

Special Comtoise Clocks and Lantern Clocks

by Chris Hooijkaas

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If you are one of those UK horologists who think that Comtoise clocks are virtually all the same with standardised movements made the Jura region of France in the late nineteenth century, then you are in for a pleasant surprise. The author is a Dutch collector who is passionate about early and unusual examples of these and lantern clocks of all types, and has amassed over a hundred Comtoise clock movements and rather fewer lantern clocks. This book is a study of fifty-seven Comtoise clocks and thirty-nine lantern clocks from the author's collection, Chris's main interest is in the movements and dials, while the cases in which they were once housed (even some of the lantern clocks were once in tall cases) are not considered. He enjoys the thrill of the chase for an unusual clock, taking it to pieces, cleaning it, studying and understanding its details and special features and reassembling it, taking photographs at every stage.

Throughout the book the Dutch text is followed by an English translation. After a short introduction that includes topics such as standard clocks, originality, cleaning, age, affordability, market and the clocks in this book, there are nine detailed chapters. The five chapters on Comtoise clocks cover those with chapter rings and cartouche dials (the latter being the small enamel plaques with the individual numbers, maker, etc), ceramic or enamel dials, quarter striking with multiple bells, clocks from the Haute Saône and Haute Marne and special clocks. The four chapters on lantern clocks deal with those from France, from elsewhere (Netherlands, Belgium, Italy and England), quarter striking on multiple bells and special clocks. The book ends with technical details such as striking systems, escapements, dials, size, where they were made and by whom. There is a one-page

bibliography and a short biography of the author.

There is no index, which is a failing of many European horological books, instead there is a detailed contents list at the front and at the rear an 'illustrated overview' with a photograph of every clock and the page on which it appears.

The description and illustration of each clock occupies from two to seven pages with an average of about fifteen to fifty-five colour illustrations. The complete clock is shown, various views of the movement, then details of hands, wheels, escapements, levers, detents and decoration. Chris delights in drawing attention to the decorative detailing of ironwork and even shows a hammer head filed to look like a sheep's head — but only when it is removed and you look underneath! It would take up too much of this review to describe all the interesting and unusual movements and mechanisms, but there are Comtoise clocks dating back to about 1735, with examples having quarter strike, sweep seconds (some with both), pin-wheel, cross-beat, and Bethume's escapements, subsidiary dials, moon phase, and alarm. The lantern clocks include a similar range of escapements, glazed side doors, quarter strike, even a six-bell carillon. There is an English lantern clock of gigantic size: the dial is 14in (35.5cm) wide and weights over 4kg larger than most longcase clocks, the bell is 9in (23cm) diameter and weighs 3.4kg, while the movement is correspondingly massive, yet still of only thirty hours duration. One clock has quarter striking and a 'walking soldier' automaton, though unfortunately the dial and figure are missing. There is another that even has sweep seconds and includes a wheel with both external and internal teeth, as well as a lantern clock of month duration.

This book emphasises that there were a wide range of interesting and ingenious clocks made on the Continent and that French and Italian lantern clocks, which continued to be made long after they went out of fashion in England, show much more technical diversity than their English counterparts. For those interested in movements, the technicalities and the craftsmanship of (mainly) weight-driven clocks, this nook is a must-read. No doubt, due to the colour of its cover and the background to the numerous photographs, it will become known as the 'blue book'.

John Robey