

Synchronome's Domestic Clocks

(as told to Norman Heckenberg and John Gardiner by Bill and Jock Jackson , 25/2/1996)

In addition to the tower clocks and installations of Synchronome controllers and slaves, the Synchronome Electrical Company of Australia sold a range of other clocks, both wholesale and retail.

Although they were able to repair all sorts of clocks they never dealt with any of the classic battery domestic clocks like Bulle, Eureka, or Tiffany Neverwind.

From the thirties on, however, they sold large numbers of AC synchronous motor clocks. Along with Lawrence and Hanson, they sold Smiths clocks complete, as also the well made Mauthé clocks from Germany. The latter included chiming versions and one with a 'carryover' reserve spring which would keep the clock going during a blackout.

There was also a range of clocks assembled from imported motors and locally made cases. In some cases this meant made in the Synchronome workshops. Bill Jackson remembers his first job was turning 12" diameter cases for synchronous wall clocks out of beautiful solid lumps of silky oak. Like many others with locally made dials, they were marked SYNCHRONOME BRISBANE. Smiths motors were used. They had a 'bijoux' motor, and also a heavy duty one which would drive a 2' dial. Later the bijoux was replaced by the QGEM, which was lighter with more plastic. When David Smith visited Australia, Bill asked why they had made the change and was told that the earlier ones lasted too long.

There was a simple wall clock model called "Austin" with a spun aluminium case made in the workshops. This was like a bowl with the numerals screen printed on the outside and the three hands unprotected with no glass r bezel. With a SYNCHRONOME BRISBANE transfer on the dial, they sold for three pounds in 1946. The first batch of three hundred sold well and it wasn't until one came back for repair three years later that it was realised that there were only three minute marks between each hour mark!

Another interesting line was custom-made clocks , built-in, especially in suburbs like Clayfield. For example a sportsman would want a clock with the hour marks in the form of bats, or a café like the Piccadilly would want its name spelled out instead of numbers. The best one was in a bedroom ceiling where the rosette was removed and replaced by a clock! There were also synchronous public clocks with dials up to 2' using the heavy duty Smiths motor. Of course in Brisbane the electric clocks only became popular around 1930 when the mains frequency was maintained accurately. This involved the installation (by Synchronome) of frequency master clocks at New Farm Powerhouse and at the City Electric Light Company.

After World War II and the setting up of the Spring Hill operation, the company also made good profits installing imported 8-day spring driven movements, both striking and chiming, into Australian made wooden cases. The movements came from Smiths, Junghans, Mauthé, Darvelle (not good quality, according to Jock), and Elliott. The cases were made in Brisbane by Woodland Woodworks (Mr. Wayper), and in Sydney by the Oxford Case Company. They came finished and lacquered and care had to be taken to avoid damage while the movements were fitted. There were six or seven styles of mantel clocks- one was called "DEVON" and

another particularly ugly style was called "YERONGA" to annoy one of the staff who lived there. The dials and bezels and hands came with the movements and the clocks are not named on the dials. On some the case style name was rubber-stamped on the wood at the back. Synchronome also marketed a completely imported clock from Wilson and Wilson, but because there were substantial import duties on complete clocks the casing of imported movements was able to generate a good profit.

Synchronome also assembled grandfather clocks using cases by Bell Brothers and movements from Smiths, Keinzle, and Junghans. We have photographs of a number of styles including a rather elegant one with a red cedar case. They had three train weight driven movements and although they are not marked on the dials some have Synchronome stickers inside the case. Many were sold.

Bill Jackson has supplied some further information to round out the above account .

'Smiths and Son England Ltd made three different types of movements, self-starting, manual start, and a heavy duty model which was self-starting. They also made small geared motors with output speeds of 1rpm and 4rpm. These were used in process timers, football timers and industrial equipment. We converted to 110V and 12V AC. Smiths also made an electric chiming and striking movement.'

'We used many other types of movements, some of which were:

Mauthe self-start, carry-over and chiming and striking, and "Neufa", a self-start time-only movement. Some people preferred the manual start to the self-start type as they would remain stopped after a power failure whereas the self-start would restart being the length of the duration of the stoppage slow. Some had indicators to show they had stopped.'

'To overcome this problem of failure a carry-over type was made using a spring and balance wheel to drive the movement. The spring was wound by the synchronous motor and switched off when fully wound with a pair of contacts on a slipping clutch or ratchet and pawl, where the driving pawl would lift off the ratchet wheel. "Venner"

had an arrangement with a collar which would move up a threadshaft or worm, then open a pair of contacts. There was also an AC/DC movement of the non-synchronous type. The time-keeping using a balance wheel and powered by a weighted arm and a mercury switch to operate the power to lift the arm with the weight. There were troubles with the 'carry-over' type as some would not start as required. To overcome this "Mauthe" kept their balance wheel rocking by a cam from the driving motor. These are only some as many firms had their own movements in their equipment. Another type used mainly on American clocks was the "Warren" high speed motor.'
