

AHS London Lecture Thursday 21 July 2016

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Engine turning & horology: history, machines, techniques

Engine turning, also sometimes known as guilloché, is a technique whereby objects, generally of metal, are decorated by shallow cuts, generally in series and in parallel, made by a hand operated machine to create a reflective and intriguing visual effect.

There are two main categories of traditional machine, the Rose Engine used for rotary work and the Straight Line Engine, used for straight line cuts or variations of it.



David Wood-Heath F.C.I.W.E.M. CEnv. is a Public Health Engineer who runs his own specialist company and has spent many years living and working in various countries, whilst at the same time following his passion for antique pocket watches, especially English watches with metal dials decorated by various techniques, including engine turning, engraving and multi-coloured gold 'appliqués'. This interest has led directly to the subject of engine turning.

Engine turning is referred to in books on jewellery and related subjects, but is generally only referred to in passing or as photograph captions as a comment: 'engine turned', but with no information as to how the beautiful effect was achieved.

There is only one book about engine turning. This was written by the late Martin Matthews the watchcase maker.

Many diverse items have been decorated by engine turning, including jewellery, powder compacts, lighters and utilitarian objects such as mirrors and hairbrushes, as well as very high quality, costly items such as gold boxes and the cigarette cases produced by Fabergé, for which the engine turning provides the main visual impact.

Horological items received and still receive the attention of engine turners, including clock cases and dials. A very significant proportion of the pocket watches produced in the 1800s, and some earlier ones, were decorated in this way for aesthetic and utilitarian reasons. Watch dials have been and still are the subject of the particular skill and artistry of engine turners in Switzerland, England and the USA.

The technique is fascinating, the potential of the machines is unlimited and the products are often splendid. This historically very secretive subject deserves to be better known, understood and appreciated.

TICKETS:

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