

A Medieval Mass (Scratch) Dial at St Mary's Church, New Shoreham, Sussex

Inspection of the south face of the western flying buttress of the chancel south aisle of St Mary's Church (Shoreham-by-Sea, West Sussex) in 2007 revealed a medieval mass dial, between the second and third bay from the west, 1.22 m above ground level [see plan, below]. At the time of writing (2011), this mass dial appears to be unrecorded and unpublished, though comparable medieval dials are known from other ecclesiastical sites in Sussex and elsewhere. Mass dials have been described as:

[M]edieval scratch dials are usually circular and rather crudely inscribed with the duodecimal divisions of the day, the radial lines cut at intervals of fifteen degrees. In many examples, the line which would have been reached by the shadow of the *gnomon* at 9.00 am is more clearly incised, this being the 'mass line' which marked the hour when mass was said on Sundays and feast days. For this reason, scratch dials are also known as mass-dials, though (as with their Saxon predecessors) they served other purposes (Friar 2000: 437).

The chancel of St Mary's Church dates to *c.* 1180–1210, and if a contemporary feature, this mass dial may be Norman in date. The siting of this dial on the extremity of the western flying buttress, standing proud of the south aisle wall, appears to have been to best catch the sun. There appears to be a relationship, also, between this mass dial and the now-blocked medieval priest's door in the fourth bay of the south aisle, whereby this dial may have used by a priest who then gained access into the chancel, sanctuary, or a (chantry) chapel in that bay of the south aisle. This would confirm the use of this dial as a mass dial, indicating the time for the priest (either the parish priest or that assigned to a chantry chapel) to enter through the priest's door for service.

The mass dial is in a relatively poor state of preservation today (it and the Caen stone around it being weathered), and it is not obvious to see upon inspection. The dial appears to be semi-circular, rather than circular, and has a radius of 120 mm. It is hoped that this record, and the corresponding photographs, will serve to assist in the preservation of this significant medieval ecclesiastical feature at St Mary's Church. These notes have also been sent, with images and measurements, to the national Mass Dial Register, compiled by the British Sundial Society (c/o Tony Wood, Gloucester); the Register is being archived at the Borthwick Institute for Archives, University of York.

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15.8.11

Sources:

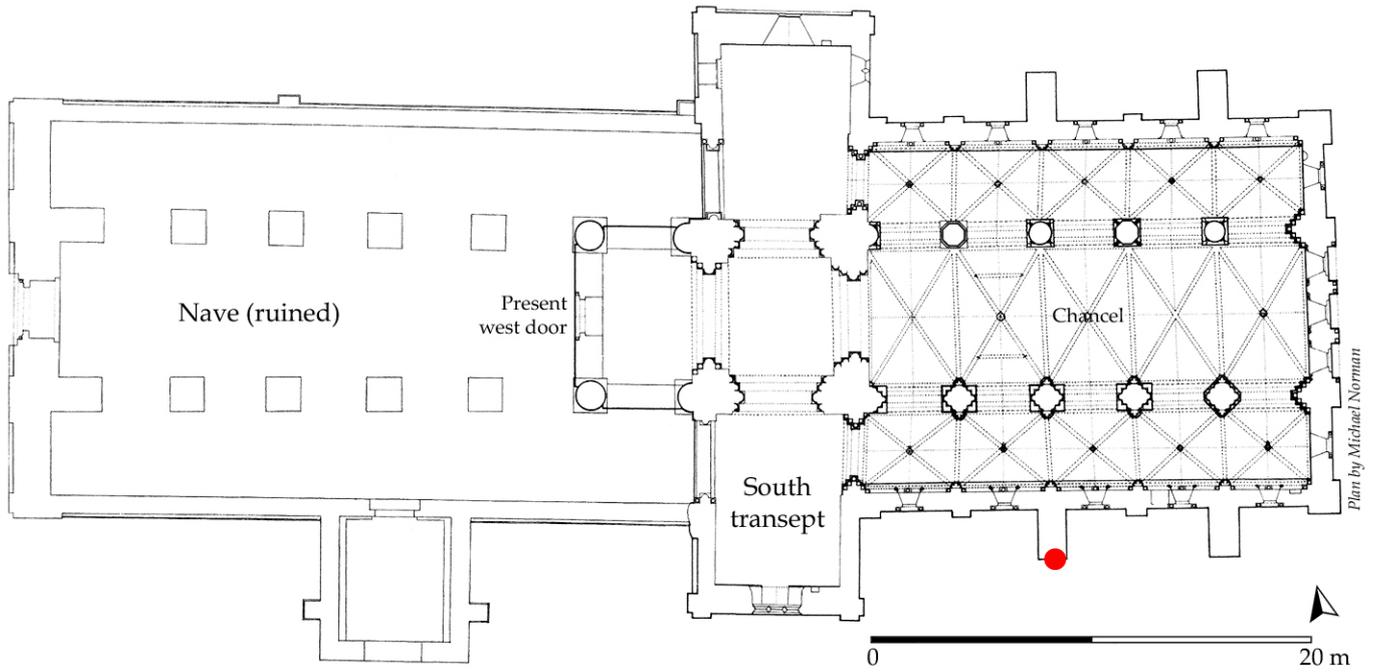
Friar, S. 2000. *The Companion to the English Parish Church*. London: Chancellor Press.

Mass Dials (Scratch Dials), British Sundial Society: <http://www.sundialsoc.org.uk/massdials.htm>

Sussex Mass & Scratch Dials: <http://www.massdials.org.uk/> (<http://www.pastfinders.com/sundials.htm>)

See images below

Mass Dial Findspot Location
St Mary de Haura, New Shoreham



● = Mass dial found on south face of western flying buttress of chancel south aisle
1.22 m above ground level



Proximity of mass dial [A] between chancel bays 2-3 to (now-blocked) priest's door [B] in bay 4

