

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THOMAS ROSS

Part 4. The Hidden Sundials of South Queensferry

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South Queensferry, now part of the City of Edinburgh, is a village situated on the banks of the River Forth between the Forth Bridge and the Forth Road Bridge about seven miles from the centre of Edinburgh.

I was always intrigued by Thomas Ross's mention in *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*¹ of a sundial in South Queensferry (Fig. 1). He states only that it "is built into a chimney-stack on the south side of a house near the east end of the village. It has had rough usage, and the ledge projecting at the base has been broken as indicated. The dial is about level with the road behind the house, and is not visible from the street."

I had looked out for it several times, but I had never seen it and I was beginning to think that the house and sundial no longer existed. But I decided to have one last attempt to find the sundial, this time putting a bit more effort into it. Using Ross's scant information regarding its position, I scoured the Ordnance Survey map and discovered that a narrow lane that I previously was unaware of led from the east end of the village towards the village centre. The clue was in Ross's words and I should have found it earlier, but the lane wasn't easily seen. It ran parallel to and on the south side of the houses that were on the main street

through the village. It appeared to me that if the house and its sundial were not on this lane, then they had definitely gone for ever.

Foolishly I started walking the lane from the centre of the village, and it was only when I had reached the second last house that the sundial suddenly appeared on the roofline to my left. Why did I start walking from the village centre? I should have started from the east end of the village and I would have found it virtually right away!

The roofline had changed since Ross's day, but it was unmistakably the same dial (Fig. 2) and still sat on a chimney stack. Photogenically, it was in a perfect position with the Forth Bridge framed behind it, but as in Ross's day, it still could not be seen from the main street.

It is a two-faced stone dial with a pyramid capping and a flower above with a winged head below. One gnomon is missing whilst a tiny part of the other can just be seen. It has Arabic numerals from 6am to 9am just visible on the south face and 2pm to 7pm just visible on the west face. The other numerals can no longer be seen and the hour lines are only just visible.

To say that I was pleased to have found it at last was an understatement. I was delighted to have discovered that it still existed.

On the eastern edge of South Queensferry, Barnbogle Castle sits within the Dalmeny Estate, owned by the Earl of Rosebery. A footpath that is open to the public runs along

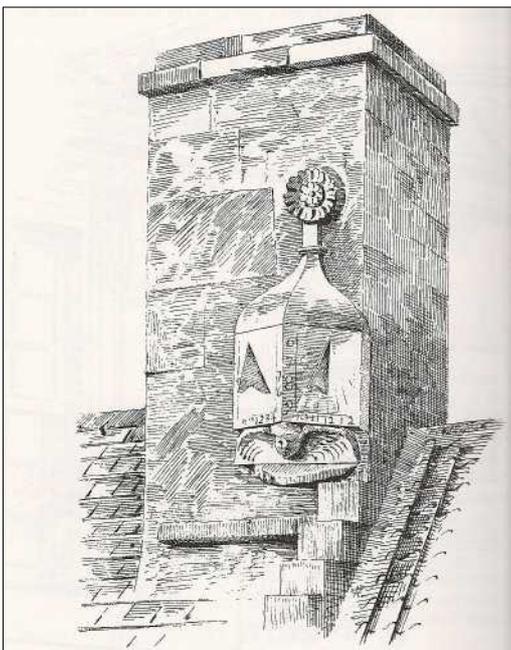


Fig. 1. South Queensferry sundial – Ross's sketch.



Fig. 2. South Queensferry sundial and the Forth Bridge.



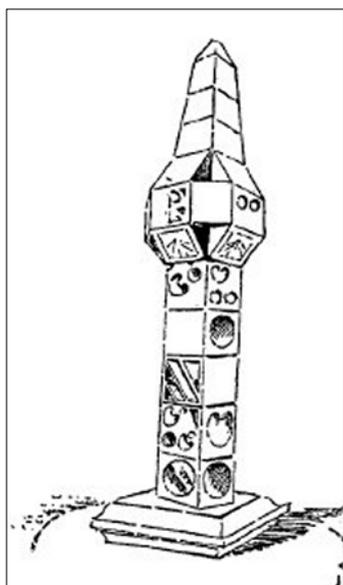
Fig. 3. The beach at South Queensferry.

the coastline from South Queensferry to Cramond, and Barnbougle Castle is about half-way along on the coastal side of the path. This 4½-mile Shore Walk from South Queensferry to Cramond is open all the year round. The walk is full of interest throughout, with beautiful and ever-changing views over the Forth to various islands and the coastline of Fife. The immediate grounds of the castle are private, however, and should not be entered without obtaining the relevant permission beforehand.

It is a delightful walk from South Queensferry to the castle, and who would have thought that such a beautiful beach (Fig. 3) existed not six miles from the centre of Edinburgh? It was virtually empty, even though it was the middle of summer on a warm sunny day.

Although the history of the castle stretches back to the 13th century, the present castle is the result of the extensive rebuilding in 1881 by the 5th Earl of Rosebery who was Britain's Prime Minister from 1894 to 1895. Apparently he practised his speeches here in a gallery especially built for the purpose.

The dial identified by Ross was an obelisk and he writes "when this dial [Fig. 4] was sketched it was standing in a



Far left: Fig. 4. Barnbougle Castle sundial – Ross's sketch.

Left: Fig. 6. Barnbougle obelisk sundial.

Above: Fig. 7. Detail of the Barnbougle obelisk sundial.



Fig. 5. Barnbougle horizontal sundial.

garden in front of the cottages Lang-green, not far distant from Barnbougle Castle, to which place it was removed a few years ago when the castle was rebuilt. It has a base a little deeper than is shown by the sketch, the lower part having been partly concealed. The dial is about 7 feet 2 inches high, and including the base 8 feet 4 inches, with a shaft 10 inches square. On one of the spaces of the shaft, on the north side, are the Cumnyngham arms."

On entering the castle grounds, a sundial (Fig. 5) can be spotted almost right away, but disappointingly this was obviously not the one identified by Ross. It was a simple square horizontal stone dial on a short pedestal with no numbers or hour lines visible. The metal gnomon is still in place.

But where was Ross's sundial? I couldn't see it anywhere. And then I spotted it. It was well hidden, and virtually surrounded by thick bushes (Fig. 6). Only on the north side was there a space where the sundial could just be seen. Even then, you had to be directly in front of it before it was visible.



Fig. 8. Barnbogle obelisk sundial scaphe.

The dimensions are as described by Ross. There are no numerals to be seen on the dial faces now, but some hour

lines remain as well as many gnomon stubs (Fig. 7). It has numerous heart-shaped and other sinkings (Fig. 8) on its many faces and is one of only twenty-six known complete examples of obelisk sundials in Scotland.

Both of these sundials at South Queensferry may be hidden, but at least they still exist. I imagine that Thomas Ross would have been pleased.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful thanks to Lord and Lady Rosebery for allowing me access to Barnbogle Castle grounds.

REFERENCE

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

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