

Carriage Clocks

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever"
John Keats

epic poem, *Endymion*, 1818

Back in the 17th Century, when travelling was far more difficult, watch makers developed what was known as a carriage watch, which was designed to hang inside a carriage. Clockmakers also developed small lantern clocks, which a traveller could unpack and hang on the wall of an inn in order to wake the owner the next morning.

The Carriage clock as we know it was developed in the early 19th century and it is said that one of the very first examples was made for Napoleon by Abraham-Louis Breguet. Indeed it was the French that initially specialised in this kind of clock.

The great advantage to the traveller at that time is that, unlike the carriage watch, it was not designed to hang in a carriage. The carriage clock had no pendulum and therefore was packed away in their luggage still running and happily lying on its side if necessary. At night the clock would be unpacked and positioned by the traveller's bedside.



Brass Anglaise 8 day carriage clock £425.

So in its common form, the carriage clock, known as a 'Pendule de Voyage', consists of a small gilt brass case with glass side panels and a hinged carrying handle. Its main feature being the platform escapement, which is sometimes visible through a glazed aperture on the top of the case and these small spring driven clocks remained in common production up until 1927.

However, when the quartz clock movement was introduced and with that multi piece cases instead of one piece cases, the carriage became much more affordable. Since the 1980's, with the advancement in electronics, the carriage clock has become more compact and small neat miniature quartz carriage clocks are available for as little as £21.

With the variety now available in mechanical versus the quartz clock, there is also a variety of shapes and styles of carriage too. The Obis is a comparatively uncomplicated style with slightly rounded edges and a light handle, whilst the Ovale by comparison has an oval base and a more clearly curved form. The Anglais has for many years been one of the most popular styles, and was taken from a French design but made specifically for the English market to appeal to those who didn't appreciate the more rounded styles. It has a more angular look and a clearly distinguishable



Henley Anglaise Carriage clock



Miniature Anglaise Quartz Carriage Clock £21

robust handle. The 'Boite' style again takes its influence from French design with a hexagon style handle and curvaceous form, whilst the Corniche has a more ornate roof.

Years ago England had a thriving watch and clock making industry, indeed my great grandfather, who founded the business back in 1909, was originally trained as a watchmaker in Birmingham. Many watches and clocks are now made overseas, with a quartz movement being very common. So it is refreshing to find that some skills still remain and that English carriage clocks are still being produced today. The English Carriage Clock companies based in Dorset continue to make the Henley range, having moved production from Shiplake in Oxfordshire. These Henley Carriage Clocks are of traditional French design and include the Anglaise, which was made by the French for the English in the 1800's, hence the name. The production of this particular clock follows the traditions of the French clockmakers in a small 'cottage industry' environment and cleverly incorporates their name – Henley – into the Roman numeral five. The clock cases are made from solid lacquered brass with beveled edge glasses and use Swiss made eleven jeweled lever platform movements beating 18,000 beats per hour with 8 Day duration. The dials are specially enameled, again emulating the original French styles, with blued steel Breguet hands. Each time piece handcrafted with its own unique number.



Gold Plated Carriage Clock with Quartz skeleton movement £150



Henley Obis Carriage Clock

As far back as I can remember, we at A A Thornton have always sold carriage clocks and continue to do so. Perhaps some may think carriage clocks are something that remains in the past, but they still have a purpose and charm.

We always keep a variety of style of carriage clocks ranging from solid brass, gold plate and chrome. Indeed in-between writing this I have been setting

out displays ready to open our doors once more in our newly refurbished shop. We have put aside one cabinet entirely for carriage clocks. The 'Petite Anglais' as mentioned before is always popular and I find it particularly attractive. With a nice weight, a clear Roman style face and priced at £75, it is a delightful gift.

For those who like a more curvaceous style, the oval carriages might appeal and are available in quartz or 8 Day key wound movements and in a lined presentation case.

The miniature carriages are a great gift idea as it is a present with a purpose and apart from telling the time some also have an alarm function. These clocks are not always put onto a mantel place and could be used in the bedroom as an alarm clock. Perhaps for you it could be a joy forever.



Chrome Quartz Carriage Clock £75.



Henley Ovale Carriage clock with case

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