



PAST TIMES

The Seaton Ross Sundials

Parish churches used sundials to enable clergymen to judge the times of services and for public use long before clocks were installed in church towers. A few Saxon sundials survive. In the middle Ages 'scratch dials' were inscribed on a buttress or wall close to the porch of a parish church. Later sundials were mounted on stone posts in the churchyard or on the wall of the church. From the 17th to



the 19th centuries churchyard and private sundials became increasingly ornate. Many are inscribed with reminders of mortality.

In some parts of England picturesque sundials of beautiful and varied design are still to be seen. We are very fortunate as Seaton Ross has three prominent sundials – on St. Edmunds Church, on Dial Farm and on Dial Cottage.



On St Edmunds Church, there is a plain south dial, made by William Watson, a farmer who died in 1857 and lies in the churchyard. On his gravestone are the lines: "At this church I so often with pleasure did call, that I made a sun-dial upon the church wall."

The sundial is vertical and it adorns the church wall. William Watson, a noted local sundial maker, made it in the year 1825 and put it up on the church wall on the 12th January 1825. The inscription reads, "Disee dies numerare tous William Watson delin 1825".

It is situated over the church door and is particularly prominent, especially when entry is made in to the church through the south gate.

The time of the day is indicated by the shadow of the gnomon. The numbers do not go completely round the edge of the face, and owing to the length of time taken to go round the dial face, some of the numbers occur twice. The gnomon is slanting so that the shadow will always fall on the same hour lines, at the same time, all the year round.

William Watson made several other dials in the neighbourhood, and in 1854 Forth's of Pocklington printed his little book of directions entitled "dialling diagrams" being examples for fifty four degrees of latitude; with explanations" for their construction. The house where he lived is still called Dial House, he placed sundials on the north and east walls of the house in 1821. In the early 1820's it had four sundials on the walls however, only one remains today.

At Dial House Farm where William Watson was born in 1784 and lived until 1838, (it was named Seaton Dial Hall in the early 19th century), William Watson wrote a poem which is dated 18th November 1828, an extract from it reads " I live at Seaton Dial Hall, it is a house at Seaton Ross, about it grows ling and moss, I put four dials on the same, by which it got this curious name".



William Watson would also make sundials for people in the area and another extract from his poem reads " If any person wants a dial, apply to me I'll make a trial, I can make for any man, upon a much improved plan, five guineas is the price of one, and each mile distant half a crown, I'll make them to put on a wall, neat, strong and true, and that is all".

Reputed to be one of the largest sundials in the country is at Dial Cottage, North End. Here is a sundial of 12 feet in diameter dial painted on the wall of the cottage. This was put on the wall sometime during the



1850's (in the 1851 census it is not listed as dial cottage but was for the first time in the 1861 census) and according to Arthur Gaunt in his article in Yorkshire Illustrated of April 1951 the sundial was added to the dwelling as an advertisement by a clock repairer who lived there in the 19th century (William Watson), it is certainly worthy of including among Yorkshire examples of the sundial maker's craft. William Watson is pictured above together with the

sundials and the diagram from the front cover of his little book of explanations.

The sundials are in a good state of preservation and visitors to Seaton Ross always admire these quaint, old, time tellers.