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Tick tick, nudge nudge

"It's a busy time of year for freemasons," says Reg Barrow, curator of the Brighton based Sussex Masonic Museum, "and I wear several hats." Intrigued as I am about his hats, aprons and other Masonic paraphernalia, I've called to ask him if he knows anything about the background to the mysterious 19th century Lewes-made grandfather clock with hand-painted Masonic symbols that has come into the possession of antique clock restorer, Bill Bruce. Reg says that the clock probably wasn't commissioned by the Lewes Masonic Lodge, "who had better things to spend their money on".

More likely, he explains, it was donated by a Lodge member. The maker was Michael Irish. I go along to Bill's charming shop in North Street to take a closer look. "Clockmakers were highly regarded in the community, often holding positions of office, such as Constable," Bill explains. He shows me the blond oak clock, made around 1810. "I can tell the provenance of a clock by the style, and Lewes clocks are quite distinct".

He points to the top curve, explaining that the "break arch hood with a small return" is typically Lewesian. And of course it also says 'Michael Irish, Lewes' on the cream-painted dial. The symbols painted on the face include a central Eye of Providence, representing the all-seeing eye of God. The principal Masonic symbolic tools are also present - the square (because Masons should 'square their actions by the square of virtue') and compasses (about creating boundaries in life). *EC*

www.wfbruce.co.uk

