

# Part 33

by Bob Frishman, FNAWCC (MA)

**W**illiam Hogarth (1697–1764), one of England’s most admired and influential artists, created a group of six satirical paintings, *Marriage A-La-Mode*, which many people consider his greatest masterpieces. He titled the second canvas *The Tete a Tete*, also known as *Shortly After the Marriage*. The series chronicles the brief marriage between a dissolute diseased young English viscount and the daughter of a rich London alderman, a union arranged by mercenary fathers for financial and social status reasons. The story ends tragically and joins other morality tales painted by Hogarth and then widely distributed as inexpensive engravings.

The series was commissioned by Mary Edwards, a wealthy reformer and art patron who narrowly escaped a similar arranged marriage that most likely would have infected her with syphilis. Hogarth’s 1742 portrait of Miss Edwards also is *Horology in Art*: a chatelaine watch hangs from her waist. The artist had little formal art instruction but was trained as an engraver who as a youth reportedly decorated watch movements.

Hogarth’s witty social commentary is on full display on this 27.5" x 35.75" oil on canvas. The exhausted husband has returned home from a night of debauchery, his broken sword suggesting illness-induced impotency despite the little dog’s discovery of a woman’s intimate garment in his coat pocket. The wife appears happier, probably recalling a recent adulterous liaison. The soberly dressed Methodist steward retreats with a pile of unpaid bills. A wild party, with playing whist, has not yet been cleaned up in rooms of garish Neo-Palladian style often ridiculed by the artist. A chair is upended, candles are guttering, a servant yawns, the overmantel painting shows Cupid among ruins.

The garishly ornate wall clock is a horrid and unlikely combination of chinoiserie and rococo styles with no logic for its combination of cat, Buddha, fish, and foliage. We hope no such clock existed. It shows the time as 12:20, and the painting’s message rings out whether this is just after midnight or noon, assuming that in this disorderly house the hands showed the actual time. Clocks and watches, and recognizable time metaphors, are regular features in Hogarth paintings. In this one, on view since 1824 at the National Gallery in London, the clock is just one of many symbolic elements that all viewers of his day would have appreciated.

## About the Author

Bob Frishman has repaired, restored, collected, sold, and researched antique timekeepers since 1980. His business, Bell-Time Clocks, is based in Andover, MA. He lectures regularly about the history, science, and culture of mechanical timekeeping, he has authored many articles for the *Watch & Clock Bulletin*, and he can be reached via [www.bell-time.com](http://www.bell-time.com). He is an NAWCC Fellow, Chair of the Ward Francillon Time Symposium Committee, and a Freeman of the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers.



**Figure 1.** *Marriage A-la-Mode: 2, The Tête à Tête*, by William Hogarth, about 1743, The National Gallery, London, NG114.