

## Carl Zeiss Presence in London - By Thomas Antoniadis London, March 2012

This note briefly documents the presence of Carl Zeiss in London with specific emphasis on the serial numbers used.

The presence of Carl Zeiss in London dates back to the 1840's and predates the introduction of the Feldstecher binoculars in 1894. An 1897 advertisement indicates that the Feldstecher binoculars could be purchased from 29 Margaret Street London West. At that time and for a number of years the presence of Carl Zeiss in London took the form of a Branch.

For a variety of reasons it was decided to form a Limited company so as to formalise the presence in Great Britain and this was done on 2 November 1909 with the formation of Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd. The registered office of the company was at Great Castle Street in central London and its Board of Directors comprised primarily of German individuals.

The commencement of the First World War on 4 August 1914 brought about not entirely unexpected changes to the running of the company and, as a result of this; the company's directors were replaced by British individuals. Despite this change the share capital remained registered in the name of Carl Zeiss Jena.

In January 1917 a winding up notice was served on the company under the provisions of the Trading with the Enemy Act 1916. Documentation obtained by William Reid from the National Archives at Kew indicates that the business of Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd was sold by the Controller appointed by the Board of Trade to Ross Ltd on 13 June 1917. The purchase included the optical factory at Mill Hill with all the machinery and tools therein. It also included the commercial premises at 13 and 14 Great Castle Street which is adjacent and parallel to Margaret Street where Zeiss had their earliest known commercial address in London. Finally, Ross took over the ministry commercial contracts that Zeiss had been filling for the previous three years.

The binocular production at Mill Hill consisted of the 6x24 (Binocular Prismatic No 3 (Mark I or Mark II) and it appears that production was at the rate of about 50-75 per week following the takeover of the factory by Ross Ltd

Sales of binoculars to the British military commenced in 1909 with the supply of the Binocular Prismatic No 2 (Mark I or Mark II). This binocular was a 6x30 and was essentially a Silvamar. The marking "Mark I" or "Mark II" on the No 2 and later on the No 3 indicated the absence or the presence, respectively, of a graticule on the right hand side. The No 2 binoculars were marked Binocular, Prismatic (Mark I or Mark II), Magnification 6, No xxx on the left hand bottom plate and Carl Zeiss Jena 1909 and small broad arrow on the right hand bottom plate. The No xxx signified the Woolwich Arsenal acceptance number. The production serial number was placed on the rim of the lower right hand plate and was stamped into the metal.

The other binocular supplied was, as indicated above, a 6x24 and this was essentially a Telex. This was marked Binocular, Prismatic No 3 (either Mark I or Mark II), Magnification 6, No xxx on the left hand side top plate and Carl Zeiss London or, later, Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd on the right hand side top plate.

Underneath the name was a year (presumably that of production). The production serial number was now to be found on the rim of the top left hand plate and was again stamped into the metal.

In addition to sales of military binoculars a small quantity of civilian binoculars appears to have been made or assembled in London both before and during the war. These comprised almost exclusively of the models Silvamar (6x30) and Telact (8x24).

The numbering of the binoculars bearing the name Carl Zeiss London or Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd has and continues to cause confusion and this note attempts to document what is known so far.

The Table below lists information extracted from my database of Zeiss numbers and I have listed the serial numbers in chronological sequence. Where a year is given in the Table it is the one appearing on the binocular.

It should be borne in mind that both the serial numbers and 4 digit numbers were extremely small and had to be stamped onto a very narrow space on the rim. This explains why some numbers given below may not be quite right. After all it is quite easy for a "6" to be read as an "8". Where I have doubts about the numbers I have followed them by "???"

<b>Year</b>	<b>Serial Number Range</b>	<b>Other markings</b>	<b>Model</b>	<b>Acceptance number range</b>	<b>Rim number range 4 digit</b>	<b>Rim No range 6 digit</b>
	290000 to 291000	Carl Zeiss London	Silvamar			
	299000 to 299999	Carl Zeiss London	Mainly Silvamar, one Telex and one Prismatic No3			
	313000 to 313999	Carl Zeiss London	Telex –two examples and No 3 Mk I in this range			
	351000 to 351999	Carl Zeiss London	Telact –two examples in this range			
	L357000 to L357999	Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd	Telact and Silvamar and a monocular 6x			
	389000 to 389999	Carl Zeiss London	Telex-one example. Rest of range No 3 Mk I or II – see below			
1909	163900 to 167000	Carl Zeiss Jena	Binocular Prismatic No2 Mark I or Mark II	1 to 915		
Late 1911 And 1912	303000 to 304000	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	2148 to 2432		
1913	340000 to 343000	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	??810 and 3889, 3956		
1913	335000 to 335999	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I	6497 to 6672		
1913	313235 313247	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I	6735 6740		
1914	313249 313250	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	6770 8786		Some rim numbers not available

Year	Serial Number Range	Other markings	Model	Acceptance number range	Rim number range 4 digit	Rim No range 6 digit
1914	322969 389346 389423 389691 389747 346226 346132	Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	8908 to 9370		
1914		Carl Zeiss London	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	9512 to 9720	L1035 to L1111	L405361 L408785
1915 to 1916		Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	9760 to 11148	L1288 to L2291	L406038 L406057 L455823 to L456466
1916		Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	11241 to 11375	L2384 to ?????	L456559 to L456696
1916		Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd	Prismatic No3 Mark I I or Mark II	1333 to 1872	L3049 to L3472	L457108 to L457647
1917		Carl Zeiss (London) Ltd	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	3390 to 3855	L4782 to L5247	L459057 to L459822
1917		Ross,London (Mill Hill)	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	3917 to 4890A	L459584 to L460657	
1918		Ross,London (Mill Hill)	Prismatic No3 Mark I or Mark II	5041A to 5994	L460938 to L461396	

The Table highlights a large gap of nearly 2600 Acceptance numbers in the year 1913 (Between number 3956 and number 6497) and then another gap between 1913 and 1914 (Between number 6740 and number 8908) of nearly 2200 Acceptance numbers. It is of course possible that these numbers were allocated to supplies from other manufacturers. There is, otherwise, a smooth transition of numbers.

An interesting observation resulting from the preceding Table is the fact that Acceptance Numbers started once more from "1" sometime in 1916. The reason for this is not known. A note dated 8 March 1919 and written by the production manager at Mill Hill (Herr F. Loewen) after his return to Jena sheds some light on the use of the "L" prefix. (See Table above). Herr Loewen indicates in his report "Account on the plant London, Mill Hill before and during the war" that the "L" number was used because they had run out of allocated numbers. They also used the "L" prefix so that they would know where the binoculars were made in case they were returned for repair.

It can be seen from the Table that prior to the war London was allocated or used serial number batches out of the main sequence of numbers at Jena. This pattern applied to other offices such as Vienna in Austria and Győr in Hungary.

The serial number ranges listed above for the pre war years were "shared" with binoculars marked Carl Zeiss Jena with the exception of the ranges 290000 to 291000 and 299000 to 299999. My database of serial numbers contains several examples of "Jena" marked binoculars in the ranges other than these two. I cannot, however, be certain that this was indeed the case.

The numbers used during the war years are in the ranges of 405000 to 409000 and 455000 to 462000 for military binoculars and 357000 to 357999 for civilian binoculars. All were prefixed by the letter "L". An examination of my database shows that the same number ranges were also used on binoculars bearing the Carl Zeiss Jena name. They were effectively used twice. Once in the regular production run in Jena and once in London. The binoculars within the range and with Jena markings include a DF03, Telexem, Turact, Marineglas, Teleater and Turolem. Whether this additional production of 6-8,000 binoculars in London was ever added to the total number of binoculars produced may never be known.

The use of "L" begun in late 1914 whereby there would be a four digit number preceded by an "L" on the rim of the right hand upper plate and a six digit number again preceded by an "L" on the rim of the left hand upper plate.

The Table also shows that the London management used the serial numbers that roughly, but not quite, coincided with the beginning of the war and carried on using these in conjunction with the "L" and the additional four digit number. Using annual binocular production information for Jena, the range 405000 to 409000 would have dated from early 1914 whereas the range 455000 to 462000 would have dated from late 1914 and certainly after the war started. It is possible that the choice was an inspired guess as it is very doubtful whether there would have been any communication with Jena at the time. The range chosen for civilian binoculars would have dated from 1911.

It has been established that the four digit "L" numbers run in parallel with the six digit numbers but not always in parallel with the Acceptance number.

The note from Herr Loewen thus explains the mystery as to why the London numbers only reached 462,000 or so at the end of the war at a time when the Jena numbers were closer to 1,000,000.

A partial reproduction of this note follows below:

"Binoculars: When I took over the plant in the middle of April 1914 I found the quality sufficient. In particular the waterproofing was improved. After carrying out the instructions / orders from Jena there were, during the war, other orders from the Government (presumably British) which were carried out and the last numbers given were added on. There was, however, a letter "L" engraved before these numbers in order to track these binoculars if they came back to us (probably meaning back to Germany). The "Tele" office and stock department were informed about this. Shortly before the outbreak of the war we received an order by telephone to export our entire stock of binoculars to Jena. About 800 were sent but they all came back –except the first hundred- after a long time because they were stopped either in English or in Dutch ports. We had rather high expenses. Even the first one hundred do not seem to have reached Jena. The (presumably the 700) binoculars were then sold by the military department to the Woolwich Arsenal. With this, as with further consignments, we had almost no complaints." The text then continues with quality problems encountered with Bausch & Lomb binoculars. This note has attempted to bring together the various facts relating to the London office. No doubt it will soon be out of date when new information comes to light.

Thomas Antoniades

#### Acknowledgements

I am very thankful to my friend William Reid for allowing me to quote material from his article "Zeiss and Ross, London and Mill Hill", which appeared in Volume 23 of the Zeiss Historica Journal (Spring 2001) and for commenting on the finished article.

I am also thankful to my friend Thomas Mix who was the inspiration for this article and who kindly provided additional information and translated the note written by F. Loewen.