



Photograph: L. M. Thompson.
Eskdale Bell, probably 15th century.

facing p. 97.



Eskdale Tenor Bell (1687). Photographed 1955 at
Loughborough before being re-cast.

ART. XI.—*The church bells of Eskdale.* By B. L. THOMPSON, M.A.

Read at Kendal, September 12th, 1957.

ON 17 November 1954 the two ancient bells of St Catherine's church, Eskdale, were taken down from their bell-turret to be repaired, if possible, by Messrs. John Taylor & Co. of Loughborough, and as they had not been seen at ground-level for many years this provided a fresh opportunity to examine them.

Both bells were described by Dr C. A. Parker¹ and it seems likely that he had studied them at close quarters, perhaps when the church was restored in 1881. He found that the treble bell was probably of 15th-century date, whilst the tenor bell had been cast in 1687. Miss M. C. Fair, writing on "The Pre-Reformation Church Bells of West Cumberland,"² described the medieval bell from a photograph of a plaster cast of its inscription, but only saw the bell itself aloft in its turret and was greatly disappointed to be unable to examine it before it went off to Taylors'. It did not come back from Loughborough until after her death. It is now desirable to report what has happened about the bells of St Catherine's and to modify slightly the opinions expressed by Dr Parker and Miss Fair.

Bell no. 1—the treble—is 15 in. in diameter. There is an inscription in Lombardic capitals consisting of ten letters SCV CV TRI BV and two more letters (or parts of letters) which appear to be meaningless. Miss Fair extended the inscription thus: SANCTA CATERINA BEATA and felt confident that this bell was one of the original bells of the church, provided for in 1445.³

¹ *The Gosforth District*, 1st ed. (1904), 2nd ed. (1926), 176.

² CW2 xlviii 108-113 (Eskdale 111).

³ In a letter to B.L.T., 28 December 1954, correcting her own note in *Transactions*.

Miss Fair thought the bell was not foundry-cast but probably the work of a journeyman bell-founder, unskilled at inscriptions, who "obviously made a mess of his job . . . he hadn't got enough letters for his inscription, and some of the few he had slipped out of place." Dr Parker compared the inscription with the inscriptions on the two bells at Waberthwaite "which are late 15th-century."

Mr Paul Taylor says the shape of the bell is unusual, "being very rounded at the top, and having a very large *argent*, which is all that remains of the canons." Whilst concurring in the opinion that, judging by the lettering, the bell is 15th-century Mr Taylor has also considered the possibility that the lettering could have been reproduced on a later bell.

This ancient bell was beyond repair, and it was decided that if it were re-cast it would lose its historical value. It was therefore brought back to Eskdale in the spring of 1956 and given a permanent home inside the church in recognition of its 500 years of service to the parish. At the same a new treble bell was provided in its place by Lord Rea of Eskdale, in memory of Piers Russell Rea of Eskdale 1925-1934, and was hung on 22 March 1956. It is inscribed: JOHN TAYLOR & CO. FOUNDERS / GLORIAM DEI CANO MCMLV / IN MEMORIAM PIERS REA.

Bell no. 2—the tenor—is 18 in. in diameter. It was re-cast in 1955 but the former black-letter inscription has been reproduced on it—Anima Mea Requiesce In Pace 1687—together with TAYLOR / LOUGHBORO / RECAST 1955. Dr Parker⁴ compared the lettering of the inscription with that on a bell at Edenhall, dated 1665,⁵ and assumed that the bell-founder's stamp, a bell between the letters W and S, was that of William Sellar of York who flourished 1662-1687. Miss Fair was half-inclined to

⁴ *The Gosforth District*, 176.

⁵ See "Church Bells in Leath Ward" by the Rev. H. Whitehead, CWI xi 133.

the same opinion but also thought of the possibility of its being the mark of William Scott of Wigan.⁶ Mr Paul Taylor has no doubt that the latter solution is correct.⁷ As for the T.S. 1287 cut into the bell when cold, some people still think the 1287 must be a mistake for 1687, but Mr Taylor throws out the suggestion that it might equally well be a mistake for 1827 and done, possibly, by somebody who hung the bells in that year. "The fittings that were on these two bells were, I should say, about 100 years old."

At present, then, there are three bells at St Catherine's: the treble bell (cast in 1955) and the tenor bell (cast in 1687 and re-cast 1955) both hanging in the turret and doing their duty Sunday by Sunday, and the former treble bell (15th century) resting in retirement on a window-sill inside the church.

For help in the preparation of these notes I am most grateful to the Rev. John Pedder, Vicar of Eskdale, Mr Paul Taylor and Mr J. Melville.

⁶ In a letter to the Rev. John Pedder, 19 January 1952.

⁷ William Scott was founding at Wigan between 1673 and 1703. See "The Church Bells of Lancashire" by F. H. Cheetham in *Transactions* Lancs. & Chesh. Ant. Soc., xxxvii 44 and xl 153.