

# TIM what a vulgar name!

---

TIM is 80 years old. The technical history of the speaking clock is too well known to THG members to be repeated here, but have you ever wondered what came before TIM?

In London a family made a living of “selling” time to businesses by the simple process of going to Greenwich Observatory and setting their Chronometer to the time signal at noon<sup>A</sup>. They then visited various jewellers, clockmaker and repairers to show them the chronometer so that they could check their regulator clock<sup>B</sup>.

The Belville family business carried on until Ruth’s retirement in 1943 (born 1854), her Father John, and Mother Maria ran the business before Ruth took over on the death of her Mother in 1892. They owned two very high quality chronometers, one by Arnold and the other by Frodsham<sup>C</sup>. The clocks were nicknamed Arnold and Charles, after their makers. Ruth died the same year she retired.

When visiting Mapping and Webb in Oxford Street she remarked to one of the assistants,

*Tim, what a vulgar name don’t you think?*<sup>D</sup>

If you want to see TIM, the British Horological Institute<sup>E</sup>, the currently have Mk I, II, and Mk III shortly being joined by an Mk IV. As David Hay, head of BT Heritage, said: “*Eighty years ago BT’s technology first created the Speaking Clock and it remains a much loved part of British life today...*” Of course, TIM was the end of Ruth Belville’s business, so I suppose she had some reason to disagree.

---

<sup>A</sup> Wikipedia Contributors, “Ruth Belville” [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth\\_Belville](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruth_Belville), accessed 05 Nov 2016.

<sup>B</sup> A regulator is an especially accurate clock, usually looking like a plain “grandfather” clock with a large sweep second hand.

<sup>C</sup> A bit like owning a Rolls Royce and a Bentley.

<sup>D</sup> Vaudrey Mercer, “*The Frodshams, the history of a family of chronometer makers*”, Antiquarian Horological Society, Ticehurst, 1981.

<sup>E</sup> <http://bhi.co.uk/>