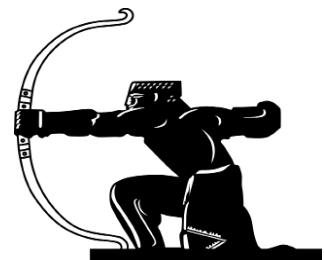


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A cache of clocks where time stands still

By Margaret Crockett

Number Four sits slightly back from the road and is easy to miss among the workman-like businesses and traders on the parade that cluster that stretch of Fortis Green, N2. The bow window is packed with clocks and pepper mills.



Back in time: John Kendall sitting in his Number Four workshop in Fortis Green and, right, repairing a clock at his workbench. All photos Lauren Baskent

Step inside and you find the shop is cluttered, full of restored wooden furniture, more pepper mills and, of course, clocks. There is no sign of a computer or even a cash register. Time seems to stand still.

John Kendall was busy at his workbench when I knocked on the door. He has a calm friendly manner and clears a beautiful spindle-backed chair for me to sit on, whilst he perches on his stool.

A childhood fascination with clocks saw him take his parents' alarm clock apart but he was unable to put it back together again. "They were pretty annoyed," he admits ruefully. John explains that for him clocks have a presence. "Clocks just interested me. They are quite fascinating because time is an interesting concept. In one sense, it's governed by the fact that we rotate around the sun. In some ways, the concept of time is quite man-made."

Later he picked up some clock-repairing skills from his uncle, although he is a largely self-taught horologist. He was mending clocks in the evenings alongside working at the Ormond Road Craft Centre and when that closed he took up clock repairing full time. He has been at Number Four for 25 years now.

The oldest clock he has ever worked on was a German miniature tavern clock from the

1720s. Tavern clocks have a round dial, quite simplistic movements and require winding every seven days. His most interesting was a Jewish clock with an unusual escapement mechanism.

Not surprisingly John's customers come from far and wide. They include private individuals, institutions, colleges and private members' clubs, mostly with basic everyday clocks. The market for longcase (grandfather) clocks has diminished, probably because of the space they take up.

Originally John trained as a cabinet maker, although he never made a clock housing. His face lights up when he talks of woodturning and he shows me examples of his 'pepper pots'. There are pepper grinders not only in the shop window but also in pride of place on the central display table. They attract customers from around the world, largely via word of mouth, since John does not have an internet presence for Number Four.

Whilst some have the traditional waisted mill shape, there are other unusual ones such as a Bauhaus-inspired design and one created from a banksia seed from Australia. It is becoming difficult to source the hard wood required to carve the thread for the screw mechanism so John finds it at antique auctions or, more recently, from the waste

wood of a clarinet maker. John has taught others horologist skills. It takes time to learn and requires a certain amount of equipment and tools. He surveys the shop, saying:



Pride of place: Pepper grinders mix with clocks in the window display



Everything at hand: Tools and spare parts crowd the drawers of John's workbench



"There is mess and clutter". But John has a constant backlog of work. Time marches on and whilst digital clocks have their place,

aren't we all a little bit fascinated with the clockwork mechanism? We are lucky to have such a skilled craftsman in our neighbourhood.

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