

## AHS London Lecture Thursday 14 January 2021

### James Nye, Johann Antel: Revolutionising Time in Early-Twentieth Century Brno

In Brno, second city of the modern Czech Republic, electricity began to arrive in the 1880s with electric lighting and, in 1900, an electric tram network. A large programme of civic improvements saw public buildings rebuilt and improved. As part of this, new turret clocks were ordered for the town hall, the new railway station, and for a large central church.

The commission for all three went to a single clockmaker – a German Czech by the name of Johann Antel. But these were no classic turret clocks. Each used a powerful electric motor, engaging with the train each minute, under the direction of remote weight-driven precision master clocks.

Some parts of the installations survive – including one of the turret movements, which found its way across Eastern Europe in the latter part of the century, first to Germany, and finally to the UK. As the mechanism underwent study and repair in the early 2000s, James began travelling to the sites of the original installations in Brno, and into the town's archives, piecing together a remarkable story.

His lecture will combine an examination of Antel's innovative technology with an exploration of the life and circle of this enigmatic Czech German clockmaker, offering contextual material about the worlds of Germanic and Czech clockmaking, which were in tension in the years preceding the annexation of the Sudetenland ahead of World War Two.



Brno c.1900. Tramway work to the fore, rebuilding at St James behind – site of an Antel clock.

*Dr James Nye is Chair of the Society, and is usually known for a focus on electrical horology, to which he returns with this lecture. He is the principal sponsor and founder of the Clockworks museum in south-east London. He will be Senior Warden of the Clockmakers Company in 2021, and chairs its Collections Committee. He is an advisory editor and contributor to OUP's forthcoming General History of Horology, edited by Anthony Turner.*

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