

# Visible Maps of Time: British Sun-dial Gardens in the Early Twentieth Century

Peter Robinson

...the sun-dial for time, the cypress for death, wheat for life,  
and the vine for joy...<sup>1</sup>

The history of the sun-dial stretches back to ancient times. The earliest known example from Egypt made around 1500 BCE seems unlikely to have been the first in use there, and it is widely recognized that in China, rudimentary use of the shadow cast by a stick—what is called the *gnomon*—to tell the time, dates back at least another 1,000 years. With subsequent technical innovations, improved astronomical understanding, and use of different materials, by the medieval period, sun-dials had become ubiquitous in European monasteries and ancient seats of learning, where recording time had both religious and agricultural significance. As Christopher Daniels notes, the Register of Sundials produced by The Sundial Society reveals that in England, some sixty percent of surviving wall-mounted or vertical dials incorporated into the fabric of a building—and therefore more difficult to move and become disassociated from their original context—are on churches and ecclesiastical buildings.<sup>2</sup> They played an essential role in keeping service times, functioning much like the astrolabe in the Muslim world, which helped believers to observe the call to prayer. In the medieval period, sun-dials were first and foremost practical, but they quickly became more elaborate and, as Varga and Keszthelyi note, it was recognized that they could be seen as “an artistic creation or a technical masterpiece”,<sup>3</sup> and very often both.

Despite their ubiquity on church walls and in monasteries, as well as in their upright form in cloister gardens, institutional use of sun-dials was soon superseded by large weight-driven turret clocks which were incorporated into

bell towers throughout medieval Europe as early as the thirteenth century. By the fifteenth century, municipal clock towers were a common feature of markets towns, helping to fuel a new virtuous spirit among the *civitas* which characterized the Renaissance. Rapid miniaturization of clocks and technical breakthroughs which improved their accuracy—notably Christiaan Huygens invention of the pendulum clock in 1656—reliability, running time, and most importantly reduced costs, meant that by the early eighteenth century, most middle-class families had at least one clock or timepiece in their home. It is within this context that the sun-dial made a remarkable transition from a specialized scientific device, to an object of beauty and philosophical contemplation. Ironically, by the period which this paper investigates, the sun-dial was celebrated for its arcane, almost mystical properties, a relic of a longed-for pre-industrial age, and a symbol of timelessness rather than of timekeeping. Interestingly, Tim Rood, writing on Roman depictions of sun-dials on mosaics, draws a similar conclusion about the introduction of the sun-dial as a new piece of technology and its impact on the delineation of time. In the case of one first century BCE mosaic, the sun-dial represents a powerful image of modernity set against the backdrop of an Arcadian Greek past in which time is “bigger”, epochal, and the object of wonder.<sup>4</sup> The recasting of the sun-dial in nineteenth-century England is encapsulated by Dante Gabriel Rossetti’s painting *Beata Beatrix* (1864–1870) in which a prominent sun-dial marks the time of Beatrix’s (Lizzie Siddal’s) death, and stands symbolically for the finality of death and the end of time.<sup>5</sup> The fact that, as Rodger Drew points out, Rossetti painted the dial with the *gnomon* misconfigured, underscores the hollowing-out of its original function as a serious scientific instrument, and amplifies its symbolic and aesthetic value, especially as a garden ornament.<sup>6</sup> As ever, Gertrude Jekyll put it aptly, “In the days of universal watches the function of the sundial is to be decorative and to stimulate gentle moralizing”.<sup>7</sup>

In her popular book *The Book of Sun-dials*, first published in 1872, Mrs. Alfred Gatty prophetically wrote that, “In spite, however, of the decay and destruction of the older examples, the day of the sun-dial is not yet done.” What drove her to this conclusion is lost to time, but she did note that, “Horizontal dials with their graceful pedestals, are still erected in gardens, and vertical ones in country houses, and occasionally on a school of public build-

ing”.<sup>8</sup> Her prediction was proven correct, for at the beginning of the twentieth century, sun-dials had a renewed lease of life, and were all the rage in gardens across England; found in the small cottage gardens so delightfully depicted in the nostalgic aquarelles of Helen Allingham (1848–1926) and Thomas James Lloyd (1849–1910), whose carefully composed pictures combined flower-heavy scenes or rural life with managed neglect, and as more formal focal points in the leisured country houses of the Edwardian “Golden Afternoon”. Sun-dials re-entered the popular and artistic imagination in a way not seen since their medieval heyday. It is the purpose of this brief paper to contemplate and to contextualize their second “moment in the sun”.

### **Influence of landscape and garden design**

During the Jacobean age, with its intimate architecture and formal gardens created on a large, but nevertheless human scale, sun-dials were imbued with a certain mystical quality, feeding a quasi-scientific fascination with the celestial and spiritual world which was being negotiated in print and by the sword the length and breadth of Europe. In this period of political and religious readjustments, the sun-dial was a bridge between the medieval mind: closed, dogmatic, mindful of sin, and the Age of Reason and scientific rationalism that was soon to explode in medicine, botany, astronomy, anatomy and physics. Latinate mottoes that accompanied dials were tintured by puritan invectives demanding hard work and reminding those who stopped in front of them of both the fragility and brevity of life. The more than half-dozen books on sun-dials that proliferated during the latter half of the nineteenth century, point to the seventeenth century as being a “golden age” of dial mottoes. Yet, by the beginning of the eighteenth century, lingering curiosity with the sun-dial as a scientific object had all but dried up. Not only was it now more or less redundant as an instrument of timekeeping,<sup>9</sup> but also, landscaping fashions were working against it too. Aesthetic incorporation into the great Arcadian visions of the cultural and political elites, with the grand sweeping vistas created on a topographical scale by celebrities like Launcelot “Capability” Brown and Humphry Repton *et al*—members of the “English Landscape School”—from a design perspective, lent themselves to large-scale buildings in the form of temples, follies, formal columns, and other landscape devices such as “eye-

catching” ruins and the ha-ha. A modest sun-dial in this setting was simply, inadequate. Coupled with the obvious incongruity of scale, sun-dials seemed to be backward-looking in a progressive age: The Age of Discovery, the Age of Science, the Age of the Enlightenment. In the popular imagination, sun-dials assumed astrological rather than astronomical characteristics. Their monastic origins tying them to what was still perceived as Catholic mysticism, a key target of dissenters and of retribution by the state. Russell W. Porter, writing in 1928 for *Scientific American* put it thus: “The usefulness of the sundial has long since departed, along with the tallow dip, the ox cart, and the spinning wheel”, concluding that “Nothing is left but the romance and sentiment, and the wealth of solemn mottoes warning us that time is fleeting, and that: ‘As time and hours do pass away/So doth he life of many decay’”.<sup>10</sup>

Only midway into the nineteenth century, when the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood advocated a return to simpler, more spiritual lines of inquiry, and re(invoked) a chivalric, heroic, premodern age, which morphed into a materialistic socio-cultural force in the form of the Arts and Crafts Movement, did the first sign of the sun-dial’s rehabilitation really begin. It is easy to see why the return to a human scale, veneration of craftsmanship, and espousal of a pre-industrial form of production marked by the seasonal passage of time, rather than by the minute hand, helped the sun-dial become emblematic of the movement and much favoured by artists and writers. As a physical object, the sun-dial embodied all the principles of the Arts and Crafts Movement with its hand-forged copper, bronze or lead dials, mason-chiseled stone pedestals, and its adaptability to vernacular idiosyncrasies. It must be remembered, that while the sun is universal, the sun-dial itself is parochial, and only accurate within a specific radius of manufacture: a sun-dial made for Tokyo cannot be used in Paris.

### **Use in the Arts and Crafts garden**

Gardens are as susceptible to changes in taste and fashion as clothing, architecture and other forms of material culture, just as they are also susceptible to the foibles of their owners. In 1870, William Robinson’s publication of *The Wild Garden* heralded a new approach to gardening in accord with many of the beliefs and tenets of the Arts and Crafts movement, especially of those



Fig. 1 The Rose Garden, The Hall, Tending showing an early 20th-century sun-dial in a rose and lavender garden. *Garden Design*, 10 (1932) p. 44.

held by leading designers such as William Morris and potter William de Morgan. Spurred by the prolific writings of Gertrude Jekyll, a gardening style gradually emerged which did away with the hitherto unbroken vistas of the landscape park which had steadily encroached towards the very walls of the stately homes to which they belonged under the seductive influence of the Landscape School. Out too, were the extravagant mid-century parterres full of carpet bedding which had, in Robinson's view, blighted English country homes for too long. In their place, a new style flourished—promoted on the pages of William Robinson's successful horticultural magazine, *The Garden*, and later on the glossy pages of *Country Life* founded by Edward Hudson in 1897. The new approach centred on breaking up the area around the house into a series of discrete spaces, often enclosed by high evergreen hedges of yew or stone walls, which became known as “garden rooms”. Hidcote Manor in Gloucestershire, created by Major Lawrence “Johnny” Johnston between 1910 and the early 1920s remains the best and most accessible example of this. The division of the garden into more intimate spaces, superficially resembling medieval cloistered courtyards, into which characters from a Walter Scott novel or an Edward Burne-Jones painting might easily have been dropped, provided secret spaces and areas for quiet contemplation, but there

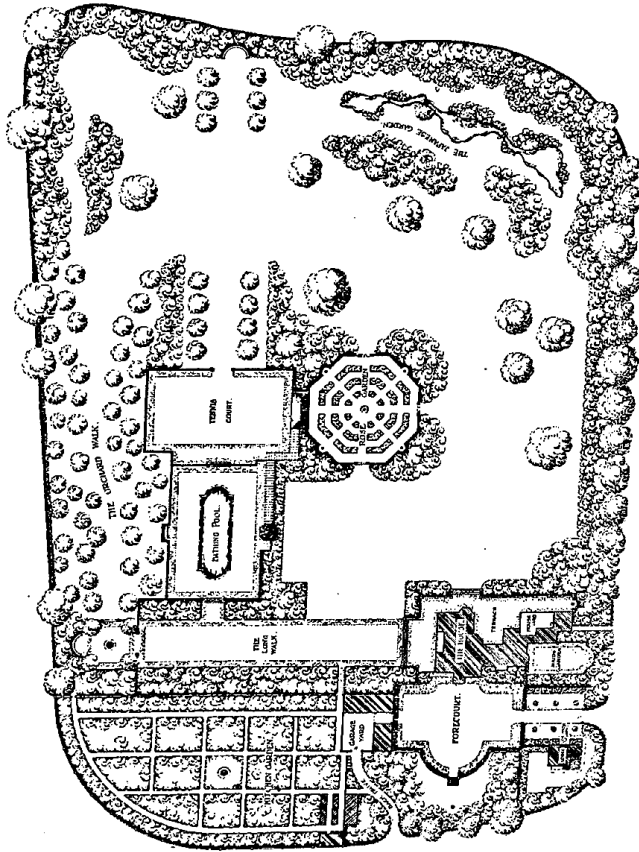


Fig. 2 Plan of a garden of 10 acres by Percy Cane showing a rose garden with concentric planting and centred with a sun-dial. *Garden Design* 17 (1934), p. 21.

was always a need for a focal point to each of these spaces. While the formalism associated with baroque gardens was decried, the Arts and Crafts garden nevertheless required structure: paths needed to lead somewhere, level changes could not be left unresolved, and since designs usually rotated around two main axes, their intersections often required a statement. Gertrude Jekyll, Edwin Lutyens, Percy Cane, Harold Peto and many other garden luminaries of the early twentieth century, answered these challenges by deploying a range

ornaments and foci: from sunken pools as at Great Dixter, to statues, fountains, urns, copper planters, mill stones, the creative laying of esoteric floor surfaces using brick patterns and cobbled mosaics, even topiary. More often than not, however, the humble sun-dial fitted the bill best of all. Jekyll was explicit here, “No little of the value of a sundial is the opportunity it affords to emphasize the central point at the junction of converging paths, as at Ditton Place”.<sup>11</sup> In most cases it was used in its upright pedestal form with a radial dial, but unlike statues, it did not have an obvious front face and could be approached from any direction to the same effect provided they were properly staged. A fine example of this is The Hall, Tendring (Essex) where in the early twentieth century, the new owner Mr. Douglas-Jones re-laid the gardens and created a lavender garden, “planted only with lavender, enclose[ing] a circular space with an interesting old sun-dial as a central feature”.<sup>12</sup> (Figure 1) In the same publication, its editor and garden designer Percy Cane, featured a design for a “Garden of About Ten Acres” in which an Octagonal Rose Garden had at its centre a sun-dial (Figure 2):

It is a garden full of colour from June onwards. Additional interest is given by recessing into the Yew four sculptured figures: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter and by a sun-dial in its centre.<sup>13</sup>

Cane reminds us here that garden ornaments did not necessarily need to be used in isolation, but could, as it were, converse with each other.

There were other major design uses of the sun-dial too. The second, made use of its versatility, for it was equally at home in a less formal setting, as part of the garden border, or offset on an area of lawn, as depicted in Thomas James Lloyd’s 1898 painting *The Sundial*, which powerfully portrays the ephemerality of youth.<sup>14</sup> In the watercolour, a beautiful young woman, dressed in a virginal white chiffon dress stands close to her seated grandmother, who is wrapped in a shawl, knitting. Close by, a sun-dial stands sentinel, ignored by both, but unmistakably hinting at the fleeting nature of beauty and the ravishes of time. Its message might easily have been lifted from the sun-warmed face of the dial depicted: perhaps *Memor esto brevis evi* (Remember how short life is) or *empus edax rerum* (time devours things).<sup>15</sup> In the background is the





Fig. 3 Sundial at Heligan Gardens, Cornwall. August 2022 © Peter Robinson

house, cottage-like in appearance, yet grand in scale, and indicating that they are deceptively well off, like many of the clientele for which Jekyll and others were designing. Not, however, that Jekyll would have approved. In her book, *Gardens for Small Country Houses*, she railed against sun-dials which look “lonely and neglected on a lawn”.<sup>16</sup>

The sun-dial was used most readily as a conjunction between paths, but it was also used as a terminus. A dial placed at the end of a broad walk, set into an alcove in a wall or hedge can be seen in many gardens of the period. The restored Sun-dial garden at Heligan in Cornwall falls somewhere in-

between the two categories (Figure 3). Sometimes, as in the example at Killerton House in Devon (Figure 4), sun-dials were used to fill the space created by a low demi-lune wall, offering views out to the wider landscape. Utilizing the classic painter’s technique of drawing attention to the dial by foreshortening, it also helps to convey the enormity of time and space, and therefore aids reflection. A similar use of an open dial setting which brings in the wider landscape (in this case the Somerset Levels) was used by Jekyll at Hestercombe for the “Great Plat”, where “Geometric-shaped panels of lawn enclosed by stone flags extend diagonally across the garden from each corner, meeting at a central sun-dial”.<sup>17</sup> It should be observed that it is no accident that many of the examples on which this paper draws are from the South West and South Coast of England, because they are areas consistently recording the highest average sunshine rates.

Finally, sun-dials were widely used as memorials. The Victorian era has long been associated with a peculiar fascination with death bordering on necromancy, with extended periods of mourning, specialized mourning jewelry





Fig. 4 Sun-dial at Killerton House, Devon. August 2022 © Peter Robinson, August 2022.

made of jet and onyx, locket and other *memento mori* containing the hair of loved ones and worse, but this was not characterized by profound morbidity. Rather, it reflected a desire to maintain a conversation with the dead, as evidenced by the steep rise in spiritualism. Apart from the obvious headstone-like qualities of the dial pedestal, and its ease of taking an inscription, sun-dials have long been symbolic of life and death, and ephemerality. Time dies with the setting of the sun, and is resurrected each new morning. “Reborn” as Rossetti poetically put it. The biblical allusions do not need to be spelled out. It is what was hinted at in Rossetti’s *Beata Beatrix*, but is developed more fully in his poem *The Stream’s Secret* written in 1870.

Its eyes invisible  
 Watch till the dial’s thin-thrown shade  
 Be born, —yea, till the journeying line be laid  
 Upon the point that wakes the spell,  
 And there in lovelier light than tongue can tell  
 Its presence stands array’d.

Its soul remembers yet  
 Those sunless hours that passed it by;

And still it hears the night's disconsolate cry,  
 And feels the branches wringing wet  
 Cast on its brow, that may not once forget,  
 Dumb tears from the blind sky.<sup>18</sup>

### Advertising and marketing sun-dials

The rise in the popularity of the sun-dial in the early twentieth century owes a lot to the influence of the medieval revival associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement and a renewed interest in recording archaic customs, vernacular architecture, and local lore, but there were other contributing factors: an increase in home ownership, the emergence of specialist suppliers of garden ornaments taking advantage of improved transportation links which allowed these heavy items to reach national rather than regional markets, and perhaps most importantly, the development of stone substitutes. Reconstituted stone had been in use as early as the 1770s, marketed as "Coade stone",<sup>19</sup> and in the 1860s James Pulham and Son had developed a stone-like cement render which was applied to real stone, bricks, or concrete with highly realistic results, but by the late nineteenth century, other artificial stone substitutes had been perfected to such a degree that after a few years of weathering, it was virtually indistinguishable from solid stone. Created using molds and then hand-finished, reconstituted stone ornaments were much lighter, cheaper, and faster to produce than real stone which required painstaking chiseling work by experienced masons. Suddenly, sun-dials and other garden ornaments became available to a new demographic. Naturally, there was a hierarchy: genuine antique dials and their original stone bases, followed by old dials on new pedestals, then entirely new sun-dials hand crafted in local



Fig. 5 Advertisement for Horsecombe Quarries in *Garden Design*, No. 8 (1931).

stone, and finally mass-produced dials with artificial stone bases. Where one could be found, discerning clients would seek out antique dials, but with increased interest in the ‘Olde Country’ from the United States, much of the architectural and gardening heritage of Britain found itself transported across the Atlantic to the new gothic piles being created there. This reduction in supply was filled by the proliferation of specialist garden suppliers and wholesalers, carrying large stocks of new off-the-shelf garden ornaments both in real and artificial stone, advertising their wares in magazines and journals. Their target was the swelling ranks of middle-class bankers, merchants, and retiring army officers seeking country homes in the Southern counties, who were taking advantage of a glut of old manor houses and land being sold off by the gentry in response to falling agricultural prices and the effects of Lloyd George’s “People’s Budget” passed in 1909. Figures 5–7 show a number of examples featured in the short-lived *Garden Design* magazine from the early 1930s. The first (Figure 5), an advert for Horsecombe Quarries Limited in Somerset, features a sun-dial on a modern columnar pedestal. The company’s free booklet offered some 60 garden ornaments in “weathered stone”, demonstrating just how many options were now available to the garden designer. The second advertisement for Hard York Stone (Figure 6) features a bird bath, one of the sun-dial’s chief aesthetic rivals in the period, but it lists sun-dials as one of their specialties. Similarly, an advertisement for A Fletcher of Matlock, Derby, features a stoneware planter, but sun-dials appear at the top of the list of its products (Figure 7). These three advertisements by companies spanning the length and breadth of England, from the South West, to Central England, to the North East, which were featured in Percy Cane’s cosmopolitan, London-based publication *Garden Design* demonstrates how the marketplace for garden products was now nationwide. By the early 1930s, following decades in which the sun-dial’s symbolic value had been slowly rehabilitated in art and literature: nostalgic, poetic, a totem of an artistic leisurely class emptying out of London into a mythologized countryside, sun-dials were now a staple feature of suburbia. In some cases, they were being refashioned too. *Garden Design* magazine had used a traditional armillary sun-dial on a baluster base as its cover design since its inception in spring 1930, but this was replaced from issue 8 (Winter 1931), with an edgy, stylized art deco version on a square


<p><b>HARD YORK STONE</b> (Self-faced)</p> <p><b>CRAZY PAVING, RECTANGULAR PAVING</b> Walling Stone (Flat-bedded) Rockery, Copings, Steps, Pier-Caps, Slates, etc.</p> <p><b>SPECIALITY:—</b> Built-up <b>GARDEN ORNAMENTS</b>. Including Bird-Baths, Dovecotes, Sun-dials, Flower-boxes, etc.</p> <p>SWIFT BROS., Quarry Owners, Kirkheaton, Huddersfield, Yorks.</p>	
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Fig. 6 Advertisement for Swift Bros. in *Garden Design*, No. 8 (1931), p. iii.


	<p><b>GARDEN ORNAMENTS</b></p> <p>SUNDIALS BIRD BATHS BOWLS VASES TABLES CRAZY PAVING, etc.</p> <p>Write for Catalogue.</p> <p><b>A. FLETCHER</b> Quarry Owner <b>MATLOCK, DERBY</b></p>
<p><b>GRACEFUL VASE</b> Ht. 18in. x 14in. Price 60/-</p>	

Fig. 7 Advertisement for A Fletcher in *Garden Design*, No. 20 (1934), p. iv.

plinth. The sun-dial had, in a sense, come full circle, and was now being associated with modernity, dynamism and forward thinking (Figures 8 & 9).

### The sun-dial as literary muse

The surge of interest in sun-dials as a garden ornament, resulted in a spate of publications discussing their every aspect, from technical descriptions like Joseph B. Clarke's article in *Garden Design*, to Jessie King's beautifully illustrated *A Book of Sundials and Their Mottoes* (1914). In Alice Morse Earle's introduction to her *Sun-dials and Roses of Yesterday* (1902), she records the enthusiasm people had for them: "I found my friends were placing sundials on pedestals in their gardens or upon the walls of their houses, or wished to erect them as memorials, and were eager to learn of all dials".<sup>20</sup> As we have seen, they were the subject of, or featured in, a number of important paintings and illustrations which tended to echo the symbolism of their mottoes: the brevity



Fig. 8 Front cover of the first issue of *Garden Design*, edited by Percy Cane (1930).

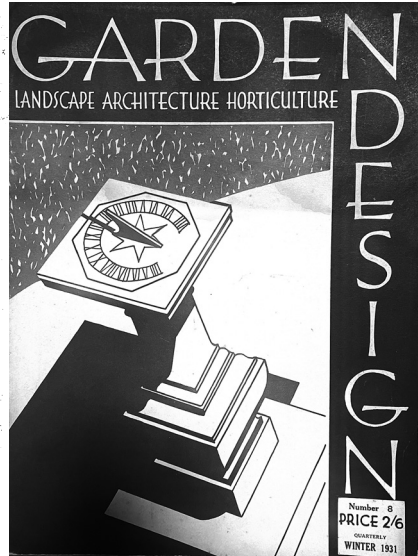


Fig. 9 Revised front cover of *Garden Design*, edited by Percy Cane, No. 8 (1931).

of life and the passage of time, and our own mortality. They were also the subject of much literary and poetical output which, generally sentimental in tone, nevertheless showed how their use in the garden went well beyond mere curiosities or forewarnings, and spoke to the garden's complex relationship with time and seasonality. Daisy Beacham's poem "The Sundial", published in 1907 in Cassell's Christian literary journal *The Quiver*, is typical of this nostalgic, sentimental imagery, and like Earle, associated them with roses. The first verse thus:

A Sundial stood in a garden old  
Where roses bloomed around,  
And wood doves coo'd on their  
swaying nests  
With a soft and drowsy sound  
And the sun shone over that garden  
fair  
While the sundial told the hours.

And this legend was graved on the  
 Old gray stone.  
 "Time flies with the buds and flowers."<sup>21</sup>

The link between roses and the sun-dial is a natural one since, like the sun-dial itself, they require strong sunshine and high light levels to perform at their best. They were in fact, perfect companions in every way. Roses were a much-loved motif of the Arts and Crafts Movement, symbolizing purity, honesty, and native simplicity, with strong medieval connotations. Earle's *Sun-dials and Roses of Yesterday* (1902) dedicates a whole chapter to roses as emblems, and features a photograph of William Robinson's Gravetye Manor festooned with climbing roses. Something more than sentimentality is expressed in the Rev. Richard S. Brooke's "The Old Sun-dial", a parable also published in *The Quiver*, but earlier in 1867 before they returned to vogue. The lengthy Christian parable emphasizes the venerability of the sun-dial: "invincible and enduring, it ever stands as the great arbiter of and referee to the sons of men, correcting and regulating time, while it intimates and ensures eternity". Here, Brooke deals with the paradox that we have already encountered, that the sun-dial segments time and simultaneously stretches it, requiring us to posit a beginning, and thereby in this interpretation, invoke a creator: the sundial, "unimpaired in its integrity, as on the day it first came from the hand of its Creator".<sup>22</sup> Like so many of the more thoughtful authors treating the philosophical side of the sun-dial, the parable also recognizes that for approximately half its existence it sleeps. Here, the Reverend Brooke aligns the faint glimmer of the moon on the dial with a Christian test of faith: the knowledge that God is still with us, even though we cannot see him and, like the sun, he seems to have abandoned us. Brooke again:

And, strange and marvellous to relate, when night deepens down on the rest of the world; a bright glimmer from under the edge of the darkness ever falls on the face of this Dial, coming from the far outlying horizons of eternity, and casting faint but certain shadows on the sun-plate, significant of that great epoch, when time shall be dissolved into the infinity of a glorious and happy futurity.<sup>23</sup>

Several writers, and indeed mottoes, also note the dial's dependence on good weather. For Joseph Addison, writing at the beginning of the eighteenth century in *The Spectator*, this was less a test of faith than an exercise in loyalty, describing a philosopher who would contemplate for two or three hours every day over the sun-dial, as "... true to the Dial, ...As the Dial to the Sun, Although it not be shone upon".<sup>24</sup>

Any meaningful conclusions drawn about why the sun-dial enjoyed such a return at the turn of the twentieth century, and continues to be popular to this day, must combine an understanding of its spiritual, philosophical, and practical properties and understand how it resonated with different demographics for different reasons. For a cohort of wealthy artists and writers, bemoaning mankind's sudden estrangement from a simpler, slower time, the sun-dial symbolized an era of artisanal production, when time was measured by the hour and the seasons, something which has been described as rural time. As a metaphor for the ephemerality of life, the dial leant itself easily to Christian readings, but it should not be forgotten that its reliance on the sun made the sun-dial deeply attractive as a pagan symbol too. Indeed, it has long been suggested that one of the great pagan sites in Britain, Stonehenge in Wiltshire, may have acted as some sort of prehistoric sun-dial, marking the solstice and other cosmic events.<sup>25</sup>

All of these influences and readings converge in the garden and writing of Vita Sackville-West who, along with her husband Harold Nicolson, created one of Britain's most celebrated gardens, Sissinghurst in Kent. Developed in the 1930s out of the remnants of a Tudor manor, the site is a palimpsest of overlaying moments, representing discrete phases of time, combining into an architectural whole, and which, like the sun-dial, suggests timelessness. Vita Sackville-West's two most famous and pertinent poems *The Land* (1926), winner of the Hawthornden Prize, and *The Garden* (1946) can be read as encapsulating the paradox of the sun-dial. In *The Land*, Sackville-West's focus is the countryside, specifically the land, its ancient practices and customs.<sup>26</sup> Like the deep-worn drovers tracks of an Allingham painting, the poem is about "big" time, epochal time, the sort of venerable time which the sun-dial invokes—time immemorial. Divided into the four seasons in a traditional Georgic



structure, it reads rather like an almanac organized around the agricultural year, and was written at a time when the price paid for the Industrial Revolution was becoming clearer to an artistic elite who, unlike Morris *et al* a generation before, were no-longer antagonists—the battle had already been lost—but observers and recorders. Life patterns that had been changing in the late nineteenth century were irrevocably altered by WWI. In 1946, Sackville-West published another narrative-length poem, *The Garden*. It was Sackville-West's response to WWII, and showed that for her, life had shrunk. In moving from the grandness of the “land” to the intimacy and seclusion of the “garden”, it is as if she could no longer see the metaphorical aspects of the sun-dial and the “big time” that it represented, but was now reading the dial: time chopped up, segmented, “small time” on a human scale. This segregation of time is reflected in the organization of her garden, with small intimate spaces in the Arts and Crafts style. Space, like time, is broken up and confronted. It was the realisation of mortality, not just of her own person, but of the system as a whole, and the recognition that nothing is eternal.

There are two sun-dials at Sissinghurst, a lead wall-mounted dial depicting six medieval figures, possibly the saints, and a horizontal dial on a fluted column set on a brick base. Little is known about either of them, where they came from or when they were placed in the garden. It is likely, however, that at least one was installed by Vita Sackville-West who in her narrative poem, *The Garden*, dedicates the final few verses to the sun-dial which foreshadows the end: the end of the day; “The shadow teaches, better than the light / The pilgrim hours go by as thread by thread / The moving pointer eats our little day / Till it be eaten nearly all away”; the end of the gardening year, “Low sinks the sun, and long the shadows fall / The sun-clock, faithful measurer of time / Fixed to man's dwelling on his flimsy wall / Or tabled flat on curving pedestal / Amongst his dying flowers, tells the last / Hours of the year as to a funeral”; and the end of life, “And how we go may shadow show / Sooner or later we all must go”.<sup>27</sup>

This paper has briefly delved into the life of the sun-dial in the early twentieth century, showing how its fortunes oscillated over time. It has always been associated with mortality, but over time found its permanent place in the garden, initially in the large country houses of the Edwardian period, where its

fidelity to the sun and permanence made it talismanic of the simplicity of an imagined pre-industrial age. Among many artistic interactions with the sundial, too many to list here, Vita Sackville-West's poem *The Garden* demonstrates how it stimulates contemplation and offers multiple readings. In the interwar years the sun-dial appeared in more modest gardens and became almost exclusively decorative and ornamental, just another garden ornament for dressing up a space. There are many other examples that might have been included in this piece, but it is perhaps most fitting to end with the words of Alice Morse Earle: "[Sun-dials are] both things of sentiment and charm, with something of the magic which we humans call fascination".<sup>28</sup>

#### Notes

1 Latinate inscription on a sun-dial recorded by Alfred H. Hyatt in *A Book of Sundial Mottoes*, The Garden Lovers Series II, London: P Wellby (1903).

2 Daniels, Christopher. "Sundials", *building conservation.com*, <https://www.building-conservation.com/articles/sundials/church-sundials.htm> (Accessed 14 December 2022).

3 Varga, Máté and Sándor Keszthelyi, "A Medieval Sundial from the Benedictine Monastery of Kaposszentjakab", *BSS Bulletin*, 27:4 (2015) <https://www.elsolieltemps.com/pdf/gnomonica/183.pdf> (Accessed 14 December 2022).

4 Rood, Tim, "Of Sundials", Anachronism and Antiquities project website, Faculty of Classics, Oxford University, (31 March 2017) <https://anachronismandantiquity.wordpress.com/2017/03/31/of-sundials/> (Accessed 14 December 2022).

5 Hawksley, Lucinda. *Lizzie Siddal: The Tragedy of a Pre-Raphaelite Supermodel*, Andre Deutsch: London (2004), pp. 207–208.

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