



THE SUNDIAL PAGE

Precision Engineering

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It was during the tour of Italy with members of the British Sundial Society in October 2004 that I was told that Anton Schmitz was organising the annual conference of the German sundial 'society' for May 2005. 'He will be in his 80th year and this will probably be the last conference that he will wish to organise. It is to be held in Bonn and you really should attend, if you can.' This friendly advice came from Peter Kunath, one of our younger German members, whose opinion I could hardly ignore. Consequently, when the formal invitation came to attend the conference, I accepted at once, including participation by way of giving a 'paper'.

A distinguished sculptor, Herr Anton Schmitz, Bildhauermeister of Bonn, is a sundial designer and maker, whose prolific output has brought his name on to the Sundial Page in *CLOCKS* on previous occasions: in November 1995 ('The Eagle has landed', Volume 18, No 6, p29), 9th July 1999-5th August 1999 ('In high circles', Volume 22, No 7, p33) and, most recently, in January 2004 ('If I ruled the world', Volume 27, No 1, p32), when his magnificent 'Baroque' sundial, made for the Schloss Miel in 2003, was described and illustrated. Anton Schmitz has also been a member of the British Sundial Society from within a year or so of the Society's inception in 1989 (Membership No 300), and has attended almost every annual conference that the Society has held. With this record of achievement in mind, I knew that it was high time that I followed Anton Schmitz's example and supported him in Bonn.

The Conference and Annual Meeting of the Arbeitskreises Sonnenuhren der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Chronometrie took place at the Novotel Bonn-Hardtberg from the evening of Thursday 5th May to the morning of Sunday 8th May, 2005. The title of the organisation may be translated as the 'Working Section on Sundials of the German Society of Chronometry' and thus it is a subsidiary of a larger parent body. Nevertheless, there must have been nearly 110 delegates present at the conference, which indicates the strength of interest in the subject of sundials in

Germany.

Although I had been given to understand otherwise, the conference programme was not so very different from the usual BSS conference programme, with informal lectures on the Thursday evening and on the Friday, with excursions on the Saturday to visit interesting sundials in the area around Bonn. Sadly, it rained on the Saturday; but this did not deter the delegates! Officially, the conference closed on the Saturday evening; but there was an informal visit to the workshop of Anton



Figure 1. The remarkable and elegant stainless-steel globe sundial, exhibited at the German 2005 sundial conference in Bonn.

Schmitz on the Sunday morning, to see the many and varied examples of his splendid sundial craft.

During the course of the conference, there was a display of material by members in the lecture hall, with exhibits ranging from drawings and photographs of individual gnomonical work to particular sundials as a finished product. Anton Schmitz had a fine display, illustrating his magnificent portfolio of sculptural sundials. There were some superb technical drawings by other gnomonical practitioners and a number of interesting 'stained-glass' sundials, horizontal as well as vertical, curiously designed to be illuminated from the inside! However, amidst this intriguing array of technical achievement, there was one outstanding

exhibit that attracted my attention. It was a stainless steel globe sundial, some 160mm in diameter, depicting an outline of the world in high relief, set upon a stainless steel post of about 1000mm in height.

Here was something different! Technically, this proved to be a universal equinoctial sundial, fitted with an hour-ring around the equator, containing a complex arrangement of lenses situated at 15-minute intervals, which permit the sun's rays to pass through each lens, as the sun transits the individual meridian. The projected beam momentarily illuminates a small light segment in the hour-ring, thus indicating the time. Evidently, each lens allows for the sun's change in declination, but shuts out the light until the precise moment of transit. The instrument is supported at the poles by a semi-circular meridian 'ring', graduated with a latitude scale, which may be set for the latitude of the place concerned and clamped in position by a screw at the head of the steel post. The globe itself may be turned about its axis, to be set for any given longitude and can be adjusted for the equation of time.

Despite being made of stainless steel, this sundial is an unusually elegant example of German precision engineering, which would look good in almost any garden or any chosen position. Even in an historic garden it would probably not be out of place and no doubt it would enhance the balcony of a fashionable city apartment. At around €2000, this is a high quality, but inexpensive instrument, designed and made by Dr.-Ing. Carlo Heller, in the name of Helios (EK), at Begasweg 3, 65195 Wiesbaden, Germany. Whilst he is undoubtedly a credit to the German sundial 'society', what appeals to me is the fact that Dr Heller is a young man, who already has more advanced sundial models under construction, which use the sun's geographical position to indicate the time. He is to be congratulated on his achievements and I hope that his sundials 'catch on' around the world!●

Note

The email address of the German sundial 'society' is:
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