

Kenyon College

Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture

Volume 3

Issue 1 *Special Ottonian Issue*

Article 20

2011

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Recommended Citation

. "Ancient Dial Solves Time Riddle." *Peregrinations: Journal of Medieval Art and Architecture* 3, 1 (2010): 7-7. <http://digital.kenyon.edu/perejournal/vol3/iss1/20>

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Ancient Dial Solves Time Riddle

A new discovery at an island abbey in the Firth of Forth has revealed that the Augustinian canons who once lived there measured time using a mass dial. Conservationists working at Inchcolm Island found the remnants of a special sundial which they believe may have been carved into a wall, among a collection of about 50 pieces of carved medieval stone which have been kept at the abbey but never studied. The dial at Inchcolm, which has been broken in two, was discovered by Historic Scotland collections registrar Hugh Morrison and medieval stones expert Mary Markus. Historians believe that the Augustinian canons lived according to a strict routine, which made it essential for everyone in the community to do the right thing at the right time, but how did they do it? Mr Morrison said: "...I turned over another stone and was really pleased to discover that it fitted together with the other half of the mass dial. Better still, it still has the corroded stub of the iron gnomon which would have once cast its shadow along the dial's radial markings ... Changing seasons and weather meant that mass dials could not always be used but when the sun shone they provided a relative means of coordinating community activities." While such timekeepers, like that at the right, from Waltham, Kent, were known in abbeys in England, they are less-well-documented at Scotland sites.



Re-written from

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/scotland/edinburgh_and_east/8214948.stm

See also: <http://www.sundialsoc.org.uk/massdials.htm>