

ART. XVI.—*Church Bells in Leath Ward, No. 5.* \*By the late REV. H. WHITEHEAD, Vicar of Lanercost.

### RENWICK.

RENWICK Church was anciently rectorial, but was subsequently appropriated to St. Mary's Abbey, York, and in 1539, on the dissolution of the Abbey, was seized by the King. "In 1578 Queen Elizabeth granted it to Lord Lincoln and Christopher Gowffe, with its appurtenances, excepting the advowson, bells, and lead". (Whellan, p. 619).

How many bells it then had we cannot know for certain, as Renwick is one of the parishes the names of which have been torn off from the Cumberland portion of Edward VI.'s Inventory of Church Goods. But very few Cumberland churches, according to the Inventory, had in 1552 either more or less than two bells. *Cumberland and Westmorland Archæological Transactions*, vol. viii., pp. 186-204.

The terrier of 1749, signed by "W. Wilkinson, curate", reports "two bells with their stocks thought to weigh about 12 stone"; which estimate of their weight, perhaps formed when they were taken down during the re-building of the church in 1733, is, as will presently appear, wide of the mark.

Whellan (A.D. 1860) says (p. 619): "There are two bells, supposed to be very ancient, one of which bears the

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\* This paper concludes the Bells of Leath Ward, see *ante p. 256 n.* The account of the Renwick Bells was found in manuscript among Mr. Whitehead's papers after his lamented death: those of Skelton and Threlkeld had already been printed in the *Penrith Observer*, and are reproduced from slips corrected by Mr. Whitehead.

inscription

inscription *Ave Sancta Maria*. He probably had his information from Mr. John Watson, p. curate of Renwick from 1832 to 1866, during whose incumbency (in 1844) the church was again re-built. But whoever supplied the information had incorrectly read the inscription.

In 1893 the late Squire Nicolson, patron of the living, presented the church with a new tenor, from the foundry of Messrs. Taylor, of Loughborough, who report its diameter as  $18\frac{1}{2}$  inches, weight 1cwt. 1qr. 4lbs., note B, and inscription *Gloria Deo in Excelsis*.

The inscription on the treble, incorrectly reported by Whellan, is the three first words of the Vulgate version of the angelic salutation :

+ AVE · MARIA · GRACIA.

The omission of the fourth word *PLENA* is due to the smallness of the bell, round the shoulder of which the inscription runs. The letters are floriated Lombardic, the intervening stop a fleur-de-lis, and the initial stamp a floriated cross in a circle within a square, of precisely the same character as the letters, stop, and cross, on the Cumrew treble, which being a larger bell includes the word *PLENA* in the angelic salutation. The same cross and lettering, but with three roundlets as intervening stop, are found in the following inscription on the second bell at Dacre :

+ IOHANNES : DE KVRKAM : ME : FECIT.

The Renwick and Cumrew trebles, then, are from the same foundry, though perhaps not quite of the same date, as the Dacre bell. The late Mr. Stahlschmidt, one of the most eminent campanologists of his time, in a letter to the present writer, said he was of opinion that the roundlets were a somewhat earlier form of stop than the fleur-de-lis, and he therefore thought that the Cumrew  
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bell may have been cast by a successor of John de Kirkham. In the same letter he gave the valuable information that the Fabric Rolls of York Minster mention John de Kirkham as a York bellfounder in 1371.

The old Renwick tenor, though superseded by the new Loughborough bell, is still, to the credit of all concerned in the matter, preserved in the vestry, where it can be easily examined. Canon Thornley reports its diameter as 18 inches. Its weight, therefore, is about 1cwt. 2qrs.; which in the terrier of 1749 was supposed to be the combined weight ("12 stone") of the two bells. I am also indebted to Canon Thornley for rubbings of their inscriptions, and for the information that they are both long-waisted, which is a sign of antiquity.

The treble I have dealt with above.

The tenor is what is called an "alphabet bell," having the alphabet in Lombardic letters, with the omission of U or V, W, and X, round its shoulder, preceded by a cross identical with that on the treble. The letters also, each of which is on a separate stamp, are of the same character as on the treble. The two bells are therefore from the same foundry, and most likely of the same date. The alphabet, or a portion of it, is found on many bells, *e.g.* on the Bywell treble, Northumberland, on the Houghton-le-Skerne treble, Durham, on several bells in Devonshire, in Rutland, and in other counties. For the alphabet as bell inscription various explanations have been advanced. The late Mr. Ellacombe in his *Devon Church Bells* suggested that it was "probably nothing more than a fancy of the bellfounder to fill up the place usually allotted for a legend, which his employers had not supplied". Such bells, as a rule, "are said to be of great antiquity" (Lukis on *Bells*, p. 30). But they "are also found from the 14th to the 17th century, many of the inscriptions of the 16th and 17th centuries being dated" (*Proceedings of Newcastle Society of Antiquaries*,  
iv.,

iv., p. 25). The late Mr. T. North said: "It has been suggested that the founders, being desirous not to offend by placing ancient precatory, and therefore often unwelcome inscriptions upon their bells, adopted this plan to escape the difficulty. By it they ornamented their bells with a goodly show of Gothic capitals which could give offence to no one. This may have been the case with the later bells; but the use of the alphabet surely had another origin on the more ancient ones. We find the alphabet or portions of it on encaustic tiles on the floors of churches. It appeared on the top of a Norman font at Severn Stoke in Warwickshire. In the *Pontificale Romanum* the bishop is directed, in the dedication of a church, to write, in the form of a cross, two alphabets, one in Greek and the other in Latin, first from the east to west, and then from north to south. There was clearly some symbolic meaning in the alphabet. Some writers on the subject say the letters represented the beginning and rudiments of sound doctrine, and the simple and pure truths of the Gospel." (*Rutland Church Bells*, p. 80-1). The alphabet in Lombardic letters is also on a very handsome silver-gilt bowl, as well as on its cover, belonging to Studley Church, near Ripon.

The two ancient Renwick bells, even if not cast by John de Kirkham himself, but by a successor, cannot be far short of 500 years old; and what with Henry VIII.'s seizure of the church, Edward VI.'s Commission in 1552-3, Elizabeth's grant in 1578 of most of "the appurtenances" of Renwick Church to Lord Lincoln and Christopher Gowffe, the re-building of the church in 1733 and 1844, and lastly the gift of a new tenor to supersede the alphabet bell, it is a wonder that they have both survived to the present time. But Edward VI.'s commissioners, though enjoined to confiscate all the bells but one of each church, seem from various indications, *e.g.*, the four pre-reformation bells still remaining at Greystoke, two at Burgh-by-Sands, two at Edenhall, two at Distington, two at Dacre

Dacre, two at Eskdale, two at Waberthwaite, &c., not to have strictly executed their orders, so far as the bells were concerned, probably deterred by fear of offending the parishioners. The same fear may have saved the Renwick bells in 1578; though why bells with inscribed invocations to saints escaped destruction during the Elizabethan crusade against "monuments of superstition" can only be explained on supposition that no one knew what the inscriptions were, which is likely enough, seeing how many custodians of mediæval bells to this day are ignorant of the inscriptions they bear. They probably ran even greater risk during the re-building of the church in 1733 and again in 1844. That they have survived the advent of a new tenor is doubtless due to the increased respect now paid in this diocese, chiefly fostered by the local antiquarian society, to venerable relics of the past, whether ecclesiastical or secular. A few years ago, as might be illustrated by several instances of ancient bells ruthlessly discarded "in part payment" of "a fine steel bell" or a set of "tubular bells," there was in some quarters a lack of sentiment in such matters; and we may welcome the preservation of the ancient Renwick bells as a sign of improved public opinion, and as an example to be followed by all "church restorers".

#### SKELTON.

Nicolson and Burn, in their history of Cumberland, published in 1777, say:—

The church of Skelton, according to Bishop Nicolson, is dedicated to St. Mary; according to Dr. Todd, to St. Michael. And there seems to be ground for the two different opinions. Upon one of the two bells belonging to this church is an inscription, *Ave Maria gratiæ plena*; on the other, *Sancte Michael ora pro nobis*. And the difference perhaps may be thus accounted for. When the feast of the dedication of the church (which originally was on the day sacred to the Saint to whom the church was dedicated) happened to be at  
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an inconvenient season, as in seedtime or harvest, it became usual to transfer it to the most vacant time in the year, about Michaelmas, when the harvest was got in. And King Hen. 8th's injunctions required all the feasts of dedication to be kept at that season. Hence in many churches, by length of time, St. Michael hath obtained the reputation of the tutelar saint; more churches being supposed to be dedicated to him than to any other saint in the calendar. (N. & B., ii., 386).

On which statement it is to be remarked that, whatever cause there may have been further south, on the ground here alleged, for such transfer of dedication, it would be strange if Michaelmas were selected as likely to be "the most vacant time" in Cumberland. Hutchinson, in 1794, advanced two other hypotheses, suggested by the following entry in Henry VIII.'s Ecclesiastical Survey, commonly called the "Liber Regis" :—

Cantaria bte Marie Virginis in Ecclia de Skelton.

He says (vol. i., p. 514) :—

It has been conjectured that the uncertainty as to the dedication arose from the method of holding the dedication feast, which might be transferred under the injunctions of Henry VIII. from the summer season to Michaelmas. But the circumstance of the chantry being dedicated to St. Mary gives the probability the other way; and that is strengthened by the dedication of the bells, one being inscribed *Ave Maria gratia plena*, the other *Sancte Michael ora pro nobis*; without we conceive the dedication was to St. Michael and St. Mary jointly.

He seems to have supposed that the dedication of the chantry must needs have displaced, or at least have been incorporated with, the dedication of the church. Jefferson, in 1840, follows Nicolson and Burn on the subject of the dedication, quoting them verbatim, except that he speaks of the two ancient bells as *formerly* belonging to the church. (*Leath Ward*, p. 156). Whellan, in 1860, adopting Hutchinson's second hypothesis of a double dedication, says (p. 623) :—

Skelton

Skelton church, dedicated to St. Michael and Mary, is an ancient edifice, &c.

Lastly, Canon Venables, in a paper on "Church Dedications in the Diocese of Carlisle," contributed in 1882 to these Transactions (vol. vii, pp. 118—149), reports the Skelton dedication as "double or doubtful"; and referring to Longmarton church, which is dedicated to SS. Margaret and James, he says:—

The double dedication is to be explained by the fact that while the church generally was placed under the patronage of one saint, one of its chantries or aisles had the tutelage of another. . . . The same cause may help us to explain some of the doubtful and contradictory dedications which perplex us in not a few cases. Bacon's "Liber Regis" gives one, the county history of "Burn and Nicolson" another. We know only too well that Bacon's huge quarto is deformed by not a few errors. This, however, is no cause of surprise in a work covering the whole of England and Wales; and, where there is a discrepancy, the authority of the county historians who devoted much care to the subject is preferable. But in some cases this discrepancy is to be accounted for by one giving the name of the church, the other that of the chantry. To determine the true dedication, and to recover the lost dedications, let me venture to recommend to the members of the Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archæological Society an examination of the mediæval wills of the district (*ante*, p. 137).

The hint about the wills is very good advice, the publication in 1893 of the *Testamenta Karleolensia* has made easy to follow. But, as far as the Skelton dedication is concerned, there is still better advice to be given:—"Verify your references". Messrs. Nicolson and Burn, when they undertook to explain away the alleged discrepancy between Bp. Nicolson and Dr. Todd, set on foot an inquiry somewhat akin to the famous question propounded by Charles II. to his courtiers: "Why is a pail of water not increased in weight by the insertion of a fish"? Bishop Nicolson, who visited Skelton in 1704, says (p. 145):—

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In the Tower there are two pretty good Bells: on the larger whereof is *Sancte Michael* (ye Church's Saint) *ora pro nobis*; and on the lesser, *Ave Maria gracia plena*.

Thus, after all the pains that have been taken to account for the "different opinions" of the bishop and Dr. Todd on the subject of the Skelton dedication, it turns out that those eminent antiquaries were both agreed that "ye church's saint" was S. Michael; *i.e.*, unless the local historians, who misquoted Bp. Nicolson, have also misquoted Dr. Todd, attributing to each the other's opinion. Unfortunately Todd's MS. history of the diocese of Carlisle, to which Nicolson and Burn had access in 1777 (N. & B., vol. i, p. iii), is now missing (*ante* ii, p. 122); but it was probably seen by Browne Willis, who, in 1727, acknowledging his obligation to his "learned friend Dr. Todd" for information on Cumberland matters (*Survey of English Cathedrals*, i, 486), assigns the dedication of Skelton Church to St. Michael.

The two ancient bells are no longer extant. All that can be said, therefore, as to their probable age is that it is evident from their inscriptions that they were of pre-Reformation date. It is also certain that they were the only bells here when Edward VI.'s commissioners reported as belonging to Skelton, "ij prche belles."

In their place are now two bells, each  $23\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter, and therefore each weighing about 1 cwt  $3\frac{1}{2}$  qrs. One of them, from the Whitechapel Foundry, is inscribed, C & G MEAR LONDON FOUNDERS 1844. The other, cracked and disused, bears the initials R.A, with the stamp of a bell between, the date 1717 above, and the word "Wiggan" below. This bell, like the Dalston tenor, dated 1704, the Kirkbampton tenor, dated 1705, and the two Melmerby bells, dated 1715, is from the foundry of the Ashtons of Wigan, for an account of which see *ante* vol. xiii, p. 213-4.

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The date of the Wigan bell, Skelton, shews that of the two mediæval bells, seen by Bp. Nicolson in 1704, one must have disappeared before 1717. Yet Nicolson and Burn in 1777, and Hutchinson in 1794, neglecting to verify their references, assumed that both the ancient bells were still in the tower. Jefferson, writing in 1840, whilst falling into the opposite mistake of assuming that both had disappeared, incidentally supplies the correction to his statement. He says :—

The two bells now in the tower are modern; one of them bears an inscription in Latin. (*Leath Ward*, p. 161.)

The bell with a Latin inscription was doubtless one of the mediæval pair, and remained until superseded by the Whitechapel bell in 1844. Whellan, to complete the series of mistakes, speaking of Skelton church tower in 1860, says (p. 623) :—

It contains two bells, one of which bears a Latin inscription.

It was not in Whellan's power to quote an inscription which no longer existed. But Jefferson might as well have quoted it, and thereby have let us know which of the two ancient bells it was that survived to his time.

By the way, as to quoting, Nicolson and Burn, as well as Hutchinson, besides misquoting Bishop Nicolson in the matter of the dedication, presumed to correct his Latin by substituting *gratiæ* for *gracia* in the inscription on the "Ave Maria" bell. The bishop, no doubt, was right; since the angelic salutation, when it occurs in bell inscriptions, invariably follows the text of the Vulgate.

Bishop Nicolson had a habit of copying inscriptions; yet, often as he mentions the bells of the churches which he visited, at only two other places besides Skelton, viz.: Edenhall (p. 58) and Penrith (pp. 152-3), did he record the

the bell inscriptions. This may be partly accounted for by the circumstance of most Cumberland church bells, hung in cots on gables, being difficult of access; and, if he did not explore the belfries of such church towers as Greystoke, Dacre, Burgh-by-Sands, Scaleby, Crosthwaite, &c., it could only have been for want of time, as he must have been fully occupied with the amount of work he evidently got through in each parish, and often in more than one parish on the same day. It is well, however, that he found time to copy the legends in the Skelton tower, as he thereby did a twofold service to Cumberland campanology. He has confirmed the probability that in Cumberland none of the church bells were confiscated by Edward VI.'s commissioners. Moreover he has supplied an additional instance of what seems to have been the Cumberland rule of dedicating a bell to the tutelal saint of the church. It was formerly supposed by campanists that such was anciently the rule throughout England. But Mr. Stahlschmidt, in a paper on "Mediæval Bell Inscriptions". (*Antiquary*, vol. xiii., pp. 213-5), has shown cause for believing that it was by no means the rule in the southern counties. Admitting, however, that Cumberland appears to favour the traditional theory, he says (*ib.* p. 215):—

It would be curious if it should turn out that North and South generally presented contradictory views: it would seem like it at present.

The Cumberland examples, as yet known, in favour of the rule are Aikton, Burgh-by-Sands, Cumrew, Edenhall, Eskdale, Greystoke, Skelton, and Threlkeld. An apparent exception to the rule is Langwathby, where the treble bears the angelic salutation, while the church, according to Bacon, is dedicated to St. Peter. Another apparent exception is Scaleby (*ante* vii., p. 231), where the church

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is dedicated, according to all book authorities, to "All Saints", and the treble bears the angelic salutation. Mr. John Sutton, of Scaleby, writing to me about twelve years ago, said :—

We were formerly under the impression that the church was dedicated to St. Bartholomew, and the tithes, or Easter offerings, were formerly paid on St. Bartholomew's Day. Latterly, however, it has been attributed to All Saints and St. Mary. How these variations have occurred I cannot say.

The claim for St. Mary was probably originated by some explorer of the belfry. The true dedication is doubtless All Saints. But this does not necessarily establish an exception to the supposed rule of Cumberland bell dedication; for at Scaleby, as also at Langwathby there is a blank treble, which, if of later date than the tenor, may have had a predecessor with dedication identical with that of the church. An unquestionable exception, however, is supplied by Renwick (*ante* p. 259.)

At Skelton there is the usage of the early Sunday morning bell at 9 o'clock.

### SKIRWITH.

There are here three bells, cast in 1858, at the White-chapel foundry, by Mears and Stainbank, to whom I am indebted for the following particulars :

No.	Note.	Diameter.	Cwt.	qr.	lb.
1	D	2ft. 6in.	5	0	5
2	C	2ft. 8in.	6	0	13
3	B♭	2ft. 11in.	7	2	13

Skirwith, a township of Kirkland parish, was constituted

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a separate ecclesiastical district in 1859. Its church, dedicated to St. John the Evangelist, was founded by W. Parker, Esq., of Skirwith Abbey, who also gave the bells.

### THRELKELD BELLS.

The Threlkeld church terrier of 1749, written and signed by "Alex: Naughley, Curate", has this entry:—

Item. Two Bells with their Frames ye greater 15 inches in Diameter at mouth and ye lesser 14 inches on which is this inscription. *Ave Maria gracia plena.*

which entry, as terriers go, is somewhat peculiar. But Alexander Naughley was a peculiar man. Hutchinson says of him:—

Here he remained fifty-one years, without ever seeking or accepting of any other promotion; for here alone, as he used to say, he was in his element, because his peculiarities did not at all diminish the respect of his parishioners. For many years he added something, but it could never be much, to his church revenue of 12£ a year, by teaching astronomy, navigation, mensuration, and other branches of the mathematics. He was also great in reputation as a classical scholar. In his modes of living he was eccentric and careless beyond example. (*History of Cumberland*, vol. 1, p. 423).

With the peculiarities of his "modes of living" we are not now concerned. But it may be noticed as characteristic of a teacher of mensuration that, whereas the clergy of this diocese were required by Chancellor Waugh to report in the terriers of 1749 the weights of their bells, Mr. Naughley contented himself with reporting the diameters. In so doing he displayed sound judgment. Many a terrier of 1749 contains but a haphazard guess at the weights of the bells. Some altogether shirk the question. The Cumwhitton terrier, as if in protest against any such question

question, says boldly: "We know not their weight". The chancellor himself seems to have discovered that he had made an unreasonable demand, since in the terrier of Caldbeck, of which parish he was rector, he abstained from answering his own question. Mr. Naughley alone had the sagacity to perceive that the best thing to be done under the circumstances was to report the diameters. He was doubtless aware that the weight of a bell might be approximately known from its diameter, but had no bell-founder's catalogue at hand to consult for the rule by which the ratio of weight to diameter was determined. So he furnished information which had not been asked for, but which was really the best answer that could be given to the question proposed by the chancellor. Another piece of information which had not been asked for was supplied by his report of the inscription on the treble. The chancellor, if he read the Threlkeld terrier, must have felt that he would have done well to take counsel with Mr. Naughley as to the questions to be asked. But the majority of the clergy would not have been pleased at being directed to report the inscriptions on their bells, most Cumberland church bells being difficult of access, and ancient inscriptions not always easy to read. Even Bishop Nicolson, zealous and able antiquary though he was, and especially keen after inscriptions, seems to have seldom got to close quarters with the bells. At Threlkeld he could not have had much time to spare, having on the same day (Oct. 9, 1703) to visit "Grisedale." Moreover the bells in his time may have been hung in a gable cot, so that he could only see them from the churchyard. He merely says in his Notes (p. 108):—"They have two little Bells". The church was rebuilt in 1777 (*Whellan* p. 553). It has now a small tower, which however is by no means easy to scale. My own experience of Threlkeld church tower was on this wise. I got as far as the first upper chamber, when immediately I found myself

myself subsiding through the floor, which as soon as I stepped on to it gave way, and I was only saved by the joists from a fall to the basement. From this chamber to the belfry the ascent has to be continued by means of an unattached ladder; but, the ladder being awkward to handle in a very confined place, I failed to adjust it, and had to relinquish my attempt to reach the bells. The then rector, the Rev. J. Brunskill, on another occasion, however, has scaled the tower, measured the diameters of the bells, taken a rubbing of the inscription on the treble, and kindly furnished me with the results of his labours.

The weights we reckon from the diameters as reported by the rector:—

Treble, diameter 17 inches, weight about  $1\frac{1}{4}$  cwt.  
 Tenor, diameter 19 inches, weight about  $1\frac{3}{4}$  cwt.

These diameters, it will be seen, do not tally with those given by Mr. Naughley. Yet that at least the treble is the same as in 1749 is evident from the fact that round its shoulder, with cross, lettering, and fleur de lis as intervening stops, all of precisely the same character as in the Cumrew treble and the old Renwick tenor, with the letter N reversed as at Cumrew, runs the angelic salutation, viz:—

+ AVE · MARIA · GRACIA · PLENA.

It is therefore a York bell, from the foundry of JOHANNES DE KVRKAM, and about 500 years old.

The tenor is blank, and therefore of very uncertain date. But Mr. Brunskill describes it as seeming older than the treble. Similar blank bells, thought to be very old, are found elsewhere in Cumberland. It is to be hoped that they may some day come under the notice of experts,  
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who may be able to confirm or disprove their supposed antiquity.

Meanwhile we may regard the "two little bells" of Threlkeld as characteristic, in number and dimensions, of the bells possessed from time immemorial by many a Cumberland church. Of 111 Cumberland churches, reported on by Edward VI.'s commissioners in 1552, as many as 76 had only two parish bells; and that these with few exceptions were small is to be inferred from the almost total absence of the epithet "great" in the description of them, as well as from the average dimensions of those that still remain. In many other counties most of the churches in 1552 had three or four "belles"—some had more—and those "gret". In which counties, for that very reason, ancient bells are now scarce. When change-ringing came in with the 17th century, to meet the requirements of which additional bells were needed, it was found cheaper to increase the number of a peal by recasting, say, four heavy bells into six lighter, than to add two new trebles; and so the old bells were mostly consigned to the furnace. In Cumberland, on the other hand, which in 1552 had but four peals of three bells, and not more than two of four, and a century later only two peals of five, the change-ringing movement took but little hold. Thus it happened that one of the two mediæval peals of four, at Greystoke, to this day remains intact. The other, at Carlisle, augmented to five in 1608, had to submit in 1658 to the recasting of three of its ancient members during its transformation into a "tunable" ring of six. The 76 mediæval pairs of mostly small bells the movement did not at all affect. Other causes, however, such as wear and tear, fall of tower and cot, cracks occasioned by ringing with cord attached to clapper, have operated to thin the ranks of the veterans; and the survivors, now confronted by a foe more formidable than any yet mentioned, seem likely to disappear before the advancing tide of "church restoration".

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But what, it may be asked, is to be done with a bell too cracked to be heard with pleasure, or too little to be heard at all beyond a few hundred yards? Well, if such be its case, take it down, and put up what you please in its stead. But pay it the respect due to a venerable relic. In the porch of the old church at Chelsea may be seen a bell on which is an inscription relating that it was presented by a man who having lost his way at night was guided back to his home by the Chelsea curfew. This mode of dealing with an ancient bell, when sentenced for whatever reason to disuse, we commend to all whom our advice may reach as a precedent which they will do well to follow.

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