

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THOMAS ROSS

Part 19: Some Sundials of East Lothian

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The region of East Lothian is on Scotland's east coast and borders Edinburgh and Midlothian to the west with the Scottish Borders to the south, and has coastlines on the Firth of Forth and the North Sea. It has more hours of sunshine than any other region of Scotland – perfect for sundials!

In volume 5 of *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*¹, Thomas Ross mentions a number of dials in this area and six of them will be covered in this article.

Dunglass Collegiate Church is situated in the very south-east corner of East Lothian just off the main A1 road. The age of the church is unclear but it was known to be in existence in 1421. An Act of the Scottish Parliament in 1563 abolished Mass and the church's days as a Roman Catholic chapel were over.

It was used as a parish church until the 18th century when it was sold to a farmer. The building was desecrated at some point thereafter when the east window was 'modified' to make an opening to allow the church to be used as a barn (Fig. 1). In 1807 some dignity was restored when Sir John Hall bought Dunglass; the family later used the south transept as a burial aisle. The church is now in the care of Historic Environment Scotland, so no more 'modifications'.

There is a rather unusual structure within the grounds of the church and Ross describes it thus:

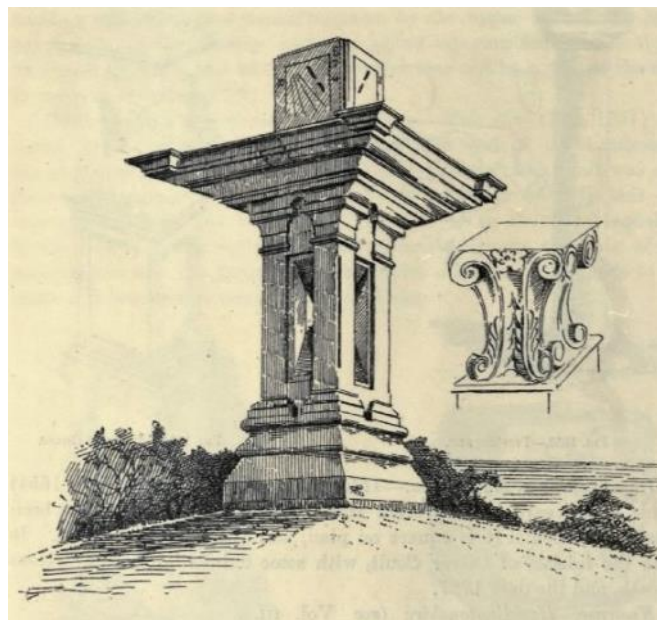


Fig. 2. Ross's sketch of the Dunglass dial, also showing the loose stone.

"This dial [Fig. 2] stands on the summit of a circular artificial mound about fifty yards south-west from the ruined Collegiate Church of Dunglass. It is square on plan, and has very much the appearance of being a fountain, with what seems to be a broad projecting square. The dials



Fig. 1. Dunglass Collegiate Church, showing the 'modification'.



Fig. 3. East face of the Dunglass dial.



Fig. 4. West face of the Dunglass dial.



Fig. 5. The Dunglass dial today.

are on the top of the seeming basin, the upper surface of which is flat; they measure about 15 inches square by about 2 feet high; but it is doubtful if this part of the structure is in its original condition. There are various loose stones, moulded and carved, lying about, one of which is here shown [in Fig. 2], and it seems probable that these are connected with the dial. The height from the ground to top of basin is about 6 feet 2 inches, and across the basin the measurement is 5 feet 1 inch; the width across the pedestal is about 20 inches."

The main difference today, apart from the general deterioration of the dial faces (Figs 3 and 4), is that the loose stone mentioned by Ross and shown in Fig. 2 has now been fitted to the top of the cubic dial stone. As Ross suggests, it was probably part of the original structure and it does not look to be out of place in its current position (Fig. 5). However, the possibility that the structure served some other purpose originally cannot be ignored, as it seems perhaps unlikely that the whole structure was designed as a sundial.

Further west, Fountainhall near Pencaitland dates from the 17th century and is a typical Scottish Laird's house of the period, although it underwent several phases of extension in the next hundred years or so (Fig. 6). Ross describes two dials at Fountainhall, and of the first he says:

"This charming old mansion has a dial [Fig. 7] on the south-west corner. Fountainhall is a seventeenth century building, and the supporting stone seems to be part of the



Fig. 6. Fountainhall mansion house with the large canted dial on the corner.

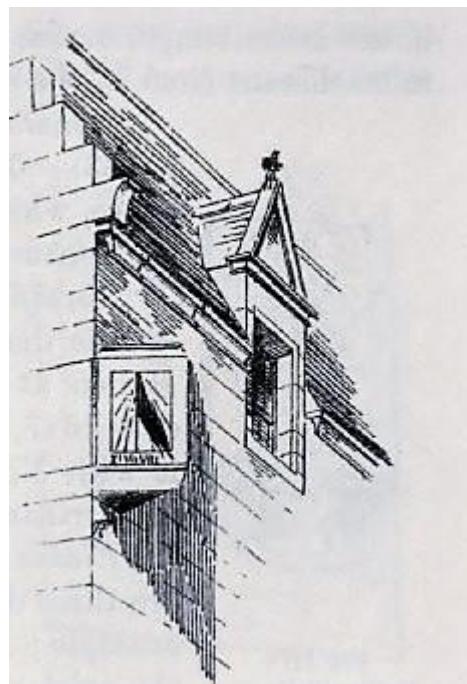


Fig. 7. Ross's drawing of the Fountainhall dial.



Fig. 8. Close-up of the Fountainhall dial.

original structure, but the dial itself is evidently of later workmanship, and is believed to have been put up by Sir Andrew Lauder about the end of last century. The dial faces due south, and is accurate as a timekeeper."

Today the dial, which has Roman numerals, is in rather poor condition with its face badly flaking (Fig. 8). As Ross says, it does not appear to be original and it may have been a replacement dial. Ross identifies another dial at Fountainhall as follows:

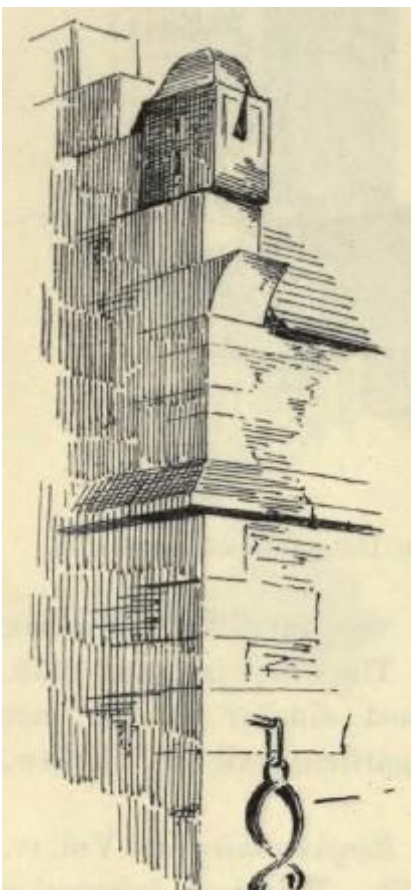


Fig. 9. Ross's sketch of the other Fountainhall dial, also showing the 'jougs'.

"This singular juxtaposition of a dial and 'jougs'² [Fig. 9] is to be found on a pigeon-house at Fountainhall. The old mansion-house was the residence of Lord Fountainhall (Sir John Lauder), and the tradition that he held occasional public courts of justice here is not lessened by the presence of the 'jougs' on one of his pigeon-houses. Only one gnomon of the dial remains entire; the stone faces have scaled off, and it is altogether in a neglected state; while the pigeon-house itself has been allowed to fall into total ruin. This and another pigeon-house stand about fifty yards south of the mansion-house, the ancient approach to which passed through between them, so that the 'jougs' and dials were in full view of all visitors."

Given Ross's description it is not surprising that this dial is now missing. The current owners, who have owned the house for only a short time, have no knowledge of it. The remains of a pigeon house are still in place but whether it is the one that had the sundial and jougs, or the other one mentioned by Ross, is not clear.

Less than three miles away lies the village of Ormiston, the location of a sundial recorded by Ross but about which he says only that:

"This simple dial [Fig. 10], supported on a moulded bracket, is placed below the eaves of a two-storied house in the village. It bears the date 1736."

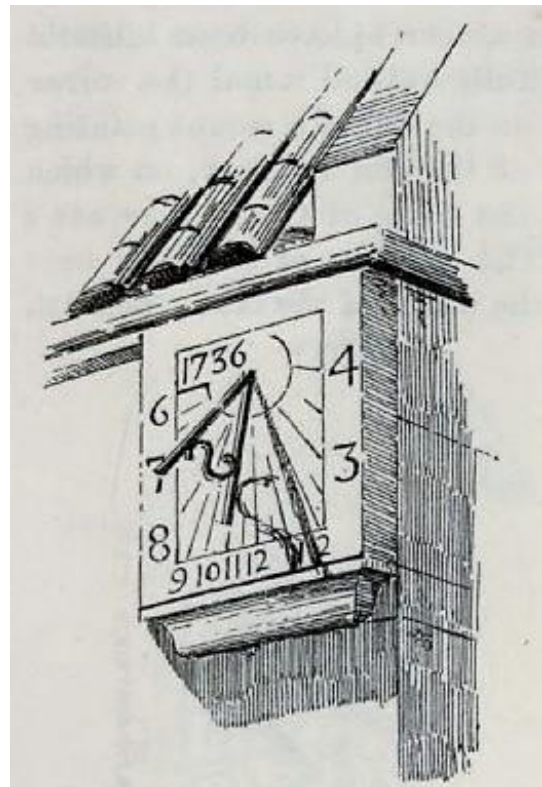


Fig. 10. Ross's sketch of the Ormiston dial.

This sundial today has been replaced by a modern dial (Fig. 11) which appears at first glance to be a faithful copy, particularly regarding the differing sizes of the numerals. However, a closer examination shows that 5pm has been added, the gnomon is positioned too low down and the hour lines do not all radiate from a single point (Fig. 12). I think

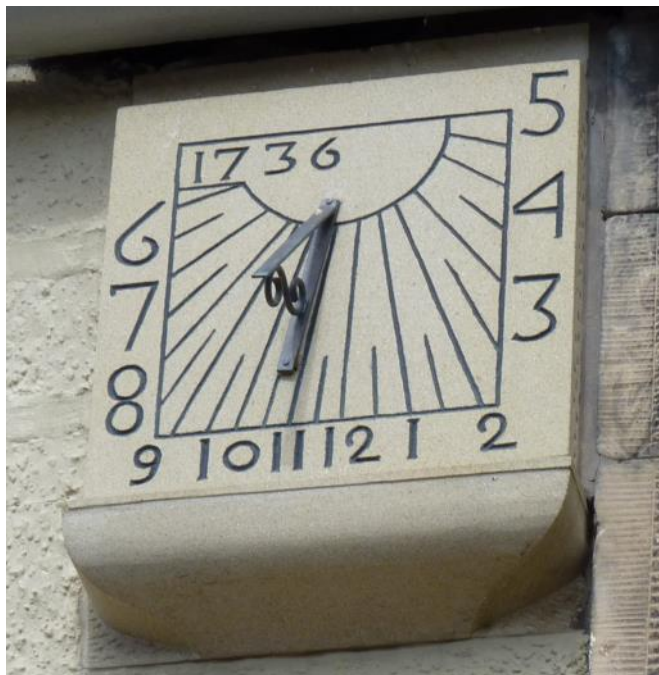


Fig. 11. The modern replacement of the Ormiston dial.

that it was John Allen who originally pointed out the hour line anomaly to me. Unfortunately I have been unable to find out what happened to the original dial.

Ross comments on another dial, at the nearby Ormiston Manse, by saying:

"The dial here [Fig. 13] stands on the top of the garden wall, but, as appears from an inscription on it, DEDICAT TO THIS CHAPEL BE THE (PARISHIONERS?), it is obviously not in its original position, but probably stood on one of the corners of the old church of Ormiston, to which it was

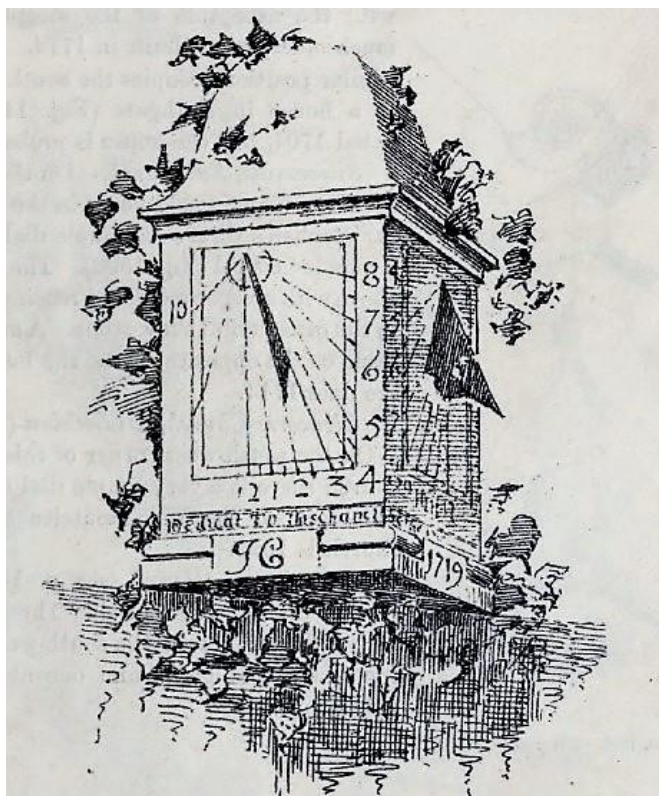


Fig. 13. Ross's sketch of the Ormiston Manse dial.

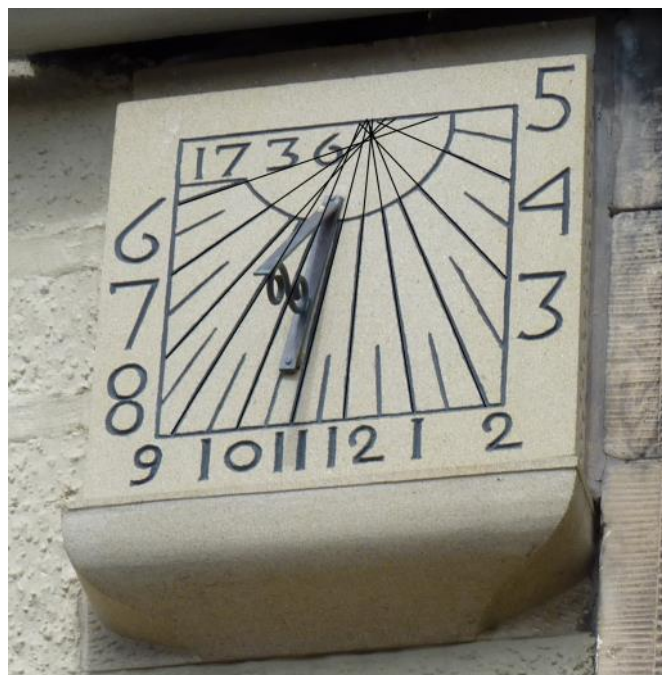


Fig. 12. The Ormiston dial with the hour lines extended.

gifted. The reading of the end of the inscription is very obscure. We have suggested the 'parishioners,' but are not at all confident of this, especially as it also contains beneath the initials J.C., probably some member of the Cockburn family, who would not likely place his private initials on a public gift. It further bears the date 1719."

The manse has been a private house for many years and unfortunately the sundial has disappeared.

The village of Garvald is situated virtually in the centre of East Lothian, and nearby is Nunraw Abbey Tower (Fig. 14) which until recently was the home of the Cistercian monks in Scotland (or at least used by them as a guest house). There is a multi-faceted sundial in the grounds and Ross comments that:

"This dial [Fig. 15] stands in the grounds of Nunraw House, and Mr. Walter Wingate Grey of Nunraw, in sending a photograph, writes: 'The small dials include dials for Cairo, Ispahan, Jerusalem, Mount Sinai, Jamaica, etc., and also Savannah, Philadelphia, etc., which shows that it cannot be more than a hundred years old; also on



Fig. 14. Nunraw Abbey Tower. Photo copyright Renata Edge and licensed for re-use under Creative Commons Licence.

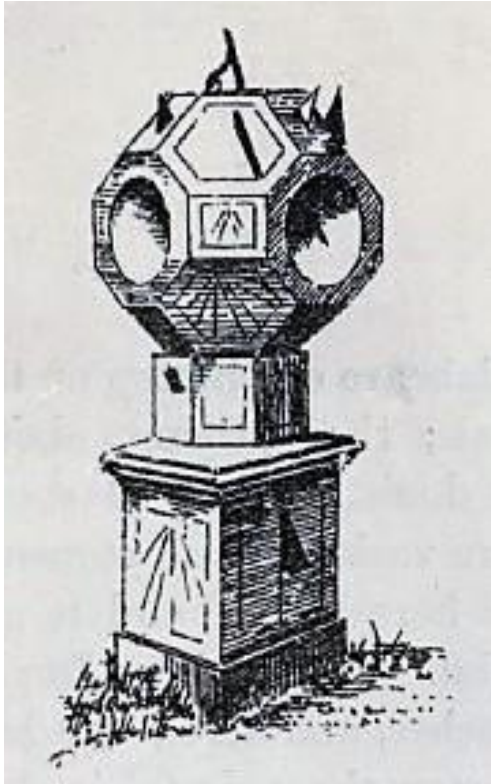


Fig. 15.
Nunraw dial
by Ross.

one of the sides of the pillar there is a system of figures for making an equation of time.' The upper, or faceted, part has the usual dials, hollowed and plain."

Ross's correspondent probably wasn't far out on his estimation of the age of this dial. Although Savannah was involved in the American War of Independence in the late 18th century, it was probably its appearance as a prominent seaport in the early 19th century that earned it a place on this dial, so that would put its age at around 80–90 years at the time of the original writings.

This dial has three sections and at the time of my visit (in 2009) the dial was lying on the ground in two parts (Fig. 16). The upper faceted part, which has 25 dials, is lying on its own and is in reasonable condition other than some missing and broken gnomons and some lichen growth. It has large vertical scaphe dials on the cardinal points and also has vertical, proclining and reclining dials as well as a horizontal dial on top.



Fig. 16. The two separated parts of the Nunraw dial.



Fig. 17. The east and south-east faces of the octagonal stone with JERUSALEM marked on the south-east face.



Fig. 18. The south-facing dial of the cube.

The other two parts (a cube and an octagon) are still connected in one piece as can be seen in Fig. 16. The octagon has dials on all eight vertical faces and the east and south-east faces are shown in Fig. 17. There is an inscription on the west face of the cube but it is badly flaked and hard to read. This is at odds with Ross's sketch of the west face which appears to show a dial face wrongly delineated. The south face on the other hand has a dial which, although faint (Fig. 18), can be easily read. This is the only dial on the cube, where the north face is blank and the east face contains the equation of time mentioned above.

REFERENCES and NOTES

1. D. MacGibbon and T. Ross: *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, David Douglas, Edinburgh (1892).
2. Common at one time in Scotland, a set of joughs was an iron collar normally attached by a chain to a wall. The collar was placed round the offender's neck and fastened by a padlock. Time spent in the joughs was intended to publicly shame the offender. Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joughs>

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