

## AHS London Lecture Thursday 13 January 2022

### Mike Bundock, **British Clock Towers as monuments of memorialisation 1836–present**

Public clocks are commonplace features of British cities, towns and villages with installations taking many different forms. Typical examples of public clocks can be seen on a wide range of buildings with churches, schools, town halls, factories and stable blocks perhaps some of the more familiar to us. In these instances, even though the clock serves a very practical purpose, it is unlikely to be the main reason for construction.

In contrast, a specific type of public clock, free-standing clock towers, have, with very few exceptions, been built with the clock as the primary purpose. These towers, arguably some of the more conspicuous public clocks gracing our streets, are typically situated in prominent locations, where they form an important part of the street scene and have over time become a much-valued part of our built heritage.

A significant number of public clocks, particularly those installed from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, have been intended as a means of memorialisation. Some commemorate events of local or national significance, while others record the life of a prominent person or local group such as those remembered on War Memorials. As part of a larger ongoing project concerning the role of public clocks as a means of memorialisation, begun in the early 1990s and drawing from a growing database of several hundred examples, this talk will focus on some of the more than 330 free-standing clock towers within the British Isles and examine the reasons behind their construction.

Using a variety of sources and period images, consideration will be given to the process of building a clock tower, from the initial idea, right through to the unveiling and the subsequent challenges of keeping the clock in order beyond the initial period of euphoria. From evidence gathered so far, the seemingly straightforward task of building and maintaining such a clock was often more troublesome than might first be supposed.



Miles' clock tower, Exeter, Devon, built in 1897.

*Mike Bundock has recently retired from a career in finance. He has been interested in horology all his adult life, having a particular passion for public timekeeping where he likes to focus on the social and economic aspects of the subject.*

#### **Attending London Lectures**

We hope to run our 2022 London Lecture Series as hybrid events, available live both online via Zoom and in-person at St Mary-at-Hill Church, Lovat Lane, London. However, the in-person element will be subject to short-notice change or cancellation, and capacity is likely to be lower than before the pandemic. Whether online or in-person, those wishing to attend lectures must register in advance at [www.ahsoc.org/events/london-lectures](http://www.ahsoc.org/events/london-lectures). If you have questions or difficulties please email [events@ahsoc.org](mailto:events@ahsoc.org).