

THE BELLS OF NORWICH CATHEDRAL

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THE bells of Norwich Cathedral can hardly be pronounced impressive by comparison with those of most other cathedrals. In former days much grander sounds were heard in the Close than those which we hear to-day, for the Priory possessed a second, and a much heavier, ring of bells.

It was not unusual for a great church to possess two rings of bells. Lincoln Cathedral had a ring of several bells in the south-west tower, and another, the "Lady Bells", in the north-west tower; and at Beverley, York, Lincoln, St. Paul's and elsewhere, there is to-day a ring of several bells in one of the towers, and a "great bell", with perhaps one or two lesser companions, in the other.

There seems to be no evidence that Norwich Cathedral ever possessed, or was intended to possess, western towers. It was usual, where a great church possessed only a central tower, to add a detached bell-tower or campanile where the heavier bells could be housed. This was done at Old St. Paul's, Worcester, Tewkesbury, Salisbury, Chichester (where the campanile still survives) and elsewhere. The campanile would be a very solid structure, able to carry safely the heavier and more impressive bells, whereas the central tower, with its much lighter construction, would only be used for the lighter bells used in connection with the liturgy—and perhaps for the clock and its bells.

At Norwich a large campanile was built, the north-west corner of which was about 30 feet from the present Erpingham Gate. At first it may have consisted of a comparatively low stone tower carrying a large upper storey of wood. This would have held the bells and may have been surmounted by a spire similar to those of the former bell-towers of Salisbury and Westminster Abbey.

The campanile was grievously damaged during the riot of 1272. The *Liber de Antiquis Legibus*, the chronicle¹ of the mayor and sheriffs of London, describes the riot in detail. It states that the Prior at the time fortified the Priory by sending to Yarmouth for a number of mercenary wretches, who, when they had arrived by water at the monastery, ascended into the campanile, where the bells hung. They furnished it as a fortress with arms, and from thence shot with bows and balistae, so that no one could pass along the streets and lanes near the monastery without being wounded.

¹ D. J. Stewart, in *Notes on Norwich Cathedral*, p. 13 (a book based on memoranda by Professor Willis for a lecture in 1847), quotes from the mayor's chronicle at length. The passages about the campanile are as follows: "Qui omnes venerunt per aquas ad illud coenobium, ascendentes super Berefridum, ubi campane dependebant, munientes illum cum armis veluti castra. . . . Quo igne invalescente, Berefridus succenditur et omnia domicilia monachorum." The central tower is referred to as *turris*.

The citizens thereupon set fire to the monastery gate. The fire increased, and as a result the campanile, and later the Cathedral tower itself, were burnt.

The damage necessitated very extensive repairs—almost a re-building—on which interesting light is thrown by the Sacrist's Rolls during the thirty years after the riot. A few quotations from these will be of interest.

From the Roll of 1304-5 (16 Henry de Lakenham).

Expensum campanilis per manum R. sacriste anno H. prioris xvi.
 Idem comptum in MMDC et iij quartis lapidum de Cadamo¹ emptis cum carriagio domus xxij.li.xij.s. Item in lxx gobatt'² emptis cum carriagio lxxij.s.iiij.d. Summa xxvij.li.iiij.d.
 Item in calyon'³ emptis cum carriagio eiusdem conductis preter carriagio de ipso lij.s.v.d.obolum.quartum. In sabulo⁴ empto cum carriagio conducto preta etc. xvj.s.ij.d.ob.
 Item in viij.^{xxvij.} trayes calcete⁵ emptis iiiij.li.iiij.d. Item in meremio⁶ empto apud Hosford xx.s. Summa viij.li.ix.s.quartum.
 Item in paccatione pro viij barris ferris⁷ xij.s. Item in clavis et aliis minutis ferramentis⁸ ij.s.iiij.d.obolum. In ij cables emptis viij.s. . . .
 Item in virgis emptis ad coplinum cum secura eorundem factura vasorum et emendis. Item in solla ad caretas coleribus lignis et de coreo et trayciis et aliis ad caretas cum clut' ferris et wereyrnes v.s.xj.d. quart. Item in herba empta ad stottus⁹ xxij.d. . . .
 Item in stipendiis lathomorum¹⁰ ab Pasche usque festum Sancti Johannis Baptiste ix.li.vij.s.vi.d.obolum. . . .
 Item in stipendiis garconium eorundem in aucupatione¹¹ cum ij.s.donis Alex.ix.s.vj.d. Item donis Ric. ad sotulares¹² pro laboribus ibidem iiiij.s. . . .

From the Roll of 1307-8 (19 Henry de Lakenham).

Berfrey.

Custos circa Berfrey. Stipendii lathomorum et cementariorum. ¹³ Stipendii carpentariorum et minuta.	Item . . . lapidum de Cadamo emptis cum cariagio de servientibus cxij.s.j.d. . . . Idem comptus pater Johanni de Rameg' pro duobus annis preteritis in amissione j marcam. Item in stipendiis carpentariorum et garconium . . . circa grossum meremium erigendum ¹⁴ in Berfrey xs.iiij.d. Item in expensis circa cabules ducendas de Jernem' . . . ¹⁵
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Dr. Saunders computes the total expenditure on the campanile during this period at about "£1,000, or £20,000 of pre-war money, in contrast to £50,000 spent at Ely".¹⁶ The smaller total spent at Norwich would seem to indicate that the damage in 1272 was not sufficient to necessitate the erection of a completely new building.

¹ Caen. ² Block of stone. ³ Flint or pebble stone used in building walls. ⁴ Gravel.

⁵ Lime. ⁶ Timber. ⁷ Iron bars. ⁸ Small pieces of iron. ⁹ Horse or ox.

¹⁰ Stone cutters. ¹¹ Were the boys paid to go fowling when not engaged on the campanile?

¹² Shoes. ¹³ Masons. ¹⁴ For erecting the large timber bell frame.

¹⁵ Cables (?) from Yarmouth. I am indebted to Miss Grace, of Norwich Castle Museum, for help in dealing with the Rolls.

¹⁶ H. W. Saunders: *An Introduction to the Rolls of Norwich Cathedral Priory*, 1930, p. 109.

L'Estrange¹ gives details of later entries in the Rolls, referring to the campanile and the five bells which hung in it. The names of four bells are preserved. The great bell in the campanile was called "Lakenham", probably after Henry de Lakenham, Sacrist from 1275 to 1289; other bells were "Stratton", called after the Sacrist in 1322; "Stockton", and the bell of "Blessed Mary", which hung in the central tower.

The campanile survived until the sixteenth century. Braun's view of Norwich shows it as a large, rather squat tower, immediately on the south of the Erpingham Gate, with battlements and small windows and crowned with a spire.²

L'Estrange finds a reference in one of the Ledger Books to a petition by a Mr. Huggins to the Earl of Leicester that certain buildings in the Cathedral precinct should be granted to him, including the campanile. The Dean and Chapter wished it to remain standing, as not only was it an ornament to the city as well as to the church, but also it was so built that to pull it down would be the sudden ruin of the church by reason of the south-west winds, and there was no other place to hang the bells to call to divine service.³ Does this mean that by this time all the bells were in the campanile, or that those in the central tower were only used for the clock?

The following occurs in the first Dean and Chapter Book:

15th June 1569. Sealed likewyse the seid day on[e] other obligacion wherein the seyd [Dean] & Chapter are bounde to Mr. Clement Paston Esquier in iiij c li fir the delyvery of certen belle metal & leade as is conteyned at large in the condycyon inrolled in the gret booke.

This seems likely to refer to materials from the roof and contents of the campanile. Thereafter its fate was sealed. The exact date of its destruction has not been discovered, but it would appear to be about 1573. A pretended confirmation of a lease dated 15 July of that year on page 388 of Ledger Book No. 3 (which is not registered in the relevant Dean and Chapter Book) demises amongst a number of other premises as follows:

a piece of voyd ground lyenge next the great Wall and the Clocher on the west syde, & so much waste or vacant ground of 34 yards, standard, in length, & 18 yards in breadth lyeing betwixt the houses & grounds lately demised to Henry Kyrton, now in the tenure or occupation of one John Parker gent on the south part & the path or way leding from the gate to the ch on the North part abutting upon the Clocher towards the west & upon the other path or way leading into the Ambry grene towards the east together also with the sayd great Clocher as the same is now very ruined decayed uncovered & defaced with all & singular the voyd plots & rooms & ground comprehended compassed & included in the premises or any part thereof with the stone & timber in & upon the premises or any part thereof. To have & to hold the sayd Clocher & all the stone timber & all other things etc.

¹ *Church Bells of Norfolk*, 1874, p. 169.

² See Plate I.

³ *Norfolk Antiquaries Miscellany*, II, p. 149.

There seem to be no further references to it. We have lost our campanile; and, like Salisbury, which is in the same sorry plight, we shall never again hear bells grandly ringing in the Close.

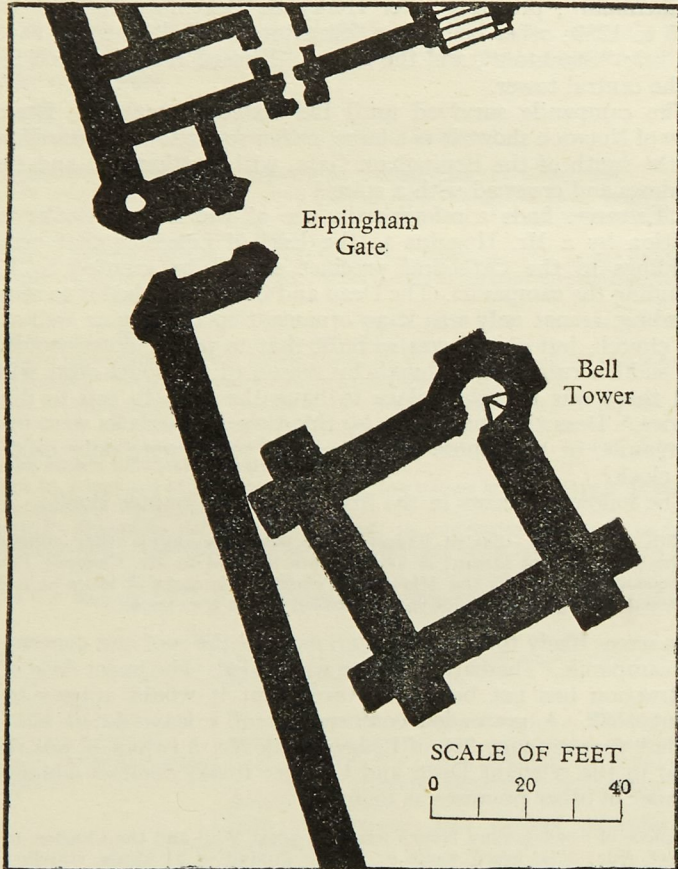


FIG. 1.—NORWICH CATHEDRAL: THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE CAMPANILE AS REVEALED IN 1881

The foundations of the campanile were discovered in 1881; it was $36\frac{1}{2}$ feet square inside, with a staircase in its north-east corner.¹ Its north-west corner nearly touched the Close wall. Part of the foundations form a cellar wall on the site.²

We turn to the five bells hanging in the central tower.³ Four of

¹ See Fig. 1.

² See the article "Bells" by Raven in Mason's *History of Norfolk*.

³ Bells 1 and 2 are shown on Plate II.

them date from monastic days, and their inscriptions are as follows:

	Diameter
(1) ✠ <i>Fac Margareta</i> □ <i>Obis Hec Munera Peta</i>	28 $\frac{3}{8}$ ins.
(2) ✠ <i>Quiesumus Andrea</i> □ <i>Famulorum Suscipe Vota</i>	30 $\frac{3}{8}$ „
(3) ANNO DOMINI 1635 I. B.	33 $\frac{1}{2}$ „
(4) ✠ <i>Subbeniat Digna</i> □ <i>Donantibus Hanc Caterina</i>	37 $\frac{1}{2}$ „
(5) <i>Orate Pro Aia . Roberti Brethenam . Monachi</i> <i>Norwici</i>	
✠ <i>Sum Rosa Pulsata</i> □ <i>Mundi Maria Vocata</i> ¹	41 $\frac{1}{2}$ „

There was in L'Estrange's time a clock bell, which has since been removed. It is shown on the cross section of the Cathedral by William Wilkins, Junr., January, 1784, in the Dean's vestry, as hanging in one of the belfry windows.²

The extant bells are all from the Norwich foundry. Nos. 1, 2, 4, and 5 were cast by the Brasyers, and the date of No. 5 is indicated by the death of Robert Brethenam, gardener of the monastery, in 1469. Each of these bears on the shoulder three impressions of the Brasyer shield, *ermine three bells*: No. 1 has the small variety, the other three the larger variety. No. 3 was recast by John Brend who managed the foundry from 1634 to 1658.

The bells are tuned in the minor key, with notes C sharp, B, A, G sharp, F sharp. This would appear at first sight to indicate that another bell, of note E, has been lost; but this is not necessarily so. Enough rings of bells exist in the minor scale to indicate that this was not uncommon and was certainly intentional in earlier days. St. George Tombland bells are a minor five. Another exists at Marsh Gibbon, Bucks, cast in 1678, and others existed at Old Marston, Oxon, and Tingewick, Bucks. Minor rings of four or three are more frequent; and although the pre-Reformation ring of five at St. Bartholomew the Great is in the major key, these bells form only part of a larger ring, part of which was destroyed at the Dissolution. Although the 3rd at the Cathedral is of later date than the others, it seems likely that it was recast with the same note as its predecessor. There seems to be no reason to deduce from their key that there were more bells in the central tower.

It seems possible that these bells were intended to echo the ancient Plainsong tones which were, and still are, sung beneath them. It is interesting to note in this respect that when the clock-chimes interrupt the Plainsong Psalms or Litany, they fit in with the music in a striking manner.³

The bells are at present hung "dead", that is, fixed and unable

¹ Plaster casts of foundry stamps on the bells are illustrated on Plate III (illustration approximately four-fifths full size).

² See Plate IV.

³ In mediæval days, these bells might frequently have been swung together without any definite sequence as is still done on the Continent. This would have further emphasized the similarity to Plainsong. A mediæval bell at St. Mary the Virgin, Oxford, is inscribed with a passage of Plainsong.

to swing, and are chimed by means of a chiming apparatus in the triforium; but there is evidence that they were rung during the period (seventeenth-eighteenth century) when most bells (even single bells) seem to have been habitually "rung up". This traditional method of sounding bells in England during the last three hundred years, in which the bell swings through a complete circle at each pull of the rope, is by far the most interesting and satisfactory method of sounding bells, provided that the tower is strong enough to make it safe to do so.

Wilkins's cross section of the Cathedral made in 1784¹ shows the bells fitted with wheels, which would only be necessary if they were "rung up". It also shows the bells hanging in a far more massive frame than that which bears them to-day. It is an "A" frame, that is, consisting of massive horizontal beams from which other beams rise at an A-shaped angle to support the top horizontal members which hold the bells. This type of frame has been usual in all periods for the support of bells hung to be "rung up".

A bell-wheel of perhaps seventeenth-century date now hanging in the bell chamber, would hardly have been brought there unless it were used at some time. The sound bow of each bell is worn in two places exactly opposite each other and at right angles to the clapper staples. This is clear evidence that at one time the clappers hit both sides in the manner usual only when bells are "rung up". Further, the bells still hang on headstocks of the type necessary, and only necessary, when bells are "rung up". These headstocks are obviously much older than the present frame; and in one or two cases the bells are fastened to the headstocks with the "feathers" which preceded nuts and bolts. Rectangular holes in the walls at the level of the first wall passage above the tower arches seem to indicate that a ringing floor may have been here at a height similar to that of the ringing floor at Winchester Cathedral.²

Beyond the fact that the bells were rung up at some period, there seems little evidence as to how frequently, or at what period, this was done. Items occur rarely in the Dean and Chapter books for repairs to the bells, such as "5 Ap. 1722, and also to make a new wheel to the third bell". The famous Norwich Scholars, the ringing society which did so much to contribute to the early rise of change ringing in England, do not seem to have practised at the Cathedral.³ J. Armiger Trollope, author of *The History of the College Youths* (1937), and who lived in Norwich many years ago, thinks that the bells were rung until about the middle of the nineteenth century, but only on formal occasions, just as the bells of Westminster Abbey are to-day.

When examining the bells recently, we made the interesting

¹ See Plate IV.

² This floor is traditionally said to have been removed in Dean Goulburn's time. It does not, however, appear in Britton's view of the lantern, *Cathedral Antiquities*, 1816.

³ They rang mainly at St. Peter Mancroft, St. Andrew, St. Michael Coslany, and St. Giles.

discovery of the signatures of Samuel Thurston and Jno. Golding scratched inside the tenor. Samuel Thurston was the most famous of the Norwich ringers during the early part of the nineteenth century. He was a stonemason, and was employed at the Cathedral. Regular payments of £1 4s. weekly to him occur in the account books from 1832 onwards, and smaller payments before that date.

The chimes of the clock, given by Mrs. Goulburn in 1872, are of interest. The notes which they strike on the bells are probably unique. They are as follows at the four quarters: 1,2,3,4,5. 5,4,1,2,3; 2,5,3,4,5. 5,4,3,1,5; 3,1,2,4,3; 5,4,2,3,5. 1,4,3,2,5; 4,3,2,4,1; 5,1,2,3,4; 2,3,4,5,1. The hours are struck on No. 5.

It seems fitting to conclude with a note on the ancient clock possessed by the Cathedral. This is said formerly to have stood in the south transept.¹ The Sacrist's Rolls for 1322-5, from which the following quotations are taken, give details of the amounts expended on its construction:

From the 1322-3 Roll.

Horologium. In bordis² emptis xxix.s. v.d. Item in uno plate de metallo³ empto iiij.d.ob. Item in clauē³ empte xvj.d. Item in sound, [glue?] empt' xvj.d. In factura.v.ymagium.xx.s. Item garcioni faciente capit' iij.s. Item in stipendio Magistri Roberti xxx.s. Item in stipendio Andree carpentarii xij.s. vj.d. In stipendio Rogerii carpentarii termino per quarantam⁴ xv.d. Item filio magistri Roberti vj.d.

Summa iiij.li.xix.s.vij.d.ob.

From the 1323-4 Roll.

Orologium. In stipendio Roberti ad festum S. Michaelis et ad natalem⁵ xx.s. Item in uno garneamento pro filio predicti⁶ Roberti iij.s.vj.d. Item in stipendio uidue carpentarii⁷ pro xxv. septimanis. xiiij.s.iii.d. Item in ferro empto et fabricat' eiusdem vj.s. Item pacat' Rogero de Stoke pro adventu suo et pro cariagio pannorum⁸ et instrumentorum eius vij.s. In uno hose de Patomi iij.d.vij.d. Item magistro Ade sculptori pro factura xxiiij paruarium ymagium⁹ xl.s. Item in cc lapidibus de Cadamo xxij.s. Item in cariagio eorumdum ij.s.vij.d. Item Johanni pro opere ferri ad orologium iij.s.ix.d. Item liberato¹⁰ Roberto de Turri pro factura magni laminis¹¹ x.s. et tantum in perdicione quia pro paupertate non potuit opus perficere nec aliquid ab eo exigi.¹²

Summa vj.li.xij.s.ix.d.ob.

¹ The picture of the south side of the choir, c. 1630, hanging in Strangers' Hall, describes the south transept as "The Ile where the clock standeth".

² Boards.

³ Key.

⁴ Six weeks.

⁵ Christmas.

⁶ The aforesaid.

⁷ Apparently the carpenter had an accident and left a widow.

⁸ Cloth.

⁹ The 24 small images may have represented the hours of the day and night. There were also 30 images probably corresponding to the days of the month, also painted and gilded plates portraying the sun and moon. See Britten: *Old Clocks and Watches and their Makers*, 1899, p. 21.

¹⁰ Stipend.

¹¹ Plates of metal.

¹² Dr. Saunders, *ibid.*, p. 111, summarizes the amounts spent on timber, stone, metal, 59 images, robes, glue, gold leaf, paint, and cymbals. He notes that the totals for 1323-35 come to £52 9s. 6½d. (over £1,000 of 1914 money), also that the insolvency of Robert de Turri presented a problem to the Sacrist.

Tillett states that this clock is said to have been burnt in the seventeenth century.¹ It would seem to have been replaced by a simpler clock of which the well-known quarter jacks above the south transept entrance are a relic.²

The quarter jacks appear to be of Jacobean date. They are about 20 inches in height; their hair is curled low over the ears in the fashion of the period, and they wear helmets with the peak turned back from the face. They have large moustaches, short red jackets with tight fitting sleeves, deep neck ruffs, voluminous breeches striped blue and white, flesh-coloured hose and clumsy shoes. Each holds a bent iron handle with a cross-headed hammer with which to strike the gongs. These hang on a decorated iron cross, the whole being mounted on an oak stand on which are fixed three inscriptions: on the left, "nil boni hodie?"; on the right, "ah, diem perdidit";³ and, in the centre, a Latin poem and a free translation of it:

*Horas significo cunctas quas Phoebe diebus,
Quas solet atque tua pallida nocte soror;
Nec magis errarem, vektor mihi si foret idem,
Nos qui, et quaeque regit motibus astra suis
Tempora nam recte designo, si mihi doctus,
Custos assiduam conferat artis opem.*

Phoebus, I tell all the hours and all is right,
As thou and thy pale sister, day and night,
Nor I no more than you, in aught should err
If he ruled me, who guides you and each star
For times I rightly tell, if of his art,
My learned helper will his help impart.

This would seem to have referred to the sun and moon on the original clock.

The quarter jacks ceased to work many years ago, as they were said to distract the congregation. In these days, when mechanical wonders soon cease to distract us, it would seem fitting to set them going again.

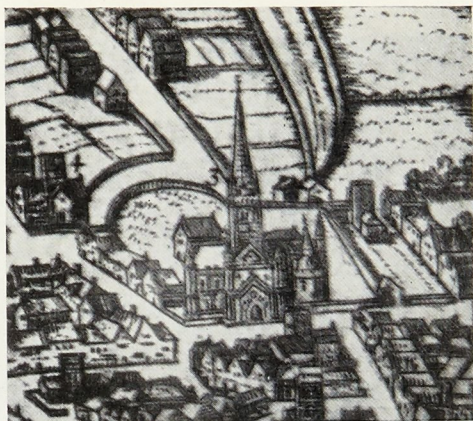
The curious small piece of ironwork at the spring of the arch above Bishop Nykke's chantry in the nave deserves mention. It consists of a bracket carrying an axle on which is fitted a small lever. This formerly suspended the chantry Sacring bell, which was chimed by a rope attached to the lever. Sacring bells were frequently arranged to be chimed in this way, and similar arrangements are at Milton Abbey (enclosed in an oak canopy) and Salhouse (restored, on the screen). As each of the altars would have had a Sacring bell, their sound must have contributed to the life of the church in no small degree.

¹ Tillett, MS. 376, Vol. I, part 2, p. 88.

² See Plate V.

³ The right-hand inscription has recently disappeared. The inscriptions are written on cardboard, evidently copied from something older. No reference is given, save that a note under the Latin poem reads: "Under the clock was a scroll containing the following words, in which the clock was supposed to address the sun."

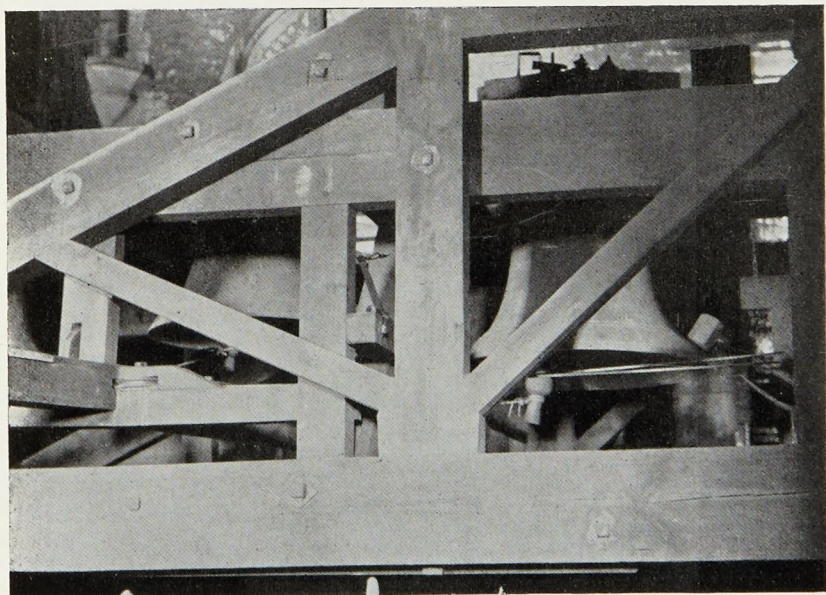
Plate I



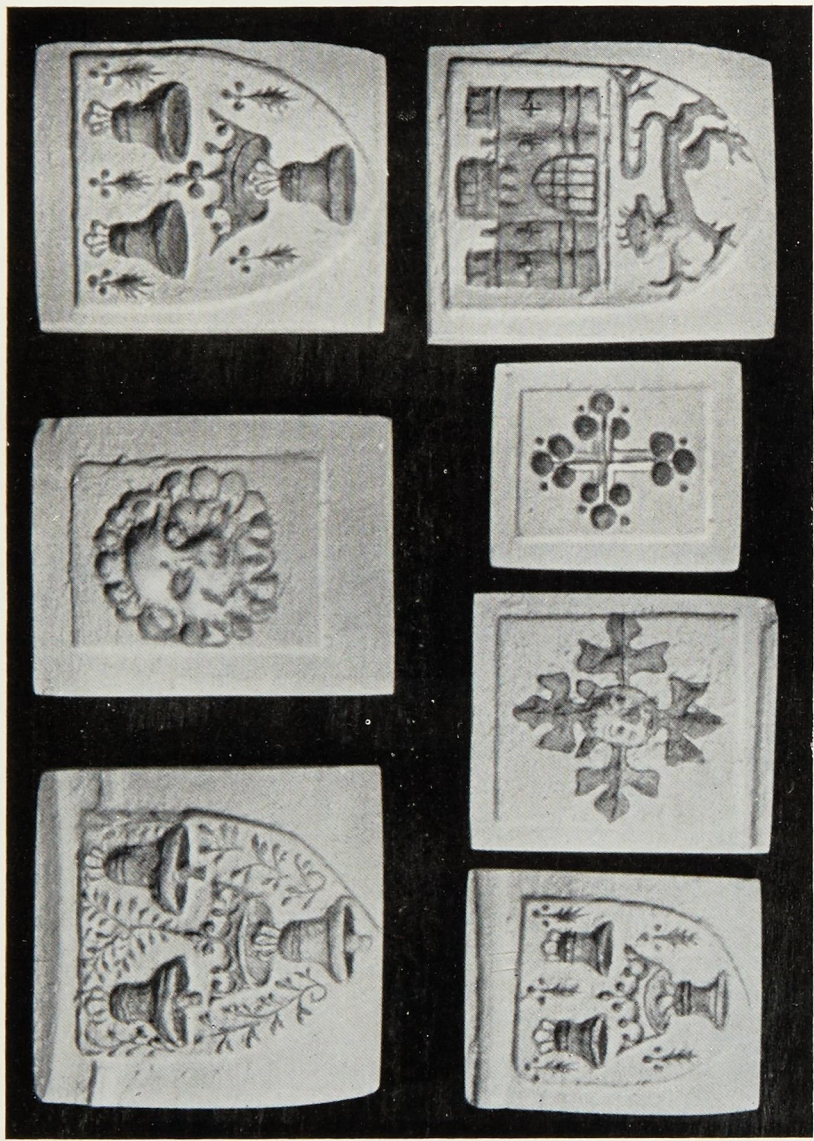
NORWICH CATHEDRAL AND CAMPANILE FROM THE WEST

*From view of Norwich, originally made for Braun and Hogenberg, Book III, 1580 (British Museum).
(See p. 91.)*

Plate II



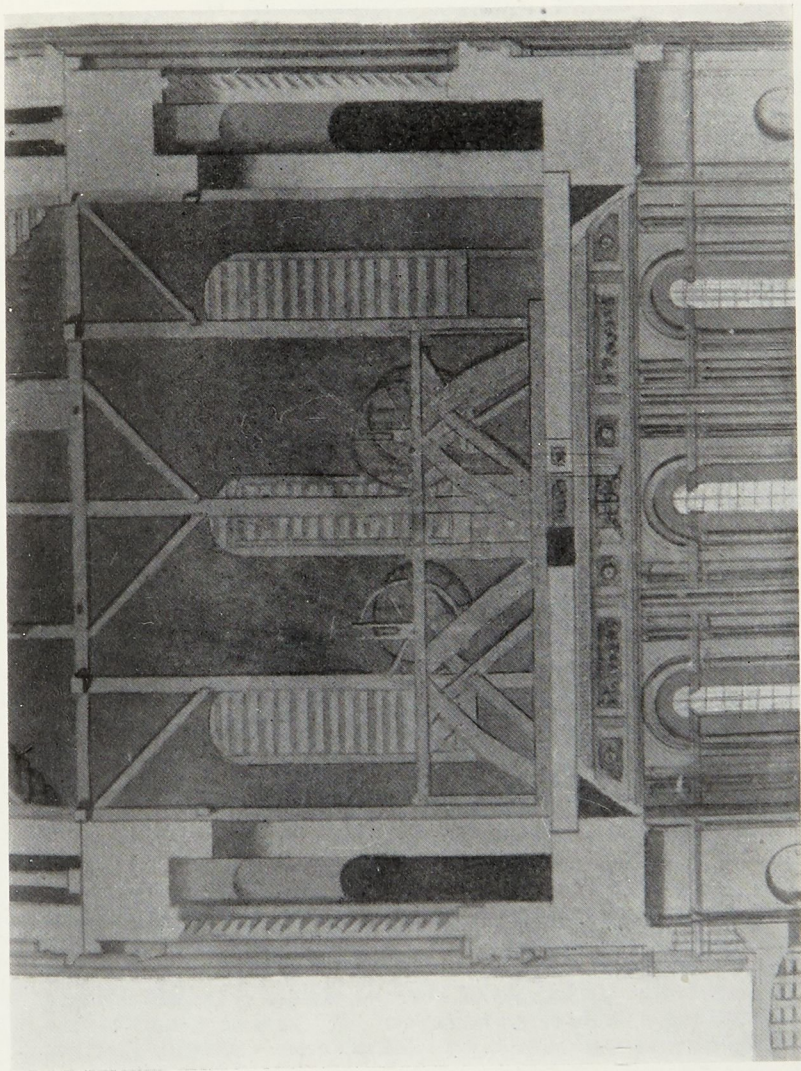
NORWICH CATHEDRAL: BELLS 1 AND 2 IN THE CENTRAL TOWER
(The old headstock of 2 is visible)



Gregory, Norwich.

PLASTER CASTS OF STAMPS FROM THE NORWICH BELL-FOUNDRY

2, 4 and 6 are on the treble; 2, 3 and 5 on the 2nd and 4th; 3 and larger head and cross on the tenor



NORWICH CATHEDRAL: BELL CHAMBER, 1784
As shown in Wilkins's cross-section in the Dean's vestry



NORWICH CATHEDRAL: THE QUARTER JACKS