

# RE-IMAGINING THE PEWTERERS' GLASS SUNDIAL

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A recent refurbishment of the Pewterers' Company Hall in Oat Lane, London EC2, has helped to show off the glass sundial the Company commissioned a decade or so ago from the Sussex firm of Opus Stained Glass. It bears the Company's arms on a pediment, and the dial face is enlivened with a spider attacking a fly (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. The Pewterers' Company dial ...

The dial is a fairly freehand copy of one originally made for the Company in the mid-17th century. The old dial survived a devastating fire at the Old Hall in 1840, and was illustrated in black-and-white (Fig. 2) in Charles Welch's *History of the Pewterers' Company*, published in 1902.<sup>1</sup> (Welch does not refer to the dial in his text, and seems to have had little idea of its date, since he places it in his first volume, among glazing records from the end of the 15th century.) The dial itself is understood to have gone into

store at the outbreak of the Second World War, and been destroyed along with other Company property in December 1940 when an air raid struck the Army and Navy depository in Chiswick.

The original dial was almost certainly made when the Company was rebuilding its former hall in Lime Street, London EC3, following the Great Fire of 1666. Several of the City Companies, including the Weavers and Girdlers, commissioned glass sundials around this time to grace their new buildings. The Pewterers seem to have employed Richard Dutton, who lived in Holborn, just outside the area devastated by the Fire, and did much of his work for the nearby Inns of Court and Chancery. The regular glazing of the new hall was entrusted to two established City glaziers, Samuel Rainger and John Odell, and the Company Accounts show several payments to them. But those for the year 1669–70 have this additional entry:

Paid Mr Dutton painting glass as p[er] receipt      £6 12s.



Fig. 2. ... and its 17th-century model.

Although there is no specific mention of a dial, it is likely to have been included in this payment. Dutton was an obvious choice, since his late father-in-law, Baptist Sutton, had been a pioneer of glass dials in London, and had painted coats of arms for the Pewterers' old hall back in 1659/60:

Paid Mr Sutton for ye painting glass in ye new parlour  
 3 Coates of Armes & repairing ye glass in ye hall  
 £7 10s

The new dial is designed to fit against a pane in an existing window, and its aspect ratio has evidently been modified to achieve this. It was clearly not intended to be a working dial, and it lacks the gnomon which the original dial would have had attached to its external face, sloping downwards and outwards from a point in the centre of the sun depicted at the top of the central area. This part of the face would have been painted behind with a white or pale-grey matt, in



Fig. 4. Suggested reconstruction of the old Pewterers' dial and surround.



Fig. 3. Dial made by Baptist Sutton for Sir Thomas Barrington MP (photo: John Davis).

order to catch the shadow of the gnomon, while eliminating any distracting view of the outside world. The hour lines and other dial details have been painted in imitation of the original – the fact that it shows six hours before noon but only four after midday tells us that the original was designed to face several degrees east of due south – an orientation unlikely to be replicated exactly in its new home. Although the dial details have been copied reasonably faithfully, the light-and-dark scale showing the quarter-hours on the sides of the inner field should have been continued across the bottom edge – its equivalent on the original dial may have been hidden thanks to a repair at some stage using slightly thicker lead strips (comes).

In its general layout, Dutton's dial is similar to a dial made by his father-in-law Baptist Sutton a few years earlier for the London home of a prominent MP, Sir Thomas Barrington – which also features a spider and fly (Fig. 3).<sup>2</sup>

But there are differences too – the Barrington dial was all painted on a single sheet of glass, whereas the Pewterers' dial was made up from nine different pieces, each separately leaded-up. This prompts the question whether the dial as illustrated by Charles Welch in 1902 was complete in itself, or whether it formed part of a larger decorative glazing scheme. The prominent classical pediment at the top, bearing the Company arms, seems oddly incomplete – it cries out to be extended on either side, with columns or other architectural devices to support their 'weight'. Classical architecture was in vogue at the time, with Wren and his colleagues about to embark on the rebuilding of St Paul's Cathedral and dozens of city churches. Glass painters regularly used prints as their source material, and it would have been a simple matter for Richard Dutton to acquire a print showing a Greek or Roman temple and use it as a template.

So, as an experiment, I downloaded the most basic temple design I could find to see how it might be made to fit. It had four pillars arranged symmetrically, and once I had embedded the Welch photo at its heart, I needed only to raise the floor a little, and shift the two inner pillars outwards, to achieve a fairly harmonious design. What seemed to be lacking was something to lift the dial off the floor. At this point I happened upon a previously unnoticed description of the Pewterers' dial, which appeared in 1803 in Volume III of James Peller Malcolm's *Londinium Redivivum* – an august work of local history. Malcolm's brief description of the old Pewterers' Hall in Lime Street contains these words:

*“There is an old carving above the door, representing a crown over a red rose, T.G. a ship on a globe, and the sun rising, inscribed, ‘Si Deus pro nobis, quis contra nos?’*

*And in a window a dial of painted glass, ‘Sic Vita’, with a spider and fly crawling on it; and the Company’s arms, under a little pediment: Azure, on a chevron, between three cross-bars Argent; as many roses Gules: ‘In God is all our trust’ ”.*<sup>3</sup>

The last six words are of course a brief paraphrase of the company motto “If God be for us, who can be against us”, as given in Latin over the door. But why quote them here unless they appeared on the dial (Fig. 4)?

Malcolm's description strongly suggests that Dutton's original dial of 1669–70 may have contained a second text, and where better to place it than across the bottom of my very tentative reconstruction?

## REFERENCES

1. C. Welch: *History of the Worshipful Company of Pewterers of the City of London*, London, Blades East & Blades (2 vols, 1902). The dial is illustrated in Vol. I, opposite p. 73.
2. J. Davis: ‘The “Lost” Barrington stained glass dial rediscovered’, *BSS Bulletin*, 21(ii), p.12 (June 2009).
3. J.P. Malcolm: *Londinium Redivivum, or, An Antient History and Modern Description of London* Vol. III, p. 440, London (1803).

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