

The Recorder

Issue 8 April 2010

An Occasional Newsletter for BSS Recorders — Exeter Edition

Telling Time in Tyttenhanger...

This year we are at the University of Exeter, staying at Holland Hall on the Streatham Campus, high above the City, whose Coat of Arms is shown above.

Topics in this Issue

- A new Stained Glass dial
- The 'Cast Courts' at the V&A
- Words, words, words
- Something new?
- Very Wearing
- A Piece of Cake
- Favourite Yorkshire Dials

AND ...

2010 REGISTER (see below)
DIGITAL INPUT (see page 2)

REGISTER 2010

A new edition of the Fixed Dial Register is planned for later this year. It will be in the same format as the 2005 edition, but with over 800 new dials and photographs. If you are interested, please complete the form that you will find in the Conference Pack. It will not commit you to purchase, but it will help me to find the best deal for printing.

Well, no not really – we just like alliterative headlines! However this story does involve 'time telling of old' with the discovery of a hitherto unrecorded stained glass sundial.

Chris Daniel has long had a great interest in the stained glass dials of the British Isles and he and Ian Butson found in the 1910 edition of the *The Royal Commission of Historical Monuments, Inventory of Historical Monuments in Hertfordshire* a mention of an otherwise unrecorded sundial at Tyttenhanger House, a house now used as commercial offices.

Its presence had been omitted from the 1950s English Heritage inventory for the house – it being simply reported as 'Heraldic Glass'. Even Pevsner failed to note the dial in 1977.

Ian and Chris each contacted the building's owners for permission to view without success, but then Ian 'Super Sleuth' Butson discovered that despite the reluctance regarding visitors there was to be an Open Day organised by St Albans District Council on the last weekend of January 2010. It was the eighth so-called '*Residents First*' opening, but open only to Council Tax payers of the District and then only via a voucher and timed tours.

Well, never underestimate the tentacles of the BSS!! It was swiftly realised that Patrick Powers is a St Albans Council Tax payer, and he was immediately detailed off



to attend the Open Day.

Let's set aside the fact that it snowed that day, that an unnecessary trip had to be made to St Albans on market day to collect a later unneeded voucher and that what had been advertised as a 30 minute tour of the house eventually took over 90 minutes. Our team stayed the course, eventually emerging with several photographs of a hitherto unrecorded, old but memorable stained glass sundial.

Yes, it is mounted in a frame

as a sort of 'suncatcher' in front of a north facing window and it is also mounted back to front! But it is a lovely, previously unknown, stained glass dial properly designed for the declination of the front façade and dating back to about 1675. In the picture here, it has been reversed to show its correct orientation.

A rare discovery of a lovely dial brought about by cooperation between several BSS Members. That is exactly what *BSS Dial Recording* is all about.

PP

Next Time you are in London.....

Dr Irene Brightmer has found valuable records in an unexpected location.

..... take a look in the amazing 'Cast Courts' at the Victoria and Albert Museum. This may not be where you would expect to see some of Britain's earliest sundials, but there they are! I am told that the V&A was not included in the BSS Museums Survey and so you will not see these in the soon-to-be-published BSS monograph. But you will find one of them in the BSS register and the other will be included in the forthcoming register of mass dials.

A visit to Kensington will save you journeys to northern Cumbria and Kent. For within a few yards of one another you can see both the Saxon dial on the 7th century Bewcastle Cross (if you look up!), and a very fine and probably early mass dial (plus several others of poorer quality) on the Norman doorway of the church in Barfreestone, Kent. The original cross with the dial is in St Cuthbert's churchyard at Bewcastle (SRN 0390), 25 miles northeast of Carlisle. It may be the earliest dial in Britain.

St Nicholas, Barfreestone is a small but very remarkable church, off the beaten track in



St Nicholas, Barfreestone, Kent
SRN 4390

Kent, but the Norman carving is of superior quality, hence the inclusion of a cast of the south doorway in the gallery. It has been suggested that the 12th century masons at Canterbury Cathedral practised their skills here, hence the quality of the workmanship in a remote rural parish church.

Plaster casts of notable monuments and buildings, or sections of them, mainly in Western Europe, were made during the 19th century and were in great demand from major international museums. Many of the casts have subse-

quently been dispersed, destroyed or lost, so that the V&A now holds the greatest collection anywhere.

It occurs to me that these casts may provide a tool for monitoring the degree of weathering of the dials over the past century or more, by comparing the present state of the originals with their indoor casts. The feasibility of this could initially be attempted, with permission, on the Barfreestone mass dial. V&A records would need to be consulted for the precise date when the casts were made.

Meanwhile, perhaps more casts of British sundials are waiting to be identified, even in museums beyond our shores?



The dial from Bewcastle Cross

DIGITAL INPUT

Trials have started for sending Dial Reports by email, with digital photographs attached. If you would like to take part, and send your next report in this way, please drop me an email for the necessary format.

One of the pleasures for a Registrar comes, in your reports, from the language of architecture. A picture may



Thomas Tompion's dial of
1709, at Bath
SRN 2492

be worth a thousand words, but still we need to describe

Terminology

dials and their setting, and the right words achieve this with concision. I delight in such words as *Corbel*, a supporting arm or shelf; *Pediment*, the triangular 'hat' on top of a range of pillars, or sometimes on top of a rectangular dial - and not as I would have thought, the base; *Entasis*, the slight swelling of a column to counteract the instinct of the eye to see it as waisted; *Entablature*, the work above the capital of a column; *Spandrel*, the corners of a square around the enclosed circle, often decorated; *Cartouche*, a scroll or tablet enclosing an inscription; and my favourite,



SRN 6158, at Ribbesford,
H&W — a well-spalled dial!

really from the field of botany, *Fimbriated*, irregularly fringed, as on the gnomons shown above.

When your reports come in, I always have John Davis's Sundial Glossary to hand - and my dictionary!

A New Class of Sundial?

The story goes that a researcher in the arcane field of numerical taxonomy received a reply from his computer; 'Congratulations, you have discovered a new phylum'.

One day perhaps, meanwhile a new class, or maybe sub-class, of sundial has been noted.

It is a variation on the direct south vertical dial (but could be extended to declining dials also). It consists of a horizontal string of numerals across which falls the shadow of a gnomon placed above. The layout is relatively simple, just extending all the hour lines of an 'ordinary vertical' onto the bottom side of the usual 'construction square'. So, instead of X XI XII I II III appearing horizontally, the extended range of VII VIII IX X XI XII I II III IIII (or IV) V can appear. The VI am to VI pm line being horizontal through the gnomon root, these times go off to infinity and cannot be represented.

In practice, although the delineation is simply achieved, the close spacing around noon and the large spacing at early morning and late evening requires a lot of wall. Consequently examples are few and far between but the examples below have been reported. They must be reckoned as early variants tried and then the usual square layout being usually preferred, being more economical in use of space and also indicating 6 am and 6 pm.



SRN 5106, Stanton Lacy, Shropshire,
Church of St Peter

A string from around 9 or 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. in Roman numerals, now quite difficult to pick out but there are two holes above in the right place where a gnomon should be.



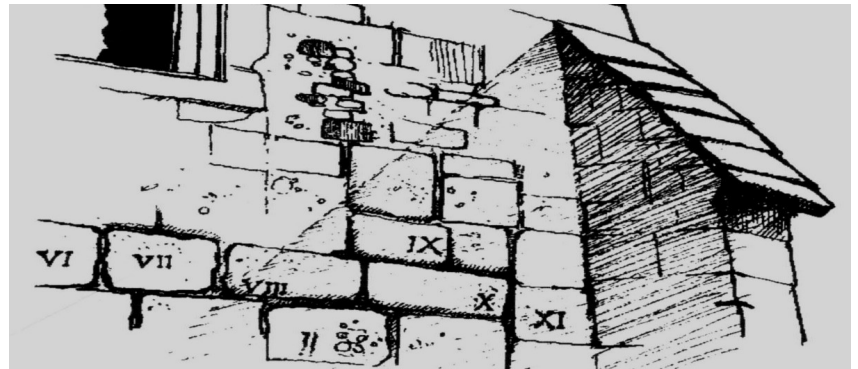
SRN 6952, Leigh, Worcestershire
Church of St Edburga

A string from 7 a.m. to 1 p.m. in Roman numerals, the VII being on a buttress angle and a stonework course higher than the other numerals. Again quite difficult to pick out but the surviving gnomon is a clear marker.



Sapperton, Gloucestershire
Church of St Kenelm

A string from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. on the west wall, almost certainly moved in re-building and separated from any adjacent string. Quite low down and easy to find.



MDR 1132, Branscombe, Devon,
St Winfred

An interesting precursor occurs here, where the coping stone of a buttress casts a shadow over a series of Roman numerals carved along the south wall from 6 a.m. to 11 a.m. (fig.4). The coping angle and south wall aspect combine to give an indicated time which cannot be very accurate over the year.

This latter dial is actually recorded with both the Fixed Sundial and Mass Dial Registers – we must leave the gnomonic taxonomy of the above dials to the experts!



Finally, a string of numbers can be found along the interior north wall at St Andrew's Church, Dalton le Dale in Durham (SRN 1082). In spite of a notice about the 'sundial' I cannot fit it into the class being described here.

*Our Mass Dial Registrar,
Tony Wood, speculates
about a new class of dials—
the horizontal band!*

Most Eroded?

Erosion on stone dials takes many forms, from light wear to complete destruction, from a little weathering to illegibility, by means of flattening to spalling, flaking and pitting – the ways of describing it are many.



Is this a contender for the most 'pitted' dial in the country? Where is it? – at Pitington (Durham, SRN 0840), of course! Last recorded in 2006. At least the gnomon is still good!

CONTACT

To contact me, whether about digital input, the 2010 Register, or any other matter, please email

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I am always glad to have news of a new dial or a new sighting, or to supply further details that we may hold of currently registered dials.

A Piece of Cake

In the December Bulletin (p 33) John Davis showed some mouth-watering sundial cakes. They reminded me of a delightful official report sent in by John Lester a few years ago:

Dial Type:	Vert (S), but usually horizontal
Location:	In the pantry
Condition:	Half eaten
Materials:	Rich fruit cake and icing
Furniture:	'Happy Birthday'
Remarks:	Restoration unlikely



As John D remarked at the time - the dial presumably shows temporary hours!

And finally, from the County of Broad Acres – Robert Sylvester's choice

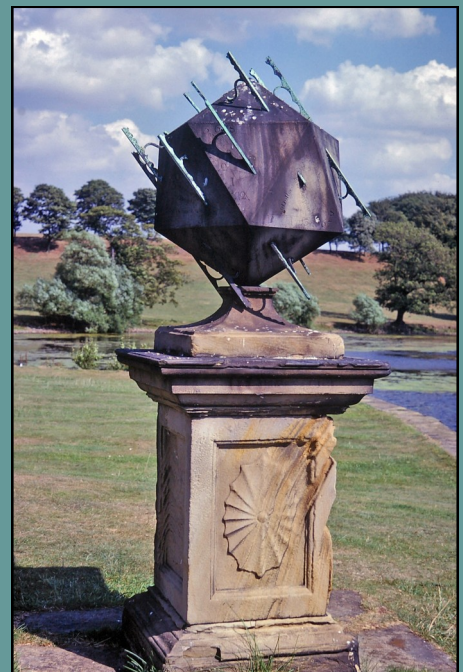
A Yorkshireman by birth, Robert is constantly surprised by the dials he failed to spot when he was growing up at his native Wakefield.

Things just did not get any better when he moved east, as forty years ago he completely overlooked the Saxon dial inside the church at Aldbrough near Hull when he was getting married.

Perhaps he had other things on his mind on that occasion!

He hopes that in later years he has remedied such omissions.

1. **Wakefield** – George Boulby's icosahedral dial at Walton Hall, SRN 0167
2. **Wakefield** – A declining dial high on Barclay's Bank, SRN 3999
3. **Leeds** – Vertical dial with Biblical motto at St. John's Church, SRN 0257
4. **Bingley** – Locally made vertical dial on All Saints' Church, SRN 0679
5. **Otley** – Double Polar Mean Time dial by Christopher Daniel, SRN 2124
6. **Cullingworth** – Vertical dial on former Methodist Chapel, SRN 1830
7. **Kirkby Moorside** – Saxon dial with lengthy inscription, in church porch SRN 0320
8. **Seaton Ross** – Massive dial on farmhouse front, SRN 2223
9. **Aldbrough** – Saxon dial inside the nave of St. Bartholomew's Church
10. **Ripon** – Slightly declining dial, well restored and at the Cathedral, SRN 2626



SRN 0167 Walton Hall