

London Meeting Lecture Thursday 19 July 2012

‘A Good Time in Berlin’ – the remarkable clocks of Normal-Zeit

by Dr James Nye

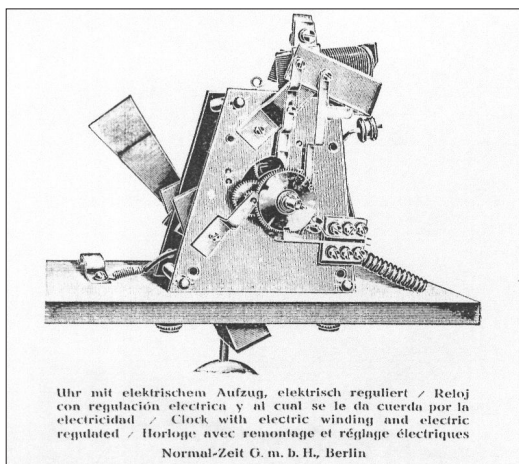


Normal-Zeit headquarters, c. 1910. Glass slide in the author's collection. Another view of the nerve centre was published in the March journal, page 395.

In 1908, when St John Winne addressed a City meeting on the subject of ‘The Time of a Great City’ – a highly-orchestrated evening of puffery for the clocks and synchronising system of his firm, STC – he made quite a play of the fact that Berlin – ‘our great commercial rival’ – had a comprehensive system of synchronised clocks, running to some thousands in number. These were provided and maintained by Normal-Zeit GmbH, the ‘standard time’ company. However, by the early 1920s, the clocks and the system had

disappeared. So much so that surviving clocks with Normal-Zeit's name on the dial are rare. The question naturally arises as to how such a widespread network, which included 600 regulated turret clocks and 1,000 dials in shop windows, could disappear from view so rapidly and completely?

The technology involved was innovative and sophisticated. The lecture will explore the origins of this remarkable system, how it worked, who was involved, and unravel the story of its rise to prominence and subsequent disappearance. If the firm (and Berliners in general) had been enjoying such a good time, what went wrong?



Normal-Zeit movement, with synchroniser. Engraving from the Deutsche Uhrmacherzeitung - Weltausgabe.



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