

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THOMAS ROSS

Part 12: A Foray into England

DENNIS COWAN

What, Thomas Ross identified sundials in England? Well yes he did. Actually no he didn't. Well he did, sort of.

He did identify and provide sketches of two dials in Berwick-upon-Tweed, which changed hands between Scotland and England more than a dozen times. But although Berwick has been in English hands since 1482, there have been many anomalies since then.

Even though Berwick-upon-Tweed is now in England, the county of Berwickshire, until its dissolution in 1975, was in Scotland. Many organisations in Scotland that were in the old county of Berwickshire still have Berwickshire in their names, such as the *Berwickshire News*, the Berwickshire Housing Association and the Berwickshire Sports Council.

Indeed both Berwick's football and rugby teams play within their respective Scottish systems and not in England. It is nearer to Edinburgh than to the nearest city in England and many people believe that Berwick should rightly be in Scotland. It appears that Thomas Ross was one of them. As recently as 2008, the Scottish National Party made calls in the Scottish Parliament for Berwick to become part of Scotland again.

We may find in the future that not only Berwick, but the whole of Northumberland. will join Scotland in the new United Kingdom of Scotland and Northumberland. The capital of course will be Edinburgh and the name of the country will probably be shortened to Scotland!

In volume 5 of *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*¹ of 1892 Thomas Ross described the dial on Berwick Parish Church as follows:

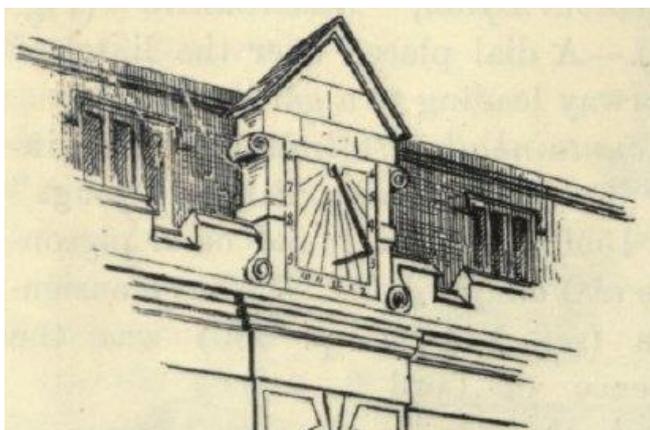


Fig. 1. Ross's sketch of the dial at Berwick Parish Church.



Fig. 2. The dial at the renamed Holy Trinity Church in Berwick today.

“This fine dial [Fig. 1] forms the termination of the south aisle wall of the nave, immediately over the compartment of the third window from the west end. The face of the dial is of a white stone and measures about 4 feet 8 inches square; the width across, including the frame, is about 5 feet 10 inches; and the height to the apex of the gablet is about 8 feet 2 inches. The gnomon is of iron, and projects 2 feet 4 inches. The church was erected in 1652.”

That last sentence is interesting. It was one of the very few churches to be built in England during the Commonwealth of Oliver Cromwell.

Now known as Holy Trinity Church, the dial is very much as it was in Ross's day (Fig. 2) although it was restored around 1991. However, it does not have the appearance of white stone as described by Ross. It is a direct south-facing dial mounted high above the south doorway of the church. It has Arabic numerals from 6 am to 6 pm with a simple open gnomon.

Next we move on to the Old Bridge that crosses the River Tweed at Berwick. Ross says

“The dial here, shown by a plan and elevation [Fig. 3], is similar to the one just described at Ayr. It is placed on the down-stream parapet, in a recess over the first pier from the Berwick side. The bridge dates from 1624, and the dial, it is believed, was put up about the beginning of this century; but whether it replaced an older one or was then quite new does not appear to be known.”

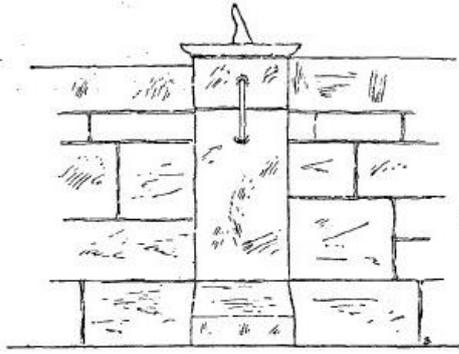


Fig. 3. Ross's drawing of the dial on the Old Bridge in Berwick.



Fig. 4. The modern dial on the Old Bridge.

When Ross stated that the dial was put up about the beginning of this century, he was of course referring to the 19th century. The dial that is in this position now is not the dial from Ross's day. The story goes that in 1953, a salmon fisherman tied his net to the sundial. It was evidently pulled into the river. It must have been a large salmon! The current dial, according to a plaque fixed to the pillar, was restored at the behest of Ruth Lister of Berwick-upon-Tweed in 1995. It is a simple circular metal dial about 8 inches in diameter with Roman numerals from 5 am to 7 pm, but with no hour lines (Fig. 4). The gnomon is in the shape of a sail, but its angle is not correct for the latitude of Berwick. It should be $55^{\circ} 47' N$ whereas the gnomon is set at somewhat less than that.

Did Ross actually visit Berwick though? Probably not, as he thanks a Mr W.D. Purves for procuring drawings of these two dials. However, he did consider them to be ancient sundials of Scotland.

Apparently Berwick is at war with Russia. The story goes that as Berwick changed hands between Scotland and England several times, it was often regarded as a separate entity. Some proclamations referred to England, Scotland and the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. One such was the declaration of the Crimean War against Russia in 1853.

When the peace treaty was eventually signed, Berwick-upon-Tweed was left out. Accordingly, Berwick is still at war with Russia. When the London correspondent of *Pravda* visited Berwick in 1966, a mutual declaration of peace was made with the Mayor of Berwick. The Mayor said "Please tell the Russian people through your newspaper that they can sleep peacefully in their beds".

Is it a true story? I don't know, but it's a good one.

REFERENCE

1. D. MacGibbon and T. Ross: *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, David Douglas, Edinburgh (1892).

dennis.cowan@btinternet.com

Postcard Potpourri 32 – Pilling, Lancashire

Peter Ransom

THUS ETERNITY APPROACHETH is the motto above this impressive dial above the south door of the church of St John the Baptist (now a redundant church belonging to the Churches Conservation Trust) at Pilling in Lancashire. You can see the name G Holden and date 1766 on the dial and 1771 on the door. This dial is in the 2010 BSS Register (SRN 1625) where it mentions that the gnomon was missing when recorded in 1992, so if any restoration is to be done this postcard could prove invaluable!



The Reverend George Holden was fascinated by tidal movements and is credited with producing the first set of publicly-accessible tide tables in the UK. Perhaps this is not surprising as Pilling is situated close to the sea and fishing (mainly shellfish and particularly cockles to Blackpool) is part of the local economy.

The postcard was published by [A.J.] Evans of Preston, who seemed to do a lot of postcards local to Preston in the 1920s and 1930s. Though this postcard has been written on, it is not addressed, stamped or dated.

pransom@btinternet.com