

# The Recorder

An Occasional Newsletter for BSS Recorders —Yarnfield Edition

## Topics

- A look at mottoes on dials
- Using the Register to answer questions about dials
- How best to use digital cameras for dial recording
- New BSS policies on gifted dial collections
- Better recording techniques
- Difficult photographs!

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## Tempus Fugit?

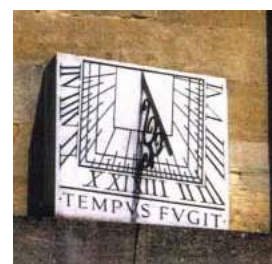
Is *Tempus Fugit* really the most common sundial motto? Over the last few centuries that motto has become engrained into the memory of most people whether or not they have any active interest in sundials. But is it actually as common as we might suppose?

The BSS database has for some time now allowed us to record mottoes that are known on the UK's Fixed dials and with not too much difficulty it is possible to study the frequency of the more common ones.

At the last count there were some 885 dials having recorded mottoes. Of these some 512 are on Vertical dials (268 of which are on Direct South dials) and 305 on horizontal dials. Almost every pos-

sible sundial type is represented in the remaining 68.

As soon as any study is attempted the first thing that is noticed is the enormous variation in the actual text of similar mottoes. So, for example mottoes using the words *Sunny Hours* (or *Houres* etc) either on their own or in various forms, total 58. Included in this number are 'I only count the sunny hours', and the fuller version: 'Let others tell of storms and showers I only count your sunny hours'. The *Sic Vita* group (including variants like *Ut Hora Sic Vita*) has 32 entries. *Horas non numero nisi serenas*; 26. *Sic Transit Gloria Mundi*; 21. *As a Shadow (such is Life)*; 14, *Pereunt et Imputantur* has 13, *Amyddst ye Flowers* variants number 11, *Watch and Pray*; 19 with *Carpe*



The declining dial on Woodstock Town Hall is one of the *Tempus Fugit* group of dials.

*Diem*; 12 or even 15 when instances of *Sieze the Day* are added. *Tempux (Edax Rerum)* occurs 9 times and even *We shall (die all)* has 6. *Tempus* as a word occurs in no less than 79 mottoes but when English versions are allowed, the *Tempus Fugit* group comes in at 84 to snatch the record as expected.

## Are our Christian Churches really aligned East-West?

It is almost an article of 'faith' that Christian Churches are aligned East-West. But how often was this achieved to any real accuracy? In view of their age one might think not often. The presence of a sundial can give a clue and it is interesting to go through the Society's database to try and get a very

rough and ready idea.

Of the 1088 churches with vertical dials, 624 or 57% have non-canted direct South Dials and 464 or 43% have canted Direct South or declining dials. Five of these even have canted declining dials!

Of course none of this takes

any account of inaccurate delineation or recording but, on the face of it, more than half of the country's churches have walls that are oriented toward the cardinal points of the compass to an accuracy that permits a Direct South dial simply to be fixed to a South wall. How did they do it?



*Ideally use a camera of 3.3M pixels resolution or above, use the highest resolution every time and use optical zoom to fill the frame with the dial. Please don't submit prints prepared on a home computer and printer!*

## The Digital Revolution

"I've just bought a digital camera and I won't use an ordinary one ever again". That is a common reaction these days but is a digital camera really as good as it sounds and does it really provide an adequate image for archive purposes? The answer is Yes, it can do – provided that the camera is good enough and the resolution and image permanence of the prints is adequate. So, what camera is good enough and what makes an image sufficiently permanent? Most digital cameras have a low resolution (640 x 480 pixels) setting and if this is used it is

rarely adequate even if the whole image is taken up by the dial. Also digital cameras often have an inadequate optical zoom that prevents one from getting close enough to fill the image with the dial. Forget digital zoom – it simply reduces the resolution of the end image and doesn't make for a good picture. With a digital camera use the highest available resolution settings, get in as close as you can using optical zoom and then get the image printed professionally – rather than on a home PC or Mac. Both Boots and Jessops offer an Internet ser-

vice for producing permanent prints at ~30p each from e-mailed images. When registering a dial sighting these prints should be sent in with a completed dial report form. BSS cannot yet accept e-mailed forms and photos because we do not have the facilities or time to process all the results. We are working on ideas for a digital archive which can accept such records but this needs a mechanism for data retrieval as well as for storage and it must be compliant with the approaches adopted by other heritage organisations. Watch this space!

## New Policy on Dial Collections

Over the past few years the Society has occasionally been presented with collections of dial records that have been built up by Members and others. One of the earliest was that of Noel Ta' Bois which came to the Society after the subsequent death of his wife Margaret. More recently we have received the results of the WI's Millennium Dial Hunt in Northamptonshire and now the Noel Rodber Collection. The current format of the ar-

chive requires one of our standard forms to be prepared for each dial and for the photographs to be archived by County. For these collections such forms generally have to be written by the Registrar and the wording is thus more about what can be seen from the photograph and no longer reflects the views of the original recorder. On top of that the photographic collection is then effectively split up within the archive. Fortunately Noel

Ta'Bois' collection went to David Young for safe keeping and, owing to the large backlog on Register entry the WI and the Rodber Collections have not yet been entered. It was appropriate therefore for a view to be taken of our procedures and the Council recently approved a change whereby such collections will be kept intact in the archives and with a new referencing approach being adopted to satisfy database integrity.



Just two of the 23 volumes from the Register of Fixed Dial records.

## The Next Register— What would you like to see?

*The next Register is likely to be twice the size of the 2000 Edition! Let us have your feedback on what form(s) this new Register should take.*

Despite the backlog of entries still waiting to be entered we are on target for the issue of another edition of the Register sometime in 2004. This will be substantially larger than the 2000 edition because of the continuing discovery of more and more dials by our ever vigilant team of Recorders. Indeed, viewed from a year away it certainly looks as if it could be twice the size! This

will present problems not just in ease of use but also in terms of cost and we shall be looking at ways in which these problems might be eased. One idea might be to publish in two separately available volumes by dividing the country into North and South. The snag with this approach is that in order for the two books to be of similar size, the dividing line would have to be drawn at

approximately Latitude 52 with all Counties in Wales and Ireland included in a so called Northern book. A cheaper 'pocket' version could be printed without images and without detailed descriptions or of course we could publish with better quality images and even word searching on CDROM. What would you like? Let the Registrar know your

## Recording the Horizontal Dial

Some recorders only use the *Furniture* box on our recording form when there are extra lines of delineation like those for the solstices and equinoxes. Many dials have no such furniture and so often this space is left blank.

However, scrolls, sunbursts and other decoration both on and around the dial itself and the positioning, and shape of the time scale, the nature of the half hour and quarter hour markers and other aspects of the layout all contribute to a dial's furniture and should be recorded so that the Register may in the future become even

more valuable to those who have an interest in researching this sort of connexion.

Things to record include:

- Is the sub-style of the dial (usually the Noon line) split to accommodate the width of the gnomon?
- Are the main hour numerals to be read from inside or outside the Chapter ring?
- Do the main hour lines pass through the numerals of the Chapter ring or not?

- There may be one or two forms of half hour marker - what are they and do they point in or out?
- What form do the numerals or marks for Noon and 4am/4pm take?
- What subdivisions of time are marked and where are they on the dial?
- Is a Watch Faster/Slower type of EoT scale provided and with what accuracy is it recorded?
- Is the EoT scale pre or post

the 1752 calendar change? (Check the date when April's EoT is zero)

- How many points has the Compass and is there a Coat of Arms, motto, maker's name, date etc?
- What city names are recorded and at what hours (or even at what minutes) are they marked?
- What other decoration is there on the dial?

## The Woodstock Dial—solving a conundrum?

On the first page the dial on Woodstock Town Hall in Oxfordshire is pictured as an example of a dial using the *Tempus Fugit* motto. However, this is not the only thing that is interesting about this dial. It was way back in 1998 that Anthony Capon first drew attention to the fact that the dial was unusual in that it is placed on a ledge and turned or canted to face South. The suspicion then was that it was a dial that was no longer in its

original position. However, closer inspection shows that time after 6pm is shown and so the dial is a West decliner despite the gnomon being placed (incorrectly) along the Noon line. Thus, this dial was delineated as a West declining dial and yet is canted to the East. The plot thickened. There are only 11 other vertical declining canted dials known in the Register so it would be nice to find the explanation. It was left to Andrew

James in 1999 to take our first photograph of the dial on St Mary Magdalene's Church in Woodstock. It was then clear that the Town Hall dial was most probably a copy of the St Mary dial (even down to its backward lettering for 7am and 8am!) rather than one delineated for its location. The Town Hall dial is probably modern. It is known only from the 1950s and was redrawn in the early 1990s. See what you think from the pictures



The dial on St Mary Magdalene's Church, Woodstock

## Be a 'Database Detective' yourself

This issue contains one or two examples of how the database can be used to extract information both about specific fixed dials and about the statistics relating to dials and dial types.

A database of broadly similar design is currently being developed for the mass dial Register. As it becomes populated with information from the

known mass dials of the UK, it will increasingly become available for analysis via similar, though naturally not identical, facilities.

If you have an interest in researching dials of a particular type or maker or if you simply want to know how common or otherwise certain dial types and recorded features are, do not hesitate to ask:

### Fixed Dials:

Patrick Powers  
16 Moreton Avenue  
Harpenden  
Herts AL5 2ET  
patrick\_powers@dunelm.org.uk

### Mass Dials:

Tony Wood  
5 Leacey Court  
Churchdown  
Gloucester GL3 1LA  
bssaow@soft-data.net

*If you have an interest in researching dials of a particular type or by a particular maker do not hesitate to make contact.*



## The British Sundial Society

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*An Occasional Newsletter for BSS  
Recorders —Yarnfield Edition*

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The British Sundial Society was formed in 1989 and is a thriving and friendly Society of nearly 600 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.

**Secretary: Douglas Bateman,**  
**The British Sundial Society,**  
**4 New Wokingham Road, Crowthorne, Berks**  
**RG45 7NR. Phone: +44 (0)1344 772303**  
**BSS Web Site: <http://www.sundialsoc.org.uk>**

*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) or to the Mass Dial Group Coordinator (for Mass Dials) at the addresses on page three..*

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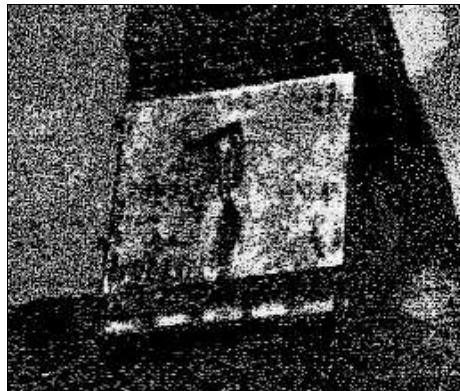
## And finally, the search for the Worst Photograph of a Dial!

No, we are not trying to find the Society's worst photographer!

In fact quite the reverse. It is fun to see the results of a stalwart attempt to photograph a dial in the most adverse of circumstances.

That might be because, as here, night had fallen just as the Recorder got to the dial or because the shot could only be taken from a very long way away.

These are just two of the 'better' cases that have passed the Registrar's Desk over the years. Unless, that is, you know better!! Perhaps you have one of your own to submit?



SRN 2050—Minster Abbey, Thanet in Kent. Taken by a digital camera as daylight completely faded. Image *much* processed even to be as good as this!!



SRN 4428—Bubblewell, Minchinhampton as originally taken from point of closest approach! Now, where is the dial?