

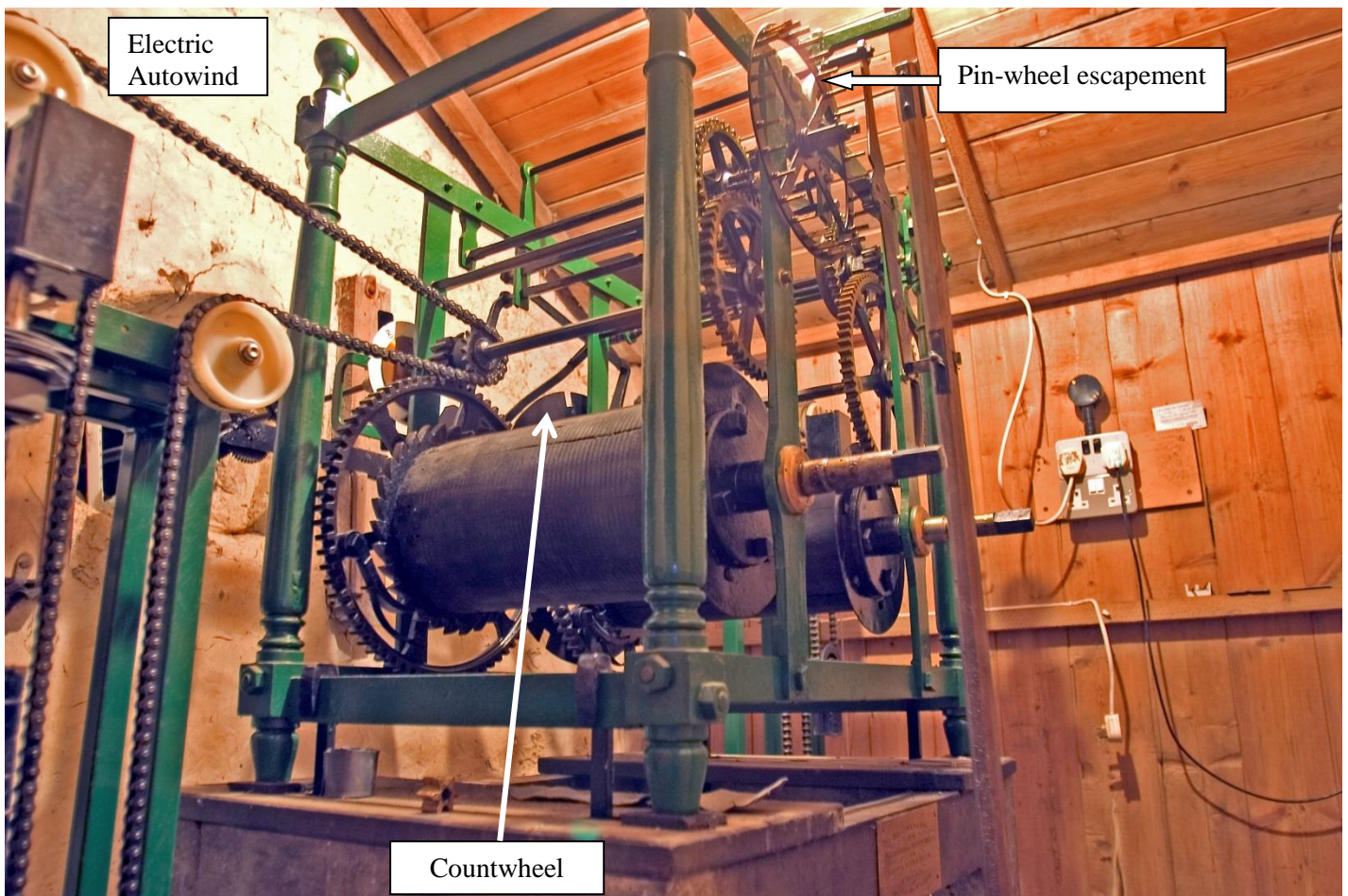
This is the Thirty-seventh of an occasional series of articles by David Stone about incidents in the history of Swanton Morley and its church

The Turret Clock in the Tower

I imagine that most of you have, at some time, looked up at the blue clock-face on the south side of the church tower, but very few of you will have had a chance to see the clock itself, because it is contained in a boxed off compartment inside the ringing chamber, and is only accessible via a set of wooden steps.

In 2004, Clifford Bird, the then Hon. Turret Clock Advisor to the DAC, wrote a short technical description of this 'large, fine and substantial' clock, stating that it is a cast iron four poster with two gear trains, one to keep the time and one to strike the hours on the bell. You can see two of the cast-iron posts in the foreground, a round knob being visible on the left-hand one. The pendulum beats at one and a half seconds, and is controlled by a pin wheel escapement; the strike is controlled by an outside count-wheel.

The clock was completely restored and the electric autowind was added in 1994 as a farewell gift from RAF Swanton Morley when the station closed.



Photograph by kind permission of Bruce Benedict

Now, the clock bears an inscription: "This clock was made for the parishioners of Swanton Morley by the Revd. A Sutton, Rector of West Tofts, and fixed June 19th 1858. I also found, in the churchwardens' accounts for the year 1858/59, a sum of £50 11s 9d "for the clock". This was presumably the cost of having the clock made and installed.

But, what on earth was the rector of another parish doing building a clock for Swanton Morley?

Well, Clifford Bird tells us that Canon Augustus Sutton was the fifth son of Sir Richard Sutton, 2nd Bt. who was said to have been one of the wealthiest men in East Anglia. Sir Richard bought West Tofts Hall and estate around 1830 and he also bought the patronage of St Mary's Church, West Tofts and spent a lot of money repairing and 'beautifying' it with stained glass.

Note that Wests Tofts, as a village, no longer exists. It was taken over by the military in 1942 and now forms part of the Stanford Battle Area. The church was empty for many years, but was returned to use in the 1980s

In fact, Simon Knott in his 'Norfolk Churches' website says of St Mary's that " a typical rural medieval church was turned into a Gothic fantasy thanks to the Sutton family of Lynford Hall. The architect was the famous Augustus Pugin and, after his death in 1852, his son E W Pugin was in charge of the work.

Augustus Sutton himself was rector of St Mary's from 1842 to 1895, but this gifted man also took a very intelligent interest in church clocks. Indeed, he saved many fine early clocks from a rusty end by having them recycled at his own expense and moved to a church where they would be appreciated and useful. Clifford Bird said that he knew of at least 30 such clocks. But he also mentions a clock in the Church of the Holy Cross at Caston, which is exactly like ours. The plate there says, "The Revd. Augustus Sutton, Rector of West Tofts, constructed this clock for the parishioners of Caston and set it in this church tower on 31st day of July 1854" (i.e. about 4 years before ours was installed.) But the movement also bears a plate "OR. PALMER. Maker, 1854, West Tofts. He is a well-known clockmaker of Thetford, and Bird says that the likelihood is that the clock was bought from one of the London manufacturers, where there was machinery to cast and cut wheels with accuracy, and that it was installed by Palmer for Sutton at both churches.

There is a note in the Caston-on-line website which says that the Caston clock was collected from West Tofts and transported by horse and cart to Caston by Mr. John Sayer, farm bailiff to the Rev. Walter John Partridge. I imagine that our clock must have been transported in much the same way. The cost of the Caston clock was £49 10s. 0d., which was for materials and workmen's wages only, as Revd. Sutton did not charge for his time. You will see that this is very similar to the cost of our clock.

I have discovered that the above Rev Walter John Partridge (b.1813) became Rector of Caston in 1850 and retired in 1886. The following anecdote is quite irrelevant to my story, but I have a bit of space to fill and it is rather amusing!

Walter John Partridge appears to have had a sense of fun. About 1872 a set of new candelabra was presented to the church. The man responsible for installing it placed a 40-stave ladder from the church floor to the small doorway at the apex of the chancel arch. WJP, then Rector, ascended the ladder to have a look at the void between the chancel ceiling and the outer roof. When it was time to come down, he stepped onto the ladder, put his legs around its ribs, took his hands off the staves and slid all the way down. On reaching the church floor, he exclaimed, "That's something I always wanted to do!"