

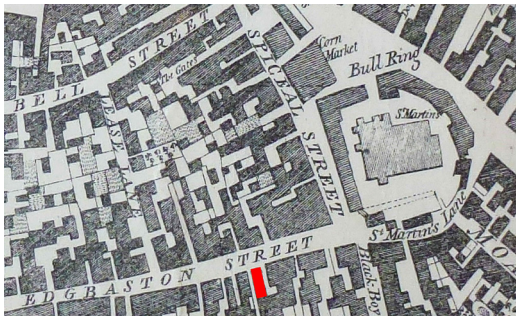
AHS London Lecture Thursday 16 November 2017

Richard Constable

Berlin or Birmingham: Finding a Market for the Black Forest Clock

Cheap in comparison with an all-metal clock, the wooden clock and the possibility even of its purchase through weekly or monthly instalments brought timekeeping within the reach of all parts of society. In many urban centres where clockmaking was regulated through the privileges granted to guilds, clocks made chiefly of wood could circumvent the rules.

But how *wooden* did a wooden clock need to be? This talk will look at the different circumstances encountered by members of the Hoffmeyer family, from near Neustadt in the Black Forest, in the cities of Berlin and Birmingham during the late eighteenth century. Already established as saltpeter merchants, when a cottage industry in wooden clockmaking grew up around them, the clever Hoffmeyers diversified as brass-founders to supply the castings on which 'wooden' clocks relied. Other family members engaged in making, exporting and retailing the clocks in foreign markets.



Central Birmingham at the end of the 18th century, highlighting John Hoffmeyer's public house and shop, the Coach & Horses.

One such market became increasingly problematic, as the protectionist tendencies of Prussian King Frederick the Great and his successor Frederick William II, in tandem with newly formed Berlin guilds, sought to bring wooden clocks under similar controls there to metal clocks. Clocks should only be 'manufactured' by licensed makers working directly in Prussia, and the parts that were allowed to be made of metal would be strictly controlled.

While in Berlin Philipp Hoffmeyer had to fight the authorities for permission to mount his family's brass clock wheels onto the arbours of a wooden clock, his elder cousin Johann (John) Hoffmeyer was making bold plans in that 'City of a Thousand Trades' where brass was no problem – Birmingham.

Helped by Black Forest colleagues in London, John Hoffmeyer would tour the country with an extraordinary show of musical and automaton clocks, that promoted wooden clocks to the wider British public and helped establish the intense network of Black Forest retailers that so weakened British provincial clockmaking, before American mass-produced horology arrived to finish the job.

Richard Constable is a descendant of Black Forest clockmakers and practices as an architect in London. His talk will draw on research for the clockmaking chapter he contributed to the local history book *Langenordnach – ein Tal im Hochschwarzwald* (2011) and for a forthcoming volume on the neighbouring community of Schwärzenbach.

TICKETS

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