

Drocourt's porcelain tributes to Romantic Love and Royal Victory. Art-historical appreciation of rare carriage clocks

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Victorian-era French carriage clocks with exceptional porcelain painting have long been admired by discerning collectors both for their horological quality and for the beauty of their panels and dials. Rarely, however, do images on the finest examples lend themselves to an art-historical interpretation. The Parisian atelier of Alfred Drocourt finished two such examples in the late nineteenth century. One was a coming-of-age gift presented to a young woman from a family with a distinguished ancestral history in Wales and England. Her clock's porcelain bears an illustrious and impeccable eighteenth-century French artistic pedigree. The porcelain painting on another Drocourt evokes a celebration of France's military prowess in Flanders during the reign of Louis XV. Art-historical perspectives not only enhance our appreciation of these two clocks as objets d'art, but also suggest potentially promising lines of inquiry about other fine French porcelain carriage clocks whose artistry merits similar analysis.

Amlwch is all aglow as to what form the rejoicings shall take on the 24th prox, in celebration of the coming-of-age of Miss Neave, the only daughter of Sir Arundal Neave (the late) and the Hon. Lady Neave, of Dagnam Park, Essex, and Llysdulas, Anglesey [... T]his young lady [...] is more in the estimation of the people of Amlwch [...] than any Royal princess [... She] had on so many occasions shown herself desirous of doing good, and following so faithfully the footsteps of her respected mother (applause).

North Wales Chronicle, Saturday 29 July 1893

Local Welsh newspapers followed closely the plans for celebrating the upcoming 21st birthday of Miss Mary Gertrude Catherine Neave. The festivities, though large, would be nowhere near as grand as those that decades earlier greeted her mother Gwen Gertrude Lady Neave (née Hughes) and Sir Arundell Neave, when they returned from Italy to Anglesey after their wedding trip. The birthday planning included the community meeting on

29 July took place at the Dinorben Arms Hotel in Amlwch, named after Miss Mary's grandfather, the Wales copper magnate William Hughes, 1st Baron Dinorben, from whom Lady Neave inherited great wealth and the family seat at the Llys Dulas estate. Miss Mary spent her birthday at the second Neave seat at Dagnam Park, Essex, to which a delegation had traveled from Anglesey to present gifts and convey felicitations from 'gallant little Wales.'

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Fig. 1. Drocourt Neave Clock. c. 1885-92. 25 (handle up) x 14 cm. Fully engraved giant gorge case, porcelain dial and panels. Oversize platform escapement. Eight-day duration. Strike and repeat on a gong. Private collection.

Foremost among these gifts was ‘a carriage clock of exquisite workmanship [...which] bore the following inscription, ‘Presented to Miss Neave by the tenantry of Llysdulas Estate and well-wishers of the neighbourhood on her 21st Birthday 24 August 1893.’ Accompanying the clock was an album naming subscribers whose contributions supported its acquisition. Fireworks illuminated the sky above Amlwch’s Dinorben Square that day. Bonfires burned on the surrounding hills. Throughout the town, banners and bunting and lanterns delighted hundreds of spectators. Festoons wished ‘Long life to Miss Neave.’ At Dagnam Park Miss Mary received congratulatory telegrams, messages, and visitors who arrived as a band played on the great lawn of the estate. The

chairman of the Amlwch delegation read in Welsh an ode composed for ‘Fair Mary Neave/known is the heav’nward bent | Of thy young thoughts, that part from virtue never.’ Miss Mary was told that ‘her family name was a household name in every house on the Isle of Anglesey, on account of the kindness and benevolence with which it was associated.’¹

Miss Neave’s clock (Fig. 1) was finished in Alfred Drocourt’s atelier in Paris, renowned for its clocks of superior horological quality and decorative elegance. Its dial and panels are rendered with exceptional painterly finesse. Their artistic pedigree, which originates in the *oeuvre* of one of France’s most iconic eighteenth-century artists, is documented for the first time in the present article. Miss Mary’s gift, which ranks among Drocourt’s finest porcelain clocks, belongs to a rarified class of carriage clocks that invite exploration of relationships between their porcelain artistry and French visual arts during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—a subject largely absent from carriage clock literature.

Jean-Honoré Fragonard, 1732–1806

The arc of Fragonard’s exhaustively-studied career followed an unconventional path for a young artist who won a coveted prize at the age of twenty and whose early masterpiece, which assured his entry into the French Academy of Fine Arts in 1765, was purchased by the king of France. Fragonard subsequently moved away from early academic and royal patronage to become a prolific and successful artist catering to aristocratic and bourgeois patrons who made him widely admired, avidly collected, and prosperous. Along with his teacher François Boucher and Antoine Watteau, he entered the pantheon of great French eighteenth century artists. ‘If one must select an artist to symbolize the eighteenth century,’ a leading *catalogue raisonné* declared, ‘we would choose... Fragonard. Fragonard is its fragrant essence—he is the eighteenth century.’²

1. For the Welsh press coverage of the celebration see ‘Coming-of-Age of Miss Neave: Presentation by Anglesey Tenantry’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 2 September 1893a, p. 3, and ‘Coming-of-Age Rejoicings’, *North Wales Chronicle*, 2 September 1893b, p. 6. For Essex coverage see ‘Society and Personal Notes’, *Essex County Standard West Suffolk Gazette*, 2 September 1893, p. 6.

2. Pierre Rosenberg, *Fragonard* (Metropolitan Museum of New York, 1988), p. 28.



Fig. 2. Neave Clock, The Warrior Dial.

On the Neave Clock's dial and panels are faithful replications of three images from a series known as Fragonard's Allegories of Love: *The Warrior's Dream of Love*, *The Fountain of Love*, and *The Oath of Love*. Executed in the late 1770s and early 1780s, the Allegories have been called 'perhaps the most revolutionary artistic achievements of the latter part of Fragonard's career.'³ Figs. 2 through 7 depict the clock's porcelains and their counterpart Fragonard sources.⁴ They represented 'a new Romantic sensibility [... and] are among the earliest and most eloquent expressions of a new vision of romantic love as an all-consuming experience of near-



Fig. 3. *Le Songe d'Amour* (*Love's Dream*), 1785. Nicolas François Regnault (French, 1746-1810) after Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Stipple etching (proof before engraved title). Widener Collection, 1942.9.2119, National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Public Domain. The autograph painting, oil on canvas, *The Warrior's Dream of Love*, is in the Musée de Louvre, Paris. (R.F. 2149).

mystical communion—a vision that was worlds apart from the blithe, libertine spirit of the Rococo era.⁵ This sensibility made the Allegories familiar subjects in popular culture, especially *The Fountain of Love*, which 'served as a source for innumerable craftsmen working in porcelain, silver, wood and other materials from the latter part of the eighteenth to the end of the nineteenth century.'⁶ Either *The Fountain of Love* or *The Oath of Love*, and sometime both together, appeared on petite perfume flasks, snuff boxes, match-

3. Andrei Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love* (The Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles, 2007), pp. 11, 110–111.

4. These well-known, originally uncoloured engraved source images are based on autograph Fragonard paintings. The colours in the clock's porcelain are attributable to the Neave Clock painter, who would not have had access to the autograph Fragonard oil paintings that were in private collections when the clock was decorated. However, at least one surviving engraving of the Oath image was coloured. It is now in the Hammer Museum in Los Angeles. But its colouring does not correspond to that on the associated clock panel.

5. J. Paul Getty Museum, *Consuming Passions: Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, 12 February–4 May 2008, Los Angeles, <<https://www.getty.edu>> [accessed 1 February 2018].

6. Mark Leonard, Ashok Roy, and Scott Schaefer, 'Two Versions of The Fountain of Love by Jean-Honoré Fragonard: A Comparative Study', *National Gallery Technical Bulletin*, 29 (2008), 41.

holder cases, biscuit figurines and bronze sculptures, on large urns or vases, as paintings depicted within paintings, and on a massive 3-foot high malachite and silvered bronze sculpture enclosing a mid-nineteenth century clock that survives only in the form of an illustration.⁷

The Neave Clock

At least three Fragonard-inspired Drocourt porcelain clocks are known to have been produced c. 1880–90. Of these, the Neave Clock is the most artistically accomplished and fully decorated with Fragonard images. Serial numbers indicate that it was the latest of the three to be finished. The earlier examples display only two of the Fragonard images, *The Warrior's Dream of Love* and *The Fountain of Love*, which appear on their panels; their dials are decorated with cherubs and floral surrounds unrelated to the Allegories. Christie's sold one of these two clocks in London on 16 November 2017;⁸ the other was, at that time, in the inventory of an antiques dealer in Surrey.⁹ Neither vendor appeared to know the Fragonard sources for the panels. The *Fountain* panel of the Christie's clock is signed by the artist, 'Baston', who is not listed in standard French listings of nineteenth-century artists.¹⁰ The dials on both clocks bear retailer names: Tiffany & Co. in New York for the clock sold at Christie's and Henri Capt in Genève for the other. The Neave Clock porcelain is not signed and its dial does not show an intended retailer.

The Warrior Dial: *The Warrior's Dream of Love* (Fig. 2)

The Neave Clock dial and panels are a visual novella in three parts. The Warrior Dial is a dense, complex composition of diagonals that sets the stage for the actions that will unfold on the panels. The trio of images delights the

eye and excites the imagination, but it is the dial that makes the entire tableau intelligible. It echoes the famous mythological story, famously painted by Fragonard early in his career, of the goddess Diana's amorous discovery of the handsome shepherd Endymion who succumbs to her charms and earns eternal life and beauty. The visual novella's second part is a vision of the lovers' yearning for love; the third affirms their love with a promise of loyalty.

The ethereal and otherworldly image on the dial represents an allegorical anticipation of love. A male warrior sleeps, dressed in a Roman-inspired ancient tunic. Hovering above is a female identifiable as Venus or 'Volupté,' symbol of sensuality and sexual desire. The title of prints made from the source engraving (Fig. 3) reads: 'Love and Voluptuousness charm the sleep of the warrior through the sweet illusion of pleasures.'¹¹ The warrior, no longer girded for battle, has shed his shield and helmet and his putto sleeps below him. Between the warrior and the female, a putto holds a torch of love. Another putto accepts an elixir poured from the vessel she carries. The Neave artist has added a 'veil of modesty' over the breasts of Venus. A nineteenth-century interpreter of Fragonard saw in the warrior's 'slumber...dreams of love [that] rise up like a Jacob's ladder...crowned by the Assumption of Venus.'¹²

The Warrior Dial is painted with consummate precision and confidence, as are the panels. Yet the panels occupy an entirely different pictorial realm, their simpler compositions featuring two lovers given almost sculptural poses, their intense emotion immediately grasped, their demeanor inspired less by classical mythology than by the Romantic era's exaltation of human passion and desire. That these two pictorial realms coexist so harmoniously on its porcelains gives the Neave Clock its special allure.

7. The illustration is reproduced in Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, p. 90.

8. Christie's Sale 14227, London, Lot 510, 'The Collector: Silver, 19th Century Furniture, Sculpture & Works of Art', 16 November 2017.

9. Horological Workshops, <<https://onlinegalleries.com>> [accessed December 23, 2017]. Stock Code BT 46/12.

10. A 'Baston' signature appears on a pair of Sèvres-style urns retailed in 2017 by a porcelain dealer in New York. Lawrence J. Zinzi Antiques, <<https://www.invaluable.com>> [accessed 2 December 2017].

11. Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, p. 58.

12. J. Goncourt and E. Goncourt, quoted in Rosenberġ, *Fragonard*. p. 548.



Fig. 4. Neave Clock, The Fountain Panel.

The Fountain Panel: *The Fountain of Love* (Fig. 4)

The lovers approach a fountain. Their romantic fervour is less dramatically portrayed on the panel than on the source image, where their bodies are almost floating as they thrust forward. The porcelain's more upright figures, dictated by the narrow panel, nonetheless manage to convey strong emotion. The source engraving was executed in 1786 (Fig. 5) In the catalogue of a 2015–16 Fragonard exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris, a curator described *The Fountain of Love* as 'without any doubt the most poetic and today the most celebrated of the allegories executed by Fragonard.'¹³ It was one of only



Fig. 5. *La Fontaine d'Amour* (*The Fountain of Love*). Nicolas François Regnault, after Fragonard, *The Fountain of Love*, after 1785. Stipple etching. The Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2000.PR.73). Two autograph versions, both oil on canvas, c. 1785, are in The Wallace Collection, London, (P394), and the J. Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles. (99.PA.30).

three paintings singled out in his obituary in the *Journal de Paris* as exemplars of his work. The Neave Clock panel (again, with a 'veil of modesty') tells the painting's story:

In the midst of a verdant forest, a young man and woman eagerly rush forward, their feet just reaching the edge of the basin of a fountain. Putti frolic in the water and billowing spray, and one of them offers a cup of the magical waters for the young lovers to drink. The story of the 'Garden of Love', an allegory of the nature and progress of love that has its origins in the poetry of classical antiquity and the Middle Ages, centres on this Fountain of Love. The fountain brings forth the water in which Cupid dips his arrows or from which lovers drink and fall in love. During the eighteenth century, artists came to treat the Fountain of Love almost as a genre subject, with

13. Guillaume Faroult, *Fragonard Amoureux: Galant et libertin* (Musée du Luxembourg, Grand Palais, Paris, 16 Sep 2015– 24 Jan 2016), p. 260.



Fig. 6. Neave Clock, The Oath Panel.

lovers in contemporary dress flirting in a garden around a decorative fountain. With this composition, Fragonard returned the allegory to its more classical origins and imbued it with the thrilling rush of those first beguiling moments of love.¹⁴

Purveyors of prints in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries often sold them in pairs. *The Fountain of Love* engraving was marketed as a pendant with *The Warrior Dreaming of Love*. The porcelain painters of Drocourt's two earlier clocks with Allegories themes probably used only these pendant images because they were most readily available in the marketplace.

14. Leonard, Roy, and Schaefer, 'Two Versions ...', 41.

15. Faroult, *Fragonard Amoureux: Galant et libertin* Cat. 96, p. 258.

16. Molotiu, *Fragonard's Allegories of Love*, p. 22.



Fig. 7. *Le Serment d'Amour (The Oath of Love)*. 1786. Engraved by Jean Mathieu, after Jean-Honoré Fragonard, etching second state, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Accession Number: 41.140.9. Public Domain. A hand-coloured version is found in the collection at the UCLA Grunwald Center for the Graphic Arts, Hammer Museum. Los Angeles.

The Oath Panel: *The Oath of Love* (Fig. 6)

The lovers embrace and kiss, arms outstretched toward an inscribed plaque that proclaims 'SERMENT D'AIME[R] TOUTE SA VIE.' ('Oath to love for one's entire life.') The Neave Clock's story is now complete, after the gauzy dream and a visit to a magical fountain. The Oath Panel puts on display Fragonard's visual imagination and skill at conveying immediacy, as if freeze-framing moments of emotion.¹⁵ The artist's handling of costume detail on the Oath Panel is perhaps the most intriguing detail on the Neave Clock porcelains. Both lovers in the 1786 source engraving (Fig. 7) wear contemporary dress and footwear, as they do in the two autograph oil paintings that have survived.¹⁶ On the



Fig. 8. Drocourt Caldwell Clock. c. 1875-80. 18.5 (handle up) x 10 cm. Fully engraved gorge case, porcelain dial and panels. Eight-day duration. Strike and repeat on a gong. Private collection.

Fountain Panel, both the male and the female wear antique costume and are barefooted. Yet the female on the Oath Panel is painted with bare feet, while retaining her contemporary dress with only minor modifications to its hem line and drapery. Thus she has been given a *partially* antique look while the male is given a *completely* antique appearance through costume and Roman sandals. A partially antique outcome, though it conforms the male footwear on the Oath Panel and the Warrior Dial, complicates choices for the female who logically should have been given completely antique costume too. The reason for this purposeful alteration is perplexing, but it provides a rare opportunity to observe such intentionality on the part of a carriage clock artist who was surely no mere copyist.

The Oath Panel touches one of the most arresting moralizing themes in the Allegories: the virtues of motherhood and family. *The Oath of Love* source engraving had a pendant,

Fragonard's *The Good Mother*, also part of the series. It is a matter-of-fact and rather formal genre image of a mother caring for her children, all highlighted as an intimate group framed by darker forest closely resembling the foliage on the Oath Panel. The conjoining of intense sexual desire and blissful familial content was a staple of literature, poetry, opera, and art in Fragonard's century, especially in the novels of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose maxims on the subject could be found decorating walls alongside Fragonard Allegories images widely circulated as prints. These juxtapositions needed no explanation in nineteenth-century France, for they were embedded in prevailing moral codes, cultural values, and social norms.

The Caldwell Clock

Art-historical investigations are voyages of discovery. For the Neave Clock the pathway leads to an illustrious eighteenth-century French artist; for another exemplary porcelain clock it leads to one of that century's most chronicled French military exploits. A decade or so before the Neave Clock emerged from Drocourt's atelier, he finished a carriage clock c. 1875-80 that was signed for the Philadelphia retailer J. E. Caldwell & Co, the city's pre-eminent jeweler to the city's elite. Its painted dial and panels depict a scene of soldierly bonhomie unfolding in a village or town setting. (Figs. 8, 9, 10). The men are officers in pre-Napoleonic eighteenth-century French tricorns and off-white uniforms with red and blue facing. The maidens pouring from a bottle or holding a flask also wear contemporary costume. The officers are posed differently in each panel, where they are raising celebratory toasts. The maidens wear different dresses in each panel, and they do not appear on the dial, where the four officers reconvene in new convivial poses. The dial's tower dominates the foreground and appears to be a civic or municipal structure, evidenced by its horizontally mounted flag under a conical roof. The panels and dial are unified visually by conspicuous pergolas above which are similarly coloured, but differently designed, swallow-tailed flags in red and yellow. The barely visible horizontal flag on the building is red and white. What the officers are celebrating is not obvious; nor is



Fig. 9. Caldwell Clock, left panel.



Fig. 10. Caldwell Clock, right panel.

their location. The exact significance of the pergolas, often symbolizing comity or affection, is obscure; the flags are not immediately recognizable. The buildings, particularly the dominant tower, could be real or imagined.

The porcelains yield meaning from a combination of informed conjecture, inferences from the porcelain's details, a reading of French military history, and architectural sources. French genre artists in the nineteenth century sought to portray realistic, often nostalgic, impressions of ordinary French civilian and military life. Tavern motifs, drinking scenes, portrayals of women serving refreshments to military officers, all found special favor. But the

Caldwell Clock's paintings have a look and feel not normally associated with genre artists. Understanding them begins with a glance at a military-themed nineteenth-century Sèvres-style porcelain piece known as the Fontenoy Vase, which depicts in one cartouche French soldiers waging a pitched battle and in the other the disabling of an enemy cannon while securing a fortified hilltop. (Figs. 11 and 12) The fighting takes place near Fontenoy during the War of Austrian Succession. From the neighbouring village of Antoing, French forces laid siege to Fontenoy, retaking it and the neighbouring town of Tournai, which had been France's first capital city.

Legend has it that Louis XV's greatest eighteenth-century general Maurice de Saxe



Figs 11 and 12 Pink Sèvres-style porcelain vase. Late nineteenth century. Signed Eug Poitevin (details). Photos courtesy of Charles Cheriff Galleries, New York, USA.

was deathly ill from dropsy in May 1745 while preparing for a campaign against the English-led forces in Flanders. Voltaire encountered him, saw his dreadful condition and asked him how he could possibly function in his half-dead state. Saxe answered: 'It is not a question of living, but of acting!' And act he did, transported by litter to a battle in which his radically new concepts of stronghold defenses made for a winning strategy consisting of 'mutually supporting redoubts between the villages of Fontenoy and Antioing.'

No European battle loomed so large in the eighteenth century as Fontenoy, which recovered for France significant areas of French-speaking Catholic Flanders, and strengthened France's position in the Low Countries, long contested between France and England. This famous set-piece battle has been studied by generations of military historians and strategists. General Saxe's book on the art of war has been praised for demonstrating 'deeper insights into tactics and leadership than any other work known in Europe, since the Romans to his time.'¹⁷ Fontenoy fueled waves of French patriotism

and propaganda. Fontenoy themes were lionized in literature, the high arts, and popular culture. France's greatest history painters and engravers memorialized the victory. The French nibbled on Fontenoy chocolates, circulated Fontenoy coins, and collected Fontenoy souvenir cards. They read Voltaire's account of the battle. Napoleon Bonaparte was said to have believed that the Fontenoy victory extended by a half-century the life of the *ancien régime*. Even today, Fontenoy has not receded entirely from memory in popular culture and history.¹⁸

With this background in mind, decoding the Caldwell Clock porcelains is perhaps best begun by noticing its colourful flags. They are not intended to be 'real' flags. They are signifiers of place, which is a familiar device in works of art. Historical French regimental, naval, and civic flags do not include red and yellow pennant or swallow-tail flags. Red and yellow colours, however, are found on some regional, municipal and heraldic flags—notably in Belgium and in pre-Revolutionary French Flanders. Fig. 13 shows a modern photo of a red and yellow flag atop a tower on

17. *Introduction, to Reveries on the Art of War*, ed. by Thomas R. Phillips (Harrisburg Pennsylvania: Military Service Pub. Co., 1944), pp. 11–12, 17.

18. The Fontenoy campaign can be re-fought by enthusiasts of a video game grandly titled 'Empire: Total War,' even though the engagement in reality lasted a matter of hours. Visitors to Paris can walk around the Place de Fontenoy near the entrance to the vast Les Invalides complex in which a display room dedicated to General Saxe in the Musée de l'Armée features an instructive multimedia re-enactment of his legendary victory.



Fig. 13. Photo courtesy of Château d'Antoing en Wallonie picarde, © Visitwapi.be



Fig. 14. *Tour d'Antoing*, prior to Viollet-le-Duc restoration. Image provided by the Ghent University Library.

what is today one of Belgium's most historic castles, located in Antoing. Château d'Antoing was restored in the late nineteenth century by the French architect Eugène Viollet-le-Duc, whose controversial historical fantasies created towers topped by steeply conical roofs similar to those found on this château as well as in his restorations of the spectacular fortified town of Carcassonne and the Château de Montaigne in southwest France.



Fig. 15. *Antoing: vue intérieure de la ville*, prior to Viollet-le-Duc restoration. Image provided by the Ghent University Library.

Prior to Viollet-le-Duc's restoration, however, the château's towers had an altogether different profile. Their squat towers under shallow conical roofs had a shape very much like that of the tower on the Caldwell Clock dial, a profile not principally associated with French châteaux. The appearance of the pre-restoration Château d'Antoing tower is shown in Figs. 14 and 15, as seen from outside and inside the village. Compare the details of the Caldwell Clock dial in Fig. 16 with the château tower in Fig. 17 and its adjacent domestic structures and tall trees in the background. Allowing for proportional and perspective changes dictated by the dial's compact space, the compositional similarities between the two images are striking. The dial's horizontal flag pole flies red and white colors that are still found on the municipal flag of Antoing.

The fenestration on the tower depicted on the dial, with reticulated window surrounds and oval stonework courses, differs from the four-pane rectilinear windows found on the nineteenth-century Château d'Antoing prints. Near Antoing, though, is the small hamlet of Bruyelles, where Fontenoy's most honored historical monument, a large mill, remained standing until it was destroyed during the First World War. (Fig. 18) This picturesque ruin was the site from which Saxe unleashed fearsome artillery volleys against enemy infantry. The ruin's distinctive oval and reticulated stonework on windows and over



Fig. 16. Caldwell Clock dial (detail).

the main door corresponds closely to the two windows on the tower of the Caldwell Clock. On some images of the monument printed in nineteenth-century books and on postcards, Château d'Antoing is visible along with a distant steeple—almost certainly the church steeple in Fontenoy appearing on the Fontenoy Vase.¹⁹ The Bruyelles ruins appeared in nineteenth century engravings, guidebooks, military histories, and French postcards, all showing oval and reticulated stonework much like the fenestration on the Caldwell Clock tower. Engravings of the pre-restoration Château d'Antoing also show chateau windows with similar surrounds.

French officers celebrating the recovery of French Flanders, gathered beneath pergolas symbolizing France's affinities with Catholic Flanders, surrounded by Flemish flags in the proximity of Antoing, all together lend verisimilitude to the tableau. Other than Fontenoy, French officers had little to celebrate in the mid-eighteenth century, an inglorious military era for a France overshadowed by England's navy supremacy. For a French nineteenth-century porcelain artist looking back, in the manner of genre painters of the day, to the previous century's most celebrated



Fig. 17. Antoing: vue intérieure (detail).

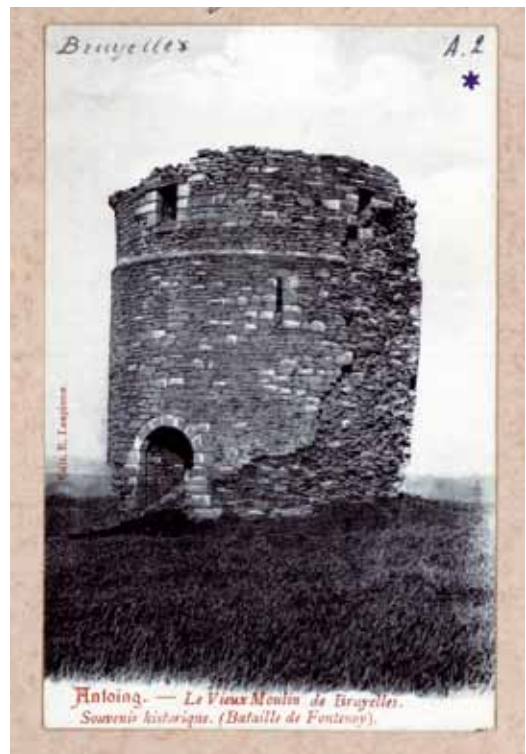


Fig. 18. Antoing. Le vieux moulin de Bruyelles, souvenir historique (Bataille de Fontenoy). Image provided by the Ghent University Library.

moment of French valour and military prowess, Fontenoy would have been an appealing subject. Fontenoy and Antoing images, quite widely available, might well have signified such a moment, giving the Caldwell Clock imagery a recognizable historical resonance.

19. One such postcard image can be seen in 'Bruyelles-lez-Antoing, Le vieux Moulin (Bataille de Fontenoy 1745)' Carte Postale, Delcampe, Belgique Hainaut <www.delcampe.be> [accessed 28 February 2018].

Porcelain carriage clocks and art-historical inquiry

Once-hard boundaries between ‘fine arts’ and ‘decorative arts’ have long been softened in professional and scholarly appraisals of visual arts traditions. Those appraisals recognize the

distinction between art, appreciated for purely aesthetic and principally visual qualities, and objects, which may possess aesthetic appeal but which also carry some more mundane, functional significance. [...] A Sèvres porcelain bowl, for example, is both art and utensil, or at least carries the capacity to be both.²⁰

So it is with some porcelain carriage clocks that happen to tell the time. The conventional wisdom about them bears repeating: ‘The majority were made in the famous Sèvres-style at factories in and around Limoges, France. The finest were surrounded by gilt and colored borders, more rarely by semi-precious stones. Some of the best panels reproduce idyllic scenes inspired by the eighteenth century paintings of Watteau or Fragonard.’²¹

What precisely does this conventional wisdom mean? Since the publication of Charles Allix’s path-breaking treatise more than forty years ago,²² opportunities have proliferated for studying images of porcelain clocks, dials, and panels in major books, special collections, international saleroom offerings, and dealers’ catalogues. Seen in perhaps numbingly familiar abundance are the ubiquitous cherubs, fashionably dressed men and women, frolicking children, courting couples in bucolic settings, flowers or birds or animals, musical instruments, lute-playing courtiers and demure maidens, ancient ruins, serene rural scenes, pastoral landscapes, geometric designs, and Arcadian subjects of one kind or another. All are part of an art-historical grammar of ornamentation,

decorative embellishments, generic and nonspecific. They elicit little or no curiosity about the precise identities, significance, or locations that are depicted. Porcelain dealers occasionally label these decorative flourishes as ‘Fragonardesque’—a term, like ‘in the style of’ that purports to describe countless varieties of porcelain carriage clocks and other porcelain objects.

To describe the Neave Clock’s artistic pedigree in these terms is plainly inadequate. Its porcelain paintings, as well as those on the Caldwell Clock, are not merely ornamental. They convey meaning. Their images inform us about history and society. We do not view them passively. We interrogate them for the back-stories surrounding their creation, acquisition and purpose, and perhaps about their artistic lineage. They challenge us to be aware that what we see in them depends on what we look for.

The number of carriage clocks warranting art-historical investigation will never be large. ‘Carriage clocks with decorative panels of any kind,’ Allix told us,

were always expensive, and in consequence they were never made in large quantities. Among the most attractive are those having porcelain panels with painted scenes and figures. [...] they have always been treated as treasured possessions.²³

But to assume that no other fine carriage clocks merit serious attention within an art-historical context defies logic and common sense. Some may be identified by re-examination of known examples with a fresh eye. Some may emerge on the market from private collections. Still others may be tucked away in museums or special collections.

Both clocks featured in the present article fall within an established art-historical tradition. Art and storytelling have been intertwined throughout the history of the

20. Michael Yonan, ‘Toward a Fusion of Art History and Material Culture Studies’, *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, Bard Graduate Center, 18 (2011), 234.

21. L. Vitale and F. Vitale, *The Carriage Clock: 200 Years of Timely Allure* (Vitale & Vitale, 1994), p. 12.

22. Charles Allix, *Carriage Clocks: Their History and Development* (Woodbridge: Antique Collectors’ Club, 1974)

23. Allix, *Carriage Clocks*, p. 182.

visual arts. Narrative art is art that tells a story. Whether about events or emotions, whether fragmentary or complete, storylines are imbued with meaning. They are, or can be made, intelligible for viewers who share literary or artistic traditions, cultural memories or contemporary experiences.

The Neave Clock's Fragonard stories derive from mythology and classical art; they don't need to be created, only to be discovered and interpreted. The Caldwell Clock's elliptical narrative about distant history yields meaning less through discovery than through reconstruction. Other narrative art traditions in carriage clock porcelain draw on literature. One unusual example traces Gulliver's voyages and travails among the Lilliputians, depicted in tracery surrounding the clock's dial.²⁴ Another tells a morality tale via a poet's praise of a Confucian proverb engraved on the clock's rear door and on the painted dial's religious symbolism promising rewards for a life well-lived.²⁵ Still another's narrative on a Drocourt clock evokes themes of French anti-clericalism during the *ancien régime*—and does so with a palette similar enough to the Caldwell Clock to suggest both could have been done by the same artist.²⁶ A fine porcelain clock—not a Drocourt—with a panel showing an elegantly dressed female carving initials into a tree has only recently been identified, with assistance from the present author, as based on Fragonard's painting *Le chiffre d'amour (The Souvenir)*, c. 1875–80, long admired in the Wallace Collection.²⁷

Carriage clock porcelains can yield art-historical insights and associations even when not sourced to paintings or engravings or drawings. The porcelain panels painted by Lucien Simonnet, for instance, who painted for Drocourt, Jacot and other leading clockmakers, reflect multiple late nineteenth-century French visual arts fashions, from

rococo-revival through Orientalism. Visual arts traditions are also hinted at in carriage clocks decorated in Art Nouveau, Aesthetic Movement, or Arts and Crafts styles, as well as with portraiture and mythological subjects. Mid nineteenth-century Chinoiserie-influences, and images associated with the Near East or Far East appear on carriage clocks partly because they might appeal to markets there, but also because they satisfied contemporary tastes of European clients. And the precisely rendered flora and fauna and birds found on finer porcelain clocks echo sources derived from nature-painting.

Progress in identifying art-historical avenues for appreciating carriage clock porcelains will be hampered by one formidable obstacle: Little is known about what's inside the 'black box' containing the matrix of relationships among clockmakers and their clients, intermediaries, and porcelain painters. Workbooks of most Parisian clock-making ateliers have been lost to history. Porcelain painters remain largely unknown, their sources obscured. Their factories or workshops are not easily traced. Factory or artists signatures rarely appear on carriage clock porcelains. Yet, as the Neave Clock and Caldwell Clock examples show, this obstacle can be at least partially overcome because the finer clock porcelains can, as it were, tell their own stories if they are given the opportunity to do so.

Epilogue: The Neave Clock's unfinished history

Name of Deceased
Neave, Mary Gertrude Catherine
64 Chesterfield House
Chesterfield Gardens
London, W.1.
Spinster
10 February 1951 (age 78)

24. *A Century of Fine Carriage Clocks*, ed. by Charles Terwilliger (Bronxville, New York: Clock Trade Enterprises, 1987), Plate 25, pp. 62–63.

25. Richard Redding Antiques, *Antique Clocks, Watches, and Barometers*, <<https://www.richardreddingantiques.com>> [accessed 16 November 2017].

26. Gordon S. Converse & Co. Auctions, Lot 507, 5 November 2016, <<https://www.invaluable.com>> [accessed 29 October 2016].

27. Leigh Extence, *Fine Antique Clocks*, Derval: The Derek Roberts Collection <https://www.extence.co.uk> [accessed 26 May 2018] Ref: D465.

Five days before Miss Mary's birthday, readers of the local newspaper learned that informed its readers that 'a most handsome carriage clock, value 50 guineas, is to be presented to Miss Neave, [...] The clock has been purchased through Mr. Daniel Jones, watchmaker, Amlwch.'²⁸ After 1893 there is no known public reference to Miss Mary's clock until 2016, when an anonymous owner described it accurately in an Anglesey publication, a half-century after her death.²⁹ The Neave Clock's whereabouts during the intervening decades remains undocumented. The clock's provenance and Fragonard pedigree are certain and indisputable but, paradoxically, its backstory is largely a void, a bundle of unanswered, perhaps unanswerable questions. What was Lady Neave's role in the acquisition of the clock by Daniel Jones? If it was directly commissioned, what exactly was the commission? To acquire a fine carriage clock? To acquire *this specific* carriage clock? To acquire a *specially painted* carriage clock with Fragonard images? How long did Miss Mary retain her clock? Through whose hands did it subsequently pass? A fictional biographer could embroider credible and felicitous answers to these questions. On an historian's horizon are only a handful of clues and inferences.

Miss Mary wrote her last will and testament shortly before her death nearly seventy years ago.³⁰ Her most important personal possessions included a favoured portrait of her mother painted on ivory before her marriage to Sir Arundell Neave, 4th baronet in 1871, and a diamond ring that had belonged

to her mother. The portrait shows her as a woman of gentle beauty and an independence of spirit, posed not in a stiff Victorian mien, but informally with long tresses and her small white dog on her lap. Mary grew to maturity knowing that her mother, widowed after only six years of marriage, had mastered the complexities of being Lady of the Manor of two important and large estates comprising almost ten thousand acres of land. Lady Neave had made Llys Dulas a part of the fabric of local Welsh society through her philanthropy and her visible presence. Born a Hughes, she descended from an elite and noble Welsh family line. And at Dagnam she was custodian of important ancestral art and antiques that included exquisite interior panelling and painted wallpaper, stained glass, family portraits and fine paintings, European and Chinese porcelain, Gobelin tapestries, and Chippendale furniture. Her own antiquarian discernment was most likely shared by her only daughter during Miss Mary's privileged and aristocratic life before her mother's death in 1916. Lady Neave was in every respect a mother who would have meticulously overseen every celebratory detail of her eldest child and only daughter's coming-of-age.

Mary's Droccourt could hardly have been acquired 'off the shelf' in Amlwch, the remote northernmost town in Wales. It can reasonably be assumed that Lady Neave authorized the purchase. Droccourt was during these years not finishing carriage clocks so luxurious as this except on special order.³¹ The absence of a retail signature on the dial is consistent with

28. 'Coming-of-Age', *The North Wales Chronicle*, 19 August 1893, p. 6. This carriage clock was uncommonly expensive at the time. An 1893 catalogue published by the esteemed Charles Frodsham & Company offered a range of carriage clocks 'with quality French cases,' the most expensive of which was 15 guineas. See L. Vitale and F. Vitale, *The Carriage Clock*, p. 35. Daniel Jones also served on a small committee responsible for selecting gifts for the coming-of-age in 1895 of her brother Sir Thomas Lewis Hughes, 5th Neave baronet. Jones's business address was on Methusalem Street, Amlwch. A longcase clock is known signed with his name, and a watchpaper is in the Museum of Welsh Life in St. Fagans.

29. Anonymous, 'Carriage Clock: Comments for Llys Dulas and Lady Dorina Neave,' *Anglesey Today* <<https://www.anglesey-today.com/llys-dulas-and-lady-dorina-neave>> [accessed on 17 December 2017. On a public Anglesey message board, the anonymous author wrote on 1 December 2016: 'I have the carriage clock presented to miss neave [...] by the servants on the occasion of her 21st birthday on 24th August 1893'. The writer seems to have assumed, mistakenly, that the recipient of the clock was Lady Dorina Neave—who was the subject of the message board thread. Dorina (née Clifton) became Miss Mary's sister-in-law in 1908.

30. Probate Notice recorded in *The Gazette (London Gazette)* 8 June 1951, Issue 39254, page 3218. Probate dated 26 May 1951. Miss Mary was a distant relative of Sir Airey Neave, the shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland who was assassinated in 1979.

31. I am indebted to Droccourt historian Leigh Extence for this observation about Droccourt production patterns at the time.



Fig. 19. Neave Clock. Engraved presentation plaque.

a direct commission. The Neave Clock's elegantly mounted and pinned presentation plaque is original to the clock. (Fig. 19). Drocourt, Henri Jacot, and other leading Parisian clockmakers had developed a marketing network in England that included well-known London jewelers, clock dealers and agents. This network included the likes of Dent and Co. and D. C. Rait and Sons, Goldsmiths to the Queen, Klaftenberger, as well as the E. Pitcher Co. wholesaler of French clocks imported into England. Such sources, or counterparts in Liverpool, would presumably have been accessible to Daniel Jones for his purchase.

Lady Neave assured the visiting Welsh delegation in 1893 that Miss Mary would value her gift 'for as long as she lived.' In the absence of documentary evidence, there is no certainty that she retained her clock for her lifetime, but the possibility cannot be entirely discounted. The clock would have been memorably associated with her attaining her majority. It would have been a reminder of her mother's pride at her coming-of-age. It would have been among her most beautiful *objets d'art*. Miss Mary's pattern of bequests to family and friends make clear that she cherished her antique possessions. If she had retained her clock, there is a hint in her probate documents about what might have happened to it upon her death. The co-executor of her estate was one Frances Chenevix Trench, also a spinster, and a member of a distinguished Irish ecclesiastical and literary family that included a Dean of Westminster Abbey. Miss Frances received Miss Mary's largest financial bequest and all of her possessions except those expressly bequeathed to others; and she was given various residual rights regarding the disposition of Miss Mary's estate. The two women had known each other for at least two decades. They shared the Mayfair address at Chesterfield Gardens. Miss Frances was among the non-family members attending the funeral of Miss



Fig. 20. Neave Clock. Original travel case and oversize key, both marked with the clock's serial number 24988, which is stamped on the clock's backplate. The number falls within Drocourt's production range during the years when the clock would have been commissioned or purchased in advance of Miss Mary's coming-of-age.

Mary's brother in 1940. Miss Frances, fifteen years younger than Miss Mary, lived until 1977. The clock is not mentioned in Miss Mary's will; nor were her bequests to Miss Frances expressly identified. That the Neave Clock was passed on to Miss Frances as a token of their affinity and long companionship is conceivable. Miss Frances' own probate documents have not yet been located.

A decade after Miss Mary's coming-of-age, Drocourt closed his business. The bulk of Neave land holdings were sold off before World War II, after which the Anglesey and Essex mansions were demolished. The whereabouts of the album identifying the Neave Clock's subscribers is unknown. Lady Neave's portrait on ivory was put on the auction block several years ago. The identity of the Neave Clock's porcelain artist remains unknown. One day, perhaps, from public or private archives in Wales or elsewhere, will emerge a long-forgotten letter or diary-entry that answers that most tantalizing questions of all: Did Miss Mary know in 1893, or ever, that Jean-Honoré Fragonard's art was so unambiguously present in her clock's porcelain? Did Lady Neave ever know? All that can be said with certainty is that the Neave Clock's survival in pristine original condition bespeaks a lifetime of attentive care and handling. Its numbered leather travel case and oversize key are intact (Fig. 20). Its porcelain dial and panels are still as lustrous and unblemished as they must have been on 24 August 1893.