



# THE SUNDIAL PAGE

## The Kersal Cell

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The Kersal Cell is an historic Grade II Listed Building off the Littleton Road in the City of Salford, in the County of Greater Manchester and close to the City of Manchester itself. The very name 'Kersal Cell' has a medieval religious ring to it, which is perhaps hardly surprising, since Kersal Cell is said to owe its origin to the grant of the 'Hamlet of Kersal' in c1148 to the monks of the Cluniac Priory in Lenton, near Nottingham, by Stephen Ranulf Gernons, Earl of Chester and Lord of South Lancashire. This grant was bestowed on the monks of the Cluniac Order to establish a place 'for the service of God' in the Earl's domain, in the district 'between Ribble and Mersey', in the Manor of Salford. Although he may well have been a good man and genuinely religious, the object of the Earl's gift might perhaps have been inspired by his natural concern for his own spiritual welfare, particularly at the time of his death.

The Cluniac Order was founded by Duke William of Aquitaine in the year 910 at the Abbey of Cluny, some 47 miles (75km) north of the City of Lyons and 10 miles (17km) north of Mâcon, in the Province of Burgundy. The order, in fact, was a medieval reformist organisation, based on and emanating from the Benedictine Order; but with a constitution that provided freedom from the jurisdiction of the local bishop and from lay supervision and inevitable interference. Thus, with guaranteed independence, other than being dependent solely on the papacy, the Abbot of Cluny became the head of what was to become the most widespread and powerful religious reform movement in the Middle Ages in Europe. Following the Norman Conquest, the Abbot of Cluny was petitioned by the Normans to found a priory in their new territory, to which he finally consented in 1077, when he sent a party to establish a monastery at Lewes. This was the first of many Cluniac foundations in Britain.

The foundation and history of the Kersal Cell was not untroubled, since, in c1175, King Henry II re-granted Kersal

to Lenton Priory, as a hermitage, to be held 'freely and quietly'. Henry II was the first Plantagenet king, an outstanding medieval monarch, who married Eleanor of Aquitaine, daughter of the then Duke William. Henry strove to curb both the power of the nobles and of the Church. He reformed English law, establishing Anglo-Saxon common law as the law of England, introduced circuit courts and brought about 'trial by jury'.

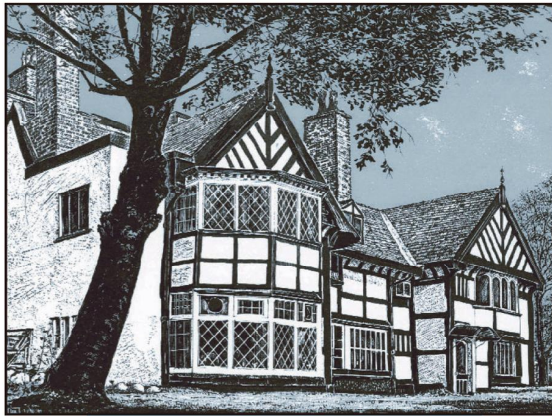


Figure 1. Kersal Cell, c1930, (from an old 'greetings' card). The sundial may just be discerned in the upper light on the right hand side of the ground-floor bay window.

Figure 2. The Kersal Cell stained-glass sundial.



Thus Kersal Cell was initially a well-founded establishment, but one which struggled to survive in the 14th century and which was finally surrendered to the Crown in 1539, following the Act for the Suppression of the Lesser Monasteries of 1536. It was this Act, in the 27th year of the reign of King Henry

VIII, which brought about the Dissolution of the Monasteries, when, during a four year period, some 10,000 monks, nuns, friars and other religious occupants were, to put it mildly, evicted and replaced by favoured laymen.

Kersal Cell was leased from that year until 1560, when it was sold into private hands. About the year 1568, it became the property of the Kenyon family and remained with this family until after the

Restoration, when the property was transferred to Edward Byrom of Manchester. Thus, Kersal Cell was inherited by John Byrom, the famous Jacobite, hymn-writer and poet, where, in 1745, in this well-loved home, he composed the Christmas carol 'Christians Awake'. Following the death of John Byrom in 1763, the property remained in the family for a good hundred years; but by the 1960s it had become a 'Country Club'.

At some time in its history, probably in the latter half of the 17th century, after Edward

Byrom came into ownership of the property, a simple stained-glass declining sundial (c20° east) was placed in one of the upper lights of the fine bay window of the ground-floor room in the west wing. The sundial took the form of a rectangular panel of plain glass, within a wooden frame, with a scalloped border in a yellow-orange stain, containing the Roman numerals, denoting the hours, and graduated in half and quarter-hours, to be viewed from inside the building. The hour-lines emanated from a solar image at the centre of the uppermost edge of the panel, with the gnomon being fixed to the outside of the wooden frame. I was able to pay a visit to Kersal Cell in about the year 1981, when I saw the sundial for myself and recorded it, although it was no longer *in situ*, but stored in the so-called 'Sundial Room'. Sadly, by 1994, the sundial no longer appeared to exist, since when the building has suffered considerable changes. Nevertheless, on making enquiries recently, I was pleased to discover that there is now a new owner, who seems inclined to restore the Kersal Cell ... including the sundial. If this actually comes to pass, no doubt the 'ghosts' of Kersal Cell will have good reason to rejoice!●