

ON SOME DORSET BELLS.

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This communication is sent in the hope that it may lead in time to the addition of Dorset to the eighteen completed counties of England.

The general character of the inscriptions resembles largely those in the neighbouring counties of Devon, Somerset, and Wiltshire; but a great deal remains to be learned as to the West-country foundries of the middle ages. When civic and parochial documents have given forth their secrets, we may expect to find foundries at such a city as Salisbury, or at towns of less importance, as Wimborne Minster, Blandford, Sherborne, Wareham, or Dorchester itself. The situation of Shaftesbury would render it less probable to be chosen for an occupation in which weight plays so notable a part. We know something about Exeter, and should be glad to know more.

There is a village named Paignton near the mouth of a little creek in Tor Bay where, at the end of the thirteenth century and in the fourteenth, lived three generations of a family named de Ropeford, who exercised the combined callings of founder, organ-builder, and clock-maker. Here in 1285 Bishop Peter Quivil, of Exeter, granted to Roger de Ropeford, *Campanistarius*, and his heirs, for one penny each Easter, a certain tenement, they to perform the work of the aforesaid crafts, receiving all things necessary for the work, with victuals and drink whenever so employed. Roger was succeeded by his son William, and William by his son Robert, and from one of the three may have come a few of the group of earlier Longobardic bells. Paignton was the greatest lordship that belonged to the See of Exeter, and here was a goodly house of the Bishop's. Under these favourable circumstances, with ready access to the sea, the work of the de Ropefords may well have extended into neighbouring counties. In the course of a century this family dis-

appears, and one Thomas Karoun, *alias* Belhuter, possibly a Scotchman, is at work for Bishop Brantingham in 1372.

Of the Dorset bells belonging to this period may be mentioned, firstly, two which bear the Salutation, in whole or in part :—

✠ **AVE MARIA.** Blandford St. Mary, 2nd.

✠ **MARIA : PLENA : GRACIA : M :** Wambrook, treble.

To these may be added :—

IE SA JHI DE I MES ER ERE. Winterborne Whitechurch, 3rd.

✠ **SANCTA MARIA.** Durweston, treble.

✠ **AVE GRACIA.** Shillingstone, 3rd.

✠ **MARIA.** Hammoon, 2nd.

✠ **SANCTE PETRE.** Tarrant Crawford, tenor.

✠ **SANCTA MARI.** Winterborne Houghton, 2nd.

SANCT : ANDREA : IS : MI : JAJNE : Wambrook, 2nd.

So far as I can judge by the pen-and-ink drawings which I made in my youth, the lettering and initial crosses on these bells are of a more simple character.

Another group shows greater elaboration, and on that account may probably take a later date in the fourteenth century. In the case of the Silton 2nd we get some limits of date assigned us, the Bidyck family having been patrons of that Rectory from 1312 to 1412.

The Rector's initials are J. C. according to my MS., but the second letter may be G or T. The inscription in my book reads

✠ **DOMINUS : M : BIDYCK : J : C :
RECTOR : DNO : FECERUNT.**

“Fieri fecerunt” is the general expression for donors, but in this rather early bell Bidyck and the Rector may be the two referred to.

Alton Pancras 3rd is inscribed **AVE GRACIA PLENA** in Lombardic, but I am not sure of the lettering. A bell at Cranborne with the same inscription is in handsome style, with a saltire cross. The second at Charlton Marshall only takes the first and second words, with a considerably floriated cross. One of the bells at Milton

Abbas, evidently not the work of one of the monks, is marked **SANCTA THOMANES + R.** The tenor at Fontmell, **AVE MARIA**, and the bell at Tarrant Keynston bear good crowned capitals, the latter with a rather elegant cross and with a fleur-de-lis between the second and third letters of the name **MARIA**, the only word on it. The Charlton Marshall tenor, with a plain cross, has endured the ineptitude of some wiseacre, who has marked it—

**+ SIT NO MEN DO MI RE BE RE DIC
TUM.**

I should be inclined to class Haselbury Bryan 3rd with the bell at Tarrant Keynston, the lettering being fine, and there being a fleur-de-lis stop between the two only words **SANCTE ANDREA.**

Two of these "Longobards" bear unusual legends, the 3rd bells at Iwerne Minster and Shapwick. After the words **+ HINC ECCLESIE DEDIT** on the former, which appears to have emanated from one who would not let his left hand know what his right hand did, there follows a hexameter hard to scan as to interpret:—

**TERCIA SIT BONA SUB IESU NOMINA
SONA.**

At Shapwick are two hexameters, adapted to metrical destruction, from a well-known hymn to St. Christopher:—

**ILLO NEMPE DIE PAULO LANGORE
GRAVE TUR CRISTOFORI SANCTI
CAMPA NAM OVICINAVE TETUR.**

Speciem is the third word in the second line of the original, and *Nempe* is an alteration from *namque*, and perhaps in this instance an improvement on it.

The last of this group which I will mention is the 5th at Broadwinsor, with

SANCTE GABRIEL ORA PRO NOBIS.

On this we happily get a founder's mark, No. 5 in Ellacombe's *Devon*, the initials *r. n.* being those of Robert Norton of Exeter. He flourished in the west in the early part of the fifteenth century, and Mr. Ellacombe, in his *Church Bells of Somerset*, records a petition presented in

1431 against him by the parishioners of Plymtree before John Stafford, Bishop of Bath and Lord Chancellor. The result is not recorded. As a rule his bells are good.

We now turn to some of the ordinary black-letter class, in the style of the fifteenth century. A few of these, which bear simply *maría*, as Alton Pancras 3rd, Compton Abbas 2nd, and Winterborne Came 2nd (which last inserts a capital R and drops the fourth letter), are presumably turned out by a not too literate craftsman. The Winterborne Came smaller bell, which prefixes *Sancta*, has a beautiful initial cross, with which I should be inclined to compare those on the Compton Abbas bell just mentioned, and on the Pulham 2nd and Tarrant Hinton treble, which bear a remarkable inscription, theologically speaking:—

✠ sunt mea spes hu tres xps maría *Joh̄s*.

This inscription is on the tenor at Compton Paunceford, Somerset.

Another curious trait of ignorance is

✠ En Ter Sede Pia Pro Nobis Virgo Maria,
which adorns the 4th bells at Stourpaine and Fontmell Magna, while the tenor at Blandford St. Mary's has a new form for *Hæc*:—

✠ Ac Cam Pana Sanc . . . in Hono Re Marie.

At Burstock is one of the earliest instances of advertisements, metrically condemnable:—

✠ me melior bere non est campana sub aere,
with which may be cited an East Anglian puff of later date:—

Thomas Gardiner have (*sic*) at last
Made as good as can be cast.

A less obtrusive and more harmonious, though censurable, hexameter appears at Whitechurch Canonichorum:—

✠ plebs oīs plaudit ut me tam sepius audit.

The composer, it is feared, would hardly have been able to justify his use of adverbs, but this is a trifle to some solecisms. It is not chargeable on the Canons of Whitechurch, for Mr. Ellacombe found it on twenty-two bells in Devon; and it may have originated the incomplete line in which the bell-founder Thomas Purdue alliteratively

celebrated his recasting with additional metal in 1676 the noble "Peter," given by Bishop Peter Courtenay in 1484 :—

PLEBS PATRĒ PLAUDIT DUM PETRUM PLE[NIUS
AUDIT].

A beautiful line, though like the others culpable in scansion, is on Broadwinsor 4th :—

✠ Est michi collatum Ehc istud nomen amatum.

This is also very common in Devon, and is found on sixteen bells in Somerset, but it disappears as we go eastward.

An approximate date may be given to the 3rd and 5th at Fordington, inscribed respectively

✠ Sancta Katerina Ora Pro Nobis, and

✠ In Multis Annis Resonet Campana Johannis,

for they bear the shield (No. 1), in which may be discerned



1.—FORDINGTON.

John Walgrave's initials. Like many other foundrymen he himself became a founder. In 1408 he was servant to the great William Dawe, called William Founder, whose marks are all over England. In that year died a wealthy and charitable man, John Plot *alias* Rouwenhale, citizen and maltman of London, and among legacies for Mass of Requiem and repair of "fowle ways" is *iiij.s. iiij.d.* for "John Walgrave, servaunt of Wylyam fondour."¹ I am inclined to connect with this pair a bell which was recast more than 50 years ago, the tenor at Pimperne. When I was bell-hunting there in 1850 Mr. Ewart, then curate

¹ *Fifty Earliest English Wills*, p. 15.

of the parish, told me that the old tenor was dated in Arabic numerals 1415, and inscribed ✠ Sancta Maria Ora Pro Nobis.

The alphabet as far as a occurs on the smaller bell at Hammoon. b is inverted. We find alphabet bells in every variety in many parts of England, and are much puzzled as to their meaning and intent.



2.—CHARDSTOCK.



3.—CHARDSTOCK.

At Chardstock the two smaller bells were adorned with the beautiful shields (Nos. 2 and 3) and cross (No. 4) of Henry Jurden, a man probably of Loughborough extraction.



4.—CHARDSTOCK.

The symbolism of his first shield indicates an unusual mixture of avocations, the dolphin and keys being emblems of the Fishmonger; the bell and the laver, of the Founder, while the wheat-sheaf is a charge in the arms of

Harleton, the maiden name of Margaret Jordan, who lies with her husband Giles in Loughborough Church. In Henry Jurden's will the description of his house and shop, in the lane called Billiter (Bellezetter) lane in the p'yshe of Seynt Katheryn Crechurche w^{thin} Aldgate of London, has led to its identification with the site at the north-west corner of Billiter Street, fronting on Leadenhall Street, while his foundry was on the west side of Billiter Street, on a space partially occupied by the East and West India Dock-house.

At Steeple we find a bell marked with the rebus of William Culverden (5), a later mediæval citizen and



5.—STEEPLE.

founder, educated, as his will tells us, at Westminster. The Culver, or dove, with *de* above it, gives his name, and there are the usual insignia of his craft.

Lastly, I mention a very remarkable find, made by my friend Judge Clarence and myself at Ford Abbey in the parish of Thorncombe, on July 5th, 1860. There we found, used as a chapel bell, I believe, a very beautiful specimen from the Norwich foundry, far separated from all its fellows, the only Norwich bell known to any of us west of London. Its note is C, and its diameter 28 inches. The inscription is

✠ *Fac Margareta . Nobis hec Munera Leta.*

On the shoulder thrice repeated is the sprigged shield of

the Brasyers (No. 6) and the initial cross (No. 7). Rhymestop (No. 8) and lettering deserve all that has been said about them by East Anglian campanists. From which of the family this bell proceeded it is impossible to say. The date is about the middle of the fifteenth century, and if any light can be thrown on its history it will be most welcome.



6.—FORD ABBEY.



7.—FORD ABBEY.

The preservation of these inscriptions is a matter of great importance, and I fear but little recognised. Year by year our old bells pass away, and with them, sometimes irrecoverably, important historical and archaeological evidence.



8.—FORD ABBEY.