

January 2024 – The Cuckoo Clock

I was beyond excited on Christmas morning when I opened a medium sized box to discover I had been bought my very own Cuckoo Clock! As long as I can remember I have found them fascinating.

As a youngster I would go to Town on a Saturday morning with my Mum, she would take us to see the clock in Orchard Square – operating on the same principle. When the clock chimed, two steel workers, Fred the Grinder and Elsie the Buffer appeared.



No longer working, the doors are still there, closed. They don't open. Who knows whether Fred and Elsie are still there.

One thing is for sure. Cuckoo Clocks are high maintenance!

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To set my clock up - it took ages! Meticulously following instruction - That was definitely my husband's job. I never read the instruction booklets on any gadget I buy! The clock needs 'winding' – or should I say 'pulling' every day (!!!). The long chains, weighted with 2 pine cone shaped weights need pulling every day to keep it working. I need to remember not to forget to do this simple task. High maintenance indeed!

You can however get battery powered cuckoo clocks – although they are easier to keep – they are not as much fun. You don't engage with the clock – or perhaps notice 'time' in quite the same way.

Do you notice time? How it passes? How the seasons change so quickly? Do you like to hibernate in winter and look forward to re-emerging in Spring? Or are you one of Winter's Snow Angels – loving the cold, the frost and the crisp imprints of footprints in the blankets of fresh snow?

This month I am thinking about time, and history. Both sparked by my interest in this particular clock. So now to a bit of history.

The pendulum swings and a small bird announces the time and sings. Ever since the 18th century, the inner workings of the clock have remained practically unchanged.

No-one really knows the inventor or even where the first one came into being, although most believe it originated in the south west of Germany. It became famous in the mid-1850's and you can buy them, handmade from Germany, Switzerland and Austria. Mine came from York, still handmade, imported from Germany.

There are two classical types – the carved one, decorated with animals, birds and leaves – the other which is house like, in the style of a log cabin or chalet.

My cuckoo clock, like so many, display two hung pine cone shaped weights that send air up the pipes to make the sound of the bird.

There is a myth that surrounds the origins of these clocks.

The first is from 1796 by Father Franz Steyrer. He tells the story of two clock peddlers who carried the dials and movements on their backs displayed on huge backpacks. They met a travelling merchant who sold wooden cuckoo clocks. When they returned home, they took with them the cuckoo clocks and a local clock maker copied it.

The second story is told by another priest (Markus Fidelis Jäck) 1810.

"The cuckoo clock was invented (in the early 1730s) The craftsman adorned a clock with a moving bird that announced the hour with the cuckoo-call. The clock-master got the idea of how to make the cuckoo-call from the bellows of a church organ".



So, the cuckoo perhaps sings the song of worship when it reminds the listener that time is passing.

Interestingly the Common Cuckoo spend the winter in Israel, and Palestinians believe they cry 'Yakub' – and as such they call it 'Jacob's bird'.

The bird itself may be the feathered friend referred to in Leviticus 11:16 and Deuteronomy 14:15.

In Psalm 31:15 it reads, "My times are in your hands".

May this new year bring with us an awareness of the importance of time, the preciousness of life and the gift of living.

And may we hear the sounds of birds singing, whether that be the mechanical cuckoo or the sparrow – reminding us that with every passing minute, there is something precious to announce.

May this year be one where we sense the presence of God as loving Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

And may we know that in all places – and during all times, the LORD holds us, and announces to us, a bit like the cuckoo, that time is passing, and we must take note and live life better because of Him.