



**A Short History
of
Time Keepers**

All Saints

Our Old Church Time-keepers

A Short History

This booklet is dedicated to the Bell ringers of All Saints who have performed so ably at services, funerals, weddings and other celebrations in Rothbury.

We are all grateful to them.

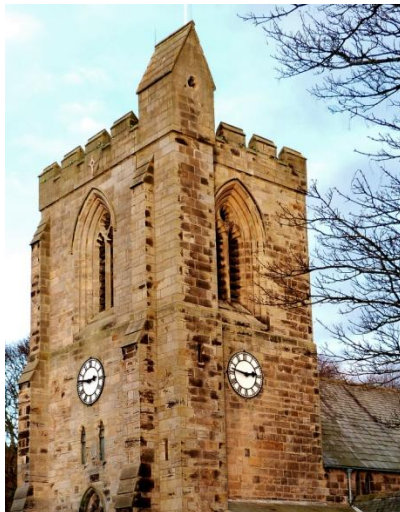
and of course to Dippie Dixon without whom the history of Coquedale would have been much poorer.

Today we take our ability to know the exact time for granted, but it was not always so. Tracking the passage of time is something that mankind has struggled with for thousands of years. We have measured time using water, candles, sand and sun in many guises.

This is a brief summary of our attempts at All Saints.

The history of All Saints time keepers can hardly be bettered other than by reference to that prolific author David Dippie Dixon who contributed so much to the history of Rothbury and Coquetdale. It therefore seems appropriate that his original article, published in the Parish Magazine 1897, should be reprinted here for all to read and as a small token of our appreciation for all that he did for All Saints and Coquetdale.

It is worth keeping in mind that the church clock and the church bells complement each other: indeed they are physically adjacent. Whilst the clock provides accurate daily time keeping the bells chime out on more ceremonial occasions: both in their way advising the time.



OUR OLD CHURCH TIME-KEEPERS.

From the Scrap book of D. D. DIXON and Parish Magazine

“There is no human invention more ancient, or more interesting, than that of the sun-dial; so ancient that the exquisite essayist, Charles Lamb, says, "Adam could scarce have missed it in Paradise"; and so interesting, that we may be sure that man's first want, after supplying the cravings of hunger, would be to invent some instrument by which he could measure the day-time into portions, to be allotted to his several vocations. “

From Mrs Gatty's Book of Sundials

THE HOUR GLASS.

The Hour-glass, or Sand-glass, as it was known to the ancient Greeks, by whom it was used to time speeches in the Law courts at Athens, as mentioned in one of the plays of Aristophanes. The typical form of the Hour-glass is always seen in the hand of the emblematical figure of Time, and is frequent on seventeenth and eighteenth century tombstones, along with the death's-heads and cross-bones, such as our forefathers were fond of having displayed on monuments to their departed friends. With us the Hour-glass is now entirely obsolete, its only survival being found in the three-minute egg glass, for boiling an egg with exactness. Preaching by the Hour-glass was very common towards the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth



centuries. The first reference we have to this curious piece of Church furniture in the Parish Record Book of Rothbury is in 1648:

"A new Pulpit the yeare above said erected. Cushion Glasse and Standard, at ye voluntary Contribution of the Parish and Minister."

And there is found in the Churchwardens' accounts for 1667 this item:

" ffor an houre Glasse

00—01--0."

The hour-glass "ecclesiastic" was placed on a standard or frame near the pulpit, so that the preacher could watch the progress of the sand from one bulb to the other, and, if need be, turn it, for these were the days of long sermons.

NB. In later years it was not uncommon to add a small wooden rectangular dish to the inside of the pulpit to accommodate a pocket watch for the same purpose.

In many churches the old hour-glass has been preserved as a relic of the past, but of the Rothbury hour-glass that timed the discourses of Thomas Cotes or John Garthwaite, who from 1656 to 1678 officiated in Rothbury Church, not a vestige remains, and the two entries in the old Vestry book are the only intimation of its existence. Butler, in Hudibras. (1663), alludes to pulpit hour-glasses having been used by the Puritans:

"The preacher, having named the text, turned up the glass; and if the sermon did not last till the sand was out, it was said by the congregation that the preacher was lazy; but if, on the other hand, he continued much longer, they would yawn and stretch till the discourse was finished."

The Rev. J. E. Vaux in his " Church Folk Lore," tells of a Vicar who used to preach for two hours, regularly turning his glass:

"The Squire of the Parish appeared to have adapted himself to circumstances, for after the text had been given out, he left the Church, 'smoked' his pipe, and returned for the blessing."

THE SUNDIALS.

The use of the Hour-glass was to regulate the time within the Church. The Sundial told the time of day outside the Church, by the sun casting the shadow of the gnomon or style on a stone or dial, on which the hours were marked. This method of measuring time by the sun is of great antiquity. Traces of it have been found in all parts of the world. The earliest of our sundials in England belong to the Anglo-Saxon period. Several old examples are found, here and there, built into the walls of old Churches.



"These stones, roughly engraved, with lines placed at varying intervals and radiating from a common centre, where once was placed the gnomon, upright or horizontal, according to the position of the dial, were the time-tellers of Englishmen before the Norman Conquest "

(Mrs Gatty's of Book of Sundials)

Sun dials are now looked upon as objects of curiosity, but when watches were scarce and clocks were not very common, the dial was

an actual time keeper. Many of the mathematical works of the seventeenth century were on the art of dialling, and an ordinary mason of that period was expected to be able to cut and set a sundial. Many of the old dials had monitory inscriptions and mottoes with, sometimes, the date of their erection and the initials of their owner inscribed upon them. An interesting horizontal sundial of this type can be seen on the lawn at Flotterton House bearing the following inscription :-

**(Ut Umbra Sic Uita."
{Life is as a shadow.)
]. W., 1773.**

J. W. are evidently the initials of an ancestor of the present Mr. C. Wealleans. The writer knows of three other old dials in the parish. One, a horizontal dial, was found dismantled in the grounds at Whitton Tower by the Rev. E. M. Young, Rector; this has been set on a neat stone pedestal, and now stands on the lawn in front of the Rectory. Mr. Donkin has a small vertical sundial in his garden at Haw Hill House, which was taken some years ago from above the doorway of an old mansion at Felton, belonging to the Smiths of Thirston. It is divided by twelve lines and figures, and bears the date 1766, while the moss-grown pedestal of a sundial stands, a picturesque object, in the garden at Trewhitt Hall.



There are traces of two very ancient circular vertical sundials in the south wall of the Early English chancel of our Parish Church. The most perfect example is that cut on the face of the eastern buttress,

about 6 feet from the ground.

The circle is 12 inches in diameter and is divided into 8 and sub-divided



into 16 spaces, with a hole in the centre for the style or gnomon. This dial, which appears to be in its original position, divided, as it is, according to the old octaval system -8 and 16- dates in the writer's opinion, from pre-Reformation times, for it

is not until towards the end of the 16th century that dates began to be inscribed on dials, and the hour lines, drawn according to the modern fashion into 24 equal hours, was generally in use here.

The Greek and Roman division of day and night into 24 hours, which now prevails over Europe, made its way slowly in England. The roughly executed double circle of the second dial, also vertical is seen on a block in the masonry of the chancel between the two eastern buttresses, on the right of the priests' door, about 6 feet from the ground. This is apparently the more ancient of the two, and may belong to the Early English period when the chancel was built. The diameter of the outer circle is $15 \frac{1}{2}$ inches, the inner circle 12 inches. There are four very distinct lines dividing the inner circle into four equal parts, with the hole for the style in the centre. This dial may have also been divided into 8 or 16, but owing to the weathering of the stone no traces of a further division can be seen. Sundials near the priests' doorway are frequently met with in the chancel walls of old churches.

** Previously to the rebuilding of the church in 1850, a third sundial surmounted the gable of the Early English porch. This was a comparatively modern one, which had probably replaced an older dial.

Some of our aged parishioners can still remember the white lines and chapters of this old parish time-keeper, which, along with many other interesting relics pertaining to the original fabric of our Parish Church, was then unfortunately lost sight of.



The following entry in the Vestry book refers no doubt to the renovating of the sundial on

the church porch:

1728 For White lead and Lamb black for ye Sun Dial.....0 0 9
 For Whitning and new drawing the lines and figure.....0 1 0

MORNING AND EVENING BELL.

In the Churchwarden's accounts of the last century we find that half-yearly payments were made for ringing the morning and evening bell. This may have been a survival of the pre-Reformation, "Morning Ave bell" at 6 o'clock, and the Curfew bell at 8 o'clock.

1767 To Ringing the Bell at 6 a.m. and 8 p.m. ½ year £0 5s 0p

1768 To John Ridley for ringing the 6 o'clock Bell 1/2 year £0 5s 0p

1775 To John Selby's Ringing the Bell M. and E ½ a year £0 5s 0p

Note by DDD

*** This sundial was discovered in the churchyard by Jonathon Harrison, Sexton in 1901 and is now in the church*

NB. This is now on the south lawn adjacent to the porch.

There is no record of how, or in what manner, our forefathers procured the funds for the purchase of this clock, but in the Churchwardens accounts there occur certain entries which extend from 1740 to 1818, relating to its erection, repairs, winding up, etc.

Easter Tuesday, March 31, 1741.

An account of half an Ancient Fabric Cess laid on at Easter, 1740, towards repairing the Steeple, erecting the bell loft (&c.).

Edwd. Elliot 6 days breaking a passage into ye Steeple	£0.9s.0p
Wm. Clark 7 days & ½ at ¼ p. day at ye loft	0.10.0p
He 2 days & half making a lease for ye Clock	£0.3s 4p
He 4 clasps for ye Clock Case	£0.0s.4p
R. Storrer Senr, Nails and Deals for ye Clock Case	£0.3s.6p

During the 18th century the ancient sundial began to be superseded by the large clock, which even during the 17th century had been erected in several church towers and in market places. A public clock was erected at Alnwick in 1717. The present town clock dates from 1771 and the cathedral clock at Newcastle from 1761 In 1740 a public clock was placed in the tower of Rothbury Parish Church. There is no record of how, or in what manner, our forefathers procured the funds for the purchase of this clock, but in the Church-wardens' accounts there

occur certain entries which extend from 1740 to 1818, relating to its erection, repairs, "winding up," etc.

1750 Jos Harle mending- the Clock	£0.5s.0p
1756 To Joseph Harle for work done to the Clock	£0.3s.8p
1769 To Joseph Harle for mending the Clock where it was damag'd by the Blowing down of the Clok Face in a Storm of Wind	£0.0s2p
To Ale to the Workmen at fixing the Clock Face in Church steeple	1p
1770 To John Ridley for Keeping the Clock half a year	£0.5s.0p
1771 To John Selby for the care of the Clock ½ yr	£0.5s.0p
Joseph Harle's Bill for the Clock	£0.5s.6p
1773 To the Sexton's care of th" Clock at	£0.5s.0p
To Richard Mordeau for cleaning- the Church Clock	£0.4s.6p
1775 To a Clock Makers Bill v:iz: Cha. Dymock Keely	£0.7s.0p
1776 To Ringing the Bell and Winding up the clock	£0.5s.0
1777 To John Johnson for Cleaning the Clock	£0.4s.0
1779 To oil for the Clock	5p
1781 Mending the Clock Key by Bob Snowdon	3p
1786 By Thos Papes ½ years care of the Clock due at Christmas	0.5s.0p
1818 Thomas Rape care of the Church clock	£2.2s.0p

At the Easter Meeting of 1818 occurs the last-entry in which there is any mention made of the Church Clock. Very soon after this date it appears to have fallen into disrepair and consequently ceased to go.

Old Walter Mavin, the well-known angler, who was born in 1815, informs the writer that he cannot remember the Church Clock ever going during his lifetime, and that as far back as he can recollect the works were all red rust.

Some years after the Old Church Clock had collapsed, the Bishop of Durham held a confirmation service at Rothbury. The bells were rung at the appointed hour, and the Bishop, accompanied by the Rector, entered the Churchyard by the east wicket, therefore the silent clock was not then observed—the dial being on the west front of the tower, but when the service was over, his Lordship and the Rector went out by the west gate on their way into the village. On passing the tower the Bishop very naturally looked up at the Clock, and, taking out his watch, remarked to the Rector, "**You keep excellent time here; I see your clock and my watch are both alike.**"

For, just at the moment the reverend pair were pacing through the porch the sexton had slyly crept up into the bell-loft by the stair which at that time led from the interior of the Church—and turned the pointers of the clock to the correct time, and little did the worthy Bishop ever dream of the trick that had been played to make the hands of the Old Church Clock agree so exactly with his gold chronometer. The Clock had only one dial, which faced towards the west and was enclosed in a diamond shaped frame. When the old Church tower was taken down in 1850, the wheels, axles, and other parts of the machinery were discovered to be perfectly useless, and not worth replacing, therefore the only thing the restorers did was to

leave an aperture in the wall of their new tower, which, we are happy to say, is at last to be utilized by the erection of our new Clock.

Messrs. Potts have undertaken to place the new Clock in the Church Tower by Jubilee Day.

Parish Magazine Apr, May June 1897

DDD



By 1897 when money had been raised by public subscription to commemorate the Jubilee of Queen Victoria, on 22 June, 1897 it was decided that part of the funds be used for a new public clock in the church.

The 1898 accounts show the new clock was set in motion by Master William John Martin Armstrong, aged 5. The accounts show the new clock was purchased and fixed for £209-10-9 whilst remaining funds of £448-6-6 were spent on extending the Jubilee Hall”

“June 22nd 1897 The Queen’s Jubilee Thanksgiving Day. A Peal of 8 was rung at 8 am”.

As an aside it is interesting to note that Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebrations were held on the 60th anniversary of her succession: not her coronation.

In 1939 the bells were silenced till May when it was found that they needed overhauling and re-hanging at a cost of £110. For the next 10 years Rothbury Urban District Council donated £4 a year or half the cost of winding and maintenance.

The heavy gales of 1950 took their toll and caused some damage to the clock. Rothbury Rural District Council pointed out that as the clock mainly benefited the local populace Rothbury Parish Council should pay. This was agreed, with the Rector and the Parochial Parish Council paying 2 guineas towards the repair cost of £3.13.0d.

In 1954 Rothbury Parish Council complained that the clock was 3 minutes slow causing residents to miss buses and the quarter hour chimes were frequently omitted.

By 1966 a small dispute occurred when it was decided that Rothbury Parish Council should take over total responsibility for the clock and requested a contribution from the church. However as the church already pay rates this was declined. From then on it became the responsibility of Rothbury Parish Council.

Up to now the clock had been wound by hand but after a donation by Coquetdale Round Table (£400.00) RPC took out an interest free loan and converted the clock to electricity at a cost of £720 plus an annual maintenance by Potts and Sons.

With the expansion of Rothbury over the years there were occasional complaints. Clock stopped: chimes too loud: cannot sleep.

Most locals who were used to the clock were complacent. On occasions when the clock was silent they reported that the lack of chimes woke them up and after all the clock had been here since 1898.

In the millennium year the clock was updated to change time automatically in spring and autumn. The £1000 cost was donated by Mrs W. Mackay in memory of her husband.

Rothbury depends heavily on tourism so when a request was made in 2002 to turn off the chimes at night it was given due consideration.

After lengthy discussions with residents complaining that they would miss the chimes and thus be unable to sleep, it was decided that no action would be taken. It was quite a furore, reported extensively in the press and on radio. The fact that the cost was liable to be in excess of £1,500 had absolutely no bearing on the decision. Local democracy rules!

Frequently reported and almost as frequently repaired, the clock was a never ending saga. Four minutes slow, an hour out, chimes lost, fuse gone, replacement motor, hammer contact lost, more written reports. It was all too much and for too long.

In 2013 the contract was given to the Cumbrian Clock Company, based in Penrith who were contracted to carry out regular maintenance and repair visits. They replaced an errant micro-switch with a heavier duty one and there have (touch wood) been no problems to date.

Today all is peaceful. The clock keeps good time; the chimes are on the quarter hour and the sound echoes pleasantly round the village just as it (almost) always did.

But for how long?

Clock and bells complement each other. In the days before watches and clocks we depended on the local bell ringer to proclaim the time. Morning Ave bell at 6 o'clock, evening curfew bell at 8 o'clock. Today there is no need for that and anyway we have a proud church clock.

But bell ringing is still practiced and thanks to Mary Dawson All Saints has an excellent peal of eight bells presented in 1893 in memory of her brother William Dawson. These sound out for services, weddings, funerals, celebrations and of course on Friday evenings which is the main practice night.

The bell ringers are always looking for new blood so if you are interested please come and join them.

Main point of contact

Colin Wheeler Tel: 01669 620569



*If you have enjoyed your visit tell your friends.
If not tell me. Rector@coquetdaleanglican.org*

