

John Taylor

Born 1936.

Philanthropist, horologist, and inventor of thermostatic electric kettles.

Autobiographical life story.

Available online at www.livesretold.co.uk



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This life story was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from Dr. John Taylor's website at www.johnctaylor.com. Where additional internet material has been added the source is acknowledged.

1. Life



I was lucky to be able to study Natural Sciences at Corpus Christi College at Cambridge University. I remember thinking I was very smart at school – until I got to university – when I realised that there were a lot of people much smarter than me!

However, after a long career, I'm now immensely proud to be considered one of Britain's greatest inventors. I returned to live on the Isle of Man 40 years ago after running the highly successful Otter Controls business in Buxton, Derbyshire.

Many of the hundreds of patents that I hold are for domestic appliances, thermostats and electrical equipment. Probably my most famous invention is the thermostat controls for the cordless kettle, patented and used throughout the world. It's been calculated that over two billion of my bi-metal blades – used in thermostats to switch off kettles – have been produced since their invention in the 1970s.

Strix, a company I founded, now holds four Queen's Awards, three for Export and one for Innovation, granted for my 360-degree cordless kettle connector.

My personal interests are varied and include mountaineering, sailing and flying, having first flown solo in 1953. One of my proudest moments in public life was being awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the 2011 New Year's honours list for services to business and horology



CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY



BI-METAL KETTLE SWITCH



2011 NEW YEAR'S HONOURS - OBE

I've always been fascinated by clocks and throughout much of my adult life, I've been immersed in the study and collecting of early English clocks. I set up Fromanteel Ltd, a horological development company, named after the Fromanteel family of clockmakers of 17th-century London. I've helped curate many major exhibitions on 17th and 18th century horology, with a special interest in the works of Christiaan Huygens (1629-1695).

I'm thrilled that the Isle of Man Post Office managed to sum up my life's work in six colourful stamps.

2. Inventions



Work with bi-metal materials started with my father's family business (Otter Controls). Eric Taylor invented his bi-metal blade and I decided that I wanted to make it smaller. I made it about the size of a 50 pence piece. I remember showing it to people, who would always say, "Gee, that's small" so I decided to call it the Otter G.

In the 1960s Jaguar, the car manufacturers, were looking at new ways to place the radiators in their cars. They were having terrible trouble sorting out the cooling fan system, so they used my patented invention in the engine cooling systems in the cars. I used to have the job of testing the cars on the race tracks. You can only imagine what fun that was!

We started to export controls to Germany to use in all sorts of electrical items, and they took off in a big way. A few years ago, after I retired, I was speaking to the current Chairman of the company. I'd noticed that the Otter G was still being made, so I asked him how many had been made in total.

Since I left the company in the seventies they've made, and this is only an estimate, almost one billion of these little bi-metal blades. I'm very proud of that, as I am for the Queen's Awards, three for Export and one for Innovation, granted for my 360-degrees cordless kettle connector.

I can go to any high street in the Western world, look in the window of any shop selling kettles, and say "I designed that one, designed that one, designed the controls on that one", and it's a very satisfying feeling to be able to say that.

3. Passions



If you're an inventor you are passionate by nature. You need to have extreme conviction in your abilities, together with vision, in order for your concepts to become commercial realities.

It's not good enough to just have ideas. You need to build a prototype and then from that you can produce a commercial model that's a success.

I have many passions in my life, particularly my flight record – I've been a pilot for 60 years – and my love of adventure and the natural world. I have a love for inventions and then turned these into commercial business successes.

Thanks to my business endeavours, I've been able to invest in good causes through various channels and in some cases giving back to the institutions that helped nurture my abilities many years ago.

Flight Record



Many people might look at me and assume that I'm just an inventor but there are other things I'm very passionate about. I've been a pilot for over 67 years now, and I have a number of private planes.

One of my favourite planes is M-DSKY, a Daher TBM 910 which is very fast turboprop aircraft.

One of the most exciting flights I've done was to fly from Stornoway in Scotland towards the Faroe Islands (part of the Kingdom of Norway) on the day of the Solar Eclipse (March 20 2015). When I told the people at Daher TBM my plans, they ran a story on their website that you can see here.

Sky News' Technology Correspondent Tom Cheshire accompanied me on the exciting flight. My father taught me to fly when I was a teenager and since then I've amassed over 5,000 hours of flying just for fun.

I suppose the biggest honour to have as a passenger was Prince William. He wanted to come to the Isle of Man to see part of the TT races, and the Governor at the time Air Marshal Ian Macfadyen asked me if I would go and fetch a visitor. Of course I agreed, only late in the proceedings finding it was Prince William and his friends who wanted an incognito visit to the Isle of Man.

I went to Lyneham, and collected him and his party and we flew them back to the Isle of Man incognito, and he had a holiday on the island with his friends, went round the TT course in one of the cars. He was here about three days before anyone recognised him, so I think he will have a soft spot for the Isle of Man and then I flew him back to Lyneham and the party.

I once had a co-pilot who was the most famous pilot in the world, Neil Armstrong, and like me he is interested in navigation. He had heard about my Chronophage clock and he wanted to come to Cambridge to see it.

He flew specifically to England to meet up with me in Cambridge, and I showed him the clock, and then we had dinner at the High Table in Corpus Christi, my old college and then we went to Marshalls Airfield, and he was my Co-Pilot flying to the Isle of Man. He spent a couple of days on the island. That was a great thrill to have such a world famous aviator as my co-pilot.

Love of Adventure

While at university I was lucky enough to be able to go on the Cambridge Spitsbergen Expedition to the Arctic. After I finished school I wanted to go back to do a PhD but I couldn't get the sponsorship needed to make the trip. Although it wasn't planned, I ended up joining the family business.

Since retiring, I've found a lot more time to pursue a number of my other interests. I'm a keen photographer and teach gliding and yachting. I also give a number of talks about my work and my interests in the hope that I can inspire young people to go on and make a success of their lives.



Passion for Clocks

I have a great passion for horology, the study of clocks. I've always maintained that the clock is mankind's most significant invention. You can erase all the Rembrandts from history and the world will be basically the same, but if you take the clocks away then everything would be completely different.

The work of men like Christiaan Huygens and John Harrison has completely changed the way we tell the time. I've always been fascinated by these great inventors and their clocks. They inspired me to design one of my most famous creations, the Chronophage.



I have one of the most comprehensive collections of early English clocks that travel the world to reach new audiences. The first clock I ever had was a Welsh Grandfather. I was thrilled to be involved with a very special clock exhibition in September 2018 which was hosted at Bonhams, 101

New Bond Street, London W1. Please see the website Innovation & Collaboration for full information.

As a child I would always stare through the window of the clock shop opposite Harrods if I was ever in London. Years later this is where I bought my first clock, which was built by a man by the name of John Taylor! I'm glad to say that I still love and treasure that clock.

Much like the case for my passion in inventing, it was my father (Eric Taylor) who first sparked my interest. I would often see him at the kitchen table trying to fix a clock and my interest grew from there. It's impossible to imagine a world without clocks, and that has always fascinated me.

I love to share my passion for horology with the public, so my clocks and watches are frequently on loan to exhibitions. A special exhibition – The Luxury of Time 1550 to 1750 – runs at the National Museum of Scotland, Chambers Street, Edinburgh EH1 1JF until January 26 2020.



4. Business Life



I like to be very hands-on in my business. I like to know all about what's going on and how everything works. It doesn't say much for the leader of a business if they don't know how all their products work!

There are several hundred patents to my name and I continue to invent with the Chronophage clock being one of my latest inventions, along with the Intelligent Pendulum.

My motto, learned from my mother, is "Think the Unthinkable".

When someone asks you to do something, don't think of all the reasons why you can't do it. Instead, think of all the reasons why you will do it. That's the ethos I've always embraced in business.

5. Philanthropy



In my generation all education was free, whereas now you have to pay for everything. You should always put something back, particularly in this day and age, so I started sponsoring undergraduates at Cambridge. I gave money to the senior tutors and the librarians so they could provide students with the best possible facilities.

You see so many bright young people who have to pass up the opportunity to study at somewhere like Cambridge because they simply can't afford to go there, so I wanted that money to be used in order to provide the students with the support needed to study there.

When I went back to visit the college after I retired I noticed that the facilities in the library were the same as when I left over 40 years before. So I wanted to give money to the library to make everything a bit more modern. I want to make sure the new generations have all the same opportunities I had, and I hope I can inspire them to become the next batch of great inventors.

In October 2017 the University of Cambridge announced its first Professor of Innovation. In the important role, Professor Tim Minshall leads the engineers and inventors of tomorrow to see their ideas become reality and change the world. I'm thrilled to have funded this new position led by such an inspirational figure who encourages students to embrace engineering.

Professor Tim Minshall, has a wealth of experience in Cambridge's world-renowned engineering, manufacturing and technology sector. He is based in Cambridge's Institute for Manufacturing, part of the Department of Engineering.

Also, in 2017 the Taylor Centre opened at the Royal Academy of Engineering in London. It's a very helpful hub where engineers can meet others of like minds and discuss their initiatives in a collaborative environment.

I'm thrilled that the Isle of Man Post Office has captured some of my contributions to philanthropy in one of the postage stamps in their magnificent set of stamps.

6. Art and Design



I'm passionate about art and design and have been a designer and inventor for all of my working life. In recent years, while building my elliptical country home Arragon Mooar, in the Isle of Man, I have produced bespoke 'design artworks', such as the Elliptical Collection that encompasses a full set of bone-white ceramic ware and hand blown glassware.

The limited edition set of classic white ceramic ware with subtle gold edging combines both traditional skills and cutting edge technology. Inspired by the high level of craftsmanship and strong British heritage behind the great Josiah Wedgwood, I unearthed long lost pottery skills in commissioning a custom made mould and setter that could incorporate the new and improved design.

Freed from the limitations of the standard 2½D shape, the result is a bespoke set of elliptical pieces in a revolutionary 3D curved shape. They are a pleasure to handle and completely unique.

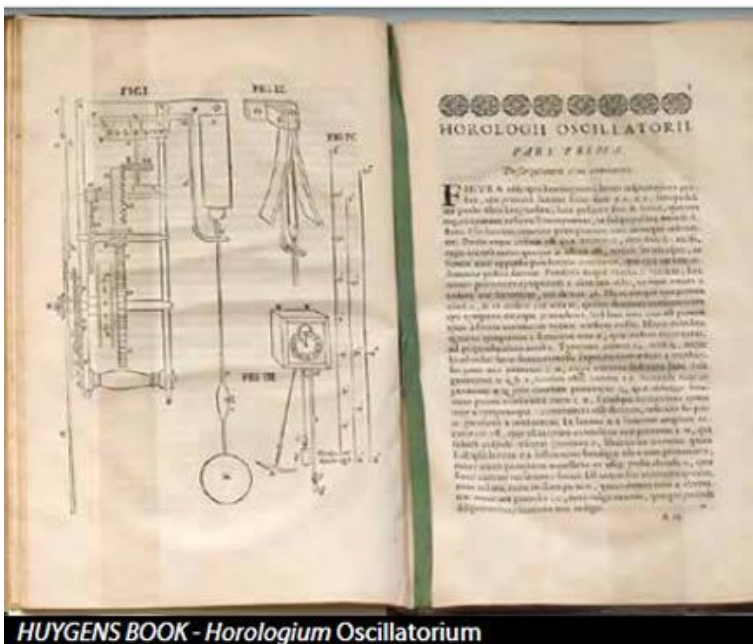
The hand blown glassware is exclusively made in Norfolk. The stylish set of elliptical glassware is designed to achieve a perfect balance of form and function, and the distinctive elliptical shape is clearly visible when viewed from the side and above. The compressed oval shape of the water glass is designed to fit a hand's natural grip to ensure maximum comfort.

I have always applied a 'nothing is impossible' approach to design using the best aspects of the past to create innovative products that are built to last.



Arragon Mooar. John Taylor designed and built this elliptical house on the Isle of Man as his home. It has a 360-degree roof terrace.

7. Horology and Clocks



Clocks are wonderful historical objects, and very important in their development, because through clocks came timepieces that went to sea and this gave ships the gift of navigation.

If it were not for clocks, we would have no jumbo jets flying the Atlantic because even now, they use time to find out where they are through GPS. So clocks have been extremely important on that front. They are delightful and beautiful objects in their own right and I think very much part of the history of Great Britain, England and London in particular.

My collection – which tours the world – focuses on early English clocks. The pendulum was first noticed as being a time base by Galileo and the apocryphal story (or it may be genuine) is that he saw the High Altar lamp swinging in Padua cathedral, and then he used his pulse to time the swing.

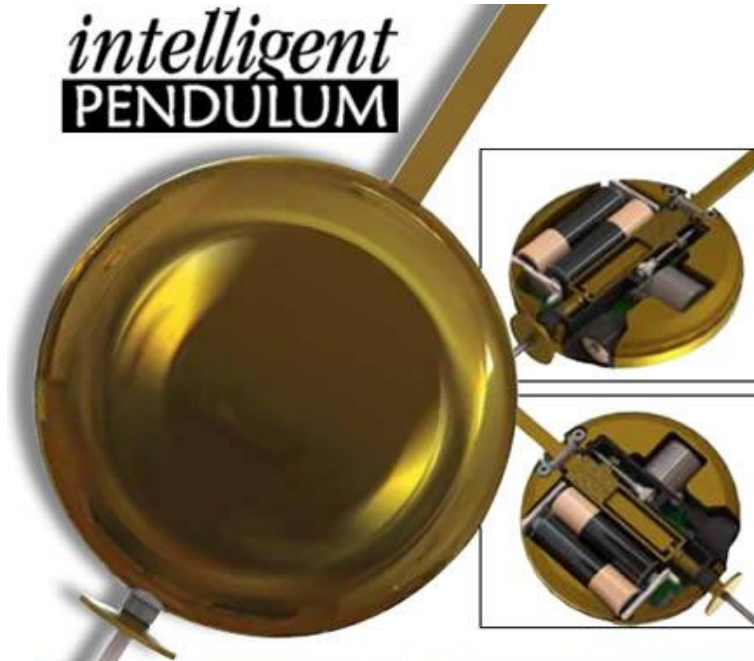
As the swing decayed he noticed that it was the same number of beats of pulse regardless of the amplitude of the lamp. He had more sophisticated timing than the beat of your heart! You can find that the larger the swing, the slower the pendulum and it's only as it decays it actually goes faster. It appears to be going fast when it's swinging in this way but in fact it's going faster time-wise when it's got a small amplitude.

Christiaan Huygens the Dutch physicist, was the first to formalise a pendulum clock, when he published *Horologion*, and he took out a patent for a domestic clock. I think that Ahasuerus Fromanteel in London was actually making pendulum clocks two or three years before Christiaan Huygens. But Christiaan Huygens certainly did the drawings and made a pendulum clock for domestic use which was disclosed in his book, and Ahasuerus Fromanteel's son went over to help with the manufacture. John Fromanteel went over to help Saloman Coster, the clockmaker in Holland who had the contract to make the domestic clocks for Christiaan Huygens.

I was lucky enough to help curate the John Harrison exhibition in the Jerusalem Chamber in Westminster Abbey, the Royal Society, and Buckingham Palace. The historical records of the development of clock making is as fascinating as the inner workings of these wonderful machines.

8. Science and Engineering

intelligent **PENDULUM**



I'm an engineer through and through and proudly express myself as a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering.

I studied natural sciences at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge which perhaps surprisingly provided an amazing education in all things practical.

The Otter Gs are very small controls I designed in the early 1960s, used as a temperature-sensitive thermostat or safety cut-out for electric blankets, hairdryers and other small domestic appliances. It is also current-sensitive, widely used in electric motors as in washing machines and the many electric motors in cars such as window lifts, windscreen wipers and seat movers.

Technological innovation has seen car design and production changes over the past fifty years, but the design of the Otter G electro-mechanical switch has remained the same.

This innovation is appreciated throughout Europe and beyond for protecting the winding on electric motors at -40c in the cold of the Arctic winters, to +50c in the heat of the desert.

An average of approximately a quarter of a million Otter G switches and derivatives are made every week, and this has been the case each week for the past fifty or so years. This is thanks to the switch's versatility and its simple but intelligent, cost-effective design.

Many of the hundreds of patents that I hold are for domestic appliances, thermostats and electrical equipment. My most famous inventions include the series of thermostatic kettle controls that have universal use, plus the cordless kettle, all patented and used throughout the world.

It's been calculated that over five billion of the bi-metal blades I designed – used in thermostats to switch off kettles – have been produced since their invention in the 1970s.

The company I founded, Strix, holds four Queen's Awards, three for Export and one for Innovation, granted for my 360-degrees cordless kettle connector.

My personal interests include flying, first flying solo in 1953. I love aeronautical design – from the streamlined shape of the plane's exterior to the dial and numerous 'clock' faces in the cabin.

I was awarded Officer of the Order of the British Empire in the 2011 New Year's honours list for services to business and horology.

My interest in innovation resulted in the design and building of innovative clocks, including the Corpus Christi Chronophage, which was donated to

and on permanent display at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge. I've also designed an intelligent pendulum.

Over the years I've made many contributions to educational establishments, including the support of the Centre for Manufacturing at UMIST, which opened in 2001. I've been an active benefactor to my former Cambridge College, contributing £2.5 million in 2008 towards the construction of a new Taylor Library for students. I've also funded many scholarships and bursaries that are aimed to help shape the engineers of tomorrow.

An Honorary Doctorate from UMIST and the title of Visiting Professor of Innovation were awarded in recognition of my numerous patents. I am also an elected Honorary Fellow of Corpus Christi College. I'm very proud that I have additionally been awarded an Honorary Fellowship of University College Isle of Man.

I assisted in the funding of the new Taylor Centre which opened this year at the Royal Academy of Engineering in London, which serves as a resource to support enterprising engineers.

I was thrilled when the University of Cambridge announced its first Professor of Innovation, who was appointed on 1 October 2017. In the very important role, Professor Tim Minshall (right) leads the engineers and inventors of tomorrow to see their ideas become reality and change the world.

This role was made possible through a donation of £2.5 million to the university. Professor Tim Minshall is a brilliant communicator and will make a huge impact on engineering students for several decades to come.



9. The Corpus Chronophage



Professor Stephen Hawking unveils the Corpus Chronophage in 2008.

When I was helping design a clock for the Corpus Christi College undergraduate library, I didn't want to create anything that had ever been done before. The design is a homage to John Harrison who used a grasshopper escapement in the development of his sea clocks. I took the idea of a grasshopper escapement that had been designed by the iconic horologist John Harrison and made it much bigger.

The Corpus Chronophage clock was unveiled in 2008 by the world-renowned theoretical physicist and cosmologist Professor Stephen Hawking and it's been a huge source of fascination ever since. Protected by six patents and using a unique mechanism, it is a fully functioning mechanical clock that shows the time without using hands.



The Tour de France passes the Corpus Chronophage.

The Corpus Chronophage is usually surrounded by a crowd of admirers – several million people a year come to see it and it is now the prime visitor attraction in Cambridge.

Adults appreciate the level of artistry, workmanship and humour that have gone into the clock's creation. The ripples on the clock face, which depict time expanding from the centre of the universe after the Big Bang, urge them to contextualise their own existence.

The Tour passes the Corpus ChronophageThe clock is equally popular with children who are fascinated by the unpredictable behaviour of the creature on top of the clock. The creature will snap its mouth, blink and move its tail, eating every 59th second at the end of the minute, so that you can never get it back.

The fact that the clock is admired and appreciated by so many people is a huge source of personal satisfaction.

The following description of the Corpus Chronophage was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the website of Corpus Christi College, Cambridge.



The Corpus Clock is one of the most distinctive public monuments in Cambridge and has been admired by residents and tourists since its inauguration in 2008. It is an unusual device for the measurement of time being both hypnotically beautiful and deeply disturbing. It was invented, designed and given to Corpus Christi College by Dr John C Taylor OBE FREng (m1959), who worked with local engineering company Huxley Bertram in constructing the Clock.

The face of the clock is plated in pure gold and the radiating ripples allude to the Big Bang, the central impact that formed the universe and could be considered as the beginning of time. Sitting atop the clock is an extraordinary monster: the 'Chronophage', meaning 'time-eater', for that is what the Chronophage does, devouring each minute as it passes with a snap

of its jaws. It evolves out of a grasshopper, a term used by eighteenth-century horologist John Harrison to describe his invention of an escapement which was a strictly functional innovation.

The Corpus Clock has no hands or digital numbers and thus at first it appears difficult to tell the time. However, look carefully and there are 3 rings of LEDs, which reading from the innermost ring show hours, minutes and seconds. When an hour is struck there is no chiming of bells, but rather the shaking of chains and a hammer hitting a wooden coffin. Time passes and we all die, a fact further represented by the Latin inscription underneath the clock, *mundus transit et concupiscentia eius*, meaning 'the world and its desires pass away'.

A further Latin inscription adorns the pendulum: *Joh. Sartor Monan Inv. MMVIII*, which translates as follows: *Joh.* is *Johannes*, *Sartor* is the mediaeval Latin for tailor, *Monanensis* is the Isle of Man, *Inv.* is *invenit*, a verb with multiple meanings, e.g. discovered/made/brought to fruition, and lastly *MMVIII* is the year 2008. Thus, John Taylor, of the Isle of Man, made it, in 2008.

10. The Midsummer Chronophage



Unlike the Corpus Chronophage, which resembles a grasshopper, the Midsummer has been based on a huge mythical fly-like creature with intricate wings and a sting in its tail.

I am not a person who stands still and I am always looking for ways to improve and innovate. The Midsummer is no exception to this rule. So the Midsummer Chronophage was revitalised in splendid shimmering colours and put on display in Cambridge at Lion Yard where it drew in large crowds of delighted people who were truly mesmerised.

Apart from its stunning and colourful design, the clock is remarkable because it engages with people and is a timely reminder that once a minute passes, it can never be had again. If you look carefully you will see that as the clock gets to 59 seconds (shown on the outer circle of lights) the creature eats the minute and you cannot get it back.

I've had an interesting life and believe that every day should be lived to the full. The Midsummer Chronophage reminds us that time quickly marches on before we know it, so it's a good habit to make the most of each hour, week and month. To complicate matters, time is relative, so minutes can move fast when we are happy and excited yet seem to slow down when less is happening.

I'm thrilled and delighted that the Midsummer Chronophage clock can now be enjoyed by those in the Isle of Man. The clock is on display until Midsummer's Day in June 2021 at the 1886 Bar and Restaurant in Regent Street, Douglas.

11. The Dragon Chronophage



The Dragon Chronophage is the third Chronophage. From the shimmering scales of the Dragon to the polished gold of the clock face, it is a stunning object and at three metres tall, it dominates any room in which it is displayed.

I was delighted to collaborate with Professor Long of China Academy of Art, Hangzhou, to ensure the authenticity of the Chinese dragon. Coincidentally, the word 'Long' means Dragon in Chinese.

Not only is the Dragon Chronophage a piece of art and a design icon, it is also a pioneering piece of technology. It is incredibly popular because it interacts with its audience, most of whom posed for a selfie!

The Dragon was exhibited in China at Design Shanghai, where it wowed and entertained the audience.

I wanted the Dragon to engage and play with the spectators, as with the others, so the Dragon winks, swishes its tail, rolls out a pearl and ripples its spine. I stopped short of making it breathe fire – only for health and safety reasons.



The Dragon's scales.

12. Chronophage Commissions



Private commission.

The importance of the invention of the clock to recent human history cannot be understated. Without the ability to measure time, we would not have been able to organise ourselves sufficiently to undergo industrial and We would not have been able to navigate effectively so would have been constrained to our respective corners of the globe. Most modern technologies would not work without accurate timekeeping.

My Chronophage slows down, speeds up and sometimes even stops, but is accurate to one hundredth of a second on every fifth minute. By its nature, the Chronophage clock is inventive and I love the challenge of designing something new, so I'm open to accepting commissions. Each Chronophage,

which is Ancient Greek for ‘time-eater’, is relentlessly hungry, gobbling up minute after minute so that you can never have it back.

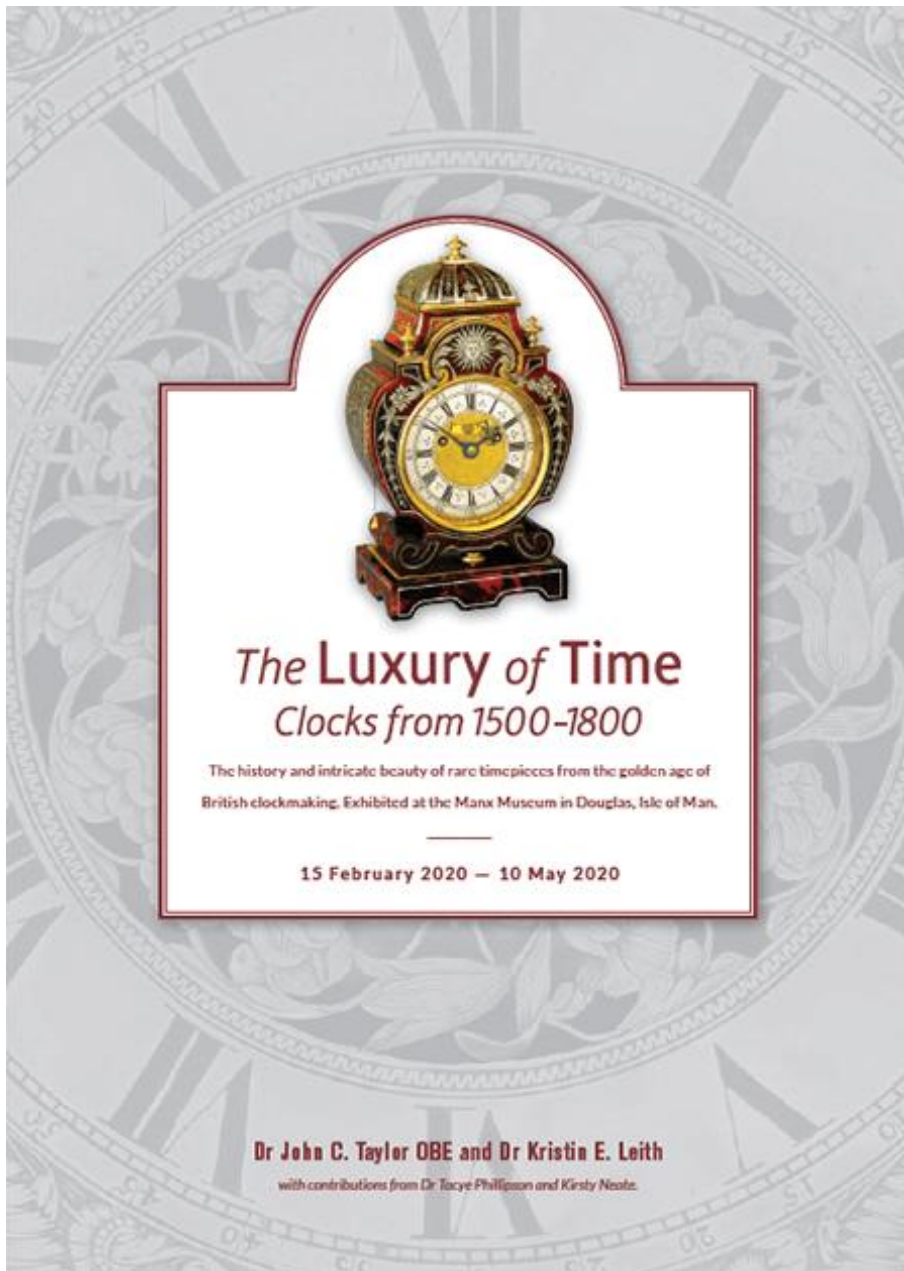
I want each Chronophage to continue to eat time for hundreds of years, so I have used materials that I know will last. Enamel, for instance, has been found in the tombs of the Pharaohs and it is my hope that these clocks will be as mysterious and mythical to our descendants as the hieroglyphs are to us. Each creature has the ability to hold you spellbound with its various tricks.

By commissioning a Chronophage, a passionate art collector would involve themselves in a unique artistic project, tying their legacy to these iconic timepieces. It’s worth noting that the commissioners of great works are often remembered alongside the artists themselves.

Please feel free to contact my team who will be delighted to assist.
Discover how to commission your own Chronophage clock at:
www.johnctaylor.com.

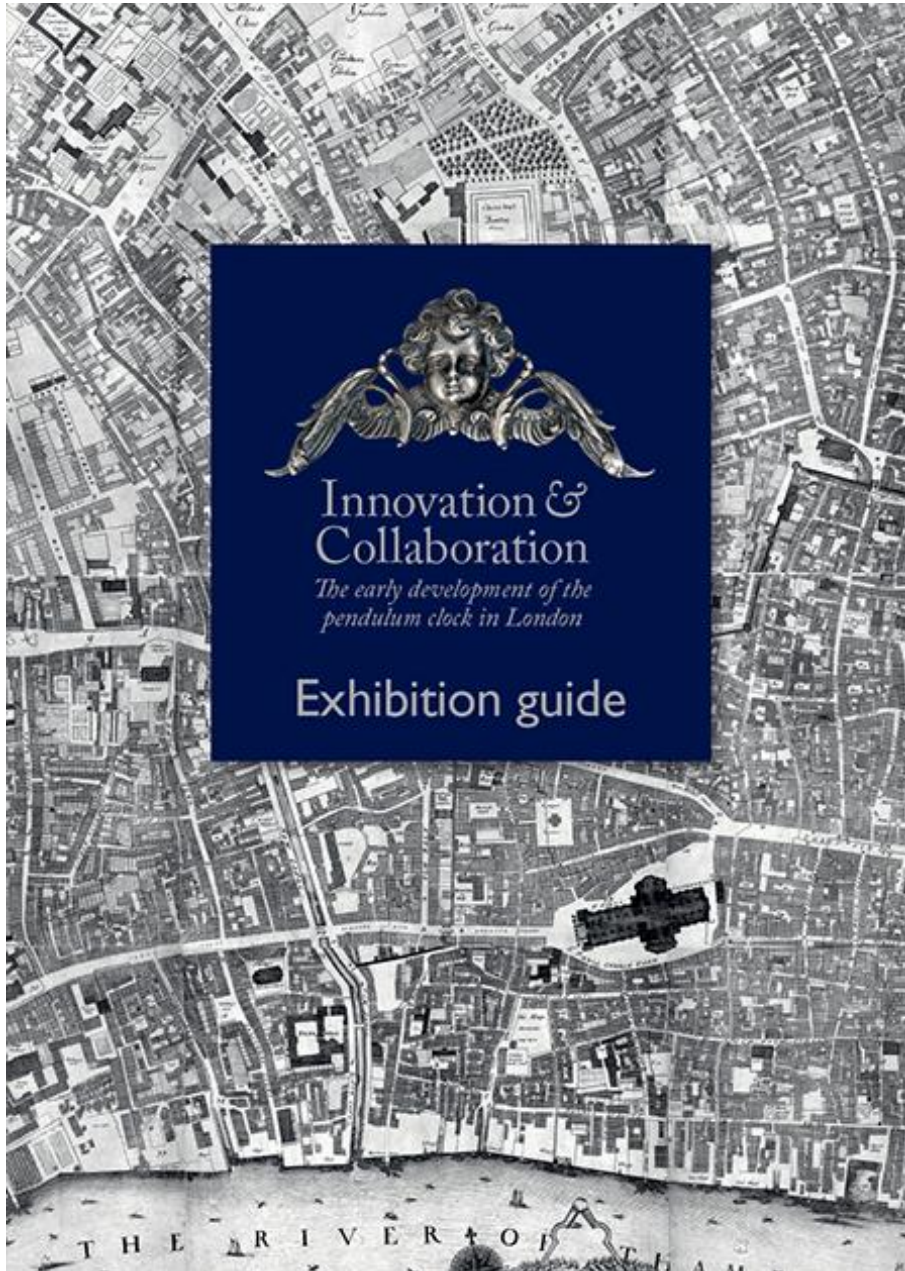
13. Publications

The Luxury of Time: Manx Museum 2020



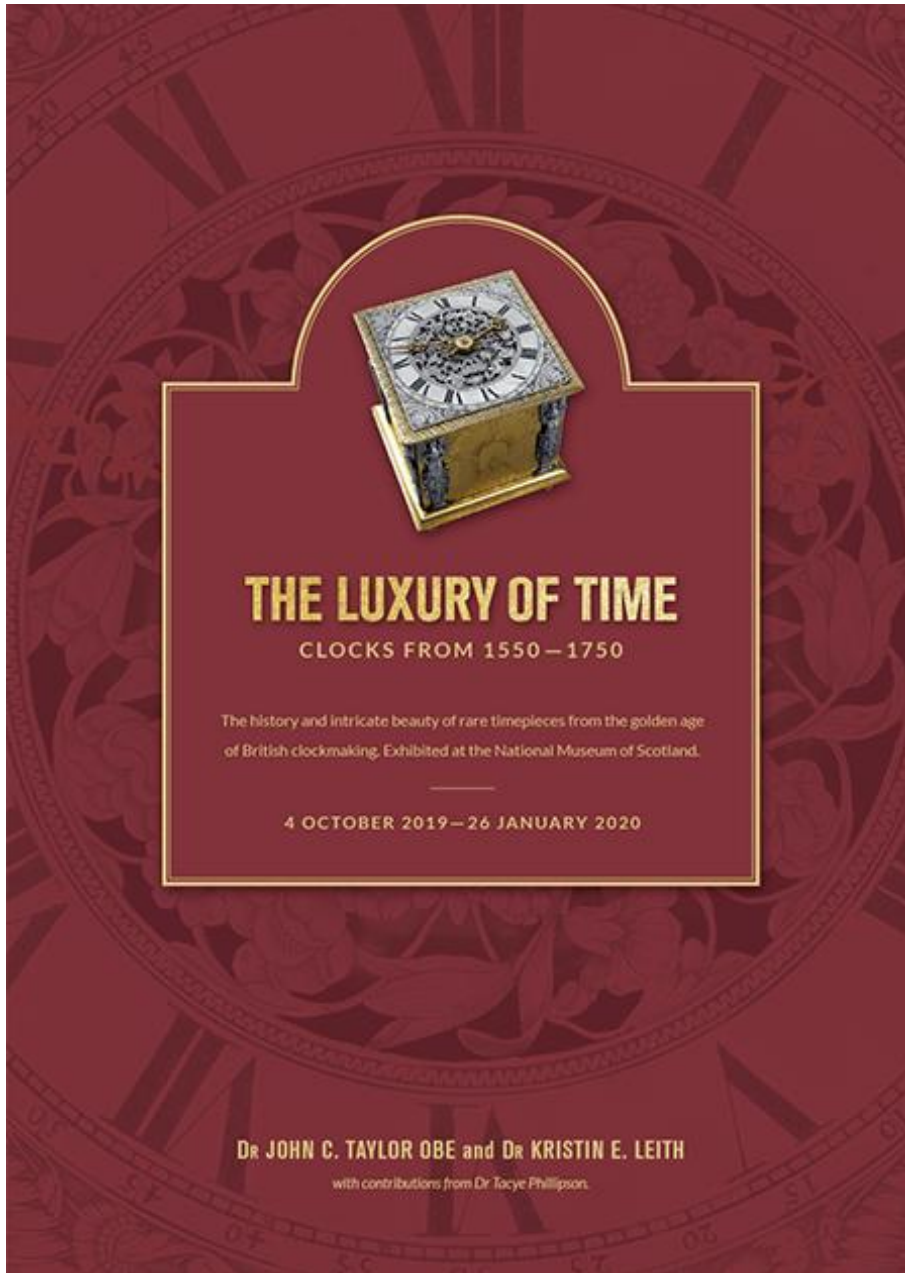
Dr John C Taylor OBE and Dr Kristin E Leith explore the history and intricate beauty of rare world heritage timepieces from the golden age of British clockmaking from 1500 to 1800. Run in association with the prestigious Isle of Man based charity, Manx National Heritage. (A4 size, 40 pages.)

Innovation and Collaboration: Bonhams 2018



Innovation and Collaboration was a hugely successful exhibition hosted with another horologist at Bonhams in New Bond Street in September 2018. The guide explores the early development of the pendulum clock in London. (A4 size, 40 pages.)

The Luxury of Time: National Museum of Scotland 2019



A highly acclaimed exhibition of clocks and watches from 1550 to 1750 was hosted at the National Museum of Scotland in 2019 and early 2020. The guide was written by Dr John C Taylor OBE and Dr Kristin E. Leith with contributions from Dr Tacye Phillipson. (A4 size, 32 pages.)

14. Arragon Mooar



Dr John Taylor outside his house with French cannon that was recovered from the wreck of Sir Cloudesley Shovell's ship that was wrecked on the Scilly Islands.

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the Isle of Man Today website at www.iomtoday.co.im.

Inventor puts his house on market for £30m

Thursday, 7 March 2019 - Property

An estate created by a world famous inventor, who has taken great care in designing something far from the norm, is on the market for at least £30 million.

With its elliptical form, fossil stone staircases showing creatures dating back thousands of years, 360 degree views and huge atrium, the Arragon Mooar estate in Santon is certainly a stand-out property.

'It's fun creating something that's unique in the world, as it's never been done before,' said owner Dr John Taylor OBE - most famous for his invention of a thermostat control that switches off a kettle once it starts boiling to stop it from boiling dry.

The Buxton-born man not only enjoys a challenge, but has a clear appreciation of nature and history having named his six-bedroom property after a 5,000-year-old Neolithic quartz circle that rests on the estate. It took seven years to build the estate, which was completed in 2014 at a cost of £23 million. The property is also wheelchair-friendly with the late Professor Stephen Hawking being welcomed as a guest there when visiting the island.

Having designed five other houses previously, Dr Taylor had asked himself 'what can I do that nobody's done before?' when purchasing the Santon plot of land covering some 280 acres. Basing a lot of his work on the classical English Palladian architecture, he created the 20,000 sq ft country house in elliptical form - the shape of an oval.

Dr Taylor said: 'I never like to do what other people have done before, a round house would have been too easy.' The unconventional shape of the property led to Dr Taylor making clever features, such as the railings throughout the house paying tribute to the house's overall oval shape. The wrought-iron Chinese dragons guarding the entrance of the building have been moulded to fit the exterior of the building.

'The whole building is curved and the dragons have been curved to fit. This is the detail I enjoy making right,' he said. He added that if he had not tried to make the dragons hug the red sandstone walls, 'nobody, probably, would have noticed... but I would'.

The best view to truly appreciate the elliptical shape is from the top floor looking into the vast atrium where his Chronophage, 'time-eater' in Greek, sits on the wall. This invention has another Chinese dragon on top, which interacts with its audience, and gives a different approach to telling the time.

Out on to the roof terrace that wraps around the copper-domed house, stunning views are provided which stretch as far as Chicken Rock Lighthouse, to North Barrule and further across the Irish Sea.

For easy access to drinks while out enjoying the views, a secret compartment within a pillar on the top floor can be found along with a fountain. This is not the only secret hideaway the building has. Looking out on to the private land there are more than 1,000 native tree species across the estate and thousands of wild flowers. A parterre garden in 17th century English country house style is also below with a garage concealed underneath with space for eight vehicles.

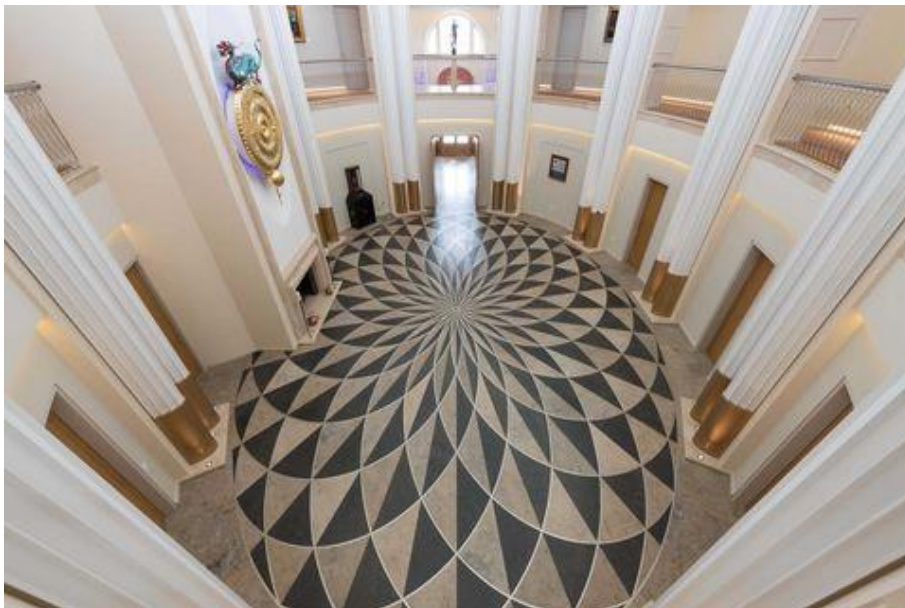
Within the centre of the parterre garden is a bronze cannon that bears the arms of French King Louis XIV and the arms of Admiral of France Le Comte De Vermandois. This cannon was used in the Battle of Vigo in 1702 in north west Spain. It was acquired by Dr Taylor in 2009. On site is an orangery, affectionately named 'Grandad's Shed' by Dr Taylor's grandchildren. It was built in memory of his own grandfather who was the head gardener at the Ynys-y-Maengwyn estate in Gwynedd and helped win many prizes competing against the Prince of Wales.

Marketed by Savills and Isle of Man agent Cowley Groves, the estate is available as a whole or in two lots. Arragon Mooar is one lot with 180 acres let on an agricultural tenancy and three cottages, and Ballafurt Farm

is the other with 102 acres, let on an agricultural tenancy. Having lived in Arragon Moar, Dr Taylor would often have visiting family members stay in the individual-styled en-suite rooms that have hypoallergenic bamboo carpets. There are also four office suites.

Dr Taylor continues to live in the island which he calls home. He was originally drawn to the island as a boarding student at King William's College, enjoying the freedom the island offered. He later saw it as the ideal place to bring up two children as a single parent. 'I brought them over because it's a safe place,' he said.

The following images of Arragon Mooar were archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.townandcountrymag.com.





15. A Personal Tribute

The following chapter was archived in 2021, with acknowledgement and thanks, from the www.web.archive.org website. In it a young Cambridge researcher, Martin Kleppmann, pays tribute to John Taylor's accomplishments, his generosity and his modesty.

Yesterday I went to see the unveiling of the Corpus Clock, also known as the Chronophage, on the outside of the new Taylor Library of Corpus Christi College Cambridge, where I studied. The short unveiling ceremony was led by none other than Professor Stephen Hawking, and has already attracted quite a bit of media attention.

The Chronophage is absolutely astonishing. I can only recommend seeing it yourself, because this video doesn't really do it justice, but it's the best I could find so far.

The Chronophage is a beast which eats away time. Dr John Taylor conceived it as a memento mori, a challenging piece of public art, and simultaneously a feat of mechanical engineering. You can read up about the details in the Wikipedia article about the Corpus Clock which I have also been editing; here I just want to make a few personal comments.

Who is John Taylor?

An air of mystery surrounds this clock and John Taylor, who led the design of the clock and funded it. I am sure that after seeing this clock there will be many voices shouting that he is a genius and/or madman, and cast judgements about him — without really knowing who this man actually is.

I have met John Taylor on a few occasions, and still I only know little about him. When I was at Corpus, several of the scholarships I received were funded by his generosity (so I probably speak with a bit of bias in his favour, but also with a bit more insight than the average journalist). From time to time, the college would organise evening socials at which John could meet some of the students he was supporting. These evenings were an opportunity for young people like myself to recognise that our work and life was part of a wider context, with many stories and human personalities involved, not faceless institutions and anonymous pounds sterling but rich and complex backgrounds. We could learn to be grateful.

At one of these dinner parties, I spent a long time talking to John. I don't recall exactly when that was, but it was probably in my second year in college, about three and a half years ago — he must have already been in the middle of designing the Chronophage. John explained to us how he made his fortune: first by examining the design of electrical connectors in electric kettles and figuring out how he could shave one penny off the

production costs by reducing the amount of material, and of course continue selling the result at the same price. One penny times many many electric kettles sold, that already paid off well. He continued to make further improvements in the field of electric kettles, and apparently the cordless kettle (with the round base, onto which you can place the kettle in any angle) is his invention.

You may think electric kettles are a boring subject, but with John Taylor talking about them, you can't help being fascinated. After all, they are very much part of our day-to-day lives. He talks about tuning the bi-metallic thermostat to achieving a perfect 3-second hard boil in Europe (once the water goes into hard boil, it should take 3 seconds before the thermostat switches off, otherwise the steam causes unwanted condensation in the kitchen); in Asia, it is tuned differently, because the water should be kept on hard boil for close to a minute to ensure germs are killed off. In the UK, electric kettles have been popular for a long time, but they didn't really catch on in Germany; this was due to the popular opinion amongst traditional Hausfrauen who found the heating element 'dirty' when calcium deposits accumulated on it. Taylor figured out that the heating element could be concealed beneath a flat kettle base, making it much easier to clean and descale, and electric kettle sales took off in Germany too.

These stories are about engineering and business only on the surface. Underneath, they are about people. About simple, everyday lives.

I mentioned to John that I was considering the idea of starting a business, and he was pleased. His advice to me was to work for myself, and not become a slave of other people. Don't borrow money from the banks, otherwise you become the banks' slave — first make profits, then fund growth out of those profits. He was particularly negative about banks.

John Taylor and Corpus

John is a very humble and retiring person — absolutely not what one would expect of somebody at his level of success. I found it positive and encouraging to see that you could be a successful entrepreneur not by being loud and self-aggrandising, but by quietly figuring out how to improve people's lives. He is not from a particularly affluent background, he was not even particularly good at university (he graduated with a 2.2, if I remember correctly) and he didn't expect to change the world.

He didn't choose to work on particularly sexy things; instead he made little improvements to the lowly electric kettle. He doesn't push himself forward, as far as I know he hasn't published anything, doesn't have a personal website or a LinkedIn profile or an article on Wikipedia, and I suspect that before this thing with the Corpus Clock the press had never even heard of him. (A PR company organised the Chronophage unveiling ceremony and

surrounding events, and I suspect that it took them a lot of effort to persuade him to appear and speak a few words in public at this occasion; my guess is that he would have much rather just quietly watched from the back.)

The Corpus Clock is just a small part of a grand plan which connects Corpus Christi College and John Taylor. A plan which involves rather a lot of money, but has a very personal level too. I think John loved his college years very dearly, and this has left him with a particular affection for the college. Also, from the theme of the clock it is obvious that mortality is important to him. It must have become clear to him that the right use of his fortune, in the years which remain to him, will involve his old love, the college.

Taylor has been pouring money into the college for several years now; he has contributed an estimated £2.5m towards the new college library, named Taylor Library in his honour; the clock came to about £1m; not to mention numerous undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships, travel grants he has sponsored, and probably a lot more which I don't even know about. His work has been very much behind the scenes, hidden; probably almost every Corpus student in the past 8 years or so has benefited from Taylor's contributions in some way, but only few have actually met him.

He is informally known as the 'Kettle Man', but he is rarely talked about, because he never seeks public attention. My housemate Naomi's PhD is being paid for by him; so were my composition studies 2 years ago. Others benefit from improved facilities and much more, probably unaware of his activity or even taking it for granted. It is almost as though Taylor's love for the college was a very secret one.

Unfortunately, I think, the college only started requiting Taylor's affection once he had started giving money and they realised just quite how deep pockets he had, which is sad because it does not seem heartfelt. Institutions like Corpus evoke feelings of fondness amongst many of their old members because of the wonderful community they provide to students.

At the same time, they have to function economically, and although Corpus is fortunate to have substantial assets, it still has to watch its cashflow carefully (a lot of the assets are in things like land, buildings, silverware, and port... and I narrowly escape a terrible pun about liquid and illiquid assets here). Funding for academic institutions is always short, and even comparatively well-off colleges or universities cry out for donations and other sources of funding. So it's not surprising that Corpus was happy to quickly enter into a hot love affair with Taylor's money, but I sincerely hope that they are in it for the love, not just the money.

For John Taylor, there may be an element of hoping to achieve immortality through becoming one of the college's top benefactors. However, as I understand it, he sees a lot more depth in this relationship than simply personal gratification. From conversations with fellows of Corpus I gather that there is a kind of long-term 'master plan': to support students to realise their full potential, in the hope that like John himself, they will go out into the world to make a difference, which earns them a lot of money, some of which they will then feed back into the college to support the next generation of students. He wants to be the trigger for a continuing cycle of progress and positive change.

Therefore, if we see Taylor's bust in the Taylor Library, or pay our tuition fees from his money, I don't believe that he wants us to think "oh, what a wonderful and generous man John Taylor is". That would completely miss the point. No, what we should be thinking is: "ah, what a good idea he had: I should be grateful and motivated by his support, and when I have developed further a few years down the line, I will remember his gift and will give something back".

Some personal comments

Of course the entrepreneurial view resonates with me. I believe that a good education is a great starting position to go out into the world, make a difference and do something worthwhile, be it changing people's lives for the better, or making a fortune, or whatever. Moreover, I too am fond of my old college, mainly because of the wonderful people I met and the profound experiences in which I was allowed to share there. I am grateful of all the college has given me, and it seems quite natural to me that if I was through some bizarre coincidence to become successful and wealthy, I would give something back to the college. Already now I try to return some of the favour by getting involved in some of the college teaching and supervising undergraduate students.

But there are also things I ponder about. Some subjects have more of a tendency to generate money than others. Law, management, science and engineering have a tendency of being good money makers; history, philosophy, arts and humanities are equally important for our culture, identity and society, but they tend not to be rewarded as much in monetary terms. If money is to become an increasingly important driving force in education and academia, we must be very careful that the revenue-weak subjects don't get neglected.

Although I value competition, incentives and support for those with particular abilities, I strongly believe we must also be careful that the system always remains inclusive. When institutions strongly rely on alumni feeding funds back to their educators, there is a danger of positive feedback loops, which makes some organisations extremely wealthy while others are

starved. Judging from historic experience, we often see people from unremarkable backgrounds going forward to do remarkable things, and it would be foolish for a society to prevent such social mobility by creating exclusivity.

I don't want the UK to end up like the US, where many universities are run very much as businesses, whose professional fundraisers squeeze every available dollar out of their alumni while the university still charges obscene tuition fees to students. Universities should remain places of reflection and wisdom, they should treasure our culture, our understanding of the world and our humanity; the purpose of a business is to make money, but that is not the purpose of a university.

In Europe of the Middle Ages, society took many steps backwards from antique times, and monasteries were pretty much the only places where culture, education and learning lived on. In the renaissance, these values gradually returned to the wider population, forming the basis for the social progress which has brought us to our current high culture.

In the older Cambridge colleges you can still feel a bit of that monastic tradition today, reminding us of the importance to treasure that culture and learning, to keep it as something precious, to be grateful, and at the same time to constantly move forward and progress, deepening our understanding of the world and ourselves.

What's this got to do with the Corpus Clock?

Which brings us back to the starting point, the Chronophage, now part of the same walls which are the home to both all the precious learning and also all the money matters mentioned above.

It is modern art? That's right, and it fits in nicely right next to the wonderful building in which I lived for a year, which dates from the 14th Century.

It is expensive? True, but amazing things rarely come free; think of all the artists, craftsmen and engineers who helped to make it happen; think of what it might cost to build a cathedral.

It is an astonishing piece of engineering? Indeed, and I'm delighted that we can still celebrate and marvel at a mechanical device in this age of electronic computers.

It is a piece of history? Yes, it is a tribute to the greatest of clockmakers hundreds of years ago, but it is still novel, it is inspiring, it is built to last, and being a clock, it is also anchored in the present.

It is terrifying and challenging? Absolutely, because no progress is made without challenge.

It reminds us that we're all going to die? Correct, and more optimistically, it reminds us that we should try to do something good with the time we have before that event.

Martin Kleppmann

On his own website the author of this chapter, Martin Kleppman (below), describes himself in 2021 thus:

I am a Senior Research Associate and Affiliated Lecturer at the University of Cambridge Department of Computer Science and Technology, funded by a Leverhulme Trust Early Career Fellowship and the Isaac Newton Trust. I work on local-first collaboration software and distributed systems security, and I teach an undergraduate course on distributed systems.

I am working towards a sustainable model for research and teaching through crowdfunding on Patreon.

In 2017 I published a book for O'Reilly, called *Designing Data-Intensive Applications*. It covers the architecture of a broad range of databases and distributed data processing systems, and it is one of the best-selling titles in the publisher's entire catalogue.

I am a regular speaker at conferences, and recordings of my talks have been watched over 150,000 times.

I have worked on various open source projects including Automerge, Apache Avro, and Apache Samza. Between 2007 and 2014 I was an industrial software engineer and entrepreneur. I co-founded Rapportive (acquired by LinkedIn in 2012) and Go Test It (acquired by Red Gate Software in 2009).

I have composed several musical works, including "Die Türme des Februar" (in German), a musical-dramatic adaptation of the book by Tonke Dragt, which premiered in 2007 with a cast of 150 people.

