

## SOME NOTES ON WORCESTERSHIRE BELL-FOUNDERS.

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In January, 1901, I had the privilege of reading before the Diocesan Architectural Society a paper on the *Church Bells of Worcestershire*, in which I dealt at some length with the various bell-founders who at one time worked in the city or county, and with their existing remains. This paper was subsequently printed in the Report of the Associated Archaeological Societies for that year. I do not therefore propose now to do more than bring forward a few items of additional information which have come under my notice.

First to claim our attention is a group of bells of pre-Reformation date<sup>2</sup> distinguished by bearing what are known as "Royal Head" stamps, or reproductions of the heads of Edward III. and Queen Philippa, as stops between the words of the inscription. Of these there are ten in the county, including three in the tower of St. Swithin, Worcester, and two or three in each of the adjacent shires. Their geographical distribution clearly points to Worcester as the centre from which they emanated, and their date, which I had previously conjectured to be the early part of the fifteenth century, has now been established by further research.

The required evidence is yielded by a bell which may be considered the most remarkable of the whole group: the tenor at Bitterley, Salop. This bears the inscription:

+ 152V (K) LE 2AIGNE (K) 2AVNT (Q) ANNE (K) PER  
LE ORDYNAVRE (K) ALER 2TVRY

(K) QVE DIV (K) AZOILE (K) PVR 2A GAVNT  
(K) MARDY

with the heads of the King and Queen (indicated where they occur by K and Q) as stops between the words.

<sup>1</sup> Read before the Meeting of the Institute on the 7th November, 1906.

<sup>2</sup> *Assoc. Arch. Soc. Report*, xxv, p. 562 ff.

The letter S is reversed throughout ; the T is Roman, not Gothic in form. The translation is as follows : "Jesu the Lord (and) Saint Anne, by the ordinance of Alice Stury, whom God pardon of his great (*gaunt=grande*) mercy." It is not only interesting as an almost unique instance (on a bell) of an inscription in Norman-French,<sup>1</sup> but for the mention of its donor, Alice Stury. Now this lady can be proved to have a close connection not only with Bitterley<sup>2</sup> but also with Worcestershire. She was patroness of the living of Hampton Lovett near Droitwich, and founded a chantry there in 1414,<sup>3</sup> which she dedicated to St. Anne, her patron saint (as appears also from the Bitterley bell). We gather also that she died shortly after, in 1415, bequeathing some plate to John Baysham, Rector of Hampton Lovett 1396-1412, who in his will, dated 1426, orders masses to be said for her soul. We cannot say exactly when the bell was given to Bitterley, except that it was before 1415 ; but she would naturally have ordered it from the neighbouring foundry of Worcester.

Plate I gives the initial cross and the heads of Edward III. and his Queen as found on these bells (Figs. 1-3), and specimens of the lettering (4-12).

Another obviously local group,<sup>4</sup> of which there are no less than thirteen examples in the county, must, I think, come next in point of date. The only feature they have in common with the preceding group is that two of them (at Spetchley and Stanford-on-Teme) bear the Royal Head stamps. But the initial cross (Plate II, Fig. 1) was formerly the property of a Salisbury founder, John Barber, whose name occurs on a bell at Chittern, Wilts. He died in 1403, and his will, unearthed by Mr. A. D. Tyssen, has recently been published by the late Dr. Raven.<sup>5</sup> It mentions one Peter le Brasier as his successor, and we may therefore assume that with the

<sup>1</sup> Norman-French appears to have been favoured in England about this time for inscriptions, *cf.* a bell at Long Stratton, Norfolk.

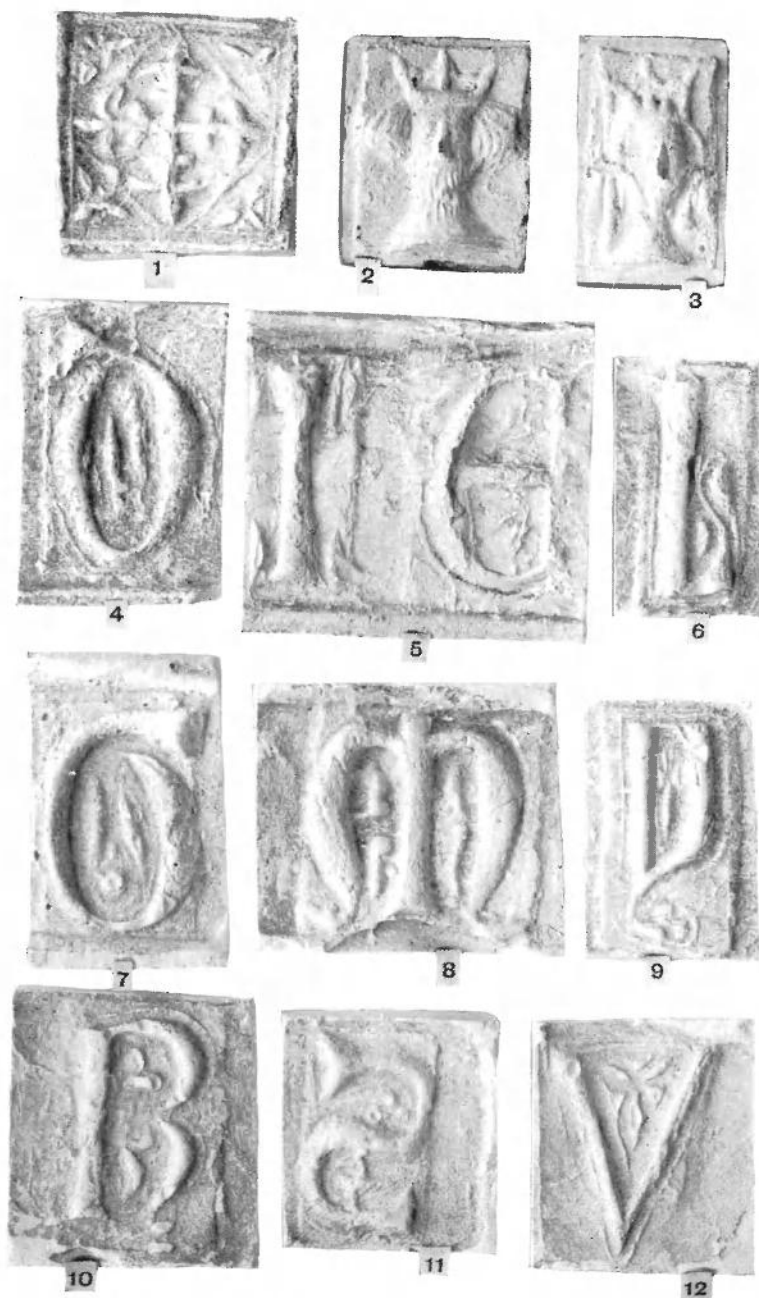
<sup>2</sup> The Rector of Hampton Lovett in Alice Stury's childhood was the owner of lands in Bitterley parish. The gift may, therefore, have been in his memory.

<sup>3</sup> See Nash's *Hist. of Worcs.*, I,

p. 543. I am much indebted to the Rev. J. R. Burton for his valuable researches on this point. See *Salop Arch. Soc. Trans.*, 3rd Ser., iv, p. xiv, and *ibid.*, p. 22; also *Notes and Queries*, 9th Ser., x, p. 236.

<sup>4</sup> *Assoc. Arch. Soc. Report*, xxv, p. 561.

<sup>5</sup> *The Bells of England*, p. 150.



STAMPS AND LETTERING ON EARLY FIFTEENTH CENTURY BELL  
AT BITTERLEY, SALOP.

latter the business came to an end, and that the plant was sold to a Worcester founder before the middle of the century.

Neither in these two groups, nor in a later group of Worcester-cast bells,<sup>1</sup> two of which are dated respectively 1480 and 1482, do we discover any evidence as to names of founders, and it is not until the close of Henry VIII.'s reign, when the Reformation was just beginning, that we first meet with any actual record of a representative of this important medieval foundry.

By the kindness of the Rev. J. K. Floyer, formerly minor canon and librarian of Worcester Cathedral, I am enabled to give here the text of the will of the only known medieval Worcester founder, one Nicholas Grene, who died in 1541. The will was proved at Worcester, 28th April, 1542,<sup>2</sup> and begins as follows :

In dei nomine Amen. The xxv day of Februarye the yere of our lorde MCCCCXLI I Nicholas Grene of the p'she of Saynt Nicholas in Wurcest' bellfounder beyng sicke of my body and in p'fyte mynde make this my testament and last wyll first I gyve and bequeathe my soll to the glorious trinite and my body to be buried in Saynt Marie churcheyarde Item I gyve unto the hye awter of my paryshe church xij<sup>d</sup>. Item I gyve and bequethe unto Elizabeth my daughter xl markes st'ling for her marriage Itm I gyve and bequeathe unto Henry my sonne all my bell moldes and all my brasse pott moldes and to occupye them w<sup>t</sup> his moder during her lyfe and all my pewter moldes of brasse what so ev<sup>r</sup> they be.

The rest refers to his domestic property, and need not be quoted here. Appended, says Mr. Floyer, is an inventory much faded and obliterated, but containing an inventory of goods, "in the belle howse," and a list of debts owing from the wardens of various churches: Dymock, Yardley, Hampton, Suckley, Blockley, "All Hallows yn Evessam," "All hallow parysse yn Worcetur," "Segeley," "Lapynton" (?Lapworth), Hadser. Unfortunately none of the parishes named possesses a bell of the period which might afford a useful clue, and we cannot at present identify any existing bells as his. The most likely candidate is, I think, a bell at Morton Bagot near Redditch, with a black-letter inscription of late

<sup>1</sup> *Assoc. Arch. Soc. Report*, xxv, p. 565. Stamps and lettering from these bells are given on Plate II, Figs. 2-9.

<sup>2</sup> Worcester Registry, No. 64, *Worcester Wills (Index Library, xxxi)*, p. 102.

character, on which are the familiar "Royal Head" stamps, connecting it with the Worcester founders. A similar bell, now recast, was at Bearley, also in Warwickshire.

Nicholas Grene established a dynasty of founders of that name, beginning presumably with his son and successor Henry, of whom we know nothing more. Of his successors we can distinguish two, if not three, all alike named John Grene. Of these the first appears at Grimley, where the 4th bell is inscribed in plain Roman letters,

GOD BE OVR GOOD SPEDE WILLIAM WOGAN IG 1599.

The former 2nd at Grimley, the former 2nd at Church Lench, both dated 1600, and the treble at Droitwich St. Peter, quaintly inscribed

GOD SAVA OVR qVEENE A LESABET,

also appear to be the work of this John Grene.

Next we find in the county a group of bells bearing a shield with three bells and the initials I. G. (Plate III, Fig. 2); these are at Stoke Prior (1620), Upton Warren (1618), and Holt (1632). They bear a plain initial cross, which is also found on the 2nd and 3rd at Cotheridge (1633) and the 5th at Grimley (1626)<sup>1</sup>. The shield is also found at Little Hereford, near Tenbury (1628), and was on the old tenor at Naunton Beauchamp, dated (probably in error) 1675. And at Lugwardine, near Hereford, there is a later bell which bears the enigmatic inscription:

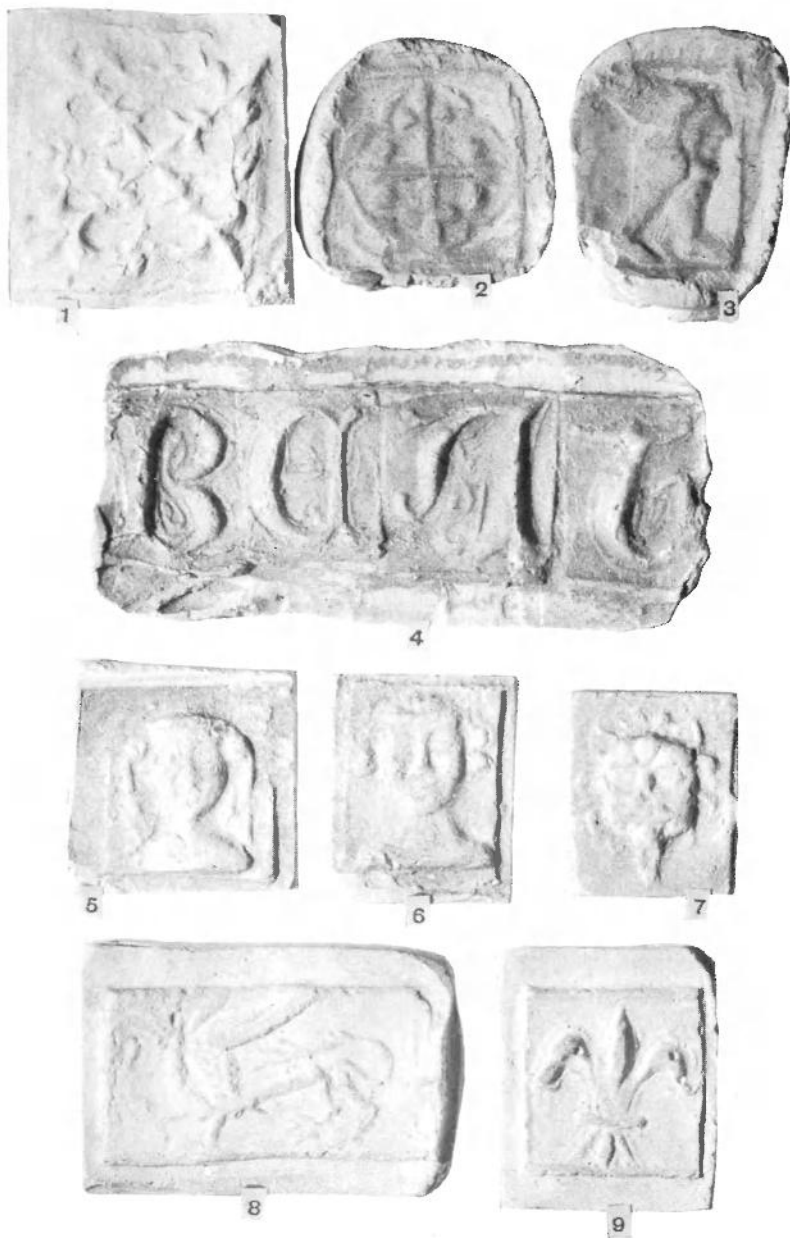
HE THAT DOTH B HOVLDE AND C IOHN G OF WOSTAR  
MEDA ME 1651.

In other words,

"He that doth behold and see  
John G. of Worcester made me 1651."

All these bells may, I think, fairly be assigned to a later John Grene, perhaps to two representatives of the name, as the Lugwardine performance is more like the first essay of an unpractised hand, the inscription, in

<sup>1</sup> The treble at Bockieton, dated 1627, belongs to this group, but has neither cross nor shield.



STAMPS AND LETTERING OF WORCESTER FIFTEENTH CENTURY FOUNDERS.

Fig. 1.—Stanford-on-Teme.

Figs. 2-9.—Grimley.

addition to its erratic orthography, being set backwards and mostly upside down! We gather from the Registers of St. Helen's, Worcester (transcribed by the Rev. J. B. Wilson) that a John Grene was baptized there in 1650-1, presumably the infant son of the last-named, and the fourth of the name. But we can trace no further examples of bell-founding by this family.

It is worth while, however, to refer to two allusions to them in other documents. In the Churchwardens' Accounts of Ludlow for the year 1623-24 is the entry,

It'm paied to Greene the Bellfounder towards his Chardgs by the  
apjoyntm<sup>t</sup> of Mr. Baylieffs iijs iiij<sup>d</sup>.

The bells being shortly afterwards recast by another founder, we may assume that this John Grene (the second of the name) was not successful in tendering for the work. And in the Accounts of Stratford-on-Avon we read that on July 26, 1627, "John Greene, bell-founder, was presented by the minister and churchwardens for working on the Sabbath day, July 13, in ye time of divine service," and probably fined.<sup>1</sup>

At Dormstone, and at Little Hereford, we find bells dated respectively 1613 and 1633, with the initials I. P. and R. D. These initials evidently denote the founders, but the first pair are still a mystery. R. D., however, is clearly identical with a Richard Dawkes who is mentioned in the Churchwardens' Accounts of St. Nicholas of Warwick, for 1619<sup>2</sup>:

In primis p<sup>d</sup> to Richard Dawkes in earnest when he vndertooke the  
casting of the fourth Bell xij<sup>d</sup>.

At the same time there was

Given to Symon Baker the Belfounder over and above v<sup>s</sup>.

The bell appears to have been actually cast at Stratford; but I am inclined to think the founders came from Worcester, as, in the first place, Stratford is too far away to have supplied a bell to Little Hereford, and secondly, the name of Baker occurs on another bell which seems to have been cast in the county. This is the treble at Worcester St. Peter, cast by Godwin Baker

<sup>1</sup> North and Stahlschmidt, *Church Bells of Herts*, p. 33. <sup>2</sup> Ed. Savage, p. 158.

in 1615, and bearing as stops a crown, a fleur-de-lys, and the keys of St. Peter (Plate III, Figs. 1, 3). The initials and similar marks occur also at Doverdale and Sedgeberrow. Possibly Godwin and Simon are one and the same person. We know nothing more of Godwin Baker, but his stamps became shortly afterwards the property of Thomas Hancox of Walsall.

In the seventeenth century there was a famous foundry at Chacomb in Northants, near Banbury, which supplied many bells to south-east Worcestershire between 1632 and 1700, bearing the names of the founders, Henry, Matthew, and William Bagley. There were two Matthew Bagleys living about 1680-1690, whom I cannot quite disentangle; but these two facts are certain: (1) that one Matthew Bagley died at Evesham in 1690, and was buried in the north aisle of St. Lawrence's Church on the 11th of June.<sup>1</sup> He is described as "Matthew Bayly, bell-founder." (2) The other Matthew migrated to London about the same time, and his name occurs on bells at Chigwell, in Essex, dated 1693.

The former appears to have spent a few years previous to his death at Evesham, whence he supplied a ring of six bells to Great Comberton in 1687, and others to Defford and Wythall in 1689. His business at Evesham was subsequently carried on by two founders of the name of Michael Bushell and William Clark, who cast the "great bell" of Badsey Church in 1706.

I append to this paper a list of Worcestershire founders, with their dates, so far as they can at present be ascertained.

#### I. WORCESTER FOUNDERS (PRE-REFORMATION).

##### (1) *Unknown founder.*

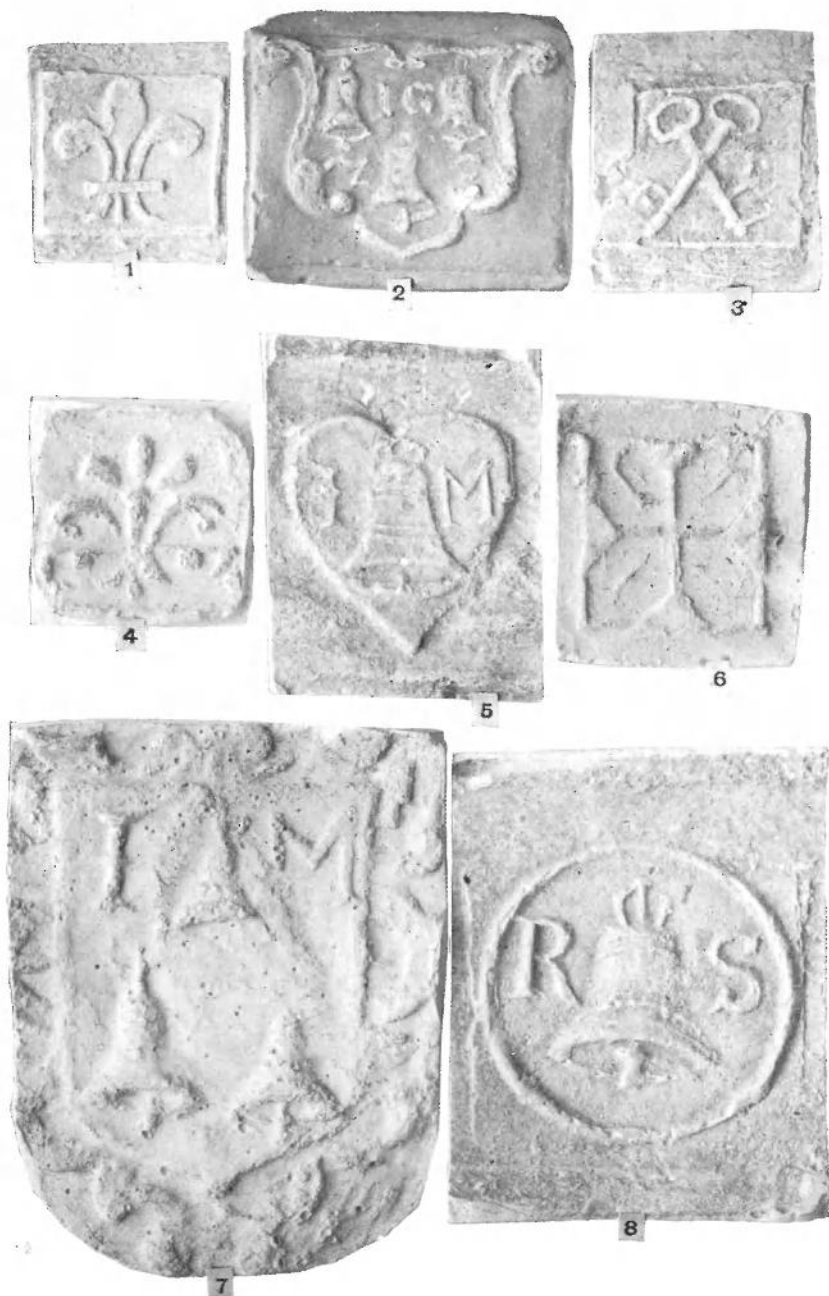
A group of bells bearing the "Royal Head" stamps, dating about 1410. (Plate I.)

##### (2) *Unknown founder.*

Stamps derived from John Barber of Salisbury; Royal Heads used occasionally. Date about 1420-1450. (See Plate II. Fig. 1.)

<sup>1</sup> See Dr. Prattinton's MSS. in the Society of Antiquaries' Library, s.v. Evesham.





STAMPS OF LATER WORCESTERSHIRE FOUNDRIES.

Figs. 1, 3.—Godwin Baker.  
Figs. 4-7.—John Martin.

Fig. 2.—John Grene.  
Fig. 8.—Richard Sanders.

- (3) *Unknown founder* (possibly of monastic origin).

Date 1475-1485 (Worcester St. Michael, 1480 ; Grimley tenor, 1482) ;  
 "Royal Head" stamps representing Henry VI., Margaret of Anjou,  
 and Prince Edward. (See Plate II. Figs. 2-9.)

- (4) *Nicholas Grene* (died 1541).

Bells not identified ; one at Morton Bagot, Warwickshire, may be his.

## II. WORCESTER FOUNDERS (POST-REFORMATION).

- (1) Henry Grene (*c.* 1550).
- (2) John Grene I. (*c.* 1600).
- (3) John Grene II. (1618-1633). (See Plate III. Fig. 2.)
- (4) John Grene III. (*c.* 1650).
- (5) Richard Dawkes and I. P. (1613-1633).
- (6) Godwin Baker (1615-1623). (See Plate III. Figs. 1-3.)
- (7) John Martin (1644-1693).

Possibly there were two founders of this name. (See Plate III. Figs. 4-7.)

- (8) William Huntbatch (1680-1692).

## III. EVESHAM FOUNDERS.

- (1) Matthew Bagley (1686-1690).
- (2) William Clark and Michael Bushell (1701-1711).

## IV. BROMSGROVE FOUNDERS.

- (1) Richard Sanders (1705-1738). (See Plate III. Fig. 8.)
- (2) William Brooke (1739-1750).

NOTE.—There are some bells of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries which were probably cast in the county, *e.g.*, at Frankley (1584), Holt (1608), Great Malvern (1611), Bransford (1620), and elsewhere ; but nothing is known of their founders.