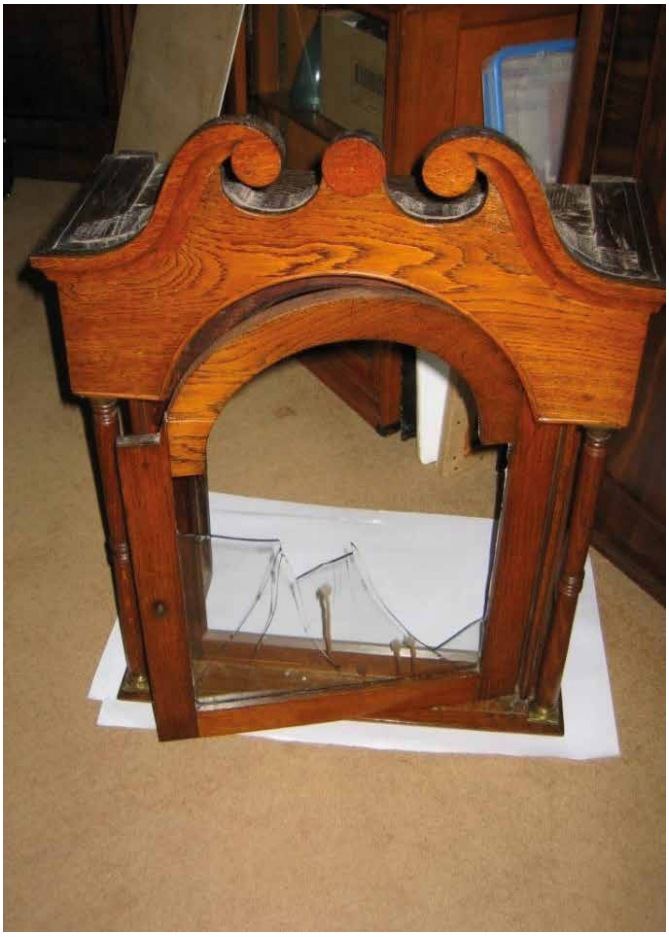

Figure 1. The damaged hood and glass.