

Compass Microscope in case with accessories, English, mid-18th century



From the first time I saw this form of microscope in Gerard L'E. Turner's book *Collecting Microscopes* in the early 1980s I have been fascinated by the shape and beauty of the instrument. This was furthered when I saw Ray Giordano's *Singular Beauty* exhibit at M.I.T. and later helped mount it at the Linda Hall Library in 2009. After handling all 127 microscopes in Ray's collection this style remained among my favorites. In May of 2013 when an example came to auction at Skinner's in Boston I decided to try to own it. I had Ray bid for me while I watched on the internet. I won it for \$ 3120. w/ buyers premium. Skinners' stated on the phone it came from a picker in Ca.

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W&S Jones Brass Botanic Microscope

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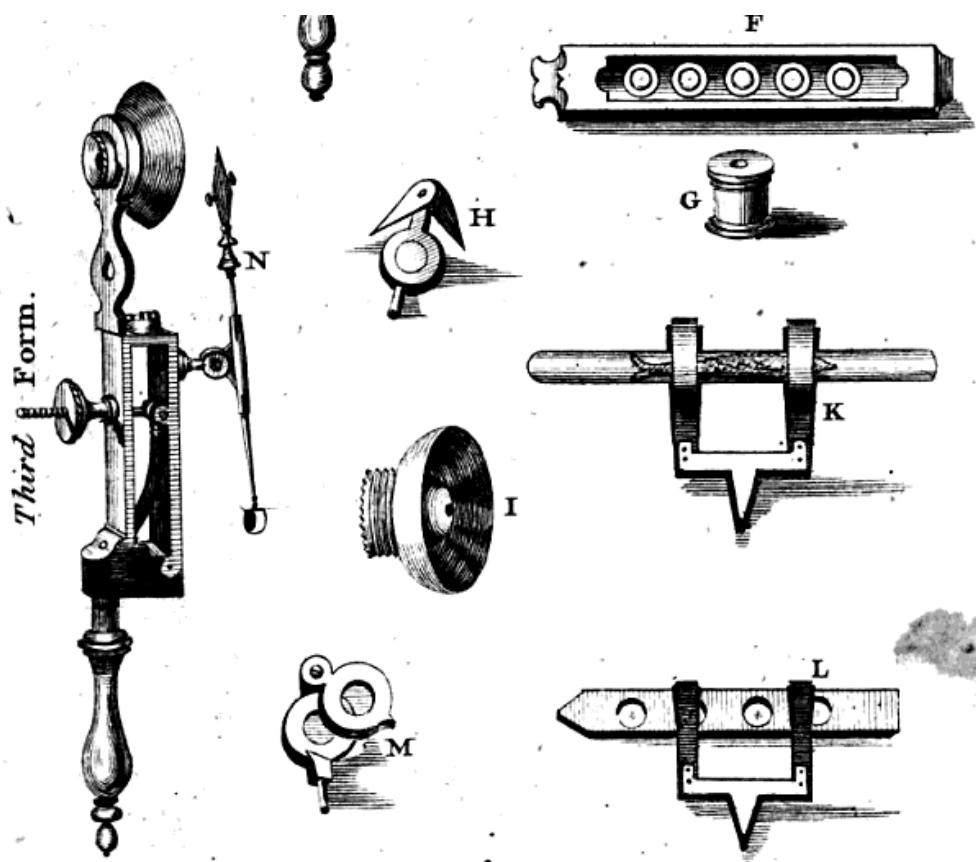
Auction: Science, Technology & Clocks - 2652M
Location: Marlborough
Date / Time : May 04, 2013 10:00AM

Description:

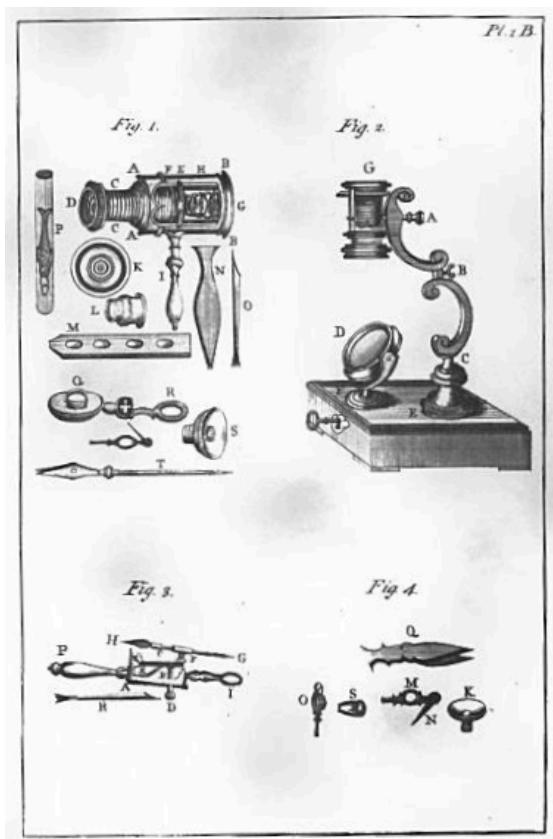
that had very little idea of what he had found. Skinner's had put a low estimate of \$ 300. - 500. which drew active bidding from the internet, floor and overseas phones.

It is very similar to a number of examples in other collections such as #11 and #12 in Ray's collection. I feel my example was most likely made by George Adams Sr. (see section about the signature) however John Cuff and Benjamin Martin both made nearly identical instruments. All examples are dated to the mid-18th century.

In Benjamin Martin's *Young Gentleman and Lady's Philosophy...* 1763 he showed three forms of single (referring to having one lens) microscopes in plate XLIII.



George Adams Sr also illustrated a compass microscope in his *Micrographia Illustrata or the Microscope Explained*, 1746. This book went through many editions and was later offered by W. & S. Jones.



Here is Adams description from the 1787 edition.

DESCRIPTION OF A SMALL MICROSCOPE FOR OPAKE OBJECTS,
Fig. 3 and 4, Plate II. B.

A, Fig. 4, is a fixed arm, through which passes a screw B,
the other end whereof is fastened to the moveable arm C.

O 2

D is

108

MICROSCOPICAL ESSAYS.

D is a nut fitted to the said screw, which, when turned, will either separate or bring together the two arms A C.

E is a steel spring, that separates the two sides when the nut is unscrewed.

F, a piece of brass turning round in a socket, whence proceeds a springing tube, moving on a rivet, through which runs a steel wire, one end of which finishes in a point G, and the other end hath a pair of pliers H soldered to it; these are either to thrust into, or to take up and hold any object, and may be turned round as required.

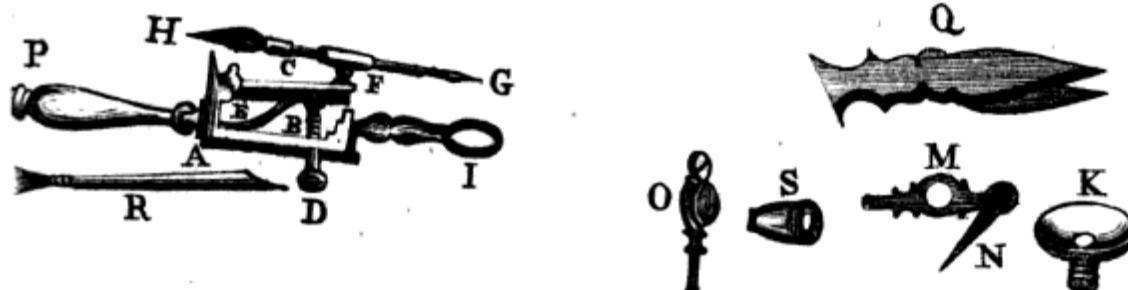
I, a ring of brass, with a female screw fixed on an upright piece of the same metal, which turns on a rivet, that it may be set at a due distance when the least magnifiers are used, and serves the screws of all the magnifiers.

K, a concave speculum of silver, polished as bright as possible, in the center of which a double convex lens is placed, with a proper aperture to look through it. On the back of this speculum a male screw L is made to fit the brass ring I, which may be screwed into the said ring at pleasure.

Four of these concave specula, of different depths, are fitted to four glasses of different magnifying powers, to be used as the objects to be examined may require. The greatest magnifiers have the least apertures.

The Opake Microscope

Fig. 14.



M, a round object plate, one side white, and the other black, intended to render objects the more visible, by placing them, if black, upon the white, and if white, on the black side.

A steel spring N turns down on each side, to make any object fast: from the object plate there is a hollow pipe, to screw it on the needle's point G.

O, a small box of brass, with a glass on each side, contrived to confine any living object in order to examine it; this also has a pipe to screw upon the end of the needle at G.

P, a turned handle of ivory, to screw into the instrument when it is made use of.

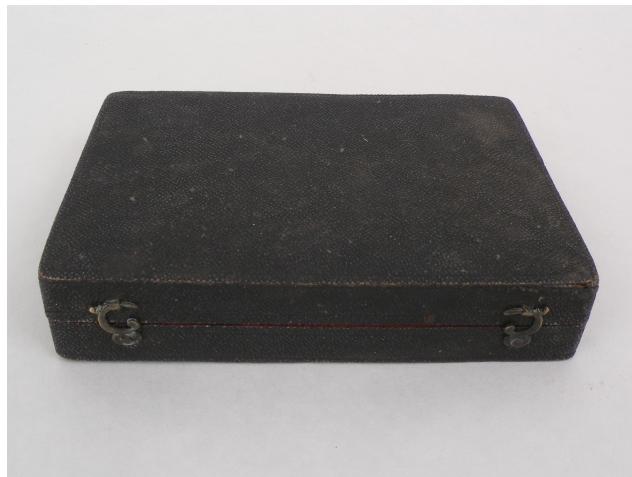
Q, a pair of pliers to take up any object, or manage it with conveniency.

R, a soft hair brush, to clean the glasses or specula.

When you would view any object, screw the speculum, with the magnifier you intend to use, into the brass ring I; place your object either on the needle G, in the pliers H, on the object plate M, or in the brass hollow box O, as may be most convenient, according to the nature and condition of it; then holding up your instrument by the handle P, look against the light through the magnifying lens, and by means of the nut D, together with the motion of the needle, by managing its lower end, the object may be turned about, raised or depressed, brought nearer the glass, or put farther from it, till you hit the true focal distance,

distance, and the light be seen reflected from the speculum strongly upon the object, by which means it will appear very distinct and clear.

This example is fitted into a wood case covered in shagreen and lined in green baize fabric. The exposed wood on the inside is paint red. I find this red paint interesting, it appears on instruments by John Cuff and Benjamin Martin from this same period, did they use the same case maker? were all these ordered by the same customer? what does it mean? So far it has only been recorded on pocket microscope cases covered in shagreen. The case measures l. 6" x d. 4 1/4" x h. 1 1/4" (15.2 cm x 10.8 cm x 3.3 cm)



The microscope follows the Adams description with 4 higher powered lenses (3 with covers) and 3 lens with lieberkuhns or silvered reflectors.



With white/
black object
plate and
tweezer clip

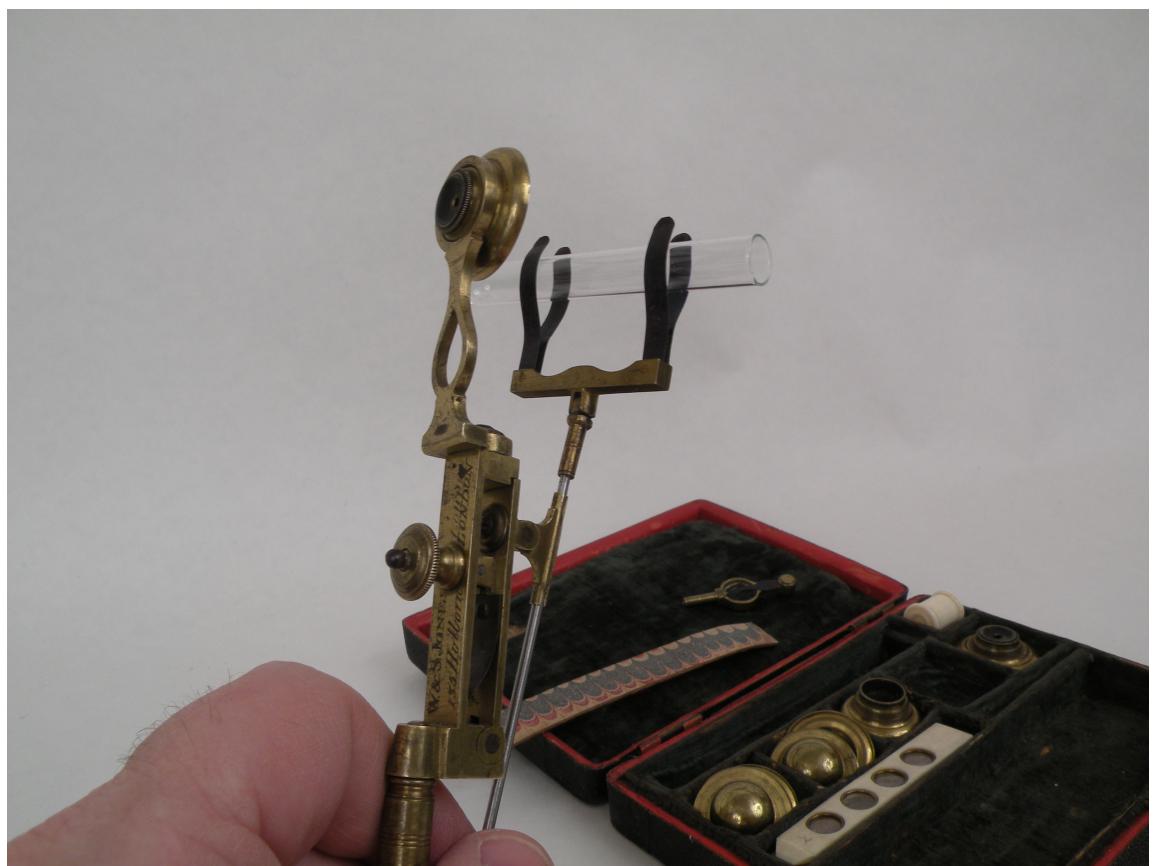
With live
box
mounted





With slide holder, set contains 4 slides with mounted specimens of ivory with mica discs held by brass rings.

With glass specimen tube. The case also contains a tweezer and two sided talc box meant to contain extra mica discs and brass rings.



This example is signed “W. & S. Jones 135 Holborn London” who were well known instrument makers in London, however they were not in business when this microscope was made. Looking at the signature there are two details quite apparent. First it was engraved after the lacquer was applied as the engraved areas have tarnished, second the engraving looks quite amateurish in both



layout (they marked out London twice) and execution.

William Jones (b. 1762, working by 1787, d. 1831) and Samuel Jones (b. 1769, working by 1791, d. 1859) were sons of the instrument maker John Jones (working 1759 to 1784, d. 1808) and had gone into their own instrument business at 135 Holborn, London in 1792. In 1800 they would move to 30 Holborn where the business would thrive for the next 60 years. George Adams Jr. died August 14 1795, his business went to his wife Hannah however she may not have been the sole owner. George Adams Sr. who died in 1772 had left the business to his son George Jr. and his second wife Ann Dudley. Hannah was not able to keep the shop on Fleet St. open and may have owed Ann a share. Hannah had private sales during April and May, 1796 in which she sold the books and the copyrights to the Jones Brothers, this included Adams book on microscopes which they published many more editions of. The remainder of the stock and tools were sold at Christie's auction house on 29 & 30 June and 2 July 1796 and it is likely the Jones Brothers were buyers as for many years they sold stock from the Adams Fleet St. shop.

We know very little about who made what in the workshops of 18th century London. It is my conjecture that this microscope dates from the time of George Adams Sr. as all other examples are dated to that same period. He offered it in his price list as did his son for many years. When the Adam's business was sold it was part of the stock acquired by W. & S. Jones. Since it was old stock and maybe not valued highly a younger more inexperienced engraver was allowed to put the new business name on it.

This may have even been Samuel Jones as he had only been out of his apprenticeship or working for 5 years. There are other examples of sloppy engraving on Jones instruments such as this signature on a pantograph. It



clearly does not have the professionalism as some of the more common engraving from later in the 19th c. when the



business was much larger and could afford to have full time engravers on staff.

If someone such as a dealer were to have added the signature in modern times to enhance the value the name Jones would be an odd choice since these microscopes were known to be made by Adams, Cuff and Martin. Additionally they would have to know the address of 135 Holborn, which Jones used for only 7 of their 68 years in business.

So based on the object itself and the connections between the Adams and Jones business, I feel this was made by George Adams in the mid 18th c. and later engraved and sold by W. & S. Jones nearly a half century later.

The instrument was given a light cleaning and some areas of the case re-glued. The tweezer clip is from a slightly later microscope and has been with it for sometime. The steel mounting shafts, glass tube and talc box are replacements.

This is to be given by my trust to the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation in the future.

Wm. R. Robertson, 2-4-2014, Kansas City , Mo. USA.

