

## THE SUNDIALS OF OXFORD COLLEGES

### ALL SOULS COLLEGE [† Important sundial]

In a print by Loggan, dated 1675, there is shown a small dial on a chimney. This has since disappeared, the date of its demolition unknown.

The present elaborate mural dial, recently renovated, shows the minutes. It was formerly on the south wall of the chapel, and was made in 1659 by William Bird, a stonecarver who lived in nearby Holywell Street, Oxford. The price charged was £54 according to the College Accounts. Christopher Wren was then Bursar of the college and as he was greatly interested in dialling, it is often surmised that he may have been responsible for its design. There is no written evidence to support this theory.

At present it is now fixed to the south wall of the Codrington Library and can just be glimpsed from outside the college. It has a cartouche of the arms of the college, festoons and a segmental cornice with a winged cherub head. and the motto *Pereunt et Impuntantur* [(Hours) pass away and are put to our account]. It has been restored on a number of occasions and is one of the most colourful of the Oxford sundials.

### BALLIOL COLLEGE

This college had three sundials and are pictured in a print by Loggan in 1675. These were two south-facing mural dials and a globe dial standing on a column in a walled garden. There is no sundial in the college today.

### BOTANIC GARDEN

In the spandrels between the heads of the lower niches on the Danby Gateway are two incised dials which face south-west. These are reputed to have been cut by Nicholas Stone somewhere about 1632, there is no written evidence to support this claim.

### BRASENOSE COLLEGE

The large mural sundial is on the south-west front of the Old Quadrangle and dates from circa 1719, the original cost was £9 but the painting and gilding cost another 7 guineas [£7.7s.0d.l. It bears the arms of the college on a shield in the upper central area. Like most of the Oxford dials. it has had several restorations.

### CHRIST CHURCH COLLEGE

Only one dial remains at the present date and is on the west wing of Peckover quadrangle. It dates from circa 1750 and has recently been renovated. It is marked for the hours VII- IV only because of its position. It is a very plain and severely functional sundial of no great beauty.

The nearby Cathedral has lost three of its mural dials. two sundials depicted on the cathedral in 1673 have disappeared completely and there was one on the southern square turret at the east end in 1705. of which no trace now exists.

### CORPUS CHRISTI COLLEGE [†† Most important sundial]

This college was favoured with the help of Nicholas Kratzer and also Robert Hegge and boasts the most impressive sundial of all. Had the college been more careful of its treasures, it would have had the most important of all the dials in the country, since Kratzer designed an elaborate polyhedral sundial with twelve separate dials surmounted by a sphere, which was erected in the college garden circa 1520. For more

details of this and other sundials at Corpus Christi College see Dr Philip Pattenden's *Sundials at an Oxford College*. An illustration of Kratzer's dial drawn by Robert Hegge is shown on page 23. The chief glory is the Pelican or Turnbull dial. This is in the form of a column and it has a long and varied history from 1581 onwards, ably delineated by Dr Pattenden in his book. These details are too complex to include in this short note. Facsimile copies were made for Princeton University, and Pomfret School, in the United States. As with all medieval dials, the Pelican dial has been repainted over and over again, plus changes of site and the pedestal on which it stands. The constant repainting resulted in a series of errors, and as some of the information on the column is ephemeral, the exact appearance of the dial has been much changed. Although the last restoration was in 1976, the paintwork is now beginning to peel away in places. The complete understanding of this complex sundial and its history requires a close study of Dr Pattenden's book and its later supplement - *The Pelican Sundial - Description of the Tables*.

## **EXETER COLLEGE**

Loggan, in 1675, illustrated a sundial facing west in the Front quadrangle, this has disappeared; he showed another on the south wall of the tower. This latter is scarcely visible without a close look and a part of it has been destroyed. The erection of buildings close by has placed it in shadow for most of the day. Nevertheless it should be restored as part of the college history.

## **MAGDALEN COLLEGE**

There are no sundials today but Loggan showed a west facing sundial on the college library showing the hours II- IV. On the east side of the library there was another sundial erected circa 1635, lost during restoration work about 1824.

## **MERTON COLLEGE**

[† Important sundial]

Once the college had three sundials, two faced each other across the Fellows' Quadrangle, one facing east, the other west. They were erected about 1610, the one on the east was removed and a clock dial fitted in its place. The other mural dial remains in place and is in excellent condition. The most interesting dial is near the college entrance and is cut into the east side of the last buttress of the north wall of the college chapel. It is rather more complex than appears at first sight as it comprises four sets of lines, viz: diagonal lines to indicate the hours, hyperbolic lines to show the sun's declination, straight lines to show the number of hours from sunrise and vertical lines again showing hours. The first three sets of lines indicated here use the shadow of the gnomon to form the indication, whereas the last uses the edge of the adjoining buttress to perform this function. Because of the unusual location, the dial can indicate the morning hours in summer months and from 6 am until 9 am only. The dial is in a good state of preservation, it was set up in 1622, certainly after the two other dials in the quadrangle. What purpose it was originally set up for is obscure, the other two dials are rather remote from the college entrance. To obtain a good photograph of the quadrangle dial one needs to stand upon the lawn, frowned upon by the college authorities.

## **ST. EDMUND HALL**

A mural sundial painted upon a wooden panel is on the south front of the quadrangle and was first placed there circa 1741 by Sir Thomas Shaw. Recently renovated to commemorate the 80th birthday of Dr Kelly, a former Principal, with a Latin epigram to Queen Elizabeth II.

## **ST. JOHN'S COLLEGE**

This college has had a number of sundials; there was one placed in the Grove made by John Jackson, mason, and it cost £12.11s.6d in 1643. In 1558 two sundials were set up by one of the college Fellows, John Dale, on the east and west sides of the quadrangle. A great storm in 1661 brought these crashing down to

the ground and they were never replaced. There was a sundial on the south wall of the chapel, it is shown by Loggan in 1675, and again by Williams in 1733. Another small dial was fixed to the west side of a chimney and it showed the hours I-III, it vanished some time after 1675 and no other details are known.

## TRINITY COLLEGE

The sundials of this college are more conspicuous by their absence. Francis Potter made a sundial in the seventeenth century but this mural dial had disappeared by 1670. There was a globe dial in the President's garden and a pillar dial composed from three geometrical solids which stood in another smaller garden. Three mural sundials respectively in the Front Quadrangle, the north Court and a west-facing dial in the First Court, are known only from illustrations by Loggan and Williams. The north Court example was demolished in 1802, probably during renovation of the buildings.

## WADHAM COLLEGE

The faint remains of two mural dials still show on the south side of a buttress of the college chapel. It is not clear to whom these may be attributed, the lower one is reputed to date from 1612, the other was added later in the time of the Warden Dr. Wilkins (1648-59). A sundial was fixed and proved by Cole in 1721, its site unknown. Wilkins is supposed to have designed a globe dial carried on the shoulders of Atlas circa 1653, this was destroyed in a storm in 1753. There is a horizontal sundial on a column near the north wall of the Fellows' garden, it was made about 1730.

## OTHER COLLEGES:

Long lost dials are shown by Loggan in 1675 and again by W Williams in 1733 in his book *Oxonia Depicta – [Oxford Depicted]*, published in 1733. The colleges include New College, Oriel College, and The Queen's College. As far as the writer is aware, there is no sundial at the modern St. Catherine's College, nor has he seen one at Keble college. There is obviously room for a more searching enquiry into these matters, in fact a complete survey of Oxford sundials.

## OXFORD CHURCHES:

The most famous sundial on an Oxford church is that of St Cross Holywell. Members who use Exeter College car park will pass this on their right when turning into Cross Street. The date of its placing on the tower is known from the church records - 1667, *Payde for making the South Diall ... £1.15s.0d., a later entry - Payde for an iron to Mend the gnomon of the South Diall ... 1s.* This is the church where the famous Oxford clockmaker John Knibb is buried, yet it has no mechanical clock in its tower. Other churches are St. Giles, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Mary the Virgin, St. Peter in the East. There is a considerable amount of recorded data in respect of St. Mary the Virgin since Nicholas Kratzer erected a column sundial on its churchyard wall and it is recorded in the Latin Ms. *De Horologiis* now preserved in the library of Corpus Christi College. Alas this important dial disappeared when the wall round the church was demolished in 1744 but fortunately we have the illustration of the sundial in David Loggan's *Oxonia Illustrata [Illustrated Oxford]* of 1675.

## FURTHER READING:

1 *Oxonia Illustrata, sive omnium celeberrimae istius Universatis Collegiorum ...* David Loggan, 1675. This book was printed by Loggan at his house in Holywell Street, Oxford. It contains 40 plates, each extending over two folio pages, with 37 views of the colleges and public buildings in extraordinary fine detail, from which details of the many sundials existing in 1675 are known.

David Loggan, (1635-1700?) was born at Danzig in 1636 and became an artist and engraver. He came to England some time before 1653, and settled at Nuffield, near Oxford. On 30 March 1669 he was appointed

engraver to the University of Oxford at an annual salary of 20s. About 1671 he married a daughter of Richard Jordan of Kencote Hall in Oxfordshire, by whom he had at least one son, John Loggan, who matriculated at Trinity College on 20 August 1688 at the age of sixteen. By 1672 Loggan subscribed to the articles of religion and matriculated for the purposes of securing the privileges of membership of the University. In 1675 he became naturalised as an Englishman, having in the previous year published his first work. Loggan became the most celebrated engravers of portraits in his time but never applied his talents to painting.

2 *Sundials at an Oxford College*. Philip Pattenden, Oxford, 1979. ISBN 0950664-4- 0 5. Mainly on the Turnbull dial at Corpus Christi College.

3 *The Pelican Sundial - Description of the Tables*. Philip Pattenden, Oxford, 1980. A companion volume to the previous title, describing the calendars and other tables painted on the column. A model of research and elucidation.

4 *The Book of Sundials*, Mrs Alfred Gatty, enlarged and re-edited by H F K Eden and Eleanor Lloyd, London, 1900. Brief mention of the dials on the Colleges at Oxford, taken from Loggan's views of Oxford. Since the entry is short, it is quoted below:

*When Loggan took his views of Oxford, published 1688, there were several dials on the colleges but most of these are gone. He shows those at Exeter, St.John's, Trinity, Wadham, Brasenose, Christ church, All Souls, Magdalen, and St. Mary Hall, besides pedestal dials at Queen's, Balliol and Pembroke, and a tall pillar in New College gardens. Of these there remains the great dial at All Souls, and one in Brasnose quadrangle; a gnomon on the south-east buttress of Wadham Chapel, possibly placed there by Dr. Wilkins, and a gnomon on the south-east buttress of Christ Church Cathedral overlooking Dean Liddell's grave in the quiet little churchyard. There is also a more modern dial near the Peckwater quadrangle, almost hidden by an acacia, and one on Holywell Church. In Pugin's time there was one on Merton Chapel, with the date 1622. [See Merton entry above].*

There are, of course, more references to Oxford sundials, mostly rather sketchy, although there are many references to the Corpus Christi college example. An interesting reference is to the window dial in the Convocation House at Oxford, this shows the afternoon hours only. On page 300 is a reference to the sundial near the Clerk of the Peace's office, bearing the arms of Thomas, Earl of Wharton, Lord Lieutenant of Oxfordshire from 1691-1702.

The sundial motto is quoted: *MINUTAE SUNT QUAE SPECTA, NON QUAE PERDIS*. [What you look at are minutes, not what you lose].

**A moment - mark how small a space  
The dial shows upon its face;  
Yet waste but one - and you will see  
Of how great moment it can be.**

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