

# Silver Tompion is the ‘best in private hands’

by Roland Arkell

Horology dealership Carter Marsh is bringing to market what it calls the most important English table clock it has ever handled.

The Winchester firm is selling the celebrated Silver Tompion on behalf of a collector from the Channel Islands.

The clock, pictured in many reference works including *Early English Clocks* (1982) by Dawson, Drover and Parkes, where it appears on the front cover, is both historically and horologically important.

Apparently commissioned for Charles II, the first contemporary reference to this clock is found in Robert Hooke's diary entry for Sunday, June 24, 1677, when Hooke noted: "Tompion here instructed him about the Kings striking clock about bells and about the striking by the help of a spring instead of a pendulum, as also the ground and use of the fly and of the swash teeth."

It boasts many 'firsts': not only is it considered the first English table clock to employ a rack rather than a counterwheel for governing the strike (the norm within a decade), but it is also the first clock by Tompion to employ his famous two-train grande sonnerie strike system.



As its name suggests, the Silver Tompion is the first clock made by Thomas Tompion which he mounted in silver (there are seven others) and the first he made with an ingenious close fitting 'lift-off' case, something that helped maximise the size of the movement without having to greatly increase the size of the clock.

The 14in (35cm) ebony case is attributed to Jasper Braem, the enigmatic Anglo-Dutch cabinetmaker and inlayer who was a co-tenant with Tompion at the corner house at the top of Water Lane on Fleet Street. An essay on Braem, who may have done much of Tompion's casework, forms part of the latest Carter Marsh catalogue.



The Silver Tompion was in a UK collection before it was purchased by dealer John Hawkins for Australian media proprietor Kerry Packer (1937-2005). It was later sold by dealer Anthony Woodburn to a German collection and then acquired by Carter Marsh's client in the Channel Islands.

Jonathan Carter considers it as "not just the best clock we have ever offered for sale but probably the best English table clock still in private hands".

Carter Marsh has handled two of the preeminent clock collections sold in recent years: those of Tom Scott and Dr John Taylor. They included other clocks from Tompion's grande sonnerie series including the Medici Tompion

The first and last clocks from the Tompion-Graham grande sonnerie series: the Iberian Graham (far left), a c.1736 burr-walnut Phase 3 full grande sonnerie striking and repeating table clock, and, left, the Silver Tompion, a c.1677 silver-mounted ebony two-train grande sonnerie striking and repeating table clock.

c.1696 (priced at £4.5m) and the Spanish Tompion c.1703 (priced at £3.5m). The seven-figure asking price for the Silver Tompion is available 'on request'.

## Complicated make

Tompion's grande sonnerie clocks, which strike every quarter hour, were far more demanding to make than a conventional hour-striking clock. In a 24-hour period they perform 768 hammer blows.

Remarkably, the Carter Marsh catalogue includes what is arguably the final clock in the sequence of around 20 royal timekeepers – the so-called Iberian Graham. Made by Tompion's heir George Graham c.1736, sometime in

its history the Phase Three walnut case and three-train movement had become separated. After the movement first surfaced at Sotheby's in 1997 and the case traced to Seville and a clock with a later movement by Daniel Delander, the two elements were finally reunited in 2016.

Twenty clocks and watches feature in the new catalogue. Three are by Graham and eight are by Tompion.

A clock signed by both makers is the c.1713 Newcastle Tompion, a mid-size ebony Phase Three striking table clock with a pull quarter repeat (priced at £375,000). Ordered from Tompion by Thomas Pelham-Holles of Halland (1693-1768), 1st Duke of Newcastle, it was in the Pelham family until it was sold at auction in 1995. The dealership has previously sold both a Tompion longcase and a sundial with a similar provenance, the three items confirming the Pelhams as long-standing customers of Tompion over three generations.

Carter Marsh will be one of two English clocks specialists at *The Treasure House Fair* that runs at the Royal Hospital Chelsea site from June 22-26. Kensington Church Street dealer Howard Walwyn will also take a stand.