

Athanase Bourdin

Carriage Clock No.7

Athanase Eliséé Bourdin, born 1811 in Crecy Sur Serre, is a well-known name to collectors of carriage clocks, with clocks bearing his name always of the highest quality and often with distinctive design features. He not only made and sold carriage clocks but decorative ormolu clocks and other fine pieces including chronometers and exceptional watches. He was also a jeweller of high repute.

Despite the high level of interest in Bourdin, very little was previously known of his history or that of the clocks themselves, indeed his first name was unknown and not recorded in any reference material. Through my research into Holingue frères of Saint Nicolas d'Aliermont, makers of the rough movements, *blancs roulants*, as supplied to many of the top makers, I came to realise that most clocks finished and retailed by Bourdin came from the Holingue workshops, although not in the very early years.

As I delved deeper into the research, I found a fascinating history emerge, one that I am still working on.

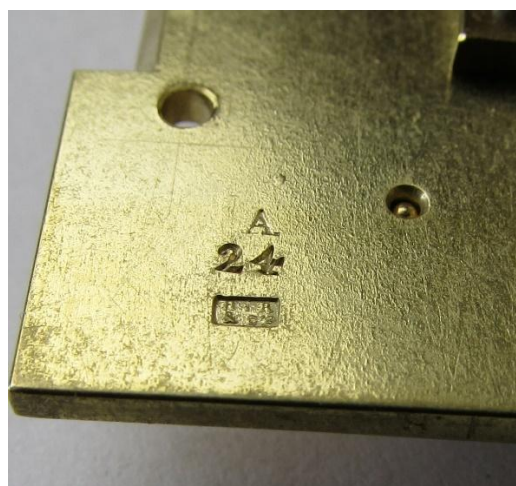
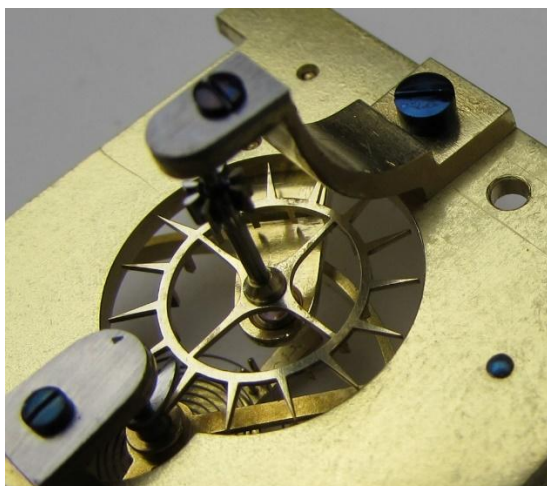
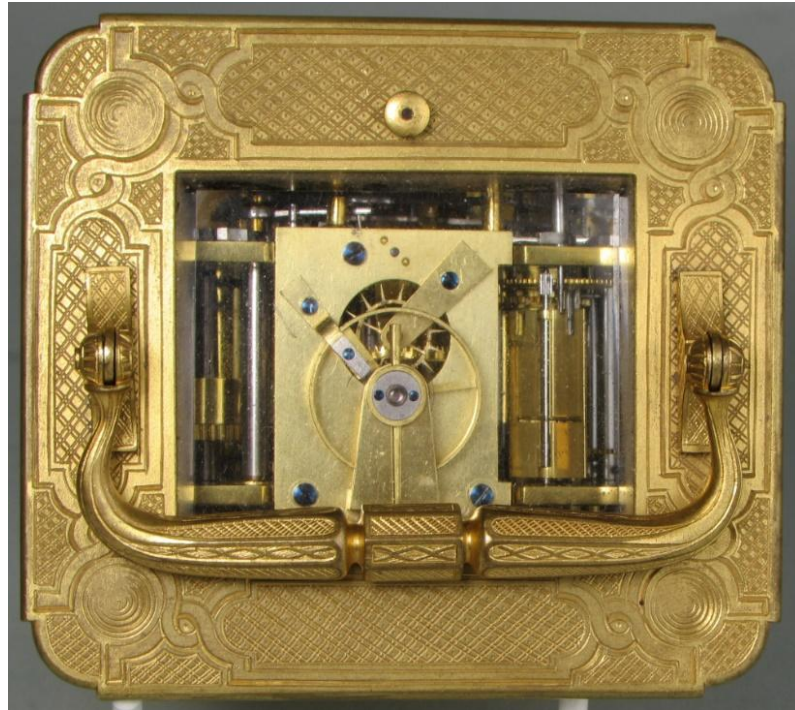
I was fortunate enough to acquire a wonderful example of an early Bourdin clock that is the basis of this article and being numbered 7 is the earliest known recorded clock signed for Bourdin having been made in circa 1838.



Interestingly, it has the name of the maker of the *blanc roulant* (blank movement) BECHOT stamped to the lower left-hand corner of the backplate. My research shows Bechot is known to have been working from at least 1823 as an *horloger* with an address at Quincampoix 59, moving within two years to Rue Montmorency 14. By the 1850s he was working alongside his son with a *specialement de pendules de voyage* at Pont-Louis-Phillipe, 3. The movement plates are tapered with fins to one end as seen on other movements made by Bechot for Bourdin, including number 72. Bourdin used movements supplied by Bechot until at least clock number 125 made circa 1840.



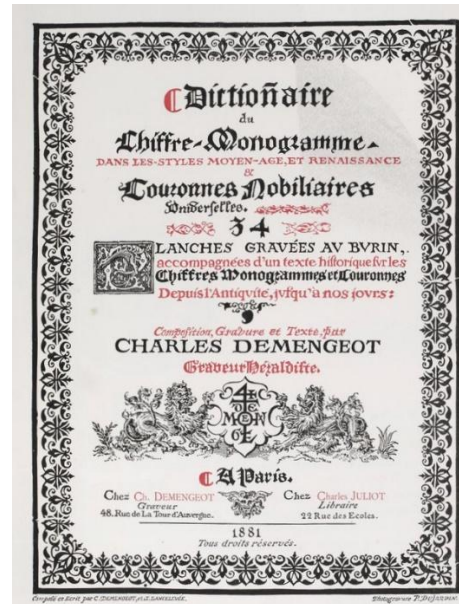
The movement is fitted with a duplex platform escapement, favoured by Bourdin in the early years, as opposed to the more normal lever escapement. The underside of the platform is stamped within a rectangular box, H. R & Cie, with additional stamps, A 24. This is in all probability the mark of the fine chronometer maker Julien-Hilaire Rodanet, more commonly known as Hilaire Rodanet. His son, the well know horologist Auguste-Hilaire Rodanet, is reported in the *Revue Chronometrique* of 1898 as having presented the *Musee-Bibliotheque de la Chambre Syndicale de l'Horlogerie de Paris* with an *Echappement Duplex pour pendule de voyage, construit par M. Rodanet père, de Rochefort-sur-mer, 1836*. Translated as: A duplex escapement for a carriage clock, constructed by my father Monsieur Rodanet, of Rochefort-sur-Mer, 1836. This being within months of Bourdin number 7 being made and quite possibly a similar example.



The backplate has two levers, one above the bells to the left for *Sonne/Silence* (Strike/Silent) and another below the bells to the right for *Gde Srie/Pte Srie* (Grande/Petite-sonnerie). This allows the clock to strike the hours and quarters on the two bells at each quarter, or just the quarters on two bells at each quarter and the hour on the hour.



The enamel dial has fine Roman numerals and is signed *Bourdin, Sr de Souriau, Hr du Roi, Rue de la Paix 24, a Paris*. Translated as: *Bourdin, Successor to Souriau, Clockmaker to the King, Rue de la Paix 24, Paris* and has gilded brass spade style hands. The subsidiary alarm dial is interesting as it has Roman numerals rather than the more normal Arabic.



The case is of an early Corniche design with shaped corners, all engraved in a style that suggests having been executed by the well-known engraver Charles Demengeot. I have examined another similarly engraved Bourdin clock which is stamped on the case *Demengeot, Graveur*. Other makers such as Raingo and Paul Garnier from this earlier period would appear to have cases engraved by him which is not surprising as this small group of carriage clock makers were working closely together, being supplied movements from the same *blanc roulant* makers such as the Holingue family of Saint-Nicolas-d'Algermont. Demengeot's entry in the Almanach of 1852 describes him as an engraver of numerous articles including *pendules de voyage* (carriage clocks) with premises at Sainte-Anne, 57 pres la passage.

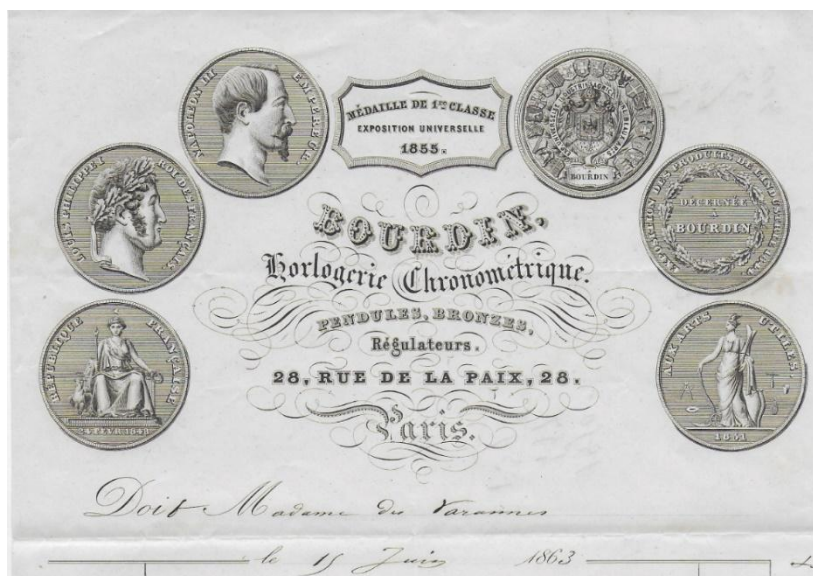
The engraved designs used on the clock cases are reminiscent of those seen in the Demengeot manual of engraving, the *Dictionnaire du Chiffre Monogramme dans les Styles Moyen âge et renaissance, et Couronnes Nobiliaires Universelles*.

In more modern times a design of his was utilised for the descriptive shield of Beauxbaton House at Hogwarts school in the Harry Potter films.

The rear glass rear door has a most unusual feature not seen before being a circular concave 'cut-out' to facilitate the siting of the bells.



Rue de la Paix is the most prestigious shopping street in Paris and home to many well-known high-end brands including Breguet and Cartier amongst others. It was here that Athanase Bourdin is first recorded as having retail premises.



Bourdin's shop being under the fifth blind from the left, under the arch.

Number 8 was the Paris premises of the Geneva carriage clock makers J.F. Bautte et Cie, as seen on an invoice dated 1837 and who in the 1850s were known to be retailing clocks under their own name but supplied by the Henri Jacot workshops in Saint Nicolas d'Algermont.

Next door at number 10 was the original premises of the horologist and jeweller Souriau who Athanase Bourdin succeeded in 1837 being recorded here for a few months prior to his move to number 24.

Interestingly, in 1847 number 10 was renumbered 12 and in 1880 became the retail premises of Breguet. At this time the Breguet concern was in the hands of the former workshop manager, the Englishman Edward Brown. This provides a link between the names in this article as his son Edouard, who took on the ownership of Breguet, purchased the country house of Alfred Drocourt in Rangipori in 1904 to where he retired. And it was Drocourt who took over the workshops of Holingue frères who had supplied Bourdin with his clocks from circa 1840.

Note the Vendôme Column in the distance that stands in Place Vendôme and where the present Breguet boutique is now situated.

With the street renumbering in 1847 Bourdin's premises at number 24 became 28. Given that nearly all Bourdin clocks have both a serial number and the address on the dial and cases, this gives a starting point to date clocks signed for him, with number 3940 the first recorded with 28 as the address.

In 1868 a new boulevard was constructed leading away from the opera house, the Avenue de l'Opéra being situated on the site of the Boulevard des Italiens. As such the top end of Rue de la Paix was demolished including the Bourdin showrooms.



I came across this albumen print by Louis-Émile Durandelle showing the demolition of Rue de la Paix and to my delight when I enlarged the image and cleaned it up, I was able to make out the name Bourdin across the top of the showroom window at number 28, the nearest of the three arched shops.



Following the demolition of his Rue de la Paix premises, Bourdin moved his showroom to 5, Rue Castiglione as recorded in the Figaro newspaper dated July 1868. Note Breguet now at number 16.

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INDUSTRIES PARISIENNES

**MAISONS EXPROPRIÉES PAR L'OUVERTURE DE LA
RUE DE L'IMPÉRATRICE.**
(Adresses définitives ou provisoires.)

BOURDIN. — Ancienne maison de la rue de la Paix, 28, par suite d'expropriation transférée provisoirement rue de Castiglione, 5.
Montres de luxe, de précision, pendules d'art, objets de bijouterie, accessoires des montres.

TAHAN. — Fantaisies parisiennes; coffrets, petits meubles, objets d'étagères. Médaille d'or 1867. *Installation provisoire, rue Richelieu, 79, au coin de la rue de Ménars.*

ART INDUSTRIEL

ROUVENAT ✱, Joaillier fabricant.

FÉLIX SAMPER et C^e. Haute Joaillerie, Bijouterie d'art. — Rue de la Paix, 16.

BREGUET. Horlogerie de luxe et de précision, rue de la Paix, 16. Ateliers quai de l'Horloge, 39. Télégraphie, baromètres anéroïdes.

DONNINGER. Pipes écume de mer et ambre, sculptures et armoiries, 21, boulevard Montmartre.

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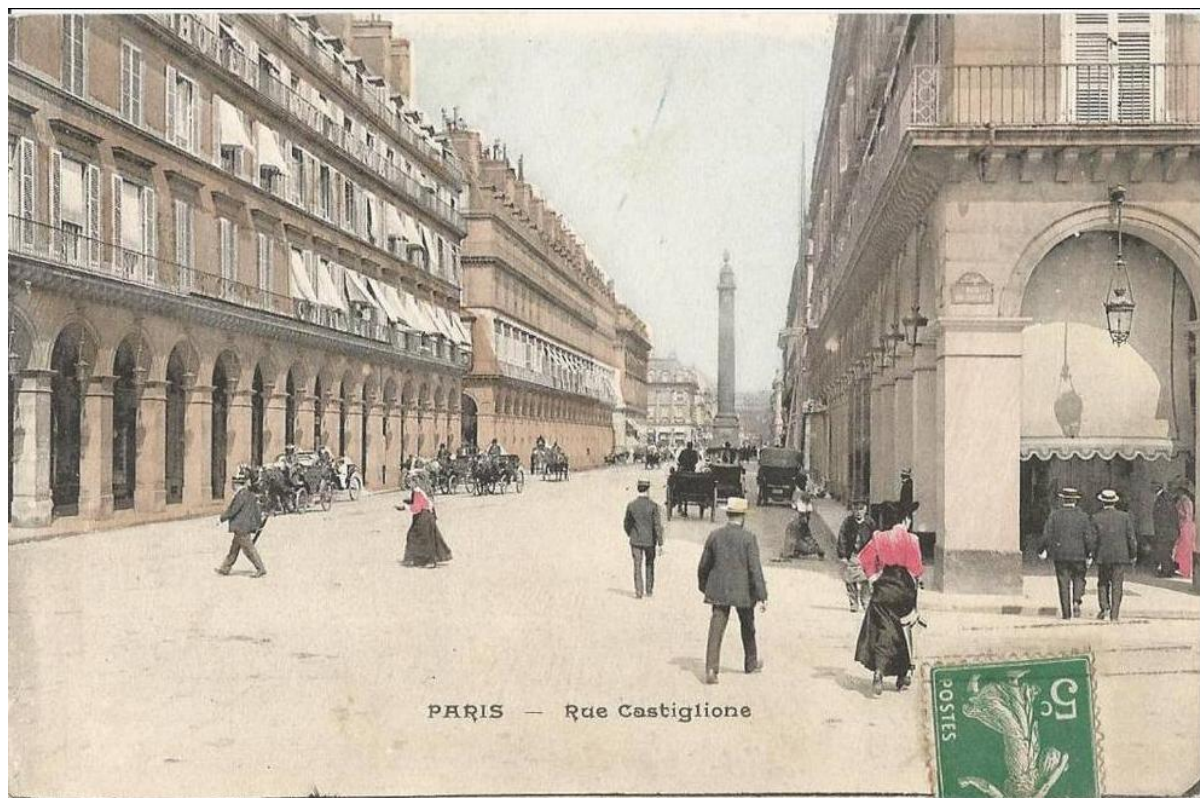
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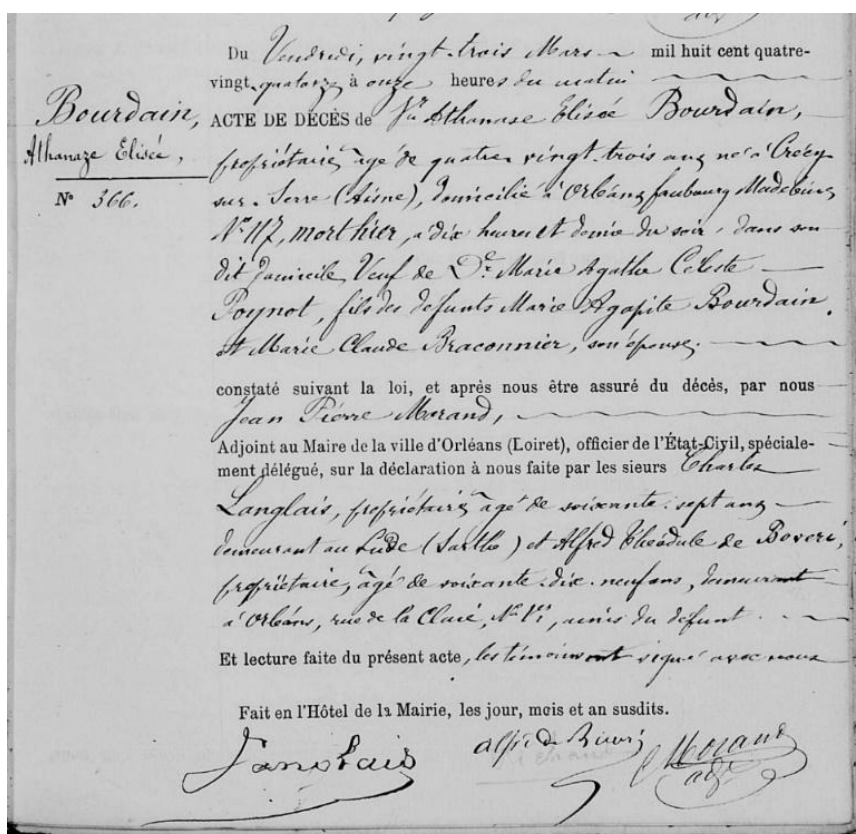
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5, Rue Castiglione behind the arches on the left

From at least 1870 Bourdin and his wife Marie Céleste, whom he married in 1834, were living a few hundred yards away in Rue Sèze where Marie died in 1876. He soon retired to be with his son Eliseé in the town of Orléans, where Athanase Bourdin died in 1894.



He was buried in Père-Lachaise cemetery in Paris alongside his wife and children.



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