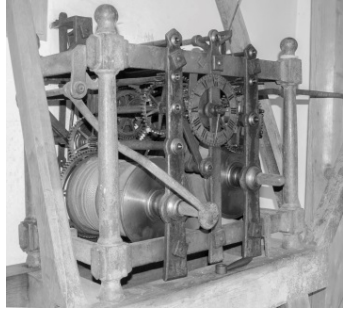


### **At the Third Stroke the Time will be 3 pm, More or Less**

Most drivers approaching Turvey from Bedford, especially those who have noticed the speed camera, will be going slow enough to see our tower clock—and regulars will have noticed that it is normally either fast or slow. Dating, as it does, from the first years of the nineteenth century, Mr Higgins's clock can surely be allowed some margin of error in its time-keeping abilities. The wooden frame of the tower probably moves as the weather changes, causing the clock to run faster or slower. It can be adjusted by lifting the big iron pendulum weight with one hand and turning the big flat nut underneath it with the other, but you have to be on the ball to keep up with our clock, it will soon be wrong again.



When we came to the Abbey in 1981, Bernard Stapleton, the gardener, wound the clock up, and kept it well oiled, I understand he got the clock going when he first came to work at the Abbey. When Bernard was forced to retire though ill health I took the job on and have wound up the clock ever since. I often wonder about the many other pairs of hands that have turned that clock key.

The clock chimes the hour and, unusually, has a wooden mallet—apparently the clock was too loud for Mr Higgins, who had the mallet changed from metal to wood. The clock weights, one for the clock and one for the chime, are two big iron cylinders 9 inches diameter and 9 inches high, they take a week to reach the floor below. When the building was being renovated in 1988 we found another weight lying in the coal dust and rubble below the clock, a monster of a weight twice as high as the ones now in use. I and someone else rolled it to the back of the garage and stood it up in the corner, where it remains to this day.

Our clock shares its tower with the radio receiver that links our guest house fire systems with the Abbey. They eye each other across the clock room, a loud, slightly irregular tick versus little shimmering red lights, past meets present.

Way back in the fifth century, Saint Benedict considered time-keeping to be important. In his Rule he assigns the job to the abbot, who can delegate it to another if he wishes. In the twenty-first century it has become less necessary to have a general time signal to let monks and nuns know what time it is, when to assemble in the chapel for what St Benedict refers to as the 'Work of God', our regular times of prayer together: psalms, prayers, readings, hymns. From St Benedict's time to the present day, from sundial to smart phone, the 'Work of God' has remained central to Benedictine life, it is the frame around which our day is built.

When the clock tower was being renovated, I took the opportunity to re-paint the clock face, painting on the back a quote from Psalm 112: 'From the rising of the sun to its setting, praised be the name of the Lord.' That praise of God is at the heart of our life!

Sr Benedict, Turvey Abbey