

PRESS RELEASE

September 2012

For immediate release



THE GENIUS OF JOHN HARRISON REVEALED AT FAIRFAX HOUSE

*A never-before-seen clock by John Harrison, the greatest name in Georgian precision clock-making and the man who solved the Longitude problem, will be the centrepiece of **Keeping Time**, the latest exhibition at Fairfax House, opening this October.*

PHOTOCALL OPPORTUNITY: Monday 24 September 1.00pm, Harrison clock (Precision Number 2) arrives at Fairfax House to be prepared for public display in our new exhibition 'Keeping Time'

The premise of this exhibition can be summed up in a question: how do you know what time it is? Today with exact timekeeping easily available all around us we take the answer for granted, but in the eighteenth century this was far from being the case. *Keeping Time* explores what life was like in the golden age of science when timekeeping technology was making new and often dramatic advances, and society was trying to keep pace with these changes. In this age of deadlines and addiction to punctuality and precision, with timekeeping instruments surrounding us in every conceivable format, can we ever imagine what life was like without a clock?



Although mechanical clocks have been with us since the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, when they were used in monasteries to ensure the regularity of the cycle of prayer, it was not until the eighteenth century that the increasing reliability and precision of mechanized timekeeping began to challenge age-old means of telling the time by the movement of sun and stars, and threatened to throw the sundial off its pedestal. *Keeping Time* explores the dramatic development of timekeeping during this turbulent period of progress in clock and watch technology in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the far-reaching revolutionary consequences for Georgian England of the introduction and increasingly widespread adoption of the reliable and accurate clock.

Celebrating and illuminating the particular innovative prowess of the clockmakers of Yorkshire and York, this exhibition brings together clocks of all shapes, sizes and types from the regional clockmaking industry to illuminate the technical skill and brilliance of Yorkshire's greatest horological craftsmen. A host of this county's finest clocks both large and small will tell the story of timekeeping from the humblest and (to our eyes) most primitive of timepieces through to exquisite treasures of the clockmaker's art. The exhibition seeks to showcase these intricate masterpieces as works of art in their own right, not simply functional objects. With pieces on loan from a range of museums including the British Museum, Leeds Museums & Galleries, York Museums Trust and also a number of private collectors, this assemblage of Yorkshire and particularly York clocks is the finest ever to be gathered in one place.

The highlight of the exhibition, and itself a key to understanding eighteenth-century Britain's obsessive quest for ever-greater timekeeping accuracy, is the Harrison Precision Pendulum Clock Number Two. This marvel of Georgian clockmaking, created by the self-taught genius John Harrison, embodies a revolutionary concept: a clock movement made almost entirely of wood, using *lignum vitae*, containing natural oils so that the mechanism required no lubrication. This clock represented an astonishing leap forward in accuracy, keeping time to within one second every month, an unheard-of feat in 1727, and one which could not be bettered by the greatest of London clockmakers. This early clock was the foundation for Harrison's later timepieces in which his search for ever more precision and reliability ultimately bore fruit in the marine chronometer, a shipboard clock that kept accurate time through lengthy voyages and in all weathers and which revolutionized navigation, finally allowing longitude to be accurately established at sea.

Fairfax House Director Hannah Phillip explains: 'In creating an exhibition on time in the eighteenth century, the ultimate name in precision timekeeping, and by extension the quest for longitude, is of course Harrison. Yorkshire-born, and a carpenter by trade his name shines through as one of the most brilliant in horology, a man whose vision, genius and thirst for conquering the unsolvable brought about such vast leaps in technology, timekeeping and of course the quest for measuring longitude. What more fitting foundation is there to an exhibition seeking to illuminate Yorkshire's great horological inventions and timekeeping innovations than one which incorporates one of Harrison's earliest feats of engineering.'

'Most exciting is that we will be seeing side by side the two longcase clocks that Harrison first designed as a pair. His idea was to gauge whether they were keeping perfect time or not – in spite of the variation in temperatures that Harrison threw at them. The first, a perfect replica of Precision Clock Number 1, and the second, the original Number 2 from Leeds Museum & Galleries will be on public display together



for the first time. This reuniting of the two clocks is an exciting moment in clock history and a triumph for Fairfax House.'

Whilst Georgian London may have unquestionably held the reputation of being at the epicentre of horological development not just in England but around the world, *Keeping Time* shows

the pursuit of scientific and horological advancement that was being carried out beyond the metropolis. Georgian clockmakers sought out thriving regional centres as the bases for their activities, and *Keeping Time* reveals the importance of York – a centre for both polite society and trade, in which accurate timekeeping was increasingly valued – as a particular focus of clockmaking innovation, with the name of Henry Hindley synonymous with scientific advancement not only in horology but other fields of scientific instrumentation.

Hannah Phillip explains: 'Timekeeping had attained a new fashionability with the clock a necessity – bet a luxurious necessity – in the homes of the county's wealthy elite, whose social conventions dictated more and more the regulation of the day's hours. For those who may not be interested in the mechanics and complex arrangements for making a clock keep an even and sustained perfect time, the impact clock technology had on society is something that everyone can identify with.'

Keeping Time opens on Friday 5 October 2012. The opportunity to see these exceptional timepieces and Harrisons *Number 2 Precision* Clock will last until the end of the year, when the exhibition closes on Monday 31 December.

Entry to the exhibition is through purchase of a general admission ticket. Tickets cost £6.00 (£5.00 Concession, children under 16 enter free) and are valid for one year.

Fairfax House is open Tuesday to Saturday 10am to 4.30pm and Sunday 12.30pm to 3.30pm. Guided tours are also available at 11am and 2pm on Mondays.

Please visit www.fairfaxhouse.co.uk for more information on *Keeping Time* and associated special events.

Ends

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