"Wha would ha'e thoucht it, Stockings would ha'e boucht it?": Clocks in the Nineteenth-Century Scottish Public Imagination.

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Introduction

At the end of the nineteenth century, readers in Scotland of various newspapers, periodicals, and pamphlets may have encountered a curious story about Bettie Wilcox, of Bannockburn, near Stirling, and her unusual longcase clock. Multiple versions of the story recount how, at the turn of the century, Elizabeth Wilcox (or Bettie, as she is more commonly known) finds out that her son, a sailor, has been imprisoned in St Peterburg, Russia. Undaunted, she prepares silk stockings for Tsar Alexander I of Russia, who, on receiving them, was much impressed. The Tsar subsequently released her son, along with £100, which Bettie used to commission an unusual longcase clock constructed by David Somerville (or George Harvey), clockmakers in St Ninians near Stirling. Reports of the story have been recorded in newspapers as early as 1814, changing and shifting in focus over decades until a proliferation of writings came to the fore from the 1870s onwards, notably led by two women, the journalist J.A. Owen and the ballad writer Agnes. H. Bowie, who saw the story published in newspapers, periodicals, and books. The clock that Wilcox had commissioned, over time transcends from being a timepiece to one of cultural significance in the public imagination.

Objects are not static things but act as symbols that humans attach meaning to (Smith and Watson 2017). In doing so, they contain 'an ongoing social life' where these meanings and values are negotiated, dynamic, and changing (Jones 2006: 109). Understanding objects critically has been extensively explored over the last three decades, notably from cultural anthropologist Igor Kopytoff's influential work, *The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process'* (1986). Since then, approaches to objects have been used across critical fields such as anthropology (Hoskins 1998), archaeology (Saunders 1999; Gosden and Marshall 1999; Burström 2014), museum studies (Alberti 2005) as well as critical heritage studies around monuments and replicas (Foster and Jones 2020). Various new methods-based approaches have evolved over decades, such as object interviews (Woodward 2015), object

elicitation (Iltanen and Topo 2015) arts-based methods (Kara 2015), inventories and itineraries and assemblages (Edensor 2011; DeLanda 2019). As such, the significance of time concerning objects cannot be understated. Objects often serve as bookmarks within the broader chronology of human experience, with their perceived value and importance shifting over time. In this context, objects can be understood as vessels of collective memory, capturing and preserving moments, cultures, and histories. The wear and tear on an object and its changing contexts of display or use all trace the passage of time.

Clocks act as dual objects and occupy a distinct position in our understanding and perception of time. They are systematic tools, harnessing the intangible flow of moments into measured, quantifiable units and compartmentalise experience into days, hours, minutes, and seconds, on the one hand, but on the other, are implicated in a much broader human and cultural engagement with time, its measurement, and its implications. Critics have long argued about the measurement, standardisation, or objectivity of time, but seeing clocks as active and cultural in their composition remains constrained by 'capitalist forms of control and domination' (Bastian 2017: 2). Various scholars across many disciplines have dealt with the semantics and meanings of time across various critical fields, however, as Bastian highlights, clocks, due to their relationship to time in a cultural frame, have often been disregarded as 'unworthy of further analysis' and seen in a reductive way as simply 'representatives of an objective or universal time' (2017: 2). Bastian proposes that a new field of study, 'Critical Horology', can go some way to address this gap, arguing for:

> a deeper exploration of the grounds upon which clocks and clock-time are produced, the relationships both have with power (in the present and historically) and an opening up of who might experiment with the possibilities and potentialities of the clock.
>
> (2017: 18)

One of the early challenges of researching Wilcox's clock was its conspicuous absence, having long disappeared from public consciousness and last being seen at an auction house in Edinburgh in 1917 (Smith 1921: 185). Even then, one known image of the clock from the turn of the twentieth century has questionable authenticity compared to detailed descriptions in earlier writings. Although the story has appeared in local history publications on Stirling over the last hundred years, sometimes recounting the story in full (Allan 1990; Cook and McNeish 2022), little critical work has been undertaken on the Wilcox story. The story, until now, has appeared disparate, with articles often referring to each other in non-direct ways. Using the digitised online British Newspaper Archive (BNA), it quickly became apparent that archival material (newspaper articles, books, illustrations, ballads, and more) produced across the nineteenth century act as a symbolic collection of meanings and values related to Wilcox's clock. When piecing archival material as stories together for this exercise, what was apparent was a consistent effort of what (Jones 2012) and others (see Summerfield 1998) have called 'composure' whereby:

> 'social performance and narration of past events and experiences are actively "composed" in an attempt to constitute the self as a coherent subject in relation to narratives that link past, present, and ultimately future' (Jones 2012: 349).

In this article, I explore how Wilcox's clock can be seen as more than simply a timekeeping device with an objective purpose. By first understanding how time and clocks in the nineteenth century were used through a cultural lens, I examine how the – idea – of Wilcox's clock's nuanced and composed nature was constructed in the public imagination during this period. Turning to the writings of J.A. Owen and Agnes H. Bowie, I reveal that the – story – of the clock represents a broader cultural understanding of what clocks during this period represent, in which they go beyond acting as objects of mechanised process. Ultimately, I argue that re-engaging with time-related objects through an interdisciplinary lens can facilitate a more nuanced and enriched understanding of the social-cultural power of clocks and has the potential to contribute to Bastian's call for an emergent 'critical horology'.

Clocks and Time in the Nineteenth Century Public and Private Life

In the British Isles, during the nineteenth century, perceptions of ordered time underwent a substantive change, underscored by the institutionalisation of Greenwich Mean Time (GMT) in 1847 and its subsequent adoption in Scotland by 1848 (although GMT was not the legal time throughout the British Isles until the 1880s). This standardisation was not just an operational adjustment but symbolic of broader societal changes rooted in the emergent industrial era. With the proliferation of factories, railways and consequent urbanisation, a uniform time framework became indispensable to ensure synchronised operations and enhanced productivity. Public clocks symbolised attitudes of precision, regularity, and order, with Zemka (2011: 2) arguing that 'Clock making and chronometry not only made it possible to run factories efficiently but also contributed designs for fine and rapid mechanical movements that facilitated mass production.' Strategically positioned in churches, town halls, workplaces, and civic spaces, they instituted the linearity of time and the societal imperative for punctuality. Their presence in public spaces can be read as a manifestation of the mechanised enforcement of societal rhythms and a tangible reflection of industrialisation in this period. The domestic sphere also saw an increasing presence of clocks across the social classes, first as long cases and later with smaller clocks, such as those in central positions, such as the mantlepiece. Longcase clocks often 'seemed to stand in the corner of a room or the hallway' occupying 'marginal spaces in everyday life' (Doolittle 2015: 256), delineating daily routines, from household tasks to leisurely pursuits.

However, time, as well as clocks, are never standalone in an objective sense. Instead, much like other aspects of society and objects, they are produced through an inherently gendered lens. Doolittle argues that clocks, particularly

in the nineteenth century, 'carried gendered meanings and were usually characterised as male' with their 'size, weight and especially the complex mechanisms of the clock reflected their "maleness"' (Doolittle 2015: 256–257). These gendered interpretations were deeply ingrained in the societal fabric, rendering clocks not merely objective instruments of timekeeping but symbolic entities representing prevailing sociocultural norms. Doolittle goes further, arguing that, especially in a domestic setting, the informal and interchangeable use of 'grandfather clock' to represent large longcase clocks (emanating from the song *'My Grandfather's Clock'* by Henry Clay Work 1876) and 'grandmother' clocks to represent small timepieces during the later Victorian period, was typical of the distinct demarcations of male and female roles. Further, it amplified these associations by casting objects, like clocks, within an encompassing patriarchal narrative paired with mechanisation.

During this period, the ubiquity of time as a central motif in the cultural landscape is evident in the vast array of literary works, plays, newspaper articles, and features within periodicals. Charles Dickens exhibited a profound fascination with time. This is seen in his recurrent depictions of clocks and the passage of time in novels such as *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *David Copperfield* (1850). Similarly, George Eliot's narratives in *Adam Bede* (1859) and *Middlemarch* (1871) portray time as a cultural regime governing Eliot's characters' lives and societies. Collectively, these artistic expressions illuminate the profound influence of time on the Victorian psyche, framing it as both a tangible measure of existence and an abstract force in shaping narratives, identities, and societal structures.

Tracing the Story of Bettie Wilcox's Clock through Time

As mentioned earlier, piecing together the development or 'story' of Wilcox's clock at the outset seemed challenging. Before taking a deep dive into the research, stories of Wilcox and her clock seemed to operate in isolation from one another, sometimes across several decades, and often containing many inconsistencies in approach and detail. However, as articles, particularly in newspapers, were organised chronologically across time, new meanings were uncovered in how the story of Wilcox and her clock was shaped. It is, therefore, no surprise that newspapers and periodicals in themselves 'structured readers' days, weeks, and months' (King, Easley, and Morton 2016: 2), acting almost as paper-based timekeeping devices.

Traditional modes of biography often assume that a telling of a life usually starts at the beginning in an onward trajectory. However, unusually, we start this section before the object becomes 'born' into full public consciousness. Beginning in 1814, a *Manchester Mercury* article which, intriguingly, sidesteps mention of the clock altogether and relies on a letter associated with Wilcox, who could not read or write and had a local man write it for her to the Russian Tsar, begging for her son's release. This interpretive 'orthographical account', with Wilcox's tale moved to Alloa, not only offers

a departure from the original vernacular of the letter but also underscores early iterations of the story that might not have accorded the clock its central place in the narrative:

> *An Orthographical Copy Of A Letter From Elizabeth Willcox, of The Town Of Alloa*
>
> Unto the most Excellent Alexander, Emperor of that great dominion of Russia, and the territories thereunto belonging.
>
> Your most humble servant most humbly begs your most gracious pardon, for my boldness in approaching your most dread Sovereign for your clemency at this time. My Sovereign, the candour of this freedom is on account of your Sovereign's goodness, in the saving and enlarging my son, whose name is John Duncan, aged 26 years, who on a prize, who was prisoner with Robert Spittle, his master, Captain of the Jean Spittle, of Alloa, a the time of the British embargo in your Sovereigns dominions in Russia, who is the only support of me his Mother, and besides I have no other friend for my support; and on account of your gracious benevolence, be pleased to accept of this small present from your ever well-wishes whilst I have breath – the small present is three pairs of stockings for going in when your Sovereign goes out a hunting. I would have also sent your Sovereign silk stockings if that my son could search for it, but the press being at this time so hot that he cannot go for fear being pressed. If your Sovereign will be pleased to accept of this, and favour me with an answer of this by the bearer, and let me know what family of children your Sovereign has, I will send stockings for them for the winter, before winter comes on, as also whats sons and what daughters you might have.
>
> Most dread Sovereign, I am your most obedient servant, and humble servant until death,
> (Signed) Elizabeth Wilcox.
> (*Manchester Mercury* 1814).

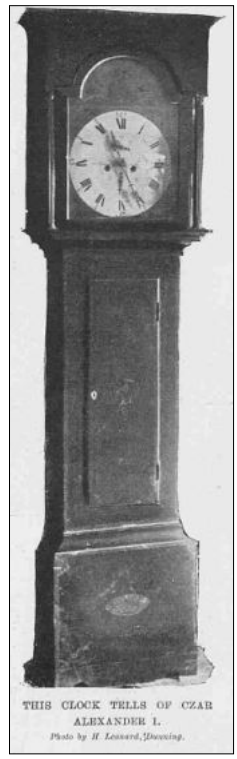


Figure 1: H. Leonard, Dunning, 1898, Photo of Longcase Grandfather Clock, Bettie Wilcox.

The decades that followed introduced variations to Wilcox's story. In *Chamber's Edinburgh Journa*l (1835), the story is again repositioned to Alloa, differing from the later affirmed locations of St Ninians or Bannockburn. Notably, the figure of Wilcox undergoes a name change, emerging as 'Elizabeth Wyllie.' *Starling's Noble Deeds of Women* (Starling 1835: 248) echoes these narrative departures, contributing to a period where details meandered and occasionally strayed from the eventual core account. Owen's later 1891

critique of Chamber's rendition, which will be discussed later, reflects on this as 'told evidently from hearsay, and with many errors' (Owen 1891: 574) encapsulating the dynamic fluidity of oral histories as they make their way into print, against the obsession with recorded narratives and knowledge systems in the nineteenth century.

However, the latter decades of that century heralded a more structured and detailed engagement with Wilcox's story. A cluster of articles in *The Stirling Observer* in October and November 1881 reveals an attempt at the story's composition. An article titled 'A Romantic Enterprise', published on 22nd October, outlines the story of Wilcox and the clock, including a letter composed on her behalf by local Alexander Bryce. *The Observer* attributes the verbatim style of the letter to Wilcox's resolve to record her sentiments:

'Ye'll just pit in't what I'll say to ye.' (J.S 1881)

However, at this point in the article, we can understand how the object and its descriptions differ from Owen's account a decade later. In this account, the inscription 'Wha would ha'e thocht it, Stockings would ha'e bocht it' is engraved on the dial plate, not a separate piece of wood. The story in full in this article remains relatively close to Owen's later account. However, at this point, the *Observer* article affirms that the whereabouts of the clock are currently unknown. This goes some way to explain the physical differences in its description of this account and reveals how objects, when not seen in physical form, still operate symbolically and imaginatively.

A few weeks later, on 10th November, a reply is published to the story by an author put simply as 'the one who knows'. Pleased with the article in the *Observer*, the reply includes more detail about the clock, stating that 'Bettie's historical time-reckoner is still to the fore, and now in possession of a Mrs Duncan of this village, whose late husband, John Duncan, was a son of the same mentioned prisoner of war in Bettie's petition' (The One Who Knows 1881). The letter corrects the October *Observer* article, stating that the couplet was attached to the clock on a separate piece of wood, not on the clockface as initially written. In connection to the story, the letter describes a set of gold teacups and saucers being sent to Sir John Wylie's mother in Kincardine-on-Forth, where Willcox was received for tea by Mrs. Wylie. This subsequent response contributes more detail and corrects inaccuracies, deepening the narrative's complexity and once again revealing a process of composure related to its biography in a much more direct way.

This unfolding dialogue in the newspaper over subsequent weeks epitomises the dynamic nature of collective memory and the iterative process of historical reconstruction. It underscores that history, especially when tied to personal and community memories, is not a static entity but a living conversation subject to reinterpretation, correction, and embellishment. In this instance, the story of the clock becomes a focal point around which various individuals seek to contribute, clarify, or amend details, endeavouring to construct a coherent and credible narrative. Such exchanges played out in public forums like the newspaper, highlights the interplay between

individual memory, collective recollection, and the written record. It highlights that longcase clocks, such as this one, contain narrative histories and add a cultural dimension to time that is not immediately foreseen.

Agency in writing about clocks and time: A.J. Owen and Agnes B. Bowie

So far, in this article, I have discussed the importance of time in the Victorian public consciousness and how clocks as objects have distinct cultural agency in these processes. Wilcox's story's most striking feature is Wilcox's female sense of endeavour for her son and the economic power she then had to commission the clock. Wilcox could have easily had the story painted or depicted in another way, yet the story being embodied in an object, particularly related to time, seems an important point to underscore. It is salient, then, that what is the most prolific stage of writing about the clock later in the 1890s, was led by two women, both from very different social classes, but have reshaped the story away from a masculine representation of time to one that becomes a much more liberated form of storytelling.

J.A. Owen (1841 – 1922) was a travel and nature writer and journalist, publishing frequently in the press, periodicals, and books from the late 1850s onwards. She travelled extensively, having lived in Australia and New Zealand, and writing about her travels to the Hawaiian Islands, the West Indies and Panama. She was notably shipwrecked on the R.M.S Douru in 1882 off the coast of Spain. Not much is known about her connection to Stirling; however, she is known to have frequently visited friends in Bridge of Allan. It is assumed that Owen first became aware of the story of Wilcox's clock in the 1890s, from then on publishing several articles related to the story (*Girls Own Paper* 1892; *Blackwood Magazine* 1891; *The Sketch* 1898), forming a personal friendship with the then owner, Isabella Duncan who lived in Bannockburn.

Owen's writing is reflective of the time, as well as her social class. In the Tory periodical, *Blackwood Magazine*, Owen, on describing the story and her involvement, almost takes on an imperialist explorer persona that, as Deininger argues, is representative of an approach during this period that was 'often prone to bias, misunderstanding and cultural imperialism' (Deininger 2016: 108). This imperialist stance is seen when Owen describes taking a 'rough old shandrydan of an omnibus' from Stirling to Bannockburn with a group of women speaking in Scots, much to her bewilderment at being misunderstood herself by the group of women when asking about the clock and its owner Isabella Duncan:

> 'Instead of an answer, there came the proverbial questions put to myself: "Do ye no' ken whaur she lives?", "Are ye wantin' to go to her?", "Do ye no' ken onything aboot her?", and so on.' (Owen 1891: 569)

Owen's sense of bewilderment to her surroundings continues, describing, accompanied by a young girl 'wandering along a rough, narrow street in twilight, down a steep brae, and beside the old bridge we entered a court' (Owen 1891: 569) At the end of the nineteenth century,

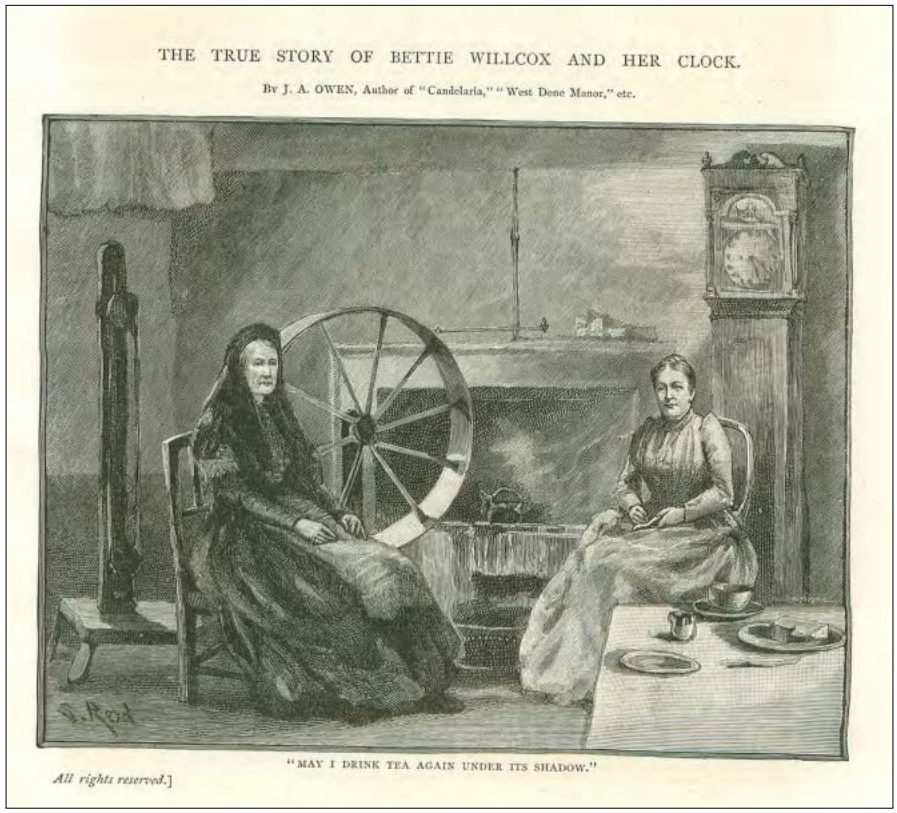
Bannockburn was still a distinct weaving town, specialising in the production of tartan and carpets. Led by manufacturers William Wilson and Sons, Bannockburn was significant in the nineteenth century romanticisation of tartan, or 'tartan mania', and our modern understandings of tartan today. Only in the 1930s, when urban expansion ensued, did the town have a more physical geographic connection to Stirling, some three miles away. Isabella Duncan was known to live in 'an end' (a one-room house within a large building) at Smart's Court in Bannockburn, which was typical of workers' cottages in the built-up, industrial Old Town area.

Although *Blackwood Magazine* had a long history of being published in Edinburgh, writings within the periodical often took an imperialist sense of exploring Scotland in this frame, no more so than in travel writing where 'the countryside' for which here I mean generally outside the urban centres of Edinburgh and Glasgow, was 'presented as an unconfined place of study, where the local communities were as much research subjects as the biological or geological features that surrounded them' (Lago 2023: 102). Owen represents Isabella Duncan as 'one of those genuine old Scotswomen of a primitive type still to be found about Stirling' (Owen 1891: 568). These tropes are unsurprising but also emphasise that the story of Wilcox's clock has an almost other-worldly or wild depiction in the Victorian imagination.

Owen goes on to write 'the true history of the clock I will now give, as Mrs Duncan told it to me' (Owen 1891: 568) and explains how distorted stories related to the clock have appeared over time, especially in *Chamber's Edinburgh Journal* (1835) and later in several Stirling papers. Owen's pursuit of rectifying and unveiling 'the true story of Bettie Wilcox and her clock,' is evident in another of her articles in *Girls Own Paper*, a year previously, where she describes the clockface, arguably the clock's most important feature, in full detail:

> There are coloured pictures outside the dial at four corners. On the right hand stands the Emperor Alexander of Russia, the father of Nicholas. He is represented as a fine, stately personage, in a long flowing crimson cloak lined with ermine; on his head is the imperial crown, and in his hand a sceptre or wand, with which is pointing to a fleet of ships 'on a painted ocean' above the dial-plate. These are not all 'idle', however, for one of them moves to and fro on a wave with each swing of the pendulum. Opposite the Emperor, in the left-hand corner, a comely looking woman stands knitting a long and capacious stocking. She is dressed in a straight, short gown without a waist, belted high up under the bust, that was worn about ninety years ago. In the corner below her, on a sea-beach in front of some men-of-war, is a well-dressed gentleman of the same period; opposite to whom underneath the Emperor, a pretty young woman stands at a cottage door with a plump babe in her arms, the very picture of 'smiling content'. (Owen 1892: 595)

Owen's description of Wilcox's grandfather clock is an important juncture in how the clock is represented. In a sense, the story of Wilcox and her actions, depicted on the corners of the clockface, represent how the clock is given a life far beyond simply telling time and carries a fundamental


THE TRUE STORY OF BETTIE WILLCOX AND HER CLOCK.

By J. A. OWEN, Author of "Candelaria," "West Dene Manor," etc.

"MAY I DRINK TEA AGAIN UNDER ITS SHADOW."

All rights reserved.]

Figure 2: S. Rod, 1892, Illustration, *Girl's Own Paper*, June 18th.

cultural narrative. Indeed, Owen's 1892 article is accompanied by a half-page sketch (Figure 2) of her meeting Isabella Duncan at her home in Bannockburn (sat on the left, next to what seems an almost more than life-sized spinning wheel for weaving) and Owen herself, on the right, with the clock standing behind them both, anchoring the scene. These depictions transfer the domestic item into an imagined consciousness of the reader, solidifying the narrative in a new way. I suggest this dialogic storytelling around the clock gives us a fresher understanding of how time can be considered when a seemingly domestic object is popularised in the public imagination. So, whilst Owen's engagement with a Victorian sense of class and imperialism is very prominent in her writings, she indirectly offers a perspective on a story that has seen considerable shifts and changes.

Turning to Agnes. H. Bowie, who was also writing in this period, we see a very different writer and how she deals with more localised forms of storytelling. Although very little is known about Bowie, she was a working-class poet, lyricist and ballad writer from Bannockburn. She published several ballads during the 1890s, including *The Russian Emperor and the Sailor's Mother: A Bannockburn Story* (1893), *Lines Written on the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Battle of Bannockburn* (1893b), and *The Muckle Slide:*

A Memory of the Olden Times, Most respectively Inscribed to the natives of Bannockburn (Undated). *The Russian Emperor and the Sailor's Mother: A Bannockburn Story* must have had some degree of popularity and in the preface displaying how the book had been sent to Queen Victoria and the Russian Royal Court, with replies from the offices of each thanking Bowie for sending her work.

Bowie's ballad highlights the journey of Wilcox from the inception to the culmination of her story, presenting not only her actions but also the nuances of the clock that are integral to the narrative. The progression of events and the plot are articulated with a much more imaginative depth, presenting the story as more of a folklore tale, and, to some degree, speaks to the evolution of the story over the previous decades where the attempts at composure and changes creates a much more imaginative space for the story and the clock to occupy.

> In the Parish of St Ninians,
> Now full many years bygone,
> Lived a sailor's aged mother,
> Very poor and all alone,
>
> (Bowie 1893: 5)

Bowie paints Wilcox as a simple countrywoman of modest means, employing descriptors such as 'humble', 'homely', 'frugal', 'modest', 'neat', and 'clean' (Bowie 1893a: 6). These adjectives frame Wilcox in a moralistic way, linking her character depiction closely with her actions, and has parallels to Owen's portrayal of the narrative. However, Bowie extends the narrative to suggest that Wilcox may have been underestimated in her actions due to her simplistic depiction, viewing her actions with pity and dismissiveness, perceiving them as naïve and childlike. As portrayed by Bowie, the underestimation of Wilcox's actions adds another layer to the narrative, allowing for the exploration of prevailing societal perceptions and attitudes of her time. This approach by Bowie provides a deeper and more subtle representation of gender and class relations in this era and how Wilcox herself is entangled within it. This undercurrent of societal underestimation not only enhances the complexity of Wilcox's portrayal but also offers insights into the values and judgments of her contemporaries, reflecting the broader societal norms and expectations:

> And while friends and neighbours pitied,
> At her little scheme they smiled,
> For they deemed it little better,
> Than a project of a child,
>
> (Bowie 1893a: 10).

Later in the ballad, Bowie illustrates Wilcox's contemplation after receiving money from Tsar, and her decision to commission a clock whereby:

> Till a thought to her there came
> That a grand historic timepiece
> Would keep green the Emperor's name
> So an eight-day clock she ordered
>
> (Bowie 1893: 14)

These lines represent a certain kind of a perpetual remembrance that gets embodied in objects. As such, these memories become symbolised in the process of memorialisation, demonstrating the process of how individual associations and memories can become part of a collective process. Bowie's rendering of Wilcox's introspection and the resultant conception of the

historic timepiece opens avenues for exploring the symbolism and representation of objects in the preservation of historical legacies. This interaction between individual cognition and material representation provides a rich contextual framework for examining how the concretisation of thought processes into tangible forms are created, but also brings us back to the point of how clocks hold a particular duality that has been held in a public imagination in this way.

Bowie's work can be interpreted as an extension of the object, not merely as a static or tangible entity but as a dynamic performance. By using the story of Wilcox and the clock, Bowie transforms the object into a living narrative, a performative enactment of memory and history. The detailed portrayal of Wilcox's thoughts and actions concerning the clock acts as a conduit, allowing the object to transcend its material boundaries and resonate within the collective consciousness. In this performative space, the object becomes imbued with meanings, stories, and historical significance, dynamically interacting with societal perceptions and cultural narratives. This approach to viewing objects as performances within the public imagination aligns with contemporary critical theories, emphasising the fluidity, interaction, and contextual interpretation of objects, and offers a nuanced understanding of their roles in shaping, representing, and reflecting cultural identities and histories.

Owen and Bowie's works contribute to the multidimensional nature of Wilcox's clock and the story itself. Following on from understanding how the story reached various forms of composure across the nineteenth century, these collections of writings from the 1890s provide diverse perspectives on the clock as a symbol of collective memory and historical resonance. By delving into individual and societal relationships with the object, both authors facilitate a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of its representational value and role in cultural discourse, and allow the clock to emerge not merely as a tangible entity but as a construct imbued with reflective and interpretative significance within collective imagination. Their cumulative narrative, therefore, acts as a platform for exploring the multifunctional role of objects in encoding and transmitting cultural and historical meanings, adding to a wider argument of how clocks act as particular objects which cultural narratives have interacted with. Although Owen and Bowie's narratives don't directly interact with cultural notions of time in their work, the importance of these timepieces appears in everyday life. They are not simply static objects. Instead, they are used, particularly in Wilcox's object, to demarcate territory in how stories are told and dealt with. Importantly, this narrative is distinctly female-centric, with Wilcox as the pivotal character and Owen and Bowie as female writers, shaping and conveying her story. This female narrative framework imparts a unique perspective to the representation and interpretation of the object, offering insights into the experiences, perceptions, and expressions of women concerning the cultural and historical context of the clock. Longcase clocks have traditionally been seen as 'male' in their representation, and I have been careful not to

use the word 'grandfather' clock in this article due to its gendered meanings. Instead, this collective set of writings reveals almost a subversion of these narratives in how clocks and the keeping of time are understood.

Conclusion

In this article, I've sought to reveal the intricate relationship between perceptions of time, clocks, and cultural underpinnings during the nineteenth century. Using Wilcox's longcase clock as a particular Scottish example, I've highlighted how understanding clocks and, more broadly, time is not purely objective or mechanistic. Owen's and Bowie's works on Wilcox's clock reveal that objects such as these can become cultural artefacts with a life of their own and contain meanings far beyond their original purpose in the public imagination. While viewing this exploration as merely a historical study of the clock may be tempting, such a perspective would be reductive. Bastian's observations on Critical Horology, further support this point, noting that even with the onset of standardised time in the nineteenth century, cultures sculpted their distinct cultural understandings and interpretations of clocks and time, influenced heavily by societal change, negotiation, and composure. This research has begun to pave the way for a broader understanding of historical time within a new critical space, and whilst research on how clocks and time have been dealt with historically, recognising clocks as active participants in societal narratives is an exciting trajectory. Beyond historical research on the social life of clocks, there is potential in using participatory methods in how clocks are perceived in the present, more of which Bastian highlights in their work as a particularly salient area of research.

The story of Wilcox's clock invites a deeper introspection into how clocks are understood as objects and time-keeping devices: it challenges us to recognise clocks not as static markers of passing hours but as intricate assemblages with cultural, historical, and societal significance. Critical Horology, therefore, can delve deep, exploring how society and time are implicated and evolve together. By embracing these explorations and methodologies, we can unlock richer understandings, revealing the layers, stories, and nuances that shape how clocks and time are understood.

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