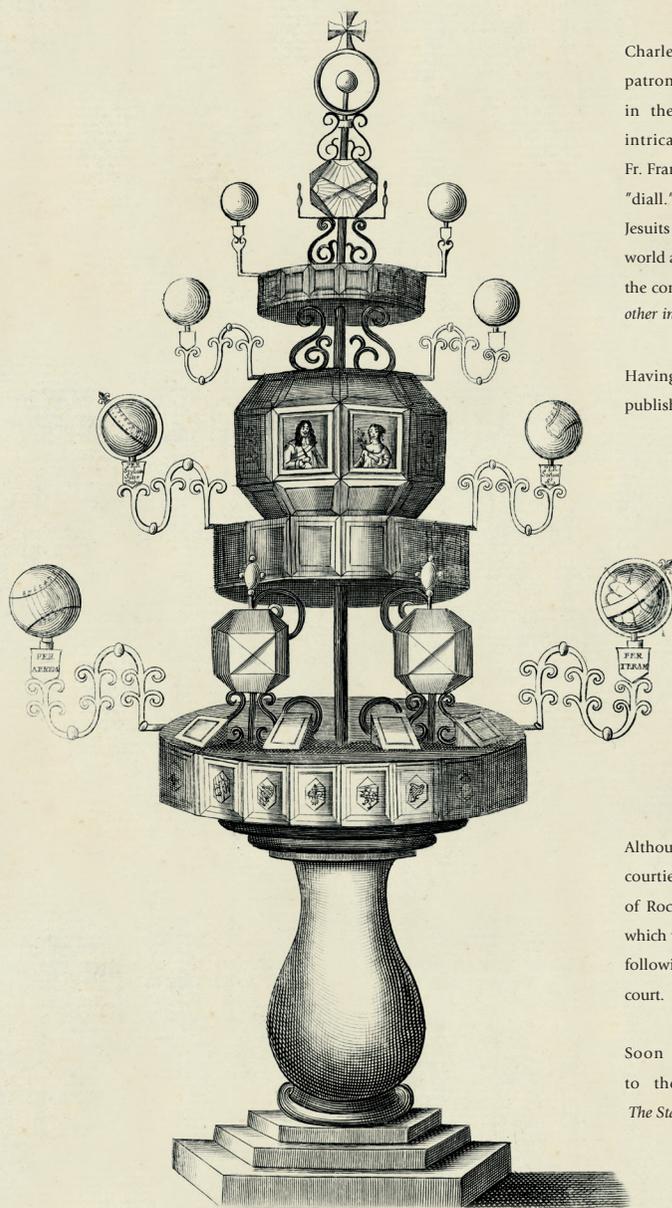


# Jesuit "dialls," finest in the world



*"He printed a discourse of dialling in quarto, Latin, and made the Jesuits' College there the finest dialls in the world."*

—John Aubrey (1626-1697) on the life of Francis Line, S.J., from Aubrey's posthumously published *Brief Lives*.

Charles II of England (reigned 1660-85), was a keen patron of scientific endeavors and resolved to have in the Privy Garden at Whitehall a new, even more intricate sundial. An elderly Jesuit mathematician, Fr. Francis Line was commissioned in 1669 to devise the new "diall." Fr. Line had created dials at the College of the English Jesuits at Liege. These dials were said to be the finest in the world and were known to Charles II during his earlier exile on the continent. (*Sundials did a better job of measuring time than other instruments in use at that time.*)

Having completed the instrument in July 1669, Fr. Line published a detailed description of it in 1773:

*A pyramid about ten feet tall surmounted by an orb and cross was formed by six so-called 'tables' of diminishing diameter supported by a stone pedestal. More than 250 dials were attached to the several 'tables,' the lowest of which, about forty inches in diameter, had twenty vertical declining dials covered with glass, giving 'the hours according to the Jewish, Babylonian, Italian, and astronomical ways of reckoning.' An upper level contained portraits on glass of the king, queen, queen mother, Duke of York, and Prince Rupert. There was even a device by which a blind person could divine the time by the heat of the sun on his hand.*

Although natural elements endangered the fragile device, courtiers were even more destructive. In 1676, the Earl of Rochester "in a frolick after a rant beat down the dyill which was esteemed the rarest in Europe." Rochester spent the following autumn and winter in exile far from the king and court.

Soon after, Andrew Marvell (1621-78) referred to the incident in the third stanza of his poem *The Statue at Charing Cross*:

*For a Diall the place is too insecure  
Since the privy garden could not  
it defend  
And soe near to the Court  
they will never indure  
Any monument how their time  
they mispend.*