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THE SUNDIAL PAGE

St Clement Danes

A few years ago, a colleague of mine, a fellow Master Mariner, who knew of my interest in sundials and of my passion for stained-glass sundials in particular, gave me tickets for the summer Antique Fair at Olympia. He told me that whilst he was there he had come across a stained-glass dial which I should go and see. I was somewhat sceptical, but I went to Olympia and found the dial. I was not disappointed; on the contrary, I was much impressed with the splendid painted glass that met my gaze.

There were two stained and painted rectangular glass panels, each incorporating an ornate oval, decorated in classical style. Each oval was furnished with a square panel, the first containing a small oval displaying the

symbol of an anchor and the letters 'C' and 'D' juxtaposed on either side of the shank of the anchor, and the second containing the sundial itself, embellished with a coat of arms, portraying three battle axes. In the first panel, below the anchor, an inscription read: 'This Fabricke was New erected, A: 1655: Robert Harper & John Pride then Church Wardens'. Similarly, in the second panel, below the sundial, there was another inscription: 'Hoc fieri fecit vitrum (quod pignus amoris,) Febr: V A:D: MDCLV', below which were the initials 'W' and 'P'. Undoubtedly a pair, the panels were painted in a bold distinctive style, less delicate than most of those of which I know; but, nevertheless, one could only describe them as magnificent.

I was, of course, attracted by the fact that the first panel described was decorated with the maritime symbol of an anchor and adorned with *my* initials. Alas, I really could not afford the four-figure sum being asked; but neither did I wish to see this piece disappear overseas or into the depths of a large national museum, where it might seldom have seen the light of day. Aware of such interest expressed both at home and from abroad, I asked the vendor to keep



Figures 1 and 2. The St Clement Danes declining (S 39° 40' E) stained-glass sundial and its accompanying panel, dated 1655.

the sundial for me, until such time as I could consult a friend who I knew collected portable sundials. I telephoned him and explained the situation, to which he replied: 'I am a bit short at the moment; but I'll have a look at it'.

It wasn't very long before he telephoned me back and casually announced that he had bought it! He said that I could come and look at the sundial whenever I wanted to and that he would be happy for me to research it. As it happened, the vendors had given me photographs of the panels; but it was only recently that I was able to

undertake any work on the matter. In retrospect this was just as well, for the new owner decided to have the glass panels cleaned and restored, before putting them on display, nicely illuminated, in his living room.

It is evident that the sundial was made for a church—but where and which one, and who made it? The sundial was thought to have been bought earlier at an auction in Norfolk; but the owner's searches in this direction were to no avail. However, I managed to interest the Norroy and Ulster King of Arms in my quest for information concerning the sundial and he was kind enough to investigate the matter for me.

His answers were soon forthcoming: the letters 'C' and 'D' with the accompanying symbol of the anchor, represented St Clement Danes in

London, confirmed by the fact that the Church Wardens of this parish church, for the year commencing 1st April 1655, were Robert Harper and John Pride. However, the coat of arms, which should have revealed the benefactor, or the person who was honoured in the production of this sundial, could not be found in any of the records of the College of Arms, suggesting that it may have been a Commonwealth grant, declared invalid at the Restoration of the

Monarchy by a Royal Warrant in 1660.

On the matter of who made the dial, the initials 'WP' have caused some to jump to conclusions: William Price 'the Elder', for example, who flourished in London c1680 until his death in 1710, a contemporary of Henry Gyles of York (*not* his pupil, as has sometimes been asserted), who would have been perhaps ten years old in 1655! Since the Church Wardens Accounts of St Clement Danes for the year 1656-1657 show that William Pollicott, a London glazier, who was evidently acquainted with, if not a colleague of John Oliver, was paid 'for making and mending and cleaning of glass in the church', it is more than likely that he was the artist who was actually responsible for this intriguing, attractive stained-glass sundial. ☺