

Jean-Claude Sabrier

Passionate about horology, immensely hard-working, ever helpful to colleagues and friends, imbued with a sense of the absurd, and generally always in high good humour, Jean-Claude Sabrier was a committed student – collector, retailer and historian – of clocks and watches in all their variety.

Scion of a family of jewellers, Sabrier soon abandoned this narrow field, establishing himself as a general antiques dealer in the Normandy where he continued to reside for the rest of his life. At the same time he laid the foundations of the extensive knowledge of horology that would lead him to become one of the leading consultants for the subject in Europe. In 1980 he joined forces with Hervé Chayette in Paris to launch regular auctions exclusively devoted to horology. Such had never previously been attempted in France, but modelled on those conducted in London by Sotheby's and Christie's, they were held on a sustained basis twice or thrice a year from 1980 until 1988. Then, after being solicited by Sotheby's Europe, Sabrier was seduced into joining the Genevan based firm of Antiquorum. Here he remained until 2000, embellishing the firm's frequent and detailed catalogues with the fruits of his researches, and master-minding several important thematic sales such as *L'Art de l'horlogerie en France du XVIe au XXe siècle* (1993), *The Art of British Horology* (1995) and *The Longitude at the Eve of the Third Millennium* (1999). The final years of his professional life were spent with the Swatch Group as advisor on the development of their patrimonial collections, in particular those of the private Breguet museum.

In parallel with such commercial activity, Jean-Claude Sabrier always continued his historical research, based on both texts and objects. In addition he actively aided the staff of the several museums that he frequented, and collaborated in the mounting of some important exhibitions, in particular those devoted to Ferdinand Berthoud in Paris and La Chaux-de-Fonds (1984), and the Leroy family at Tours (1987). It was however precision horology



Jean-Claude Sabrier (1938-2014).
Photo courtesy of Philippe Monsel.

that came increasingly to dominate Sabrier's attention, and it was in this field that he produced an enduring monument of detailed research in his study of Louis Berthoud and Henri Motel (bibliography N° 16), a work honoured by the Académie de la Marine. In 1997 he was awarded the Gaia Prize for the generality of his works, but several more were to follow, in particular the study devoted to Frederick Houriet (bibliography 21), and collaboration in the exhibition of Breguet watches mounted at the Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg (bibliography N° 19).

The death of Jean-Claude Sabrier on 29 November 2014 following a fall in his home deprives the international horological community of one of its most prominent and skilful denizens. He was one of the architects of the revival of interest in both historical and contemporary horology that has occurred in the last several decades; part of that era also passes with him.

Anthony Turner

Principal horological writings by Jean- Claude Sabrier

- 'An early anonymous self-winding watch', *Antiquarian Horology*, vii March 1972, 526-28.
- 'A propos d'une montre automatique

- ancienne', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xiii 1974, 8-13 (with André Imbert).
- 'Une montre expérimentale de Ferdinand Berthoud au Musée d'Evreux?', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xix 1977, 7-13.
 - 'Une montre à roue de rencontre sur deux niveaux', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xix 1977, 45-50.
 - 'L'extraordinaire "oignon" de Monsieur Camus', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xix 1977, 71-77 (avec Giuseppe Brusa).
 - 'Un chef d'œuvre de Breguet', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xx 1977, 67-72.
 - 'L'Horlogerie à la Biennale des Antiquaires de Paris au Grand Palais', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xxiii 1978, 7-9.
 - 'Histoire de l'échappement à ancre : les montres à ancre françaises de la première génération', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xxiii, 45-60.
 - 'Henri Motel et la chronométrie française de la première moitié du XIXe siècle', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xxv 1979, 23-52.
 - 'Les Montres à ancre françaises de la première génération : informations complémentaires et rectifications', *Bulletin d'ANCAHA*, xxv 1979, 69-72.
 - *La Montre de 1580 à 1930*, St Omer & Evreux 1982 (with Bernard Seneca).
 - *Le Guideargus de l'horlogerie de Collection*, (Les Editions de l'Amateur), Paris 1982.
 - 'La Contribution de Ferdinand Berthoud aux progrès de l'horlogerie de marine', in Catherine Cardinal (ed), *Ferdinand Berthoud (1727-1807), horloger-mécanicien du Roi et de la Marine*, (Musée International de l'Horlogerie), La Chaux-de-Fonds 1984.
 - 'Eclaircissements sur la contribution de la famille Le Roy aux progrès de l'horlogerie' in *La Dynastie des Le Roy, Horlogers du Roi*, Exhibition Catalogue (Musée des Beaux Arts de Tours), Tours 1987, 27-36.
 - *Les Horloges Lanternes françaises*, (Rogers Turner Books Ltd), Greenwich et Le Mesnil-le-Roi, 1988.
 - *La Longitude en mer à l'heure de Louis Berthoud et Henri Motel* (Editions Antiquorum), Geneva 1993.
 - 'Louis Berthoud and the finding of Longitude at Sea : new Developments' (translated by Sebastian Whitestone), *Antiquarian Horology*, Winter 1997, 522-34.
 - 'Pierre Le Roy's watches "for the Use of astronomers and seamen"', (translated by Sebastian Whitestone), *Antiquarian Horology*, xxiv Winter 1998, 315-25.
 - *Breguet in the Hermitage : Catalogue*, St Petersburg 2004 (with Emmanuel Breguet).
 - *Steel Time* (with Georges Rigot), (F. P. Journe), Geneva 2005
 - *Jacques-Frédéric Houriet, 1743-1830*, (Editions de la Chatière & Editions Simonin), Chézard St Martin & Cernier, 2006.
 - *Le temps poétique : la haute horlogerie de Van Cleef & Arpels* (avec Michel Serres, Franco Cologni, and Sharon Kerman), Paris (Cercle d'Art), 2009.
 - 'Breguet, homme de "marketing"', in Hervé Chayette, Jean-Claude Sabrier & Anthony Turner, *Breguet chez Chayette*, Paris 2010, 45-56.
 - *La Montre à remontage automatique, XVIIIe-XXIe siècles* (Editions Cercle d'Art), Paris 2011.