

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THOMAS ROSS

Part 2: The Sundials at Craigiehall

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Craigiehall is a late 17th century mansion house which is located some six miles west from the centre of Edinburgh and is currently used as the Headquarters of the British Army's 2nd Division. It has been in use by the military since the start of the 2nd World War when it was requisitioned by the Army and indeed Germany's surrender of its forces in Norway in 1945 was negotiated and signed there. It is rumoured that Rudolph Hess was there for a short while after his flight from Germany in 1941, but like Bonnie Prince Charlie before him, he is rumoured to have been everywhere! The mansion house is now used as the Officer's Mess.

There are two sundials at Craigiehall – a wonderful four metre high obelisk on the lawn in front of the Officer's Mess, and a horizontal dial to the rear. In the *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*,¹ obelisk sundials are described as follows:

“The constant parts of these dials are a square shaft, a bulged capital, and a tapering finial. Where the dial is of the normal type and unaltered, the shaft is divided on each side into five horizontal spaces by incised lines, thus presenting twenty compartments. These compartments are hollowed out with cup-shaped, heart-shaped, triangular, and other sinkings, which are generally lined so as to mark the hours, and were without doubt always meant to be so. The sharp edge of the figure casts the shadow, which is especially distinct in the angular shapes and at the top of the heart sinkings,

where there is often a certain amount of undercutting. Stone gnomons of various forms are frequently left in the cup-hollows, and metal stiles are to be found in all the dials. Occasionally some of the spaces are left blank, and on the north side initials, dates, and arms sometimes occur.

The capital is always bulged out so as to form an octagon in the centre, with an upright facet on each of the eight sides, having a dial n each. Above and below each facet over the four sides of the shaft are sloping facets, with a reclining dial or a proclining dial on each the former being those dials whose faces slope towards the sky, and the latter those whose faces slope towards the ground. The eight triangular pieces formed by the meeting of the square and octagon are cut out, and most effective shadows, from an artistic point of view, result from this arrangement, giving an air of dignity to the capital, which is wanting in the one instance (at Drummond Gardens) where this arrangement is departed from. The upright facets of the octagonal part have heart-shaped and cup-shaped sinkings, as in the shaft; but the proclining and reclining parts seldom have sinkings. Nor has the tapering finial, although usually covered with dials, ever any sinkings; like the shaft, this part is divided by horizontal incised lines, the number of spaces, for which there appears to have been no rule, varying according to the height of the finial.

Ross goes on to describe the obelisk dial at Craigiehall:

“This dial [Fig. 1], which is one of the normal type, has undergone a considerable transformation. When the

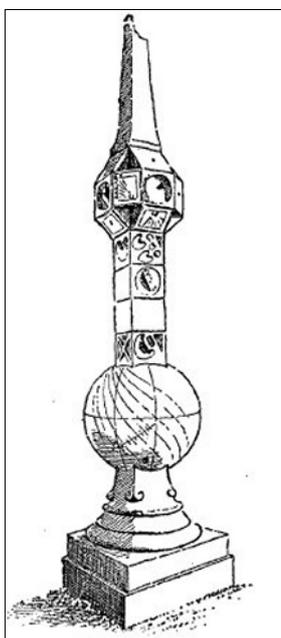


Fig. 1 (left). The obelisk dial at Craigiehall as drawn by Thomas Ross.

Fig. 2 (right). The obelisk dial now.



mansion-house was rebuilt about the middle of last century by the Hon. Charles Hope Vere, second son of the first Earl of Hopetoun, the dial, which was probably broken, was set up on a new and most original base, consisting of a globe about 2 feet 2 inches in diameter, into which the shaft is fitted, burying the whole of one of the five spaces. The globe is supported on a rounded base, and the whole rests on a square plinth. The upper portion was also renewed, but not strictly after the old form, a slightly curved outline without division lines having been given to it. The whole of the renewed work is of white sandstone, while the original dial is of red sandstone. The height from the ground to top of globe measures about 4 feet 8 inches, thence to top of capital about 4 feet 5 inches, and the renewed top 2 feet 11 inches; total height is about 12 feet. The width of the base at the ground is 2 feet 2 inches. The dial stands in the park, and is protected from the cattle by an iron railing."

Ross's hopes that the dial would be protected in its enclosure did not materialise as the sundial was discovered in pieces in 1965 within an enclosure of old railings to the south of the Officer's Mess.² It was subsequently restored by the Ancient Monuments Branch of the Ministry of Public Buildings and Works and re-erected at its present site on the lawn in front of the Officer's Mess – see Fig. 2.

As to its current condition, it appears to be still much the same as Ross saw it some 120 years ago. The only noticeable differences to me are that the lines on the globe are hardly legible now, but Ross may have enhanced them in his sketch, and the red sandstone parts may now be more worn. As in Ross's day, there are no gnomons remaining, but I counted stubs of some twenty-four, plus numerous cup hollows and geometric sinkings (Fig. 3), all of which functioned as sundials.



Fig. 3. Detail of the obelisk.

It was probably made in the late 17th century, but it is unique since its modification in the 18th century by the addition of the globe base. Obelisk sundials are few and far between, only twenty-six known complete examples exist in Scotland, and there are no other obelisk sundials quite like this one.



Figs 4 & 5.
The horizontal sundial with the dial by John England.



As previously said, the other sundial at Craigiehall is a horizontal dial (see Fig. 4) and is located behind the Officer's Mess, just to the side of the west lawn and in front of the tennis court. Its pedestal is of carved stone, about one metre high, with a brass octagonal dial plate shown in Fig. 5. It can be dated fairly accurately, as an inscription on the dial plate reads "Made by England, Instrument Maker to Her Majesty Ann, Charing X London". Anne was on the throne from 1702 to 1714 so the sundial must be from that period.

This date is further confirmed in that John England was known to be a mathematical instrument maker working from Charing Cross between at least 1703 to 1708. A 10 inch astronomical ring dial, signed by him and dated 1703, is at Trinity College, Cambridge. He also made a number of

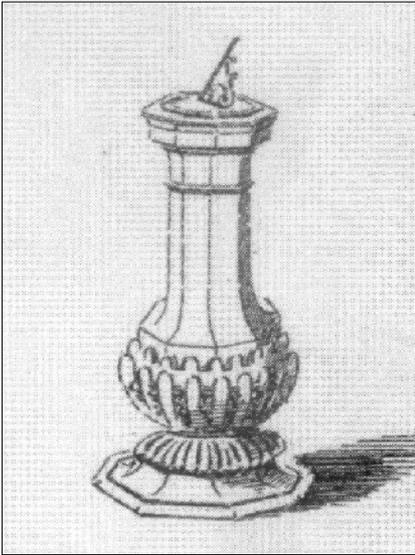


Fig. 6. Ross's drawing of the horizontal dial.

instruments for that College's observatory including a ring dial, a sector and an analemmatic dial, all now at the Whipple Museum.³ Samuel Saunders⁴ was at one time apprenticed to England.

The dial has now fading Roman numerals from 4am to 8pm, but more interestingly it also has an Equation of Time table, which dates it to after 1672. Unfortunately the table on the dial plate is now quite faint and is difficult to read, but if you look carefully, the months of the year can be seen at the top of each column of figures. The dial also includes the arms of the Marquis of Annandale quartered with those of his wife, Sophia Fairholm of Craigiehall, whom he married when she was only fourteen. It was this marriage that eventually resulted in Annandale taking ownership of the Craigie estate.

Ross says of this dial:

“The horizontal dials at Craigiehall [Fig. 6] and Hoptoun are almost identical. The carved work on the pedestals was probably wrought by the same hand. On the

first-named is the inscription MADE BY ENGLAND, INSTRUMENT MAKER TO HER MAJESTY AT CHARING X, LONDON, with the arms of the Marquis of Annandale quartered with those of his wife, a Fairholm of Craigiehall.”

It can be seen that there is a difference of opinion regarding the word following ‘Majesty’ in the inscription, but the words are faint and either could be correct. However, it doesn't change the likely date of the sundial.

Ross mentions the dial at nearby Hoptoun, but does not provide a description, other than it was almost identical to the one at Craigiehall. Neither does he provide a sketch. Both of these mansions were built at the same time, both designed and overseen by the same architect, Sir William Bruce. According to contemporary reports, they suffered from the same problems that we have nowadays, in that tradesmen were often taken from one to work on the other and vice versa.

In July 2011, following a Defence Basing Review carried out by the Ministry of Defence, it was announced that Craigiehall would be closing in 2014/2015. Who knows what will happen to the mansion house and grounds, but more importantly from my point of view, what will happen to the sundials? Let's hope that access to these two wonderful sundials will be preserved in the future.

REFERENCES

1. D. MacGibbon and T. Ross: *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, David Douglas, Edinburgh (1892)
2. There is some dispute regarding this date. Some sources say that it was discovered in pieces in 1972.
3. Jill Wilson: *Biographical Index of British Sundial Makers from the 7th century to 1920*. 2nd edition. BSS Monograph 2 (2007).
4. M. Lose: ‘Samuel Saunders – a study of a London sundial maker’ *BSS Bull.*, 24(i) and 24(ii), (March & June 2012).

For a CV of the author, see *Bulletin* 23(iv).