

William Clement (1638-1704) was born in Rotherhithe, England. He initially made anchors for local shipbuilders. He transitioned into clock making after he moved to Southwark. He joined the Clockmakers Company in 1677 as a brother, became a master in 1694, and was recognized as a leading London clockmaker in the late 17th century. He was one of the earliest clockmakers to apply the anchor escapement to clockwork, and used a pendulum about a yard long (that took a full second to move back and forth), which produced greater accuracy than ever before. These pendulums are actually 39 inches long (to the center of the bob) and are now referred to as a seconds pendulum (also called a “Royal” pendulum). Each swing (or half-period) takes one second. Around 1680, he built a tall wooden clock case to house the movement and long swinging pendulum, which also diminished the effect of air currents against the swinging pendulum. This type of tall case clock led to adding a minute hand to the dial, which made it possible to measure time to the nearest second.



William Clement tall case clock. Made in London ca.1685. The case is wood with walnut marquetry, and the movement is brass and steel. The 10 inch square brass dial is engraved: Wm Clement Londini fecit.

The term “grandfather clock” was not coined until 1876. The American songwriter, Henry Clay Work, saw a tall case clock in the George Hotel in Piercebridge, England and asked the owners of the hotel about its origin and history. They said the after the first owner died the clock became inaccurate and when the second owner died, the clock stopped working altogether. He was inspired to write a song titled, “My Grandfather’s Clock,” in 1876 which became responsible for the common name “grandfather clock” being applied to tall case and longcase clocks.