

Etienne-Pierre Drocourt, his son Alfred and a previously unrecorded relationship with Henri Jacot



I have been interested in carriage clocks since the early 1980s when I was working alongside renowned horologist and author Derek Roberts in Tonbridge, Kent. This was a period when he was quite possibly the most high-profile dealer in the world of antique clocks and we were producing quarterly catalogues of recently purchased and restored stock. A large part of each production was taken up by French carriage clocks for which I took a keen interest, but for which little was known about by comparison to the other antique clocks we dealt in. There was, of course, Charles Allix and Peter Bonnert's book, *Carriage Clocks, Their History and Development* published by the Antique Collectors Club in 1974, but very few other references. I was lucky enough to get well acquainted with both of these fine men being as I lived only a few minutes from their respective homes.

A few years later, having set-up on my own account as a dealer and consultant, I purchased a very fine Jacot carriage clock and set about writing up a short history for my notes. Over the years I handled more and more Jacot clocks, alongside those of Drocourt and other well-known names in the Parisian carriage clock trade, each time adding more to my files on each. In 2013, having twenty or so Jacot clocks in stock, and access to the same amount again that I had sold, I decided to hold an exhibition in my showrooms in Devon, and to produce a catalogue with an updated history of the maker. As I set about putting this together I began to realise how little was actually known about Henri Jacot, his family and their clocks. Indeed, as I delved into their history I realised that a fair amount of that published was incorrect, or uncorroborated, and that there was a story to tell. I hypothetically threw away the reference books and started from afresh and for good reason. For instance, most references to Henri Jacot state his successor to be his nephew also called Henri, but this is incorrect; his successor *was* his nephew, but he was named Albert Jacot, the son of Henri's brother and business partner Julien. After Henri's death in 1868 the business continued to be known as *Henri Jacot* and rather like his father before him there were times when Albert was sometimes referred to as *Henri*, but that wasn't his given name.

I was also somewhat amazed that there was nothing at all written about the origins of Henri Jacot, where he came from and when; and so I used this as my starting point. This was to prove particularly difficult as there were many horologists named Henri Jacot working at this time in both Switzerland and France and all I had for my particular Henri was his known date of death. It was after some months of fairly intense research that I was able to finally state that he was born Henri-Louis Jacot-Descombes on the 6th of July 1796 in the Swiss village of Le Locle in the Canton of Neuchâtel, the son of the horologist Daniel-Henri Jacot-Descombes.

And so the story began; one which is still moving forward to a final publication. In the course of my research I have now studied nearly a thousand clocks signed for Jacot and nearly the same for Drocourt, along with many others attributed to both them and their associates.

After a year of long hours getting the Jacot exhibition up and running I proclaimed to my wife Bianca that I would never ever undertake such a thing again. But as soon as that exhibition was taken down I decided on a follow up the next year with an exhibition of clocks by Pierre Drocourt and his son Alfred. The reason for taking on the task of furthering my research into Drocourt was that whilst studying Jacot I had found a previously unknown link between the two families; one that was surely the reason that Etienne-Pierre Drocourt was to set out on the path to become an horologist and, along with his son Alfred, become one of the most influential of carriage clock makers.

As with my research into Jacot, I put aside for now what had already been written about the Drocourt family and basically started from scratch using only source material. After a number of twists and turns I came upon the birth of Etienne-Pierre Drocourt in a small village called Gargenville, at four o'clock in the evening of the 10th of November, 1819 to *cultivateur* Pierre-Francois and his wife Margueritte, née Chappée. It was, and still is to a degree, a farming community on a bend of the river Seine and looking through the archives I could find no reference to any horological activity in the place that may have enticed the young Etienne-Pierre down that particular route. That was until I opened the map a little wider and saw that Gargenville was actually situated within a group of three villages, all within walking distance of each other, with another being Guitrancourt; which by now I knew to be the village where lived the *horloger* Julien Jacot, father of Albert Jacot, Henri's successor. Julien was fifteen years older than Pierre (as he became known) and was certainly living in Guitrancourt prior to 1836 when the young Drocourt was still living in the area; although Julien Jacot was also recorded at various times residing at rue Montmorency 25, later renumbered 31, the business premises and home to his brother Henri. It must be considered more than coincidental that Pierre took an interest not only in horology, but in carriage clocks in particular, having lived but a short walk from Julien Jacot, within a hamlet of villages situated some way out in the countryside.

Pierre was known to have left Gargenville by 1841 and was presumably now in Paris and living amongst the horologists of the Marias region of the 3rd arrondissement. The first record of him in the city shows his marriage to Marie-Adèle Vandel on the 3rd of April, 1845. Unfortunately the records of this marriage were destroyed when the Communards set fire to the Hôtel de Ville, the city hall, in January 1871. The next record of the family is the birth of their son, and successor in the business, Alfred Drocourt, on the 7th of October 1847. Although the record for this birth was also lost in the fire, it is known that they were living at rue Saintonge, 8, as it is shown as Alfred's place of birth on his wedding notice to Marie-Eugénie Jorre in 1868.



This is an interesting address within the story as I also unearthed the birth here of Olympe Baveux in 1842, she being the daughter of Louis Baveux, *horloger* of Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont who, in my previous research into Henri Jacot, was proven to have been in a partnership with Jacot and actually witnessed Henri's death certificate. Olympe was therefore the brother of Alfred Baveux, born two years later in Saint-Nicolas, who himself went on to supply Henri Jacot's successor Albert from the early 1880's, being those movements stamped on the front-plate with his AB trademark. And so the connection between the two families was growing stronger.

It was through these doors, when numbered rue Saintonge 8, that Pierre Drocourt lived and where Alfred Drocourt was born.

To save confusion it must be noted that rue Saintonge joined with three other roads running through the region in 1851 and so number eight today isn't that of Drocourt's time. It is now numbered 38, and is interestingly just a few steps across the road from number 43, home of Raingo Frères, the famous clockmakers who made, amongst other pieces, Orrery clocks for which they became so well-known. It isn't inconceivable that both Drocourt and Baveux may've worked with Raingo as number eight wasn't registered as a business premises, purely living accommodation, and the clocks that Drocourt first advertised as making when setting up on his own would appear very similar to those made in the Raingo workshops.

The long-standing address for Pierre and Alfred Drocourt is rue Debelleye 28 and although some records suggest a further address, rue Limoges 8, these two are in fact one and the same with the street name changed after an amalgamation with others in 1865.

Pierre is first recorded as having set up on his own in 1853 with a workshop at Coutres-Saint-Gervais 3, a few yards from the lower end of rue Saintonge.



The site of Pierre Drocourt's first workshops at 3 rue Coutures-Saint-Gervais

Unfortunately when I last visited Paris this building was no longer standing and is now a restful tree-lined area within a small park in front of the Picasso Museum; but the footprint is clearly visible and it is obvious the premises themselves weren't very large. In 1855 this address was recorded in the *Annuaire du Commerce Didot-Bottin* alongside the new workshop in rue Limoges. Both entries gave descriptions of the business set-up, and both were remarkably similar except for one important part; the Coutures-Saint-Gervais workshops were making inkwell style clocks with no mention of carriage clock manufacture, whereas the rue Limoges workshops were described as producing *pendule de voyages*. Presumably Pierre moved to the much larger premises to allow him to now make and supply carriage clocks.

Delrieux Vve) et Kreski, *fab. spéciale d'encriers*, Puits-Blancs-Manteaux, 9. *

Drocourt, *fab. d'horlogerie, spécialité d'encriers, pendules marbre et bronze, avec quantièmes perpétuels, à échappements circulaires*, Coutures-St-Gervais, 3. *

Dubin, *fab. d'encriers de poche à ressorts genres anglais, bronzes*

Dreyfus, Martyrs, 50.

Dreyss, Université, 77.

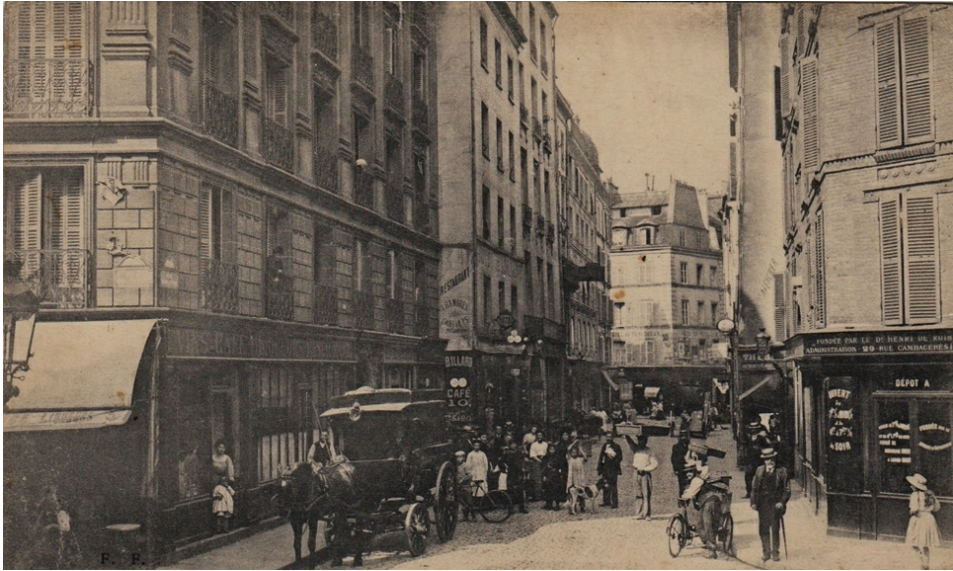
Drocourt, *fab. d'horlogerie, spécialité de pendules de voyage et encriers-pendules, marbre et bronze, avec quantièmes perpétuels, à échappement circulaire*, Limoges, 8. *

Dromery, Buffault, 5.

Drouot, pl. Maubert, 36.

Droz (P.-F.), Roquepine, 11.

Dubois (P.) Rh.-Poissonnière, 13.



Rue Debelleye, previously rue Limoges, with 28 on the right-hand side beyond the round lamp. Further along and crossing over rue Bretagne can be seen a high prominent roof with two dark windows, this being the rear of Saintonge 8. Further along would take us to number 31, the address to which Drocourt was to move to in the early 1900s and then number 33 where lived Eugenie Didier who would marry Auguste Lechevallier before his move to take on the management of the Saint-Nicolas-d'Alhiermont workshops.

Over the last few months I have been able to obtain two carriage clocks that are not only historically important in their own right, but build on the relationship between Pierre Drocourt and Henri Jacot. Most clocks that one sees signed for either maker are from the later period, the late-1860s/early-1870s and beyond, when both Pierre and Henri were no longer involved in the running of their respective businesses, that role now in the hands of the next generation; Albert Jacot and Alfred Drocourt. It was these latter two that built up the commercial side of both concerns, stamping the movements with their trademarks and



Henri Jacot: 489 from Period II and dated circa 1856.

producing clocks in greater numbers and for a growing market. It is quite unusual to find carriage clocks made prior to this time by Henri Jacot or Pierre Drocourt that bear either maker's signature. Both were producing clocks for others to retail and the need to place a signature or mark anywhere on the clock movement wasn't such an important matter. But I was fortunate enough to hear of a carriage clock becoming available for sale in June of 2016, in the States which was signed in fully engraved script *Henri Jacot* across the backplate, as well as on the dial. I obtained images and after careful consideration realised that this was indeed an example made before the well-known HJ parrot mark, a 'Jacot' being a South-African grey parrot, or the poinçon dating the various exposition awards which was stamped within the plates from the beginning of the period III clocks. Not only that, but my hope was that it would be the 'missing link' to a number of carriage clocks from this earlier period that I had bought and studied, finally proving them to be examples made in the Jacot workshops. This period of manufacture also had its own different numbering

system as compared to the later Period III examples.

I bought the clock and on its arrival I spent some time studying it closely. It was indeed a carriage clock from this earlier period when Henri himself was running the business; at a time when he and Julien had just built the workshops in the centre of Saint-Nicolas-d'Alhiermont, across the road from where some years earlier Honoré Pons had built his own home and workshops and which were now home to his successors Delepine-Cauchy.

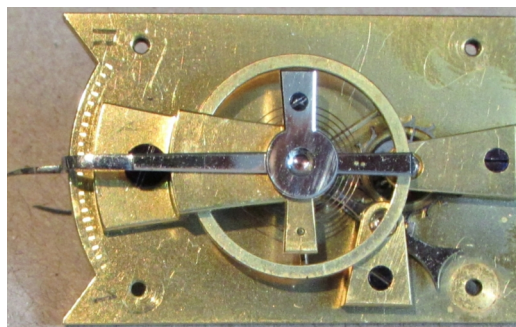
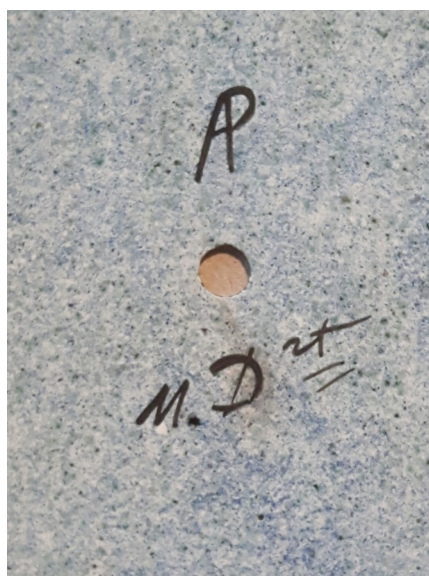
The movement did match the others I owned and were obviously from the same source meaning that at last it was possible, using this signed example, to identify those early anonymous movements as being manufactured by Henri Jacot as I had believed.

Then in September of 2016 I was made aware of a carriage clock coming up for auction in Italy; a clock with a case style familiar to me. I was sent various images, none of which gave any clue in identifying the maker as there were no stamps to the movement nor a name on the dial. But it appeared to me like another relatively early Jacot movement, from what I was now terming Period II, those made from the time Henri Jacot set up his manufacturing workshops in Saint-Nicolas-d'Algermont in 1854 until the production of the commercial Jacot clocks post-1867. I termed Period I as being from his and Julien's arrival in Paris in 1825 until 1854. There was a slight problem with this analysis though; the case style I had seen before was not one used by Jacot, but by Drocourt on clock number 1311, an early example at present in a Russian collection. Not only that, the platform escapement was unlike anything that Jacot would use, having a plain flat brass balance instead of the bi-metallic type with timing screws that he favoured. I went back and studied the images of number 1311 and there, seated on the top of the movement, was the same style of platform with the plain brass balance. Surely these two movements must've been finished in the same workshops, those of Drocourt.

On the day of the auction I had no choice but to secure this clock and a short while later it duly arrived at my home. The added excitement for me was that it was numbered 2, obviously an extremely early example from whoever made it. As with the Henri Jacot clock, I spent a day taking it apart and studying it carefully, comparing it to the Jacot and various other clocks of that period. This study confirmed that the basic movement obviously came from the same source as the Jacot; the plates and wheelwork were identical as was the actual layout of the wheelwork, alongside other features such as the screwed movement pillars and the barrel bridge covering both barrels being in a crescent shape. The under-dial work was laid out slightly differently but interestingly there were unused markings which tallied with the known Jacot examples. As already noted the platform and the case were identical to Drocourt 1311. I then took off the dial and signed in ink on the rear were the initials AP for the dialmaker Aimé Petremand. Although having died in 1843 this mark was still used by his widow Phillipine Sandoz, followed by his daughter Lise-Olympe Petremand and her husband Adolphe Mojon, who had married in 1844; this being the same Mojon who just a few years later was to supply both Drocourt and Jacot with dials. The majority of dials made at this time, and for a period after, often had written in ink on the rear the name of the dial *émailleur* and painter the *peintre de cadrans* along with an indication as to whom the dial was being supplied to. For instance, one often sees dials inscribed on the rear *Jt: a Jacot*; being by Émile Jeannet for Jacot. But the excitement with this dial came with the inscription written below the AP; the initials *M. Drt*; indicating a dial destined for *Monsieur Drocourt*.



*Pierre Drocourt number 2,
made circa 1855*



As previously deduced, I knew that Drocourt started making carriage clocks in 1855 and I knew from my studies that Henri Jacot was making this style of movement in his new workshops in Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont from at least 1854 with my early Jacot numbered 489 made around this time. It is therefore probable that number 2 is only the second carriage clock that Pierre Drocourt had so far made, having moved to Limoges 8 in 1855, and that he obtained the *blanc roulant* from Henri Jacot before making a few of his own alterations to the layout. The relationship between these two makers, previously unrecorded, was beginning to take on some importance.

In 1870 the business name changed to *Drocourt et Fils* before reverting back to *Drocourt* Pierre having gone into semi-retirement in 1872, moving to a house on the quay at Rangiport, being the part of Gargenville that sits on the banks of the Seine.



The quay at Rangiport with Pierre Drocourt's house being the tall one in which he lived until his death in February 1892

Alfred Drocourt took over the reins with some vigour and began to move the business forward, becoming very much a part of the horological world in Paris and Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont. By now he was obtaining *blanc roulants* from Jean-Francois and Louis Holingue, known as Holingue Frères, and took a far more commercial outlook very much in line with what Albert Jacot was now doing with the Henri Jacot concern, producing quality carriage clocks in increasing numbers for both the home market and the burgeoning export market. Alfred ended up buying the Holingue business in 1875, and therefore having everything for carriage clock production *in-house*, placing his Paris manager Auguste Lechevallier in charge as *Directeur de Maison Drocourt*. They continued in this famous horological town for many years before Drocourt put his house and workshops, set within 12 acres of land, up for sale in 1904.



The house and workshops belonging to Alfred Drocourt in Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont as seen in an early 1900s aerial shot. When put up for sale in 1904 the buildings were described as recently built.

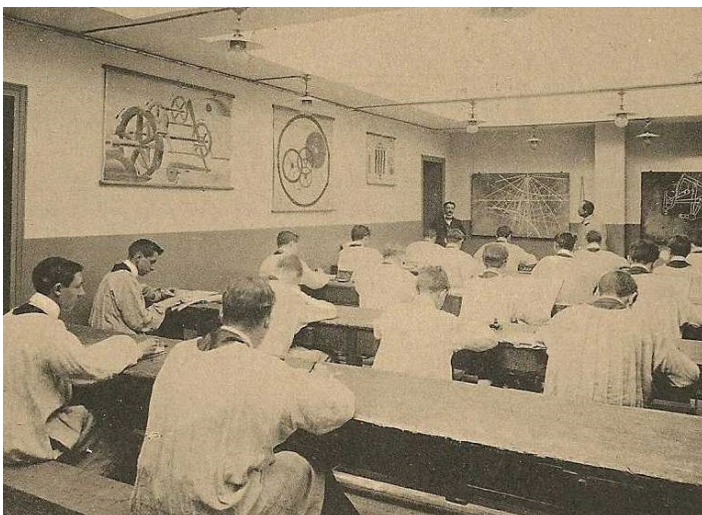
The Paris workshops, at the now re-named rue Debelleyne 28, continued until 1907 when the premises were taken over by the authorities to build a girls school and Alfred was forced to move a few yards up the street to number 31, the back of which coincidentally sits adjacent to Saintonge 8, his birthplace. These smaller premises were to prove problematic with the volume of clocks being produced falling dramatically, and by 1910 the horologist Louis Chazel had moved into thirty-one; the last recorded Drocourt clock numbered 36279.



Drocourt number 28978, signed on the ivory dial with the address as 28 rue Debelleyne whilst the original travelling box has the address as number 31 embossed within.

Alfred Drocourt had been a mainstay of the Parisian horological world; he was one of the twenty-one founder council members of the *Chambre Syndicale de l'Horlogerie de Paris* set-up in 1873; *Tresorier of Conseil d'Administration*, of the *L'Ecole d'Horlogerie* in 1887/88 and vice-president in 1897. He is also known to have given prizes in the form of medals and money for those apprentices and workers who it was deemed by the council were deserving, including a *récompenser* of 25 francs in July 1905.

In 1882, along with A.H. Rodanet, the President of the *Chambre Syndicale*, Drocourt was on the editorial committee of the *Revue Chronométrique* which was now being published by the Chambre itself. He was also a member on the board of the horological jury for the 1900 Paris Exposition.



Alfred Drocourt stands in the doorway overlooking a class of students at the Paris School of Horology



Drocourt's stand at the Paris Exposition of 1900 for which he was awarded a Hors Concours. As a jury member for the horological section he was unable to accept an actual medal award.

The main role of this article was to bring to light the previously unknown early relationship between these two well-known carriage clock makers and to shed light on how Pierre Drocourt came to be an horologist influenced no doubt by Henri and Julien Jacot. It is just a small precis of the research I have so far undertaken which also encompasses other families associated with both Jacot and Drocourt.

For further information, along with a summary of my research, please refer to the two catalogues produced for the exhibitions I ran for Jacot and Drocourt, in 2013 and 2014 respectively, and which are available to read in the *Exhibition*

