

The First and Last Recorded Drocourt Carriage Clocks



Drocourt 36340 and 2

This article is best read after a re-acquaintance with that which I had published in the newsletter in October 2016, relating to the relationship between the Drocourt and Jacot carriage clock making families, in which one of the following clocks, Drocourt number 2, was discussed.

There are some fifty-years between the first carriage clocks produced by Etienne-Pierre Drocourt, having set-up in Paris in the mid-1850s and the last manufactured by his son and successor Alfred in circa 1909.

In the space of two weeks last year I was lucky enough to obtain both the first and last recorded examples as made by the Drocourt family.

Etienne-Pierre Drocourt, known as Pierre, was born in the village of Gargenville, some thirty miles from Paris, in 1817, the son of *cultivateur* Pierre-Francois. By at least 1845 he was in the city as it was in that year that he married Marie-Adèle Vandel, with their son, and Pierre's successor, Alfred Drocourt, born in December 1847 at their home situated in the Marais region at rue Saintonge 8. By now Pierre was quite probably working across the road at number 11, being the workshops of the well-known clockmakers, Rain-go frères.

In 1853 it is recorded that Pierre set up on his own account at rue Coutures-Saint-Gervais 3 moving the following year to larger workshops at rue Limoges 8, to become known as rue Debelleye 28 in 1861 following the change in street name.



Rue Debelleye 28 during my last visit to Paris, with a later frontage having been converted to a girls's school following Alfred Drocourt's departure.

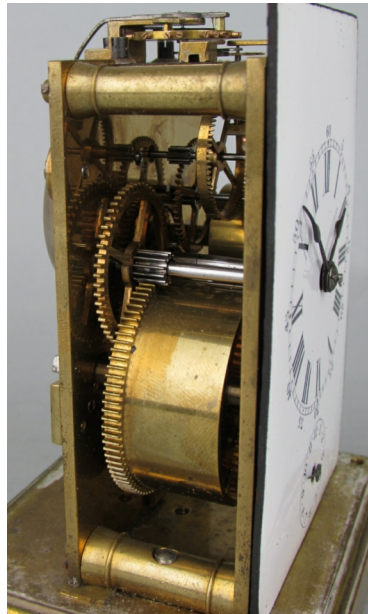
Having taken over the running of the business from his father in circa 1872, Pierre having retired to the family home in Rangipori, it was in 1875 that Alfred Drocourt then purchased the Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont workshops from their main supplier, Holingue frères (whose movements were discreetly stamped on the frontplate with the initials H.L.), placing his Paris manager Auguste Lechevallier in charge as *Directeur de Maison Drocourt*. They continued to make the high-quality pieces that Holingue were known for, having supplied such eminent makers as Paul Garnier, Bourdin, and Moise Bolviller amongst others. The quality of Alfred Drocourt's carriage clocks was comparable with the best of the time, often utilising fine and elegant cases with superb decoration, and always high quality movements. But changes were afoot and in 1904

Alfred Drocourt put the Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont house and workshops up for sale, at a time when he was just a few years from losing the large Paris workshops at rue Debelleye 28; the premises being turned into a girl's school which still operates on the site today, with Drocourt moving along the road to the much smaller number 31. It was during this period that some rather strange anomalies occur in both the serial number sequences and the quality of clocks signed for Drocourt. I have in my possession a number of their clocks that are of the highest quality, with serial numbers that would suggest being made in the late 1890s, but which are supplied with travelling boxes embossed within the lid with a wonderful gilded stamp giving the Debelleye 31 address and also showing the award for the *Hors Concours* at the Paris Exposition of 1900 (Drocourt was unable to receive a main medal award being that he was one of the jurors for the horological section).



Rue Debelleye 31, home and workshops to Alfred Drocourt for the last few years of his working life.

Alongside which I also have a number of signed Drocourt clocks from the early 1900s that can only be described as of average, or even below-average, quality when compared to other examples from his stable and which surely came from other makers. One example is a fairly mundane Obis-cased clock, 34671, that on first viewing would never be considered something produced from the Drocourt factory, but which is comprehensively marked as such, with the base-plate stamped with both the name and address and with the DC trademark to the backplate now a rather light, stamped' version rather than the earlier substantial embossed example as used for the previous thirty-odd years.



Serial number 34671, a carriage clock certainly not of the quality expected from the Drocourt workshops.



My belief is that Drocourt had become very much involved in the Parisian horological scene, he was *Tresorier de Conseil d'Administration* to the new horological school set up by the *Chambre Syndicale de l'Horlogerie de Paris*, a society founded in 1873 and of which Drocourt was also a founder member. He was also on the editorial committee of the *Revue Chronométrique* and also put himself forward as a jury member of the horological section for the Paris Exposition of 1900. As such there was a reliance on Lechevallier to keep the carriage clock side up and running and Alfred Drocourt may well have taken his eye off the ball. Losing both the house and workshops in Saint-Nicolas on the retirement of Lechevallier, and then a year or so later the large Paris workshops obviously took its toll.

Alfred Drocourt (circled) and the Jurors for the Horological Section of the 1900 Paris Exposition



Having taken over the Hologue workshops in the mid-1870s, Drocourt started his own sequence of *roulant blanc* numbers, those stamped between the plates and which indicate the movement number, as opposed to that of the clock, with his sequence deviating from that used on the Hologue supplied movements from pre-1875; basically starting from scratch. What is interesting to note is clock number 29233 is the first to no longer have a *blanc roulant* number, a situation that continued until then end of production; giving credence to the idea that the movements were indeed coming from a different source.

My research into the serial numbers of Drocourt and Jacot reveal that both had runs of the same type of movement made at one time to be finished off over a longer period, this being more prevalent with the more complicated movements, such as those with grande-sonnerie strike; therefore a run of grande-sonnerie movements could run to some twenty or more to be finished and cased up as needed. Therefore we get a situation, as touched on earlier, where an earlier numbered grande-sonnerie clock will be seen with the later number 31 address, despite the records showing it was first produced as a *blanc roulant* some ten years earlier. Indeed, one fine grande-sonnerie in my possession, which would date to circa 1890, has actually had the number 28 on the address to the dial struck-off with 31 put in its place, which is repeated to the address plaque on the underside.

So it is that by the time the last known clock, number 36340, was manufactured, it would've been made *for* Drocourt, not in his workshops, to be then signed and sold by him.



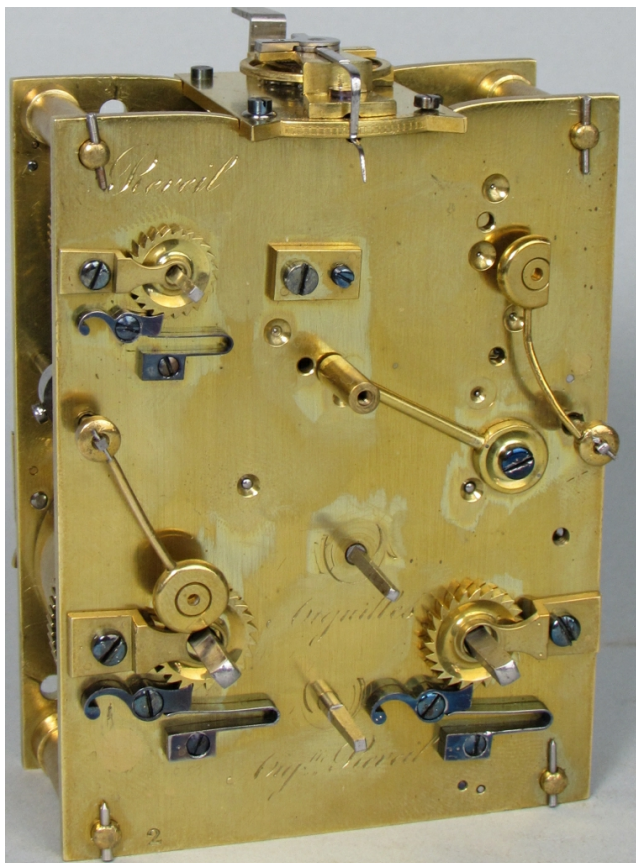
Serial number 19110, a grande-sonnerie carriage clock which should, by number, date to the early 1890s, but which has the case stamped for the 1900 award and the address as 31 rue Debelleyne, with that on the dial having the 28 struck through and 31 added, as is the case with the name plate to the underside; and so was 'released' no earlier than 1907.

The first of the two carriage clocks discussed here is stamped with the serial number 2 and therefore it must be assumed was made in that first year, 1854; the design and style would suggest this to be the case as it is very much 'of the period'. But there is a slight twist to this clock, as has been recorded in the aforementioned article previously published. Close examination gave every indication that this clock movement was actually made by Henri Jacot in his new workshops just opened in the centre of Saint-Nicolas-d'Alermont, the town near Dieppe on the English channel in Northern France from where many of the best carriage clock makers were setting up their workshops, at a time when carriage clock manufacture was becoming more commercialised.

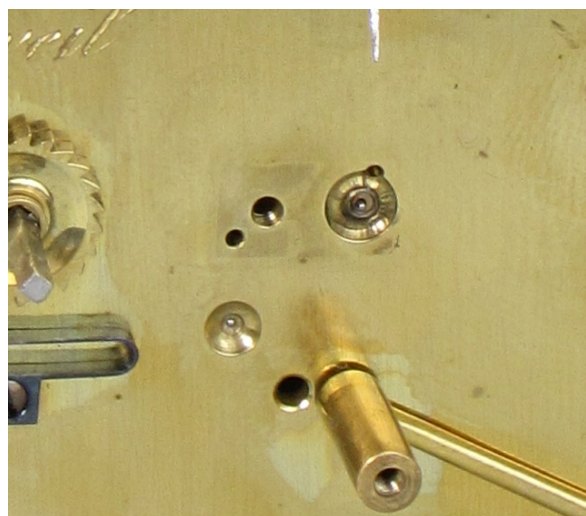
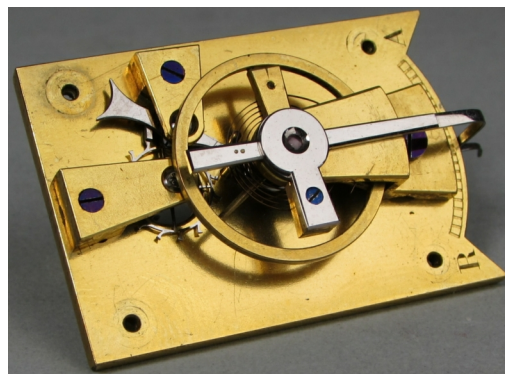


When I first acquired the clock there was no indication as to who had made it as there is no trademark to the backplate; but comparing it to images of Drocourt number 1311, held in a private collection in Russia, I noticed it had the same case style, the same movement layout, arrow mark to the backplate and the same style of platform and so I held out some hope that it was indeed an early Drocourt. Taking off the dial confirmed my suspicions, and was an exciting moment as the rear of the dial was marked not only for the dial-maker Aimé Petremand, but also *M. Drt*, for Monsieur Drocourt. And on examining it closely I noticed that, as would be expected, the movement layout matched that of Drocourt's clocks, except that there were a number of filled holes. At first this filled me with a slight sense of horror, until I looked more closely and found that not only did the slight changes of layout appear to

have been undertaken at the beginning of the movement's life, and therefore in either the Drocourt or Holingue workshops, but that this 'alternative' layout actually matched exactly one that I'd been studying only a few weeks previously, that of an early period II Henri Jacot numbered 489, made circa 1856. By comparing the movement with this early Jacot I established that Drocourt number 2 did indeed house an early Jacot movement. There were even signs that it had had the steel contrate wheel end-piece removed and replaced with the more normal brass with screw adjustment type, and that the barrel aperture on the frontplate had been opened up, and the hour wheel cock re-aligned to take this, and if taken back to original would also match that as seen on Jacot clocks. I concluded that, as first thought, it was most likely made in the same year that Pierre opened his Paris workshop at rue Limoges 8, being that it was from here that he first advertised as a maker of *pendule de voyages*. That it was changed to a layout as used by Holingue frères, and Drocourt himself, was most revealing and as such this clock may well have been a 'one-off' changed by Drocourt for whatever reason as he went into early production as a carriage clock maker. It may even be considered a possible prototype that was worked on before full production of carriage clocks was undertaken. It is also interesting to note that the style of script for the engraved wording on the backplate is almost identical to that seen on Holingue clocks of this period, to the point that it is obviously by the hand of the same engraver.



Number 2: The backplate showing the Holingue/Drocourt 'arrow' along with the early Holingue style of script; but with various Jacot features.



The layout of various parts to the movement that allow it to match the layout of those movements made by Holingue Frères at the same period; and the filled holes which, if in use, would correspond exactly to movements coming from the Henri Jacot workshop at this time.

Above: The changed hour-wheel cock placement on the frontplate showing the original screw-hole now filled and used as a steady pin hole, with the barrel aperture now widened.

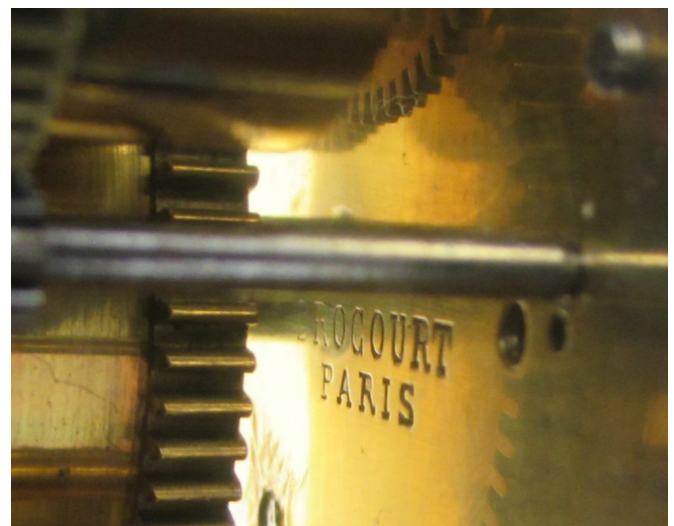
Left: Although almost impossible to see in an image, it was at this position, seen with the contrate wheel adjustment bridge removed, that the original steel end-cap, with off-set screw rod adjustment, was originally placed.

Below left: The hammer arbor moved down, as seen on the backplate.

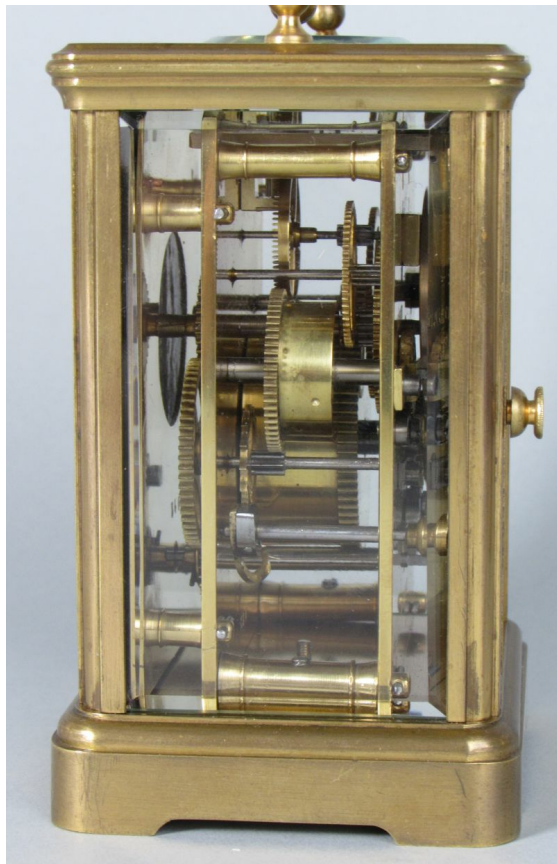
Below right: The alarm set-off lever moved up and right on the frontplate.



By the end of the Drocourt production in 1909 the business had changed considerably with 36340 being the last serial number that I have recorded. As would be expected knowing the changes that occurred within the company in obtaining clocks to be sold under the Drocourt name, this is a fairly standard eight-day timepiece clock, and fitted with an alarm. It has a relatively plain Corniche case rather than the flamboyant cast and decorative case of number 2; the movement is fitted with a platform lever escapement with compensating balance, complete with timing screws, as compared to the early form of Drocourt plain brass balance; it also has the blued-steel spade hands that Drocourt was now utilising, compared to the trefoil hands fitted to 2 and a dial which, although of excellent quality, doesn't match the dial made for the early clock by Aimé Petremand. He was a superb dial maker who died in 1843, but whose business was carried on by his widow Phillipine Sandoz followed by their daughter Lise-Olympe and son-in-law Adolphe Mojon; the latter then setting up on his own accord when he supplied both Holingue and Drocourt, as well as the Henri Jacot business in the years following the succession by Albert Jacot in the early 1870's.



This page: 36340 including above which shows a mistake on the stamp for 'Alarm' above the alarm winding arbor, and which was stamped over the word Hands, obviously a mistake in the workshop. Would that have been allowed in earlier years?



36340: side views of the movement

In the period between these two clocks being made, the markings to the backplate of Drocourt clocks became fairly standardised with the known trademark of the initials D.C. stamped either side of a clock within an oval; the design of the various arrows stamped around the hand arbor to show the direction of setting; the style of lettering for both the regulation index, being the S/F as seen set below the platform; and the actual wording 'Hands'. There was also a further trademark stamped between the plates being an oval with the wording *Drocourt Paris Fnt* set to the surround (Fnt being short for fabricant, or maker), this having been the original backplate trademark in the early years.

But by the time of 36340 these markings had changed somewhat; for the last near-thousand clocks produced there was no trademark at all on the backplate, and the additional oval between the plates had gone, to be superseded by the wording 'Drocourt, Paris' whilst it is to be noted that the various other markings on the movement are now somewhat different.

The fifty-year journey from number 2 to number 36340 is certainly an interesting and thought-provoking one, the research for which has certainly given me great pleasure.

If anyone has any queries, please do not hesitate to get in contact via email at leigh@extence.co.uk Likewise, if there is any information that may be lurking out there within the membership that it is felt may add to my research I would be more than happy to hear from you.