

SUNDIAL SUPPORTERS REVISITED

ROGER BOWLING

Ten years ago I described¹ some life sized 18th century figures cast in lead and supporting sundials on their heads. I called these, not pedestals but 'sundials supporters'. They were the first mass-produced garden ornaments and six types were sold; two versions of a blackamoor, two versions of Father Time, an Indian, and one which has never yet been found, Hercules. The figures are attributed to the sculptor John Nost (Jan van Ost) or to his one time associate Andries Carpentiere, or to John Cheere who purchased John Nost's stock and carried on selling them using his moulds.

In the intervening years, nine more figures have come to light together with more information on the history of some of them. This article is acknowledgement and thanks to the several BSS members, and two non members, who have found, recorded and told me of them. Their names appear in this article so I thank them all and apologise for any missing. Three of the figures were originally wrongly identified, so I have included here the key characteristics of each. All are made of lead but most appear to have been painted so may look like marble if white or bronze if shiny brown.

The Old Blackamoor wears a feather skirt, kneels on his left knee and looks to the left. It is attributed to John Nost or John Cheere.



Chris Daniel

Fig. 1. *The Old Blackamoor, Wiltshire.*

1. Wiltshire. SRN 3802. (Fig. 1) Recorded by Chris Daniel. Painted a shiny brown so it appears to be bronze.
2. West Green House, Hartley Witney, Hants. SRN 4368. I first noticed this in a gardening magazine. It was also recorded by John Davis and Andrew James.
3. Dallam Tower, Milnthorpe, Cumbria. SRN 3978. Recorded by Robert Sylvester after information from Peter Cooper, a non-member. Dallam Tower was built in 1604 and the sundial appeared about 1720. The uncle of the present owner, in a moment of revelry, shot the figure and the gun is still in the house. The actual dial is corroded, but the figure is in good condition, apart from the bullet holes which were repaired in 1983.
4. Yale University, Connecticut, USA. Now lost. The blackamoor figure, representing America, was supposed to be a Red Indian which, with the Asian Indian and other figures never made, was part of a set believed to have been intended to represent the continents. An Indian figure was set up at Hampton Court in 1702, but two months later William III died and no more figures followed so that was the end of the project; anyhow that is the story. In 2001, Fred Sawyer bid in an internet auction for some postcards as one was of Elihu Yale's garden at Glemham Hall, Suffolk, with a sundial in the centre of the photograph. Elihu Yale was the founder of Yale University. Fred did not win the bid but later managed to purchase the card from the buyer. I had already listed in my first article a blackamoor figure with dial once at Glemham Hall, now lost. Fred sent me a photograph of about 1940 of the dial in a courtyard of Johnathan Edwards College, Yale, in excellent condition. This blackamoor must therefore have travelled with Elihu Yale back to his home, all the way to America, but now he is lost again and there appears no record of his present whereabouts.
5. Painswick Hall, Gloucestershire. In 2007, three BSS members (John Davis, Harriet James and Tony Wood) visited Painswick Hall and met the owner. In the house was a painting, a landscape of the house and gardens in 1748 by Thomas Robins (fig. 2). They were very sharp eyed to notice on the painting the tiny figure of a blackamore with dial on the lawn. John photographed the painting and it shows what I think is the old blackamoor on a square tiered plinth of the correct shape. A different pedestal now occupies the plinth.



John Davis

Fig. 2. *The gardens, Painswick Hall, 1748 (detail). Thomas Robins. The painted figure is less than 10mm high.*

The Young Blackamoor wears a feather skirt, kneels on his right knee and looks to the right. His face is also younger but he does not look any happier. Attributed to Andries Carpentiere. Surprisingly, no more of these figures have appeared, either new ones or records of lost ones. There must have been far fewer produced than the old version, despite the fact that the old version seems to have been very popular: maybe Andries Carpentiere charged more.



B.G. Kirkman

Fig. 3. *The Indian, Pine Lodge Gardens, Cornwall.*

The Indian. Wears a loin cloth and turban. Attributed to John Nost

1. Pine Lodge Gardens, St. Austell, Cornwall. SRN 5145, (fig. 3). Recorded by B.G. Kirkman, a non-member. This is only the second Indian figure supporting a dial to appear, although there is a third at Melbourne Hall, Derbys. supporting a salver and urn.



Tony Wood

Fig. 4. *Father Time, Type 1, Flaxley Abbey, Gloucs.*

Father Time 1 has wings and a beard, and holds the dial with both hands. Attributed to Nost and Cheere.

1. Flaxley Abbey, Gloucestershire. SRN 3181, (fig. 4). Recorded by Tony Wood. The only other figure like this is at Blair Castle, Tayside.

Father Time 2 has wings and a beard, and holds the dial with one hand. Attributed to Nost and Cheere. Ian Butson has provided more information about this figure. I previously noted it from a London saleroom catalogue of 1986 which stated it to be from St Osyth Priory, Essex. Ian has found a better photograph from a small book, *Essex Curiosities* by Derek Johnson, and another catalogue, the four day sale of the contents of the Priory in 1920. This lists three dials; one "A fine XVII cent. cast lead figure of Time supporting a sundial, 3' 6" high on a square stone base". In fact it is 18th century and is life size. Clearly, in 1920 the figure did not sell or the new owners decided to keep it at the Priory until 1986. Its present location is still not known.

The above two versions of Father Time are lead figures usually attributed to John Nost, not to be confused with the three stone figures also attributed to him which I described in a later article, which also included versions by other sculptors.² Illustrations of some of these can also be found in another article.³ Those members who attended the BSS Conference in Cambridge may have seen the fine figure of Father Time in the gardens at Anglesey Abbey but, for those who didn't, a photo by David Le Conte appears on p.87 of the *June Bulletin*.

A Father Time figure in stone. Fawley Court, Henley on Thames, Oxon. (fig. 5). Recorded by Ian Butson. I mentioned the figure in the second of my articles, a poor picture of which I found in *Garden Ornament* by Gertrude Jekyll, 1918. There was no attribution or location given. I did not



Ian Butson

Fig. 5. 'Would you want this man in your garden?', *Father Time*, Fawley Court, Henley, Oxon.

provide a photograph as I had only a very poor print. I noted that the figure was strange, nothing like the others, which show a stern Father Time looking down at the dial on a plinth; this man is evil, cadaverous, cringing and seemingly insisting that he shows you the time. I have not had to alter my opinion. After 90 years he has been rediscovered by Ian at Fawley Court, Near Henley, Oxon. The dial is a poor, broken, modern thing. There is no record of where the figure was before its present location or how long it has been at Fawley Court.

Fawley Court was designed by Christopher Wren and built in 1683. Grinling Gibbons and James Wyatt both had a

hand in the decoration of the house and 'Capability' Brown in the design of the park. In 1953 it was bought by the Polish Congregation of Marian Fathers and it now houses a large collection and exhibition of Polish history. It is open to the public on certain days. The Fathers have no knowledge of the sundial's history; presumably it was there in 1953.

In the ten years since my first articles, five new figures have been found. Two further figures, the present locations not known, have been noted and one of these may be in America. A little more information has come to light on one figure that should still be in the country and a stone Father Time dial has reappeared after 90 years. The total of extant lead figures now stands at fourteen but two of these do not carry sundials. There were in 1997 fifteen lost dials, with past locations known. Of these, one reappeared in 1940, at Yale University, only to become lost again. There has been no sighting of the lost Hercules figure even though he existed up to about 1950. Of the life-size or larger stone or Coade stone Father Time figures, I listed seven. The whereabouts of two were unknown, but one has reappeared. It is satisfying when one's small effort bear fruit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REFERENCES

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2. R. Bowling: 'Sundial Supporters Part 2', *Bull BSS*, **97.2**, pp.45-47 (1997).
3. J. Wall: 'Old Father Time', *Bull BSS*, **13**(iii), pp.92-96 (2001).

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Following on from Piers Nicholson's article on Noon Cannons on pp. 9-10 of this issue, Chris Daniel has supplied a picture of a solar cannon being fired at the Palais Royale Gardens in Paris. It is taken from the English edition of M. Arago's *L'Astronomie Populaire* (Popular Astronomy), c.1870.

Since the gun fires (theoretically) at solar noon, we hope that the French gentleman has already consulted an Equation of Time table before checking the accuracy of his watch!