

MASS OR SCRATCH DIALS INFORMATION

Mass, or scratch, dials were normally located on the south wall of medieval churches and were used by priests to determine the time for Mass. The radiating lines flowed from a central hole which contained a wooden peg known as a gnomon (Greek for 'indicator') which allowed the sun to cast its shadow. If a dial is not on the south wall it is probable that the stone has been re-used. If it is inside a porch then the porch is a later addition.

The British Sundial Society is compiling a register of all mass dials in the country. If you find a mass dial you should contact them to see if the dial has already been recorded. They will send you their recording if there is one. If the dial is not on the register they will send you a report form to fill in and return. Photographs of any mass dial, whether on the register or not, are appreciated. The contact for the Society is:

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When recording a mass dial describe the gnomon hole, the radii and any pock marks (small holes at the ends of the radii) The diameter of the dial should be given together with the height above ground. The following is an example of how to record a mass dial.

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CHANCEL, exterior S wall

To the east of the priest's door is a dial with a large, deep gnomon hole, ten radii and fifteen pocks. Four of the radii are rather faint, the others are pronounced. The pocks do not form a perfect circle.

diam 25cm, h. above ground 152cm

Diagram showing elements of a mass dial

