

This document outlines the commercial history of the Synchronome company including its later mergers and eventual demise with a chronology of information relating to patents, installations and staff members. It is a good source of detail on the late company history. This document was compiled by Mr Paul Joyce in preparation for the book Synchronome, Masters of Electrical Timekeeping by Robert HA Miles but contains additional information not in the book.

EW Odell

SYNCHRONOME CHRONOLOGY

F HOPE-JONES & G B BOWELL 1894/1895-1897
THE SYNCHRONOME SYNDICATE LTD 1897-1901
THE SYNCHRONOME COMPANY 1901-1912
THE SYNCHRONOME COMPANY LTD 1912-c1975
TANN-SYNCHRONOME LTD c1975-c1982
TANN SYNCHRONOME LTD c1982-1988

Workshop at:

Birkenhead Cheshire 1894/1895

removed to:

Furnival's Inn Holborn London WC 1895-c1896

later at:

53 Victoria Street Westminster SW c1896-1897

then Head Office and Works at:

Clerkenwell House alias The Synchronome Building

latterly (by 1913) called Synchronome House

32 & 34 Clerkenwell Road London EC 1897-1938

Registered Office at:

85 Gracechurch Street City of London EC 1897-1901

Sales and Contracts Dept at:

19 Caxton House Victoria Street Westminster SW1 (1925)-1938

Other Departments at:

Victoria House 117 Victoria Street SW1 by 1937

then Sales, Contracts, Service and Maintenance Depts all at:

Victoria House 117 Victoria Street SW1 1938-1939

Factory removed to:

The Abbey Turret Clock Works Woodside Place Mount Pleasant

Alperton Wembley Middlesex during 1936,37,38

Sales and Contracts Depts removed to:

The Abbey Electric Clock Works Woodside Place Mount Pleasant

Alperton Wembley Middlesex 1939 closed 1963

Service Department remained at:

Victoria House 117 Victoria Street SW1 1939-(1940)

Factory and Offices removed to:

The Abbey Electric Clock Works

Station Road Westbury Wiltshire 1962,63 closed 1988

Sales and Service Dept for London and Home Counties at:

The Abbey Electric Clock Works

34 Palfrey Place Kennington Oval London SW8 1963-(1965)-
closed before 1978

Registered Office at:

Stirling Corner Boreham Wood Hertfordshire c1973-(1978)-
closed by 1988

The Synchronome Co Ltd purchased by:
BATH AND PORTLAND GROUP ENGINEERING DIVISION c1957
 and amalgamated with:
C H POTTS of LEEDS c1957 and
GILLETT & JOHNSTON LTD of CROYDON 1957-1965 at:
 The Abbey Electric Clock Works Woodside Place Mount Pleasant
 Alpertton Wembley Middlesex -1962 then at:
 The Abbey Electric Clock Works
 Station Road Westbury Wiltshire 1962->
 The Synchronome Co Ltd purchased by:
STRATFORD EQUIPMENT COMPANY 1969
 which was later retitled as:
JOHN TANN GROUP c1973
 The Synchronome Co Ltd title changed to:
TANN-SYNCHRONOME LTD c1975
 restyled as:
TANN SYNCHRONOME LTD by 1982
 Tann Synchronome Clockmaking Division purchased by:
BRIGHT, SON & CO (CLERKENWELL) LTD 1988
 Southgate Road Islington London N1
 restructured as:
BRIGHTS OF LONDON LTD 1989
 and moved to:
 Westgate Business Park Westgate Carr Road
 Pickering North Yorkshire YO18 8LX 1989
 Tann Synchronome Fire and Security Division purchased by:
TUNSTALL GROUP PLC 1988
 Registered Office at:
 Whitley Lodge Whitley Bridge Yorkshire DN14 0HR
 Tann Synchronome Security sold to another firm 1988
 Tann Synchronome Fire Systems [and Contract Clock Maintenance]
 amalgamated into:
TUNSTALL SECURITY AND TANN SYNCHRONOME 1988
 and factory removed from Westbury to:
 Kenn Road Clevedon North Somerset BS21 6LH 1988
 Tann Synchronome purchased by:
MENVIER SECURITY LTD 1993
 Menvier Security and Tann Synchronome purchased by:
THE COOPER GROUP 1997

SYNCHRONOME CHRONOLOGY : 1950-1969

1950 A new Electrical Impulse Clock catalogue EI.50 issued.

Free Pendulum Clock SH.82 ordered by the Northampton Polytechnic Institute, Clerkenwell 1950. Frank W Burgess' first two patents for The Synchronome Co Ltd relating to Secondary Pendulum Clocks (both applications filed 18 September 1950, complete specifications with drawings 18 September 1951, published on 19 May 1954). The Synchronome-Compton Carillone electronic chiming machine was the brainchild of F W Burgess in 1950; produced in conjunction with Leslie Bourn, Chief Electronics Engineer of the Compton Organ Company of Acton, there were above twenty installations during the following decade. It was first shown at the British Industries Fair, Olympia, Stand J.331, in May 1950, where Synchronome also displayed a Shortt Free Pendulum, a turret clock and a watchman's security alarm system. William Hamilton Shortt FBHI was elected Master of the Clockmakers' Company for 1950. Frank Hope-Jones' will proved; he left but £3,836 gross.

1951 W H Shortt's article on reduced air pressure experiments with SH.7 at Exeter was published in January 1951. The Synchronome Co displayed a Shortt Free Pendulum, a turret clock and a Carillone electronic chiming machine at the British Industries Fair, Olympia, Stand H.520, in May 1951. Before being shipped off to South America, SH.81 was exhibited at the Festival of Britain's Dome of Discovery on the South Bank. W H Shortt was Deputy Master of the Clockmakers' Company in 1951.

1952 At the British Industries Fair, Olympia, during 5-16 May 1952, Synchronome displayed on Stand 505 a Shortt Free Pendulum, a turret clock, a Carillone electronic chiming machine and a generator frequency indicator dial.

1953 The Synchronome Electrical Company of Australasia Ltd in Brisbane was reformed under Arthur A Jackson as The Synchronome Electrical Co of Australasia Pty Ltd, with a new associated manufacturing company known as Australian Clocks Pty Ltd in the charge of his elder son William Alfred Jackson. The two firms, at different addresses, were eventually united in 1973. The former Synchronome House at Clerkenwell was probably demolished c1953 and replaced by the present Bryles House, Nos 32-34 Clerkenwell Road and 1-3 Berry Street EC1. The Sutton Arms PH at rear, on the corner of Berry Street and Great Sutton Street, still survives (1996).

1954 W H Shortt was appointed member of awards committee for the Worshipful Company of Clockmakers' new Tompion Medal under Chairmanship of the Master Sir H Spencer Jones, in April 1954. The first recipient of the Gold Medal, at the Mansion House in the City of London on 1 November 1954, was W H Shortt himself for the invention of the free pendulum clock. Work on

the caesium atomic frequency standard was then at an advanced stage of progress jointly at US Naval Observatory, Washington and NPL in Teddington. A new Synchronome Electrical Impulse Clock catalogue EI.54 issued.

1955 The rebuilt premises on site of former Synchronome House were partly occupied by A Shoot & Sons (Clerkenwell) Ltd at No 32 Clerkenwell Road by January 1955. The first caesium atomic clock, designed by Louis Essen and J V L Parry at NPL, came into service 1955. Sir Harold Spencer Jones retired as Astronomer Royal at the end of the year.

1956 The final groups of Free Pendulum Clocks SH.92-98 were ordered in 1956. Brian Chapman joined the company staff at Alperton 1956.

1957 The Synchronome Company Limited letterheads of September and October 1957 addressed from Abbey Electric Clock Works, Woodside Place, Mount Pleasant, Alperton, Wembley, Middlesex, list Company Directors as W J E Gammage, R B Ogden FCA, F W Burgess. Burgess signed as Managing Director. At this time the component parts for master clocks were still made available for amateurs and model engineers (an unprofitable facility withdrawn only in the spring of 1965). Messrs Gillett and Johnston Ltd of Croydon were purchased in 1957 by Bath and Portland Group, the building stone corporate, and removed to premises in the 'Wembley area' (ie Alperton). It appears that by then Synchronome was already under control of the Bath and Portland Group's Engineering Division, and no longer a private company. C H Potts of Leeds, turret clock makers, were also absorbed by Synchronome at about this time.

1958 Removal of all sections of Royal Greenwich Observatory to Herstmonceux completed in 1958 under Sir Richard van der R Woolley, 11th Astronomer Royal 1956-1971.

1959 Frank W Burgess' second two patents for The Synchronome Co Ltd relating to Polarised Pulse Circuits and a new Dial Advance Mechanism (provisional applications 17 July 1959, complete specifications with drawings 29 June 1960, published 18 April 1962). Provisional and complete specifications are addressed from Abbey Electric Clock Works, Alperton.

1960 The Synchronome Co issued a new Electrical Impulse Clock catalogue in the latter part of 1960. Publicity on the Synchronome-Compton Carillone about this time gives agent for Eire as A P Haslam, 39 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin; and the agent for Scotland as Messrs Ellis & McDougall, 12 Sawmillfield Street, Glasgow C4. Sir Harold Spencer Jones (1890-1960), late Astronomer Royal, died 1960.

1961 At the ASEE Exhibition at Earl's Court the Synchronome Company stand displayed a new calendar clock, a new type of slave dial for surface mounting, and a 5' diameter 4-dial

impulse turret clock controlling Synchronome-Compton Carillone electronic chimes. The BBC six-dots Greenwich Time Signal was operated by an atomic clock at GRO Herstmonceux from 1961.

1962 Frank William Burgess (c1901-1962) died on 27 August at the age of 61. He was working until being admitted to hospital some 14 days before, and died from post-operative shock. The burial took place at Reigate, Surrey. Obituaries appeared in the September and October issues of HJ. He was survived by his wife and three daughters, also by a son D F Burgess on the Synchronome staff. Although adjoining factories had been taken over by Synchronome, the Alpertons works were now considered too small for their needs. Later in 1962 they commenced removal of the production and administrative departments to new premises with office block and a small colony of war-time Nissen huts, at Station Road, Westbury, Wiltshire. This change, planned to be completed by the end of December 1962, was intended to provide for future expansion. Many of the key personnel moved with the company to Westbury, but Sales and Service departments were to remain at The Abbey Electric Clock Works, Alpertons for another year.

1963 The entire removal of all departments from Alpertons had been achieved by December 1963. Advertisements carrying the Alpertons address continue in HJ up to the end of the year, but in the December issue a supplementary notice states the new address as The Abbey Electric Clock Works, Station Road, Westbury, Wiltshire, with the Sales and Service Department for London and the Home Counties at No 34 Palfrey Place, Kennington Oval, London SW8.

1964 HJ no longer carried Synchronome advertisements by 1964. In March 1964 a personality profile of H E (Bill) Jones MBE was published in Group News, the newspaper of the Bath and Portland Group of which The Synchronome Co was still a member. Consolidated at Westbury by 1964 the company diversified its manufactures, setting up a new Research and Development Department for production of fire alarm equipment and automatic fire detection devices. An important new product of 1964 was the Synchronicity system.

1965 The Mark II version master clock movement superseded the established pattern by or in 1965. The price quoted for a standard master clock in May 1965 was £47.0.0. At this time a change in company policy directed withdrawal of the long established but non-profit making facilities for amateur constructors, no doubt one consequence of the movement layout modifications. Although no further orders had been received since 1956, a Shortt free pendulum was estimated to cost between £1,200 and £2,000 in June 1965 depending on the ancillary apparatus required, and a hit+miss synchroniser would be about £35. A new Synchronome catalogue compiled at Westbury 1965 consisted of loose publicity sheets, issued in March and October, punched between covers with a slide-on spine. All

subsequent trade literature similarly appeared as single sheets. The Minute-Master $\frac{3}{4}$ secs pendulum 1 minute transmitter maintained on the Hipp toggle principle was introduced by March 1965 for small installations. This model, also marketed by National, appeared in three slightly differing versions but was fairly short-lived. The standard master clock is shown October 1965 in a plain asymmetrical rectangular case with partly blacked-out glazing - these cases, although well constructed of polished hardwood, cost a mere £6.0.0.

By early 1965 the firm had several outlets and agencies positioned around the British Isles, that for London and Home Counties remaining at No 34 Palfrey Place, Kennington Oval. The Midlands Office was at 66/68 Hagley Road, Edgbaston, Birmingham 15; the North West Regional Office at Browns Building, Pomona Docks, Hulme Hall Road, Manchester 15; the Leeds Office at Marshall Mills, Leeds 11. Scotland & Northern Ireland Agents were Ellis & McDougall (Electrical Services) Ltd, 185/189 Broomloan Road, Glasgow SW1; and the Agent for Eire remained A P Haslam, 39 Lower Gardiner Street, Dublin 1. Synchronome Company letterheads of March-May 1965 list Directors as K Selby, M D Flatley, and L R Pullen, with A F Holbrook signing for Sales Liaison. By 10 June two additional Directors had been appointed: F N J Macgowan and J V Borthwick. Cyril Coombes, formerly of Gillett and Johnston of Croydon, who had continued under the new regime at Alperton, negotiated purchase of the turret clock section of the business to reconstitute Gillett and Johnston at Croydon in 1965. Following his death in 1972 his son Stephen Coombes succeeded as Managing Director.

1966 The Westbury telephone number had changed to 2491/2/3 by 1 February, and 2491/5 by March 1966. A F Holbrook signed letters as Sales Office Manager from 10 March. Half seconds pendulum 'Reserve' master clocks with motor wound dead beat escapement movements transmitting 1 minute reverse polarity impulses were being imported by Synchronome from Westerstrand of Sweden from early 1966; their subsidiary dials, although lettered as 'Synchronome' and 'Made in England', also contained Westerstrand movements. This clock, bought in to compete with Gent's Chronopher and ECS Memory Master, was first included on a Synchronome Company price list dated 1 April 1966 at £45.

1969 Now well established as a manufacturer of alarm systems, Synchronome was detached from Bath and Portland Group in 1969 and purchased by the Stratford Equipment Company. By 1973 this was retitled as the John Tann Group, and incorporated the former Tann safe manufacturing company. A list of the new Directors appears on letterhead labels in 1970.

SYNCHRONOME CHRONOLOGY : 1970-1998

1970 The post-Bath and Portland Group directorate is listed out on letter heading labels in November-December 1970 as follows: L J Thomas, Chairman; J R Benton, Managing Director; B A Evans, Secretary; H W Gathergood, D V Watson, G E Martin, and D G Jones, Directors.

1971 William Hamilton Shortt died on 4 February 1971 age 89. He was survived by three daughters. The BBC six-dots Greenwich Time Signal was modified for the International Atomic Time Scale at midnight on 31 December 1971, the sixth dot now being lengthened to render it more easily distinguishable. The GTS had been operated by an atomic clock at RGO Herstmonceux since 1961.

1972 H E Jones MBE, late Technical Manager of the Synchronome Company, gave a talk on 'The Synchronome Systems' to the AHS Electrical Horology Group at Uffington 11 March 1972. He was assisted by his life-long colleague W E Richardson and his son E H Jones, the current Chief Engineer and a Director of the company. BHI removed headquarters from Clerkenwell to Upton Hall near Newark 1972-73 (officially opened on 25 January 1973). Synchronome / Westerstrand Reserve Master Clock priced at £52.90 in list dated 1 May 1972.

1973 Stratford Equipment Company had become John Tann Group by 1973. Synchronome Company Ltd letterhead of February 1973 from Station Road, Westbury, Wiltshire, reflects this change and lists Company Directors as follows: B A Evans, Chairman; J R Benton, Deputy Chairman; G E Martin, Managing Director; D V Watson, D G Jones, E H Jones, J W Harwood. A F Holbrook remained in position as Sales Office Manager. The company was stated to have been 'entirely reconstituted' by this date, with a Registered Office at Stirling Corner, Boreham Wood (sic), Hertfordshire.

1975 By August 1975 the company title had been changed to Tann-Synchronome Ltd. Works and offices continued at Westbury. A letterhead of 28 August 1975 from Station Road, Westbury, Wiltshire BA13 3JT, states the firm's products to be Fire, Time, and Security Systems. Directors were: B A Evans, Chairman; R L Martin, Managing Director; D V Watson, J S Flukes, D G Jones, W E G Manning, G E Martin, and L R Stokes. D Scollen was a Sales Administrator. The Registered Office remained at Stirling Corner, Borehamwood, Herts. Although standard impulse clock systems, together with synchronous motor and self-contained battery movement dials, continued to be a major product under the Synchronome title in the 1970s, demand for large public clocks had practically ceased by mid-decade.

1978 Trade leaflets and price lists issued in 1978 indicate a great diversity in Tann-Synchronome's fire alarm and other security equipment. The outlet for London was now at the Borehamwood address.

1982 Standard Synchronome one seconds pendulum half minute impulse clock systems were still obtainable according to a Tann Synchronome (sic) installation and maintenance manual of 1982.

1983 A Synchronome quartz master clock was available by 1983. Synchronome offices were by now established in Italy, Belgium, and USA for the growing export trade.

1987 Letterhead of Tann Synchronome dated 22 June 1987 gives the firm's products as Fire, Time, Security and Access Control Equipment. R S Winfield is Finance Director.

1988 Tann Synchronome's fire protection and security systems division was bought out in 1988 by Tunstall Group PLC of Whitley Lodge, Whitley Bridge, nr Doncaster, Yorkshire, a large telecommunications and security conglomerate. As to the time systems part of the firm, little enough of interest appeared in the sale during the latter half of 1988, most remaining old stock, so it was claimed, having been previously dumped in skips. The early Cheltenham College master clock of 1899, kept in Tann Synchronome's showroom and loaned by them for display in the 'Electrifying Time' exhibition of 1976, was reportedly jettisoned by Tunstall but salvaged by an astute member of the former Synchronome staff. Bright, Son & Co (Clerkenwell) Ltd purchased the remnants of the clockmaking side, consisting of all surviving current stock, tooling, and a mass of technical drawings from the Westbury period, but no rights to use of the Tann Synchronome title. The time systems maintenance contracts had been withheld by Tann Synchronome staff and were taken away with them. The Westbury premises were then vacated. Security systems having been promptly sold off to another company, the fire systems division removed to Tunstall's factory at Kenn Road, Clevedon, in North Somerset where the firm continued to function as Tunstall Security and Tann Synchronome. Contract maintenance of time systems was retained in a small way under the new regime.

1989 Brights of Clerkenwell were restructured, altering the company title to Brights of London Ltd in October 1989. They then removed from Islington to new workshop premises at Westgate Business Park, Westgate Carr Road, Pickering in North Yorkshire. Some servicing of Tann Synchronome clocks was carried on by Brights until c1991/92 when their stock of spare parts ran out.

1990 Royal Greenwich Observatory removed from Herstmonceux to Madingley Road, Cambridge.

1991 The brothers William Alfred and John Arthur Jackson sold Synchronome Electrical Company of Australasia Pty Ltd in Brisbane to Tony Klee in 1991. Clocks are no longer produced by the firm.

1993 Tunstall sold Tann Synchronome to Menvier Security Ltd in 1993 and presented the Synchronome Company's own Free Pendulum SH.99 (originally retained as part of the assets) to Liverpool Museum, where it was put on display in the new Time and Space Galleries; the installation was carried out by Brian Chapman in 1993. Tann Synchronome continued in business at Kenn Road, Clevedon as a trading division of Menvier Security.

1997 Menvier Security Ltd was bought out by the Cooper Group, a large USA conglomerate with British interests, in 1997 but Tann Synchronome remain at the Clevedon premises.

1998 The Synchronome Company Ltd title was purchased from limbo in 1998 by James Nye of Pollicott Manor, Ashendon, Buckinghamshire. Discussions in progress by the Cooper Group to move Menvier Security and Tann Synchronome from Clevedon for amalgamation with another English section of the group, perhaps at Banbury, have not yet reached a conclusion (September 1998) but might eventually result in the disappearance of the Tann Synchronome title.