

“The Carriage Way”



International Carriage Clock Chapter #195
Founded 2013

The National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors

Volume 2021 No 2.



A 19th Century French Gilt Brass Carriage Clock on a Plinth

President's Report



Stan Boyatzis

Welcome to our second newsletter for 2021. I hope you are all well, staying safe and managing with the COVID-19 situation. Various Chapters are now starting to hold face to face meetings. The 2021 NAWCC Convention in Hampton Virginia, July 15th to 18th, is definitely going ahead. Our Director, Ken Hogwood, will be there representing Chapter 195 and signing up new members.

Membership in Chapter 195 remains stable and now stands at 277. The executive continues to work hard to promote the chapter. I again encourage current members to spread the word about Chapter 195 and invite friends with an interest in carriage clocks to join. Remember, this is your newsletter so if you have any helpful hints or unusual carriage clocks you own or have seen please share these with the membership. If you have any queries about a carriage clock please do not hesitate to contact Doug, Tom, Ken or Leigh. Details are at the back of the newsletter.

This month's feature article is by Tom Wotruba on 'What is a Plinth as Part of a Carriage Clock? Tom looks at various definitions of the word 'Plinth' and how they relate to carriage clocks. He looks at examples of the different forms on carriage clocks identified as having a plinth. This article was first published in *Clocks Magazine* in March 2021. Thanks and acknowledgement is made to John Hunter editor of *Clocks Magazine*, for permission to reproduce this article.

The second article is by David LaBounty on how to restore a 'Brass Carriage Clock Case'. David explains how these can be easily restored to their former luster resulting in an increase of their appeal and value. Members should enjoy reading both articles. Both Tom and David welcome questions from members.

Remember copies of previous newsletters, hints and a question page are included on our website. There are also carriage clock articles from the Bulletin and carriage clock videos from the NAWCC library. You will need to be logged in as a NAWCC member to access these.

<https://new.nawcc.org/index.phpSEB195rosshogan@optusnet.com.aup/chapter-195-international-carriage-clock>

A link to the Online Galleries website is again included. This is a useful website to research retail prices of carriage clocks and what is currently for sale. The website is updated weekly. We are happy to include other websites that may be of interest to the membership.

The Executive Committee hopes you enjoy reading the Newsletter and welcome future articles from other members.

Members of the Executive Committee:

Stan Boyatzis: President (Aust.) Email: carriageclocks@optusnet.com.au

Keith Potter: Vice President (Aust.)

Doug Minty: Secretary (Aust.) Email: dminty@optusnet.com.au

Ken Hogwood: Director (USA) Email: kenhogwood@aol.com

Carl Sona: Director (Aust.)

Tom Wotruba: Director (USA) Email: twotruba@sdsu.edu

Leigh Extence: Director (UK) Email: leigh@extence.co.uk

Chapter 195 Email: carriageclocks195@gmail.com

What is a Plinth as Part of a Carriage Clock?

Thomas R. Wotruba (USA)

Occasionally one reads about a carriage clock with a case that incorporates or rests on a plinth. The term “plinth” has been used to signify a type of case component or accompanying part. Its specific form has been defined in various ways, however, and thus its meaning and description may differ from one clock case example to another. Sometimes it is stated as an integral part of the case structure itself. Other times it refers to a structure separate from the case itself but designed to be easily attached to or detached from the clock case. Further on we will look at some examples of both forms on carriage clocks identified as having a plinth. But first let us review how this term has been explained and defined.

Of the two major books published on carriage clocks, it is surprising that neither offers any discussion or even definition of the term “plinth”. A look in the index of each book finds no page references to the word “plinth” anywhere in their contents.¹ Another source which provides information related to clocks in general does present a definition of “plinth” as *“The lower part of a clock case upon which the case is built, also termed the base. Sometimes the skirting only is referred to as the plinth. Correctly the whole as indicated is the plinth. The base or stand upon which a cup or trophy stands.”*² This definition is not very precise, however. It states at first that the plinth is the lower part of the case, or base, and then states that the “skirting” is sometimes called a plinth. Whatever is meant by the “skirting” is not clear. The definition goes on to state that the plinth is “the whole as indicated” but it is not clear what “the whole” means. Its final description about the base or stand does imply that the plinth is separate from the object that stands on it. Of course, this definition in a clock encyclopedia is meant to apply in general to clocks of various types, not just carriage clocks, and apparently even to objects other than clocks. When a still more general source of definitions is consulted such as Webster’s 2nd International Dictionary, we find (on page 1891) that a plinth is *“The lowest member of a pedestal, hence, in general, the lowest member of a base; a sub-base...”* This definition suggests, as noted at the start of this article, that a plinth can be a part of a base or separate from a base. Roget’s International Thesaurus references the term “plinth” as falling into two categories of meaning under the headings of *Base* and *Support*. Altogether, these sources give us what might be summarized as the most generally proposed meaning of the term plinth: *a base and/or support attached to or separate from a larger object.*

But in terms of our interest specifically in carriage clocks, is it possible to refine this definition? A carriage clock is somewhat unique because it is portable and typically contains a handle by which it can be carried. When it is not being carried it is set somewhere to be displayed. In its display location there might be a platform or separate stand on which the clock is placed.

¹ Charles Allix, *Carriage Clocks: Their History and Development*, Antique Collectors’ Club, Ltd., 1974; Derek Roberts, *Carriage and Other Travelling Clocks*, Schiffer Publishing Co., 1993.

² Donald de Carle, *Watch & Clock Encyclopedia*, Bonanza Books, New York, 1977, p. 31.

These separate stands can vary from being plain in design to being complementary with design similarity to those of the clocks they support. Regardless, they will not accompany the clock when it is traveling. All carriage clocks have a case that contains a base to which the sides and top of the case structure are attached.

If a plinth were simply a part of the clock case, the all carriage clocks would contain a plinth, whether traveling or at rest. But when a separate stand exists upon which the portable clock is displayed at rest, this stand is what can be identified as a plinth. Of course, a clock does not have to be portable to be accompanied by a separate stand on which it rests, so non-traveling clocks likewise can be accompanied by a plinth. Thus, since all clocks generally have a case with a base, a *plinth* identified specifically as an individual component will be a separate and unattached structure beyond the base.

Before we look at examples of carriage clocks with a plinth, let us get an idea of how rare or common this feature is among carriage clocks overall. We can get some idea by looking at auction listings or books that confine their coverage to carriage clocks and discover what share of those clocks are described as possessing a plinth. One major Christie's auction of 134 French carriage clocks took place in 1997.³ Three of the 134 lots involved a clock that contained a "plinth" or "stand" in their description and as evidenced by their picture. Two were made by Drocourt and one was made by Garnier. Shortly thereafter, in 1998, Christie's presented an auction of French carriage clocks that contained 187 lots.⁴ In this event also there were three clocks described and pictured as containing a plinth or stand. One was retailed by Asprey London, one was signed H. RoCHAT, Paris, and the third was not identified as to maker or seller though it was described as French. A third source is the book described as containing clocks chosen and described by Joseph Fanelli.⁵ It contained descriptions and pictures of 100 carriage clocks of French, English, Swiss, and Austrian origin. Only one clock presented contained what was described as "a separate platform" and the description contained a further comment that "Display platforms are rare, as few seem to have survived." This clock was identified as made by Drocourt. From these three major carriage clock displays reviewed, only 7 out of the 421 presented (just under 2%) contained a case part or structure that might be considered as meeting the definition of a plinth. I did not attempt a page by page search through the books by Allix and Roberts but feel rather assured that the incidence of clocks shown in those books with a separate structural component like a plinth would not exceed this 2% number.

³ Catalog of "French Carriage Clocks From an Important Private Collection," Christie's South Kensington, July 3, 1997.

⁴ Catalog of "The Dr. Eugene and Rose Antelis Collection of Important French Carriage Clocks," Christie's South Kensington, 26 November 1998.

⁵ Joseph Fanelli, "A Century of Fine Carriage Clocks," Bronxville NY, Clock Trade Enterprises, 1987.

An Example of a Carriage Clock with a Plinth

Figure 1 presents a front view of a carriage clock including a plinth. This clock was described as “A late 19th century French gilt brass grande sonnerie striking gorge-cased carriage clock ... all mounted on a matching desk stand set with winged female figures to each corner.”⁶ There is no mark or signature identifying the maker but the initials LB with the word BREVET underneath



Figure 1. 19th Century French Gilt Brass Carriage Clock on a Plinth

are found on the underside of the escapement platform (not pictured). The meaning of these initials is not known though a speculation is that they refer to Louis Baveux who worked with Henri Jacot in the latter part of the 19th century. Other features include an enamel dial with Roman chapters, an outer ring of Arabic numerals making the minutes, and moon or Breguet-style hands.

⁶ Lot 13, Bonhams, 15 December 2009, Fine Clocks and Barometers, New Bond Street.

Below the main dial is an Arabic alarm subsidiary dial. The clock measures $8\frac{3}{4}$ inches high including the handle when on the plinth. When off the plinth the clock measures 7 inches high including the handle and $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches without the handle. It is 4 inches wide and $3\frac{1}{4}$ inches deep. Figure 2 shows a view of the clock when removed from the plinth. It appears complete in design and thus similar to many other carriage clocks that have no plinths.



Figure 2. The clock in Figure 1 with the Plinth removed.

A separate view of the plinth is shown in Figure 3. Note how it complements the gorge design of clock case itself with its gilt brass finish. In addition, it includes the set of winged female figures placed as decorations at each corner. Note also the four posts extending up from the corners that serve to align the plinth with the four corners in the base of the clock case, suggesting further that this plinth was made specifically to fit to this clock.



Figure 3. Separate View of the Plinth with its Decorative Figures at each Corner.

The back of the clock is shown in Figure 4. Behind the open back door can be seen two gongs and their associated hammers on the right side, and a gong on the left that sounds the alarm when set. At the top of the gong support are the initials F.D. Visible at the top of the case is the push button to activate the repeat of the grande sonnerie striking.



Figure 4. The back of the clock in Figures 1 and 2.

Other parts of this clock's case are pictured in Figures 5 through 7. Figure 5 shows a view of the platform escapement through the large glass window at the top of the case. Figure 6 is a close view of the number of the clock, 4230, as found at the bottom left side of the backplate just slightly hidden when the gong coils are in place. Figure 7 presents a section of the outside bottom containing a three-position selection lever for full striking of hours and quarters, or partial striking of hours only, or no striking at all indicated as silent. These features of the clock itself are not, however, related to or affected by the presence or absence of the plinth.



Figure 5. Platform Escapement Through Top Window of Case.



Figure 6. Clock Number 4230 on Lower Backplate.



Figure 7. Strike Selection Lever on Case Bottom.

Examples of Other Carriage Clocks With Removable Plinths

Another example of a carriage clock resting on a plinth is seen in Figure 8. The maker is Drocourt and it is numbered 11856 with a date of circa 1885. The description of this clock at the



Figure 8. Carriage Clock by Drocourt #11856 on a matching engraved plinth.

time it was sold did not contain the word “plinth” but rather used the phrase “original engraved base.”

The overall height of the clock with plinth attached and clock handle up is 12 inches. The clock itself when separated from the plinth and with its handle down is 8¼ inches high. The front porcelain panel depicts a courting scene below the main dial of Roman numerals with an alarm dial in its center. The plinth has engraving identical to that of the case of the clock and has four cast and finished winged dragons at the corners. The movement strikes the hour and half-hour on a gong and repeats the hour by activating the push button at the top of the case.

Figures 9 and 10 present two other carriage clocks resting on removable plinths. Both are made by Drocourt, whose name is associated with excellence in carriage clocks and often with those



Figure 9. Carriage Clock by Drocourt #11237 on matching engraved plinth.



Figure 10. Carriage Clock by Drocourt #10930 on matching engraved plinth.

on plinths. Both clocks were made in the latter part of the 19th century. The decorations in the four corners of their plinths are similar to those seen earlier in Figure 2 and these gilt bronze stands are engraved to match the decoration of the clock cases resting on them.

Both clocks contain attractive porcelain panels as visible in these pictures of their dials which contain Roman numeral chapters and smaller Arabic alarm dials below. Both also have push buttons at the top of the case to activate the repeat of the hour strike.

Not all plinths are designed as those shown thus far in Figures 1, 8, 9, and 10. Different designs and even different materials are sometimes involved. Figure 11 shows a carriage clock made by



Figure 11. Carriage clock by McCabe #2716 on matching engraved plinth.



Figure 12. Carriage Clock by unknown maker on detachable marble plinth.

McCabe in what was termed a “bird’s beak” case, with an accompanying plinth of matching gilt brass design engraved with a crest of a rampant lion. The clock was made circa 1840 and is numbered 2716. Its silver finished dial with Roman numerals contains a subsidiary seconds dial at twelve o’clock. It strikes the hours and quarters on two gongs but has no push repeat button. Figure 12 shows one of a pair of clocks made circa 1885-1890. It strikes and repeats as shown by the push button at the top of the case, and rests on a removable plinth made of rouge marble. The other clock of the pair (not shown) has a presentation plaque dated 1885 and rests on a removable plinth of the same size, color, and material as that shown in Figure 12. Whether the plinths were made at same time as the clocks is not known but they have accompanied the two clocks for many years.

Examples of Carriage Clocks with Plinths that are Not Removable

Two examples are shown here which were specified in their catalogs or auction listings as containing plinths. In both cases the plinth is a connected part of the clock case and thus is not removable. So in terms of the earlier discussion at the beginning of this article regarding a plinth as a separable structure beyond the base of the clock, these would not be defined as plinths but instead as integral parts of the clock cases. But since many descriptions found in various catalogs and other listings of carriage clocks refer to these configurations as containing plinths, the following examples are presented to illustrate this view.

Figure 13 is a 19th century gilt metal carriage clock by an unknown maker. It has a white enamel dial with roman numerals and further below a small seconds dial. The Corinthian columns are supported by what was termed a “stepped plinth base with bracket feet.” “This base is not removable, however, since if it were, the case parts above it would lack sufficient support. The height of the clock is 20 cm. or just under 8 inches, including the raised handle.



Figure 13. Carriage clock by unknown maker described with stepped plinth.



Figure 14. Carriage clock by unknown maker described with a plinth base.

Figure 14 is described as a late 19th century with a gilt brass case and reeded Corinthian columns “on a plinth base with applied filigree decoration”. This base is likewise not removable. Its white enamel dial contains Arabic numerals and its movement is stamped “GH”. The height of this clock is also 20 cm. with the handle raised. Both of these clocks are attractive and both contain a repeat button at the top of the case which, when pressed, activate the repeat of the hour strike. Whether they contain a plinth depends, of course, on its definition.

Conclusion

This article is meant to explore the meaning of the structure termed a plinth, especially with regard to how it is related to carriage clocks. As noted at the start of this article, there are various definitions of this term, but when applied to carriage clocks which are portable, the most appropriate meaning proposed here is that a plinth is a component supporting the clock when it is at rest but is detachable and remains in place when the clock is picked up and moved. Otherwise a plinth would seem to be a component or extension of the base of the clock's case. And under these conditions, is a "plinth" that is fixed to the clock's case really a separate component at all? Any ideas or comments about this topic would be welcome by the author. Please send them to twotruba@sdsu.edu.

Acknowledgements

The author expresses sincere thanks for the ideas and some materials that were used in this article. In particular, the picture of clock in Figure 10 was provided by Stan Boyatzis and the picture of the clock in Figure 12 was provided by Leigh Extence. Both Stan and Leigh offered additional thoughts on the topic of plinths which helped organize the ideas presented here. The sources listed in footnotes 3, 4, and 5 were likewise useful in helping focus on the meaning of plinths with regard to carriage clocks. Even my *Roget's International Thesaurus* had some entries for the word "plinth" that were useful in prompting my thinking on this topic.

Carriage Clock Case Restoration

David J. LaBounty, CMC FBHI (USA)



Carriage clocks are works of art and a dirty, ugly case is more than a distraction. These can be easily restored to their former luster resulting in an increase of their appeal and value. Shown above are the effects of several hours of cleaning, polishing, and lacquering. The effort is well worth it!



This example is one of the dirtiest carriage clock cases I've ever seen. This case will obviously benefit from the restoration process and is a good example of the drastic, and exciting change that can happen.

The first step is to completely disassemble the case.



Turn the case over and remove the base plate, if present, and the four screws in the corners. (This case doesn't have a base plate.) Removing the four screws will separate the base from the four pillars. Care should be taken so that none of the glass panels will get damaged.



Remove the door and glass panels being careful not to drop them! The two side panels will be the same size while the door and front panel will be unique in size. It isn't generally necessary to identify right or left panels.

Remove the movement from the base plate.



The two screws visible underneath the top hold the handle and top plate to the rest of the case. These will need to be removed in order to access the four screws holding the pillars to the top. Notice, the upper glass has been poorly replaced in this example and the case would need a proper piece installed even if it wasn't broken. The original would have been oval and beveled.



Once the handle and top plate are removed, the four pillars can be removed from the top. Unlike the glass, these pillars will need to go back into the same positions from which they originated. Many carriage clock case pillars are marked for position and careful notes should be taken to avoid confusion and to identify any markings. The method I employ is to return the top screw to the top of each pillar to aid in identifying the top of the pillars. There will be more discussion of identifying pillar position during the assembly section.



Once the case has been disassembled, it is time to remove the glass from the door frame. This example has the glass sandwiched between two brass frames. Removing the screws frees the glass panel. Some carriage clock doors have two screws holding the bottom part of the door frame in place. Removing these two screws allows the bottom of the frame to be slid out of position and the glass slid free.



Removing the door knob will aid in the polishing process but be careful not to damage the door frame or the knob. Chucking up on the knob in the lathe and turning it out by hand is the safest method. However, if the restorer is reticent to remove the knob, it may be left in place.



At this point, the case is fully disassembled and the metal components are ready for the ultrasonic cleaner. Place the parts in a basket to avoid loss of small components.



While the case is going through the ultrasonic cleaning process, the glass panels may be cleaned with glass cleaner. Be careful of any chipped edges which may cut flesh!



The ultrasonic cleaner will remove much of the debris, and brighten the brass, but the components will still need more attention.



The scaling on the brass can be removed on the buffer-polisher with a wire brass brush but take care that the piece isn't grabbed by the machine! Following the de-scaling process, the pieces will need to be polished with a polishing compound like Simichrome. This step will take the most time since the metal should be polished to its final luster. Polish until the brown blemishes are gone. Some deep scratches or imperfections might have to be left as-is since removing them would require removing too much metal.



Polish all of the brass components until the desired luster is achieved.



The components are run through the ultrasonic once more to remove any polishing compound. Care must be taken at this point to avoid leaving any fingerprints or otherwise marring the brass.



The parts are now ready for the final step! The brass will tarnish over time unless it is sealed with lacquer.



There are two lacquers for brass that may be used. One is a clear coat and the other is a gold colored lacquer. I prefer the gold colored lacquer as that gives the case a richness and antique look. The parts are taken to a spray “booth” which can be made from a cardboard box.



Elevate the parts so the tops and sides are easily accessed. The parts will need to be rotated in order to lacquer all sides. It isn't necessary to lacquer the underside of the base or the areas which aren't exposed when the case is assembled.



Some parts are more easily hung for spraying. If possible, avoid laying parts flat as it makes it difficult to evenly coat all sides.



Once the lacquer is dry, the parts may be handled freely and the case reassembled. Install the pillar posts and be sure to get them in their proper positions. The two for the back will have a flat side, rather than a slot, to accommodate the door. The pillar posts have pins on their ends and, if a pillar doesn't properly fit, it may be in the wrong position.



Install the handle and top and then install the glass. The glass panels will typically have a narrow end which slides in towards the top. If the glass seems to wedge as it is slid into place, flip it over and check for a better fit. It is advantageous to hold the glass in place with a rubber band but the case finish must be protected from the rubber band with a soft cloth.

Slip the assembled door into place, install the movement on the base and the movement/base assembly into the case. When tightening the screws which hold the base in place, squeeze the pillar posts against the glass to help tighten the glass in the post slots.



The finished result! Ready for a new top glass and awaiting the restoration of the movement.

Do you own a carriage clock?

If so, you may have questions about your clock. Such as,

1. When was it made and by whom if it is not signed by a maker?

Many carriage clocks are marked by retailers, such as “Tiffany”. Many times, the maker is not identified. However, the maker can often be identified by the construction style and other tell-tell signs found on the movement.

2. Should I clean the case, or not?
3. And the greatest question of all, what is its value.

This is the hardest question to answer because of the many variables, such as condition of movement and case, the name and standing of the clockmaker, & the quality and rarity of the clock. We are not licensed appraisers. We can only advise you where to look for comparable clocks so you can make your own "best guess" as to the actual value, always remembering the oldest approach to a value is "Willing Buyer, Willing Seller".

Members of our chapter have many years of experience collecting, researching and restoring carriage clocks. Many are willing to help you answer some of these questions.

This free service is for NAWCC members only.

Email questions and pictures of your carriage clock (one clock at a time, please) to:

Tom Wotruba: (USA) twotruba@sdsu.edu

Doug Minty: (Australia) dminty@optusnet.com.au

Ken Hogwood: (USA) kenhogwood@aol.com

Leigh Extence: (UK) leigh@extence.co.uk

Link to the 1stdibs website:

<https://www.1stdibs.com/search/?q=carriage%20clocks>