

**Figure 7, left.** Left-side view of the John Bower clock movement.

**Figure 8, right.** Weights and pendulum.

Kirriemuir (pronounced kĕrĕ"mer), often called Kirrie (pronounced kĕre), is a picturesque town with winding streets and fascinating architecture located in Angus, Scotland. The 2001 census recorded its population at 5,963. The beginnings of the town stretch far back in human history, as documented in several important Bronze and Iron Age archaeological sites in close vicinity. The town had its name first recorded in writing in 1201. Over the last 800 years there have been more than 30 different spellings of the name (which are recorded in volumes of the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland<sup>6</sup>) and include Keirmure, Kelimur, Kerymure, and Kerymore. (Interestingly, the Kirrymuir spelling is not included.) Kirriemuir was a thriving textile center, known for its local weavers, for more than 150 years (from the 1760s to the World War I era). Kirriemuir is also the birthplace of the internationally known author and playwright, Sir James Matthew Barrie (1860-1937), famous for creating Peter Pan. The town's square proudly displays a statue of the Peter Pan character (Figure 9, previous page).

### Clockmaker John Bower

John Bower was born in Lintrathen, Angus, Scotland (a tiny village eight miles west of Kirriemuir), on April 24, 1761, to Andrew Bower (his mother's name is unclear) and died circa 1830. It is believed he was married twice and had several children from both women, but some of the names of the children and other family details are unclear.

He was a clockmaker known to be in business in Kirriemuir, Angus, Scotland, from 1790 to around 1825. He specialized in tall-case (grandfather) clocks. Scottish publications cataloging antique clocks and clockmakers offer little information about him other than he was known to have been in business in Kirriemuir in 1802 and that he operated a business on High Street in Kirriemuir in 1825.

It is known that Bower made the entire tall-case clock (movement and case),<sup>7</sup> unlike most of his contemporaries who usually ordered the case from a local cabinetmaker. However, it is likely that he purchased the dials and had his signature hand-painted on them. The weights, pendulums, and assorted iron parts that Bower used in his clocks are likely to have been made in a nearby blacksmith shop in Kinnordy, Scotland. It is also known that he manufactured clocks in kit form that he sold to be self-assembled by his customers.

One known child of his, John Thomas Bower (born in Kirriemuir, Scotland, around 1795 and died in Clerkenwell, London, England, on August 25, 1849), was a noted tool and lathe maker. The clockmaker John Bower is often mistaken for his son John Thomas Bower.

It is known that John Thomas Bower moved to 13 King Street, Clerkenwell,<sup>8</sup> in London around 1827 when his first trade registration appeared. He was registered from 1827 through 1832 as an engine and lathe maker, which was noted the year of his death (1849) in the London Trade Directory. The 1839 Pigot's Directory of London<sup>9</sup> lists him, as follows: "BOWER, John: engine lathe and tool maker and engine turner on metals and steel, 13 King St, Clerkenwell."

A rare and complete original rose engine lathe<sup>10</sup> (Figure 10) built by John Thomas Bower in the late 1820s is on display at the Bob Lynn Historical Woodworking Trust, Inc., Museum in Ashburton, New Zealand. The head stock is engraved "J Bower."

After his death in 1849 John Thomas Bower's will was proved in the Prerogative Court in Canterbury, England, and his personal estate was determined to be valued at 5,788 pounds, 12 shillings (a substantial amount for the time). His apprentice, William Millis, took over the business after his death.

**Figure 10.** Rose engine lathe built by son John Thomas Bower, ca. 1820s.



LINDSAY HOLLAND, ARCHIVIST FOR THE LYNN MUSEUM

## Other Clocks Attributed to John Bower

Several other tallcase clocks built by Bower are known to exist. One of the earliest known Bower clocks (Figures 11 and 12) was donated to the Kirriemuir Gateway of the Glens Museum in June 2007 by John Drummond, whose family possessed it for several generations.

There are two known Bower tallcase clocks with brass dials. One features a beautiful mahogany case with a brass dial that has no moonphase disc (Figures 13 and 14).

The Peter Pan House and Museum (birthplace of James Matthew Barrie) in Kirriemuir houses a John Bower tallcase clock (Figure 15) with an intricately designed mahogany case featuring a refinished and very colorful dial. The dial is believed to have been refinished by another clockmaker local to Kirriemuir, John Watson, because it resembles his typical style and choice of colors.

A fine example of a Bower tallcase clock made from pinewood (Figures 16 and 17) stands 86" tall and features a swan's neck pediment, arched style feet, and a central finial.

Another Bower tallcase clock (Figure 18) is a typical early nineteenth-century design with an oak case, three finials, and a painted white dial.

## Notes

1. White dials became popular in the 1780s. They are painted iron dials (decorative paint hardened by heat processing) that were less expensive and easier to produce than brass dials.

2. A spandrel is the space between the inner round-dial edge and the rectangular enclosure, located at the four corners of the dial.

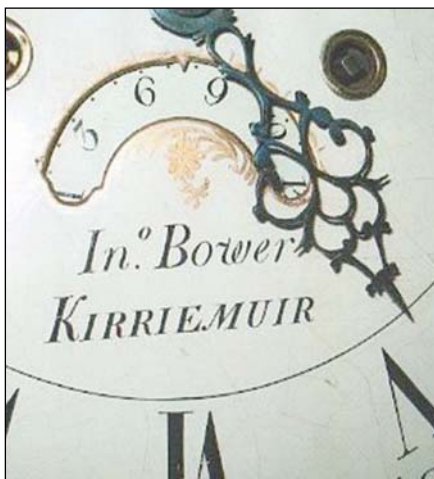
3. False plates were originally made of cast iron. About 1820 they began to be made of sheet iron. They allowed the clockmaker to attach the dial to the movement's front plate in a position relative to the moving and working parts without damaging the dial. False plates are mainly used on 8-day movements.

4. Brian Loomes notes in his book, *The White Dial Clock*, that he has seen a rare false plate marked "Walker & Finemore, Birmingham," circa 1810, which he assumes was most likely before these men set up shops independently.

5. The Friends of Kirriemuir Gateway to the Glens Museum is located in Kirriemuir, Angus, Scotland, and houses Scottish artifacts. Its stated goals are to educate the public, encourage local involvement in the work of the museum, and to provide support to ensure optimum community access to the museum and its artifacts.

6. The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland allowed monarchs to authorize official documents without having to sign each document individually.

7. Information about John Bower's clockmaking techniques is noted in documents housed in the Kirriemuir Gateway to the Glens Museum.



**Figure 11, above.** An oak tallcase clock by John Bower, ca. 1800.

**Figure 12, center top.** closeup of dial signature.

**Figure 13, above right.** John Bower tallcase clock, mahogany wood case with a brass dial, ca. 1800.

**Figure 14, center bottom.** closeup of signautre on dial boss.



**Figure 15.** John Bower tallcase clock, mahogany wood case, refinished dial signed "J. Bower, Kerrymuir." The colors and style of this dial are typical of clock dials after the time that Bower was an active clockmaker.



**Figure 16, left.** John Bower tallcase clock, pinewood case measuring 86" x 20" x 11", ca. 1820.

**Figure 17, above.** Tallcase clock dial of Figure 16 clock has hand-painted semicircular flower spandrels and is signed "Jn. Bower, Kirriemuir," in gold leafing.

**Figure 18, right.** John Bower tallcase clock, oakwood case featuring three turned finials and signed "Jn. Bower, Kirriemuir," ca. 1810.



ANDREW LENDRUM.

8. In the 1800s Clerkenwell was part of London's watchmaking district.

9. Pigot's Directories started in 1814 and covered the period before official Civil Registration began and are a valuable source of information about all major professions, nobility, gentry, clergy, trades, and occupations including taverns and public houses and much more are listed. The Directory also lists timetables of the coaches and carriers that served a town.

10. A rose engine lathe is a specialized kind of geometric lathe. The headstock rocks back and forth with a rocking motion or along the spindle axis in a pumping motion, controlled by a rubber section moving against a rosette or cam-like pattern mounted on the spindle, while the lathe spindle rotates. Rose engine work can make flower patterns, as well as convoluted, symmetrical, multilobed organic patterns. The patterns it produces are similar to that of a spirograph, in metal. No other type of ornamental lathe can produce "rose" patterns.

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Randy Jaye is actively involved in collecting and restoring clocks, wristwatches, and pocket watches. He is also continuing research and writing on various horological topics. He has served as president of Chapter 154 in Daytona Beach, FL, and co-chair of the 2011 NAWCC Florida Mid-Winter Regional. He can be contacted at: [randyjaye@gmail.com](mailto:randyjaye@gmail.com).