

ELIZABETHAN GILDED POCKET SUNDIAL

BY AUGUSTINE RYTHER

Dated 1585, made for the Lincolnshire squire, Sir George St Paul



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On the left, the full heraldic achievement of Sir George St Paul, showing his family arms of the rampant lion, quartered with the arms on the dial shield, which are those of Snarford, and the arms of an earlier heiress in the St Paul family, Elizabeth Strodet. On the right is the shield that appears at the head of Thomas St Paul's tomb, showing the St Paul lion rampant, and the Snarford arms.



hand at the centre, the mark of a baronet, and a helmet above, the symbol of knighthood. The arms displayed top right of the achievement, which should, by the rules of heraldry, relate to an earlier marriage than that in the lower part, must therefore be those of the Snarford heiress, also Elizabeth. It was marriage to her that brought Thomas St Paul to Lincolnshire at the end of the fourteenth century, and began the family tree that was compiled in about 1630, and still exists. Therefore it is entirely appropriate that George should wish to record on his dial his ancient lineage in his home county, rather than using the St Paul arms. Further confirmation of the importance the St Pauls placed on their family's Lincolnshire roots is to be found in a shield on the tomb of George's father, Thomas, which shows the two sets of arms, the St Paul rampant lion, and the Snarford three birds, side by side.

We do not know at what point in its over 400 years of existence the Ryther dial belonging to George St Paul was lost. It is possible that on one of his frequent visits to Glentworth to meet his father-in-law, he may have dropped it. Or it may have been lost by a subsequent owner. What is certainly a small miracle is that something so delicate survived at all, and has now been found.





AN ELIZABETHAN GILDED POCKET SUNDIAL

By Augustine Ryther, dated 1585



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This elegant dial, by one of the most famous engravers in London in the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, is remarkable in that it is signed and dated by its maker, and bears the name of its owner, who has been identified. The pocket dial is the Elizabethan equivalent of the modern watch, a very personal item, constantly in use, and therefore chosen with care, and much valued. This dial is only the third instrument by Augustine Ryther to have come to light, and it is the earliest. It had been dug up by chance on the estate of the father-in-law of the owner.

THE INSTRUMENT

This small, oval pocket sundial of gilded brass (major axis 48 mm) was reputedly found buried in the earth by a farm worker at Glentworth in Lincolnshire. On the chapter ring are the initials of the maker and the date: * AR * fecit * 1585 *. The initials are those of Augustine Ryther (c. 1550-1593), a leading map engraver and instrument maker in London, and the dial has been authenticated by Professor G.L'E. Turner. This is the earliest surviving instrument by Ryther; the two other instruments signed by him are dated, 1588 and 1590 respectively. Engraved inside the lid of the dial are an heraldic shield and the name: * Geo = Seyntpoll. This is the name of the owner, who has been identified as Sir George St Paul of Snarford and Carlton in Lincolnshire, near the location at which the dial was discovered.

The dial comprises the following parts:

- The lid, decorated with foliage and a female face, surrounded by crested birds.
- Inside lid, the shield and name of George St Paul.
- The chapter ring, bearing the signature and date, and 16 hours.
- The magnetic compass in its well, with the original wind rose and mica cover.
- The base, decorated with flowers in a vase.
- The rim, inscribed with the motto:
* VT * VITA * SIC * FVGIT * HORA, a typical memento mori.



The top of the closed dial (illustrated actual size) showing traces of original gilding, and the fine engraving.





*The rim of the closed dial,
showing the engraved motto:
*VT*VITA*SIC*FUGIT*HORA*

Fitted over the compass well is a gilt-brass frame that supports a folding gnomon and a chapter ring. The angle of the gnomon measures about 54 degrees, and the modern latitude of Snarford is 53 degrees and 20 minutes. The marked hours of daylight run from IIII (am) to VIII (pm).

It is surprising that the compass card, or wind rose, and its mica cover have survived intact. Mica is a transparent silicate that crystallizes in the monoclinic system, with perfect basal cleavage, making it a good substitute for glass, especially when an elliptical shape is required – here 43x36 mm. The wind rose has 16

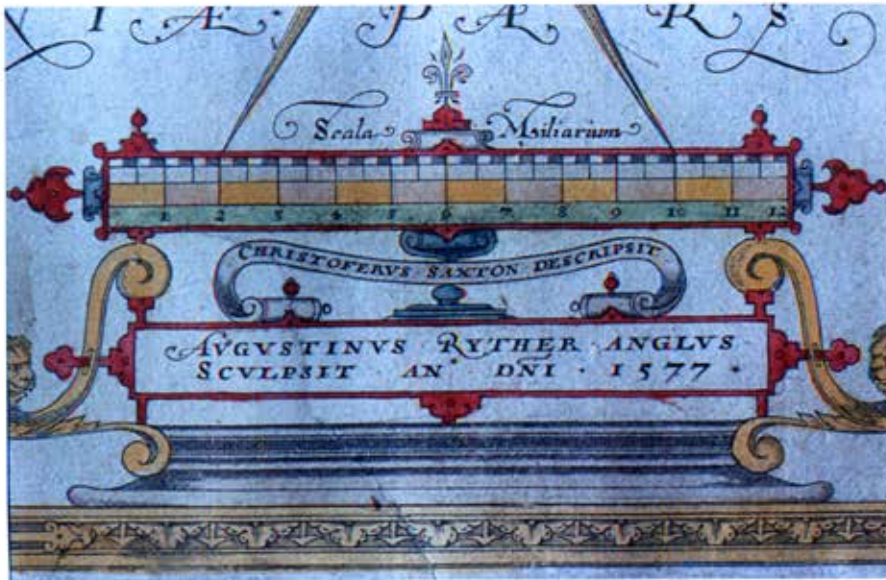
directional particoloured triangular pointers, in silver, blue, and gold. A further 16 directions are made by circumferential lines only. This card resembles the compass card in a compendium dated 1600 by Charles Whitwell, who was Ryther's apprentice.

The dial is most delicately engraved in Ryther's characteristic hand. Absolutely typical of his work are the letter l, which has a flick to the left halfway up the ascender, and the letter t, with its serif at the bottom. The signature initials AR are ligatured, as Ryther often did when engraving his full signature. Even without these initials, the hand of the maker is unmistakable.

THE MAKER

Augustine Ryther was the first important English map engraver, and proudly claimed his nationality on occasion by signing himself: "Augustinus Ryther Anglus", to distinguish his work from that of the Flemish engravers. In the mid-sixteenth century, Flanders was the world centre for map engraving, and the closely similar skill of engraving brass scientific instruments. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, these skills spread to London, brought by a man who had worked in Louvain, and moved to England in 1540. He was known as Thomas Gemini. Ryther was one of his successors, and was also primarily a copperplate engraver, but he did make brass instruments as well. The fine quality of these can be judged from the few that have survived. Until the appearance of the present dial, only two instruments by Ryther were known. These are a compendium in the collection of the Science Museum, London, and an altazimuth theodolite belonging to the Museo di Storia della Scienza in Florence. Both these instruments are signed: A Ryther; given the small size of the present





Augustine Ryther's signature on the Saxton map of Gloucestershire, which he engraved. Note the use of "Anglus" after his name.

dial, it is appropriate that the maker's initials only are used. The other instruments are dated respectively 1588 and 1590. It is interesting to note that the compendium also bears, round the rim, the name of the owner: WILLIAM PAWLEY OWETH THIS SAME IN ANNO DOMINI 1588.

Neither the date nor the place of Ryther's birth are known. He was a friend of the Yorkshire surveyor, William Saxton, for whom he engraved five maps, so it is possible that he was a northcountryman, but this is mere conjecture. The first hard information we have comes from a book he published on his own account in 1590, a translation of an Italian treatise on the defeat of the Armada, by Petruccio Ughaldini. What he offered for sale with the translation of the Italian text, were ten detailed charts, and one general one, covering the progress of the Armada, all engraved by himself. On the title page of this work, Ryther gives the name of his premises: "the shoppe of A.Ryther beinge a little from Leaden hall next to the Sine of the Tower". Also on the page are the arms of the Grocers' Company. Ryther was one of the several instrument makers who became free of the Grocers' Company; indeed, he founded a dynasty, for some of his apprentices, notably Charles Whitwell, were also to become Freemen of the Grocers' Company. No record has been found of any marriage, but the burial of "Augustine Ryther" is recorded in the registers of St Andrew Undershaft in the City of London, on 30 August 1593. That he was working until his death is clear from the date of his last commission, a large bird's-eye plan of Cambridge on nine copper sheets, published in February 1592/93. Ryther had also produced a similar plan of Oxford in 1588. In addition to his work for Saxton on the famous Atlas of English county maps, and the remarkable





Above: Sir George St Paul as he appears on his monument in Snarford church, Lincolnshire. He is shown in colour in full armour, his right hand supporting his head, his left on his sword hilt.

Right: George St Paul's father, Thomas, with his wife, Faith, beside him on their magnificent bed monument in Snarford church.



Armada charts, Ryther engraved sea and coastal charts, and two polar projections of the constellations, drawn by Thomas Hood. He even engraved and signed a set of playing cards, the suits being county maps of England and Wales.

Ryther's skill as an engraver was remarkable. Working on maps and charts provided testing requirements, both for elegant large and decorative majuscules for the titles, counties and seas, and for tiny minuscules for the names of towns, of which there could be as many as 500 in one county. Evidence of the smallness of the lettering he could produce is to be found on his playing cards. Thus he achieved complete control in the use of the burin, and his instruments show how varied and stylish were his lettering and decoration.

THE OWNER

George St Paul, whose name is engraved on the dial, was born in 1562, probably at Snarford in Lincolnshire, since the tomb of his parents, Thomas and Faith, as well as his own, are in the Church of St Lawrence, Snarford. This simple, and now isolated church is made remarkable by the extraordinary monuments behind the altar. There are three which date from around the turn of the sixteenth century, and are polychrome, still in a fine state of preservation. Sir Thomas St Paul, with his wife beside him, lies in full armour on a superbly carved six poster bed. Opposite is the wall tomb of their son, George, also in armour, with his wife below, both leaning on their right arms, the whole memorial a riot of colour and decoration. Beside this is a large medallion, also coloured, bearing the full-face head of Robert Rich, Earl of Warwick, and the profile of his Countess, who was the widow of George St Paul. These monuments present some of the main characters of the story surrounding the Ryther dial.

George St Paul was a magistrate, like his father, and in 1588 he was made High Sheriff of Lincolnshire. In 1608 he was knighted, and was created a Baronet in 1611, two years before his death. George "was seasoned with the grounds of learning", as his funeral oration put it, at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, and was a benefactor of the college, and also of the Bodleian Library, and of Magdalene College, Cambridge. That he was a man both of means and of generosity is made clear in the oration preached by the King's Chaplain at his funeral, and then published:

"Shall I go on to tell you of other Deeds of mercy? How for these thirty years he gave ten old and poor men gowns and money every year, and of late added twenty to their number; how Market Rasen had £4 yearly towards the Relief of the Poor, besides £160 that were given to help the poorer and younger sort of



Part of the map of Lincolnshire from Saxton's county atlas of 1576. Snarford is in the middle and Glentworth to the north-west.



Tradesmen, by good sums, to pass from one to another, as there was Need; and now by his Will he hath given a large sum of money to build an Hospital and a large yearly Pension for ever, to relieve such as shall be placed in it; besides the relieving of ten poor Men, with a certain Pension and Gowns, for ever, that shall be chosen out of the Towns near adjoining to his house at Snarford."

There was clearly wealth in the St Paul family, and there was also ancient lineage. The St Pauls, unlike many of the Elizabethan landed gentry, were not *nouveau riche*. The family settled in Lincolnshire at the end of the fourteenth century, when a Yorkshireman, Thomas de Paulo Sancto (as he is described in his family tree) married Elizabeth of Snarford, who was an heiress. Both of these attributes made George an attractive proposition for an ambitious father seeking to marry his daughter advantageously. This was exactly what happened.

George St Paul married, in 1583, the fifteen-year-old Frances Wray, second daughter of Sir Christopher Wray (1524-1592), whose home was Glentworth Hall, not far from Snarford in Lincolnshire. Wray was a lawyer, who became a Member of Parliament in 1553, and rose to be Speaker of the House of Commons. In 1574, he received his knighthood, and was appointed Chief Justice of the Queen's Bench. His was a typical Elizabethan success story, a clever Yorkshireman who used the law to achieve position

Sir George St Paul, and his wife, Frances, on their tomb in Snarford church. Note the exquisite detail of Frances' dress and ruff, and of Sir George's armour.



and wealth, for he owned, at his death, considerable property in Yorkshire and in Lincolnshire, where he built a fine house at Glentworth. It is noteworthy that Wray's Will consists of nine pages, with detailed instructions on the disposal of silver and gilded tableware, and jewellery, including the "collar of Esses" he is wearing in his portrait. The marriage of the young people was a typical union between two families of rank living in the same county. Wray clearly thought well of his son-in-law, for he wrote to Lord Burghley, the Lord Treasurer of England, petitioning him for a knighthood for George St Paul in January 1591; the letter still survives. In fact, the request was unsuccessful, and George did not get his knighthood till 1611.

The marriage of George and Frances sadly did not produce an heir for the St Pauls. After a long interval of twelve years, they had only one child, a daughter, who died before she was two years of age. She is commemorated in a Latin poem on a brass plaque in Snarford church. After George's death in 1613, Frances, still a young woman, married Robert Rich, of Felstead in Essex, who purchased the title of Earl of Warwick, but only survived a few months to enjoy it, for he died in 1619. Frances passed the rest of her long life – she died in 1634 – at Snarford, and like George St Paul, with whom she chose to be buried, she was famous for her charity, giving to local schools, hospitals and churches, and supporting students, as he had done, at her father's college of Magdalene at Cambridge. The St Paul estate then passed out of the direct line, and the connection of the family to Snarford was broken, hence the present isolation of the church containing the family tombs.

This amazing dial contains even more information than the maker's initials and the owner's name. It also bears, above St Paul's name, a shield, "argent a fess sable between three birds sable", to use the language of heraldry. This is not the arms of the St Paul family, which is "argent a lion rampant double queued gules crowned or". Again we need to return to the tombs at Snarford, where there is a wealth of heraldry.

The full achievement of arms of Sir George is quartered, showing top left and bottom right the St Paul lion. Top right is the arms on the dial, and bottom left is pictured "gules on a bend argent three eagles displayed sable", which has been identified as the arms of an early fifteenth-century St Paul wife and heiress, Elizabeth Strodet. The achievement also carries a red



Sir Christopher Wray, father-in-law of George St Paul, wearing the "collar of Esses" left in his Will to his son. Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London.

