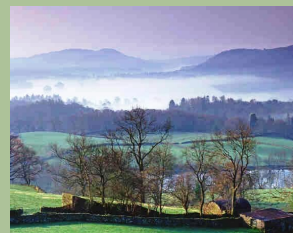


The Recorder



An Occasional Newsletter for BSS Recorders — Grange-over-Sands Edition

Our venue this year, the Cumbria Grand Hotel, stands at the southern tip of the English Lake District. Windermere, pictured above in a view from Troutbeck, is just six miles away.

Topics in this Issue

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- Favourite Devon Dials

Here our chairman, Chris Daniel, discusses a rare find. Few such non-professional dials have survived, and they enlarge our understanding of domestic life in the seventeenth century.

In early May 2008, whilst wandering through a field in Lincolnshire with a metal detector, Tom Redmayne came across a curious piece of lead in the ploughsoil of the field. Taking this home with him, he carefully cleaned it, revealing crudely engraved numerals and radiating lines that resembled a part of a sundial. Indeed, this is exactly what he had discovered. Fortunately, a few months later, whilst several members of the metal-detector group, to which Tom belonged, were looking in the same area, another part of the sundial was found by his friend David Chadwick, who generously donated the fragment to Tom. More fortunate still was the fact that this piece bore the inscribed date '1688.' Shortly after this, a further piece of the dial was found, making three fragments in all; but still with parts of the 'jigsaw' missing.

Examination of the fragments confirmed them to be the remains of a horizontal dial, cut as a 133mm (5¼ in) square dial-plate from a thin sheet of lead and crudely delineated with hour-lines from the centre of the dial, with Roman numerals denoting the hours from 4am to 8pm. The half-hours are also indicated by 'pin-hole' like indentations. The numerals lie within an hour-ring bounded by two circles, the outer circle having a radius of about 65mm. Evidence of iron oxide staining along the area of what would have been the 12 o'clock hour-line indicates that the gnomon was almost certainly made of iron, probably being triangular in shape.

A Lincolnshire Find

Determining the latitude, for which the sundial was constructed, by means of the hour-line angles, was not possible, due to the damage to the dial-plate and the distortion of

art of *dialling*, i.e. the construction of sundials, was at its zenith, instrument-makers were producing fine brass sundials, often signed by the maker and quite often dated



Photo courtesy the DPC, Greenwich

these lines. However, from the circumstances of the find, there is little reason to doubt that the instrument was manufactured locally. Likewise, from the stylistic evidence, the date of the sundial is not in question. This is clearly inscribed in the southern sector of the dial-plate as "May the 30th" with the year "1688" engraved within a rectangular box. Below this inscription there is the single letter "M," which might have been incised in error or which might have been an intentional monogram.

In the 17th century, when the

with the year of manufacture. Thus, this Lincolnshire sundial is rare in the fact that it is made of lead rather than brass and that the date is crudely inscribed in such a fulsome manner. This suggests that the sundial was commissioned to commemorate a particular occasion, probably a death, by someone who was not well placed to afford a fine brass instrument. Nevertheless, this individual was evidently sufficiently well educated to be able to delineate the dial, or he knew someone who was able to do this.

Ex Google semper aliquid novi

Google cars may not be welcome in country villages, but no one can object to their capturing images of dials like these. Patrick Powers browses the internet to good effect!

Not everyone is what might be called a computer 'buff' but it has to be said that despite the many pitfalls waiting to strike a novice computer user, there are many advantages for the modern diallist. Access to the BSS website glossary has surely to be one and being able to search your own CD-ROM copy of the 2005 Register must be another. But now, following the inauguration of Google Street View a new one has emerged.

At the time of its UK announcement in March 2009 the major streets of some twenty five UK cities had been photographed by Google and the images added to their excellent mapping system.

Although the system is by no means complete it does allow a user of Google Maps to move



John Knox's House in Edinburgh SRN 2069 (<http://tinyurl.com/dxpenr>)



The Seven Dials column in London, SRN 0004, (<http://tinyurl.com/dcwxey>)



The dial at 3 Mulberry Walk London, SRN 3778 (<http://tinyurl.com/djth3>)

down the main streets of a photographed town or city and take a look at the buildings as they are passed. Some of our best dial heritage is on buildings that have been photographed

and it is fun to see what dials can be located and sometimes even to move closer in to see a little of their detail.

The Noel Ta'Bois Collection — A Tale of Three Tails

Tony Wood, our Mass Dial Registrar, has been sorting through a mountain of slides.



The Brookbrae Cat Dial

The late Noel C Ta'Bois preceded our Chairman Chris Daniel as the monthly contributor to the Sundial Page in *Clocks* magazine.

His articles were based on extensive recording of both sundials and mass dials around the country. Surprisingly, there are a very large number of mass dial pictures amongst the photographs. Consequently, as Mass Dial Registrar, over 1000 35 mm colour slides came my way. Fortunately they were all carefully boxed and indexed and the Mass Dial slides are now being transferred to CD.

The slides of scientific dials are now with John Foad and will enhance the Fixed Dial Register with many pictures where we now have none.

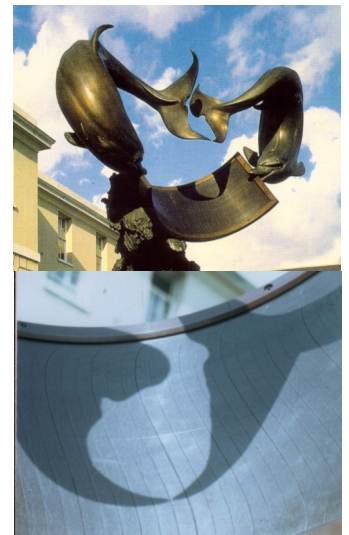
Then, out of the blue, came a further packet of Noel's slides, this time from Pat Briggs, a fellow Meccano enthusiast. This was a mixture of sundials and mass dials and confirmed

that Noel must have spent all his spare time looking for dials in the early 1980s, all in glorious sunshine!

Amongst this latest collection were two of particular interest - perhaps providing a link with Noel's *Clocks* successor - two dolphins and a cat!

The dolphins are the well known ones at Greenwich and here is a photo of them in action, providing the little gap between their tails to tell the time. It all works beautifully.

The other dial is tantalizingly labelled '*****' and features a black cat whose tail forms the gnomon. The dial is by Brookbrae and is a simple attractive design. Why Brookbrae chose a black ground for some of their dials is a question no doubt future archaeologists will puzzle over. When we look at the location shot we see the cat high up on the wall and also a most unusual noon mark formed by a flagpole and window mullion, the noon



SRN 2157, Greenwich

mark also appearing on the ledge above the window - so it all looks intentional.

All another mystery perhaps; fortunately now in the hands of John Foad, our Sundial Registrar!

The Welsh Language on Sundials

Recording the Welsh language on sundials is not a major task as there are few known dials with Welsh inscriptions.

There is a newscutting on this from a Welsh paper of 1921, inserted in a 1927 manuscript in the National Library of Wales (Harris-Williams 1927). A correspondent expresses surprise at the apparent rarity of Welsh mottoes on dials. He asks "Were our forebears in Wales so imbued with the classic spirit that they would have nothing but Greek or Latin on their sundials, or is the Welsh language not suitable for gentle moralisings on the flight of time?"

The present recorder has seen many dials in Wales with Latin or English mottoes but none in Greek, and few in Welsh. Searching the BSS register has produced three, and reports elsewhere bring the grand total to five.



SRN 2736

The best one is the fine vertical painted dial on St Cybi's Church, Holyhead (SRN 2736) which has recently been restored (illustrated above). Mrs Gatty (1900) included the motto in her collection and had been informed it was written by a sixth century Welsh bard:

YR HOEDL ER HYD EI HAROS
ADDERFYDD YN NYDD AC YN NOS
("Man's life, though be prolonged it may,
Draws to its close by night by day")

There is a Welsh inscription around the edge of the pedestal of the dial in the quadrangle of Bangor University (SRN 4351, illustrated alongside):

HED AMSER
MEDDI NA!
ERYS AMSER
DYN A
"Time goes
You say - no!
Time stays
Man goes."

Harris-Williams saw it in 1923 and described a "bronze crescent sundial," but this has clearly been replaced. Interestingly, the replacement octagonal dialplate, while not incorporating a motto, does include some Welsh language. The graph for the EOT has "add" and "subtract" in English and Welsh ("adio" and "tynnu") and the initials of the months are also in English and Welsh.

A third one in the BSS register is also in Gwynedd (SRN 2205) and dates from 1816. See the register for the Welsh motto, (no translation yet!).

Another dial with a Welsh inscription is mentioned in Gatty. However, when it was seen by Harris-Williams in 1922 it was broken and the stone was inside the church at Whitford in Flintshire. Happily, it is still there, waiting to be photographed for the BSS register. His drawing shows it to have been a direct south vertical dial showing the latitude, and he quotes the following motto:

GWEL DDYN MEWN GWIW LAN DDEUNYDD
MAE FFO HEB DARIO MAE'R DYDD
("Behold oh man, the day
It flieth without tarrying").

Sadly, the last one has recently been stolen from its pedestal in a North Wales churchyard near Colwyn Bay. The dial was officially listed in 1997, although the inscription was by then illegible. It was dated 1731 and its rare Welsh motto was recorded by Harris-Williams:

MAE'R HAUL AC AMSER AR EU HYNT
YN MYNED RHAGDDYNT CEUNYDD
GWNA DDYN DY ORCHWYL HEB YMDROI
MAE RHAIN YN RHOI I TI RYBYDD
NI BYDDI YN DY OES FEL AWR A DDERFYDD
HIR YN RHODIO'R LLAWR
("Sun and time on their course
Between them move for ever
Man, see to your task without delay
For those two give you warning
That you will not be long on earth
Like an hour you will end").

Are there really so few sundial mottoes in Welsh? And are they only to be found in North Wales? It is doubtful.



SRN 4351

Members are urged to look hard and record any new finds to the BSS Registrar.

Dr Irene Brightmer muses on the paucity of Welsh inscriptions. Surely more wait to be found?

Is there Honey Still for Tea?



SRN 3248, Benthall

Biblical quotations abound on dials, but one which I had not seen before was that favourite of all lovers of golden syrup, 'Out of the Strong Came Forth Weakness' (from Samson's riddle at his marriage feast, Judges xiv 14). It can be found on the slate dial at St

Bartholomew's Church in Benthall, Shropshire (SRN 3248). Beneath the carved quotation across the top, hardly visible in this picture, a hole in the slate reveals a realistic human eye in coloured mosaic tiles. Does anyone know the significance of this? The original dial dates from 1893, but a new plate was made in 1961. The maker must have learned more about what lies behind, but church records are silent on the matter.

Below the dial, and separate from it, we find the reason for the motto. A small stone is carved in the form of the grotesque snarling head of Samson's lion. Between its open jaws, bees fly in and out, nesting in the wall behind. There is a long association of bees with St Bartholomew, and his feast day, August 24th, coincides with the time of gathering of

the honey crop. We have many other dials in the Register on churches dedicated to St Bartholomew, but none of them, I think, show any connection with this tradition.

However, another dial housing bees can be found, this time at St Mary's Church in Witnesham, Suffolk (SRN 3328). Arthur Mee, writing in 1941 in his *King's England* series, said of this church: "The embattled tower, with an 18th century sundial, flows with honey in summer. From time immemorial bees have hived behind its sundial, and we were told that in the time of the harvest of the bees, when the flowers are flooded with nectar, the over-charged combs overflow on the benches in the tower".

On a hot September day, the cool dark interior of the little church of St Thomas at Harty on the Isle of Sheppey, is also alive with the sound of bees and the smell of their honey. But that, and its mass dial, is a story for another time.



SRN 3328, Witnesham

And finally - Favourite Devon Dials — John Lester's Choice

1. St. Michael & All Angels, Marwood. (1762). Some would call it Jn^o Berry's masterpiece. Declination lines showing hours of daylight, 11 noon place names, sun's azimuth. SRN 0081
2. St. Peter, Tawstock. (1757). Even better. All that Marwood has plus boundaries of 6 astrological houses. Wonderful valley setting. Berry could monopolise this list! SRN 0087
3. Holy Trinity, Milton Damerel. (1808). A forthright dial typical of its era. For once the rector has managed to get his name above those of the churchwardens. Deep clear engraving. SRN 0096
4. St. Mary, Buckland Filleigh. (1727). Beautiful parkland setting. Roman numerals use 'anticlockwise convention' but the most memorable feature is the churchwarden's name – Humphrey Chugge. SRN 2997
5. St. James, Bondleigh. (1706). Wonderfully ornate despite the engraver having to double up the left hand inner border because he hasn't got the dial plate central on the slate. SRN 0099
6. Eastacombe Farm, Clawton. (1737). Small but interesting. Three separate hour scales – for Clawton, Jerusalem & "Barbado". Twelve place names. SRN 6062
7. SS Peter & Paul, Ermington. (1766). Beautifully engraved even though the engraver has elided two words of the motto and still had to abbreviate the last one. SRN 0371
8. St. Mary, Diptford. (1694). A pediment of three discs surmounts this dial, a design peculiar to South Devon and Cornwall. It is mounted askew on the porch. SRN 0104
9. St. Andrew, Harberton. (1855). Mrs Crowley thought this dial 'complicated and uninteresting' and didn't draw it. A surprising omission – it even has transversals. SRN 0376
10. Ottery St. Mary. (2001). In the hospital grounds, a fine reclining dial by Ben Jones. Its plate is tilted so that it can be read from the nearby pathway. SRN 5654



SRN 0087—Tawstock