

ART. XII.—*The muckle toun bell o' Carlile.* By C. G. BULMAN.

IN CWI vii 239-244 (1884) Chancellor Ferguson and Mr W. Nanson contributed a paper under the above title. Therein they stated that the Town Hall clock of Carlisle struck the hours on a large bell, which upon investigation turned out to be an extremely fine medieval bell, bearing upon it, in floriated Gothic capitals the legend "RADULPHUS COMES : DE WESTMORLAND : EFECIT ME FIERI." The bell is described, and some information is given about Ralph earl of Westmorland who was Ralph Nevill, fourth Baron Nevill (*circa* 1365-1425), appointed governor of the city and castle of Carlisle by Richard II in 1385-6, and was created Earl of Westmorland in 1397. It is suggested that this bell was given to the citizens of Carlisle by Ralph Nevill during the time that he was governor of the city, possibly in order to replace an earlier bell which had perished in the great fire of 1392. This fire destroyed a great portion of the centre of the city, including the seat of the municipal government. Ferguson and Nanson mention a conjecture that the bell was given by Earl Ralph to the chantry of St. Alban, situated nearby, of which the name survives in St. Alban's Row, and that the city got it when the chantry was suppressed in the reign of Edward VI. The paper ends with a quotation from a Border Ballad, "The Fray of Solport":

"Captain Musgrave an a' his band,
Are coming down by the Siller-strand,
And the muckle toun-bell o' Carlisle is rung."

Presumably Ralph Nevill's bell is the "muckle toun-bell o' Carlile" which is referred to in the ballad.

I had occasion to refer to the above paper recently,

and was not a little astonished to find that the bell is now in Tullie House. Unfortunately it is badly cracked which was, presumably, the reason for its relegation to its present position.

The question immediately arises under what circumstances did the bell become cracked and removed from the turret of the Town Hall to the Museum.

Two years after the paper appeared in *Transactions*, fire broke out in the clock turret of the Town Hall, on the evening of 19 August 1886, and what happened can best be described by an extract from the *Carlisle Patriot* of 20 August 1886:

“Last evening great excitement was caused in Carlisle when a report spread that the Town Hall was on fire. It fortunately happened that the fire occurred at a time when the members of the Fire Brigade could be quickly got together. Shortly after half-past nine sparks were observed issuing from the cupola . . . The damage to the works of the clock, part of which, we believe, are as old as the reign of Charles II, is great. Melted lead from the cupola fell through on to the works . . . the bell has been cracked from top to bottom. The fire is believed to have been caused by gas jets with which the clock is lighted.”

Ralph Nevill's bell was then removed to the Museum, and although we must deplore the fact that the bell which had served the city so well for so many hundred years at last fell a victim to the accidents of time, we may well be grateful that it should remain in the city and not be sent to the bell-founders to be melted down and re-cast.

I am indebted to Mr Robert Hogg for the photograph of the bell as it stands. So far as I know no picture of the bell has been previously published.

One point remains. Upon what bell does the Town Hall clock now strike the hours? With the permission of the civic authorities I penetrated into the clock turret and found there a bell, bearing upon it a Latin inscription. An examination showed that the bell is modern for upon its shoulder appears the name of the bell-founders, J. Taylor & Co., Loughborough, and lower down the

initials J.A.W., which no doubt stand for "James Atkinson Wheatley", Mayor of Carlisle, 1885-86. The Latin inscription is simply a copy of part of the ancient one on Earl Ralph's bell, "EFFECIT ME FIERI" followed by the date (1886) in floriated Roman numerals.

The following extracts from Carlisle Corporation minutes give some additional information about this bell:

"21 September 1886.

"The treasurer reports that he has received payment from the Phoenix Fire Office on the claim made by the City Surveyor for the damage done by the late fire at the Town Hall, including the clock, namely £97.

"Resolved. That it be recommended to the Council to authorise the Surveyor to take the proper steps to have the Town Hall Clock repaired, a new bell purchased, and the cupola heightened, and that a special Meeting of Council be called to sanction this resolution on Monday at 10.0 o'clock."

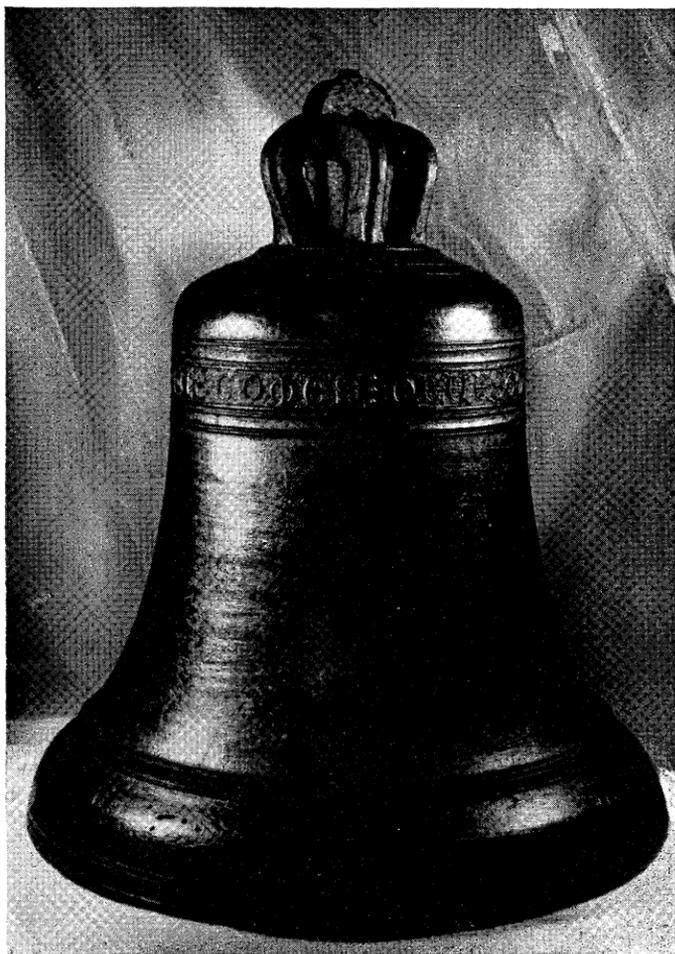
"12 October 1886.

"Mr Ferguson laid before the Meeting a letter from Edwin H. Banks, Esquire, offering the present of a bell to the Corporation for the Town Hall clock, to replace the bell cracked by the recent fire.

Resolved. That the thanks of this Council be tendered to Mr Banks for his kind offer.

The donor, Edwin Hodge Banks, lived at Highmoor, Wigton, and was a member of our Society, which he joined in 1885. He was a man of many activities and good works. He was a magistrate for many years, chair-of Wigton Local Board, a member of Wigton Board of Guardians and of Cumberland County Council. The interior of St. Mary's church, Wigton, was restored at his expense. He died at Brighton on 20 August 1917 and his obituary appears in CW2 xvii 262.

I am indebted to Mr Kenneth Smith, City Librarian, for obtaining the above extracts from the Corporation minutes, and also for the extract from the *Carlisle Patriot*.



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