



Keith Sinfield and his wife Jenny with a picture of one of Christopher Holtum's clocks. MHRA-29-02-12 Holtum Feb88 (1)



Karl Benz built the petrol-powered Motorwagon in 1885.

Did clockmaker beat Benz to the first car?

BY PETE HORTON

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AN 18TH-CENTURY newspaper describing "a chariot without horses" may be evidence that a Church Lawford man invented the world's first car, two historians are hoping.

Some 180 years before Karl Benz invented the petrol-powered car, Christopher Holtum was busy in London exhibiting his own invention.

An advertisement in the January 13, 1711 edition of the *Daily Courant*, one of the world's first newspapers, describes a chariot "in which man may travel without horses, the like never made nor seen before", and that the man demonstrating it, Christopher Holtum, was a clockmaker from Church Lawford.

Holtum filed no patents and there is no record of him in the transactions of the Royal Society.

But the advertisement mentions the vehicle as "having the praise of all persons of quality and ingenious men who have seen it."

The cutting caught the attention of local historians Keith and Jenny Sinfield, who are trying to find out more about Holtum and his contraption - in particular how it could have been powered.

Keith said: "Just occasionally you come across something which is so incredible that it takes your breath away - I was astounded when I first read the

Advertisement.

†† An Invention of a wonderful Chariot, in which Persons may travel several Miles in an Hour without the Assistance of Horses, and measure the Miles as they go; it turns or goes back. 'Tis one of the greatest Curiosities that ever was seen in Europe, having the Praise of all Persons of Quality, and ingenious Men that have seen it. Note, That it is convenient for any Gentleman that is afflicted with the Gout, or that is incapable of walking, thro' Lameness, to ride about his Park, or about his Garden, without damaging his Tarris-Walks or Grass-Plants. The Invention is so highly approv'd, that there is already one bespoke by a Parson of Quality, which is to go on four Wheels, and swing in the Nature of a large Coach; which, according to a modest Computation, will travel at the Rate of seven or eight Miles an Hour. If any Person of Quality is desirous to use them with Horses, they may either travel as far again in a Day as they can with another Coach, or go as far with a Pair of Horses, as the Coaches hitherto in Use can with six. Note, That such as are bespoke for Parks or Gardens only, will come very reasonable, others at proportionable Prices. It is now to be seen at the Cabinet-shop, over against the Globe Tavern, near St. Martins Lane in the Strand; where Attendance will be given at all times 'till the 2d of March.

The newspaper cutting in question.

accounts of Christopher Holtum's demonstrations.

"What I would really like to find out is how the machine worked.

Clockwork would be impractical for a small vehicle and the world's first

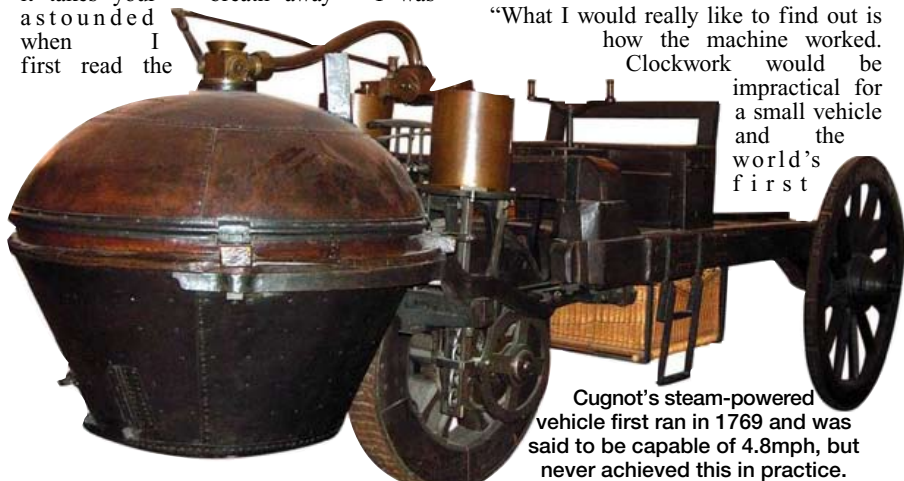
steam powered car didn't appear until 1769."

Keith added: "It seems like his exhibition lasted for two weeks, so it doesn't sound like a scam. What would be really useful is if someone could find a diary or first-hand account of Holtum's machine. That may be the key to finding out what type of machine this could have been."

Examples of Holtum's clocks have recently appeared in auctions. One was sold in 2006 for £800, another in 2011 for £1,600 and one this year for £1,600.

Keith said: "We already know some details of his life, but we are keen to find out more. We would be interested to hear from anyone with information about Christopher Holtum."

Anyone who can help can contact the Sinfields by writing to 22 Church Road, Church Lawford, Rugby, CV23 9EG, or emailing keithsinfield@talktalk.net.



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