

ART. IX.—*Notes on the church bells of Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands*. By BRUCE L. THOMPSON, F.S.A.

*Read at Carlisle, September 27th, 1974.*

IN our *Transactions* there is only one article<sup>1</sup> specifically on bells in Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands (that is in the districts of Furness and Cartmel) and even then it refers to just five of the churches in the area. However, the author of it, Harper Gaythorpe, described the ancient bells at Urswick and Aldingham in *Furness Lore*.<sup>2</sup> He was a noted expert on the subject and his records are preserved in Barrow-in-Furness Public Library.

A more extensive account of the bells may be found in the last of a series of papers on the church bells of the whole of Lancashire by F. H. Cheetham in the *Transactions* of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society;<sup>3</sup> this is a primary source of information but is not complete, being restricted to bells at the thirty churches which were "founded before the year 1800". Twenty churches have been built in North Lonsdale since 1800: Allithwaite; Bardsea; nine churches in Barrow; Brathay; Dalton-in-Furness, St Margaret; Grange-over-Sands; Haverthwaite; Lindal; Sawrey; Ulverston, Holy Trinity; Ulverston, Osmotherley; and Low Wray.

At the end of 1972 there were forty-nine churches, with 120 bells and 18 tubular "bells",<sup>4</sup> a total of 138.

<sup>1</sup> CW2 ii 282. "Church Bells in the Archdeaconry of Furness: Colton, Kirkby Ireleth, Broughton, Woodland and Seathwaite."

<sup>2</sup> Transactions of the Barrow Naturalists' Field Club, iii, no. 2 (1900). Urswick, p. 100. Aldingham, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Volume xl, 1922, 1923 (1925).

<sup>4</sup> Ten tubes at Finsthwaite, 1892; 8 tubes at Ulverston, Holy Trinity, 1902.

There are five medieval bells in the district of Furness (2 at Aldingham, and one each at Broughton-in-Furness, Colton and Urswick) and one probable medieval bell in the district of Cartmel (at Cartmel Fell). Until 1831 the church of Kirkby Ireleth had a medieval bell lying in the churchyard, but it disappeared in 1844.<sup>5</sup> The church of Dalton also had a medieval bell but the fate of this is obscure: it seems to have been still in existence until 1865.<sup>6</sup>

At *Aldingham* there are two medieval bells in a ring of three, the second bell and the tenor. Harper Gaythorpe was of the opinion that the date of both of them must be between 1488 and 1525 and that they were cast by Richard Mellor of Nottingham or his son Robert; no. 2 has a diameter of 32 inches and its only inscription consists of the letter S repeated three times, alternating with a cross repeated three times; the tenor has a diameter of 34 inches and is inscribed: CELORUM XPE PLACEAT TIBI REX SONUS ISTE.

The former tenor at *Broughton-in-Furness* is late 14th or early 15th century and is inscribed: IOHANNES EST NOMEN MEUM; its diameter is 20 inches; it is somewhat damaged, and the clapper is missing. This bell was replaced in 1869 by a new tenor bell, and the old one was preserved by Viscount Cross at his house, Eccleriggs. Since then it has been returned to the church where it may easily be seen at the east end of the south aisle.

The single bell at *Colton* is 14th century and is inscribed: CAMPANA BEATI IOHANNES APPLI; its diameter is 22 inches; there are fairly good reasons for assuming it came from Conishead Priory.

The oldest of the ring of four at *Urswick* is a mid-15th century bell named MARIA; it is also inscribed:

<sup>5</sup> Harper Gaythorpe, CW2 ii 292.

<sup>6</sup> Paul V. Kelly, CW2 xxix 226. F. H. Cheetham, *op. cit.*, 109.

WILELMUS DE HARYNGTON DOMINUS DE ALDYNGHAM ET DOMINA MARGARETA UXOR EIUS, the names of the donors; its diameter is  $33\frac{1}{2}$  inches; it was not originally at Urswick but was given by the Haryngtons to Conishead Priory, and may have been bought from the Priory after the dissolution.

One of the two bells at *Cartmel Fell* is ancient but "blank", and therefore difficult to date; it seems likely to be the original bell of the "chapel" which is known to have been built about 1503. The bell is 24 inches in diameter, cracked, and disused.

There are no datable bells of the second half of the sixteenth century, and strangely few of the seventeenth. It is possible that the two at Coniston, a pair, belong to this period; they seem to be much older than was supposed by Cheetham and they may have come down from the first church at Coniston which was consecrated in 1586.<sup>7</sup> The earliest of the Cartmel ring are no. 5 and the tenor, both dated 1661 and both by Scott's foundry at Wigan.

When we come to the eighteenth century there is quite a good collection of dated bells. Taking them in alphabetical order they are as follows. The treble at Aldingham is dated 1711 and is the work of Abraham Rudhall of Gloucester; it may have been cast at Kendal where Rudhall or one of his workmen re-cast two bells from Brigham, Cumberland,<sup>8</sup> and one from Orton, Westmorland,<sup>9</sup> the very same year. Allithwaite has a little bell, loose in the church, of unknown origin except that it bears the name of A. Seward, Lancaster, who flourished in the 1790s.

The Blawith treble although blank and hanging in the bell-cote of the Victorian church is the one acquired by the parish in 1782 for the previous church (across

<sup>7</sup> Miss J. Gnosspelius sent photographs of them to Mr F. Sharpe, F.S.A., who thought they would be 17th century.

<sup>8</sup> Rev. H. Whitehead, CW1 xiv 282.

<sup>9</sup> B. L. Thompson, CW2 lxx 59.

the road, and now in ruins) with funds realised by the sale of part of the Common. This gave rise to the jingle:

Blawith poor people,  
 An auld church and new steeple,  
 As poor as hell  
 They had to sell  
 A bit of fell  
 To buy a bell,  
 Blawith poor people.<sup>10</sup>

Cartmel Priory possesses two bells (now no. 3 and no. 4) from the foundry of Evans of Chepstow, the one is dated 1726 and the other 1729. At Cartmel Fell the bell which is in use today is by Edward Seller of York, 1734.

At Egton the bell is blank but is probably of 1791; it hangs in a tower added to the present church in 1969. Field Broughton also has a blank bell surviving from the eighteenth century; when Cheetham wrote his paper it was at the Vicarage but was subsequently restored to the church. Similarly, Flookburgh church tower contains in addition to the present ring a bell from the former "chapel" (which was in the middle of the village street); it is dated 1736 and bears the initials W.E. (for William Evans).

Grange-over-Sands has a bell dated 1772 purchased from Cartmel in 1856; it is said to have hung in the small bell-cote at the west end of the Priory and was tolled after the main bells had ceased ringing.<sup>11</sup> Hawkshead fairly recently — 1958 — increased the number of its bells from six to eight but five of them (nos. 3, 4, 5, 6 and the tenor) are dated 1765 and were cast by James Harrison, a bell-founder at Barrow-on-Humber, Lincolnshire; no. 7 was probably also his but was re-cast in 1810.

<sup>10</sup> A. P. Brydson, Two Lakeland Townships, 118.

<sup>11</sup> From the notes of J. S. Remington.

There are single bells at Rampside, given by John Gardner in 1739 and evidently cast by Luke Ashton of Wigan; Rusland, 1752; and Satterthwaite, 1737, again by Evans of Chepstow. The old bell at Torver was discarded when the church was rebuilt in 1908 but was later hung in a recess at the school where it can still be seen from the roadway; it is of some interest because it was cast in 1730 in Dublin, which is a little surprising. To complete the eighteenth-century bells, Urswick's no. 2 is by Rudhall, 1711, and will have been cast at the same time as the Aldingham treble already mentioned; it is pleasant to picture them probably journeying together from Kendal to Low Furness.

When we come to the nineteenth century it is convenient to distinguish between the first half and the second. The first half is the more interesting: it includes single bells at Staveley-in-Cartmel, about 1800; Dendron, 1810; Haverthwaite, 1825; Lindale by T. Mears, 1828; and Ulverston, Holy Trinity, probably 1831. Kirkby Ireleth has four bells (out of six) dated 1831 by William Dobson of Downham Market, Norfolk, an otherwise unknown bell-founder for this part of the country. In 1836 Mears cast six bells for Brathay and six for Ulverston, St Mary (the old parish church).

In the second half of the century there was much building and re-building of churches. Barrow-in-Furness had seven new churches, four of which were "temporary" buildings all dedicated on the same day in 1878 and all consecrated in 1879; one of these, St Mark's, still exists and still has a steel bell by Vickers Sons & Co. Ltd. of Sheffield (not to be confused with Vickers the shipbuilders). Unfortunately, this firm's unmelodious steel bells were popular round about that time, and although some have been replaced by better bells others still persist: one at Sawrey, 1868;

three at Lowick, 1885; and perhaps the bells at Lindal<sup>12</sup> and Osmotherley, for which no information is forthcoming. Both are practically inaccessible.

John Warner & Sons cast the tenor at Broughton-in-Furness in 1869 and a fine ring of eight bells for Barrow, St James, in 1877. Finsthwaite has an 1856 bell by C. & G. Mears, and Low Wray an 1876 bell by Blews of Birmingham. The rest of the bells before 1900 are all by John Taylor & Son of Loughborough: Barrow, St Paul, 1895; Blawith tenor, 1866; Field Broughton, 1895; Seathwaite, 1881 (a bell of 1828 re-cast).

With very few exceptions the twentieth-century bells in the area covered by this paper have all been cast by Taylors. It is only necessary to remark on the following: Barrow, St Matthew, has a bell re-cast in 1901 which was originally dated 1716 and came from Lowick. Cartmel in 1932 added two light bells to the previous four, making a ring of six. Flookburgh in 1949 added two bells to the previous four; Hawkhead in 1958 added two to the previous six. Urswick was given a tenor bell in 1955, increasing the number from three to four. So in all these four cases the numbering is now different from the numbering given by Cheetham. It is sad to have to record that the two old bells at Pennington (treble 1719, tenor 1689) were replaced by a new one incorporating the old metal in 1926; and Woodland's 1774 bell was re-cast in 1957.

As for bells from foundries other than Taylors there is a Mears bell at Dalton-in-Furness, St Margaret, of about 1902, and the parish church at Dalton is the proud possessor of ten bells also by Mears, 1927, the tenor (25-2-25) being the heaviest bell in Lancashire-North-of-the-Sands. (Kendal, Holy Trinity, is the only

<sup>12</sup> At Lindal Vicarage there is the Italian bell described by Cheetham as then (1925) being at Millwood. Mr J. Melville has established that the maker of this bell, Terzo Rafanelli, was born at Pistoia in 1794 and died in 1874.

other church in the Diocese of Carlisle with ten bells.) The single bell at Ireleth, dated 1929, is by Gillett & Johnston of Croydon.

Some of the Barrow-in-Furness bells not already mentioned started life elsewhere: St George's came from the Jute Works, St John's from the Shipyard, the one at St Francis was a ship's bell, and the one at St Aidan's was previously at the parish room.

The writer is grateful to the friends who have helped in the preparation of this paper, especially Mr J. Melville whose knowledge of Furness is unique.

At Sawrey there is a second-hand bell, presented in 1969 but not yet hung. It was formerly at St Mark's Church, Deptford (which has been demolished), and was cast by John Warner & Sons in 1883.