

# The Recorder

*An Occasional Newsletter for BSS Recorders —Egham Edition*

## Changes to the Register and hope for Digital Camera Users!

### Topics

- Register changes
- Flies on horizontal dials—Wow!
- The 2005 Editions of the Register
- Was Isaac Newton involved?
- Serendipity for a Recorder?
- A Christmas Interlude
- The Importance of European Mass Dials
- Wiltshire's Wonders.

Although it still looks much the same to the BSS Member on the proverbial 'Clapham Omnibus', the Register and its processes have gone through a few changes in the past year in readiness for the publication this year of **Register 2005**.

At the very lowest level for example the abbreviation for the 'Sun Dial Reference Number (SRNO) has at last been changed to the more logical SRN.

At a more important level the database has been changed to allow it to accommodate Lat/Long in degrees, minutes and seconds. Not only does this better reflect the accuracy available from GPS equipment but it also improves dial location by Lat/Long, something which when only degrees and minutes were stored was not at all easy. This change is also of particular importance when recording the location of dials

that are in places not served by the UK's National Grid.

The dial data entry form has been amended to reflect this new requirement for entry.

Since an OS NGR of the form SU123456 gives a location to considerably better than the old degree and minute Lat/Long, the opportunity is being taken to back convert many existing NGRs to the new deg, min, sec format so that the two formats reflect a similar accuracy.

However to indicate that the figures are a conversion (and are in fact accurate only to a few seconds) a tilde (~) symbol is being placed after the converted readings in the Register.

Changes have also been implemented in the way that the Society's archive is handled now that we have sadly lost Anne Somerville's sterling

services. Both the Fixed Dial and the up and coming Mass Dial archives will now be maintained in Report order rather than, as before, in County and SRN order.

The database will be used to locate dials of interest and a new *Quality* measure has been introduced so that our better sightings and records can be more easily located when necessary.

Finally, the Council has approved a study to investigate ways in which dial sightings might be submitted electronically by e-mail, something which isn't possible currently.

A new Digital archive will be required for this and a lot of database development needed before it can be announced. Those of you with computers and digital cameras—watch this space, there might yet be jam tomorrow!

## Flies on Dials?



SRN 5963

We are used to finding an image of a fly on some UK stained glass sundials. It is thought to be a play on the motto 'Time Flies'.

However, when Ian Butson came across SRN 5963 in Barkingside Gtr London, his photograph caught the real thing and on a horizontal dial too...! Sadly this dial is incor-

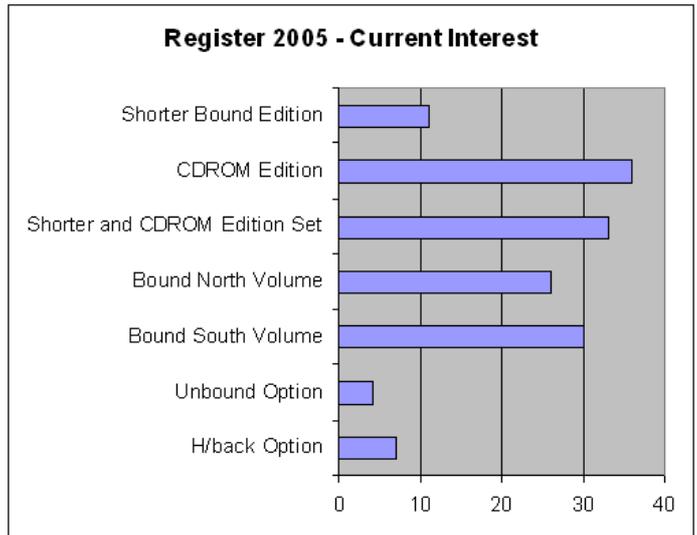
rectly set up with its South point at 225 degrees instead of 180 and, like many such modern dials that have a 'knuckleduster' style of gnomon piercing, its root is also slightly too far South.

## The BSS Fixed Dial Register 2005

*Considerable interest has been shown by Members in all of the planned editions of the 2005 Register, with many ordering more than one version. The chart opposite shows the current position.*

Well, we might be a little later than originally planned but the new Register is on target to be published shortly after the Egham Conference with the CD version to follow a little time after that.

The short additional delay has been caused by a flurry of new dial sightings sent in by recorders after it was announced that new editions were to be published! However this has only served to make the Register 2005 more comprehensive and complete.



## A double-take on a direct dial...

One of the more recent new dial sightings has been that of SRN 5967 at Lavendon Grange in Bucks. On the face of it, it is a conventional Vertical Direct South dial. It is very neatly inserted so as to be flush with the wall and is not canted out.

Yet if so then this means that either the house is built unusually precisely to face South or of course the dial is not accurately delineated. Musing on this whilst reading the rest of

the excellent information given about the dial, one's attention is drawn to the fact that Issac Newton paid regular visits to Lavendon Grange. Pity the poor householder if his dial had not been correct and Sir Isaac was visiting...! But look again. The two VI numerals are not quite in line with the top of the dial and there is a faint remnant of an hour line to the right of the drip stain from the gnomon. The dial *does* decline a little, possibly only by 3 de-

grees East.

Maybe that house owner was just as much a stickler for accuracy as Sir Isaac after all?



Lavendon Grange SRN 5967

## The Dial Recorder's serendipity?

It's hard to believe that in 2004 a recorder in the UK could still stumble on quite so many unrecorded dials in one place as did Ian Butson in July 2004.

On one of his many dial hunting expeditions last summer he happened to be in Headington near Oxford.

After recording the well known dial SRN 4015 on the Dial

House in London Road, he ventured into the Oxford Crematorium and Garden of Remembrance there. No dials had ever been recorded from this place yet Ian found no less than twelve! Not only does this appear to be a record in its own right, but the last entry coincidentally gave him a local number equal to his Membership Number: 717/717



One of the better dials in the gardens

*Just occasionally a Dial Recorder can make an amazing find. Read about Ian Butson's experience in Oxfordshire last year!*

## A Christmas Interlude and a Recorder's Luck

It is perhaps a social error to send the same Christmas card two years running – which happened this year with Tony Wood's card to Edward Martin, the previous Mass Dial Registrar.

Now familiar with the robin perched on a snow covered sundial and being an artist himself Edward suggested that the dial was painted from life

and what did Tony think?

The artist was Dr Jeremy Paul so Tony asked his local museum, which specializes in such things as bird art and lo! – 'Yes' they said, 'We sell his pictures, here's his address'.

The dial is famous, being 'Bishop Wilson's Sundial' yet it was still unrecorded in spite of its fame. Safely registered as

SRN 6014, the Society archive now contains a Christmas robin as the only picture of this interesting dial.

Tony's luck was not yet exhausted however; on filing under 'Isle of Man' (you guessed!) he found a long forgotten catalogue of Manx dials with makers' names included. Our Biographies author was delighted!



## The increasing importance of European Mass Dials

The growing interest in mass dials in continental Europe is evidenced by a flow of reports and photographs. The Society of course has quite enough to do without compiling registers of overseas dials but the reports are filed and available for comparison with dial types and locations recorded in Europe.

Herbert Rau in Berlin has compiled a summary of dials so far discovered on mainland Europe. France (400), Germany (360) and Spain (300) are the largest contributions with Italy at 100.

All much smaller than England's current 3000. There are also one or two question marks hidden in the figures. Horizontal forms are distinguished from vertical and here Norway leads the way with between 5 and 10, the uncertainty arising from the presence of 'compass rose' markings as explored by Johan Wikander in Trondheim.

The two Scottish and two Irish horizontals are not listed; not surprising as they have not really been publicized, indeed the Irish ones appear here for the first time.

Whilst we are in Ireland the figure of 19 quoted by Rau consists entirely of dials which come under 'Saxon' in English



Bremore Dial



Ulster Museum Dial

chronology and raise the question of distinction between pre- and post-Conquest dials. In England the division is clear as Saxon dials (pre-Conquest) form a small specific corpus of around thirty examples, well scattered from Co. Durham to Gloucestershire.

Other countries, however, have not had the benefit of a clear French invasion marker point and so classification is not so easy. It is possible indeed that some continental mass dials

may well pre-date 1066.

The other feature of interest is that the systematic recording of mass dials started very early in England with Dom Ethelbert Horne around 1910 in Somerset.

In contrast, Maria Koubenec in Germany recorded the first there in 1965 and only recently have the numbers listed in France and Spain been found.

What do Continental mass



dials look like? Just like ours on the whole, the difference on occasion being as illustrated.

Sometimes the wall appears to be of brickwork – but may not be. The dial has been adapted here but may be spread over several 'bricks'. Perhaps there is a dating clue here?

Was England a backwater when the rest of Europe was converting to clocks and scientific dials? Or was the relative stability of our society responsible for the preservation of so many mass dials?

*Here Tony Wood agrees that the interpretation of the UK's wealth of Mass Dials might be significantly assisted by an understanding of dials of a similar type to be found in Europe.*

*Comments and ideas from Readers are always welcomed on this puzzling subject.*

Acknowledgements to: Finola O'Carroll, Dublin, The Ulster Museum, Belfast and Herbert Rau, Berlin



The British Sundial Society

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The British Sundial Society was formed in 1989 and is a thriving and friendly Society of several hundred members. Its objects are to advance the education of the public in the art and science of gnomonics and the knowledge of all types of sundial; to catalogue and advise on the restoration of sundials that still exist in the British Isles, and to research their history. In addition to publishing the Bulletin and other books, it organises meetings and a major conference every year.

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Reg Charity 1032530

*The Registers of the British Sundial Society are formed from archived written records each certified by the individual dial recorder and accompanied by photographic prints or transparencies.*

*The main data on the forms and (since 1998) a scan of one or more of the photographs of the dial and a scan of the form itself are recorded on a relational database for subsequent search, identification and retrieval.*

*The database content forms the basis of the Register which is published at intervals and which is made available to Members at a competitive price.*

*Searches of the databases can be made for research purposes upon application to the Registrar for Fixed Dials, Patrick Powers or to the Mass Dial Group Coordinator, Tony Wood at the addresses to be found in any Bulletin*

## And finally, Wiltshire's Wonderful Sundials—by John Ingram

Following publication of the last edition of *The Recorder* in which mention was made again of the idea of noting the top ten dials in each County, John Ingram came forward with his ideas for Wiltshire.

He writes: "I suggest the following Top Ten for Wiltshire. I am unable to include those that I haven't yet seen, particularly the notable horizontal dials at Ramsbury (SRNs 3802, 3803 and 3804). Quite shamelessly I have included two Mass Dials, one because it is 11th C and could be said to be Saxon and the second because it is so well known.

Perhaps I should have included either of the window dials at Lacock Abbey (SRN 0395) or Marlborough (SRN 2308) at the expense of the Sutton Mandeville Pillar dial, but I have a particular fondness for the latter and, after all, it is mentioned in Pevsner".

### John's Choices for Wiltshire...

1. **Inglesham**—The 11thC Mass Dial on St John the Baptist Church
2. **Inglesham**—The 13th/14thC Mass dial on the statue of the Virgin Mary also at St John the Baptist's Church
3. **Salisbury**—the Vertical (S) dial with declination lines in the Cathedral Close SRN 2028
4. **Salisbury**—The Cross Dial at Leaden Hall School SRN 3941
5. **Steeple Ashton**—The Vertical (D) dial at St James' Church SRN 2513
6. **Steeple Ashton**—The Multiple Pillar Dial on the Village Green SRN 0926
7. **Stourhead House** [NT]—The Horizontal dial there SRN 2516
8. **Sutton Mandeville**— The Multiple Pillar Dial in All Saints' Churchyard. SRN 2403
9. **Sutton Veny**— The Multiple Pillar Dial in the Churchyard of St John the Evangelist. SRN 2285
10. **Upavon**—The Horizontal Dial at the Trenchard Lines Officers' Mess. SRN 0025



SRN 2403