

Purchase of the Bruce Longitude Sea-Clock

The Bruce-Oosterwijck longitude pendulum sea clock is one of only two examples of a clock of its kind in the world, and represents the first attempt to solve the 'the longitude problem,' the issue of measuring longitude which scientists tried to solve as people began to make transatlantic voyages.

The inability to accurately determine longitude made any significant sea voyage innately hazardous had been clear for millennia. Enter Alexander Bruce, (1629-1681), 2nd Earl of Kincardine, politician, judge and inventor.

While residing in the Netherlands, he met and built a friendship with Christiaan Huygens, the inventor of the pendulum clock. Huygens believed strongly that the key to the 'Longitude Problem' was a highly precise timepiece; he saw his recent invention, the pendulum clock (1657) as an ideal starting point.

Although the sea clock was ultimately unsuccessful in accurately measuring longitude, it was a significant attempt and represents a pivotal moment in maritime history. It would take 100 more years before the longitude problem was famously solved by English carpenter and clockmaker John Harrison.

Image



The Bruce-Oosterwijck longitude pendulum clock
National Museums Scotland
Nation/region

Scotland

Grant awarded

£36,000

Award date

22/10/2018

Related News

National Museums Scotland acquires rare clock from pioneering attempt to determine longitude at sea

National Museums Scotland has acquired a historic Bruce-Oosterwijck longitude pendulum sea clock