

# Clocking the design of iconic timepieces

## TREASURES ELEANOR FLEGG

**J**ohn Donegan's of Dublin is best known for making pocket watches. Between 1845 and 1892 the company made 22,179 pocket-sized timepieces. They also worked on a much larger scale. Donegan was a Catholic and a Nationalist who expressed his political leanings in a series of eight monumental Irish Harp Clocks. Each is a towering 9ft high and includes every Celtic symbol you can think of. One of these is going under the hammer at Antiques Ireland in Waterford, on Wednesday 13 May. It's believed to be the first Irish Harp Clock to be sold at auction.

The Irish Harp Clock (Lot 276: est. €6,000 to €9,000) is a grandfather clock on steroids, magnificent but slightly bonkers, and heavily carved with nationalist symbolism. "You can't miss it," says Thomas Keighery, auctioneer. "It's a very imposing clock." The dial is placed within a crowned harp, carved in oak. It's decorated with shamrocks and set within a cluster of pikes, which famously symbolise the 1798 Rebellion.

The trunk of the clock houses a barometer, with a carved wolfhound above the dial, and a thermometer. There are extremely long round towers on either side and a lyre below. The base is shaped like the Giant's Causeway.

This extraordinary object came from a private collector, now in his 90s. "He bought it from a historic house in Co Waterford in the 1960s, previously owned by a successful industrial family," Keighery says. "It was the pride of his collection."

The Irish Harp Clock is for sale as part of an auction of clocks at Antiques Ireland. The 400 clocks come from four private collections and include 44 grandfather clocks, 130 wall clocks and the rest are assorted carriage clocks and mantle clocks. "There's a cuckoo clock here that's driving us mad," says Keighery. "It's going off every 15 minutes."

If the Irish Harp Clock is at one end of the horological spectrum, the Art Deco Cartier clock at Adam's is at the other. Almost the only thing the two pieces have in common is that both of them tell the time.

Small enough to be held on the palm of the hand, the rock crystal, enamel and diamond-set folding strut clock was made by Cartier, New York, around 1915.

This tiny, exquisite timepiece (Lot 54: est. €20,000 to €30,000) is going under the hammer at Ad-

am's sale of Fine Jewellery and Ladies' Watches on 12 May.

The circular dial, which seems to hover within its carved rock crystal base, is decorated in cream and cobalt blue with Roman numerals. The hands are embellished with rose-cut diamonds, the hour hand with a star-motif rose-cut diamond terminal, and the bezel with rose-cut diamonds. It's a clock with an interesting provenance.

It comes from the collection of the legendary Lola Armour, who reputedly faced off a gang of burglars sent by Al Capone.

The Armour family fortune came from the unromantic business of meat-packing. In 1867 (about the time that Donegan was making Irish Harp Clocks in Dublin), Philip Danforth Armour Sr. (1832-1901), co-founded Armour & Company in Chicago.

The company pioneered assembly-line factories, which allowed for almost every part of the animal to be used to make glue, soap, pharmaceuticals and fertiliser. This was known as using: "everything but the squeal." It was also the first company to produce canned meat and transport raw meat using refrigerated railcars.

Philip's heir, Jonathan Ogden Armour (1863-1927), was much less successful. By the time he died, the family fortune was all but lost. His wife, Lola Armour, inherited the remainder. She invested wisely and became famous for her jewellery collection.

According to family legend, this collection was targeted by the Chicago gangster, Al Capone, whose men locked Lola in the cupboard as they ransacked her room. Undaunted, Lola shouted from the cupboard that they should leave her the most sentimental pieces. Remarkably, the burglars obeyed her instructions and left her the pieces she described. Or so the story goes.

The items from Lola Armour's collection for sale at Adam's (Lots 40 to 58) are being sold by one of her descendants, who came to live in Ireland with her family several years ago. Sadly, they're not the pieces returned by gangsters.

The gem of the collection is a cane handle (Lot 40: est. €8,000 to €12,000), made in Paris in the 1750s. It's in the shape of a dolphin with the agate-carved figure of a

Moor emerging from its mouth.

He's wearing a gem-set gold turban and jewelled bracelets, and looks like the genie from Disney's *Aladdin*.

See [antiquesireland.ie](http://antiquesireland.ie) and [adams.ie](http://adams.ie).



**The Irish Harp Clock (top); and the Art Deco Cartier clock (above)**