



Dial Time

The SunInfo On-Line Newsletter

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SunInfo's Dial Time Newsletter

Here's a little diversion into dialling with a few stories taken from the SunInfo web pages in the past months, some new topics and some updates on older stories too.

We hope you will enjoy them.

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Telling Time in Tyttenhanger...

Well, no not really – we just like alliterative headlines! However this story does involve 'time telling of old' with the discovery of an hitherto unrecorded stained glass sundial from the seventeenth century. Christopher Daniel has long had a great interest in the stained glass dials of the British Isles and he and fellow BSS Member Ian Butson found, in the 1910 edition of *The Royal Commission of Historical Monuments, Inventory of Historical Monuments in Hertfordshire*, a mention of an otherwise unrecorded sundial at Tyttenhanger House, a house now sadly only used as commercial offices.

The dial's presence had been omitted from the 1950s English Heritage inventory for the house – it being simply reported as 'Heraldic Glass' and even Pevsner had failed to note the dial in 1977.

Ian and Christopher each contacted the building's owners for permission to view without success, but then Ian 'Super Sleuth' Butson discovered that despite the reluctance regarding visitors there was to be an Open Day organised by St Albans District Council on the last weekend of January 2010. It was the eighth so-called 'Residents First' opening, but open only to Council Tax payers of the District and then only via a voucher and timed tours.

Well, never underestimate the tentacles of BSS! It was swiftly realised that Patrick Powers and his wife Catherine, were St Albans Council Tax payers and they were immediately 'detailed off' to attend the Open Day.

Let's set aside the fact that it snowed that day, that an unnecessary trip had to be made to St Albans on market day (no less) to collect the, later unneeded, voucher and that what had been advertised as a 30 minute tour of the house eventually took over 90 minutes. Our team stayed the course eventually emerging with several photo-



graphs of an hitherto unrecorded, old but memorable stained glass sundial.

It is mounted in a frame as a sort of 'suncatcher' in front of a North facing window and it is also mounted back to front and ignominiously, is mounted over the leaded comes of the Chapel's window too! But, as you can see from the reversed image above, it is a lovely, previously unknown, stained glass dial properly designed for the declination of the front façade and dating back to about 1675. It bears the motto *Lumen Umbra Dei*. (Light is the Shadow of God).

Tyttenhanger House is currently up for sale—along with its dial—a snip at just £12M. We have alerted the agents to the presence of this dial and we hope that the new owner will treasure it and who knows, one day maybe even put it back in the front façade?

'The Impossible has become Possible'

**Sunshine where
there was none
before...**



The small town of Rjukan sits deep in the narrow Vestfjord Valley, in the Telemark region, south-west of Oslo, in Norway.

The towering peaks that surround it rise to almost 2,000 meters above sea level and block out the sunlight for half the year. The deep valley ensures that during the six months of winter, the surrounding mountains cast a

shadow over the town even at midday. Rjukan residents live in a permanent shadow from September to March.

But, in 2013, the people of Rjukan celebrated the installation of three giant mirrors, which finally brought winter sunshine to their town centre. About 1,000 people, among them children in sunglasses, cheered when the main

square became bathed in sun for the first time in their winter months.

The mirrors, with a combined reflective surface of 50 square meters, have been set up on a ridge on Gaustatoppen mountain, brightening up the previously gloomy town centre by flooding it with up to 600 square meters of sunlight.

Twenty-first century technology has made the \$850,000 project possible, with the computer-powered mirrors shifting every 10 seconds to track the movements of the sun during the day.

Rjukan's mayor, Steinar Bergsland says that Rjukan is a place "where the impossible has become possible".

The Risks of Restoration

**The sad loss
of a popular
and 'record
breaking'
friend**

The Parish church of St John the Baptist at Stokesay, near Craven Arms, Shropshire dates from the 12thC. It was variously rebuilt in 1654, 1664 and received a new roof in the 20thC. It is believed to have been severely damaged during the Civil War; but remains a rare example of Commonwealth church building.

For much of its later life it also boasted a vertical sandstone painted sundial (SRN 2526), set up around 1825, see the picture, and for many years this old dial was the most recorded sundial by BSS Members!

Sadly SRN 2526 was scrapped by the Church Wardens in 1999 because it is said to have



The old dial at Stokesay Church before it was scrapped.

'broken' when it was removed for restoration. We do not know how badly it was broken. It had been known to be cracked for a long time and the concern now is that maybe that was all that was wrong. We shall now never

know whether or not it could have been saved. Whatever, the decision was taken by the Church Wardens to scrap it. And astonishingly, with it the excellent sturdy gnomon—possibly for its scrap value.

To their credit, a new dial was commissioned (SRN 4179) to go in its place and installed shortly after. However the new gnomon doesn't cast a shadow as well as the old one and it can be hard to read the time from the ground. You have to go up into the adjacent Stokesay Castle to get the best view.

Despite the excellent replacement it is still sad to have lost such a very popular and well documented friend.

The Mystery of San Marco's Noon Mark

The column of S. Alipio lies at the far NW end of the façade of St Mark's Basilica in Venice.

Although little known and certainly rarely observed, by the multitudes of visitors to this famous place, this column actually supports a noon mark of considerable age.

In 1493, the Serenissima asked Gian Paolo Ranieri di Reggio Emilia for a new clock in order to replace the one, called S. Alipio's, that since 1384 had been situated on the façade of the Basilica.

Then, on November 3rd 1495, when the clock was almost ready, the Senate, in accordance with the Procuratori di S. Marco, decided to place it at the entrance of the Mercerie and that a new suitable building should be erected for that occasion.

The construction that we still see today was completed in two years and decorated by a huge bell and two bronze giants. In 1500 the Senate and the Procuratori di S. Marco decided to erect new edifices on both sides of the tower; and these were concluded in 1506.

In 1755 eight columns were added, in the seventeenth century manner, to reinforce the pillars at the ground level and support the two lateral edifices.

The Clock Tower, enriched by the splendour of its materials, is one of the most important links between the Piazza and the rest of the city as well as a religious and civil symbol.

All this of course required the means to set the clock. That was achieved by the Noon Mark.

The mystery is that we do not know for sure whether the noon mark that we see today



is the one installed to regulate S. Alepio's 1384 clock or the new one we see today that operated from 1497—or both!

Whatever, the mark we see today is worn, the gnomon droops and is rusted but the details and engraving of the column are still visible and (with only a little inaccuracy) it still marks Solar Noon today.

Fixed out from the column is a leaf shaped gnomon with a central hole and the rusted remains make three other 'holes' on either side.

Of course this particular Noon Mark was used before concepts of Time Zones had been developed and even before 'accurate' clocks began to be made from 1650 onwards. It must therefore have been used simply to set the clock(s) to Solar Noon.

Even with all its wear, corro-



sion and lack of restoration it is fun to see just how 'accurate' we would judge it today.

A photograph of the time of the moment of Solar Noon was made at the point shown in the second figure.

Corrections were then made of the reading on the internal clock of the digital camera. The difference from UK time, the daily drift of the camera clock since the photograph had been taken were all considered and the adjustment for Italian time, the longitudinal distance from Venice and the equation of time were all applied. At the end of this the ancient and damaged Noon Mark was found to be showing solar noon only 12m 40 seconds fast!

Not at all bad for something that might possibly have been marking Solar Noon for the best part of 628 years.

**Accurate today
to within a
quarter of an
hour—and that
to a time
system that
hadn't even
been invented!!**



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Alfred and the Mottoes...



Long standing BSS Member John Ingram really started something when he acquired a box of Bassett-Lowke model trains way back in 2006!

In there with them was a copy of Alfred Rawlings' "A Little Book of Sundial Mottoes". Alfred Rawlings (1855-1929) was a post-

impressionist watercolour painter who specialised in landscapes and seascapes and who wrote this book in 1914. It is quite rare and contains four watercolours each by Rawlings and each with an artists' soliloquy. But there is no mention of the locations. Did these dials actually exist? Given the realistic nature of Rawlings' landscapes and seascapes; probably so, for those other than that on the front cover. Do they exist now? Possibly. Maybe a reader can help?



What of the mottoes? Well these are quite special too. There are 131 of them in all and surprisingly many do not forecast the doom and gloom that we have come to expect of dial mottoes we see today. Of course there are several that are well known but there are a few that are not. Interestingly, the booklet confirms the origin of the motto which has so often been quoted as representing fake dials: *Let Others tell of Storms and Showers I'll only count your sunny hours.* Its popularity stems from the fact that it was the motto chosen by Queen Alexandra for the dial at Sandringham House.

However, who has previously seen this gem on a dial? See the little day star moving, Life and time are worth improving, Seize the moments while they stay, Seize and use them lest you lose them and lament the wasted day.

For all his artistic merit though, Rawlings was clearly not a diallist. One 'motto' in the book is quoted as: *Watch Faster, Watch Slower!*



SunInfo is a website of especial value to all those interested in the world of sundials.

It provides an eclectic mix of news, information, research, advice and comment and it even includes a reference section containing over a hundred inter-

esting documents devoted to the history, information and comment about sundials, sundialists and sundial societies in Britain and the world.

Separate linked pages are dedicated to details of the latest Annual Conferences of both BSS and NASS, the locations of their venues, how to get there by train, car or air and things to see and do whilst in the area. How do you get to see all these? Just point your browser at:

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