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A Case of (Hidden) Identity: Ralph Greateorex's Sundial as a Dividing Engine

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This paper will present the results of the research that had been carried out over an historical scientific instrument, a dividing engine part of the collection of the Gabinetto di Fisica of the Seminario Vescovile in the city of Cremona that was under conservation treatment by myself. During this study a fragment of a sundial was found, used as part of the engine. Further analysis confirmed that the sundial had been made by the scientific instrument maker Ralph Greateorex (1625-1675).

Following the methodology proposed by George L'E. Turner the research was pushed in all the directions, finding some new archival sources for the life of Greateorex, reconstructing the social aspect of the craftsmen in London during the British Renaissance, and the connections that this incredible instrument maker had. The social aspects were crossed with the scientific ones, considering the mathematical knowledge that the maker must have had.

In this contest mathematical practitioners in the renaissance's London played a fundamental role in developing new instruments and using these tools as a meaning to teach and rise awareness of the importance that mathematics, physics, chemistry and the natural philosophy in general held in the modern society that they were shaping. Some of the persons we can remember were William Oughtred, Samuel Hartlib, Robert Boyle, Robert Hooke, Christopher Wren and Samuel Pepys. People with different interests, that shared their knowledge with Ralph Greateorex, all of them dealing with him as a scientific instrument maker, and sometimes also as a friend.

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