

TWO MANCHESTER GLASS DIALS

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There were once two glass dials within a few miles of the centre of Manchester: both have now disappeared. One was at the Old Parsonage, at Didsbury in the south of the city, and the other at Kersal, in the City of Salford. The only thing which can be considered to connect them is that both might have been caused to be erected by once prominent citizens of Manchester and Salford. We know exactly by whom and when the Didsbury dial was constructed and I wish in this article to just suggest by whom the Kersal dial may have been conceived.

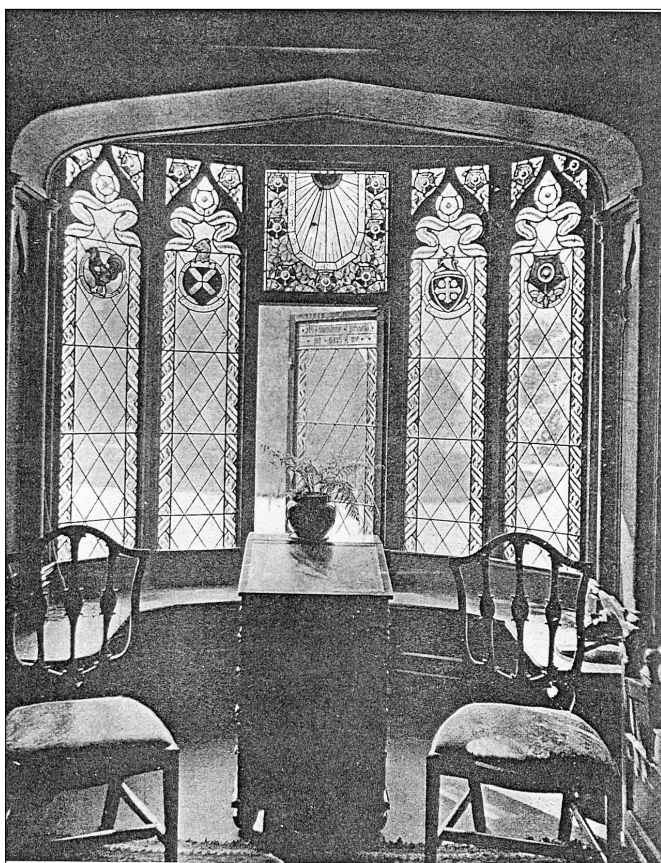


Fig. 1. The 1903 stained glass dial at Didsbury Old Parsonage. From a contemporary photograph in ref. 1, also believed to have been published as a postcard.

The Dial at Didsbury Old Parsonage

Mr Fletcher Moss was a Manchester business man. He moved to the Didsbury Old Parsonage in 1865, buying it 1884 and living there for over 40 years. He was a Manchester worthy, councillor, philanthropist and antiquarian, becoming Alderman of the City, JP for the County Palatine of Lancashire, and President of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society. He left the Parsonage and its gardens to the city.

It was his antiquarian interests which occupied his spare time. On frequent occasions, every month or so, he and his friends, mainly other businessmen, visited historic sites on day trips. They travelled by train, bus or bicycle, sometimes considerable distances, exploring many old houses and other buildings. In those days most of the houses were not open to the public but one of the group probably knew the owner, or they just knocked on the door. Those times are long gone.

The results of the travels were written up by Fletcher Moss in seven large volumes illustrated by good photographs, some taken by himself.¹ He was clearly interested in sundials for several are illustrated – in fact I think he wrote the best description of the Marrington dial, Shropshire (SRN 2234).

In his account² of his public work for the city, he describes the window of the library which he designed, with the sundial which he also designed in 1903 (see Fig. 1). Whether he delineated it himself I do not know, but certainly he had friends who could have helped. The dial declines 25° west (Fletcher Moss's own figure) and is on frosted glass. In the opening light beneath the dial is the motto, 'As sunshine passeth—so pass me'. I imagine Fletcher Moss got inspiration for the dial from one he saw in some old house that he and his friends visited on their pleasure outings, but I can find no clue in his books. The windows with the mock heraldry survive, but not the dial or the motto.

The Kersal Cell Dial

This dial (Fig. 2) and the house in which it was situated, have already been described.³ The dial was situated in a large eight-light bow window. It is a simple design, with the unusual feature that the sun's image at the top centre of the dial appears to be shining through white clouds with scalloped edges. It doesn't match the style of any of the known makers of stained glass dials, but appears to be in typical early-18th century style. The building, Kersal Cell, is on the site of an ancient monastic establishment which suffered at the dissolution. It is a large half-timbered 16th century building, very much altered. Not only has the sundial disappeared, but so also have the large bow windows. In its later years the building was a girls school, a country club and finally a night club; the survival of the sundial despite these episodes is remarkable. It disappeared in the 1990s.

Kersal Cell came into the hands of the Byrom family during the 17th century.⁴ They also had properties in Manchester. John Byrom was born in 1691: he was educated at Trinity College, Cambridge, becoming a fellow in 1714, and mar-

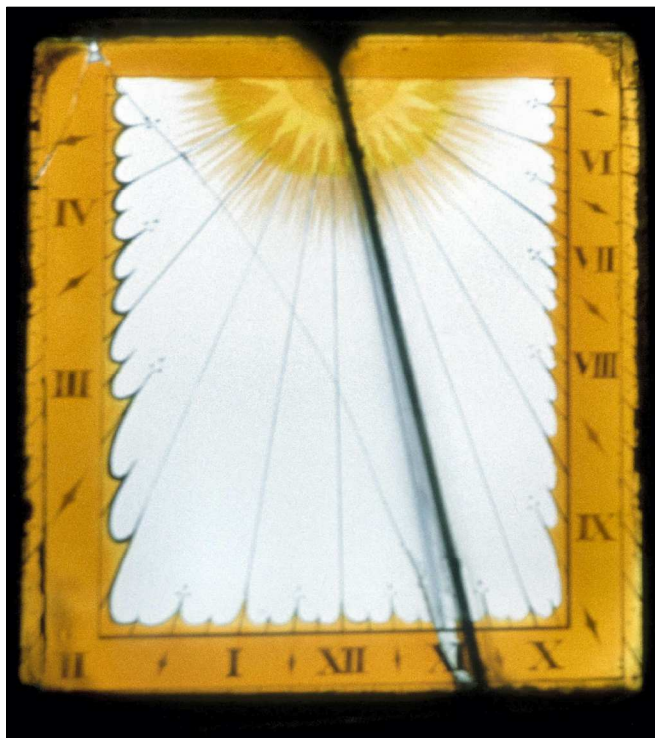


Fig. 2. The Kersal Cell stained glass dial. Photograph by C. Daniel, taken autumn 1982, from ref. 3.

ried his cousin Elizabeth in 1721. He then spent most of his time in London or Cambridge suffering ceaseless complaints from his family that he was never at home. He is best known for three things; inventing a shorthand system and teaching it to the great and good of London in an effort to earn money, writing the words for the Christmas Day hymn, *Christians Awake* (he was a prolific poet), and being a leading Jacobite.

In London, Byrom cultivated the leaders of society, much by teaching shorthand and his membership of the Royal Society, becoming involved with disputes on many topics, and he also filled his head with what may have been fantasies. He was a lover of Princess Caroline, Princess of Wales, later Queen Consort of George II, and convinced himself that he was the father by her of Prince William, Duke of Cumberland. If such was the case then Byrom inadvertently brought about the bloody end to the Jacobite cause. But there are other things that appear more serious; before marriage he went to France to study medicine, but he never practised, so was he in fact plotting in the French hotbed of the Jacobite cause? Was he involved in the death of George I by poison – as has been suggested?

He must have met the Young Pretender, and his daughter certainly did. His support of the Jacobite cause was known in some government quarters and he was friends with some of the leaders of the young Pretender's cause. Two of his near-neighbours in Kersal, a father and son, both Thomas Siddal, lost their heads, one after the 1715 rebellion, and Thomas the son was one of the nine Manchester martyrs in 1746. Around that time Byrom was publicly accused of being the leader of the north-west faction of the Jacobites. He was living a dangerous life and he associated with some

very dangerous people. It is surprising that he did not lose his head too – were his old friends protecting him, or was he really a government agent, a double agent? His life was all very mysterious.

In his later years, Byrom retired back home to Manchester and studied philosophy and religion, and, like many educated men at that time, searched for the 'truth' in geometry and proportion. He left a large collection of geometrical and architectural drawings spanning 170 years, which contains a single engraving of a sundial, a John Marke double horizontal dial.⁵ This might, along with his young gentleman's Cambridge education, indicate some interest in dialling.

Why would I suggest that John Byrom could have been the instigator of the Kersal Cell sundial? I have no evidence, but I think it reasonable to point a finger in his direction. I might have expected to see some allusion on the dial to the Jacobite cause, a symbol of some sort, but there is none. Unless it can be thought that the sun behind the clouds represents a cause not lost, the clouds will one day part and herald the true king.

One of John Byrom's aliases was John Shadow, so could the sundial very aptly represent his own life of secrecy, scheming, intrigue and fantasies, a life lived in clouds and shadows?

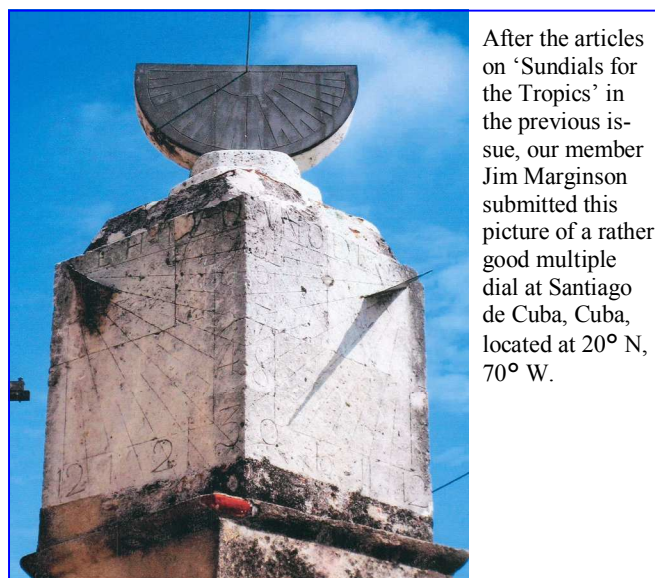
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Christopher Daniel for the photograph of the Kersal Cell dial; John Davis for useful discussions; and Joy Hancox.

REFERENCES

1. F. Moss: *Pilgrimages to Old Homes*, 7 vols. Pub. by the author. (Various dates, early 20th century).
2. F. Moss: *Fifty Years Public Work in Didsbury*, Pub. by the author, (1915).
3. C. Daniel: 'The Kersal Cell', *The Sundial Page*, *Clocks*, 35, (June 2007).
4. J. Hancox: *The Queen's Chameleon*, Cape, (1994).
5. J. Hancox: *The Byrom Collection*, Cape, (1992).

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After the articles on 'Sundials for the Tropics' in the previous issue, our member Jim Marginson submitted this picture of a rather good multiple dial at Santiago de Cuba, Cuba, located at 20° N, 70° W.