



ALFRED DROCOURT  
CARRIAGE CLOCK MAKER

Two Exceptional Clocks

# PIERRE & ALFRED DROCOURT

Pierre Drocourt was born in Gargenville in 1819, a small town some thirty miles from Paris.

He came from a family of *cultivateurs* with no apparent interest in horology but did live a few fields away from Julien Jacot who in circa 1820, alongside his brother Henri, founded one of the great carriage clock making dynasties in Paris. Guitrancourt is seen here in the foreground with Gargenville in the distance.



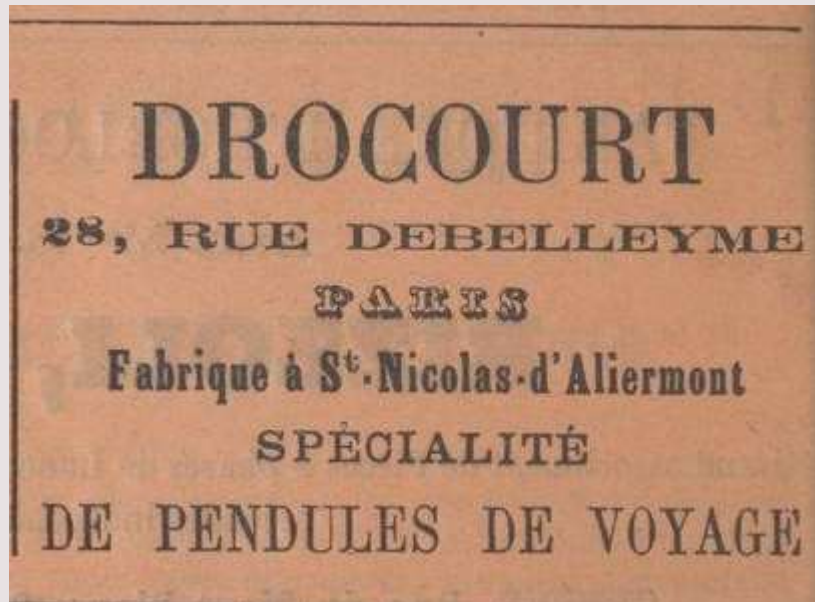


Pierre moved to Paris as an apprentice in circa 1836 and lived at Rue Saintonge 8, now 38, where he married Marie-Adèle Vandel. They had a son, Alfred Drocourt, born October 1847.





In 1852 Pierre moved to his well-known workshops at 8 Rue Limoges in 1855. The road name changed to 28 Rue Debelleyme in 1865 and these workshops would be continued by Alfred Drocourt.

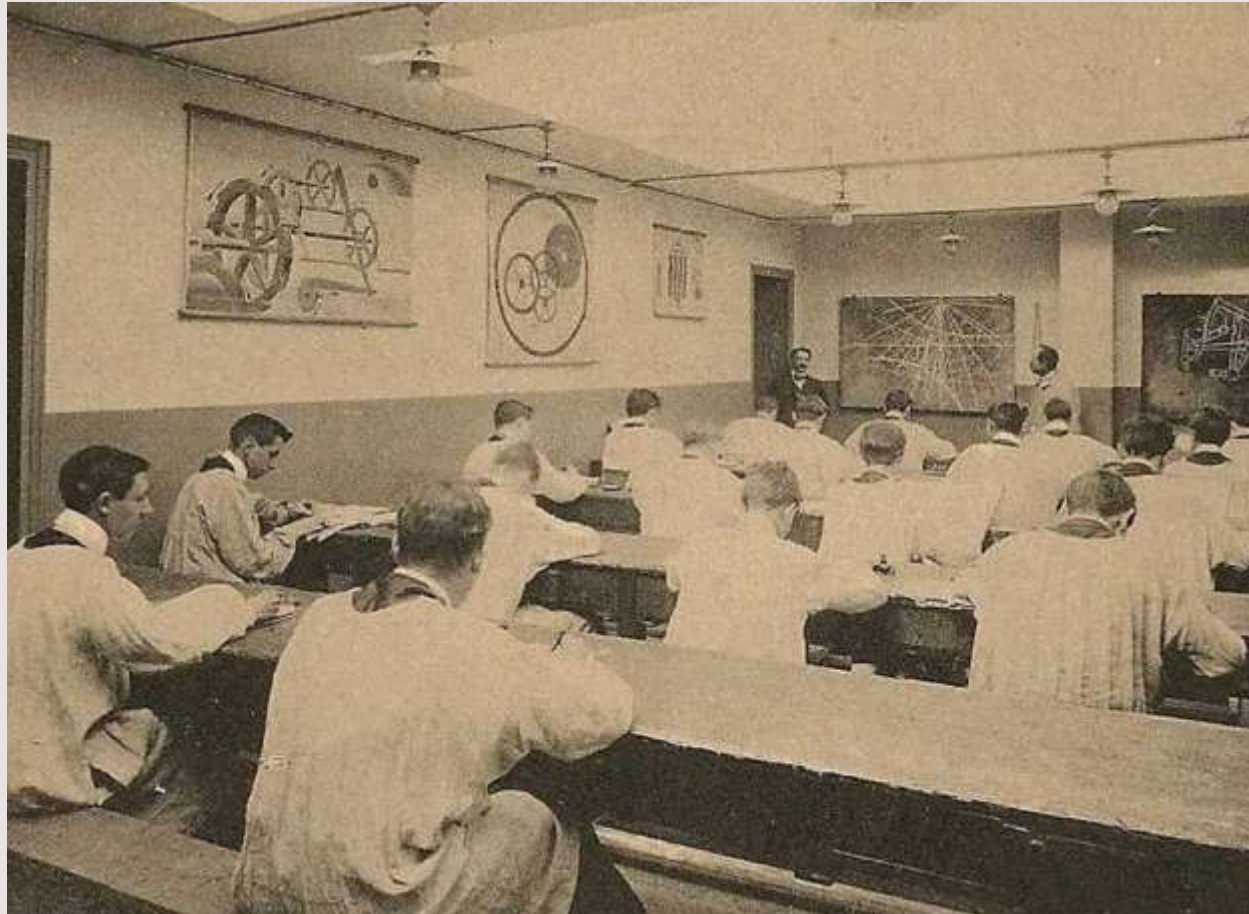




In 1872 Pierre retired and Alfred took on the business. He did so with some gusto turning it into one of the most prominent carriage clock businesses of that, or any other period. Here Alfred is seen in the middle of the back row of the Jury for the horological *classe* at the 1900 Paris Exposition, looking slightly to his left, an attribution that took some weeks of research to confirm.



Alfred was a founder of the school of horology in Paris and this image of a class in progress shows him standing in the doorway.



# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

In 1875 Alfred Drocourt increased his production of carriage clocks by taking over the workshops of his supplier of *blancs roulant*, Hologue Frères, situated in the horological town of Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont, near Dieppe in northern France.

As a family Hologue were previously unheralded makers with very little known about them. But my research into the family suggests that they are one of *the* most influential and important makers in the history of carriage clock production having manufactured and supplied both movements and complete clocks from the earliest period of Jean-Baptiste Hologue in the 1820s, followed by his sons Jean-Baptiste and Louis who joined forces as Hologue Frères in the late 1840s.



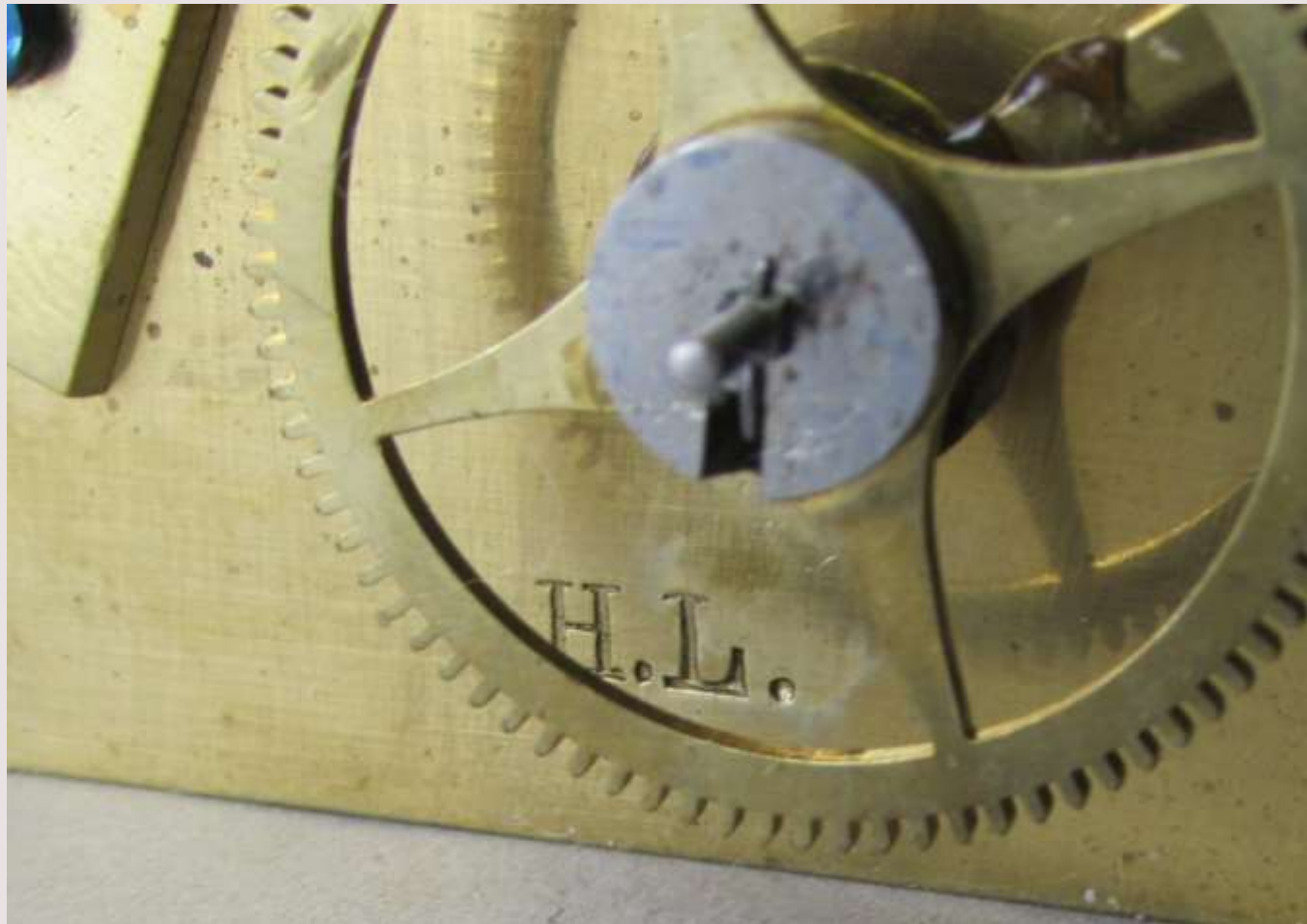
# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS



Looking down the main street in Saint-Nicolas-d'Aliermont.

Note the clockmakers windows built to attract the best daylight for working by.

# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS



Holingue stamped the frontplate of their movements with the initials H.L.

# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

Holingue supplied such eminent makers as Paul Garnier, Athanase Bourdin, Moise Bolviller, Georges Moser and, of course, the Drocourt family.





# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

An example of the close relationships between these makers.

An inkwell clock of the style advertised by Drocourt and signed for Georges Moser.



# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

With the movement supplied by Hologue Freres and fitted with a chaff-cutter escapement as patented by Paul Garnier who also used Hologue to supply his movements.



# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

Through piecing together various sources of information including land sales particulars, census records and the like I was able to work out the position of the Drocourt house and workshops in the town where his manager Auguste Lechevallier lived and worked, and from where carriage clocks from this famous maker emanated from.





# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

Within the oval below are the Drocourt house to the right and workshops to the left.



# DROCOURT: MAKERS & SUPPLIERS

It was a wonderful moment when I realised that my research had not only unearthed the position in the town of the Drocourt house and workshops, but that both were still extant with the wrokshop being used as a car mechanics. Note the truncated smelting chimney.



Alfred Drocourt's stand at the Paris Exposition of 1900.

As a member of the committee, he was unable to be honoured with a medal but did get a *Mention Honorable*.





In 1904 Alfred Drocourt moved from his Paris premises at 28 Rue Debelleyme and placed the Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont house and workshops on the market. He also sold his house situated on the quay at Rangiport, the lower part of Garganville, to Edward Brown, owner of Breguet.



Alfred Drocourt supplied many of the main top London and American retailers including J.W. Benson Ltd of Regent Street who held a Royal Warrant at that time.

Through these retailers' clocks made by Drocourt found their way to some of the most distinguished families in Britain, including one that was purchased by Queen Victoria and another destined for Alice Liddell, the inspiration for Alice in Wonderland.

Both clocks are here with me today and have fascinating stories to tell.

# QUEEN VICTORIA

In 1877 Queen Victoria gifted a carriage clock to a favoured Godson, Victor Biddulph, to commemorate his confirmation on the 30<sup>th</sup> March.





# QUEEN VICTORIA

A Gorge cased carriage clock with *grande-sonnerie* strikework sourced in London through J.W. Benson of Old Bond Street.



TO VICTOR BIDDULPH  
FROM  
HIS GODMOTHER VICTORIA R  
ON HIS CONFIRMATION MARCH 30 1877



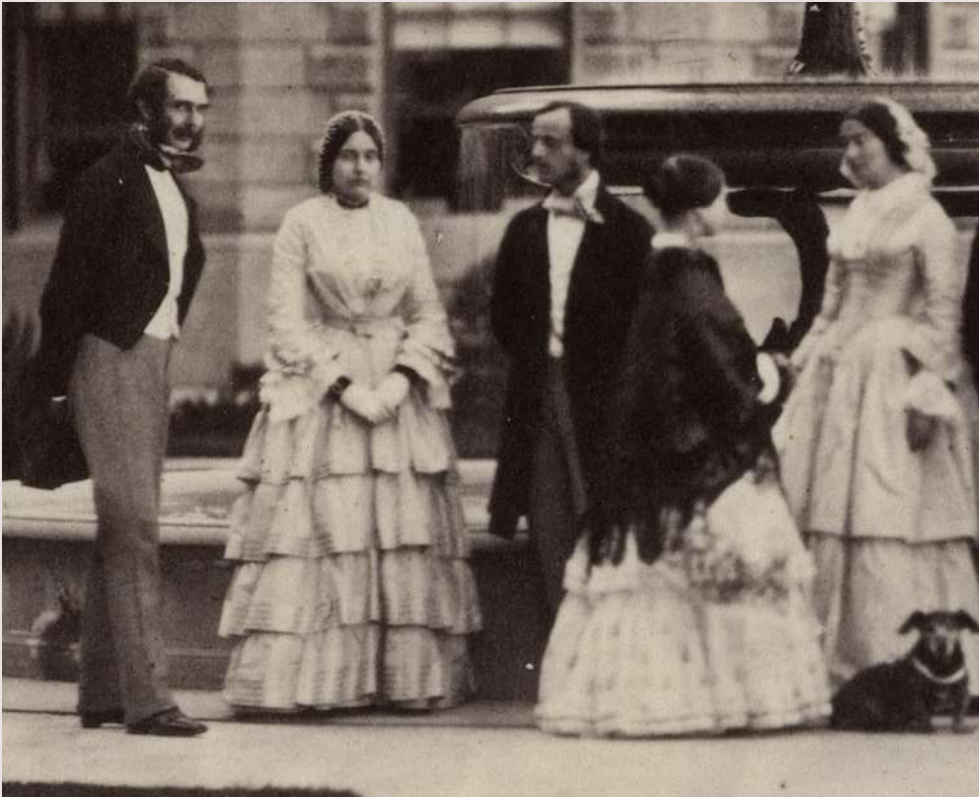
WITH HIS OWNERSHIP LABEL TO THE UNDERSIDE OF THE  
LEATHER CARRYING CASE





# VICTOR BIDDULPH

## HIS FAMILY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO THE QUEEN



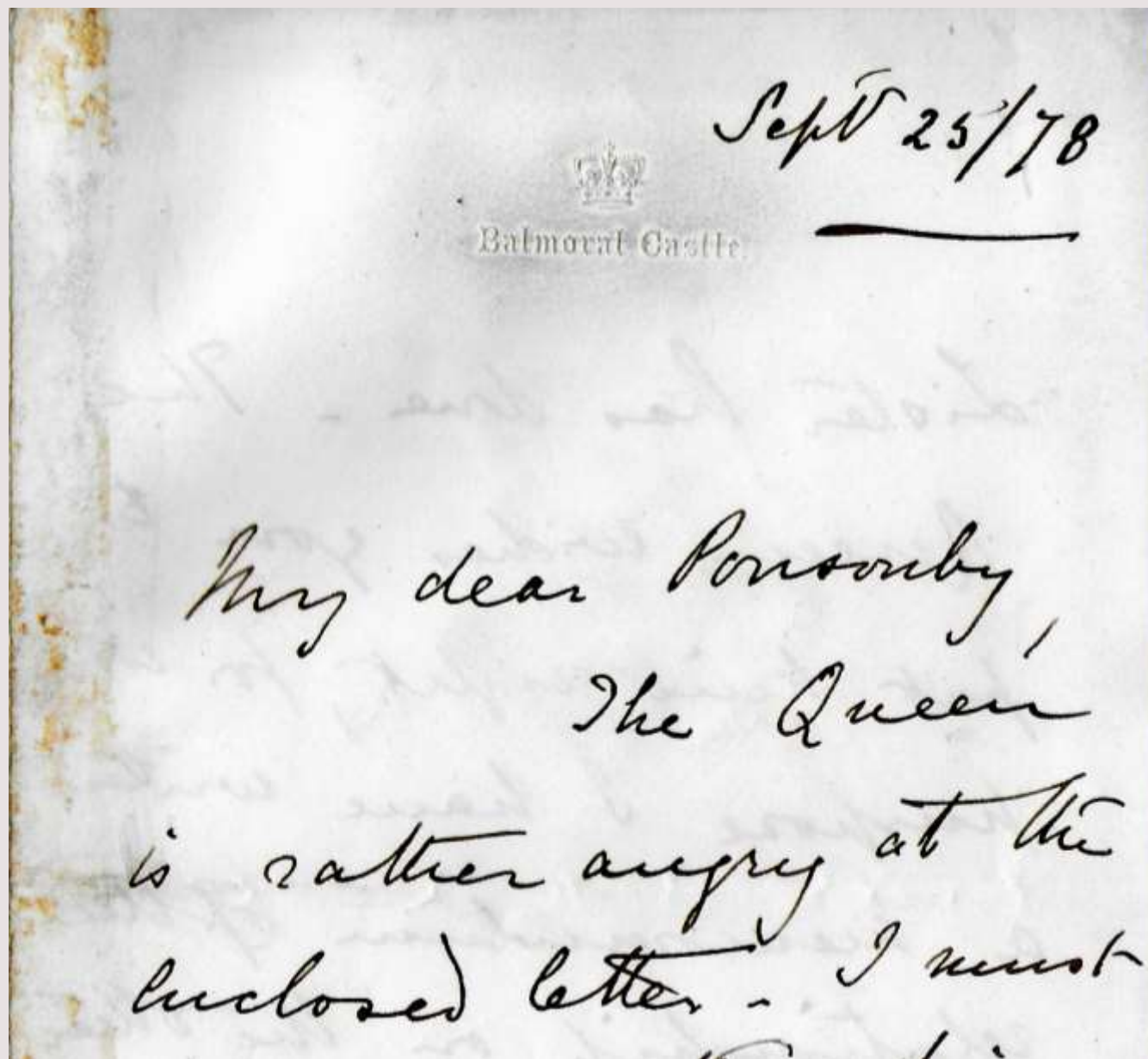
Victor Biddulph was born in St George Hanover Square, London in April 1860, the son of General Sir Thomas Myddelton-Biddulph and Mary Frederica Seymour, who having been *Maid-of-Honour* to Queen Victoria was made an honorary *Lady of the Bedchamber* following their marriage in 1857.

Sir Thomas with Queen Victoria at Osborne House in the 1870s.

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.

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'



Sept 25/78

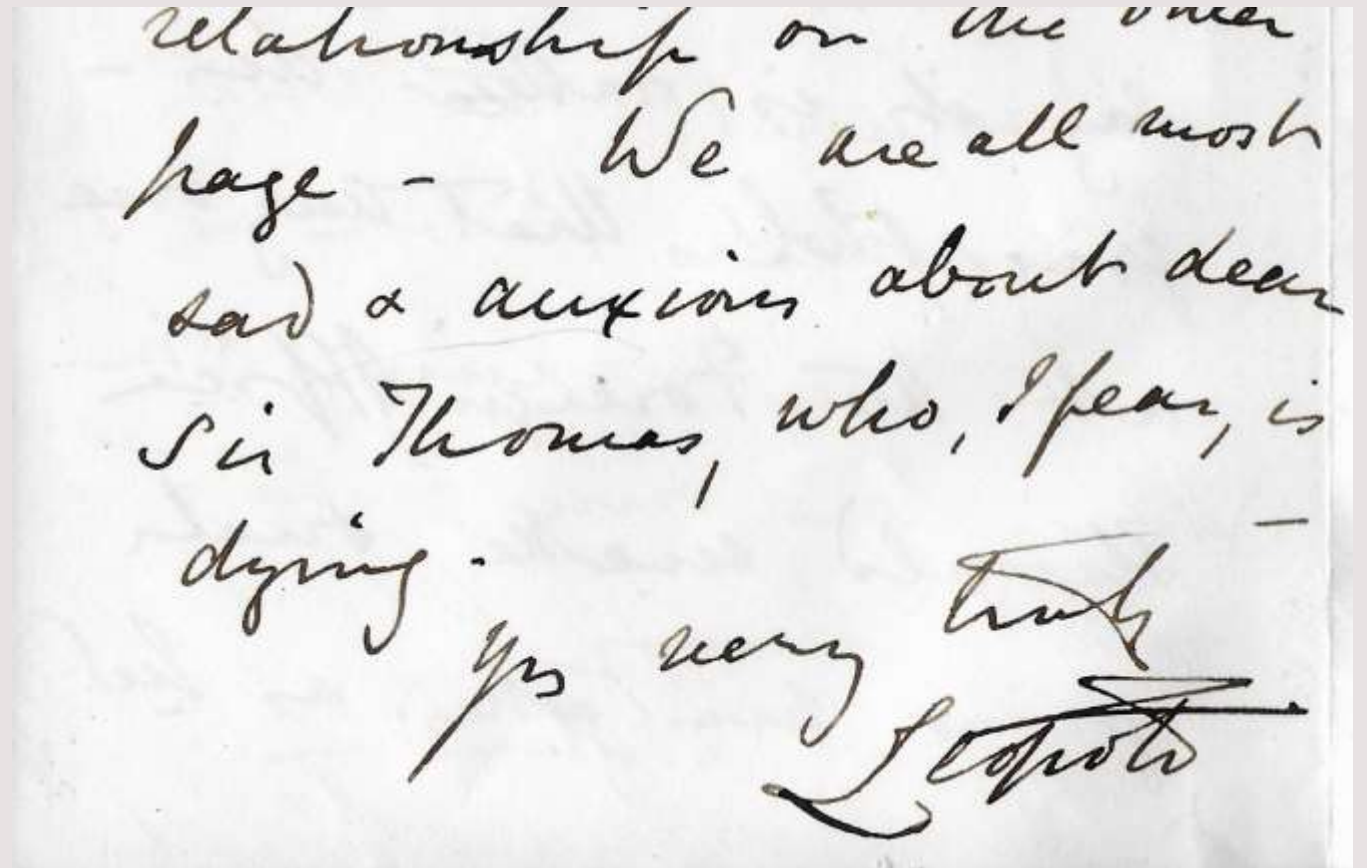
Balmoral Castle

My dear Ponsonby,  
The Queen  
is rather angry at the  
enclosed letter - I must

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'We are all most sad and anxious about dear Sir Thomas, who, I fear, is dying. Yours very truly, Leopold'

A photograph of a handwritten letter on white paper. The text is written in cursive and matches the text in the adjacent blocks. The visible portion of the letter reads: "relationship on the inner page - We are all most sad & anxious about dear Sir Thomas, who, I fear, is dying. Yours very truly Leopold". The signature "Leopold" is written in a large, stylized cursive script at the bottom right.

relationship on the inner  
page - We are all most  
sad & 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.

The Queen 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.



*Drinking Fountain erected by Queen Victoria  
in the memory of Sir Thomas Biddulph  
1874*



Victor Biddulph, the recipient of the clock, is seen here seated opposite Princess Beatrice and the rest of the cast of the play *Whats Up*, where he played the lawyer Fennel.

It was written by the Irish playwright Dion Boucicault and performed in the ballroom at Balmoral Castle on the 5th of October 1889 as part of the 31st 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 Frederic*  
*Myddelton Biddulph of Stansfield Cusmer in*  
*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 100 St. James' Court in the*  
*County of Middlesex Spinster sister in law of*  
*deceased and George Tourney Biddulph*  
*of 143, Chancery Row in the County of Middlesex*  
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.

Victor Biddulph died on the 13th 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.

But what of the clock itself?





WAR OFFICE,  
WHITEHALL,  
LONDON, S.W. 1.

6th December, 1928.

Forwarded with the compliments of General Sir Walter Braithwaite, by whom it was received from Lady Haig with a request that it should be forwarded to

Major General Sir John Ponsonby  
whose present address Lady Haig was not sure of.

Lady Haig is at present at Bemersyde, St. Boswells,  
Roxburghshire, Scotland.

Major-General Sir John Ponsonby, KCB. CMG. DSO.  
Gilmuire,  
Ascot.

Found tucked in the travelling box of the clock:  
A letter dated December 1928.

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, 1st Earl Haig.

Following his death on the 29th 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.

This being the Ponsonby mentioned previously in Prince Leopold's letter.

# 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 shown previously.

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

# SIR JOHN PONSONBY & SIR THOMAS BIDDULPH ON THE BALMORAL ESTATE

The close relationship between the Biddulph and Ponsonby families is shown in this albumen image depicting Sir Henry Ponsonby, father of the last known recipient of the clock, seated front row far left next to Sir Thomas Biddulph, father of the first recipient of the clock shortly before the latter's death in 1878.



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.

That Prince Leopold was close to Victor Biddulph's father is most interesting as the prince was also a close friend of Alice Liddell, the inspiration for Charles Dodgson's *Alice in Wonderland*, the recipient of the other clock shown here and one that was also made by Alfred Drocourt.

It is a clock that my research has shown to have an equally fascinating history to that owned by Queen Victoria.



# ALICE IN WONDERLAND



In 2021 I purchased a carriage clock from Mary-Jean St. Clair that was once owned by her grand-mother Alice Hargreaves nee Liddell, Lewis Carroll's inspiration for *Alice in Wonderland*.

Made in Paris by the well-known clock maker Alfred Drocourt, the pillared Anglaise case is made of silvered brass with panelled sides. What is so fascinating is that the engraved decoration to the dial, side panels and case depict riverside scenes of reeds, insects and flower heads all very reminiscent in their manner of the images shown in the early copies of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Alice Through the Looking Glass* as drawn by John Tenniel.

These engraved riverbank scenes would have been the view that Alice and her sisters would encounter as they punted down the River Isis with Lewis Carroll (Charles Dodgson) in the summer of 1862 as he regaled them with stories of Alice's fanciful adventures; stories that became the basis of his famous children's books.

The clock is complete with its numbered Moroccan leather travelling box.







The serial number on the clock movement 17647 dates it to 1879/80, which is intriguing as correspondence sent to me by Mary-Jean St. Clair, and Alice's great-grand-daughter Vanessa Alice Tait, state that the clock was given to Alice as a wedding present in September 1880 when she married the cricketer Reginald Hargreaves, becoming Alice Hargreaves.

ASCOT  
1085.

BROADWOOD HOUSE,  
SUNNINGDALE.

I received the clock  
on my father's death  
as his only child  
He wanted it for Alice  
as he only child.

M. Tait

24 May '22

Dear Leigh,

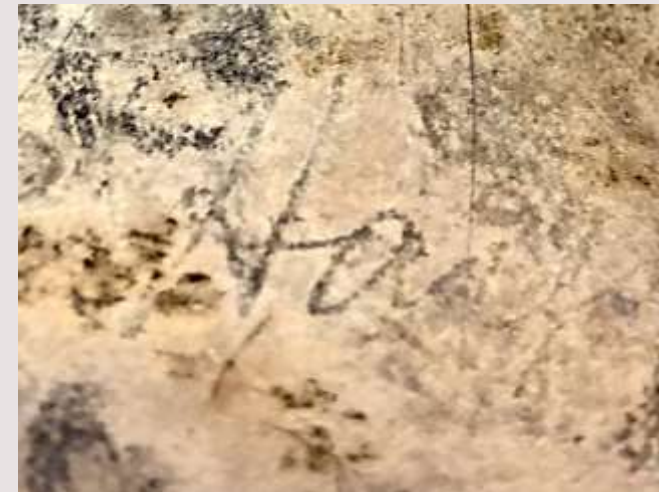
Here is my mother's  
note. I am afraid it is  
not the most legible, or  
printed on the cleanest paper  
(neither is mine!).

My mother thinks the  
clock was probably a  
wedding present to Alice,  
but we don't know from  
when.

Best,  
Vanessa



On examining the clock closely, I found a wonderful faint signature to the underside: Mrs Hargreaves.



# THE ALICE SIGNATURE

By chance, some months after obtaining the clock I was able to obtain an album put together by Ada Coralie Meade-Waldo, a member of an Edwardian society family.

Ada used her album to illustrate with photographs, drawings and other ephemera visits to friends and family at their grand homes around the south-east of England and other parts of the country between circa 1902 and 1907.

One page is devoted to a visit to the Hargreaves family home Cuffnells in Hampshire and is signed by Alice, the signature being a perfect match to that seen on the underside of the clock, thus proving that the clock is actually signed by Alice herself. There can't be a better attribution to ownership than this.

Also on the page is the signature of her son Caryl who was to own the clock following the death of Alice in 1934. This is confirmed in the note previously mentioned and shown below. As such I have original signatures of all three members of the family who had possession of it.



Signatures of two of the three owners: Alice Hargreaves and her son Caryl





Alice Hestance Hargreaves  
Margaret P. Hargreaves



Signatures of two of the three owners: Alice Hargreaves and her son Caryl



# UPTON HOUSE

Mary has confirmed that the clock was passed on to Alice's son Caryl Hargreaves following Alice's death in 1934 and would have been with him at his home Broadwood House, Ascot.

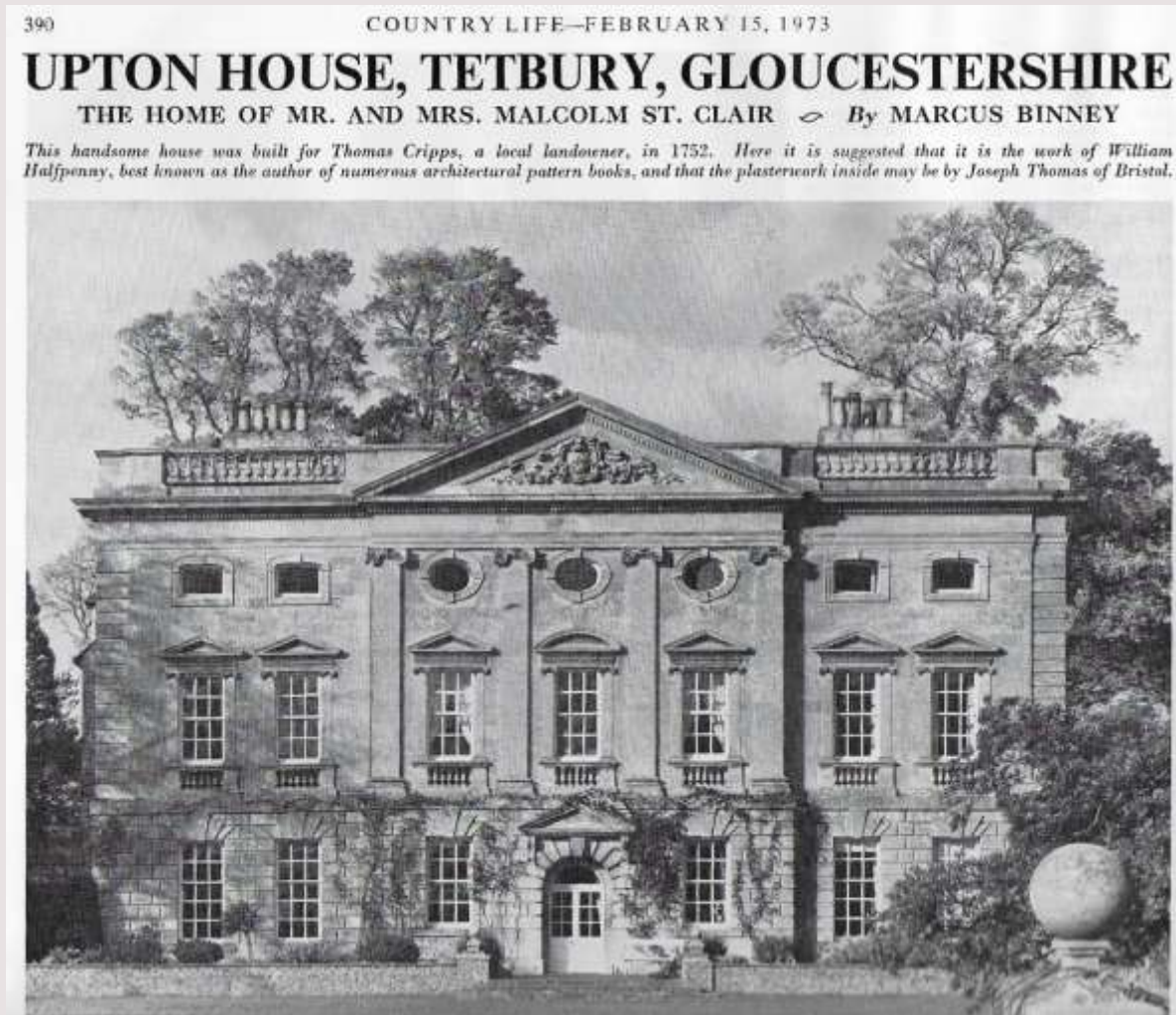
Caryl then passed it on to Mary-Jean Hargreaves, his daughter and Alice's grand-daughter, on his death in 1955. She married Malcolm St. Clair, the Member of Parliament for Bristol South-east, setting up home in a large country house, Upton House, situated near Tetbury, Gloucestershire.

In an email sent to me, Vanessa states in summary that *My mother (Mary-Jean) has written a short note for you confirming that the clock belonged to Alice, and after that Caryl. It would have moved with him when he moved house, and after that was kept at Upton in its case.*

In the letter sent by Mary-Jean she has used *Broadwood House* letter-heading despite her not having lived there for many decades. A lovely touch.

In researching Upton House, I came across a copy of Country Life magazine dated 15<sup>th</sup> of February 1973 in which there is a five-page article on the house and its history.

This being when Malcolm and Mary-Jean St. Clair were living there.





9.—THE SITTING-ROOM. The chimneypiece has been changed though the overmantel survives

And there the clock, kept within its box as stated by Mary, is clearly shown in a photo of the sitting room, seated on a table next to the fireplace.





And there the clock, kept within its box as stated by Mary, is clearly shown in a photo of the sitting room, seated on a table next to the fireplace.



In the letter sent to me by Vanessa, it states that her mother believes the clock was given to Alice as a wedding present, but she is unsure by who. Finding out who may have originally given Alice and Reginald Hargreaves the clock led me on to another path of research, one that would then give a name to every person whose hands it has passed through, from it being made in the Drocourt workshop to myself.

Alice Liddell's father Henry held the important post of Dean of Christ Church, Oxford, a position in the rarefied world surrounding Oxford University at the time where he was to come across Charles Dodgson, aka Lewis Carroll. It therefore seemed likely that the wedding would be noted in the newspapers of the day. A search through the Oxford newspapers, following a tip-off from Mark Davies of the Lewis Carroll Society, brought forth a wonderful description of the wedding itself which, due to Henry Liddell's standing in the Church, was held in Westminster Abbey, home of Coronations, Royal weddings and state funerals.

URDAY, SEPTEMBER 18, 1880.

### THE MARRIAGE OF MISS LIDDELL.

It is but seldom that a marriage is solemnised within the precincts of the ancient Abbey Church of Westminster, that grand mosoleum of England's greatest heroes, orators, poets, and statesmen. That honour, however, was accorded to the daughter of the Ven. the Dean of Christ Church on Wednesday last, and to add to it Dean Stanley himself performed the marriage ceremony. Apart altogether from the friendship which exists between the two deans, it was a graceful act on the part of the head of the Abbey to remember that Dr. Liddell was formerly Head Master of Westminster School, and that his connexion with the city was in itself a plea for the celebration of the ceremony in the grand old fane. Besides, the bride has in her veins the Ravensworth blood, her father being the nephew of the late earl. And, then, every one knows how Dean Stanley delights to honour those who have been at anytime associated with the Royal Family. It will be remembered that Dean Liddell was domestic chaplain to the late Prince Consort, and that he is at present extraordinary Chaplain to Her Majesty the Queen. There was, therefore, perfect fitness in the happy ceremony of Wednesday taking place where it did.

Miss Alice Pleasance Liddell, the bride, is the second daughter of the Dean, and is too well known to need a word of praise in these columns. The bridegroom is Reginald Gervis Hargreaves, eldest son of the late Anthony Hargreaves, Esq., of Cuffnells, Lyndhurst, Hampshire, Justice-of-the Peace for that county, and also a Deputy-Lieut. and J.P. for the county of Lancaster, by his wife, Anna Maria, second daughter of the late

VOLUN  
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Monday  
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Co-OP  
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A meetin  
and Mr.  
OBER-A  
Othe Am

And there at the end was a list of the wedding gifts given to the couple including Prince Leopold, son of Queen Victoria, who gave Alice a horseshoe brooch that she wore on the day. Although five clocks were listed as presents one stood out; a *Handsome engraved travelling clock* given by Alfred Penn.

Research into the name Alfred Penn brought up a clear link with the cricketing career of Reginald Hargreaves.

**Mr Meyrick, cigar cabinet**  
**Mr and Mrs Montifore, diamond and pearl spray of marguerrites**  
**Miss Liddell's Byron's works, illustrated**  
**Mr T. L. Pearson, flask**  
**Mrs Penn, old finely-carved fan**  
**Mr and Mrs J. Penn, blotter and envelope case, silver mounted**  
**Mr Alfred Penn, handsome engraved travelling clock**  
**Mr H. Reeve, gold mounted travelling bag**  
**Countess of Rothesay and Hon. W. Lealie, ivory card case**  
**Lieutenant Colonel Reeve, old silver framed photograph**  
**Hon. Fitz Noy Stewart, pair of Dresden china figures**  
**Lord Victor Seymour, strawberry and cream dish, blue china, silver mounted**



Reginald Hargreaves

In June 1875 Reginald made his first-class cricket debut for Hampshire against Kent at the latter's ground in Catford where he came up against Frank Penn, *the famous Kent batsman* who had a *short but very brilliant career, ranking for several years among the finest batsmen of his day*. Frank had three brothers including Alfred (Dick) Penn, another county cricketer for Kent who made his debut for the county in July 1875 against Sussex at Hove

The third brother, William Penn, also played for Kent.

Therefore, Reginald Hargreaves would have played cricket both against and with members of the Penn family on many occasions from 1875 onward.



# DEATH OF ALICE IN WONDERLAND

November 16<sup>th</sup> 1934  
Westerham, Kent

Scratched—Wortmoss  
Twoaday 6.80 5.00  
Fourth Race — Canterboy  
Prices— 13.40 7.60 4.40  
Scratched—Uptodate, Mantados, Jim John, Drinkwater, Fizzaz, Ariel  
Cross.  
Fifth Race — Last Time  
Prices— 13.90 10.10 2.70  
No scratches. Gunwale 10.40 2.90 Little Dinah 2.10  
Sixth Race — Easlest Way  
Prices— 13.80 11.80 6.10  
Scratched—Corrymeela. Fairly Wild 4.00 3.30 Major General 3.60

## 'Alice in Wonderland' Dies at 82 After Long Illness

Mrs. Hargreaves, Real Life Model for Lewis Carroll's Famous  
Character, Succumbs Following Protracted  
Coma in English Home.

By the United Press.  
WESTERHAM, England, Nov. 16.—Alice in Wonder-  
land is dead.  
The fair haired little girl of the famous 'book lives on in  
immortality, but Mrs. Alice Liddell Hargreaves, who as a  
inspired Lewis Carroll to write his famous fantasy,  
died after a long illness. She was 82.  
She died four days before her



# THE THREE OWNERS OF THE CLOCK



Alice Hargreaves née Liddell



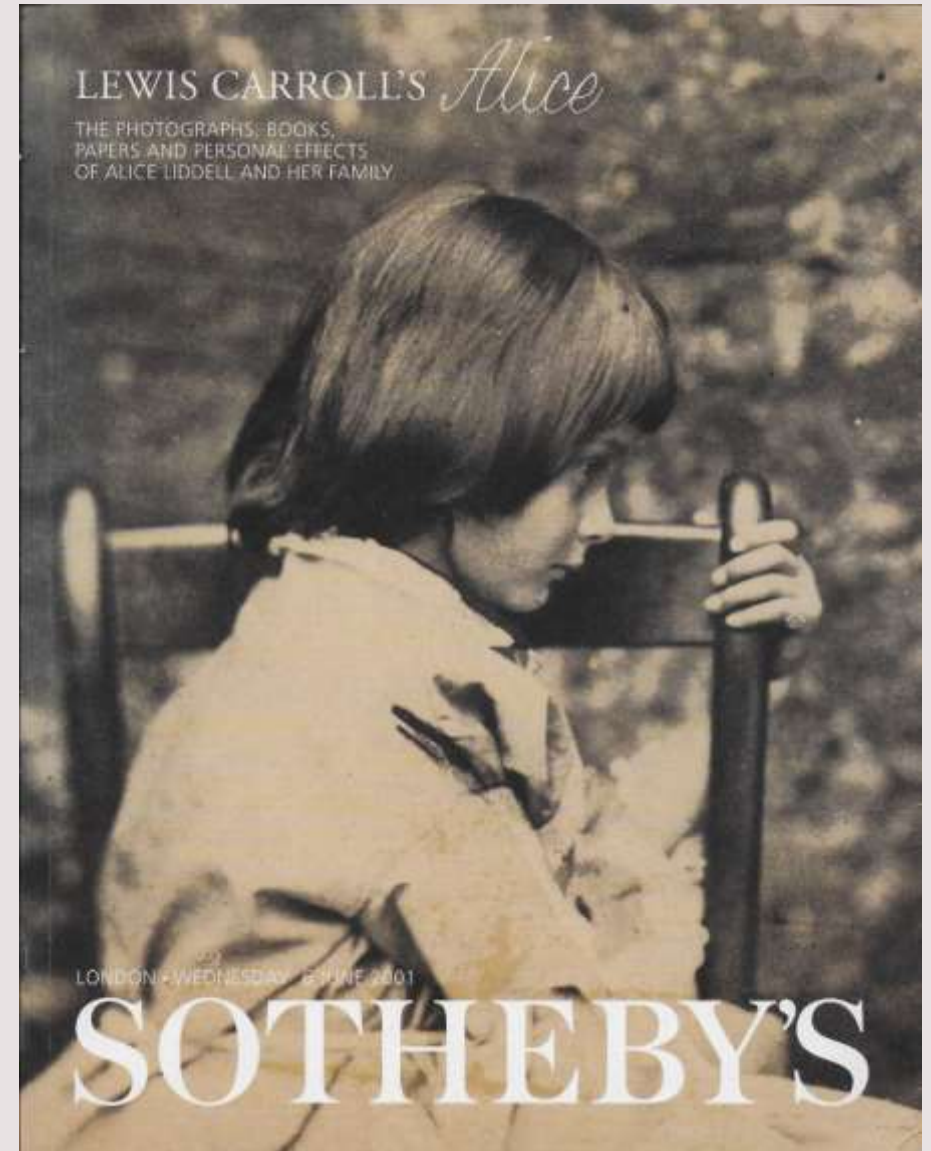
Her son Caryl Hargreaves with his daughter Mary-Jean



Alice with grand-daughter Mary-Jean

# SOTHEBY'S

- On the 6<sup>th</sup> of June 2001 Sotheby's of London held a single-owner sale entitled *Lewis Carroll's Alice, The Photographs, Books, Papers and Personal Effects of Alice Liddell and her Family*. The majority of the items came from Alice's grand-daughter Mary-Jean St Clair but didn't include the clock.
- The sale produced an astonishing final selling figure of over two million pounds (including auction commission) showing the enduring interest in the real Alice.



# ALFRED DROCOURT

## TWO EXCEPTIONAL CLOCKS

