

AHS London Lecture Thursday 18 September 2014 David Rooney

The Speaking Clock in the History of Public Relations

On 5 June 1935, the Poet Laureate, John Masefield, wrote to the Postmaster General, Sir Kingsley Wood, about the qualities required for a telephone speaking clock. 'The voice is to be impersonal', he explained. 'It is to come like the voice of a nightingale singing in the midnight'. So began the nationwide competition that selected Ethel Cain as the 'Girl With The Golden Voice'.

Two years previously, public-relations pioneer Sir Stephen Tallents had joined the British Post Office and begun a radical shake-up of its publicity activities. In 1936, his ideas came to fruition in the public launch of the speaking clock, with a Post Office sales manager observing that 'publicity pays'.

In this profusely illustrated talk, David Rooney will discuss the history of the speaking clock, the introduction of public relations to the Post Office, and the use of sexuality to sell time by the telephone.

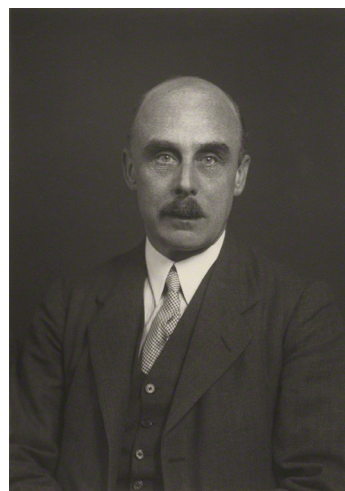
Please note that this is a change to the lecture advertised in the December 2013 *Antiquarian Horology*.



David Rooney is the Curator of Time, Navigation and Transport at the Science Museum, London, and a former Curator of Timekeeping at the Royal Observatory, Greenwich.



Ethel Cain, the 'Girl With The Golden Voice', pictured on a cigarette card in 1935 (by courtesy of Upacut Image Library).



Sir Stephen George Tallents, by Walter Stoneman, 1932 (© National Portrait Gallery, London).

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