

# THE SUNDIALS OF GERALD LAING

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Gerald Laing was a pop artist of some repute, in the mould, according to some, of Andy Warhol. He was born in 1936 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne and spent a great part of the 1960s living and working in New York. Like Roy Lichtenstein and Robert Indiana, with whom he worked after moving to America, he helped to define the 1960s with popular images that symbolised the icons of the era, be they automobiles—a particular favourite of his—or film stars. The famous image of Brigitte Bardot with her face encircled by a target ring is one of Laing's works.

His work is exhibited in public and private collections around the world, including the Tate, the V&A, the National Portrait Gallery and the National Gallery in London; the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum, New York, and the Smithsonian Institution.

In 1969 he left New York for the Scottish Highlands where he bought and restored the crumbling Kinkell Castle near Inverness. He abandoned painting and turned his hand to sculpture, setting up his own bronze foundry at Kinkell. One of his works, depicting four rugby players in a line-out, stands outside Twickenham, the home of English rugby. He returned to painting only fairly recently and these works include Victoria Beckham, Amy Winehouse and Kate Moss.

However, he is hardly known at all for his sundials, being responsible for at least four. He cast a bronze Scottish obelisk sundial at his foundry at Kinkell (SRN 1175, Fig. 1) for Dunphail House in Morayshire and was known to have been in correspondence with, and may have met Dr Andrew Somerville on this subject early in 1990. Photographs and copies of correspondence between the two are in the collection of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland. It is possible that this sundial was never installed at Dunphail, as Gerald Laing's website appears to indicate that it is at Kinkell,<sup>1</sup> unless of course, he made another one for himself!



Fig. 1. Kinkell obelisk.

The shaft has four square panels on each side with cup hollows (scaphe dials), hearts and vertical dials showing Babylonian, Planetary and Italian hours. The central boss has an octagonal band complete with four cup hollows with declination lines on the south face. The finial has four panels on each side giving the time in New York, Chicago, Hong Kong and Tokio.

Laing produced a very similar obelisk sundial in 2000 for the Wormsley Cricket Ground on the Getty estate in Buckinghamshire (SRN 6044, Fig. 2). This obelisk is in Portland limestone with bronze gnomons and shows the time at various cricket locations around the world including Delhi, Sydney, Barbados and Johannesburg. This dial was described in the Somerville Lecture at the BSS Annual Conference at Oxford in 2004.

He also produced a huge 37ft high market cross in 2001 which stands in Falcon Square in the centre of Inverness (SRN 7098, Fig. 3). It was unveiled by Prince Andrew and is a popular meeting place for people, young and old. It is made from the finest Clashach sandstone and is topped by a bronze Scottish unicorn. Four bronze flying peregrine falcons (sculpted by Leonie Gibbs) said to be in various stages of attack on a pigeon, are positioned around the upper reaches of the obelisk.



Fig. 2. Wormsley Cricket Ground.

Kevin Karney



Fig. 3. Falcon Square, Inverness.

Four cup hollows, robustly designed by Emma Lavender, are located around the base at the cardinal points. They show BST with declination lines marked by their zodiac symbols and include a graphical representation of the equation of time (Fig. 4). The gnomons have been designed to be particularly vandal proof. It was 'Dial of the Month' on the BSS website in June 2011.

In 1991 he produced 'Axis Mundi', a six metre high obelisk of polished black granite surmounted by the five wise virgins in bronze for Standard Life's offices in Canonmills in Edinburgh (SRN 2074, Fig. 5). It includes three cup hol-



Fig. 5. 'Axis Mundi' at Canonmills, Edinburgh.



Fig. 4. The *West?* scaphe dial at Inverness.

lows in cast bronze mounted at eye level on the east, south and west faces. The south dial has a 150 mm pin gnomon whilst the east and west dials each have a peripheral notch. The south dial, like the market cross at Inverness, has a graphical representation of the equation of time. The dials include hour lines, equinox and tropic lines. The gnomonics are by George Higgs.

Unfortunately, Standard Life's offices here have been sold for development and the obelisk has been removed to storage. A spokesman for Standard Life confirmed that they have no current plans for its redeployment elsewhere.

Gerald Laing died in November 2011 aged 75.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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#### REFERENCE

1. Gerald Laing's website: [www.geraldlaing.com/index.php/work/publicsculpture\\_artwork/the\\_kinkell\\_sundial/](http://www.geraldlaing.com/index.php/work/publicsculpture_artwork/the_kinkell_sundial/)