

NOTES ON SOME NOTTINGHAMSHIRE BELLS.¹

By the Rev. CANON RAVEN, D.D., F.S.A.

In a ramble of a couple of days in Nottinghamshire in the summer of 1855, from Worksop to Southwell, and thence to Newark, looking at churches and climbing towers, I collected a few inscriptions on old bells, which after the lapse of many years I venture to bring under the notice of the members of the Royal Archaeological Institute, in the hope that the collections of others may be brought to light, and further information gained as to the history of the bells of the county.

Of those which I saw, the earliest, I think, was the smaller bell at Halam, without inscription, but noted by me as "a regular 'petasus,' with a flat edge, rather conical, and surmounted with six cannons forming a sort of crown." The Rev. Robert F. Smith, vicar of the parish, kindly answered my inquiries, corroborating my record of the Norman chancel arch, and the *voussoirs* of zigzag mouldings in the chancel door. He informs me that this bell is cracked. From its character it seems a rare survival of Norman or very early Plantagenet times, and as the furnace may some day be its destiny, I hope that a photograph may be taken of it before it passes away. These specimens of the early founders are of manifold importance in the history of the craft.

Next, we come to a little group with Longobardic lettering, probably some two centuries later than the Halam treble, if it may be dignified with that name, namely, the trebles at Kirklington and Edingley and the third at Rolleston. That at Kirklington is inscribed

SCA: MARIA: ORA PRO NOBIS: ROBERTVS
WILKINSON: MEIERI: BECIT ✠

I have to thank the Rev. J. A. Pink, vicar, for examining the initial cross (Fig. 1) and the form of the letter

¹ Written for the Nottingham Meeting, 1901.

S (Fig. 2) in the inscription. The result is that the cross is identical with that used by a nameless founder, known in Lincolnshire for a group of what are called S bells, from their bearing that letter only. The form of the Kirklington S corresponds with these, but the little leaf ornamentation is not discernible, for which perhaps the casting may be accountable.

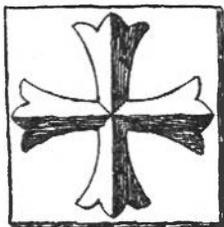


FIG. 1.



FIG. 2.

On these bells other marks, a rose, and shield bearing the letter R and a bell, are sometimes found, both of which were afterwards used by Nottingham founders. The position of the churches and this circumstance of union of marks favours a Nottingham origin. Any information about Robert Wilkinson of Kirklington will be valuable, as giving an approximate date for the founder.

In 1376 William le Brasiere "de Notyngham" was admitted to the freedom of the city of Norwich. He is thought to be identical with "Willelmus de Norwyco," the maker of the bell at Hellesdon, Norfolk, given by Johānes de Heglesdon, whose brass in that church is dated 1384, and of the second at Conington, Cambridge-shire. There seems, however, to be no identifying the Kirklington lettering with that of these bells. In the last number (Vol. XIV, p. 308) of the original papers of the Norfolk and Norwich Archaeological Society we find in the View of Arms for the Leet of Wymer in 1355, "Willelmus Brasyere."

At Edingley we are met with difficulty of access. The two bells were in some manner of tower in 1855. Now they are in a turret, and the vicar thinks that no ladder in the parish will reach them. My pen-and-ink sketch,

however, seems to identify the smaller of this pair with Rolleston third in origin. Instead of the cross at Rolleston there is, indeed, only a thick perpendicular line, and between the words in each bell are three dots, whereas at Kirklington there are but two. The inscription is:—

□ SANCTA · MARIA · ORA · P · NOBIS

Provisionally, therefore, I regard this bell as the handiwork of a certain John of York, as the third at Rolleston is unquestionably from his foundry. The inscription on the latter bell runs:—

✠ ILLI : RECERVNT : ME · IN : HONORE : TRENITATIS.

which suggests that the bell was the gift of the Parish Guild.

The bells of John of York are to be found at a considerable distance from the city from which he is named.

That praiseworthy recorder of Cambridge events, Bowtell, the bookbinder, in his MS. which remains in Downing College Library, has given the inscriptions on the old eight at St. Mary's-the-Great, before the recasting by Richard Phelps in 1722. On the fourth we find "Johannes Yorke hanc campanam fecit in honore Beate Marie." No work of John of York's, however, is extant in that county, but in drawing nearer home, bells are found bearing his name. In Northamptonshire is the tenor at Great Billing, bearing the same inscription which I have given from the now recast Cambridge bell, and Mr. North gives a similar legend, naming St. Peter instead of St. Mary, as on the old third at Clapton, a church dedicated to St. Peter.¹ The larger number in Leicestershire, ten in all, suggests a possible temporary establishment of this founder in or near Leicester, or a

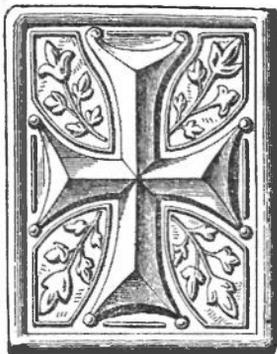


FIG. 3.—INITIAL CROSS OF JOHN OF YORK.

¹ *Church Bells of Northamptonshire*, pp. 57, 222.

business tour, such as we can trace in other founders' operations, the castings being made on the spot. The ten are Billesdon fourth, Birstall third, Brentingby treble, Cotesbach second, Hungarton third, Long Clawson fourth, Sproxton two smallest, Witherley fifth, and Wanlip second. The last-named, however, seems later in date, having + *Sancte Nicolauē Ora Pro Nobis* in black-letter, but it bears the angel so frequently found on the other bells. If any one will be at the trouble of marking on a map these places where the marks of John of York are found, he will see, as it appears to me, a distinct suggestion of a business round, made in part along the Watling Street, though beginning in the county of Nottingham, a part of the archdiocese.¹

The founder's craft was early and successfully practised at York. Brother William of Towthorp, probably a Franciscan, cast the beautiful mortar of the farmery of St. Mary's Abbey in 1308, and it remains in the York Museum as a memorial of his skill. Richard Tunnoc, bell-founder, who represented the city in the Parliament held at the opening of the reign of Edward III., has left his mark in York Minster by means of the well-known Bell-founder's Window. John of York was very likely a follower of Tunnoc, and the style of his lettering renders it quite possible that he may have learned his business from that M.P. of Plantagenet days.

Leaving this little Longobardic group, we must notice the little treble at Carlton-in-Lindrick, remarkable for the magnificent lettering, which as yet is only known in that tower and in the county of Lincoln.

It has only fallen to my lot to see these exquisite characters at Tennyson's birthplace, Somersby, but they are to be seen in other towers in that county. The first view of them is as to the astronomer

"When some new planet swims into his ken,"

but hardly anything is known of their history. The position of the churches seems to indicate Lincoln as the site of the foundry. The time is the earlier part of the fifteenth century, as proved by the dates 1423 on the second and

¹All but two are in the north-eastern quarter of the county.

third bells at South Somercotes, and 1431 on the third at Somerby near Brigg. Contemporaneous with the South Somercotes date is the last year of the incumbency of William Chambers, as we should call him, who was rector of Carlton-in-Lindrick from 1417 to 1423, as I am informed by his successor, the Rev. J. Foxley.

The hexameter on this bell is one well known in many parts of England:—

+ VIRGINIS □ EGREGIE □ VOCOR □ CAMPANA □
MARIE □ DNS WILLS ◇ CHAWMBIR

The initial cross is not the unusually fine one found on the majority of the Lincolnshire group, which is in a square, this being smaller, and in a lozenge.

The letter O contains a bishop's head, presumably the effigy of Bishop Fleming, who presided over the see of Lincoln from 1420 to 1431.

A full account of the two Mellours, founders, of Nottingham, towards the end of the fifteenth century, and of the grandson of the younger Mellour, Robert Quernbie, may be found in *North's Church Bells of Lincolnshire*, pp. 103–105.

From the same source we obtain several notices of the Oldfields, who seem from Mr. Fowler's notes to have migrated from York. After Robert Quernbie's death Henry Oldfield carried on the business by himself. I found two of his bells, the third and fourth at Farn-don, inscribed respectively, "God save ovr chvrch," and "JESVS BE OVR SPENE 1589,"

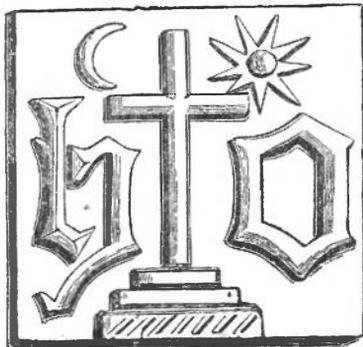


FIG. 4.—STAMP OF HENRY OLDFIELD.

with his moon and star mark, adopted by his son George Oldfield, who cast in 1663 the two bells at Bilsthorpe. This use of the paternal stamp is notable for the survival of the head and tail of the H above and below the G, and the insertion of a face into the O. We must not omit the share taken by Henry Oldfield in the recasting of Great Tom of Lincoln in 1610. This work he carried

out in conjunction with the Newcombes or Leicester in the cathedral yard, evidently producing a very grand bell, though it did weigh 100 lbs. more than its predecessor. I must not enter into its history, save to record its sad end through some mismanagement in the striking of the clock-hammer, that frequent cause of a crack in a fine bell. In 1827 a crack was found in its rim, and it was broken to pieces by blows of its own clapper on June 18th, 1834, the recasting with additional metal, on the 15th of November, giving the present fine bell, which weighs a ton more than the Tom of 1610.

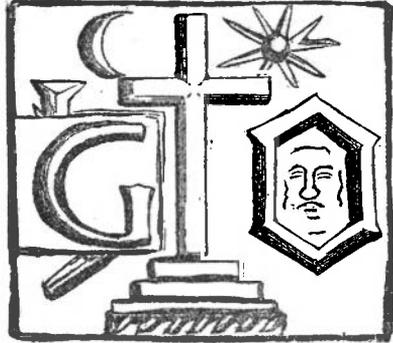


FIG. 5.—STAMP OF GEORGE OLDFIELD.

It may prevent disappointment to seekers after old bells if it be noted that the rings of eight at Southwell Minster and Newark, each with a tenor of 28 cwt., were from the celebrated foundry of the Rudhalls of Gloucester, in the time of George I., and of the Worksop six only one, which has no inscription, is of an earlier date. The bells at Elston and Farnsfield appear in the Downham Market list, and cannot be older than 1778, when Thomas Osborn dissolved his partnership with Edward Arnold of St. Neot's, and set up a foundry in his native town.

The subjoined list of Pre-Reformation and modern bells in the county is kindly supplied by Mr. H. B. Walters, F.S.A. :

PRE-REFORMATION BELLS.

Wm. Dawe :
Greasley.

J. Danyell :
South Muskham.

Early Nottingham (fifteenth century) :

Burton Joyce.
Cromwell.
Selston.

Nottingham (R. Mellour) :

Bunny.
 Carcolston.
 Cotgrave.
 Owthorpe.
 Ruddington.
 West Bridgeford.

Misterton.
 Radford.
 Scarrington.
 Shelford.
 Stapleford.
 Thrumpton.
 Whatton-in-Vale (sanctus).
 North Muskham.
 Langford.
 Colston Bassett.
 Strelley.
 Sutton Bonnington, St. Anne.

Unknown :

Cropwell Bishop.
 Hucknall Torkard.

MODERN BELLS.

Taylor's List :

Balderton, 5.
 Beeston, 8.
 Blyth, 6.
 Bulwell, 6.
 Clifton, 6.
 Coddington, 5.
 Everton, 6.
 Harby, 5.
 Holme Pierrepont, 5.
 Lenton, 6.
 Langar, 5.
 Radcliffe-on-Trent, 6.
 Willoughby, 6.

Warner's List :

Winthorp, 5.

Mears' List :

Averham, 6.
 Edwinstowe, 6.
 Perlethorpe, 6.
 East Retford, 8.
 South Collingham, 5.
 Sturton-le-Steeple, 5.

Others :

Kirton, 8.
 Normanton - on - Soar, 4 of
 1897.
 Misson, 6 of 1894.
 South Wilford, 5 of 1891.