

AHS London Lecture Thursday 16 May 2013, 6.15 pm

## Matthew Shaw - 'Decimal Clocks and Ten-Day Weeks: the French Republican Calendar'

Guided by the enthusiasm of the Enlightenment, the French revolutionaries sought to reshape time, just as they transformed society. In the autumn of 1793, the Jacobin National Convention introduced a new calendar, drafted by the earnest educationalist Charles Gilbert Romme and the ambitious playwright, Fabre d'Églantine. The new system of time dated the year from the foundation of the Republic in 1792, renamed the months after the seasons and weather, and introduced ten-day weeks. Closely tied to the decimal reforms of weights and measures, the new calendar also metrified the seconds, minutes and hours of the day.

Now collected as rare examples of a relatively-short lived and utopian experiment, decimal clocks and watches are a physical reminder of the ambition of the revolutionary period and evidence their concern for scientific reform, as well as the high-regard given to the art and science of horology in the late-eighteenth century.

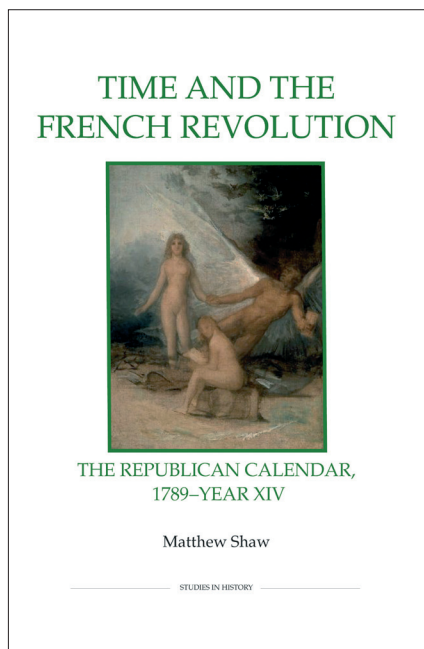
This talk will examine the process that led to the creation of decimal time and look at the evidence for the extent to which such timepieces were used during the revolutionary period. It also considers the importance of the new, national watch factory created at Besançon as part of these reforms, and which the new republic hoped would create a French watch industry based on the ideals of revolution, rather than the aristocratic and royal patronage that previously supported the French industry.



Dr Matthew Shaw is a curator at the British Library. His book 'Time and the French Revolution - The Republican Calendar, 1789 - year XIV' (Boydell and Brewer, 2011) was reviewed in the June 2012 issue of this journal, where it was described as a 'fascinating book'.



Decimal Clock, Folkestone Triennial 2011, Ruth Ewan, 'We Could Have Been Anything That We Wanted To Be'. Photo: Steve Wilde/Flickr (CC-BY-ND)



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