

Sundials at Windsor Castle

'Sundials and Weathervanes' was the title of a booklet which acted as a magnet drawing us in to PIC's second-hand book shop in Bridport, Dorset. The owner, whose initials are P.I.C. allowed us a few minutes browsing before coming forward and responding to our obvious interest in the booklet of which he is the publisher and we were soon in his back room where he introduced us to his collection of sets of magazines dating back to Victorian times and to his hobby/ business of extracting from them articles on topics of specialist interest from which he produces paper backed booklets for sale in his shop.

Much later we emerged bearing his last two copies (there has since been a reprint) of 'Sundials and Weathervanes'. The booklet includes an article taken from Strand Magazine of 1892 which opens with a familiar ring--

The fact that sundials will soon be a thing completely of the past, and the interest which attaches to their usually beautiful forms and their quaint mottoes, makes one wish to put on record at least a few of those that may still be found in out -of-the-way- places

--- Through the courtesy of General the Hon. Sir J.C. Cowell, K.C.B., and with the kindly help of Mr Nutt, the well known architect of Windsor, I have been able to give to the readers of PIC's PUBLICATION a presentment of a Royal sundial, which stands on the East terrace of Her Majesty's private gardens at Windsor Castle. It was erected by Charles II, was designed and carved by the famous Grinling Gibbons, and its gnomon - which is an especially beautiful one - bears the King's

monogram and crown. The dial-plate is graven with the Star of the Garter, with its motto, "Honi soit qui mal y pense," and with the maker's name "Henricus Wynne, Londonii, fecit."

With the kindly help of Mr Nutt - I had no royal architects in my acquaintance - and so addressed my enquiry, in the first instance, to 'The Head Gardener, Windsor Castle' requesting information about the dial, perhaps a photograph or better still a visit. I was rewarded with a reply from the Deputy Surveyor of The Queen's Works of Art at The Royal Collection Trust inviting me to make an appointment to see the dial which is in the care of The Queen's Horologist at Windsor Castle, Mr Peter Ashworth - a BSS member.

Since this is an important, historical dial and since permission to view it, although freely given on this occasion, is obviously limited, and since I had no wish to keep it all to myself, I asked if I could be accompanied by a small group of friends and we eventually settled on a party of eight. However the visit had to take place early in the morning, so that we should be clear of the private garden before the castle is opened to visitors and it proved almost impossible to assemble a group of eight members of our widely dispersed society who could be at the gates of Windsor Castle by 9am on a weekday morning. The outcome was that my husband, Peter, and I made the visit on a cold, wet morning in November and arranged for another group of eight members to visit the dial at a later date. A date was tentatively agreed for May 1996 but this was eventually cancelled and so the possibility of a group visit still remains.

The dial stands on the North Terrace with the Queen's private garden to one side and a splendid view over the town of Windsor to the playing fields of Eton on the other.

The gnomon is beautifully engraved and carries the King's monogram CR intertwined so that the initials can be read from either side. The dial plate is unusual in that it is made from a thin sheet of brass bolted to a thicker base plate. The surface plate which is engraved with the maker's name and the Garter Star and motto has worn through in one or two places and the base plate, of another material, can be seen underneath. Acid rain it seems is no respecter of sundials and the problems of restoration are as urgent on the terrace of Windsor Castle as anywhere else.

Indeed with the constant stream of aircraft to and from Heathrow and the traffic which snarls continually round the castle walls, it must be a particularly vulnerable site. The pedestal differs considerably from the artists impression which appeared in the Strand Magazine article but is more accurately represented in the drawing which accompanied an article in Country Life in 1913. It stands 3 feet 4.6 inches high and is carved with flowers, fruits and acanthus leaves.

At 9 o'clock on a wet November morning there was barely enough light for taking photographs but we did manage a brass rubbing before taking cover indoors from the persistent rain. Peter Ashworth then showed us several references to the dial from the castle archives which will I feel sure be of interest to BSS members.

W H St. John Hope writing in Country Life in 1913 says:-

'On the north side of the enlarged terrace is a sundial upon a handsome shaft of portland stone carved with

swags of flowers and acanthus leaves round the base. The dial is engraved with "Henricus Wynne Londinii fecit," and in the accounts for 1679- 80 is an item of £20 paid to -

Hen: Winn for a large brasse horizontal dyall placed at ye end of ye north tarrac e& for a jouney to Windsor to place it upon ye Pedestall

The latter is the work of Grinling Gibbons, who was paid the same year "for cutting & carveing ye Mouldings and Ornaments for the Pedistall of the large Dyall in the North Terrace."

The height of the pedestal is 3 feet 4 5/8 inches.'

("Windsor Castle, An Architectural History" by W.H. St John Hope. Published in Country Life. 1913 p. 319, 320, 327 ,580)

In 1891 W.J. Loftie describes the position of the dial as -

... at the north-eastern (end) where the terrace was extended towards the East over the escarpment, and was furnished with a sundial and with a flight of steps which led down into the south garden.

And adds:-

'There is an anecdote worth repeating about this sun-dial which still stands on the Terrace. One day in the summer of 1787, the King, George the Third, and his favourite son, the Duke of York, had walked for some time up and down the Terrace in conversation, when the King, being tired, stopped and leaned his arms upon the dial. A sentry immediately came forward and respectfully, but firmly, told his Majesty that it was part of his duty to prevent any person from touching the sun-dial. The King, instead of showing displeasure, commended the soldier to the favourable notice of his colonel, and he was shortly afterwards promoted.' ("Windsor Castle" W J Loftie Seeley & Co., London 1891 p114)

There are however several references to another dial, a double horizontal dial, which is described as standing on the short south terrace

George Bickham, jun., in 1742 wrote:-
wrote

"At the East End of the Terrace there is a bowling green, and a Draw-Bridge at the Bottom. On the West there is a very curious Sun-Dial erected on a Pedestal, by the order of King Charles 11. which was made by one Henry Wynne, whereon all the points of the compass are particularly delineated, at which Place a Centinel always stands, and when any unguarded Spectator claps his Hand upon it, he claims, by Dint of Custom, Sixpence as a Forfeit."

(George Bickham jun. *Deliciæ Britannicæ* London 1742, p142)

W H St John Hope also refers to this dial :

'The completion of the short south terrace is marked by the setting up of a sundial upon it. This had been bought in 1677-8 and is entered among the taskworks for that year -

"Henry Wynne for Materialls and Workemanship in making a Large Double Horizontal Dyall sett in the Southeast Terras Walke at Windsor Castle according to Contract for the same £25."

And in the current account 40s is entered among the travelling charges as paid to, *"Henry Wynn for his Journey and Charges from London to Windsor for setting ye great Horizontal dyall on ye Tarras Walke"*

In the following year John Vanderstraine accounts *"for carveing ye stone Eagles that the brasse dyall is set upon"*

I have no further information about this dial but it certainly seems to have been something special and I would welcome any further information about it.

There are other sundials on St Georges Chapel which can be seen from the area to which the public is admitted. These are also in need of restoration and - I blame myself for this - recording.

We left the castle at about 10.15am by which time the yard was filling up with tourists and - wouldn't you know - the sun was shining.

[©Jane Walker 1998. This article was first printed in the BSS Bulletin No 98.2, June 1998. Text published here by permission of the author].