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## THE *MERIDIES MEDIA* GREENWICH NOON DIAL

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Members of this Society may recall the article which I wrote concerning the history of the *Meridies Media* noon mark sundial, designed in 1967 by Dr Tadeusz Przykowski, the noted Polish sundial authority. This dial had been commissioned by the National Maritime Museum at Greenwich for installation on the south wall of the Meridian Building of what was then the Old Royal Observatory (ORO). At this time, these buildings were an integral part of the Museum and Dr Przykowski had been commissioned to produce designs for seven other dials, to enhance the walls of Flamsteed House.

I was a relatively junior member of the Museum staff at this time, having joined the Department of Navigation & Astronomy in 1964. In 1967, I had been given direct curatorial responsibility for the Museum's extensive sundial collection, which was on display in Flamsteed House, which was then the only ORO building open to the public. Needless to say, when Dr Przykowski's sundial was set in place, I had been given the task of supervising this work. Whilst the designer had specified that the dial should be made of green marble, the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works, who constructed the sundial, made it out of wood. As it happened, no one that I know of had seen a dial of this kind before and, as previously related, I discovered that

*The re-created Meridies Media noon mark. The picture was taken at 13:00 BST on 10 October when the sun conveniently appeared through the clouds, having earlier appeared for observing the noon crossing of the central line.*



the design was back to front! In 1969, the dial was duly rectified and repainted; but it was Przykowski's unfortunate mistake and the solving of this problem which was the principal cause of my interest in sundials and my later involvement in sundial design.

In about the year 1991, Przykowski's sundial had suffered from severe weathering and it was taken down. Forty years after it had been placed on permanent display, a chance meeting between Douglas Bateman and Dr Gloria Clifton in June 2009 brought about the idea of restoring Przykowski's original mean time noon dial. In due course, I became involved in this matter and agreed to take on the reconstruction design of the dial. Firstly, it was necessary to estimate the costs and to raise the necessary funds with an appeal, principally aimed at members of the British Sundial Society; but their considerable generosity soon enabled the work to go ahead. The original gnomon was removed and taken to the Crucible Foundry for refurbishment and I became fully engaged in the reconstruction design work.

The design of the sundial was necessarily based on Przykowski's original work, including the use of prominent Roman numerals to denote the months of the year. However, the little roundels, which he had used for the demarcation of the months, were altered to small red diamonds, partly as a matter of personal preference and partly as a subtle means of marking Her Majesty the Queen's Diamond Jubilee. The Roman numerals were also altered so as to make them look more elegant. However, unlike the normal delineation of such a sundial, this had to be related accurately to the dimensions of the gnomon and the exact distance of the nodus to the vertical surface of the dial plate, working to the nearest millimetre! Thus, the thickness of the dial-plate was 20mm, whilst the longitudinal dimension of the analemma worked out at exactly 1500mm, with dimensions of 1898mm overall length and 530mm overall width, with a weight of 54.4 kg.

I had commissioned Ben Jones, whom I had worked with before, to order the slate – Kirkstone slate – and to carve the dial, which he did with consummate skill. He also re-designed the numerals and lettering to make them more elegant. Against considerable pressure of other work, he finished the dial by mid summer and brought it up to Greenwich, suitably fixed in a wooden frame, to keep it from being damaged, where it was photographed and safely



*The dial at 11:48:29 GMT on 10 October.*



*Part of the gathering at the opening: at the left, Doug Bateman talks to Darek Oczki and Rafal Zackowski from Poland, representing the Przykowski family and, centre-right, Dr Kevin Fewster and Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd discussing sundials.*

stored in the studios of the official photographers DPC. At this time, it should be remembered, the Royal Park of Greenwich and the Royal Observatory were completely off limits and closed to all who were not involved in the Olympics and the Paralympics. However, a date for the installation of the sundial was fixed for the 10 September 2012 and an 'unveiling' date for a month later on 10 October.

It was just as well that I had allowed a month between the installation date and the unveiling date, since we actually commenced the installation on Tuesday, 11 September. Nevertheless, although the scaffolding was in place at the time, it was no easy task hoisting the dial up to the correct level and fixing it in position. There were problems in replacing the gnomon in its original site, as a result of which the dial plate required some adjustment, which did not take place until Tuesday, 24 September; but, at last, a day later, the gnomon was installed and the scaffolding came down. All this time, the weather had not been at its best, with rain clouds hampering the work; but on Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> of the month, I managed to observe the spot of light at the centre of the sun image shadow and to check the dial's accuracy. On the following Tuesday, 2 October, excellent photographs were taken and I concluded that the sundial had an error of 40 seconds slow on clock time!

According to plan, on Wednesday 10 October 2012, on a day when the weather was kind and the sun shone for us, Sir Mark Lennox-Boyd duly declared the sundial to be 'unveiled'. Some thirty or so members of the British Sundial Society were present, as was Dr Kevin Fewster, Director of the Royal Museums Greenwich and members of the Museum staff, including Dr Gloria Clifton, Rebekah Higgett, and Lucy Cooke, who had organised the Appeal Fund and the unveiling event. I was able to say a few words of thanks to the assembled gathering; but, in some sense, the beautiful and elegant *Meridies Media* sundial, that now adorned the wall of the Meridian Building in the Royal Observatory, might not have been there if Dr Tadeusz Przykowski had not made a mistake in his design in 1967. Thus my thanks are not only due to Ben Jones, and all those who contributed to the sundial; but to the Polish doyen of gnomonics, who caused me to become a designer of sundials!

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