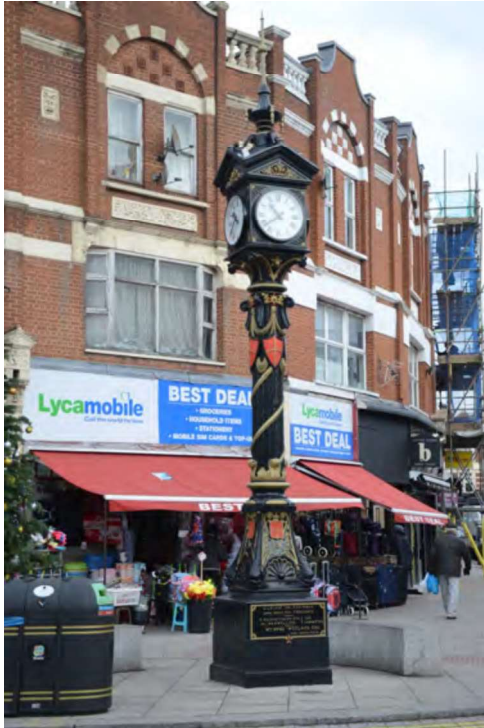


Harlesden Public Clock. A Clock in Time. Part 1



The Harlesden Clock in December 2018 (left) and the plaque on the base of the clock (right), suggesting that the clock was erected in 1887, and not 1888.”
(photos by H.Brown)”

The following is a chronology of the Harlesden Village/Jubilee clock, from the first record of the notion of having the clock. I do not pretend that this is a complete record, but if you know something different, I would be delighted to learn more.

May 1885. Reported that there was a proposal to have a public drinking fountain in Harlesden. This movement has now decided to have a clock instead. Mr. William Orme Wedlake is named as the prime mover.

There seems to be a hiatus in developments until:-

June 1886. A letter in local newspaper demands information about the scheme to supply a village clock.

THE VILLAGE CLOCK.
SIR,—I signified my approval of the scheme for a village clock more than a year ago, and though every now and then the matter is revived it appears nothing practical has yet come of it. What I want to know is, why so much time is being wasted when the need of a clock of the kind is becoming daily more necessary? I have just heard of one very influential inhabitant who has been quite ready to form one of the committees to contribute towards the cost of the village clock, but I fear he will withdraw if there is to be so much delay. Will you see what can be done to hasten on the matter, and oblige,—Yours faithfully,
A VILLAGER?

The letter that seems to have awakened the campaign.
From Willesden Chronicle 18/06/1886

A week later the same newspaper carries a reply from Mr. Orme Wedlake. The problem it seems is a lack of “committed subscribers”. Messrs Gillett & Co. are named, as turret clock makers, and as likely contractors.

October 1886. Willesden Local Board provides assurance of assistance.

November 1886. Gilletts have submitted a design for the clock, cost around £150.00. Subscription pool stands at around £82.00.

November 1886. Messrs. Dell have been interviewed, and may well be part of a joint venture with Gilletts, in the manufacture of the clock.

December 1886. A meeting held on the 8th undertakes to appoint a Committee to decide various aspects of the job. Possible additions to the clock design include illumination, a striking clock with chime, drinking fountain or trough for dogs. It is at this juncture that mention is made that the clock may be dedicated to Queen Victoria for her 50th Jubilee.

November to December 1886. The growing lists of subscribers is published in the local press.

March 1887. Local Board Surveyor presents plans for the clock, submitted by Gilletts.

April 1887. A delegation from the clock Committee addresses the Board, to ask for provision of services (gas for lighting, to illuminate the clock at night, and water for the fountain/trough).

Spring 1887. The Local Board minutes discuss whether the width of the road, at the proposed site, and the depth of proposed foundations will be adequate.

June 1887. The Local Board declare a holiday for their employees, to celebrate The Queen's Jubilee, to take place on 21st.

July 1887. A delay in the progress of the clock project is explained. The seat of the problem seems to be due to the indecision over whether the clock will have chimes. It seems that Gilletts had prepared estimates for a clock without chimes, and are unwilling to absorb the extra cost. Fresh tenders are requested. Also, many pledges from subscribers remain unfulfilled, so the costs could be met anyway.

August 1887. Revised plans are approved by the Local Board. Messrs. MacFarlane of Glasgow are cited, as new contractors.

October 1887. Belief in the clock project is questioned in local newspaper. (A cardboard replica of a turret clock appears in the High Street).

The belief that the erection of the Harlesden Jubilee Clock has been postponed till the next Jubilee or the Greek Kalends is rapidly gaining ground, and it would be well, therefore, for the committee to make some announcement as to the present prospects of the scheme, and thus allay the not unnatural fears of some subscribers who are beginning to think that it is high time they saw something for their money.

Belief in the clock begins to wane. Willesden Chronicle. Local Gossip Column, 07/10/1887

Late October 1887. Willesden Junction Station receive a new clock. Is a village clock now needed?

November 1887.

11th. The imminent arrival of the clock is announced, manufacture by Messrs. Stevens Bros of Queen Victoria Street. Plans for the clock to be displayed at Dells, in Harlesden.

18th. Although the clock will not be installed until January (1888), it will bear the inscription "...erected by public subscription A.D. 1887".

30th. Subscription fund still some £20.00 short of target.

January 1888. On 6th, it is announced that Gas Light and Coke Co. have removed lamp standard, to



A photograph of the clock, as it appears on a postcard from early 20th Century

make way for the clock, and excavations have been made.

13th. A watchman has been installed at the site.

24th. Mr. Wedlake and Mr. Stevens request that Local Board continue to provide gas and water. Surveyor instructs Mr. Stevens to erect hoardings around the clock. (Presumably, by this date, the clock is in place, but perhaps not yet functional).

28th. The clock is officially unveiled, with a ceremony. Eight-year-old daughter of Committee member Mr. Goldney Cary, performs the opening tape cutting. The manufacturers are confirmed as being Messrs. Stevens Bros of Upper Thames Street, and Milton Iron Works, of Glasgow.

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We were glad to see that the Harlesden Public Clock Fountain was this week taken in charge by the contractors to the Local Board, for the purpose of remedying the water overflow nuisance, and for placing the much-needed steps for enabling children to reach the drinking cups.

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More trouble with the clock, but proof that it did have a drinking fountain. Willesden Chronicle Local Gossip Column, 29/06/1888

February 1888. Mr. Dell, local clockmaker undertakes to wind the clock regularly, for the first year.

Public Clock Committee announces that there is still £40.00 to be found, to discharge all of the expenses.

March 1888. Some concern is expressed about the gas burners on the illuminating lamps. Perhaps the clock faces are not clearly visible, under all conditions.

June 1888. Water overflow issues on the drinking fountain. Local Board instructs surveyor to provide granite steps to the drinking fountain, so that children can reach it.

July 1888. A full list of subscribers is to be posted inside the premises of Messrs. Beeson, on Harlesden High Street, for the public to see.

November 1888. The Board are advised to provide stronger protection posts, around the clock, as one is damaged, and is described as being made of “such frail” material.

1889. The Committee is seeking to pass over the ownership of, and responsibility for the clock to the Local Board.

February 1889. Mr. Wedlake sends a letter to the Board, asking them to take over “..provided such

clock is handed over free from all liabilities” (the Board’s stipulation). Memorandum of transference is requested by the Board.

April 1889. Memorandum is submitted, and accepted, and the Board’s seal is affixed. The clock is now the property of local government.

There is nothing to report, concerning the clock, for some time, during the 1890s and the first decade of the twentieth century. Most of the news items concern the proposed running of trams through the area, the suggested routes that might be followed, and whether or not the roads, in the area of the clock would need to be widened.

To be continued.

Harry Brown



Jubilee Clock at the turn of the 20th century (www.images-of-london.co.uk)

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