

Colchester Clock and Watch Makers 1700-1850

Provincial clockmaking in oldest town in England

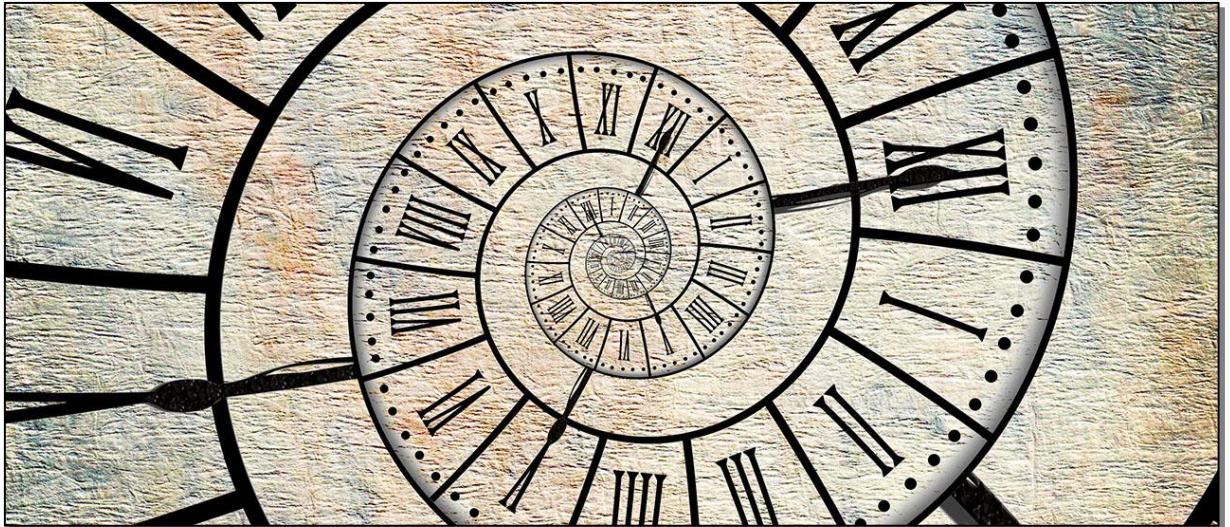
-- Smorthwait, Hedge, Banister --

*Prepared by Robert St-Louis, Member of NAWCC Chapter 111
Presented to Chapter Meeting on Nov. 24, 2019*

*Dedicated to Bernard Mason, collector of
Colchester watches and clocks, and author*



Lantern clock ca. 1710



An old clock or watch is a time machine

- It tells the time, obviously
- It allows us to travel through time to its place of origin, and its makers
- Let us travel to Colchester and visit some of its excellent clockmakers

Overview

Background on English Horology

Colchester: historical, social and horological context

Clock/Watchmaking practices at the time (1700-1850)

Historical connections between these three makers

Some details about their timepieces in my collection

Where to find more information

English Horology - background

Later development in England than continent

Lantern clock is the first “English” domestic clock (made from late 1500’s to around 1750)

Clockmakers’ Company founded London 1631

1657: introduction of pendulum for clocks

1675: introduction of balance spring for watches

1685: revocation of Edict of Nantes – influx of Huguenot (Protestant) watch and clockmakers

1660-1750: English supremacy (East, Tompion, Knibb, Fromanteel, Quare, Graham, etc.)

Long-case clocks originate around 1660

London attracted the greatest names in the kingdom and set the trends

Provincial clock and watchmaking followed the lead from London, with some delay

Trends out of fashion in London persisted in the provinces for some time longer (e.g. lantern)

Very capable horologists in the provinces though not as well known as those of London

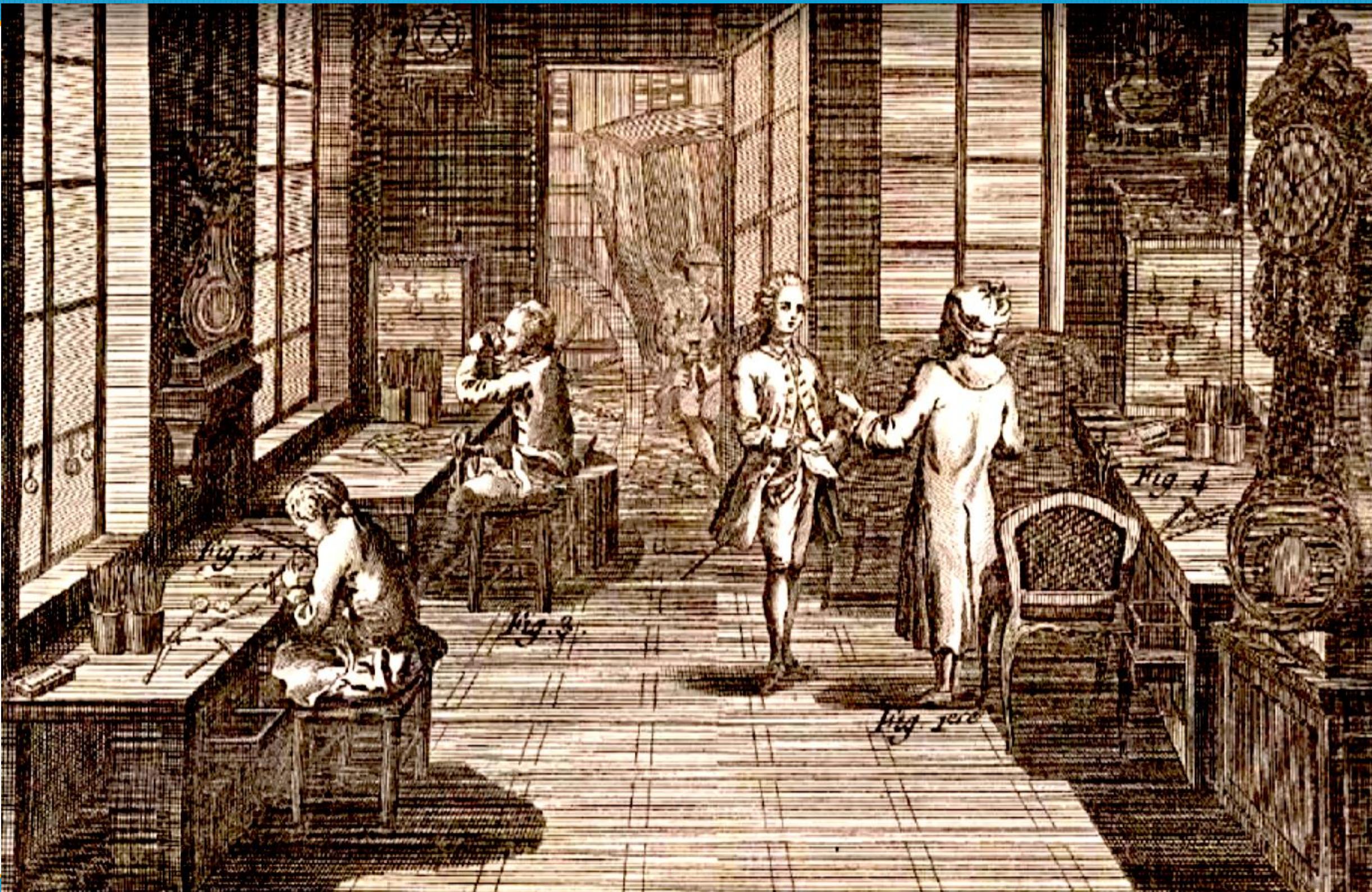
Apprenticeship was just as demanding (7-8 yrs)

Flow of parts, supplies, and movements to and from London and provinces

Watch and clockmaking centers in Birmingham and Lancashire supplied all of England

England exported many timepieces worldwide

Provincial makers mostly supplied nearby communities (towns and countryside)



Colchester in Essex County



- Around 50 miles from London, an hour by train (8-12 hours by horse & carriage)
- Oldest recorded town in Great Britain (500-100 BC)
- Major Roman occupation town 100-400 AD
- Prosperous, growing medieval town
- On main route from London to the continent via Harwich and the “hook of Holland”
- Bay and Say trade (woolen fabrics) main source of wealth during 18th century
- Affected by economic downturn in early 19th century (Napoleonic Wars, agriculture depression)



Colchester in 1805



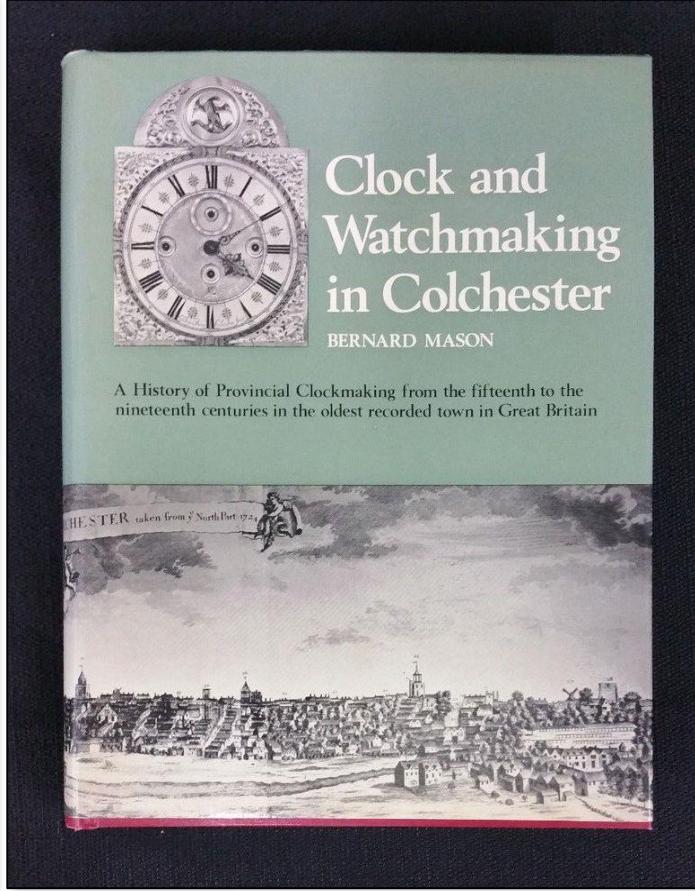
Ruined nave of St-Botolph's Priory Church

Year	Population
1400	9,000
1800	25,000
1850	40,000
1900	60,000
Today	200,000



Colchester Castle built in 1100

Robert St-Louis 2019



Bernard Mason OBE (1895 – 1981)

- Prominent Colchester business man and philanthropist
- Started acquiring and collecting Colchester clocks (and watches) in 1927
- Owned 216 of 375 known examples
- Collection stored in his house Tymperleys

- He and his wife spent 18 years researching and documenting material for 1969 book
- Tymperleys donated to city as a museum after his and his wife's death
- Several tall clocks suffered water damage
- Tymperleys turned into tea room
- Part of collection now in Colchester Museum

Clock-Watch Making in Colchester

Bernard Mason in his book* identifies 4 phases:

The Rise (1460-1699)

The Zenith (1700-1750)

The Decline (1751-1799)

The Extinction (1800-1850)

Initial focus on clockmaking, then both clocks and watches, and finally predominantly watches

Natural place for early clockwork (economic importance, ecclesiastical centre)

Horological industry shortly followed London and flourished during 17th and 18th centuries

Dutch Fromanteel family settled there in 1588

By 1712 no less than 8 makers in Colchester

Clock movements largely made locally

Clockmaking Evolution

Brass lantern clocks (1645-1750)

Hooded wall-bracket clocks (1730-1745)

30 hour then 8 day long-case clocks(1660-)

Mantel or table clocks (1750-)

Watchmaking seem to originate around 1700

Traditional verge-fusée design throughout 1700's

English lever replaces verge near mid 1800's

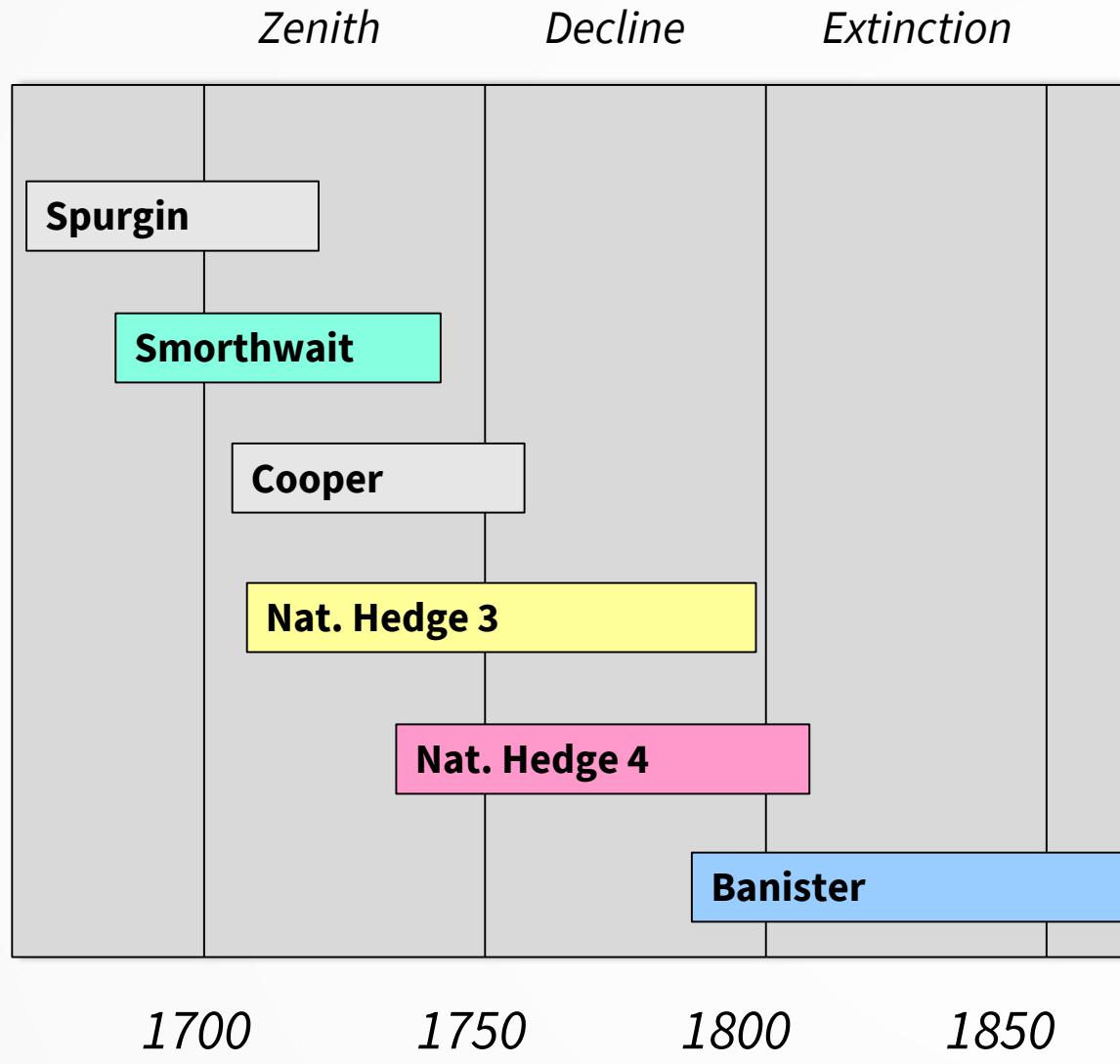
Some components imported, others made locally

Many turret clocks also made locally

By 1850, local manufacturing could no longer compete with London, Birmingham, Lancashire, and disappeared

* Bernard Mason: *Clock and Watchmaking in Colchester*, 1969

Story of a few Colchester makers



Jeremy Spurgin (1666-1699)

Jane Spurgin – widow (1669-¹⁷⁰⁶-1739)

John Smorthwait (1675-1739)

William Cooper (1706-1757)

- Apprentice to Smorthwait

Nathaniel Hedge 3 (1710-¹⁷⁷²-1795)

- Apprentice to Smorthwait

- Partner to Cooper

Nathaniel Hedge 4 (1735-¹⁸¹⁸-1821)

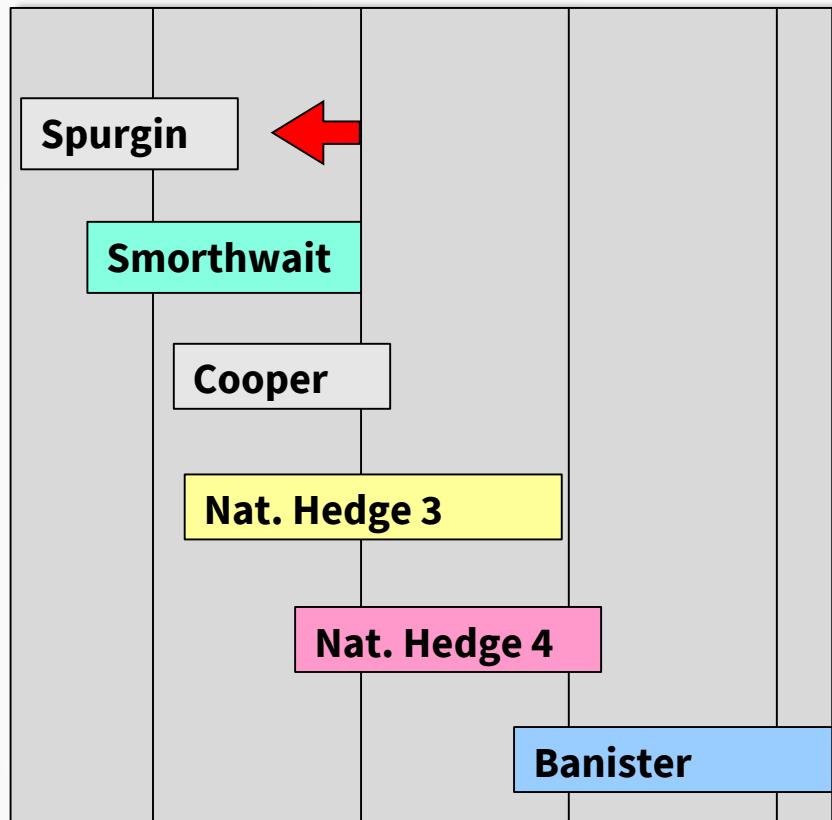
- Son and apprentice to Hedge 3

Joseph Banister (1778-¹⁸⁵³-1875)

- Partner and successor to Hedge 4

Jeremy Spurgin

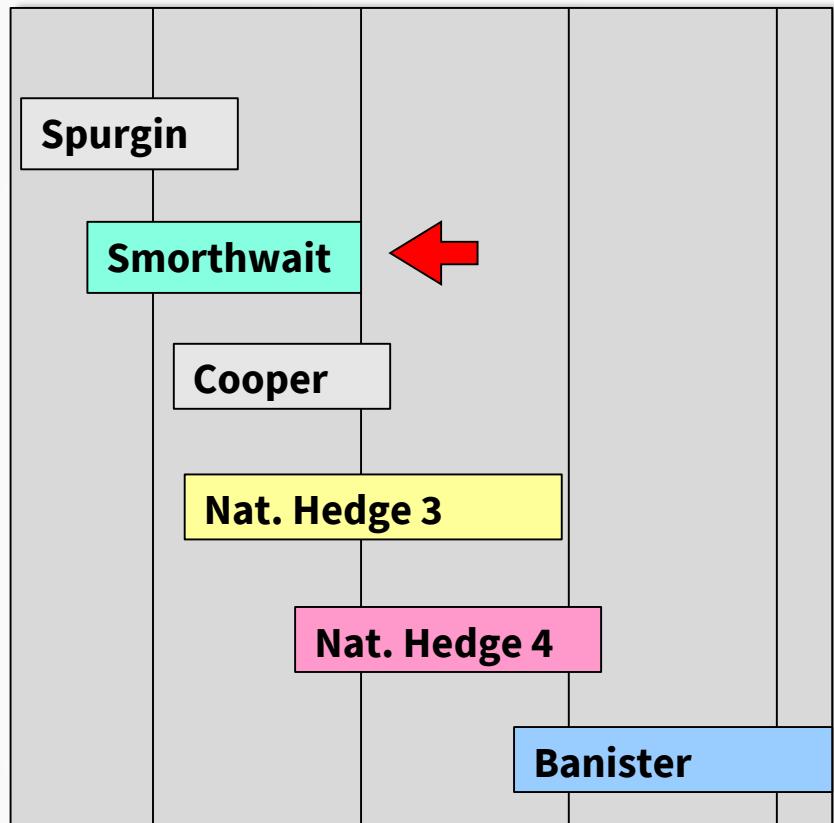
(1666 - 1699)



- Born a Quaker, married Jane Davill in 1690
- Started his business in 1693
- Died suddenly (no will) in 1699
- Left a widow with four daughters aged 1 to 8 years old
- Jane continued to run the business for a few years (with the help of a journeyman)
- Finally sold “stock-in trade, tools and goodwill” to John Smorthwait, around 1708; he also took over the premises
- Jane Spurgin died in 1739

John Smorthwait(e)

(1675 - 1739)

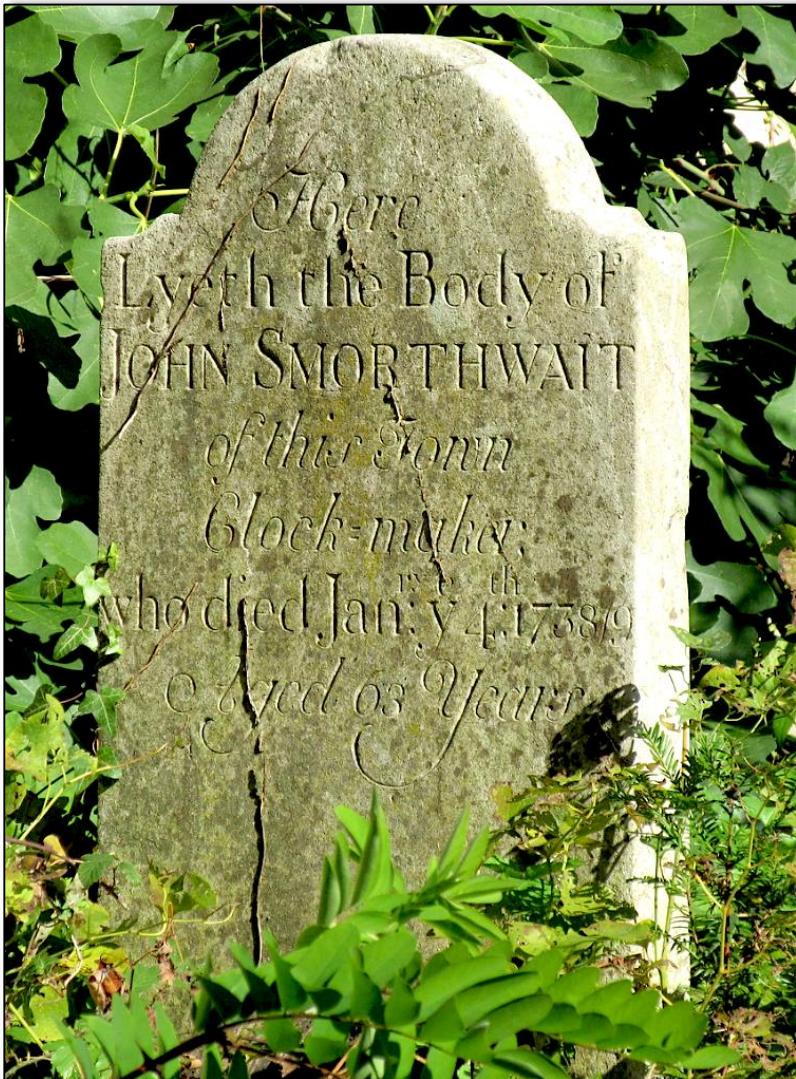


*Life story from Mason book, and
articles by Brian Loomes*

- Born in Westmorland in 1675, was a prolific Colchester maker
 - High standard of workmanship, excellent reputation
 - Mason knew of 80 clocks and owned 37
- Loomes found fascinating facts that Mason did not know
 - His father William and an uncle became burglars, highwaymen, thieves, coin clippers, counterfeiters
 - They were hanged in 1684, when Smorthwait was only 8
 - John was sent away later to learn clock-making
 - He married in 1699, had 4 children (Sarah born 1704)
 - His wife and three children died in 1708-9 (plague?)
 - Moved to Colchester with young Sarah around 1708
- Likely wanted to get away from his sordid childhood, loss of family, and set down new roots in Colchester
- 1708: Buys stock, tools and business from Spurgin's widow
- 1722: at 47, he married Susan Flanner, 42 year old widow
- After being almost a recluse for 20 years, he became very active and respected in his parish and in town administration
- 1720-7: Apprenticeship of William Cooper for £20

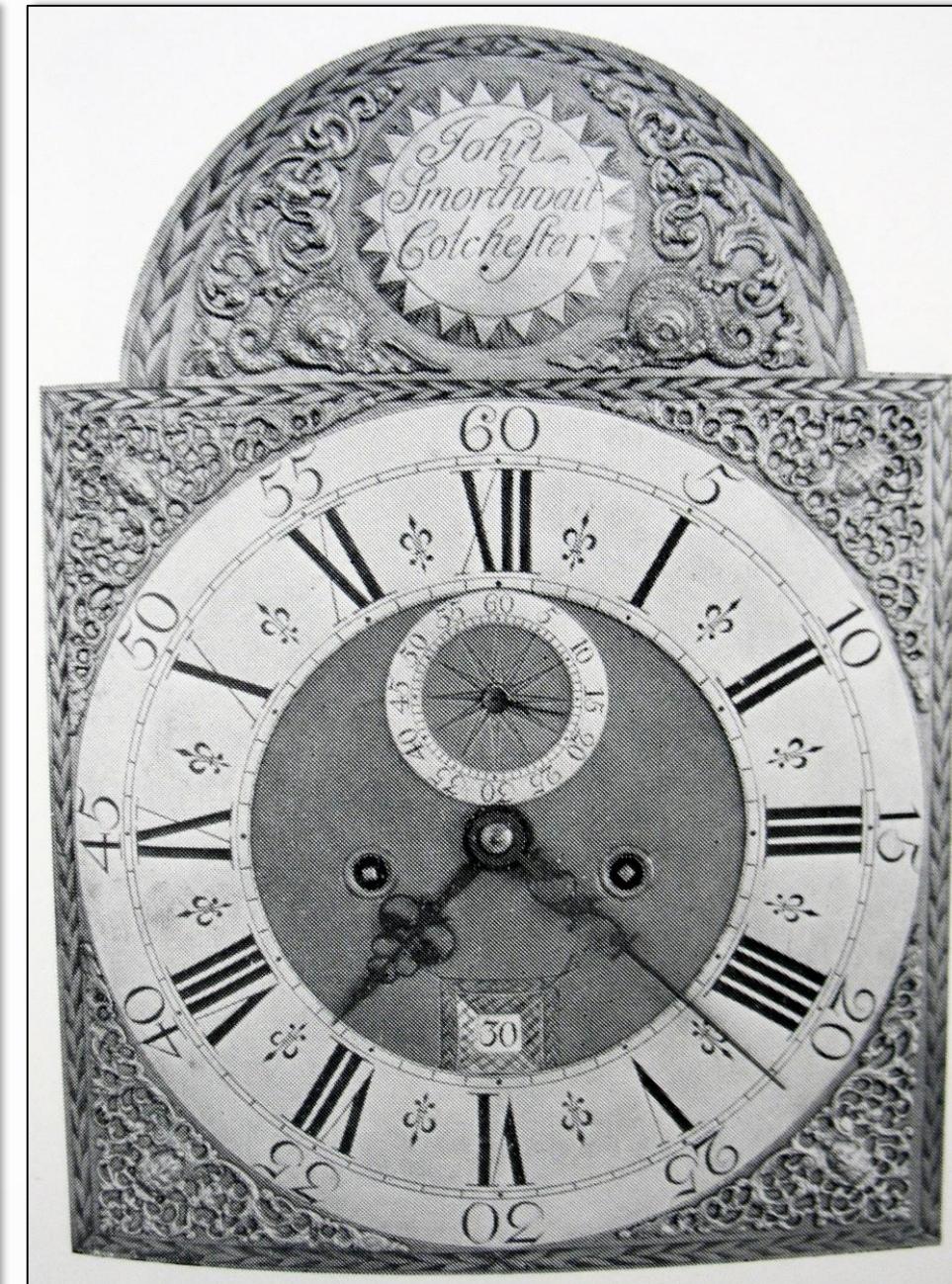
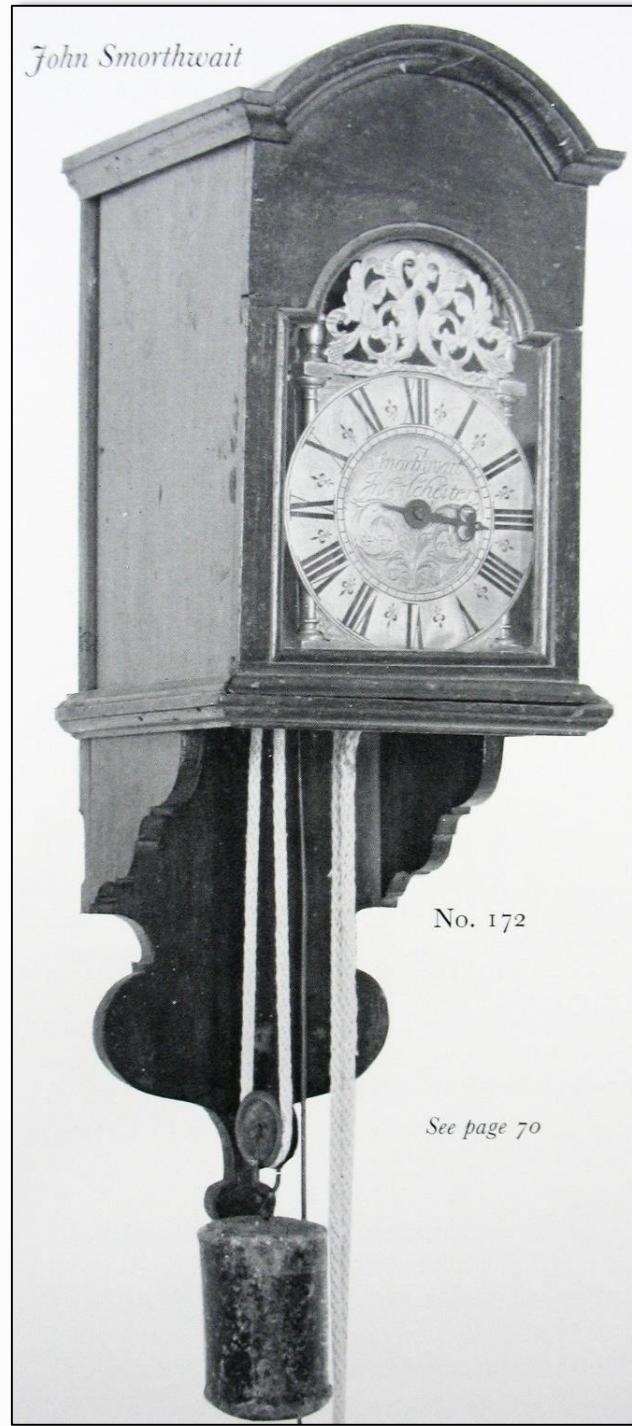
John Smorthwait(e)

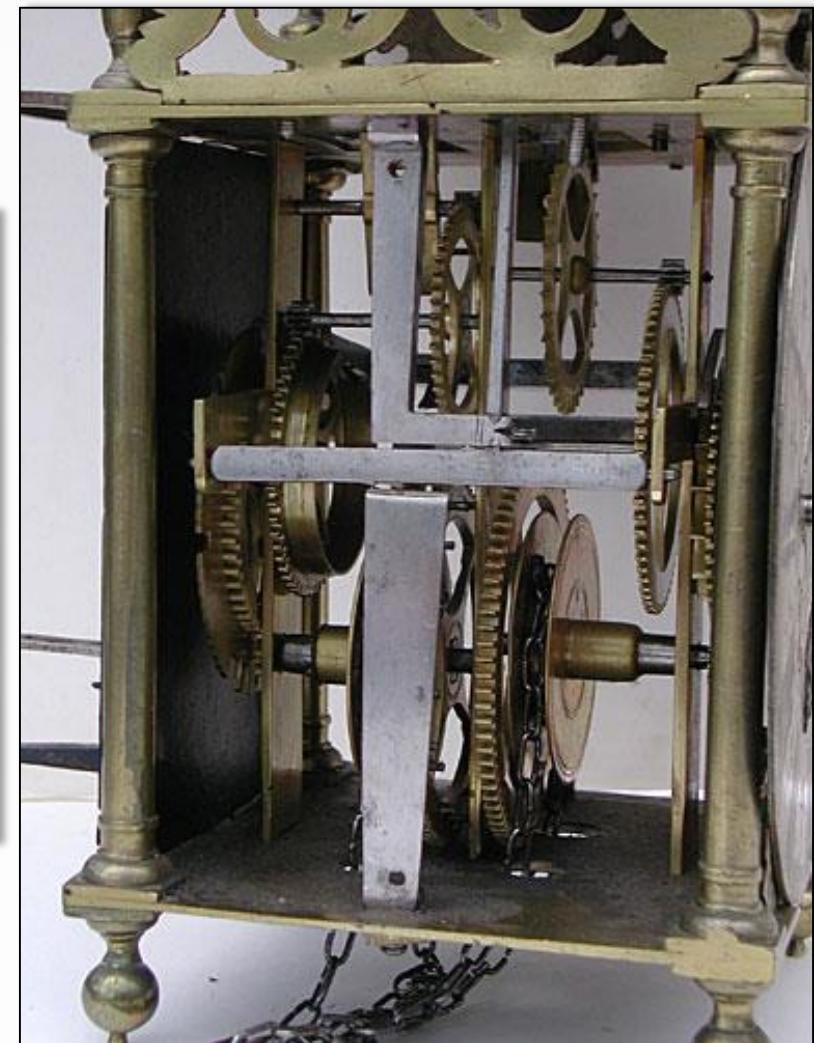
(1675 - 1739)



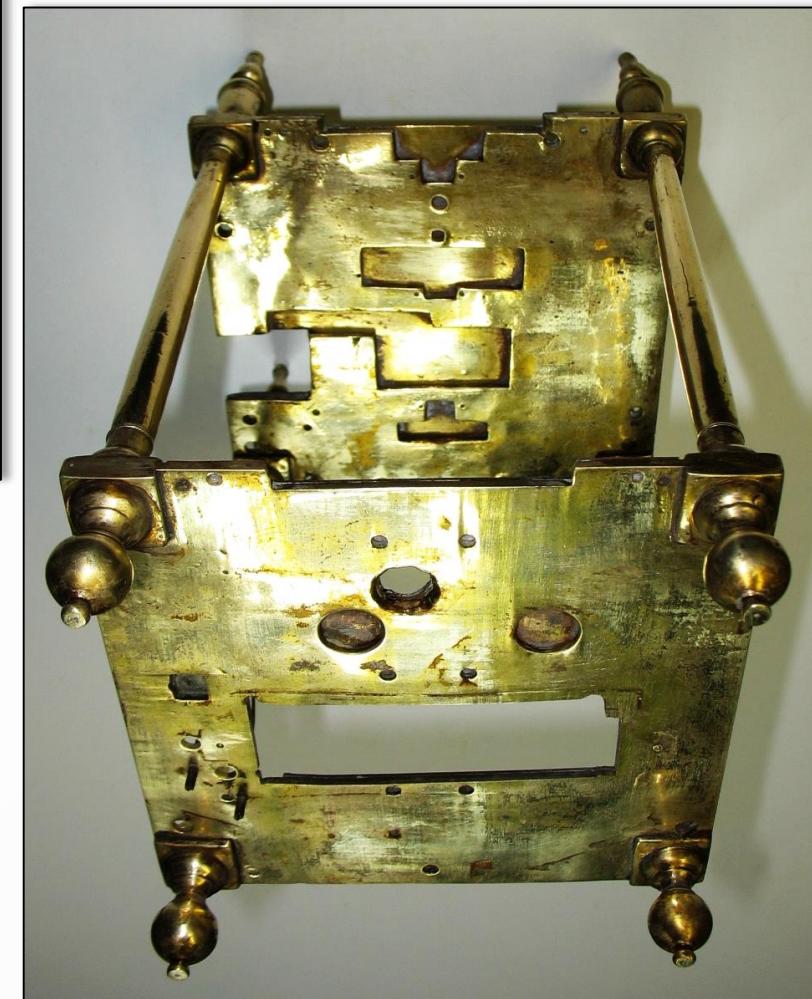
Grave of John Smorthwait

- 1728: Start of apprenticeship of Nathaniel Hedge 3 for £10
- 1728: Apprenticeship of Daniel Powlin for £31
- 1733: Smorthwait proudly elected Justice of the Peace
- Oct 1733: Hedge secretly marries Sarah near Colchester
- Jan 1734: Hedge (24) and Sarah (30) bring forth a child
- Smorthwait is disgraced: a strict churchman, he turns them out of his house, and disowns his only daughter
- 1736: In his will, no mention of daughter or grandson
- 1739: Smorthwait dies, aged 63
- Buried in All Saints Churchyard, “clockmaker” on headstone
- Most of his estate, including stock of goods, left to his wife
- Six weeks later, Hedge successfully negotiated with widow to acquire stock-in-trade, tools and goodwill
- Hedge sets himself up to trade under his own name, and takes on Smorthwait’s last apprentice, Samuel Downum





Robert St-Louis 2019



Robert St-Louis 2019

“We clock enthusiasts tend to become bogged down in the details of the clocks, their style, age, fine engraving, unusual escapements. We tend to forget that the maker was not a clock-making machine, but a real person often with far more of a burden in the form of the stresses and worries of life than we experience ourselves.”

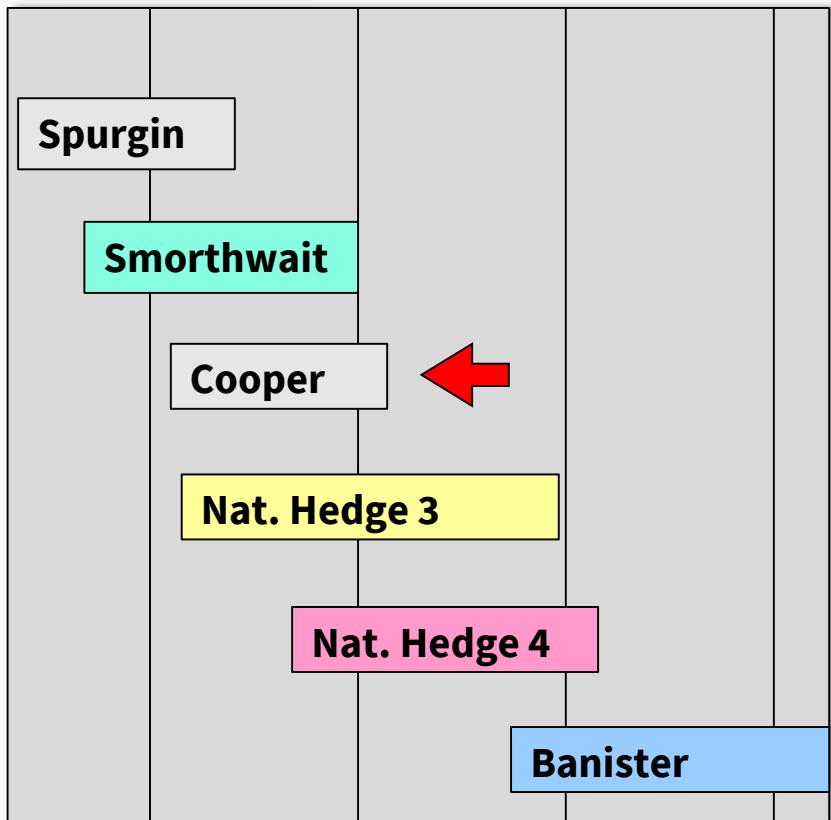
– Brian Loomes, writing about John Smorthwait

All the clockmakers described in this presentation shared similar traits and social issues:

- Deeply religious, hard-working, socially engaged men striving for quality in their work
- Extremely well-trained through one of the most demanding apprenticeships in the land
- Living in often difficult times, during great changes and traumas in English society
 - The rich, a tiny minority, lived luxuriously in large country houses or elegant mansions
 - Life was difficult for poor people, no government assistance, high child mortality
- Craftsmen and tradesmen found themselves better off than poor, but never far from it
- Provincial clockmakers in places like Colchester probably fared better than some of their London brethren, for a while anyway
- They worked as long as they could, sometimes to an advanced age, and only some would benefit from a comfortable retirement.
- They were esteemed citizens of their towns, respected by customers and neighbours.

William Cooper

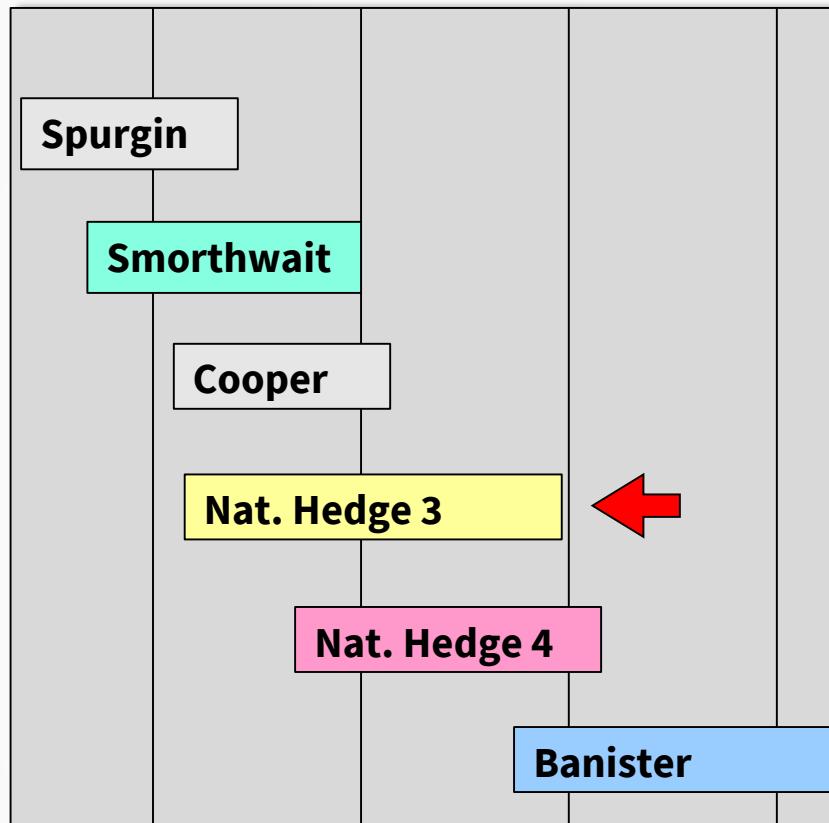
(1706 - 1757)



- Born in 1706 in Suffolk
- 1720-7: Apprenticed to John Smorthwait
- 1728: Started his own business in the same parish
- 1729: Married - of 7 children, 5 die before age of five
- 1733: Helped Nathaniel Hedge by taking him on as a partner
- 1733-9: Traded as “Cooper and Hedge”
- 1736: Confirmed Smorthwait’s signature in his will
- 1739: Hedge left when he acquired Smorthwait’s business
- Cooper made little impact on clockmaking in Colchester
- 1757: Died a poor indebted man

Nathaniel Hedge 3

(1710-1772-1795)



- 5 generations of Hedges moderately prosperous weavers
- Nathaniel Hedge 2 earned a precarious livelihood
- Nathaniel 3 born in 1710 in Colchester
- At 18, it was decided he should seek a new trade
- Apprenticed to John Smorthwait for £10, a reduced sum
- 5 years into it, fondness for Sarah, who became pregnant
- Expulsed with Sarah and child from master's household/will
- Helped by Cooper who took him on as partner
- Bought Smorthwait's business from his widow, soon after he died – had obvious confidence in his abilities and courage
- During first 12 years of marriage he and Sarah had 8 children
 - Both daughters and 3 sons died in infancy
 - Three sons survived and followed in the business
(Nathaniel 4, John, Thomas)
- Nathaniel was a good churchman
- Proved to be a keen business man and a fine craftsman

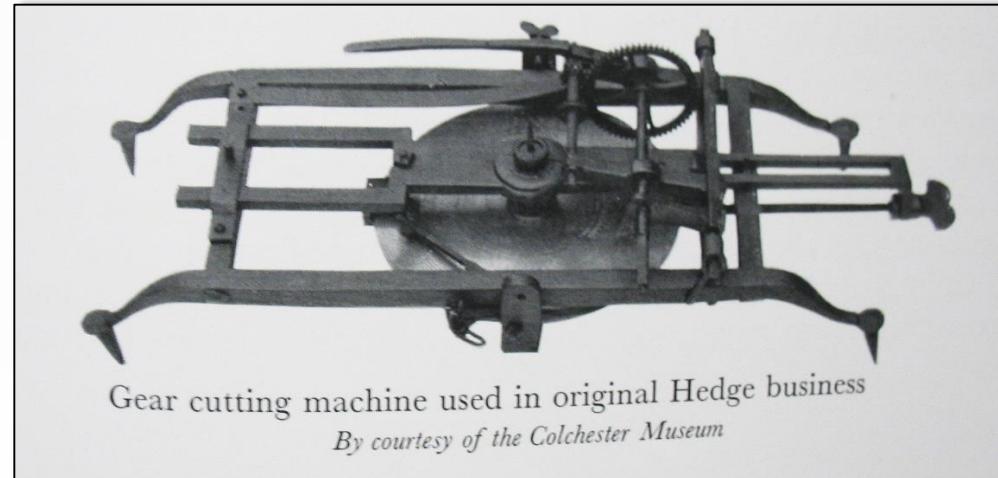
Nathaniel Hedge 3

(1710-1772-1795)



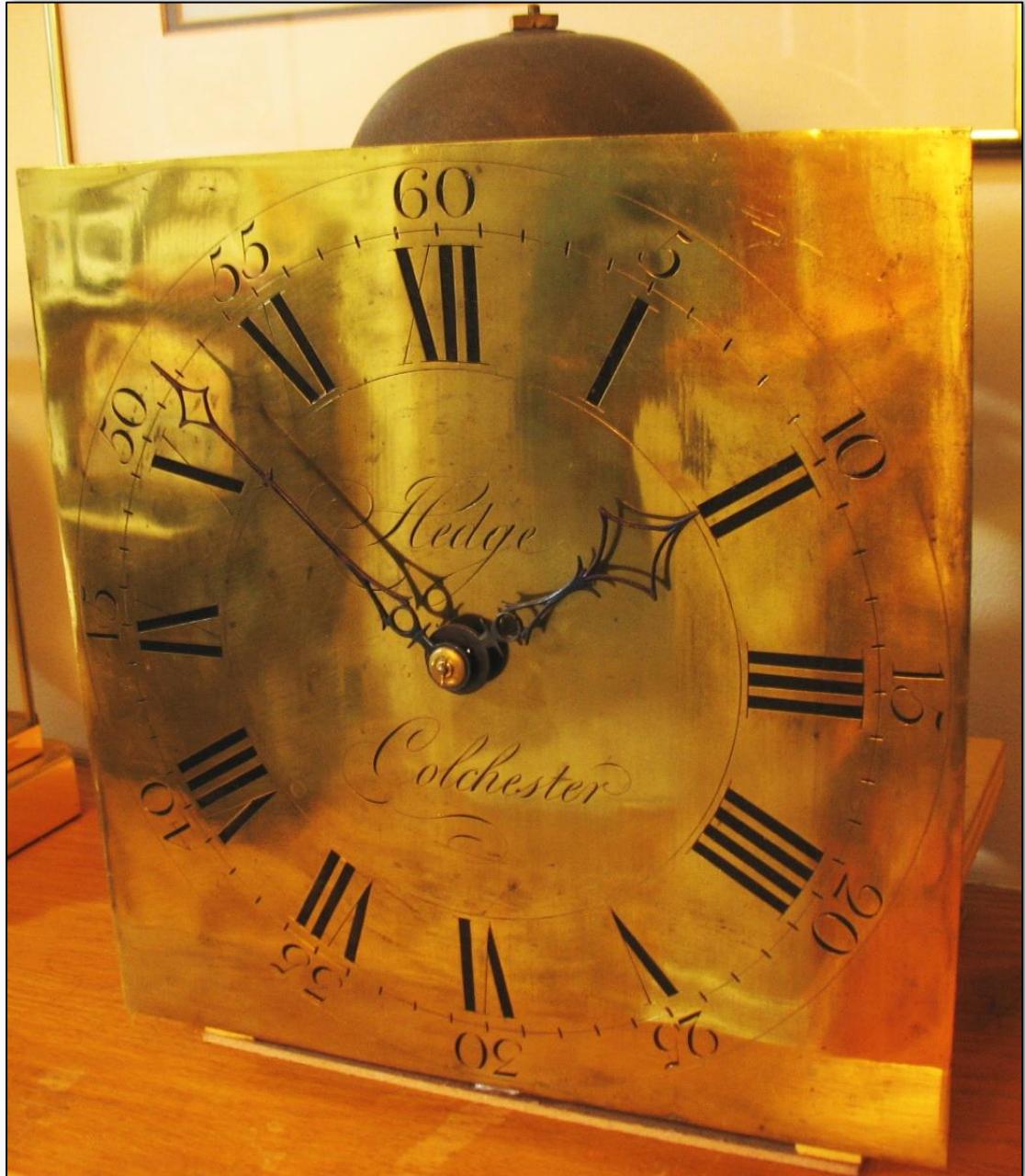
Grave of Sarah Hedge, and
Nathaniel Hedge 3

- Once his business well established with his sons, Nathaniel devoted more time to the civic life of the town
- Hedge's business operated as a small, well-equipped factory
- Produced high-grade 8 day long-case and other clocks and watches, notably more affordable 30 hour long-case clocks
 - Movements were always high quality, and produced in house at 97 High Street
- Nathaniel 4 started training in 1749, and launched into his own business in 1765
- Nathaniel 3 signed "Natl Hedge", then "Hedge" (post 1765)
- Nathaniel 4 signed "Nathaniel" (or "Nath") Hedge
- Sarah died in 1770 (62) - Nathaniel remarried to a widow two years later, retired and left the business to his two sons
- Nathaniel 3 died in 1795 (85) and was reunited with Sarah in her grave



Gear cutting machine used in original Hedge business
By courtesy of the Colchester Museum



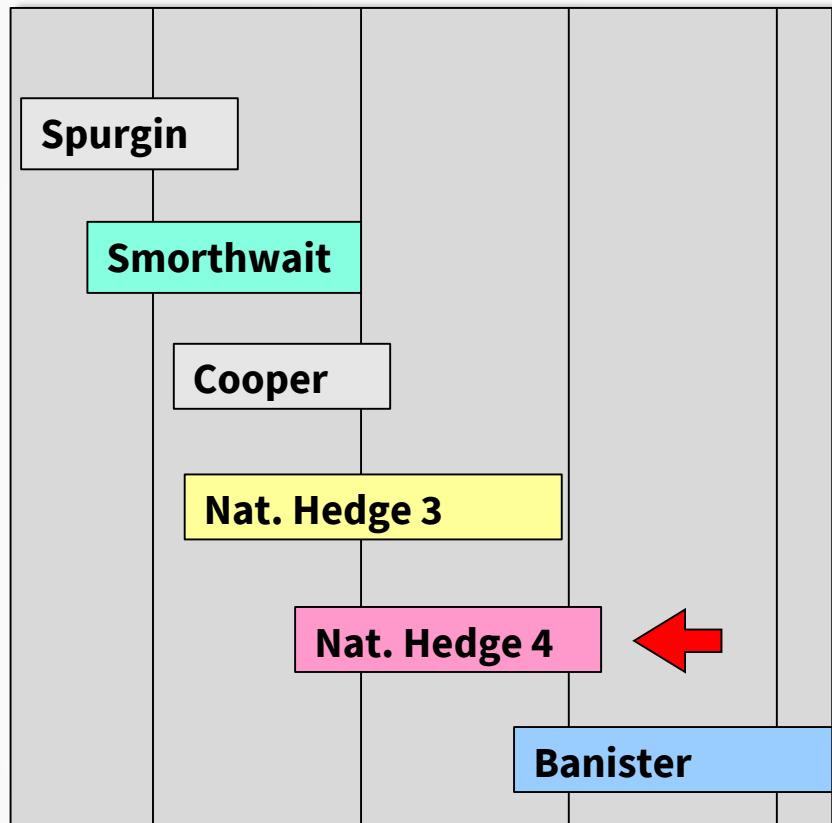


Nathaniel Hedge 30 hour Tall case clock movement 11" brass dial circa 1765-70

Robert St-Louis 2019

Nathaniel Hedge 4

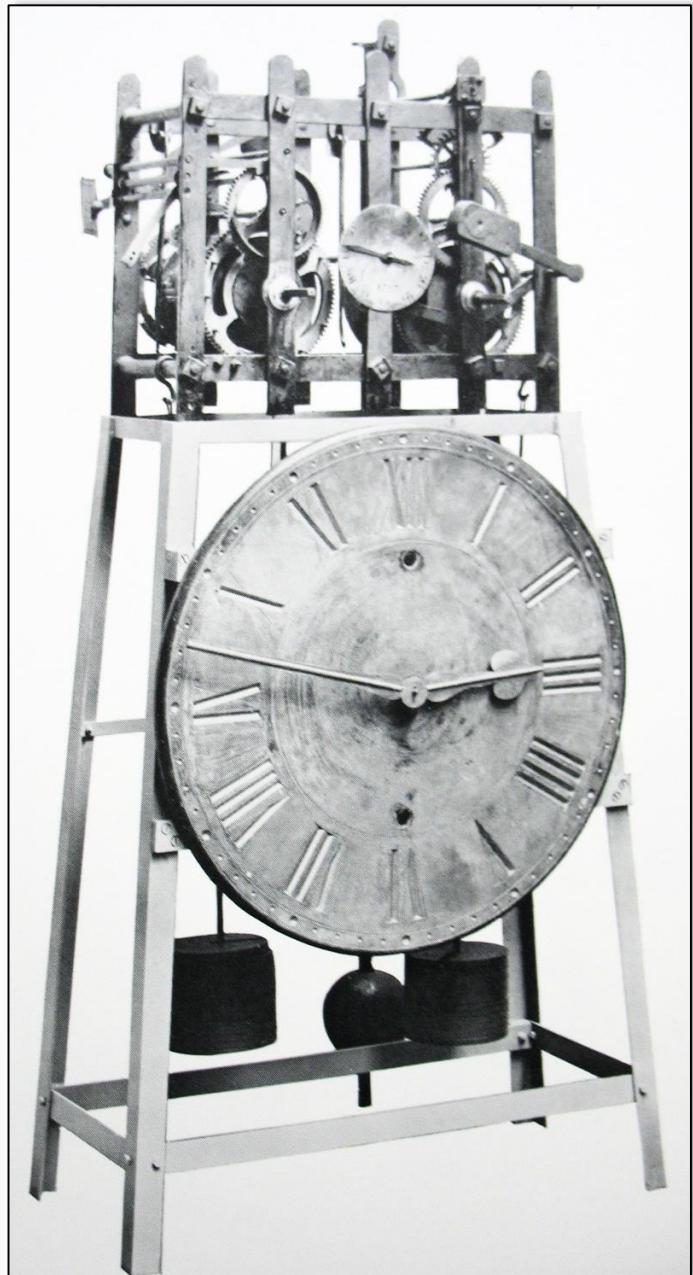
(1735-1818-1821)



- Born in 1735 in Colchester
 - Learned family trade from his father and joins business
 - Married Martha Gibson, an established milliner (hat maker), in 1765 and starts his own business
- Ipswich Journal: Nathaniel Hedge Junior, watchmaker and goldsmith – takes this method of acquainting his Friends that he has taken a shop near the Obelisk in Colchester and sells all sorts of Watches and Clocks, Plate, Plain Gold Funeral Rings, Jewellery, Jappan'd and Plated Goods, etc.*
- Fine craftsman and dedicated watch and clock maker
 - He and Martha had 7 sons and one daughter
 - Nathaniel loses all seven sons at relatively early ages, the last one 10 years before him – sorrow born by Christian fortitude
 - Like his father, he had a strong business acumen and sense of civic responsibility and service
 - A sincere churchman, he was elected churchwarden, a role he held for 32 years, until he was 76

Nathaniel Hedge 4

(1735-1818-1821)



- Completed turret clocks for the community
- The Hedge's (and later, Banister) could produce work at all levels (turret, domestic clocks, watches)
- Signed his works "Nathaniel (or Nath.) Hedge"
- His business prospered as he moved into larger premises
- The finest and most important watchmaker in Colchester
- Commenced numbering his watches at 2,000
- His son Charles became goldsmith and silversmith, so Nathaniel focused on clock and watchmaking
- 1803: hired young Joseph Banister as journeyman
- 1807: partnership between Hedge (72) and Banister (29)
- 1808: son Charles died and Nathaniel took on his business to help his son's family
- 1813: Nathaniel sold his part of the business to Banister
- 1818: Finally able to retire
- 1821: Nathaniel Hedge died, aged 86.



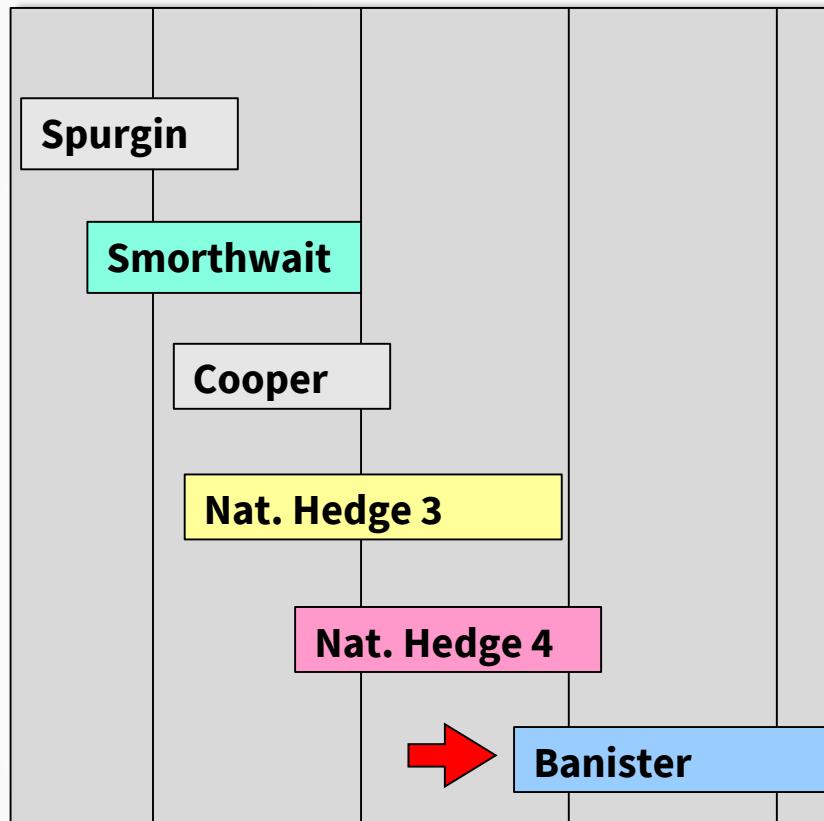
Hedge & Banister COLCHESTER 6823 Circa 1810
Fine verge-fusee watch; Diamond end-stone on
balance cock; "Tompion" style regulator

Hedge Junior(4)
EIGHT-DAY MANTEL CLOCK c. 1765
Ebonized case



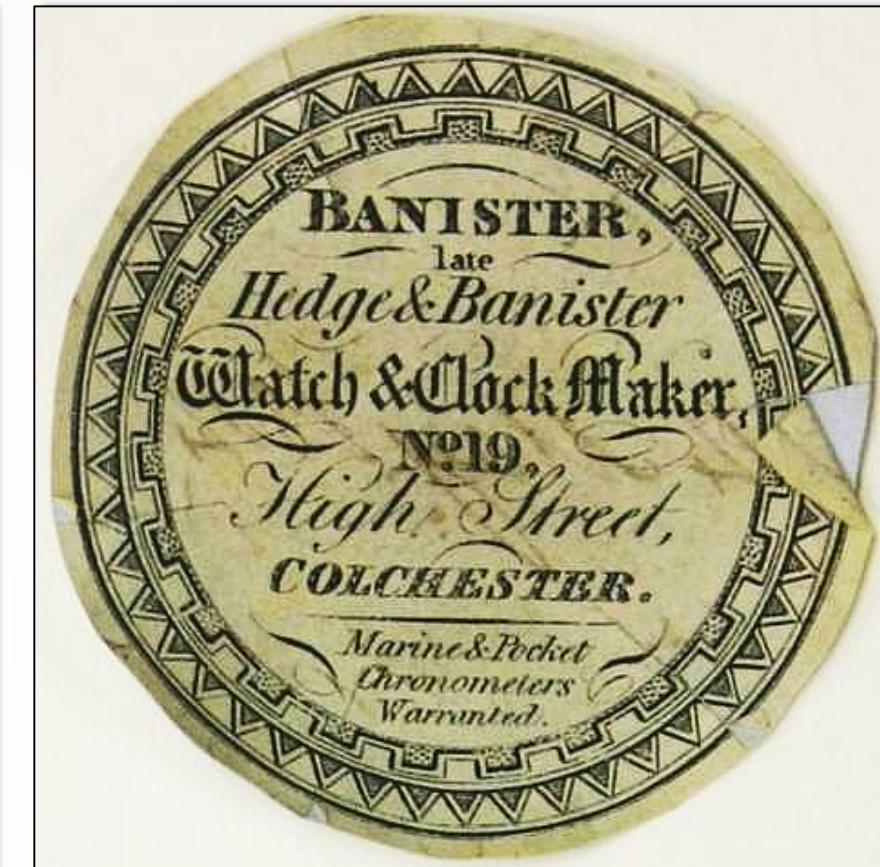
Joseph Banister

(1778-1853-1875)



*Mason obtained family documents
from two grandchildren*

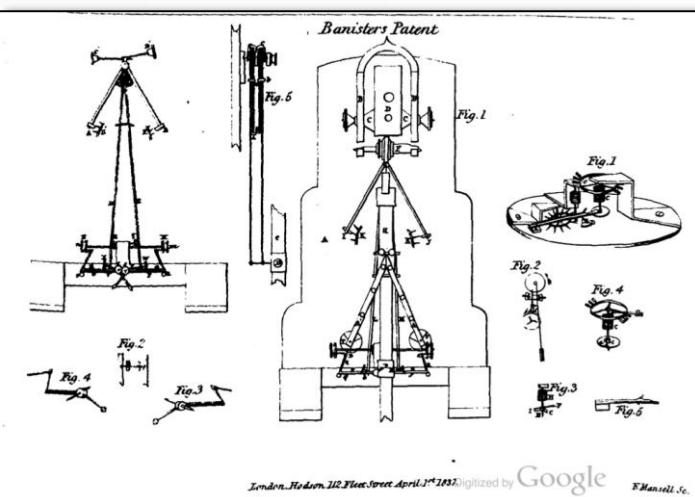
JOSEPH BANISTER – Oil painting
c. 1800



- Born in 1778 in Lichfield (163 miles from Colchester)
- Possibly trained in Birmingham or Coventry
- 1803: Hired as journeyman by Nathaniel Hedge 4
- 1807: Partnership between Hedge (72) and Banister (29)

Joseph Banister

(1778-1853-1875)



- 1809: Married Anna Maria Snell of Colchester (14 children)
- 1813: Took over the business from Hedge
- 1818: Bought Hedge's jewelry business on his retirement

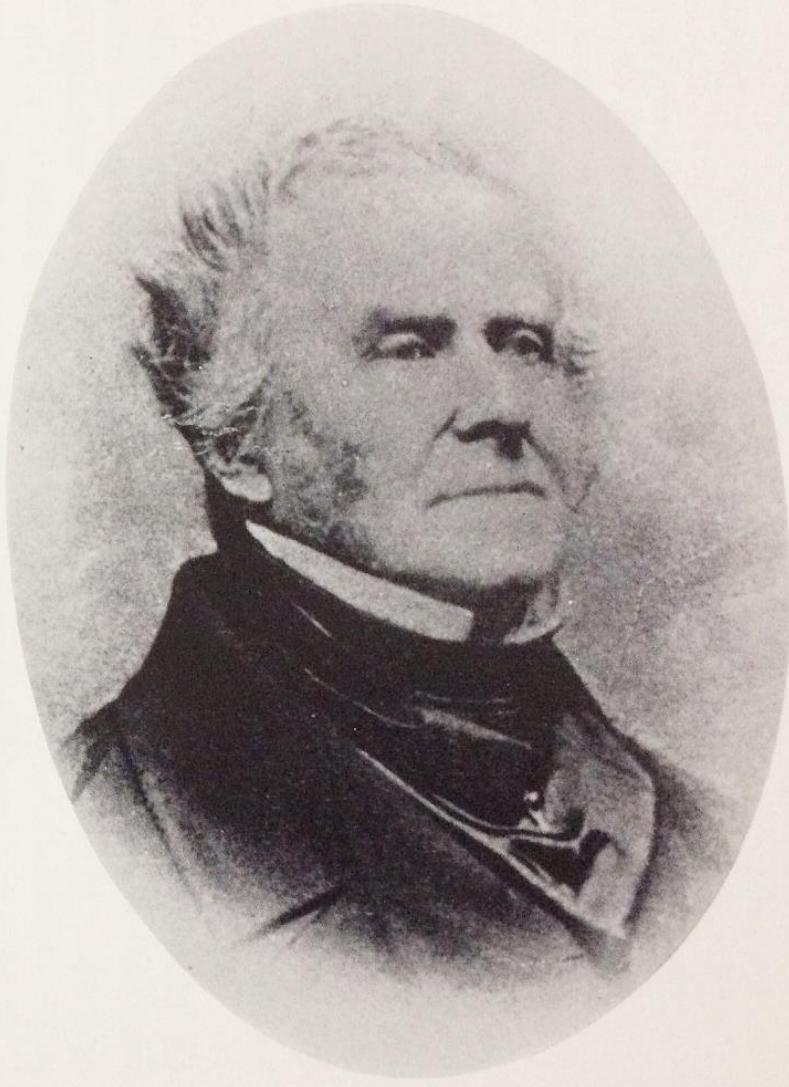
Colchester Gazette, 1821: ... [Banister's] watches in particular are of his own manufacture, an advantage which few, if any other Person between London and Yarmouth possesses, and are besides warranted not to be surpassed by any Manufacturer in the Kingdom, in Price and Quality.

- Built a number of dead beat regulators for other shops
- Pallets and escape wheel jeweled, escape behind backplate
- 1836: developed an improved dead beat escapement, but the cost of a Letters Patent was £160, difficult for him to raise
 - Friends and neighbours raised the money, attesting to his standing
 - Banister was surprised and humbled by the generosity bestowed
- Demonstrated it at a gathering of scientific men at a soirée of HRH the Duke of Sussex at Kensington Palace.
- Banister's new escapement was reviewed very favourably by many renowned chronometer makers (Vulliamy, Dent, etc.)

Joseph Banister

(1778-1853-1875)

JOSEPH BANISTER – Photograph
c. 1870



- Only a few regulator clocks seem to have been made by Banister with the escapement
 - Likely too costly for broad use in clockmaking
 - One was commissioned by Duke of Sussex before he died
- Although an outstanding clock maker, he shifted his focus to quality watches (and chronometers) later in life
- During 54 years in Colchester, was very active in town affairs
- Story of the stopping long-case clock
- 1853: in his 75th year, Banister announced his retirement and advertised the sale of his stock at “very Reduced Prices”
- He was essentially the last in a long line of fine clock and watchmakers in Colchester, and possibly the finest
- 1857: moved to London to live with his sons Joseph Snell and Joseph Henry, who sold watches, clocks and chronometers
- Later moved to Eccles, near Manchester, and lived out his remaining years with his daughter
- Death came to him in Nov. 1875, at advanced age of 96



High Street Colchester ca. 1904

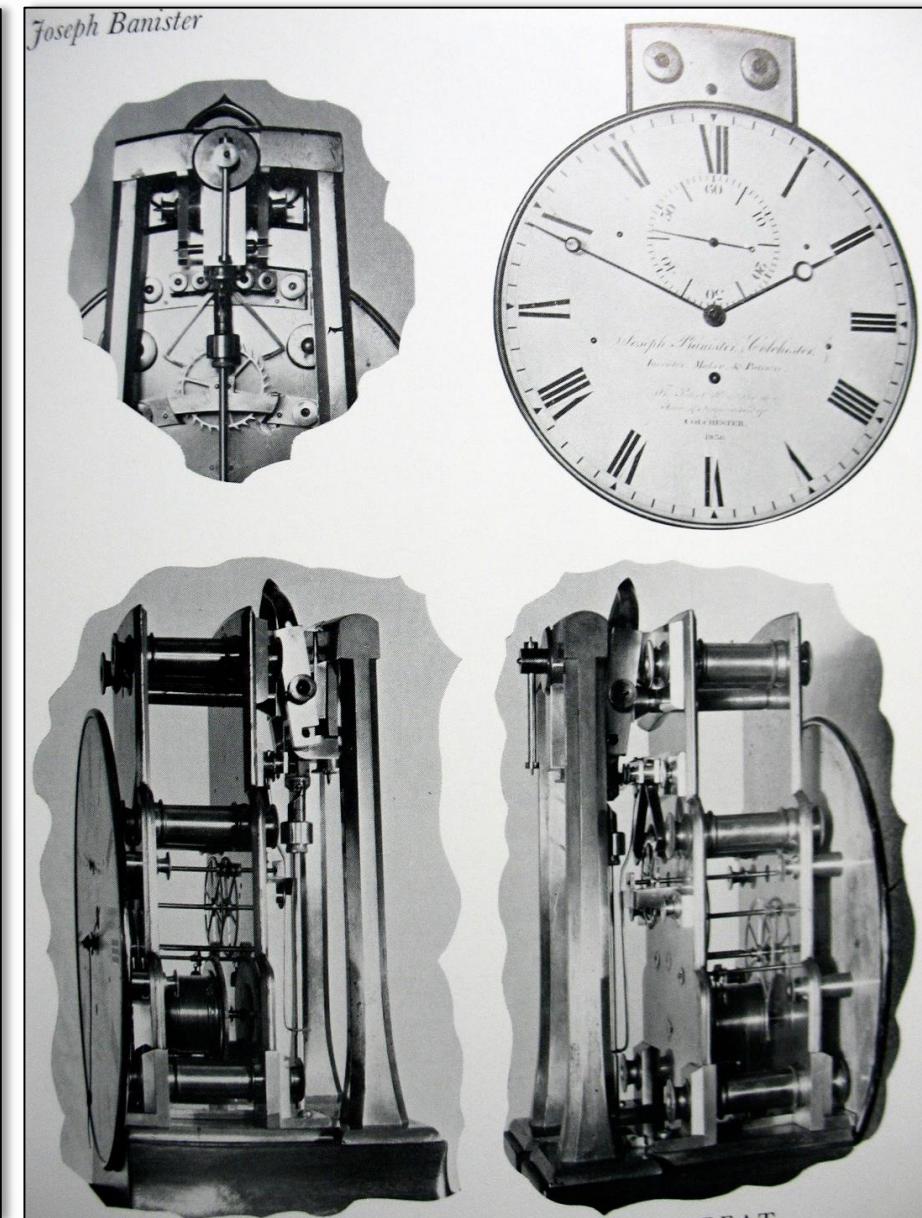
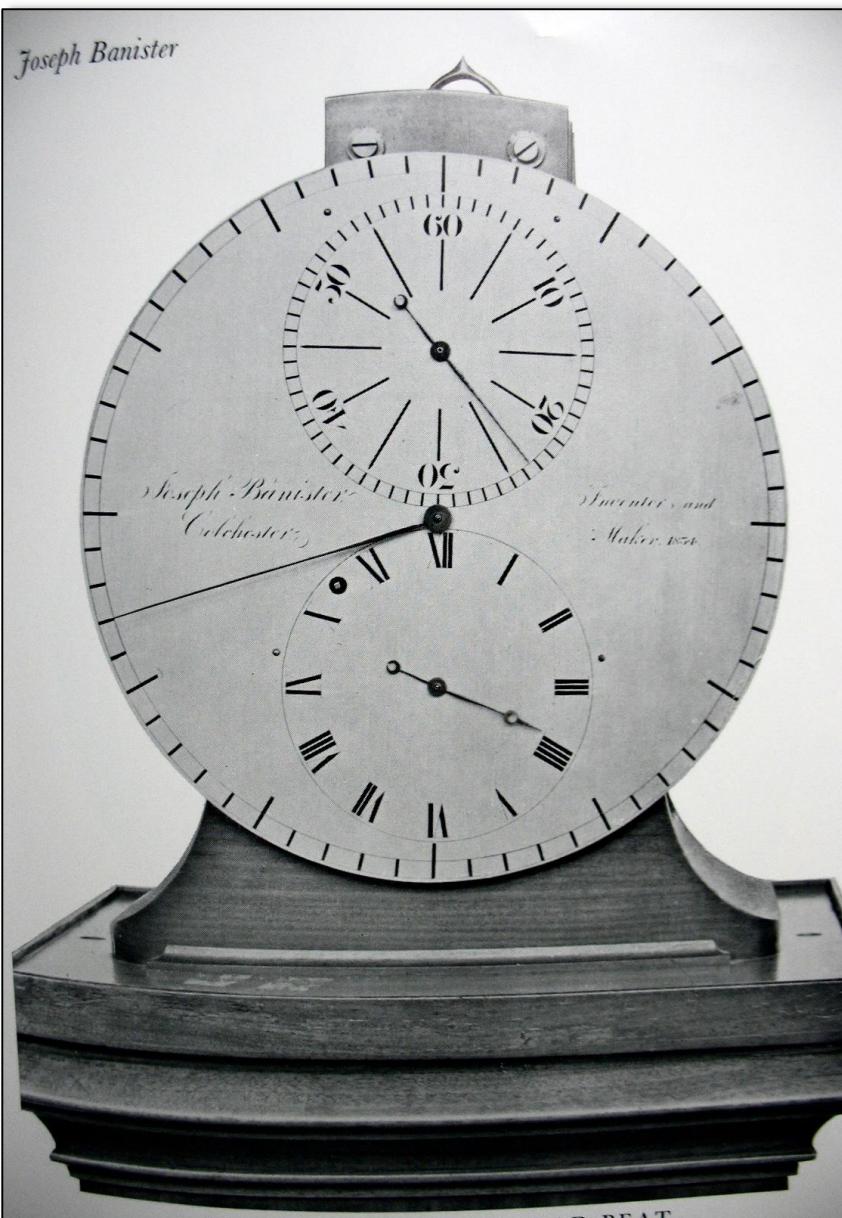
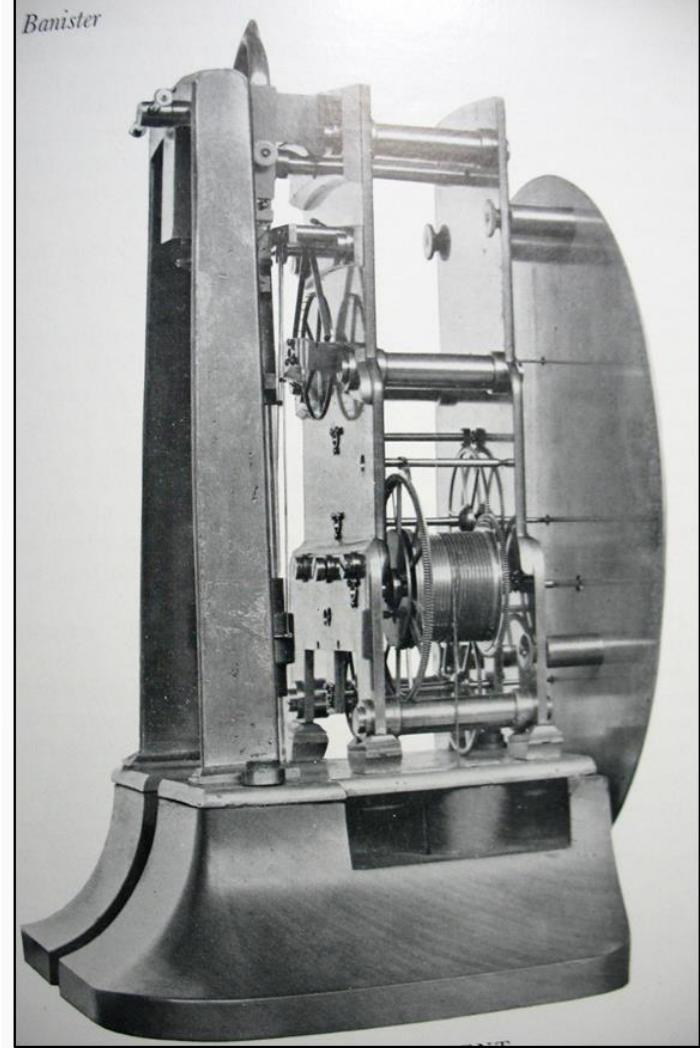
Watch and Clock “Makers” (1848)

- William Argent
- **Joseph Banister** (*)
- James Braddock (*)
- George Samuel Buxton (*)
- Daniel Hill
- Joseph Hopwood
- William Jennings
- Thomas Mason
- George Schwerer
- Nicholas Schwerer
- James Sparke
- Henry Turner (*)
- William Wire

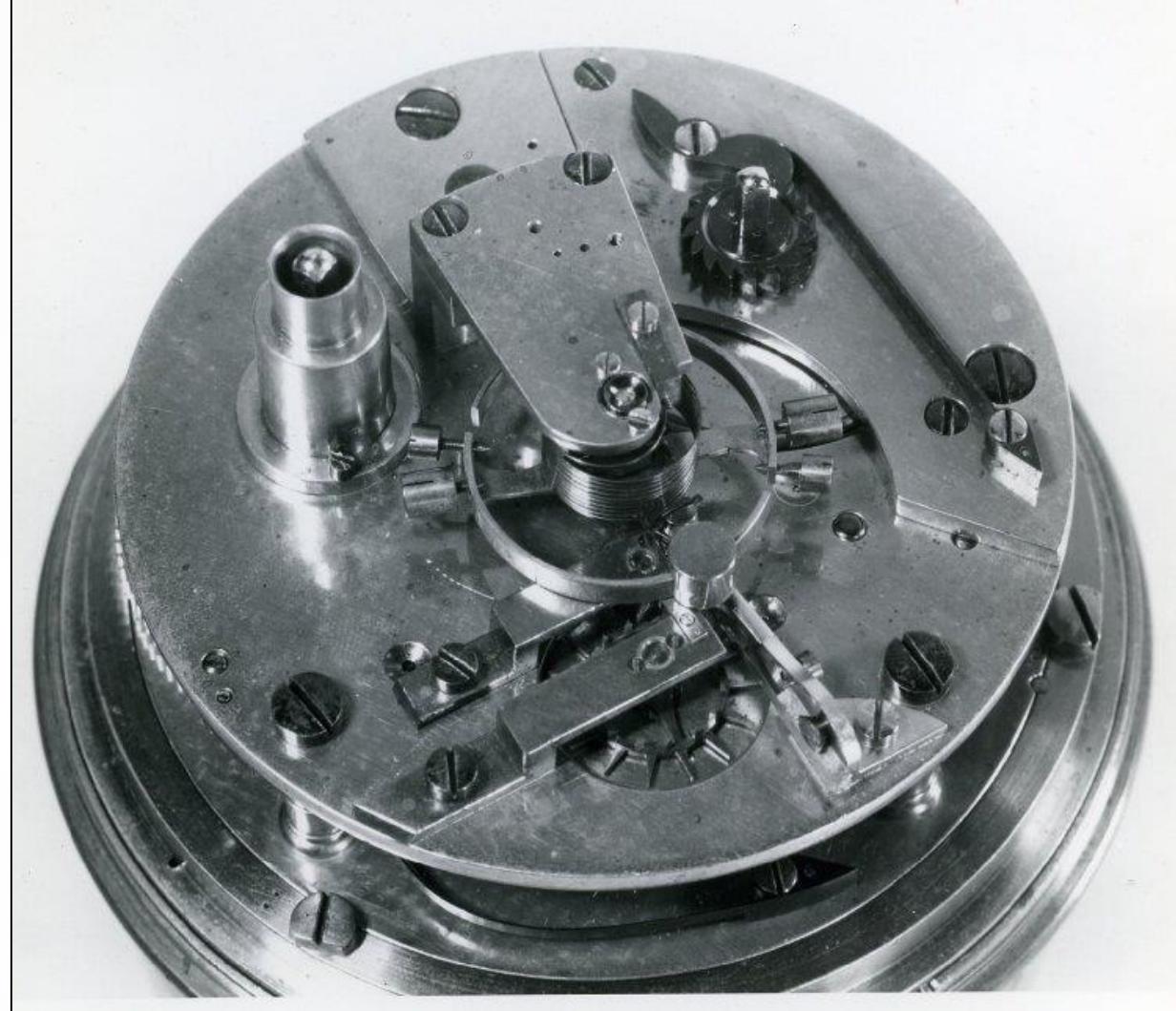
(*) Known actual “makers”, others are likely retailers

From White’s Directory of Essex 1848

Banister



Dead Beat Escapement Regulator Clocks by Joseph Banister Circa 1838



*Constant Force Escapement Marine Chronometer
by Joseph Banister - Circa 1830-40
(in the British Museum)*



Hedge & Banister
COLCHESTER
No. 6823 Circa 1810-12
Fine verge-fusee watch
Diamond end-stone on
balance
“Tompion” style regulator

Banister COLCHESTER
No. 7166 Circa 1820
Fine verge-fusee watch
Early “Bosley” regulator



Banister COLCHESTER
No. 8281 Circa 1840
Fine English Lever watch
Later “Bosley” regulator



Hedge & Banister No. 6823
Circa. 1810-12
Verge-fusee
“Tompion” regulator



Banister No. 7166
Circa. 1820
Verge-fusee
Early “Bosley” regulator



Banister No. 8281
Circa. 1850
English Lever
“Bosley” regulator

Story of a few Colchester makers



John Smorthwait

Nathaniel Hedge (III and IV)

Joseph Banister

*Bernard Mason "Clock and Watchmaking In Colchester"
Country Life Books 1969*

*Thank you for your time
and interest.*