

SUNDIAL TRIP TO LONDON

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Early this year, Kevin Karney gave one of his stimulating lectures on sundials to the Lavant Valley Decorative & Fine Arts Society at Chichester, which he cleverly tailored to the local area. His talk was rated top marks and it spurred a new interest by the members, resulting in a fully booked coach trip to London to see sundials, but unfortunately this outing had to be cancelled due to icy road conditions. By request, an alternative modified trip was organized for later in the year by Prof Liz Juniper, with people making their own travel arrangements to London for a guided tour of the City and its sundials.

We all congregated in the coffee shop at St Paul's Cathedral where our Guide, Judy Stephenson, who is a member of the City of London Guide Lecturers' Association, met us. Judy, together with Tim Kidd, were approached a few years ago by Piers Nicholson, the creator of the sundial on the river close to the Millennium Bridge, who asked if they would do sundial tours mainly for the equinoxes and solstices, but also at other times, when requested. Judy briefly discussed

the tour duration and options with our Group, before setting off towards Paternoster Square to see the noon mark dial by Frank King and Kristi Shea. The idea was to view this imposing dial in all its glory in the sunshine at noon, but sadly we were blessed with rain instead.

Upon my request we walked back towards St Paul's Cathedral to the gardens in Amen Court, which belongs to the Chapter of St Paul's Cathedral, to see whether the gate was open and access was possible. We were in luck and the eighteenth century horizontal dial by John Rowley and attributed to Christopher Wren (Fig. 1) was inspected by all, before making a hasty exit, aware that we were indeed on private property. The names Amen Court and nearby Ave Maria Lane both originate from words recited by clergy in their litanies on procession around the medieval cathedral.

Judy was very informative and entertaining regarding the history of the City, and the sundial viewings were interspersed by learning about past life in the City, of how street names originated, and how trading took place in coffee houses prior to the current Stock Exchange being built. General meeting places were designated by illustrated signs as many

people were illiterate, and the nursery rhyme of 'Hey diddle, diddle, the cat and the fiddle, the cow jumped over the moon' was derived from this tradition.

We walked onto Blackfriars to the City of London Boys School in Paul's Walk, where there is the splendid polar dial by Piers Nicholson which was unveiled by the Rt. Hon. Lord Mayor of the City of London on the 13 December 1999. This is a millennium dial with exactly 2000 engineering bricks and a time capsule (Fig. 2, below).



We also noted other means of time-keeping and on Bracken House in Cannon Street, named after Bernard Bracken the one time Chairman of the Financial Times, a memorial clock dedicated to Sir Winston Churchill was of particular interest. Winston's face is at the centre of a golden sunburst and surrounded by gilded signs of the zodiac on an azure background. This is described as 'not a sundial but an unusual astronomical sundial related clock' and was designed by Frank Dobson and Philip Bentham in 1959.

Our next port of call was a Wren church of St Stephen's, where a modern wide bowstring equatorial sundial was standing in the courtyard surrounded by buildings and thus proving an inappropriate location for a sundial. There is, however, a chink in the buildings and the dial may well be able to indicate noon, but a sunny day is required to check this out.



Fig. 1. The John Rowley dial, on a pedestal sometimes attributed to Wren, at Amen Court.

Apparently The Venerable Peter Delaney, the priest in charge, told Judy that Henry Moore was adamant that this was precisely where the dial should go. It is a maquette of the famous Henry Moore 5.5 m tall sundial, made for The Times newspaper and erected in 1967 outside their now non-existent premises opposite Blackfriars Station, before being sold and shipped to Belgium.

Further dials visited were in Cheapside (Fig. 3), where on the corner are two vertical stone dials, one west declining and the other south declining with a gold sunburst,



Fig. 3. Twin dials at Cheapside.

Fig. 4. The dial at St Catherine Cree.



attributed to Prof J. Skeaping, which were erected in 1958 when this post-war building was constructed for the Sun Life Insurance Company. Then on to St Katherine Cree Historic Church which survived the Great Fire of London and dates from 1630. On the street side is a vertical south declining rectangular dial dating from around 1700 (Fig. 4). The gnomon is rather

Fig. 5. The 1982 memorial to the Merchant Seafarers.



precarious but the face is in fair condition with gilded embellishments including declining lines, Babylonian/Italian hours, Zodiac signs and a motto 'Non Sine Lumine' (Nothing without Light).

We passed by the Clockmakers' Museum in Guildhall Library, Aldermanbury, which I noted for a visit on another day, and continued down to Tower Hill, where an imposing horizontal dial of over 6m sits over the Underground Station (see the item on Edwin Russell on p.32). This has an outer ring depicting the history of London from AD43 to 1982 including the founding of the Tower of London, the Thames freezing over, the Civil

considered a privilege to be beheaded and this was saved for Royalty and other dignitaries, as common people were hanged. Nearby was the short stretch of medieval wall built on Roman foundations dating from the conquest in AD 43 when London was founded.

A further memorial was to be found close by with an anchor and chain and points of the compass (Fig. 5). This rather impressive landmark is in memory of the Merchant Seafarers who gave their lives to secure the freedom of the Falkland Islands through 1982. This is not described as a sundial but does have all the attributes of looking like one, with the anchor and chain being a gnomon and Roman numerals engraved around the outside of the top plate.

During our tour Judy also mentioned the White Rabbit in Alice in Wonderland by Lewis Carroll (aka Charles Dodgson) who was an Oxford mathematician. Apparently the White Rabbit was based on Dean Liddell who was always running late for services as the bell tower at Christ Church was running on 'Oxford Time' which was always 5 minutes behind London time and thus making him late.

The day was very enjoyable and we all appreciated the time and knowledge given by Judy and since then one of the party has already observed and photographed a dial while on her annual holiday in Croatia, commenting that prior to the recent sundial experiences it had gone unnoticed.

Further information can be obtained from downloading The City of London sundial trail from the internet.

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