

Arsène Margaine

with Lucien Simonnet Panels

An exceptional carriage clock with a wonderful provenance

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It is not often that a carriage clock comes along that has such a superb history and provenance with all the detail that makes it such an interesting piece.

The eight-day duration movement is stamped with the serial number 1258 to the backplate strikes the hours and half-hours on a gong, with push button repeat of the last hour at will and a subsidiary alarm.

The dial incorporates delicate black Roman numerals against the silvered surround below which there is a depiction of a young man offering a bouquet of flowers to a girl, whilst above various insects are seen flying.

On one side panel a girl is featured wearing a pink dress with hollyhocks around her whilst on the other side a girl dressed in yellow, green and purple is writing on a tree.

The case is of an Anglaise/Cannelée design but with more depth to the mouldings and has a matching handle.

Height: 8¾ inches (22.3cms): including plinth: 7 inches (18cms): handle up.



One of the panels is based on the original by Jean-Honoré Fragonard, *Le Chiffre d'Amour* (*The Souvenir*) which is in the Wallace Collection; but whereas it is believed Fragonard signed his depiction on the panel with his initial on the tree trunk, on the clock panel we see this replaced by L.S. for the renowned painter of Sèvres porcelain *Lucien Simonnet*. The Simonnet attribution becomes more apparent when comparing the clock movement with those seen in other carriage clocks bearing Simonnet panels, all of which are near-identical and obviously originate from the same workshop, suggesting that Simonnet used the same clockmaker; or the same clockmaker used Simonnet panels.

The arrow as stamped on the backplate to show the direction of moving the hands is near-identical to those used for a short period by the well-known carriage clock maker *Arsène Margaine* and is the same as seen on most movements using Simonnet panels.

This hand-setting arrow appears on early serial numbered movements 118 – 794, with the same script for the word *Hands* as on this example and with the distinctive Margaine regulation index stamped to the backplate. From recorded serial numbers 2571 until 4746 this arrow then appears on movements actually stamped with the Margaine beehive trademark whilst still having the similar script for the word *Hands*. The arrow mark most associated with Margaine, that with three tails, doesn't appear until recorded serial number 5428 with the wording *Hands* now in a block script. Therefore it can be assumed that the early clocks stamped with this distinctive arrow are all from the same workshop and can therefore be attributed to Arsène Margaine.



A porcelain panelled carriage clock with the same hand-setting arrow as this example has been seen with the side panels signed in full for Simonnet whilst the dial is signed with the initials L.S. in the same form as seen here. That example was sold by Dreweatt's Auctioneers, Berkshire in May 2020.

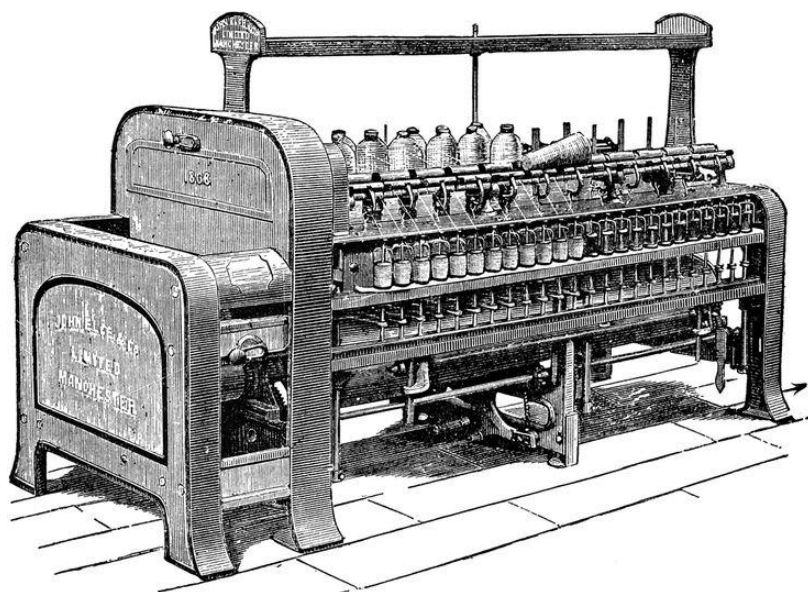
A further clock having definite Simonnet panels and signed with the same L.S. initials was offered at Bonham's auctioneers, London in June 2019.

The clock discussed here rests on an ebony base which bears a silver presentation plaque on which is engraved: *Presented to L.H Simpson Esq. as a token of respect by the work people of Park Mills, Preston on the occasion of his marriage on April 24th 1880.*



According to Grace's Guide referring to The Cotton Mills in Preston 1891, Park Mills was home to *The Park Lane Twist Company, Cotton Spinners and Manufacturers*, situated in North Road, Preston, Lancashire. This is within an area dominated by the cotton industry at this time being in such close proximity to the great trading ports of Liverpool and Manchester. *The Park Lane Twist Company* were one of the larger concerns operating at the time with 48,760 spindles producing 448/608 throstle. A Throstle machine, for spinning cotton, was so named as whilst running it made the soft sound of a throstle singing. The numbers 448 and 608 are for the two types of machine used, with the number being the amount of spindles coming from each and continuously spinning onto individual *Pirns* or *Bobbins*.

The managing director in 1891 is noted to be A. Simpson, who was obviously related to the Simpson presented with this clock, who in turn were quite probably related to the other Simpson family members involved in the industry at the time. A half-century or so earlier, a John Simpson, along with Samuel Simpson, was involved in the first cotton mill in Manchester, *Simpson's Mill*, built in partnership with the famous industrialist Richard Arkwright in 1782 who invented the water frame of which the Throstle was a descendant which used the same principles but was better engineered and driven by steam rather than water wheel. Arkwright's son, also Richard, married Mary Simpson in 1780.





Park Mills, Map of Preston 1890



Park Mills today

This clock was formerly in the collection of famed horological dealer and author Derek Roberts, whose book *Carriage and Other Travelling Clocks* was published by Schiffer Publishing Ltd in 1993. Derek's own notes on this clock stated: *The dial and side panels, which are silvered, are probably some of the finest I have seen.*

For a comprehensive history of Margaine, his clocks and working practices see *Antiquarian Horology*, the journal of the Antiquarian Horological Society, June 2014, pages 807 to 826 inclusive; *The Horological World of Francois Arsène Margaine* by Tom Wotruba.



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