

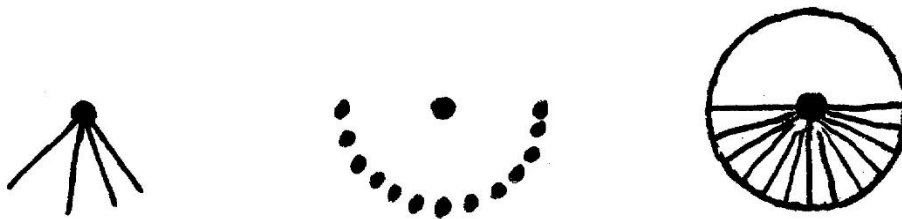
Mass or Scratch Dials

Mass or Scratch Dials can be found on the south side of many medieval churches. They are called Mass Dials because it is thought that some showed the time of the Mass and other services held during the day. They are also known as Scratch Dials because many of these dials look amateurishly made with lines scratched into the stone.

Saxon dials, by comparison, look like they were made by a mason. They are rare, larger and found high up on a wall. Scratch dials tend to be fairly small and found lower down on the walls, buttresses, windows and doorways of a church.

The dial's central hole would have contained a horizontal wooden or metal rod that cast the shadow. This rod is known as a gnomon (pronounced No Mon). The gnomon hole might be found in the mortar joint between two stone blocks, in the same block as the dial or in the block above the dial.

Some Mass/Scratch dials have just a few radiating lines, some have many. Some have their radiating 'hour' lines within circles or semi circles and others have, a ring of 'pock' marks drilled into the stone instead of 'hour' lines. Some dials are neat but many are very ragged indeed.



Mass/Scratch Dials can be found in unlikely places: on walls facing east, west or north and inside churches too. This is probably due to the stone blocks being re-used in the rebuilding of the church. Dials can be found inside porches suggesting that the porch was built sometime after the dial was made.

They seem to have been made from perhaps 1250 onwards eventually being replaced in the C16th by the scientific dial with its sloping gnomon.

The British Sundial Society is compiling a register of all scratch dials in the country. If you find a scratch dial, please contact the Mass Dial Registrar to see if the dial has already been recorded. If it has, they will send you a copy of the record for it. If the dial is not on the register, they will send you a report form to fill in and return. Good photographs of any scratch/mass dial, even previously recorded dials, are much appreciated.

The contact for the British Sundial Society is:
Ben Jones, BSS Mass Dial Registrar email: massdials@sundialsoc.org
BSS website: http://sundialsoc.org.uk/dials_menu/mass-dials/