

Walking along the High Street, many have confessed a conditioned reflex - a compulsion to look up at the Church Clock. Time may not be of the essence; there may be no appointment to keep; and there is nothing in the oven. But look up they must.

For many weeks now there has been nothing there - a clock without a face - just canvas and scaffolding. But now it is back! All's right with, if not the world, the Town Centre.

So sorely missed, it encourages a look back, through the passages of time, to know whether earlier generations have been so conditioned and so sorely deprived.

The first mention of a clock was before Robert Smyth had an idea for a free grammar school. It was in a bond, entered into for twenty years on 14 April 1602 and recorded in full in J E Stocks' *Parish Records* between Geoffrey Palmer, mercer (i.e. dealer in textile fabrics), and William Taylor, roper, both of Harborough to John Lee of Lutterworth, clockmaker. In this John Lee agreed, 'to repair and amend the clock and chimes in the Chappell of Harborowe in all things needful (except ropes) and to make and keep the said chime in a good sweet solemn and perfect tune of music, as ever the same was, at the sight and judgement of a skilful man in music to be chosen by the townsmen of Harborowe'. For these duties, John Lee was to receive his first payment of 6/8d (33p) of lawful money in England at or in the South Porch at the Feast of the Holy Trinity 1603.

It would not have been like the clock we know today. It would have had a single hour-hand but no minute-hand. There would be no minutes marked on the dial and the spaces between the hour-numbers were not divided to show the quarters until over a century later. The first public clock in London with two hands did not appear until 1671.

Nichols' *History of Leicestershire* records that the old clock and chimes were thoroughly worn out by 1726 and were replaced by one with a wood dial in 1729 with quarters.

From the evidence of the old verses fixed under its dial, the old clock and chimes had been a gift. *'Jonathan Jenkinson, gentleman, of his benignity! Did give this clock and chimes which here erected be.'*

Jonathan is believed to have been a descendant of Anthony Jenkinson, trusted ambassador to Queen Elizabeth I in the early sixteenth century and born in Harborough about 1530. The painting of the wood dial was paid for by Mr. Samuel Rouse (father of Rowland) draper of this town.

This clock lasted 42 years and was taken down in June 1791. In the following October it was replaced with a 'handsome stone dial improved by a minute part'. At last, minutes were shown and presumably it now had two hands! The diameter of the whole dial including the ring moulding was 8 feet. The table of the dial was formed out of two stones each of them about 8 hundredweights. In 1836 the dial was removed and replaced with an illuminated one, lit by gas and paid for by the workmen of the town. This is 22 years before the church interior had gas lighting.

The present clock mechanism, which is in a chamber well below the clock face, was given to the church in 1902 by Mr. Sydney Loder who lived at Greenfield Lodge in Northampton Road. It is an amazing mechanical structure of cogs and chains and weights and a pendulum and has now been working for nearly a century. Up to the early 1960s, someone had to climb the forty or so circular stone steps up to the clock chamber every day and use a large winding handle to give an average of 100 turns each to the clock, the quarters and the hour mechanism. Then the Urban District Council replaced the winding gear with electric power. At about this time, the glass of the clock face was replaced with a plastic white sheeting which was vandalised in August 1996.

The Town Clock

J F Cox



The sundial on the South Wall of the tower appears on the drawing of the church made by Rowland Rouse in 1564. It was restored by John Fothergill of Three Swans fame and Fawltly Towers-like reputation in 1948 and again during the 1980s stonework restoration.

It may not be appreciated how important the sun dial was to the early clocks. There must have been a sun dial before those recorded because this was the only method by which the early clocks could be corrected. Sun dials gave local time, but, for example, high noon in Plymouth is 16 minutes later than London. It was not until the railway age that a British standard time was established at Greenwich and by 1852 was being distributed throughout the country by electric telegraph.

Now that the ancient cogs of the old mechanism can start up again with a new polycarbonate clock face and new surrounding stonework, we can pass along the High Street and reflect upon the clock's distinguished service to Harborowe town

