

Homes & Workshops of the Carriage Clock Makers of Saint Nicolas d'Alhiermont



As part of my research into the carriage clock makers Jacot and Drocourt I have amassed a fairly extensive collection of postcards from both Paris and the town in which both had workshops, Saint Nicolas d'Alhiermont. Situated near Dieppe on the northern French coast, the town was home to not only some of the finest carriage clock makers but also four great chronometer makers. As this piece is a visual appreciation of the various buildings associated with these makers I have not gone into too much historical detail of each as this is covered in my research already published and that still to be so. There are many more makers and associates within the town that are represented in my collection, but I've kept this article about those that are of most interest to carriage clock collectors.

The historical beginning of the carriage clock industry is obviously associated with Abraham-Louis Breguet and the wonderful portable clocks made by him for wealthy patrons. It is generally assumed that Paul Garnier came next in the carriage clock timeline with his well-made but 'affordable' *pendules de voyage* as first recorded at the Paris Exposition of 1834 but most likely first shown at the exposition of 1827, with a number of other early makers producing carriage clocks fairly soon after. Then from 1855 came a period of increasing production within the industry culminating in the large output of superb quality clocks from the workshops of such as Jacot, Drocourt, Margaine and others. From the beginning of carriage clock manufacture the various workshops of Saint Nicolas d'Alhiermont played a significant part.

What is often overlooked is Henri Jacot's place in the early process of carriage clock production. The majority of clocks signed for Jacot, those with the well-known parrot mark and inner poinçon, were actually made after his death in 1868 and following the commercialisation of the Jacot business by his brother Julien and Henri's nephew and successor Albert Jacot. But Henri-Louis Jacot-Descombes, to give him his full name, was a contemporary of Paul Garnier and is known to have set up workshops in 1820 following his arrival from Switzerland, and was therefore one of the very first to make *pendules de voyages*. In this context he becomes an important early maker and one who I now believe made *blancs-roulants* for use by Garnier who was in the main an *inventeur* and designer rather than a fully-fledged maker. I have now found a mortgage document signed jointly by both the Jacot and Baveux families for premises in Saint Nicolas. Allied with the unearthing of various directory entries naming Henri Jacot as an *horloger* in the town surely proves that Jacot had an interest in workshops there and worked closely with the carriage clock maker Louis Baveux. Paul Garnier had another close Saint Nicolas association with the maker Jean-Baptiste Hologue. Hologue is an *horloger* who has slipped under the radar somewhat but whose early carriage clock movements are of superb quality with research showing him as a maker as early as 1836. Hologue was to later work alongside his eldest son François and it was François, in circa 1846, who then went into partnership with his younger brother Louis to form Hologue frères. They continued to supply Paul Garnier with both *blancs-roulants* and complete clocks with their distinctive H.L. mark seen on the frontplate of a large number of Garnier clocks. That the two concerns had a close working relationship is further evidenced by the number of H.L. signed movements that I have examined that have no obvious Garnier markings but are fitted with his *chaff-cutter* escapement.

In 1875 the Hologue workshops were taken over by one of their main clients, Alfred Drocourt, who then installed his Paris manager Auguste Lechevallier as *Directeur de la Maison Drocourt*. Prior to this date the Hologue family had supplied many other important makers with movements and indeed complete clocks including Moïse Bolviller and the wonderful examples as retailed by Athanese Bourdin in his showrooms in Rue de la Paix, Paris.



The view above is looking down toward the *Bout d'Aval* area, the river end of the town, where most of the early makers from circa 1820 set up their workshops. The houses seen here were homes built on the proceeds of the towns burgeoning horological industry.

There were many other important makers with workshops in Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont including the well-known Honoré Pons who had been tasked with reviving the prospects of the town by reinvigorating the horological trade, a story that is known to most collectors.

It was down this road that various members of the Holingue family had their premises with François living across the road from the carriage clock maker Charles-Boromé Delépine, who had himself taken over the business of Honoré Pons in 1846. He soon developed a partnership with another Saint Nicolas *horloger* Charles Canchy, one that lasted until the death of Canchy in 1856. Delépine was succeeded in circa 1891 by Delépine-Barrois who it has always been assumed was Charles-Boromé alongside another partner called Barrois. But this is not the case as will be seen. The house next to Charles-Boromé was also owned by him and eventually sold to Alfred Drocourt in 1875 becoming the home of Auguste Lechevallier. He lived here whilst running the nearby Drocourt workshops acquired from the Holingue family who had previously supplied them with *blancs-roulants*.

Shown below, and directly across the road from Charles-Boromé Delépine's premises was the large château belonging to the great chronometer maker Victor Gannery. He was succeeded there in 1851 by the nephew of Henri Motel, Onesime Dumas, considered the most important chronometer maker in France. Following the death of Dumas in 1889 his successor Émile Delépine took residence. He became the fourth fine chronometer maker to make this magnificent house his home and workshops as the château was split in two and for some time was also home to the chronometer maker Jean-Aimé Jacob. He is known to have worked alongside his next door neighbour François Holingue, the two of them being awarded a joint horological patent in 1846. The aerial view of this area, shown below, shows the various houses and workshops spread out over the area, including the château set back on the left.





This view is taken looking from *Bout d'Aval*, the lower end of the town, looking up the main street to the centre and beyond toward *Bout d'Amont* at the top end. Many of workshops were situated on this road, or lanes coming off it.

The majority of large houses seen in this photo were built and owned by the main horologists living in Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont. Closest to the camera are those of the early makers, above which set back from the road is the château belonging to Émile Delépine with the workshops ranging up an alleyway to the side and rear. The next house, behind the two tall trees, is that belonging to François Holingue which included the workshops of Alfred Drocourt, visible as five sloped roofs to the left and which are still intact today. Opposite the château the premises of both Charles-Boromé Delépine and Lechevallier are situated.

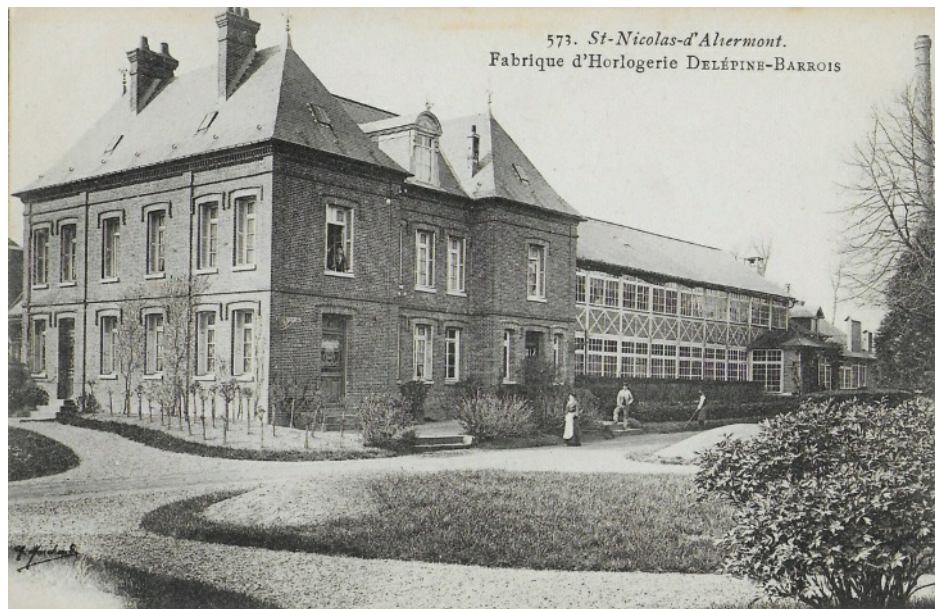
In the distance can be seen the church in the town centre around which the more important area of horological activity developed later in the century. Further back, in front of the furthestmost line of trees are the homes and workshops of Albert Villon and his successors Paul Duverdrey and Joseph Bloquel. Other workshops, including those of Denis frères, Vaucanson and Lambert are also discernable.



Looking from the town centre back down toward *Bout d'Aval* with a wonderful *horlogers* window visible beyond the right-hand row of terraced houses.

Note how it is built to maximise the light.

The tall tree at the curve of the road in the distance sits near to the homes and workshops of Boromé Delépine, Sauteur, Drocourt and the Holingue family amongst others.



By the 1870s the central area surrounding the church had taken over from *Bout d'Aval* as the more prominent horological part of Saint Nicolas d'Alhiermont and there followed the building of large houses and workshops for, amongst others, Baveux, Delépine-Barrois and Couaillet.

As alluded to, the Delépine of Delépine-Barrois is not Charles-Boromé taking on a new partner after the death of Charles Canchy, as previously assumed but in fact a relative of his named Ludovic Delépine along with Ludovic's wife Marie Barrois. Marie was a Parisian girl who had no prior horological experience as such. Her father had died in Paris and her widowed mother then married her sister's brother-in-law, the horloger Gustave Sauter. They moved to Saint Nicolas d'Alhiermont in circa 1880, where the Sauter family had been horologists for many years, and where Marie met and married Ludovic Delépine in 1884. Together they formed the Delépine-Barrois business that became one of the finest carriage clock producers of the late-Victorian period and eventually succeeded Charles-Boromé Delépine following his death in 1891 and therefore by descent were successors to Honoré Pons. They originally lived in a house next to the church with workshops set up in the gardens but moved across the town square to the prominent house with workshops that is well-known having been depicted on many postcards of the time, as seen above. It is quite probable that these premises were originally built by the step-uncle to Marie Barrois, the prominent horologist Augustin Sauter, brother to Gustave. Both house and workshops still exist, albeit the latter as apartments, situated behind a large hedge off the main street adjacent to the cinema.

Ludovic and Marie Delépine returned to Paris in 1912, having had an horological business running in tandem with that in Saint Nicolas from at least 1901, and their business, along with the house and workshops, were taken over by the Couaillet family as seen in the following image which depicts the same house as above. The further reasoning for this takeover will become clear.

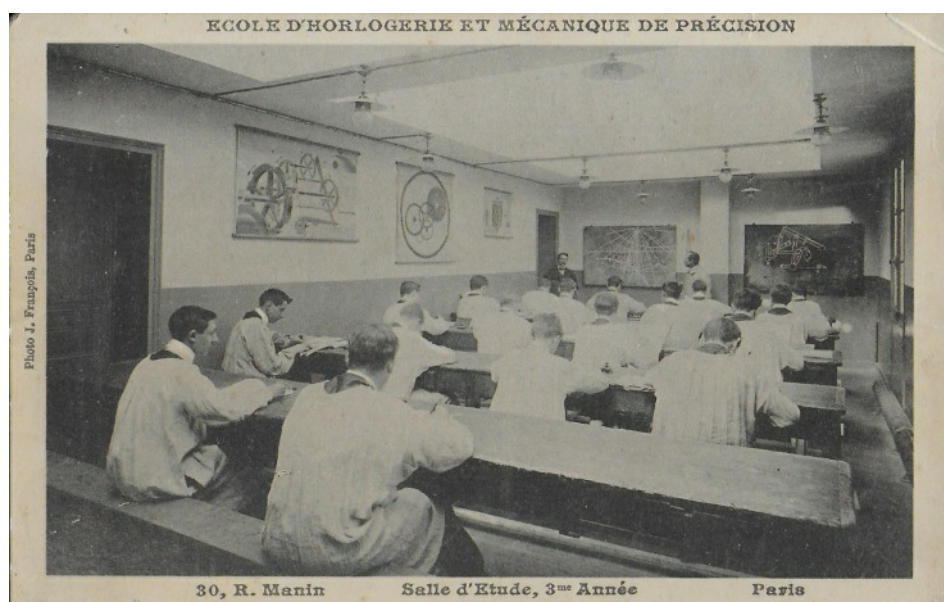




The Baveux family were also originally in the lower part of the town with Louis Baveux being very much involved with the Paris-based Henri Jacot. That they had a close relationship is shown by the fact that Baveux signed Jacot's death certificate in 1868. The family moved to the big house, shown above, in the town centre sometime prior to 1876 after which Louis's son Alfred took on the running of the workshops. It is Alfred who, for a short while, signed the inside plates of his carriage clock movements with the distinctive *AB* monogramme, being a copy of his signature. It is quite probable that the two girls seen in the window are Alfred's grand-daughters with the group standing in front being some of the workforce along with girls from the school next door.

Interestingly, during this period Alfred Baveux not only made movements but was also supplied with *blancs-roulants* to finish by both Charles-Boromé Delépine and then Delépine-Barrois, which were in turn then signed for Jacot for whom Baveux were still the major suppliers and quite possible partners.

Alfred Baveux died suddenly in 1891 and his two sons Alfred-Roaul and Louis returned home from their studies at *L'École d'Horlogerie* in Paris where, under the tutelage of Alfred Drocourt, they had both been awarded a number of end-of-term prizes. They continued the business under the name Baveux frères until following the disastrous fire in 1917 Alfred Jr moved to Dieppe and built new workshops, whereas his brother Louis moved to Paris where he ran what is now the Hotel Pax Opera.



A classroom at the École d'Horlogerie where both Baveux brothers were taught before their return to Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont. This is a wonderful image as it actually shows Alfred Drocourt himself stood in the far doorway.

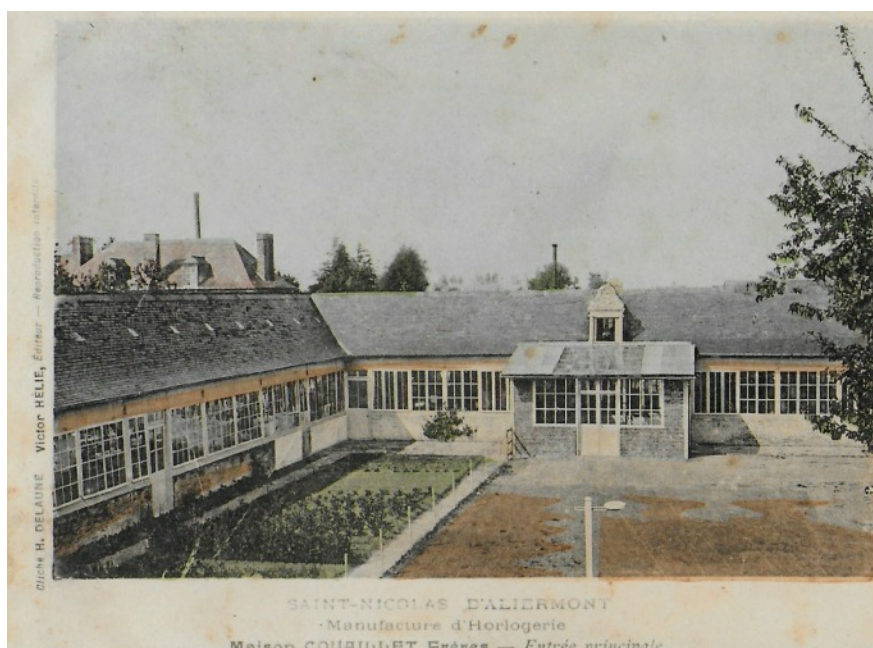
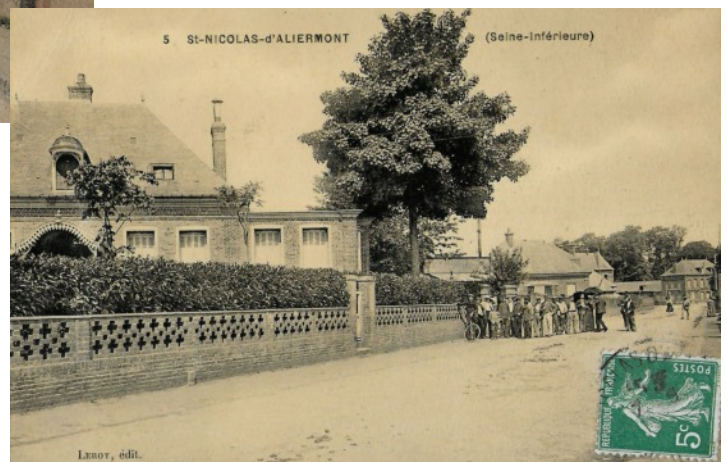
In 1885 Armand Couaillet was employed by the prominent maker Albert Villon, but in 1892 he decided to set up his own workshops alongside his brothers Denis and Ernest, becoming Couaillet frères. They moved to the centre of town and built new workshops. Armand went on to buy a large château, named Le Brejol, situated a short walk down the main road.

Couaillet and Baveux's workshops were only separated by a fence and actually occupied the same triangular area of land around which the Couaillet brothers had large houses built within yards of each other. Both Baveux and Couaillet suffered large fires that all but destroyed their respective premises and it was the Couaillet fire of 1912 that prompted them to take-over the Delépine-Barrois concern situated across the road when Ludovic and Marie Delépine returned to Paris. Couaillet went on to rebuild the lost workshops and continued to use these workshops alongside their new acquisition. The Baveux fire occurred in 1917 and completely destroyed the house and workshops but miraculously, according to contemporary newspaper reports, caused little damage to their competitors next door. This didn't stop litigation flying between the two in 1920 with both sides blaming the other over various matters appertaining to the fire. The legal paperwork makes for very interesting reading! The Couaillet homes are still standing to this day, as is Le Brejol.



This image shows how close the workshops were with the white painted arched entrance to the Couaillet workshops next door to the brick built entrance to those of Baveux.

This photo to the right was taken further back up the road and shows the Couaillet house that was attached to the workshops and which is still standing today, albeit cosmetically changed.



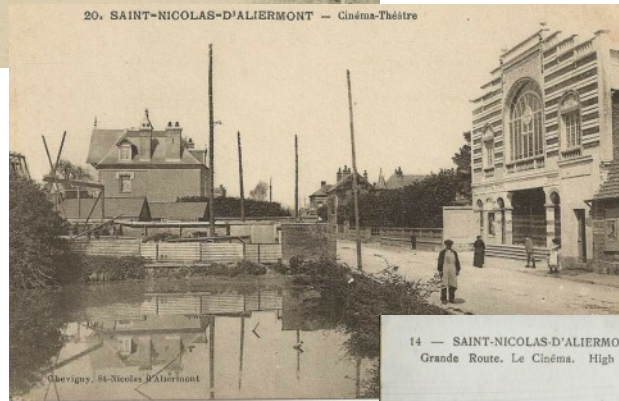
Having gone through the main gate to the Couaillet premises a courtyard opens up with the main doorway shown here going through to the extensive workshops. Compare this with with the later aerial image.

Visible in the distance is the chimney attached to the Delépine-Barrois, then Couaillet, workshop.



Three images of the lower end of the Couaillet workshops. Pre the 1912 fire; after the fire; and following the rebuild. Beyond the cinema on the main road is the hedge-lined entrance to their future premises as previously occupied by Delépine-Barrois.

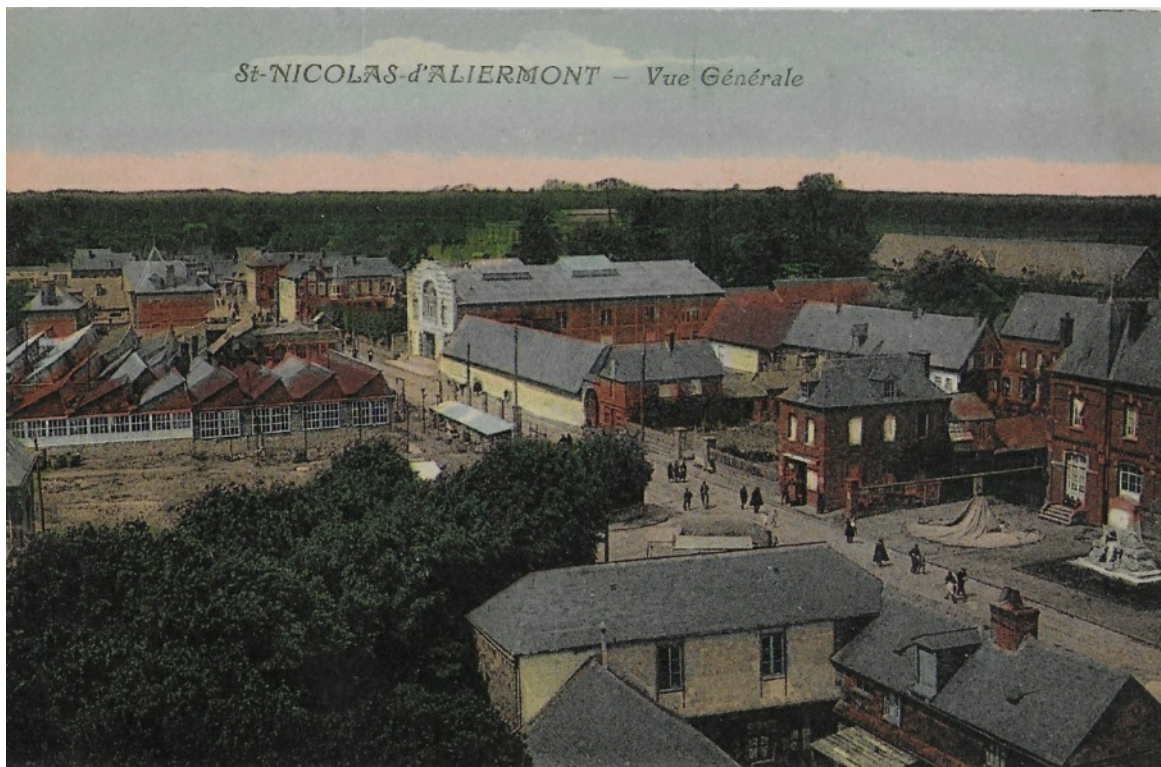
Interesting that the top image has the name Couaillet inked in over the original rubbed out name Baveux.



The interior of the Couaillet workshop showing carriage clocks being made.



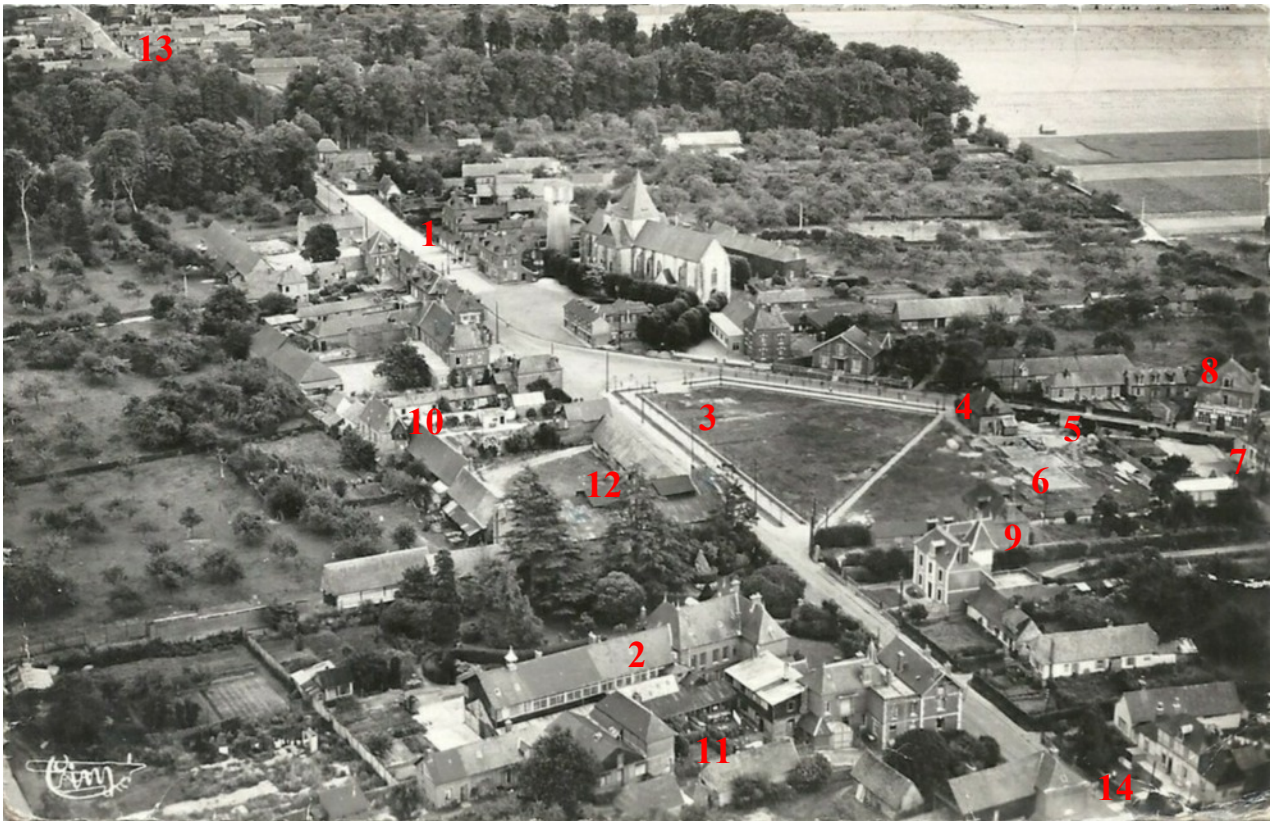
A view from the top of the church overlooking the Baveux house and workshops with those of Couaillet behind. The hedge-lined entrance to Delépine-Barrois is seen beyond the white-fronted cinema, with the roof of their house just visible. Interestingly the hand written note states that the workshops are manufacturing *fabrique d'abus*, armaments, where as previously they had been a *fabrique d'orlogerie*. This was to aid the French First World War effort.



The same view shortly after and showing the devastation caused by the 1917 fire. All the Baveux premises are now gone leaving a clear view of the Couaillet workshops.

That this is taken close to the date of the fire is shown by the building of the war memorial in front of the Mairie on the right with the top half still under wraps. This was erected the same year as the fire.

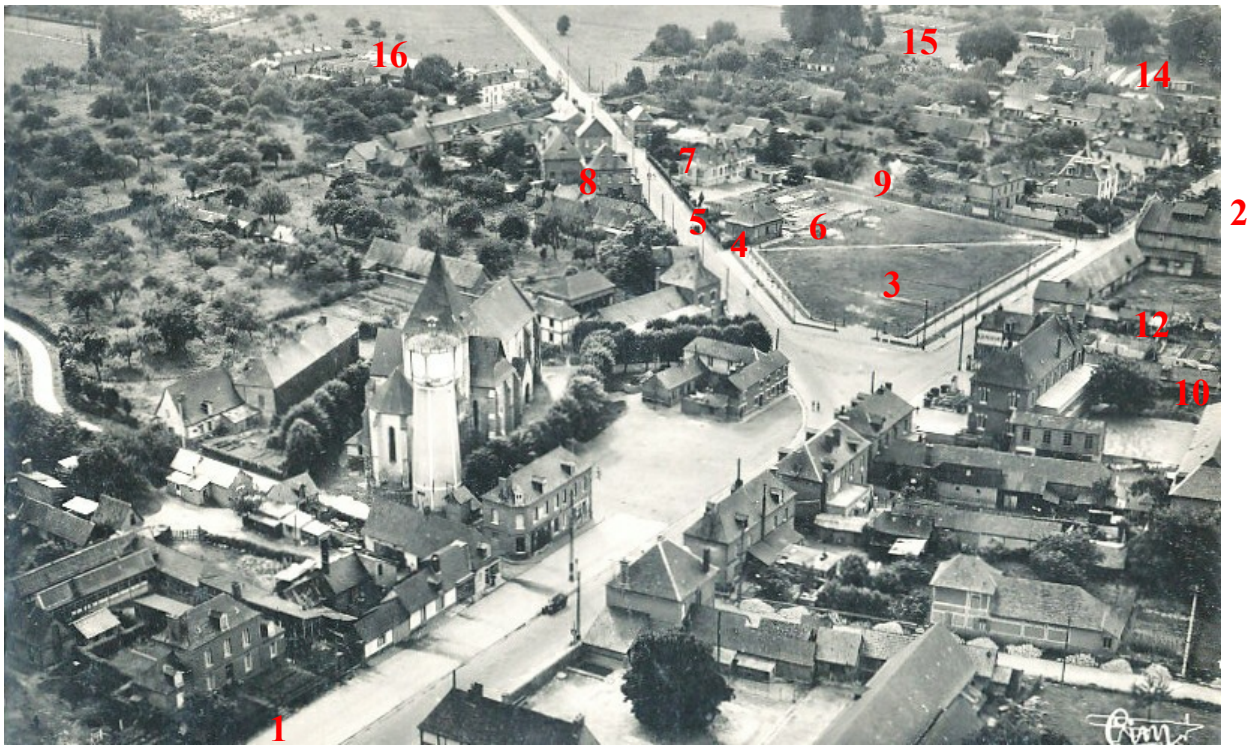
The cream farm buildings to the right of the cinema were demolished to make way for the Horological Museum and to the left of the Mairie is an alleyway leading to courtyard where at least seven horologists had small workshops.



Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont

Known homes and workshops of some of the top makers

- 1 Delépine-Barrois probable first home and workshops
- 2 Delépine-Barrois house and workshops as later taken over by Couaillet frères (the workshops now converted to apartments.)
- 3 The site of the Baveux house and workshops.
- 4 The entrance to the Baveux (Jacot) workshops now incorporated into the school.
- 5 Site of the entrance to Couaillet frères.
- 6 Site of the courtyard and inner entrance to the Couaillet workshops.
- 7 Couaillet house as attached to the workshops.
- 8 Couaillet brothers house.
- 9 Couaillet brothers house.
- 10 Site of the alleyway and courtyard of horologists premises next to the Mairie.
- 11 Site of the courtyard of horologists workshops next to the Delépine-Barrois house.
- 12 The farmhouse that now houses the Horological Museum.
- 13 Onward toward *Bout d'Amont* and the Duverdrey & Bloquel house and workshops.
- 14 Toward *Bout d'Aval* passed the Château Le Brejol owned by Armand Couaillet.



The main road to the right continues down passed the workshops for Denis frères and Vaucanson and on to the *Bout d'Aval* region of Holingue, Delepine etc whilst to the left the main road continues to the *Bout d'Amont* region of Villon and Duverdrey & Bloquel.

14 Château Le Brejol home to Armand Couaillet. Note attached workshops to side.

15 Grounds and further workshops of Château Le Brejol after setting up the new business in 1925.

16 Workshops of horological suppliers Lambert.

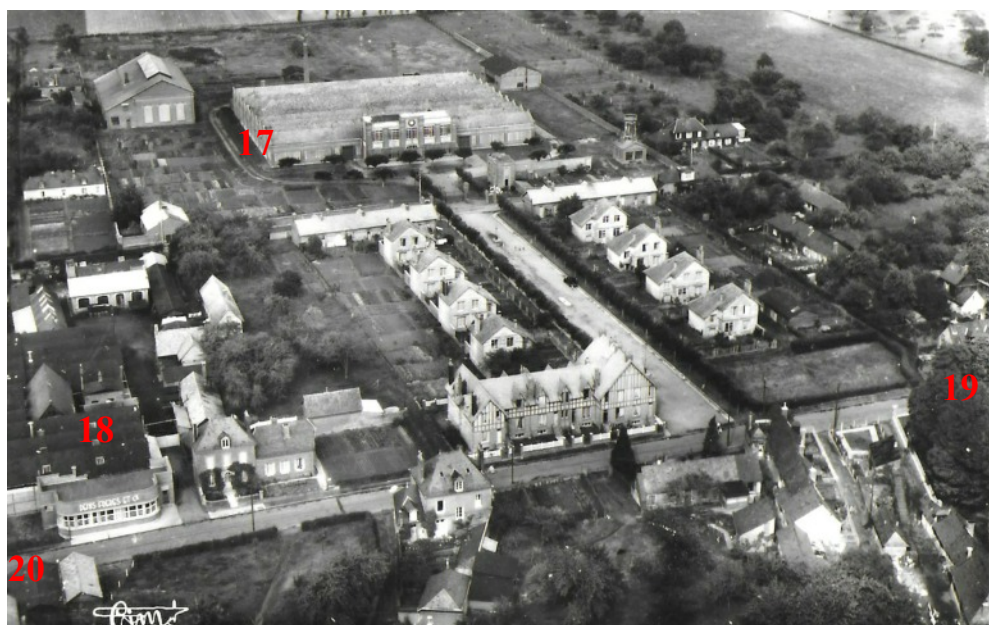
Image Below

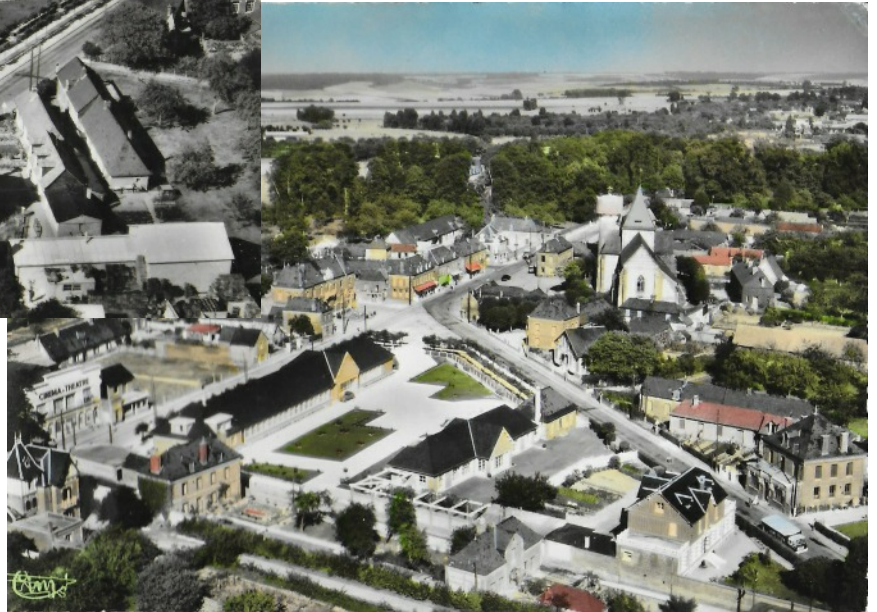
17 Workshops of Vaucanson with workers houses either side of the road to the front.

18 Art Deco entrance of Denis frères with workshops just visible. The entrance is no longer there but the workshops are now a car repair centre.

19 Road to the centre.

20 Road to *Bout d'Aval*.





Two further views overlooking the town square. The Baveux & earlier Couaillet sites are now a school being the long building across the road from the cinema.

To the right-hand side of the pointed end of the triangle of land sits the Couaillet house that was attached to the workshops, with a better view shown face-on in the black and white image, and which is seen in the earlier postcard.

This and the two other Couaillet brothers houses are still standing today. One being the old post-office on the other side of the street situated to the right of the red roofed bungalow and the other to the left of the image with the two red chimneys.

In the middle of the triangle can be seen a long building with a porch which is situated on the exact site of the original courtyard entrance to the Couaillet workshops. The basic form can be visualised when compared to the earlier postcard. The site of the Delépine-Barrois workshops can just be seen in the top left of the black and white card. The house is still in situ whilst the workshops are now converted into apartments.



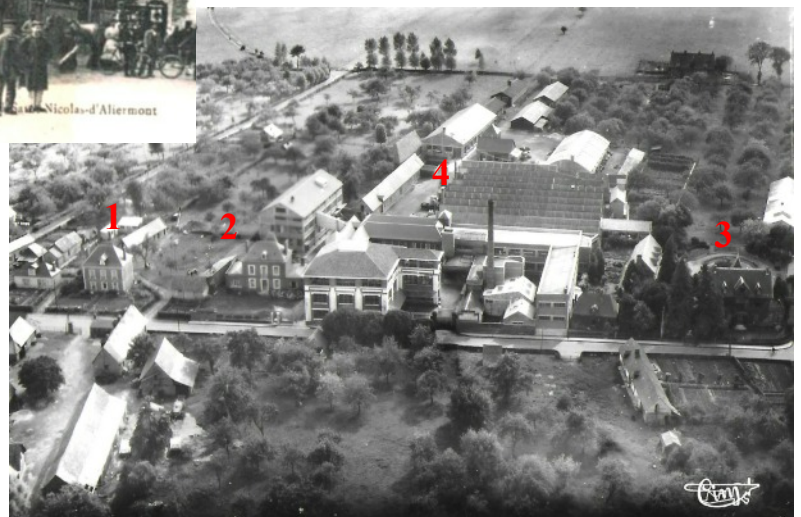
The château Le Brejol owned by Armand Couaillet. He set up a new business here after Couaillet frères went bankrupt in 1925, building small workshops in the old stable block, the remains of which still survive to this day.

In a further addition to the story, following the folding of the Couaillet business it was bought by Baveux, by now being run solely by Alfred Baveux Jr. from his base in Dieppe.



Further up the main street, past the town centre and into the *Bout d'Amont* area of the town were situated the carriage clock making workshops of the prominent maker and one-time mayor, Albert Villon. He first set-up here in 1867 and by 1889 professed to be making some 20,000 carriage clocks per year. In 1887 Paul Duverdrey joined Villon as a director who in turn was joined by Joseph Bloquel after the death of Villon in 1910 to become Duverdrey & Bloquel. The firm later became the alarm clock making concern Bayard.

Villon had a large house built which for a time he shared with Paul Duverdrey and his family, seen between the trees below, before moving to another house he had built near enough next door as seen behind the iron railings. A quite magnificent house was then built for Bloquel, seen above, and hidden behind the large tree below. The main workshops have recently been demolished, along with Duverdrey's house, with a park now in its place but the Bloquel home is still standing on the corner as is the Villon house to the left.



- 1 Villon's later home.
- 2 Villon's original home becoming that of Duverdrey and his family.
- 3 Bloquel's magnificent house.
- 4 The workshops.



This is one of my favourite postcards in the collection which shows a glimpse of Delépine-Barrois's original house on the left and down past the church to the Couaillet workshops in the distance.

But its main attraction is the lovely signature of Martha Duverdrey, of the Duverdrey family and was sent by her to *Monsieur Deleule, Fabricant d'Horlogerie, Morteau, Doubs*. Deleule was a member of the well-known watchmaking family in the south of France and this is a small link between these two great horological areas situated at both ends of the country.



This narrative started with Abraham-Louis Breguet and ends with a link to him via the above postcard. This shows an image of Alfred Drocourt's country house situated in Rangipont on the river Seine. I have paperwork showing Drocourt selling this property in 1904 to Edouard Brown, owner of *Maison Breguet* in Paris. Brown retired here and lived in this house with his sister Madelaine.



leigh@extence.co.uk

© Copyright Leigh Extence 2020