

# Queen Victoria

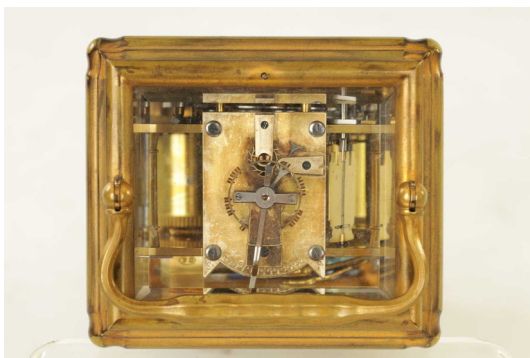
## A Carriage Clock gifted to her Godson Victor Biddulph

In March of 1877 Queen Victoria gifted a carriage clock to a favoured Godson, the 16 year-old Victor Biddulph. Over the course of a number of months, since making its purchase, I have been able to unravel the fascinating provenance of the clock and the wonderful history of those involved in its ownership.

The clock is a Gorge carriage clock with a *grand-sonnerie* striking movement stamped for the maker Alfred Drocourt and signed on the dial for the retailer *J.W. Benson, 25 Old Bond Street, London*. The movement is numbered 15584 giving a date of manufacture of circa 1876. The clock was made in the Drocourt workshops in Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont, France before making its way to his outlet at 28, Rue Debelleye, Paris and onward to Benson in London. It comes complete with the original leather travelling box stamped with a repeat of the serial number and having a label attached to the underside on which is printed *V. M. Biddulph*.

The front of the case is engraved *To Victor Biddulph, from his Godmother Victoria R, on his Confirmation March 30 1877*.

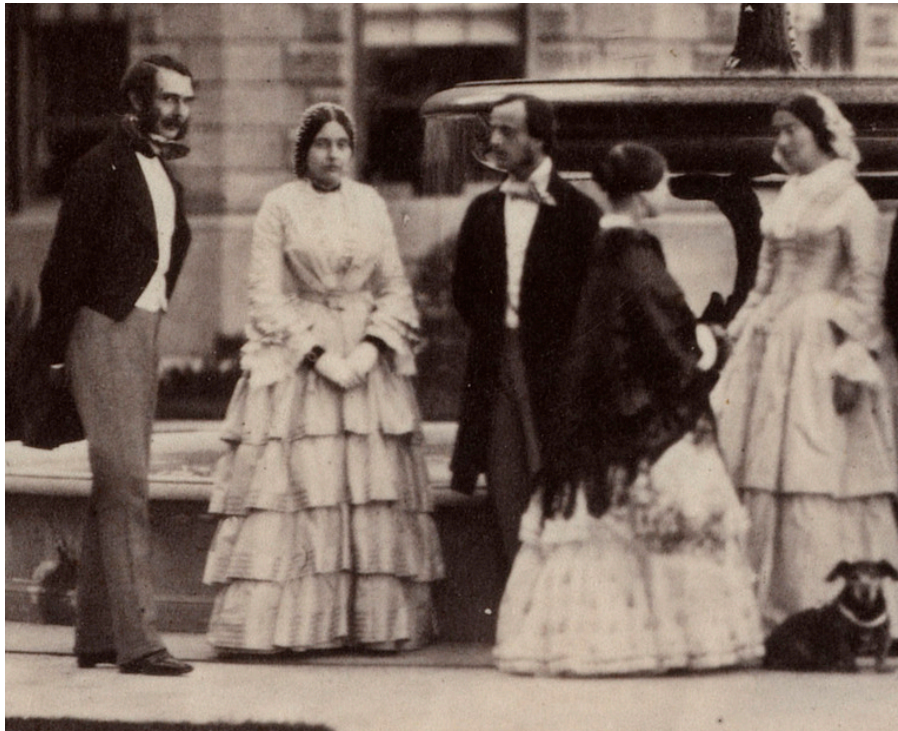




Queen Victoria gave many articles as presents, with a number supplied by J.W. Benson who had a Royal Warrant, but this clock is more significant than most given the history of the families involved and their relationships and close friendships with the Royal family.

Victor Biddulph was born in St George Hanover Square, London on April 1860, the son of General Sir Thomas Myddelton-Biddulph and Mary Frederica Seymour, who having been *Maid-of-Honour* to Queen Victoria was made an honorary *Lady of the Bedchamber* following their marriage in 1857.

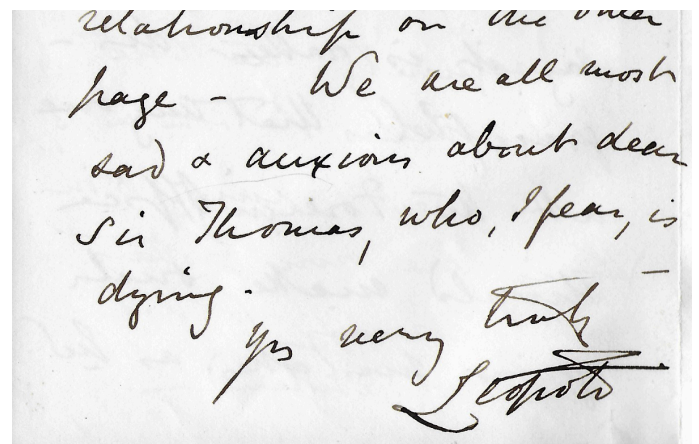
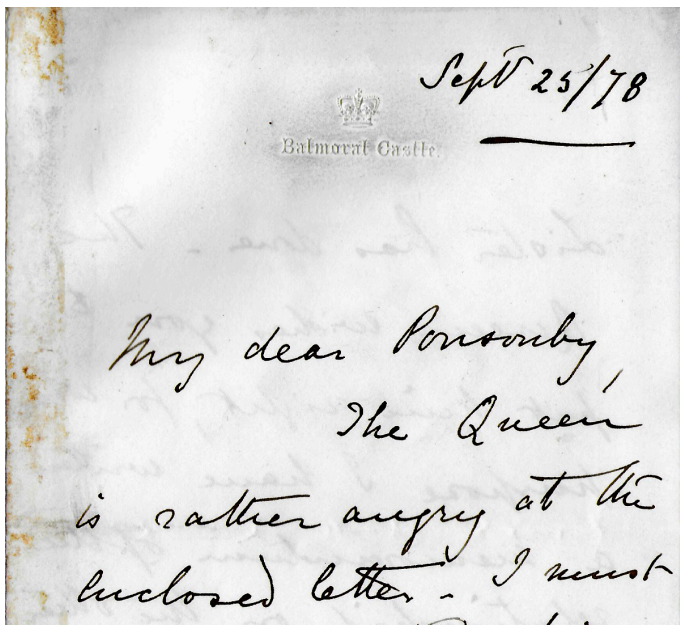




Sir Thomas Biddulph, facing the camera, at Osborne House on the Isle-of-Wight, with Queen Victoria in the black shawl. Osborne House was the Queen's seaside retreat which she and Prince Albert used as a refuge from Buckingham Palace and Windsor Castle.

Sir Thomas held the position of *Keeper of the Privy Purse*, looking after the financial affairs of the Queen and the Royal Household. He died in September 1878 at the Mains of Abergeldie bordering Queen Victoria's home at Balmoral Castle. During his short illness the Queen visited him daily and following his death had a memorial drinking fountain erected on the Balmoral estate.

I have a wonderful four-page letter dated 25<sup>th</sup> September 1878 hand-written on Balmoral Castle letter-headed paper by Prince Leopold, son of the Queen, as sent to Sir Henry Ponsonby, someone with another important link in the story of the clock, in which the Prince ends with 'We are all most sad and anxious about dear Sir Thomas, who, I fear, is dying. Yours very truly, Leopold'.



Following the death of Sir Thomas the Queen had erected in his memory a drinking fountain on the Balmoral estate. She also granted the Hon. Lady Biddulph use of rooms within the Henry III's Tower at Windsor Castle where she died on 23rd October 1902. King Edward VII and other members of the Royal Family visited her in the days before her death. Census records show that Victor Biddulph was also resident in the Tower and therefore it may be assumed that the clock was situated there.



This print shows Victor Biddulph, the recipient of the clock, seated opposite Princess Beatrice and the rest of the cast of the play *Whats Up*, where Victor played the lawyer Fennel. It would appear that Victor rather favoured this seating position, leaning on the back of a chair with his arms crossed as also seen in the earlier image of him.

The play was written by the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault and performed in the ballroom at Balmoral Castle on the 5<sup>th</sup> of October 1889 as part of the 31<sup>st</sup> birthday celebrations for Prince Henry of Battenberg.

Queen Victoria commented in her diary that 'the music was perfectly disgraceful'; but found the second act of the play was 'very amusing and exciting'.



DEATH ON OR AFTER 1st JANUARY, 1898.

Will.

BE IT KNOWN that *Victor Alexander Frederick Myddelton Biddulph of Stansfield Clerewin the County of Berks.*

died on the *13<sup>th</sup>* day of *February* 19 *19*.

at *Stansfield aforesaid*

AND BE IT FURTHER KNOWN that at the date hereunder written the last Will and Testament

of the said deceased was proved and registered in the Principal Probate Registry of His Majesty's High Court of Justice, and that administration of all the estate which by law devolves to and vests in the personal representative of the said deceased was granted by the aforesaid Court to

*Frederica Alice Charlotte Myddelton Biddulph of 160 St James Court in the County of Middlesex spinster is late of deceased and George Tournay Biddulph of 43 Charing Cross in the County of London Esquire the Executors named in the said Will.*

Dated the *25<sup>th</sup>* day of *April* 1919.

Gross value of Estate £ *35921-15-4*  
Net value of Personal Estate £ *33451-0-0*

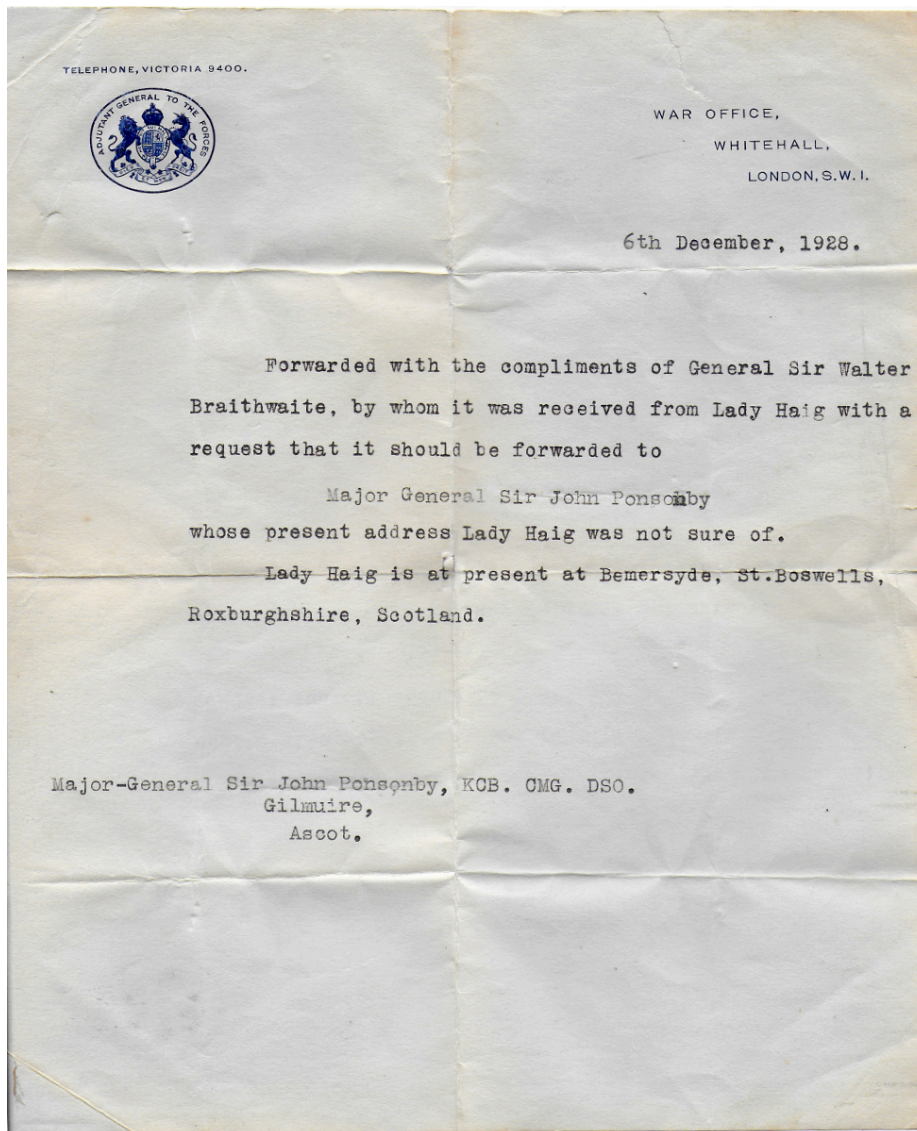
IA.

(N) (88/49) Wt. 37365/A, Gp 163, 14009 12-16 W B & L

THIS IS THE LAST WILL AND TESTAMENT of me VICTOR ALEXANDER FREDERICK MYDDELTON BIDDULPH of Stansfield - ALEXANDER  
Clerew in the County of Berks Esquire I appoint my sister Frederica Alice Charlotte FREDERICK  
Myddelton Biddulph of 160 St James Court Buckingham Gate in the County of London and MYDDELTON  
my cousin George Tournay Biddulph of 43 Charing Cross in the County of London EXECU- BIDDULPH  
TORS of this my will I bequeath the following legacies Free of duty namely To St Andrews 5  
Hospital Clerew the sum of one hundred pounds and to St Stephens National Schools  
Clerew provided the religious teaching at those schools is as far as possible the  
same as it is at the date of this my will the sum of one hundred pounds and if any dis-  
pute shall arise concerning the last mentioned legacy such question shall be settled  
by my executors whose determination shall be final And I declare that the receipt of  
the respective Secretary or Treasurer for the time being of the said Hospital and  
School shall be a good and sufficient discharge to my executors for the same legacies  
respectively As to my real estate if any and the residue of my personal estate what-  
soever and wheresoever and property over which I have any power of appointment I give  
devise and bequeath the same to my said sister Frederica Alice Charlotte Myddelton  
Biddulph for her own use and benefit absolutely requesting but not imposing an obli-  
gation or creating a trust that she will take the same care as long as he needs it of  
George William Upton whose parents now reside at 7 Bryn Terrace Spital Clerew afore-  
said as I have been in the habit of doing and also that she will provide my dog with  
a happy home or if this be not possible will have him painlessly put an end to I re-  
voke all former wills IN WITNESS whereof I have hereunto set my hand this first day  
of September one thousand nine hundred and thirteen - VICTOR A F M BIDDULPH -  
Signed and acknowledged by the said Victor Alexander Frederick Myddelton Biddulph as  
his last will and testament in the presence of us both present at the same time who  
in his presence and in the presence of each other have hereunto subscribed our names  
as witnesses - H A CARTER 39 Bedford Row London Solicitor - JOHN DANIEL Clerk to

Victor Biddulph died on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 1919 with his will proven in the following months where it is stated that he left the majority of his possessions to his spinster sister Frederica Mary Biddulph. Did she then take ownership of the clock or had it already been gifted elsewhere?

It was with some excitement that I found a letter dated December 1928 tucked into the travelling box of the clock. Typed on War Office headed paper, this letter seems to suggest that the clock had somehow come into the possession of the renowned First World War commander Field Marshall Douglas Haig, 1<sup>st</sup> Earl Haig and following his death on the 29<sup>th</sup> January 1928 his widow Lady Dorothy Haig was attempting, via Haig's good friend General Sir Walter Braithwaite, to have it delivered to Sir John Ponsonby.



Sir John was the son of the late Major-General Sir Henry Ponsonby, Queen Victoria's private secretary and Prince Albert's *equerry*, as portrayed by Geoffrey Palmer in the film *Mrs. Brown*, and was the 'My dear Ponsonby' who received the letter from Prince Leopold.

It was Sir Henry who succeeded Sir Thomas Biddulph, father of Victor, as *Keeper of the Privy Purse* in 1878. And as with Victor's mother, so it was that Sir John's mother Mary Ponsonby was also a *Maid-of-Honour* to the Queen.

The relationships between these two families and therefore with the ownership of the clock are strengthened by a paragraph at the end of a letter dated 2<sup>nd</sup> May 1869 written by Victoria, Princess Royal, Empress of Germany and the first born daughter of Queen Victoria, which she sent to Mary Ponsonby. Princess Victoria ends the letter by asking that Mary Ponsonby 'remember me to... Mary Biddulph'.

This close relationship between the Biddulph and Ponsonby families is also shown in an albumen image depicting Ponsonby and Biddulph together at Balmoral Castle shortly before latter's death in 1878. In this group photo Sir Henry Ponsonby, father of the last known recipient of the clock, is seen seated front row far left next to Sir Thomas Biddulph, father of the first recipient of the clock.



If, as requested by Lady Haig, the clock was delivered to Sir John Ponsonby it would have come full circle. From the son of the Queen's *Keeper of the Privy Purse* to the son of his successor in that role.



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*Images of Balmoral Castle, Windsor Castle and Osborne House courtesy of The Royal Collection Trust*